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# The History of Childhood in Colonial Ghana, c.1900-57

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in 2015

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# Abstract

Children in colonial Ghana lived through a unique kind of childhood, very different from anything observed in either pre-colonial Africa or the metropole. In pre-colonial Ghana, despite the importance for adults of child-bearing, children had a low social status, with few rights to balance their onerous obligations to their elders. But the relationship between children and adult society was – at least in theory – redefined by the colonial presence. Colonial modernity was increasingly perceived to be placing children in moral and physical danger. There was a greater imperative for childhoods to incorporate play and education and for the colonial state to safeguard adult society by protecting the welfare of individual children and reforming the delinquent young.

The remainder of the thesis focuses on how these shifts were experienced by children themselves. The second part of the thesis examines the intellectual and emotional history of children. Children understood the colonial world very differently from adults. Children began to fear recognisably colonial institutions and authority figures but also to associate comfort and security with metropolitan material culture. Children had a sometimes acute awareness of imperial wealth and power and the relative weakness of the colony. But, simultaneously, children were largely apolitical because of their lack of experience and their intense focus on the present and the self.

The final part of the thesis deals with the economics of childhood. Children were a valuable, if vulnerable, part of the colonial workforce. Child labour was used in new ways as economic and technological change created a raft of ‘small jobs’ for children to undertake. But, in a fundamental reassessment of the social purpose of child labour, the thesis argues that much of

the work undertaken by children was 'accumulative' rather than exploitative. It was labour that bridged the gap between economic childhood and adulthood and allowed children to acquire tangible, human and social forms of capital.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In 1948, when the last census before Ghanaian independence was enumerated, 43 per cent of the Gold Coast population were aged fifteen or under.<sup>1</sup> The experience of this neglected group under British rule is the subject of this thesis. Their ‘colonial childhoods’ were, I argue, very different from anything experienced in either pre-colonial Africa or the metropole. The chronological and geographical scope of the project, the Gold Coast between 1900 and 1957, requires brief comment. The old ‘Gold Coast Colony’ encompassed the coastal and southern areas of what would become the territory proper and, here, 1874 might be seen as the beginning of colonial rule. But then, between 1896 and 1901, Asante and the Northern Territories were added to these British possessions, as part of the European scramble for Africa, to form the enlarged Gold Coast.<sup>2</sup> This thesis is the first of its kind, which is surprising because the area covered by modern-day Ghana has perhaps the richest historiography of any country in sub-Saharan Africa except South Africa. Social and intellectual historians have been particularly prominent. A sophisticated historical literature on Asante, the most documented pre-colonial state, means that we understand not just the political and military narratives of

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<sup>1</sup> The British colony of the Gold Coast became Ghana on independence in 1957. E. V. T Engmann, *Population of Ghana, 1850-1960* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1986), 104.

<sup>2</sup> The core territory of the former Asante Empire became, roughly speaking, the colonial administrative unit, the Ashanti Region.

its history but also the ideologies and beliefs that underpinned the empire.<sup>3</sup> In the colonial period, pioneering historical work has been done on the impact of colonial capitalism and the cocoa boom; the disruption of gender roles; urbanisation; and the intellectual vitality and doctrinal flexibility of 'traditional' religions.<sup>4</sup> But despite the density of this literature, childhood remains unexamined and children appear only at its edges, in studies of motherhood or of boys becoming men. This project is very different: age is the primary analytical axis throughout and my focus is on the young, not on adults.

This research project was the product of two interlinked beliefs about social history. The first of these was the idea that children should be taken seriously in their own right in African historiography, rather than appearing at on the edges of 'adult' or 'youth' histories, or appearing as the mute raw materials who will be shaped by, and later make, history. The second idea was that, as is now well-established in the historiography of other regions, childhood is neither a cultural universal nor a historical constant, but rather exhibits enormous variation over time and space. The overarching research question that arose from these concerns was thus simply: how did the huge historical shifts that affected the Gold Coast between 1900 and independence in 1957 alter the experience of childhood? But this immediately posed a supplementary question: did this period also witness childhoods that

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<sup>3</sup> T. C McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, "I Will Not Eat Stone": *A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000); T. C McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001); Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

were recognisably 'colonial' in some way, rather than simply coterminous with the period of British rule?

'Childhood' is, however, a large and somewhat nebulous concept and, with little historiography on childhood in Africa as a thematic guide, it was necessary to break these broader concerns down into several more focused areas of research. However much we emphasise the agency of young people, children's place in society is largely determined by the laws, customs and beliefs of adults. The first research priority, then, was to establish whether in the first half of the twentieth century the existing relationship between children and adult society was altered by a colonial encounter that encompassed the arrival and evolution of competing ideas, beliefs, laws and institutions centred on childhood. The second research focus drew on the idea that children have rich internal lives and that, just as colonialism altered the political economy of Africa, so it affected patterns of thought, behaviour and belief. As such, I wanted to address whether children thought and felt in ways that were both different from adults and specific to time and place and, in particular, whether these peculiarities resulted from children reflecting on their own social position and the Gold Coast's position within imperial hierarchies. The final research focus was on children's economic activity. This interest stemmed from archival surveys that suggested the unusual richness of documentation on child labour and the importance of work to childhood experience. Some of the questions this raised were simply ones of empirical reconstruction: where did children work, what did they do, under what conditions and how did this change over the colonial period? But, given the centrality of work to childhoods in the Gold Coast, I also wanted to address a deeper question that might challenge some of the underlying assumptions of the historiography on

child labour in Africa: was a working childhood, even in the commercial economy, necessarily 'exploitative' – or could it be socially useful from the point of view of the child?

But why study childhood in the Gold Coast at all? There are four good reasons for historians to take children, and childhood, seriously. The first is demographic. Given that the Gold Coast had such a young population, a significant minority were living through a colonial childhood at any one time and, as the half century drew on, an ever greater proportion of adult society had the formative experience of a colonial childhood. The Gold Coast also experienced high child mortality and low life expectancy throughout the colonial period. In 1931, surveys of mothers in rural areas found that 40 per cent of their children had not survived into adulthood.<sup>5</sup> Death among children was a brutal commonplace of family life. In 1955, 50 per cent of reported female deaths occurred among those aged fifteen or under and 86 per cent of those girls had died before their fifth birthday.<sup>6</sup> The number of Africans who died without ever reaching biological adulthood in the colonial period means that any social history of the Gold Coast that neglects childhood is inherently incomplete. The history of childhood is not, however, just about remembering those who have been forgotten, it is also about exploring the historical significance of children and childhoods.

Indeed, the second reason to incorporate childhood into scholarly analysis is that historical change is reflected in childhood experience and, in turn, childhoods impact upon historical dynamics. As Morrison puts it, 'the history of childhood is not just about childhood, it is about the larger themes in history, such as gender, imperialism, the environment, religion and

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<sup>5</sup> K. David Patterson, *Health in Colonial Ghana: Disease, Medicine, and Socio-Economic Change, 1900-1955* (Waltham, MA: Crossroads Press, 1981), 151.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.



spirituality, nationalism, poverty, consumerism, and warfare'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, childhood is a powerful refractive lens through which to study the aims and ideologies of wider society. Children are imbued with both promise and threat, at once able to inherit and conserve a certain social order, or to disrupt it. As a result, child-rearing has been an equal concern for those who have sought to transform or to preserve the status quo. Children also became ideologically emblematic, their welfare and behaviour shoring up or undermining the legitimacy of power. Western historiography has successfully exposed previously hidden aspects and contradictions of adult power by studying the institutions, debates and policies surrounding childhood.<sup>8</sup> But the technique holds great promise, too, for both metropolitan and indigenous systems of thought and power in the colonial periphery. As we will see, the history of childhood in the Gold Coast also illuminates debates that were taking place on how traditional beliefs could be reconciled with the demands of colonial law and order, how the moral and physical dangers of urban life could be negotiated, how the world of work should be organised, and how far the state would have to intrude into the private sphere to secure social stability.

Third, if discourse on childhood can tell us a lot about macro-historical changes, then children's lived experience is similarly informative about how these were reflected or rooted in those aggregate patterns of living, working and dying centred on the household and the family. Indeed there is a persuasive argument to be made that the true historical importance

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<sup>7</sup> Heidi Morrison, ed., *The Global History of Childhood Reader* (London: Routledge, 2012), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the global historiography of childhood is explored in the next section but I am thinking here particularly of Foucauldian approaches to the school and of work on delinquency and vagrancy in Soviet Russia, where officially children had everything they needed. Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); M. Gleason, 'Disciplining the Student Body: Schooling and the Construction of Canadian Children's Bodies, 1930–1960', *History of Education Quarterly* 41, 2 (2001): 189–215; Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

of political or ideological shifts is best measured by changes on this smaller scale. As in the realm of political discourse, the constraints and possibilities surrounding children's lives were a powerful motivation for parents and households, influencing decisions on migration, family size and the division of labour. The family has thus emerged as an agent of historical processes like industrialisation and urbanisation, rather than their helpless victim.<sup>9</sup> The study of child labour has in fact been particularly productive, shedding light on how households responded to economic change and shifting social mores.<sup>10</sup> In the Gold Coast, children were a crucial part of the family economy and the need to provide education, training or seed capital lay behind many family decisions, and disputes. More broadly, changes in the nature of childhood altered the fabric of everyday life. The presence or absence of child workers determined the sights and sounds of many public spaces. Children who went to school dressed differently, had a huge impact on family budgets and threatened to upend generational hierarchies of knowledge. Children were early and enthusiastic adopters of new forms of leisure, like western team sports and the cinema. These were small-scale changes, but ones with a large impact on lived experience in the colonial period.

The fourth reason why studying childhood is worthwhile is that children are agents in their own right. According to scholars of the 'new social studies of childhood', children interpret the world around them in ways that are valid and interesting. They create culture by themselves, in peer groups and in collaboration with adults. And they can act of their own free

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<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the trajectory of 'family' history, see T. K. Hareven, 'The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change', *American Historical Review* 96, 1 (1991): 95–124.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the material discussed in the next section see, for example, S. Lassonde, 'Learning and Earning: Schooling, Juvenile Employment, and the Early Life Course in Late Nineteenth-Century New Haven', *Journal of Social History* 29, 4 (1996): 839–870.

will, with initiative, bravery and often against the wishes of adults.<sup>11</sup> All told, children have the capacity to make as well as react to history. That said, childhood agency should not be exaggerated. There are biologically determined limits, mostly physical but also social, to children's freedom of action, and these remain relatively constant against a backdrop of historical change. Children are not the prime movers of history, and yet the margins in which they act remain important, nuancing and reflecting hidden aspects of more significant historical dynamics. In fact the most promising research direction lies away from portraying children as mere auxiliaries to existing historiographical themes and narratives and examining instead the agency of children in and for themselves.<sup>12</sup> Examples from Africanist research include boys in nineteenth-century Central Africa becoming functionally literate at mission stations and then absconding in favour of factory work and schoolchildren in 1970s South Africa who, despite an often hazy grasp of the politics, became central actors in the Soweto Uprising.<sup>13</sup> In the Gold Coast, children thought deeply about their place in the world and their curiosity, ambitions and even their fears were shaped by the time and place in which they grew up. In the economic sphere, children sometimes worked because an adult forced them to but, in other circumstances, their work was entrepreneurial, innovative or even illegal, and entirely

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<sup>11</sup> William A Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2005); Allison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Patrick J. Ryan, 'How New Is the 'New' Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, 4 (2008): 553–576.

<sup>12</sup> A similar argument has been made for the history of women. See, for example, Liat Kozma, 'Moroccan Women's Narratives of Liberation', in James McDougall, ed. *Nation, Society and Culture in North Africa* (London: Routledge, 2003), 112–130.

<sup>13</sup> Phyllis M. Martin, 'Life and Death, Power and Vulnerability: Everyday Contradictions at the Loango Mission, 1883-1904', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15, 1 (2002): 70; Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *'I Saw a Nightmare...' Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).



a matter of their own initiative and for their own benefit. For all these reasons, children are worth studying.

## Approaches to the history of childhood

Childhood is such an interesting subject for historians to study because it is a combination of the socially constructed and the biologically determined. Since the inception of the sub-discipline, historians of childhood have attempted to locate and define the 'child' in the past. The foundational text of the history of childhood, Phillipe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*, argued that there was no separate category of the 'child' in medieval Europe, a theory that has by now been thoroughly debunked.<sup>14</sup> A rich historical literature now exists and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the 'child' that has emerged is a historical construct rather than a static or universal category.<sup>15</sup> There is still, however, a certain tension within the discipline over whether historians should recreate childhoods simply to hold a mirror to adult society or as a means of studying children as historical agents. Heywood raises the 'common complaint that histories of childhood tend to leave out children' and that, until recently, scholars have treated the young 'as adults-in-the-making, rather than as children in their own right'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, there was a preponderance of institutional or legal histories in the early decades of the field, at the expense of child-centred studies. This option is less open to scholars of childhood in Africa

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<sup>14</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Colin Heywood, 'Centuries of Childhood: An Anniversary—and an Epitaph?', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, 3 (2010): 341–365.

<sup>15</sup> The state of the field is surveyed in Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman, 2005); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Bianca Premo, 'How Latin America's History of Childhood Came of Age', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 1 (2007): 63–76; Ping-Chen Hsiung, 'Treading A Different Path?: Thoughts on Childhood Studies in Chinese History', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 1 (2008): 77–85.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Heywood, *Growing Up in France: From the Ancien Régime to the Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4–5.

because record-generating institutions of childhood either did not exist until the later colonial period or their records are not available in the archives. A more thematic approach suited both my intellectual interests and the shift in the discipline towards a more child-centred approach. While it is true that the historical forces shaping childhood in the Gold Coast were firmly rooted in the adult world, my research has, as far as possible, focused on how these shifts were observed, experienced and shaped by children themselves.

Africanists have only recently placed children at the centre of academic inquiry – and much of this work is contemporary rather than historical.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Africanist historians have not, in general, engaged with the global literature on childhood and so children appear most often as simple ancillaries to the existing themes of African historiography.<sup>18</sup> It will be argued here that the ‘child’ of African historiography is more a reified concept than a historical product: historians have either implicitly endorsed a thoroughly contemporary ideal of childhood or applied metropolitan concepts to the colonial periphery. Much historical nuance has been lost as a result. This section examines how Africanist historians have studied the topics of ‘delinquent’ youth, education and child labour. In each case I suggest how greater attention to the historically-constructed nature of childhood can help advance a more nuanced picture of African childhoods in the past.

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<sup>17</sup> For a representative selection of recent work, see Alcinda Manuel Honwana and Filip de Boeck, eds., *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005); Alex De Waal and Nicolas Argenti, eds., *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the only exceptions to this are Beverly Grier and Abosede George, who historicise child labour and girlhood respectively: Abosede George, ‘Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and the Colonial State in Development Era Lagos.’, *Journal of Social History* 44, 3 (2011): 837–859; Beverly Grier, *Invisible Hands: Child Labor and the State in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006).

Most historical attention thus far has concentrated on youths, who left a heavier archival trace than the very young, due primarily to colonial concerns over their socially disruptive potential. But 'youth' is a problematic analytical category unless we consider how it was separated from earlier childhood. In his historiographical survey, Waller argues that 'colonial interventions' ruptured many existing paths to adulthood and that African youth subsequently experienced a 'crisis of confidence in the promise of maturity'.<sup>19</sup> Yet if historians want to understand how this crisis arose for individuals then it is perhaps as important to study the boundaries, markers, and experiences of *immaturity* as it is to understand those associated with adulthood. A greater focus on the early life cycle and the quotidian experience of the young is the most obvious next step for Africanist histories of childhood. Indeed it is a key argument of this thesis that colonial childhoods were profoundly different from those in the past; disruptions to the lifecycle were thus emerging much earlier in life than is suggested by just studying youth and were keenly felt by both adults and children.

'Rebellious youth' have received the bulk of Africanist attention.<sup>20</sup> The rise of juvenile delinquency in the colonial period has been linked to the socioeconomic fault lines that emerged in new urban centres, the misguided priorities of colonial policing and the desire to preserve racial or sexual order.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have also explored how youth gangs were responsible for predatory violence and acquisitive criminality – but also a creative force in

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Waller, 'Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa', *Journal of African History* 47, 1 (2006): 81.

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent survey of this work, see Waller, 'Rebellious Youth'.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Burton, 'Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy: Urbanization and Delinquency in Dar es Salaam, 1919-61', *Journal of African History* 42, 2 (2001): 199–216; Chloe Campbell, 'Juvenile Delinquency in Colonial Kenya, 1900-1939', *Historical Journal* 45, 01 (2002): 129–151; Laurent Fourchard, 'Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria', *Journal of African History* 47, 1 (2006): 115–137; John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Paul Ocobock, 'Joy Rides for Juveniles': Vagrant Youth and Colonial Control in Nairobi, Kenya, 1901–52', *Social History* 31, 1 (2006): 39.

urban culture and a source of welfare and honour for their members.<sup>22</sup> Other works have reintroduced the generational dynamics frequently applied to pre-colonial African history but often occluded by class and race in the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> But ‘youth’ is a problematic unit of analysis for African colonies precisely because it was a metropolitan category – social, biological and sexual – used somewhat uncritically by contemporary observers and, retrospectively, by scholars.<sup>24</sup> In their overwhelming focus on social deviancy and resistance, Africanist studies of youth have tended to replicate the intellectual trappings of the *metropolitan* concept of youth – rebelliousness, stress and disorder – that were in turn replicated in the colonial archive. A binary and antagonistic relationship between generations may be more an archival artefact than a reflection of historical reality and, as such, there needs to be a greater focus on how youths consented and conformed to power, not simply how they resisted it.<sup>25</sup>

This body of work on delinquency was an important starting point for my own research, but I have taken a very different approach. The legal and institutional response to the growing colonial concern over young Africans produced the most important set of sources I have used

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<sup>22</sup> Filip de Boeck, ‘Kinshasa: Tales of the ‘Invisible City’ and the Second World’, in Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 243–285; Clive Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Simon Heap, ‘“Their Days are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets”: Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s’, *Journal of Family History* 35, 1 (2010): 48–70.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000); Meredith McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> On metropolitan concepts of youth and adolescence, see John Muncie, *Youth and Crime*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2004), 68–70; S. Fishman, ‘The History of Childhood Sexuality’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, 2 (1982): 269; Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 10, 50–1, 60–2.

<sup>25</sup> Straker has made a similar argument for anthropological studies of youth: Jay Straker, ‘Youth, Globalisation, and Millennial Reflection in a Guinean Forest Town’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, 2 (2007): 299–319.



in reconstructing the history of childhood, documents from the juvenile justice system. But existing studies have tended to look at delinquency with the delinquents removed, mainly because the available sources make adult perceptions easier to reconstruct than the actions and motivations of children.<sup>26</sup> For the Gold Coast records survive both from individual trials and from investigations of alleged delinquents. This opened up new possibilities for studying youth crime or, as I have chosen to do, for using these records to study subjects other than delinquency. Throughout the thesis I have used these sources to illustrate the social and economic history of children in the Gold Coast; in the next section I discuss the methodological challenges these sources present. Moreover, rather than placing colonial concern about delinquency at the centre of my analysis, I have, in Chapter 3, placed it in the broader context of the evolving relationship between children and the state and of contested ideas about the nature of African childhoods.

If the study of African youth has been handicapped by the use of metropolitan concepts, then historical studies of education and child labour in Africa have often been refracted through a lens of contemporary moral judgments. In contemporary discourse, the working childhood is an aberration, an injustice or a historical relic. Education, by contrast, represents the normative model of childhood, and learning is the natural and morally superior childhood activity.<sup>27</sup> My argument is that this contemporary model of childhood has implicitly, and erroneously, informed much Africanist historiography on colonial children, distorting our understanding of the choices between schooling and labour and, by extension, the very nature

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<sup>26</sup> Fourchard, 'Invention of Juvenile Delinquency', 116.

<sup>27</sup> For a critical summary of this discourse relating to childhood in contemporary India, see Sarada Balagopalan, 'Memories of Tomorrow: Children, Labor, and the Panacea of Formal Schooling', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 2 (2008): 267–285.

of African childhood. Indeed many Africanists have implicitly endorsed or adopted the idea that education is central to childhood. There is a large and critical literature on the cultural impact of western education, the imperial divergence from western pedagogic practices, and the struggles to control the education system.<sup>28</sup> But the education of individual children has generally been seen as a positive catalyst, creating a generation of ‘exemplars and social engineers’.<sup>29</sup> The education of individuals has in turn been linked to those narratives that historians have, at various times, been sympathetic towards: ambition, social mobility, nationalism, modernization, self-realization, and resistance.<sup>30</sup> This work has demonstrated the centrality of education to wider historical dynamics, but historians have inevitably concentrated on the most successful, and most visible, products of colonial schools. As a result, historiography has bypassed the majority of African children who did not attend school and has minimised the short- and long-term costs of education. South African scholarship offers an alternative approach. Clive Glaser, for example, has analysed how individual Sowetan youths profited socially and financially by choosing gang membership over education and how those who avoided or dropped out of apartheid-era schools still proved key actors in the 1976

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<sup>28</sup> The sprawling debate is summarised in Timothy Parsons, *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 37–49; of particular importance are Cati Coe, *Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism, and the Transformation of Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Terence Ranger, ‘African Attempts to Control Education in East and Central Africa 1900-1939’, *Past & Present*, 32 (1965): 57–85; Deborah Gaitskell, ‘Race, Gender and Imperialism: A Century of Black Girls’ Education in South Africa’, in J. A. Mangan, (ed.), *‘Benefits Bestowed’?: Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Carol Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans’ Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918-1940* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), xxviii.

<sup>30</sup> Of many possible examples, see Karin Barber, ed., *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); J. S Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971 [1958]); Philip Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Summers, *Colonial Lessons*.

Soweto Uprising.<sup>31</sup> This more dispassionate approach to formal education was important in framing my own research because it suggested the need to appraise the full costs of schooling and incorporate unschooled children into historical narratives of colonialism.

In comparison to other African colonies, education was relatively widespread and well-established in the Gold Coast. Missionary schools had a long-standing presence in coastal regions: primary education was firmly established by the 1840s, the first English-language secondary school opened in 1876, and university-level training was available at Achimota College, opened in 1927. Historians have examined the arrival, spread and cultural and economic impact of western schooling in some detail.<sup>32</sup> But I have chosen not to place education at the centre of this study. Only a small minority of colonial subjects received an education – and the majority of those were educated in the southern half of the colony, in urban areas, and in the late-colonial period. The proportion of school-age children enrolled in educational establishments rose from just 9 per cent in 1930 to 29 per cent in 1950, and 41 per cent in 1957. In 1948, only 4 per cent of the overall population had received six or more years of schooling but this figure varied from almost 18 per cent in the colonial capital Accra to just 0.2 per cent in the Northern Territories.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, enrolment did not necessarily mean regular attendance, and, although statistics are hard to find, school inspectors often complained of chronic absenteeism.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi*; Clive Glaser, “We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis’: School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 2 (June 1998): 301–323.

<sup>32</sup> Coe, *Dilemmas of Culture*; Foster, *Education and Social Change*; C. K. Graham, *The History of Education in Ghana: From the Earliest Times to the Declaration of Independence* (London: Frank Cass, 1971); Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: ‘How to Play the Game of Life’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Figures adapted from Engmann, *Population of Ghana*, 82, 109; Foster, *Education and Social Change*, 113–18.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Village Day Schools, Krachi District, 1945-47, ADM 39/1/100, NAG.

More importantly, I wanted to write a history of children and not adults. Perhaps the most interesting recent historiography on African education has concentrated on the agency of school pupils, the use of the classroom as a retreat from the authority of adults and the state, and the disruptive impact of education on existing hierarchies of gender and generation.<sup>35</sup> These kinds of histories require either detailed written sources or extensive interviews. But the most accessible sources on education in the Gold Coast are written by and for adults; they are documents of policy rather than thick description of the classroom. Reports on schools and classes are almost child-free documents and even reports on individual pupils can reveal more about the adult author than the child subject. (One report from the elite Achimota school claimed 'He looks a bit temperamental: I remember thinking so when I was watching his pole vault'.)<sup>36</sup> In Chapters 4 and 5, I explore how colonialism impacted upon the worldviews and thought processes of children in the Gold Coast. As might be expected literate children left behind the most detailed evidence of this phenomenon. Yet I have also tried to include unschooled children in my analysis and I treat western schooling as just one of many important intellectual influences on 'childish' thought.

Education is still, however, an important thread running through the thesis. The impact of schooling was profound despite the fact that it touched so few lives directly. Education broadened the possibilities of what children did, could and ought to do, what they might know and where that knowledge might come from. Schooling created new role models and authority

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<sup>35</sup> Corrie Decker, 'Reading, Writing, and Respectability: How Schoolgirls Developed Modern Literacies in Colonial Zanzibar', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, 1 (February 2010): 89–114; Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi*; Carol Summers, 'Subterranean Evil' and 'Tumultuous Riot' in Buganda: Authority and Alienation at King's College, Budo, 1942', *Journal of African History* 47, 1 (2006): 93–113.

<sup>36</sup> Report on B.O., Secondary School Reports, 1956, MAG 21/15/14, Manhyia Archives, Kumasi [henceforth MAK].



figures, and new paradigms of correct behaviour and achievement; it introduced new forms of play and it gave children new conduits and freedoms through which to explore the world. Above all schooling was transformative because its influence spread beyond the school gate and the sound of the school bell. The high throughput and turnover of pupils, children's keen awareness of hierarchy and difference, and the efficient distribution and mutation of new knowledge within peer cultures all meant that the influence of school spread rapidly from schooled pupil to his non-schooled cohort. The cliché of the African classroom, open-air and bounded only by a tree's shadow, makes for an apt metaphor. It is always worth bearing mind how few children went to school but, equally, the true impact of education is not captured by statistics alone.

By contrast with education, child labour has commonly been associated with 'negative' historical narratives. Contemporary and retrospective observers of western societies, for example, have been more critical of the use of child labour in 'larger, more commercial and more capitalist' concerns than of its use within the family.<sup>37</sup> Unpaid labour for the household, meanwhile, has often been viewed as natural and non-exploitative – or rather, as Grier has argued about child labour in general, it has become invisible through its ubiquity.<sup>38</sup> Such domestic labour can even gain implicit approval because it allows children to go to school and thus conform to contemporary ideals of childhood.<sup>39</sup> In Africanist historiography such morality judgments are complicated by the relationship of child labour to colonialism. Most

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<sup>37</sup> Jane Humphries, 'Child Labor: Lessons from the Historical Experience of Today's Industrial Economies', *World Bank Economic Review* 17, 2 (2003): 178.

<sup>38</sup> Beverly Grier, 'Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship: A Critical Overview', *African Studies Review* 47, 2 (2004): 15.

<sup>39</sup> Olga Nieuwenhuys, *Children's Lifeworlds: Gender, Welfare and Labour in the Developing World* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.

research has focused on the contribution of African children to the accumulation of land and capital by Europeans in settler colonies, an approach that is less relevant for non-settler colonies in West Africa such as the Gold Coast.<sup>40</sup> Colonial exploitation has also overshadowed the alternatives to working for Europeans: the roles of children in subsistence agriculture, in the household economy, and in African firms and commerce are largely unknown.<sup>41</sup> Kwabena Akurang-Parry, for example, identifies how children in the Gold Coast were incorporated into the booming cocoa transportation business in the early twentieth century, but his focus on forced labour perhaps obscures the sheer pervasiveness of child labour beyond extreme examples linked to ‘colonial governments allied with expatriate trading companies’.<sup>42</sup> The empirical gap surrounding household economics obscures long-term patterns of childhood economic activity, the benefits or social uses of a working childhood, and the financial trade-off between labour and learning.

Chapter 6 and 7 seek to fill this historiographical lacuna for the Gold Coast by exploring the economic aspects of childhood. As much as possible I have tried to remove moral judgements from the historical analysis of child labour. A family strategy approach offers a potentially unifying analytical framework for understanding the choices made over child labour. The ‘new economics of the family’ analyses the household unit as a rational entity seeking to maximize

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<sup>40</sup> William Beinart, ‘Transkeian Migrant Workers and Youth Labour on the Natal Sugar Estates 1918-1948’, *Journal of African History* 32, 1 (1991): 41–63; W. C. Chirwa, ‘Child and Youth Labour on the Nyasaland Plantations, 1890-1953’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (1993): 662–680; Grier, *Invisible Hands*; Hamilton Sipho Simelane, ‘Landlords, The State, and Child Labor in Colonial Swaziland, 1914-1947’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, 3 (1998): 571–593.

<sup>41</sup> Valuable exceptions include Beverly Grier, *Pawns, Porters and Petty Traders: Women in the Transition to Export Agriculture in Ghana*, Working Papers in African Studies 144 (Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1989); Elias C Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi 1859-1960* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, ‘The Loads Are Heavier than Usual’: Forced Labor by Women and Children in the Central Province, Gold Coast (Colonial Ghana), ca. 1900-1940’, *African Economic History*, 30 (2002): 43.

its well-being: here the choice between school and work is understood as a financial one.<sup>43</sup>

Analysis of family strategies holds great promise for the Gold Coast; indeed, existing literature has implicitly adopted this approach by ascribing enthusiasm for education to a desire for social mobility driven by structural changes in the economy.<sup>44</sup> However, because children have not been treated as economic producers within the family, the perceived benefits of education have not been examined alongside the true costs it imposed: the cost of fees, books, and uniforms were important, but so too was the labour that the household lost by sending a child to school. The great strength of analysing family strategies in this way is that it removes the moral judgments on child labour that twenty first-century observers find so difficult to avoid.

But the family strategy framework is no panacea: there are inherent difficulties stemming from the theory's roots in neoclassical economics. Firstly, it is deterministic and bestows families with high levels of foresight and dispassionate analysis; as Cunningham argues, this can reach the stage where a 'strategy' can only be explained as an unconscious one.<sup>45</sup> It is better to accept that decisions were not always 'correct' and that they were made on the basis of imperfect information and uncertainty over the future. This helps explain how similar families adopted different strategies, and it explains, too, how the adoption of one strategy could have an unexpected outcome: not only could the assumptions and rationality underlying the strategy be wrong, but the aggregate of similar decisions made by other families could change the

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<sup>43</sup> For a survey see Robert J. Willis, 'What Have We Learned from the Economics of the Family?', *American Economic Review* 77, 2 (May 1987): 68–81; historiographical uses of the family strategy approach include Clark Nardinelli, *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> This idea was advanced most influentially in Foster, *Education and Social Change*; but the argument also underlies, for example, Allman and Tashjian's work on the growing importance of education in the ideal of parenting in colonial Asante: Allman and Tashjian, "I Will Not Eat Stone".

<sup>45</sup> Hugh Cunningham, 'The Decline of Child Labour: Labour Markets and Family Economies in Europe and North America Since 1830', *Economic History Review* 53, 3 (2000): 414.

socioeconomic environment in which that strategy would play out. The second problem with family strategies is that they assume a unitary family with a single goal.<sup>46</sup> This is clearly too simplistic: the interests of a wife are not always those of her husband, the ambitions of a child can diverge from parental expectation, and the interests of maternal kin in childrearing can clash with those of paternal kin. In the Gold Coast, in fact, these divisions were crucial in shaping how, where, and for whom children worked.<sup>47</sup> Finally, people in the past were as influenced as contemporary historians by moral and cultural concerns over their children: when it came to decisions over work and education, honour, probity, and intellectual interest (among other things) had a value immeasurable on any financial matrix. Thus, family strategies could encompass ‘irrational’ behaviours as individuals wandered, inevitably and irrevocably, outside the confines of neoclassical economic models.

With these provisos in mind, this thesis proposes a conceptual model of colonial childhood built from the foundations of the new economics of the family. Education is necessarily a part of this model, but, rather than being the central pillar of childhood, it is an option with both benefits and costs, an option considered alongside other alternatives in the light of the family’s means and needs, the talents and preference of the individual, and the socioeconomic environment both now and in the predicted future. The ‘economic’ model of childhood proposed here has two parts. First, it is argued that children were productive, meaning economically active and important. Chapter 6 will demonstrate that children were integral to the productivity and viability of the household and were at work in all major sectors of the economy. Furthermore, the nature and utility of child labour corresponded to structural and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> On childrearing disputes in Asante: see Allman and Tashjian, *“I Will Not Eat Stone”*, 85–125.



technological change in the colonial economy.<sup>48</sup> The second aspect of the model is that children were not just economically productive but also accumulative: that is, childhood was not a static state but a dynamic and accretive process, with economic adulthood as an important target. The key argument of Chapter 7 is that children were significant economic actors as individuals and that a working childhood involved not just labouring for the household, a master, or employer, but also the personal accumulation of financial, intellectual, and social capital. This approach avoids two potential pitfalls when studying childhood in the past: an undue focus on schools as the primary source of human capital and the assumption that child labour is inherently exploitative.

## Scope, sources and methods

The methodology of the history of childhood is complex and unique. At the most fundamental level, historians need to ask a troubling question: if the overriding task of the discipline is to *discover* the historical nature of the ‘child’, then can this entity be located in historical sources without some *a priori* concept of what a child is? The answer is no: but this makes the historian’s task more complicated, not impossible. Historians are limited by what contemporary observers saw and by the vocabularies those observers could mobilise. In the Gold Coast, the metropolitan term ‘child’ was not congruent with its vernacular translations, still less with social reality. And yet in the vocabulary of the colonial archive there is just *the* child, a single English word for multiple concepts. So, when a metropolitan observer makes casual mention of a child in a scene from everyday life, in the context of an administrative document or even in careful anthropological description, which ‘child’ is being referred to? Is

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<sup>48</sup> An interesting parallel exists here with early-twentieth century North America: David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

this the local or the metropolitan ‘child’, and is the paradigm of one obscuring the reality of the other? And, in any case, how much information – on age, appearance, status or identity – is destroyed as the social child is encoded into the ‘child’ of language?

The specifics of language in the colonial Gold Coast further complicate research on children. In Africa the rhetoric of empire often expressed racial hierarchies in the vocabulary of age: colonial subjects were children who needed to be raised and disciplined by European powers.<sup>49</sup> This infantilising language is easy enough to discern in abstract writing about colonialism but it is harder to disentangle in writing about individuals. African domestic workers and assistants, in particular, were often described as ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ regardless of age. As Chapter 6 will show, Europeans certainly did employ children in their homes and businesses but many of those named as boy or girl would be better described as man or woman. Vernacular languages and West African English are just as slippery. Here social hierarchies were often expressed in terms of age – youth being synonymous with low social status. In both pre-colonial and colonial Asante, the term *nkwankwaa* (or youngmen) described a group of all ages, excluded from political or economic power despite their ambitions.<sup>50</sup> In colonial and contemporary Ghana, the English terms ‘small boy’ or ‘small girl’ could serve as literal descriptions of young children or as derogatory descriptions of low-status adults, often with ideas above their station. Sensitivity to the complexities of language is therefore always necessary when identifying biological children in historical records. Such sensitivity can in fact nuance our picture of childhood in the past. In trial records, for example, child witnesses

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<sup>49</sup> Lisa McNee, ‘The Languages of Childhood: The Discursive Construction of Childhood and Colonial Policy in French West Africa’, *African Studies Quarterly* 7 (2004): 20–32.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Allman, ‘The Youngmen and the Porcupine: Class, Nationalism and Asante’s Struggle for Self-Determination, 1954–57’, *Journal of African History* 31, 2 (1990): 263–279.

would often identify themselves with the line 'I am a small boy' or 'I am a schoolboy'; the derogatory undertones of the phrase 'small boy' suggest how the spread of formal education created new hierarchies among biological children during the colonial period.

The problem of identifying biological children is therefore serious – but it is not insurmountable. Most importantly, historical investigation is accumulative rather than instantaneous. The interrogation of source material can thus be an iterative process, in which an increasingly clear historical picture of the 'child' modifies scholarly interpretation, partially overcomes the myopia, assumptions and linguistic limitations of the original observer and also illuminates how different categories of the 'child' overlap and conflict with each other. The most difficult part of this process is its beginning. The historian's initial frame of reference has to coincide with that of contemporary observers, simply because the objects of study have to be those individuals *identified* as children, or the topic becomes intractably large and elusive. In the Gold Coast – as elsewhere – the most suitable approach is to use a relatively transparent and constant definition of the child extracted from primary sources and, from that starting point, deconstruct the category of childhood itself. I have defined children in this study as those under sixteen years old in part because this is also the cut-off point in the most important body of written source material available, colonial records.<sup>51</sup>

But childhood is not simply defined by chronology. Nor is the state of being a 'child' a static or unvariegated one. The transition from birth to adulthood was long, complex and occasioned a great deal of ceremony and social thought. When anthropologists and sociologists examined childhood in the Gold Coast between the 1920s and 1950s, the typical

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<sup>51</sup> Sixteen is the upper limit in the census of 1948 and was also used in the creation of a separate juvenile justice system.

stages of life they identified displayed remarkable parallels (as well as stark differences with) existing western models of childhood.<sup>52</sup> With the provisos that the 'lifecycle' is often disrupted, reset and more flexible than a written prescription allows for, and that significant variation could be observed across the Gold Coast, that idealised model of child development is presented here.<sup>53</sup> The processes of socialisation during childhood, and the ceremonial transitions between different stages of childhood and on into adulthood, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The most distinctive aspect of childhood in the Gold Coast was that, among the Akan and Ga peoples of the South, the first week of a child's life was considered as a discrete stage in the life-cycle. This was a time of great physical and spiritual danger for both the mother and her infant; the pair were normally kept at home, or even further afield, and during this period of confinement the baby was given an assortment of ritual and medical treatments.<sup>54</sup> Crucially, despite assuming a corporeal form, the first week after birth was a kind of pre-life for infant

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<sup>52</sup> This may, of course, have been a function of measurement, of scholars finding what they expected to find. But the diversity of empirical material, particularly informing the survey of the sociologist Barrington Kaye and the associated ethnographic dissertations discussed later in this chapter, helps to offset this fear. Barrington Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana: An Impressionistic Survey* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962) Moreover, anthropologists have often acted as 'gadfly' intellectuals, using the peculiarities of non-western childhoods to disprove universalising theories of human nature and culture. Robert A. LeVine, 'Ethnographic Studies of Childhood: A Historical Overview', *American Anthropologist* 109, 2 (2007), 249-51.

<sup>53</sup> On the methodological shortcomings of the idea of the 'life-cycle', and the more flexible patterns that emerge in social history, see Alan Bryman, Bill Blythway, Patricia Allatt, and Teresa Keil, eds. *Rethinking the Life Cycle* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) and Heywood, *Growing Up in France*, 70-6.

<sup>54</sup> On the details of these rituals, discussed further in Chapter 2, as practised in the 1950s, see Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 49-60. Earlier in the century, the practises surrounding birth were described principally by R. S. Rattray for the Asante in the forested central regions of the colony and by Margaret Field for the coastal Ga. M. J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 161-9; R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 54-8. The diverse Northern Territories are covered, unevenly, by R. S. Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 133, 417-8, 498-9 and Meyer Fortes, *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi: The Second Part of an Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 28-30, 166-7.



children. They were believed to be spiritual rather than social beings, clinging precariously to life and as yet uninterested in the material world.<sup>55</sup> For Akan and Ga children, the second stage of life, infancy, began with an outdoor ceremony in the second week after birth and marked the beginning of a child's social existence, as it was given a name and incorporated physically and emotionally into the wider household.<sup>56</sup>

Thereafter, the archetypal stages of childhood resemble more closely those documented by observers of western childhood. Infancy was, of course, a period of dependency and close contact with parents. To western observers this may even have been exaggerated by the practice of mothers, or older siblings, tying infants to their backs with cloth while they went about their work. Infancy ended with the twin markers of weaning and learning to walk; there was no accepted universal age for either but most children began walking, and were weaned, between their first and second years.<sup>57</sup> Early childhood lasted until about eight years old. There was no formal or ceremonial division between early and late childhood; instead the transition was marked by the assumption of new labour roles, increased freedom from parental supervision and the household space and the increasingly rigorous division into gender-specific peer groups during work and leisure activities.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This concept is discussed further in Chapter 2.

<sup>56</sup> A shorter period of 'pre-life' was reported for the northern regions of the colony, though considerable local variation seems to have been the rule. Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 56-8, 74, 87, 97-107.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, 87, 97-107.

<sup>58</sup> The clearest description of a 'staged' childhood in the context of the colonial Gold Coast is in Meyer Fortes' description of the northern Tallensi people. This work includes a useful table outlining the increasingly complex, independent and gender-segregated activities that children undertook as they got older. Meyer Fortes, *Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland*, International Institute of African Languages and Cultures Memorandum 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 63. Fortes' analysis is largely applicable to the colony as a whole. For further discussion of these issues, particularly as they relate to child labour, see Jack Lord, 'Spatial Approaches to the History of Child Labour in Colonial Ghana', *Polyvocia: SOAS Journal of Graduate Research* 2 (2010): 31-45.

The next stage of childhood came with the onset of biological puberty. As in the West, adolescence was believed to be a time of moodiness, rebellion against authority, sexual experimentation and radicalism of ideas and fashion.<sup>59</sup> It was also believed (at least by adults) to be generally a 'very happy time'.<sup>60</sup> But adolescence also led to sharp gender division in the lifecycle of children. For a girl, puberty often meant the imminent end of childhood because it was a sign that she was both ready and expected to marry. In most societies in the Gold Coast, a girl's first menstruation was marked with elaborate ceremony that signified to the community her chastity and eligibility for marriage.<sup>61</sup> Puberty for boys was not marked ceremonially and they could expect a much longer wait as social 'youths' than girls.<sup>62</sup> Adulthood, too, was achieved in gender-specific ways. For girls, adulthood was primarily rooted in the lifecycle and reproduction: menstruation in some areas, marriage in others but, most commonly of all, giving birth to a child of one's own. For boys, adulthood was primarily about accumulating the wealth that would allow them to marry: boys became men when they could 'earn their own livelihood'.<sup>63</sup> This sketch of how 'typical' childhoods played out in the Gold Coast is a useful guide, but also a potentially misleading one. As the rest of this thesis will demonstrate, the experience of colonial childhood is much too complex to be captured within the linear models of the life-cycle used by colonial-era anthropologists and the events that defined the life course were under pressure from historical forces.

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<sup>59</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 201-12.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, This is, inevitably, a simplification. As Chapter 6 shows, both girls and boys were important economic actors and, as Chapter 7 demonstrates, children of both genders accumulated wealth in various forms as they worked, learned and traded during their formative years. For a discussion of Asante women accumulating capital and goods before their marriages, see Gracia Clark, *African Market Women: Seven Life Stories from Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

Children are not of course homogenous and the experience of childhood in the colonial Gold Coast varied by age, gender, class, ethnicity and region. I have tried to capture these divisions in my analysis but it was not always possible to make fine-grained distinctions. The main reason for this is the constraints of the available sources. A combination of colonial and local indifference to children means that the 'child' of my source material was often a generic cipher rather than a fully described individual. Disaggregating the experience of childhood by age or gender is possible in the case of child labour because the sources on this topic are particularly rich; but for other topics the picture is necessarily more general. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the concentration of many sources on older children and, in particular, on boys at the expense of girls. Even when it is not possible to differentiate among children, there is so much that unites the young and divides them from adults that historical analysis is still worthwhile. Children were relatively small, weak and new to the world and the biological, psychological and social fact of their childhood so conditioned their experiences of colonialism that we cannot help but gain new insights by examining things from their perspective.

Perhaps the most pervasive methodological problem in writing the history of childhood is that children have very little direct impact on the historical record. Children are not, of course, absent from the archives but they rarely appear without some kind of adult mediation. This is partly a product of social power. Children do not control government or those institutions which shape their childhood; they are the objects not the architects of power in schools, orphanages and reformatories. But the exclusion of children from the archive is also partly a function of literacy and the preservation of written information. Children are less likely to write complex documents and these are still less likely to survive; both of these problems are

more acute in societies with low literacy rates. The child-authored documents that do survive tend to be either idiosyncratic, tightly-focused texts (a scattering of which survive in Ghanaian archives) or texts preserved by elite families (Ghanaian examples of which are probably held in private collections).<sup>64</sup> Both types of source are tricky to deal with because their narrowness in authorship or in focus makes it easier to write something closer to literary criticism than the kind of broad-based social history I intended for this project.<sup>65</sup> Historians have used large collections of child-authored sources, especially diaries, to identify important trends in the history of western childhood.<sup>66</sup> This could be an exciting area of research in the future but the focus of Ghanaian archives on government records at the expense of private papers makes this approach unfeasible at present.

Child-authored sources may be rare but the colonial archives still provide the most detailed and novel evidence of childhood experience in the Gold Coast. Archival series on education, the scout movement, welfare services and juvenile delinquency all place children at centre stage. However these records are by no means complete and some exciting potential materials, particularly relating to social welfare, were unavailable at the time I undertook my fieldwork. Outside these few dedicated archival series, children make only sporadic, fragmentary appearances in the archives: in files on slavery, forced labour, ethnography and health; in coroner's reports; and in court records. As such, the net must be cast widely in search of evidence. This study incorporates materials from the national archives of both Britain and

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<sup>64</sup> On the importance of such private collections of writing, see Barber, *Africa's Hidden Histories*.

<sup>65</sup> An interesting example from North American history is Karen Sánchez-Eppler, 'Practicing For Print: The Hale Children's Manuscript Libraries', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 2 (2008): 188–209.

<sup>66</sup> Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

Ghana, as well as four of Ghana's regional archives and the archive of the Asantehene's office in Kumasi.<sup>67</sup>

The production and preservation of knowledge about children is not equal across time and place and historical research is constrained by the intensity and focus of adult concern with the young. For the Gold Coast the unevenness in source quality and quantity is driven by the broader dynamics of imperial history. Children are most frequently written about as subjects of social concern, tension and reform; the colonial government was, however, relatively uninterested in African children until the 1930s and so there is a paucity of archival data relating to the early colonial period. The upsurge of imperial interest in African children is delineated in Chapter 3 but, to simplify, it was linked to a growing insecurity over social order in the colonial present and a desire to reform the next generation to secure the future. The imprint that this colonial concern left on the archive makes it significantly easier to reconstruct the social history of childhood in the late colonial period. There are also more detailed archival records for cities than for rural areas, where most Africans continued to live. This imbalance stems in large part from the spatial bias of archives towards commercial and administrative centres where there was a sustained colonial presence. On child labour, for example, colonial knowledge focused on those spaces which were subject to either greater government control or greater metropolitan oversight: mines, expatriate firms, plantations, transport hubs, highways and city streets. As Chapter 6 will show, children did work in such environments but the most common workplace – the family farm – perhaps remained the least observed by

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<sup>67</sup> The Asantehene ruled the pre-colonial Asante empire and remains a powerful political figure in contemporary Ghana.



colonial officials. Overall, the rural areas of a largely rural colony, and a large fraction of the colonial period itself, are under-documented.

The available archival materials were overwhelmingly created in and about urban centres in the post-1940 period. The sources that resulted are rich enough that they can be read ‘against the grain’ to illuminate a great deal more than just the political and ideological circumstances surrounding their production. The most significant development was the creation of the Department of Social Welfare between 1943 and 1946. This body was charged with developing and administering a juvenile justice system, including courts, penal institutions, and a probation service. Most significantly for the historical record, probation officers were given the power to monitor and intervene in the home lives of the colony’s child subjects. Probation officers were locally trained civil servants who gathered their information from home visits and interviews, producing structured reports on their charge’s history, home life, and daily activities. These reports are rich in unexpected detail and are the single most important body of sources in used in this thesis. These reports relate to cases before the Accra juvenile court in 1946 and 1952-57 and cover more than eight hundred children in total.<sup>68</sup>

Nonetheless probation reports should be treated with caution. First, they are an example of what Steedman has called ‘forced narration’: autobiographical stories surrendered at the behest of the state rather than freely given.<sup>69</sup> It is impossible to gauge what information was held back by children and their parents or what was not recorded by probation officers.

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<sup>68</sup> Juvenile Court, Accra, 1946, SCT 17/5/299, NAG; Juvenile Court, Accra, 1952-4, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; Juvenile Court, Accra, 1954-56, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; Juvenile Court, Accra, 1956-57, SCT 17/5/302, NAG. These reports are a matter of public record, but I have changed individual names in the main text, preserving only the initials and generic ‘tribal’ surnames (like ‘Zabrama’). Initials and dates are used in the footnotes to allow unambiguous identification of the original records.

<sup>69</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 55.



Second, probationers are not totally representative of the wider child population – although this problem is less severe than it first appears. ‘Delinquent’ children were certainly more likely to be migrants, male, impoverished, or living outside their natal home.<sup>70</sup> But the wide spectrum of alleged crimes, and the inclusion of the innocent alongside the guilty, ensures a broad socioeconomic spread, even if the sample size for some demographics is small. Crucially, the colonial state was not necessarily competent to decide which children were in moral danger or were a threat to social order. Probation records do not simply deal with ‘bad’ children. The sample is thus more random than it first appears, encompassing not only objectively problematic children but those swept up in raids on the railway station or taken into custody at incidents of public disorder, those found innocent of any wrongdoing, scared and vulnerable runaways, those suffering from the neglect of their parents, and girls who were victims, rather than perpetrators, of sexual crimes. The reports’ undeniable urban focus is partially offset by the dynamic linkages between city and country that they reveal. Overall, the methodologically troublesome aspects of the probation reports are outweighed by the rich detail on individual lives and the unrivaled data they provide on the material experience of childhood in the Gold Coast.

Connecting the detailed picture that emerges from the archive of late-colonial childhoods with deeper historical narratives requires additional sources, of which anthropological writing is the perhaps the most interesting and methodologically challenging. The Gold Coast was scrupulously documented by colonial-era anthropologists, and their rich body of work has been crucial for historians of both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. This historiography, moreover, has been sensitive to the difficulties of anthropology as a source and is thus a useful

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<sup>70</sup> Geoffrey Tooth, *A Survey of Juvenile Delinquency in the Gold Coast* (Accra, 1946).

methodological guide for research. Historians have been able to locate evidence of historical change in anthropological material, despite the timeless underpinnings of that discipline. The use of unpublished field-notes mitigates to an extent the distorting power of the anthropologist as an observer and interpreter.<sup>71</sup> And by examining how anthropologists were received and remembered in local societies, the construction of anthropological knowledge becomes less opaque.<sup>72</sup> There is always going to be a disparity between the early- and late-colonial periods in terms of the historical data available, but the use of anthropological material can help to close this gap.

Children and childhood were not the primary topics of investigation for any of the most important anthropologists working in the Gold Coast. But their works do cover aspects of life that, to varying degrees, touched upon childhood: fertility, kinship and the rituals that marked birth, adolescence, adulthood and death.<sup>73</sup> In addition there are a small number of works that relate directly to children. Rattray wrote a continent-wide exploration of children in African myth.<sup>74</sup> Fortes, meanwhile, was a child psychologist in London before he came to the Gold

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<sup>71</sup> McCaskie, *Asante Identities*.

<sup>72</sup> Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, esp. 182–216; Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>73</sup> R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929); R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*; R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930); R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: The Primitive Ethics of a Savage People* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916); R. S. Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, vol. 2; Meyer Fortes, *Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi*; Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi: Being the First Part of an Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945); Meyer Fortes, *Time and Social Structure, and Other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1970); Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*; M. J. Field, *Social Organization of the Gã People* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, on behalf of the Govt. of the Gold Coast, 1940); M. J. Field, *Akim-Kotoku: An Oman of the Gold Coast* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1948); M. J. Field, *Search for Security: An Ethno-Psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960).

<sup>74</sup> R. S. Rattray, 'The African Child in Proverb, Folklore, and Fact', *Africa* 6, 4 (1933): 456–471.

Coast.<sup>75</sup> His continued interest in children led to the publication of his brilliant study of education and play in the Northern Territories, *Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland*, and shorter articles about drawings by Talensi children.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to this traditional corpus of colonial-era anthropology I have made extensive use of a series of local ethnographies specifically about childhood and child-rearing, written by students of the University College of the Gold Coast in the 1950s. The theses were written according to a template and are primarily descriptive rather than analytical. Moreover the raw data from which they are constructed lies close to the surface, related through direct observation, quotations or paraphrasing of informants' words; verbatim interviews are sometimes contained in appendices. Barrington Kaye compiled a more analytical, but largely ahistorical, survey of child-rearing in Ghana using these theses.<sup>77</sup> Kaye's survey is a particularly useful resource because only a subset of the theses he used survive in the library collections the University of Ghana at Legon. But Kaye apparently paid no attention to the relatively unmediated voices of children contained in the theses: interviews, detailed accounts of play and pictures drawn by children. All of this data allows historians to tap into an elusive vein of childhood experience, certainly subject to the inevitable interference of social scientific measurement, but also more immediate and direct than autobiography and oral testimony. These sources were particularly useful for reconstructing the intellectual history of children as

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<sup>75</sup> Susan Drucker-Brown, 'Notes toward a Biography of Meyer Fortes', *American Ethnologist* 16, 2 (1989): 375–385.

<sup>76</sup> Meyer Fortes, 'Children's Drawings among the Tallensi', *Africa* 13, 3 (July 1940): 293–295; Meyer Fortes, 'Tallensi Children's Drawings', in Barbara Bloom Lloyd and John Gay (eds.), *Universals of Human Thought: Some African Evidence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); M. Fortes, *Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland*, International Institute of African Languages and Cultures Memorandum 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

<sup>77</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children*.

the researchers asked questions about children's wishes, fears and notions of correct behaviour. Analysis of the resulting statements and pictures not only reveals how children thought, but how cognitive patterns were being altered by historical change.

Photographic collections were also an important source of evidence. The Basel Mission Image Archive contains over five thousand photographs from the Gold Coast, mainly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>78</sup> The photographic collections of the British National Archives cover the entire colonial period and contain amateur photography as well as the more professional work of the Colonial Information Service.<sup>79</sup> Photographs proved important for several reasons. While adults writing about everyday life often ignored or marginalised children, the camera recorded the presence of children in public spaces regardless of how unimportant they were deemed to be. The economic activity of children, for example, was not taken particularly seriously by contemporary observers but there is a great deal of evidence available in photographs from the time. Even when adults were photographing other things, children had a tendency to wander into frame and thus imprint themselves onto the historical record.<sup>80</sup> And, finally, children were popular subjects of photographs for those who wanted to publicise their good works in Africa, from the housing of freed slaves by the Basel Mission to the provision of modern educational facilities by the colonial government.

Although historians are forced to deal primarily with adult-authored sources, an alternative to the observations of children that adults left in the historical record is adult memories of childhood and, in particular, autobiography and oral testimony. These sources can fill the

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<sup>78</sup> Basel Mission Image Archive, n.d., <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/bmpix/controller/index.htm>.

<sup>79</sup> Many of the relevant series are now available online. The National Archives, *Africa Through a Lens*, n.d., <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/africa/>.

<sup>80</sup> This phenomenon can also be seen in films from the era, as fictional characters are followed down the street by real and clearly uncooperative children. Sean Graham (dir.), *The Boy Kumasenu*, 1952.



thematic voids of archival texts that are essential to writing a complete history of childhood experience: emotion, relationships, play and the senses. Autobiography and oral testimony both create an epistemological challenge for historians because both types of source are subject to an opaque distortion between the time of an event and its subsequent retelling: the more time that elapses before an event becomes a source, the more variables inform the creation of that source. Historians need to consider how and why such sources were created and, in the case of interviews, how their own presence has shaped the historical data that emerges in the present. There are a small number of published autobiographies that cover colonial childhoods in the Gold Coast.<sup>81</sup> These are valuable but – like any corpus of autobiography – flawed by the inherently exceptional nature of their authors.<sup>82</sup> A more representative source of evidence might be oral testimony. Here the problem was a dizzying array of choice – the potential pool of interviewees comprises all those Ghanaians born before independence – and a limited time-frame for research. I prioritised archival research in the initial stages of my research but did conduct some interviews in Walewale in northern Ghana. These were useful, particularly on the topics of child migration and childhood fears, and certainly show the potential of oral testimony for future research on childhood.

## Plan of the thesis

The thesis is structured into three parts: these explore, first, the relationship of children to adult society; second, the intellectual and emotional history of children; and third, the

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<sup>81</sup> Most obviously Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1996); S. W. D. K Gandah, *The Silent Rebel* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004); T. E Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle: Memories of My Childhood Days in Asante* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

<sup>82</sup> M. J. Maynes, 'Autobiography and Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Methodological Considerations', *Social Science History*, 16, 3 (1992): 517–537.



economics of childhood in the Gold Coast. Part One, *Children and Adult Society*, sets out a pre-colonial baseline for local philosophies of childhood and explores how colonial rule challenged many of these beliefs. In Chapter 2 I argue that despite the importance for adults of fertility and child-bearing, children in pre-colonial society were largely excluded from the social compact. They were often owned and transferred as commodities. They had few individual rights to balance their obligations to others. Their low jural status was justified by the religious belief that children were not quite of the material plane and so their loyalty to adult society was thought to be equivocal and suspect. At its most extreme, the subordination of an individual child's interest to the collective wellbeing of kin or community brought local societies into direct conflict with colonial law. More subtly, the ideas brought to the Gold Coast by missionaries, educators and officials challenged existing ideas about how children should be raised and threatened to upend existing generational hierarchies.

Indeed, Chapter 3 argues that the colonial presence redefined the relationship between children and adult society. Children were increasingly seen as in need of protection from the moral and physical dangers of the adult world. There was a greater imperative for childhoods to be innocent and carefree, incorporating play and education alongside labour. And there was a growing belief that children were valuable as individuals and that protecting an individual child's welfare was valuable in and of itself. From the 1940s onwards colonial officials increasingly believed that African children were threatened by delinquency and other social problems that could only be addressed by modern child-centred institutions, by state regulation of the domestic sphere and by weakening kinship power over children.

Part Two of the thesis, *The Intellectual History of Children*, explores the lived experience of colonialism and uses a variety of sources to uncover how children interpreted the world

around them. Chapter 4 looks at the history of emotions, specifically examining children's fears and their sense of physical security. Children experienced these emotions very differently from adults, primarily because of their existence on the social and physical edge of the adult realm. But in the twentieth century the very notions of fear and security were changing. Children began to fear recognisably colonial institutions and authority figures but, simultaneously, to associate comfort and security with metropolitan material culture. Chapter 5 explores children's encounters with empire and authority. I argue that children had a sometimes acute awareness of imperial wealth and power. But, at the same time, children were largely apolitical, cut off from this adult realm by their lack of experience and by their intense focus on the present and the self.

Part Three, *The Economics of Childhood*, looks at children as producers and accumulators of wealth. This research challenges existing Africanist interpretations of child labour as a narrowly exploitative institution. Chapter 6 does document the dangerous, poorly remunerated conditions in which many children worked. But I then consider why the colonial economic infrastructure relied so heavily on the 'small jobs' done by children. I also argue that many working children found that their mobility and autonomy expanded as demand for their labour increased in both cash crop agriculture and the informal urban economy. Finally, Chapter 7 undertakes a more fundamental reassessment of the social purpose of child labour. I argue that much of the work undertaken by children was 'accumulative' rather than exploitative. It was labour that bridged the gap between economic childhood and adulthood. From a young age children accumulated tangible capital in the form of money, land, livestock and goods; human capital in the form of skills, knowledge, literacy and numeracy; and social

capital in the form of relationships, human networks and cultural belonging. The advent and expansion of formal schooling disrupted, but did not destroy, this pattern of accumulation.

## Part One

### Children and adult society

## Chapter 2

### 'Tradition' and colonial rule

In his classic study of African kinship and family economics, the anthropologist Claude Meillassoux wrote that 'gold, cloth, and ivory, metal anklets and cattle may well be desirable, and even look like treasure, but they are only able to produce and reproduce wealth if they are successfully reconverted into the instruments of life'.<sup>1</sup> This is a neat summary of the importance of 'wealth in people' for African societies. In an under-populated continent, characterised by harsh environments and high rates of child mortality, competition for followers and the production of new life have been two crucial dynamics of African history.<sup>2</sup> Jane Guyer has suggested that 'wealth embodied in rights in people lies close to the centre of African economic and social history over the past five hundred years: in the slave trades on the one hand and in political and kinship history on the other'.<sup>3</sup> Both aspects are vital in understanding the history of childhood and the reasons why fertility and the production of children were of crucial importance in the Gold Coast, as they were elsewhere in the continent. In the Gold Coast, fertility was central to the idea of a well-functioning society and to the worth and honour of individuals. The anthropologist Margaret Field documented this particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meat and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Demography and control (or loss of control) over people make up the overarching framework of John Iliffe's magisterial survey of the continent, *Africans: The History of a Continent*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Jane Guyer, 'Wealth in People, Wealth in Things - Introduction', *Journal of African History* 36, 1 (1995): 84.



well for Ga societies in the south east of the colony, but examples could also be drawn from elsewhere in the Gold Coast.<sup>4</sup> Much religious ceremony and local medicine was dedicated to expediting pregnancy and birth, and treating childlessness and miscarriage. Fecundity was celebrated but, conversely, not having children was perceived as a failing. Sometimes infertility was blamed on third parties. Throughout the Gold Coast, witchcraft was an idiom used to explain a perceived decline in fertility caused by, or coinciding with, colonialism; in Ga societies, witches were believed to cause sterility in adults and to eat the *kla* (life force) of unborn babies, who would then die in the womb.<sup>5</sup> But the struggle to have children could also be a very personal one, especially for women. In the Ga town of Labadi, death during pregnancy was thought to be 'unspeakably disgraceful' if it also led to the death of the unborn child; any woman who died in this way was buried in an 'accursed grove'.<sup>6</sup> Field was told by a local medicine man that a difficult birth could be caused by an unconfessed crime.<sup>7</sup> Barrenness was blamed on either bad *gbeshi* (destiny or luck) or the ill will of a deity. Women desperately sought treatment if they remained childless, seeking out 'god after god and physician after physician'.<sup>8</sup> William Addo, who studied child training in a Ga village in the 1950s, even suggested that the respect that children gave to individual adults may have been modulated by their status as parents. Addo witnessed a nine-year-old boy being told to descend a coconut

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<sup>4</sup> For a survey of the 'universally positive' attitude towards having children documented in the 1950s: see Kaye, *Child Training in Ghana*, 22–39.

<sup>5</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 93; M. J. Field, 'Some New Shrines of the Gold Coast and Their Significance', *Africa* 13, 2 (1940): 138–149. For a discussion of witchcraft anxieties in the colonial period, see Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 115–9.

<sup>6</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 59; In Ashanti Region in the early colonial period, the government closely monitored a similar custom to check that the bodies of the mother and her child were not mistreated before being buried. Chief Osei Mampong, Bantama, Kumasi, Afunsua custom held on his grand daughter at a village Whimasey, who died yesterday, 1907–1908, ARG 1/2/29/2, National Archives Ghana [henceforth NAG] Kumasi.

<sup>7</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 114–5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

tree by a childless woman. But the boy chastised her: 'Why have you come to flog me? What have I done? Go and flog your own son'.<sup>9</sup> Addo reported that the woman then 'became quiet and sullen and left him alone'.<sup>10</sup>

But, while adults in the Gold Coast went to great lengths to have children, the importance of fertility did not automatically translate into children being highly prized as individuals. From a modern, western perspective, this seems odd; from a historical perspective, it is unsurprising. In his anthropological survey of childhood, David Lancy documents whole 'societies, indeed entire periods in history, where children are viewed as unwanted, inconvenient *changelings* or as desired but pragmatically commoditized *chattel*'.<sup>11</sup> My argument in this chapter is that children in the Gold Coast were thought of as both 'chattel' and 'changelings'. Children had the characteristics of chattel in that they were valued as a means to an end, rather than for their own sake, and their interests were frequently sacrificed for the benefit of the group. There was also a long-standing tradition of children having a value that could be measured and traded. Children had the characteristics of changelings in that they acquired their full humanity and social rights only gradually. They were thought of as otherworldly, particularly when very young, and they were treated with some suspicion, and even callousness, as a result. In the early colonial period these social phenomena brought local ideas about childhood into dramatic, but short-lived, conflict with British rule. This was most obvious in relation to commodified transfers of children – slavery and pawning – and to ritual killing. But, once

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<sup>9</sup> William A. Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo a Village in the Ga State' (Master's Dissertation, University College, Achimota, 1954), 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), x. Emphasis in the original.

these affronts to law and order were dealt with, the colonial state remained relatively indifferent to African children until the 1920s.

## Children as chattel

Children in the Gold Coast were seen as a store of wealth and work. From an early age they were useful around the house or on the farm and, as they got older, they were expected to provide for their relatives. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the economic activities of children, but here I am concerned with the social ideology that children were a resource to be drawn upon by the family and wider society. The idea is prevalent in various ceremonies surrounding birth. The Ga naming ceremony recorded by A. B. Quartey-Papafio in the 1910s contained the line, 'May the families always be in a position to pay respect and regard to this child, and out of his earnings may we have something to live upon!'<sup>12</sup> The version recorded by Field contained the line, 'May he eat by the work of his five fingers'.<sup>13</sup> In the Asante naming ceremony, the grandparents asked 'that he grow up and continue to meet me here, and let him give me food'.<sup>14</sup> Another revealing expression of the idea that children were a store of wealth and work comes from an Asante *Adae* ceremony witnessed at Techiman by R. S. Rattray in the early 1920s. The priest spoke thus:

May this town prosper, may the bearers of children bear children,  
and the males beget children; when we seek for wealth let us get  
some; as for your children who have gone to the forest in order to

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<sup>12</sup> A. B. Quartey-Papafio, 'The Use of Names among the Gas or Accra People of the Gold Coast', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 13, 50 (1914): 168.

<sup>13</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 64.

get snails, grant that they get some to bring, grant that we get some  
to eat and some to sell that we may buy cloths to cover ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

This is revealing because it linked children to the continuity of communities and, simultaneously, associated the unglamorous work children were assigned with the prestige it brought to others.

The idea that children were a store of wealth and work seems to have been common across the territory in the early colonial period. These ideas were grounded, moreover, in a series of social practices that ensured that the wealth and work that children embodied was mobilised, circulated and exchanged for the benefit of adults. Indeed, children had little say in how the value they embodied was used.<sup>16</sup> The Gold Coast was split between matrilineal societies like the Akan, in which ownership of children was traced through the mother and maternal relatives, and patrilineal societies like the coastal Ga and the savannah peoples of the Northern Territories, in which ownership of children was traced through the father and paternal relatives.<sup>17</sup> But what united both was that children were ‘owned’ and that children were thus vulnerable to the whims and needs of the adults who owned them. In Asante, Rattray described children as being the *nkoa* (subjects) of their maternal uncle, and subjecthood is perhaps the best way to understand the social place of children with respect to their families; it was not equivalent to slavery but ‘nothing worse than that condition of voluntary and essential

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<sup>15</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> This is something of a simplification. I argue in Chapter 7 that, in the twentieth century at least, as children got older they began to work for themselves – but they certainly remained juniors in terms of economic autonomy and domestic authority.

<sup>17</sup> In matrilineal Asante, this tension gave rise to the saying ‘We men do not beget children to enrich us’, a recognition that, despite the wealth that children would eventually produce, much of it would flow to maternal relatives rather than to the biological father. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 10.

servitude in which every man and woman stood in relation to some other person or group'.<sup>18</sup>

The social systems that anthropologists described in the colonial period probably failed to capture the extent to which social rule-breaking, family relationships and children's agency all allowed young people some freedom to resist the demands that adults made of them. But the net result of children's inferior social status was that many found themselves transferred between adult beneficiaries, with little input into the process.

These transfers can be divided into two main categories, the economic and the spiritual, although there was no absolute separation between the two. Adults could transfer their children to a spiritual authority by dedicating them, before their birth, to the service of a god. Field described Ga parents who, having struggled to conceive, had promised a god the services of their next child if he helped them give birth.<sup>19</sup> These so-called fetish children fell into two categories. The first were in a temporary state of spiritual bondage that left their everyday life relatively unaffected. At puberty, a ceremony was performed that released them from the god's influence.<sup>20</sup> The second category, however, were in a permanent state of bondage. As children they were left with 'uncut, matted hair, and black-and-white beads' and, as adults, would be trained as a *woyo* (medium) or a servant of the shrine.<sup>21</sup> This fate could be escaped only by paying 'heavy fines and sacrifices'.<sup>22</sup> Field described such children as a common sight. A similar phenomenon may also have occurred in Asante. Rattray's description is ambiguous but he noted 'young priests' being 'dedicated to 'Nyame [the supreme sky god] for life'.<sup>23</sup> Fetish

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>19</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 179; see also, Quartey-Papafio, 'The Use of Names among the Gas', 182.

<sup>20</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 179; Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 88.

<sup>21</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 143.



children are also a common sight in European photography from the colonial period.<sup>24</sup> Political authorities also had some rights over the children of their subjects. Twins were thought to be of great spiritual power and significance and, in Asante, they traditionally belonged to the chief, becoming 'if girls, his potential wives, if boys, elephant-tail switchers at the court'.<sup>25</sup>

More familiar were transfers of children for economic reasons. The most common transfers of children were undertaken within extended families. Children were sent to work for relatives, or to receive training, or discipline, that they could not receive at home. The circulation of children could smooth out the cyclical, but unpredictable, labour supply of the household, it could strengthen ties between disparate branches of the family and it could allow wealthier family members to raise, and benefit from the labour of, poorer relatives' offspring.<sup>26</sup> Although the child concerned was rarely consulted, these practices were relatively uncontroversial and continued throughout the colonial period. They are discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 6. In the Northern Territories, girls could also be transferred to unrelated households, as a prelude to marriage, in exchange for bridewealth.<sup>27</sup> Girls who were sent to other households retained, in theory, the option to reject the marriage itself, though Meyer Fortes suggested that

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<sup>24</sup> The desire to document the exotic complicates the usefulness of such photography as evidence of how widespread the practice was. From the Basel Mission photographic archive, for example: Friedrich Ramseyer, 'Woman carrying fetish child on her back', c.1888-1908, D-30.23.015; Friedrich Ramseyer, 'Women carrying fetish children', c.1888-1908, D-30.23.012; 'A fetish child', c.1931-1940, QD-30.018.0097, Basel Mission Picture Archive; Wilhelm Ananda Stamm, 'Woman with two children. The child who is standing has been dedicated to the fetish, and its hair may not be cut', c.1927-1938, D-30.63.110, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

<sup>25</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Esther Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meat and Money*.

<sup>27</sup> Essay on the Peoples of North-West Province by M. M. Read, Commissioner, 1908, NRG 8/2/217, NAG Tamale.

they were often put under great pressure to go through with it.<sup>28</sup> Colonial officials did not, however, consider 'child marriage', to be a common problem or a part of local cultures.<sup>29</sup>

In the pre-colonial period, commodified transfers of children were common and, as will be discussed below, were perceived as a direct challenge to colonial rule and to metropolitan ideals of childhood. The area that would become the Gold Coast had a long history of involvement with slavery. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, the Asante empire was a large producer of slaves, the northern savannah regions were reservoirs from which slave populations were drawn and coastal states were important middlemen in the trade. After the British abolished the Atlantic trade in 1807, exports of slaves from the Gold Coast via maritime routes declined precipitously, but slaves were redirected to internal markets and slavery itself became harsher and more commodified.<sup>30</sup> Relative to their demographic importance in Africa, children were under-represented during the legal phase of the Atlantic slave trade, perhaps because they were ill-equipped to survive the middle passage and to undertake plantation work in the Americas.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, children made up a large part of the internal trade in slaves because of the more integrative nature of slavery in what would become the Gold Coast. Slaves were bought as workers and as followers; children, cut off from their own kin, had little choice but to follow. Men in matrilineal societies were particularly keen on child slaves, or on having children with their slave wives, because these were the only offspring over whom they had

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<sup>28</sup> Meyer Fortes, Memorandum on Marriage Law Among the Tallensi, Marriage Law, 1931-57, NRG 8/2/200, NAG Tamale.

<sup>29</sup> Prevention of Forced Marriage of African Girls, 1937, ADM 23/1/928, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>30</sup> Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Freelabour in Asante, 1807-1956* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004); P. Haenger, *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast: Towards an Understanding of Social Bondage in West Africa* (Basel: Schlettwein, 2000); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 159–70.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Lovejoy, 'The Children of Slavery – the Transatlantic Phase', *Slavery & Abolition* 27, 2 (2006): 197–217.

undisputed rights.<sup>32</sup> As well as the outright sale of children into slavery, others were given to creditors as a security on debts owed. Although such pawnship was temporary it shared many unpleasant characteristics of slavery.<sup>33</sup> This was, however, a financial transaction often mediated by the obligations of kinship. In Asante, for example, it was common for a biological father to take his own children as pawns if he could afford to advance money to the mother's *abusua* (matrilineage) rather than let the maternal uncles send the child elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

The abolition of slavery and slave-trading in the Gold Coast was uneven but has great significance for the history of childhood. The Emancipation Act was applied to the Gold Coast Colony in 1875, to the former Protected Territories that were annexed to the Colony in 1901 and to Ashanti Region and the Northern Territories in 1908. Children (and particularly young girls) made up an increasing proportion of purchased slaves from the late nineteenth century onwards because their social and physical vulnerability made them easier to enslave and less likely to abscond. These were often imported from the poorer savannah regions in the north to the wealthier areas of the south where demand for labour was higher.<sup>35</sup> Their experience was often an unhappy one. Apart from the violence of adults, transferred children faced isolating treatment from other children. One example of this comes from an extraordinarily well-documented child slavery case tried in 1941. The case concerned three Busanga girls who were taken in early childhood from French Upper Volta to the northern town of Bawku and

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<sup>32</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Gareth Austin, 'Human Pawning in Asante 1800-1950: Markets and Coercion, Gender and Cocoa', in Toyin Falola and Paul E Lovejoy (eds.), *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 119-59; Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, 'The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810', *Journal of African History* 42, 1 (2001): 67-89; on pawning in the Northern Territories: NRG 8/2/217, NAG Tamale.

<sup>34</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Trevor Getz, 'British Magistrates and Unfree Children in Early Colonial Gold Coast, 1874-1899', in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Child Slaves in the Modern World*, (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2011), 163-5; Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 34-7.

sold to a local man. Although generally well-treated, alienation from the other children in the house was a problem for the Busanga girls. One testified that: 'I used to cry because I had marks and the other girls had not. The other girls used to make fun of me and say I had cheeks like calabash. Generally speaking I was not happy'.<sup>36</sup> The 'marks' this girl referred to came from facial scarification, a practice common in the Northern Territories, either in infancy, childhood or to signify the transition to adulthood. But the scarification that signified inclusion in Busanga areas marked these girls as different and inferior in Bawku, as they worked and played together with local children. Chapter 6 returns to theme of the vulnerability of child workers.

## Children, slavery and the colonial state

The abolition of slavery and other forms of unfree labour is perhaps the most studied aspect of the history of childhood in the Gold Coast. In this section I argue that abolition was the initial catalyst for early colonial officials to suspend the racial logic of colonialism on the basis of age and, if only for a brief historical moment, to see the African child in a similar light to the European child. Abolition was significant for the relationship between children and the colonial state because the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1893 empowered magistrates to place destitute, abandoned or freed children into the custody of a suitable guardian. Trevor Getz and Kwabena Akurang-Parry have produced valuable research on this topic but neither historian focuses on how abolition initially set the tone for the relationship between the colonial state and its young subjects. Akurang-Parry notes that, while the policy of apprenticing freed child slaves in the first decade of the twentieth century included legal obligations for the master to provide for the child and a stipulation that the children's welfare

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<sup>36</sup> Domestic Slavery - Slave Dealing, 1937, NRG 8/2/205, NAG Tamale.



be appraised regularly by the District Commissioner, apprenticeship nonetheless exposed children to economic and sexual exploitation.<sup>37</sup> But, by concentrating on the perceived failures of this policy, Akurang-Parry ignores the broader implications for the colonial view of the 'African child' and the obligations this imposed upon the state. Getz, meanwhile, argues that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British magistrates' reactions to child slavery cases were shaped by their own 'cultural conceptions of childhood' and, in particular, the idea that children needed both 'protection and discipline'.<sup>38</sup> This is a vital point but it downplays the two-way flows of African-Atlantic intellectual history. Officials might have brought certain preconceptions of childhood to the colony but local conditions, not least the spectre of slavery itself, altered their ideas considerably. And, as we will see, without the scrutiny and insecurity that accompanied abolition, the 'African child' was seen as much less suited to, or deserving of, European standards of child welfare.

There are two points to expand upon here. The first is that, in addition to the need for protection and discipline that Getz identifies, colonial officials also thought that children should enjoy a degree of freedom and free will much greater than they would experience in indigenous society (or at least indigenous society as it was perceived by Europeans). Two cases concerning freed slave children from the Central Province of the Gold Coast Colony in 1909 illustrate how colonial officials were also concerned that children should be protected from the *slavery-like* characteristics of guardianship, fosterage and even marriage. The provincial commissioner described two girls and a boy in the guardianship of a man named Taylor as 'of

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<sup>37</sup> Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, 'Missy Queen in her Palaver Says de Gole Cosse Slaves is Free': The British Abolition of Slavery/Pawnship and Colonial Labor Recruitment in the Gold Coast [Southern Ghana], 1874-ca.1940' (PhD, York University, 1999), 295–303.

<sup>38</sup> Getz, 'Unfree Children', 164.



an age when they can judge for themselves'. He told the local district commissioner that Taylor should retain custody only if 'you are sure that these girls and boy quite understand that they are at liberty to go away at any time and that Taylor cannot call on them for any money or to return anything he may have given them'.<sup>39</sup> Another case concerned a freed slave girl, Satura, who despite being apprenticed to a man named Renner, was supposed to have eloped with a police sergeant, Ginadu Wangara. The provincial commissioner was unwilling to force Satura to return but he also emphasised that Wangara 'cannot keep her against her will nor charge her or anyone she may possibly go to any compensation'.<sup>40</sup> This was in stark contrast to the chattel-like status of children described in the previous section. Children seem to have been aware of this shift in authority. In the late nineteenth century, a small number of children were able to use colonial institutions to effect their freedom.<sup>41</sup> Free children may even have used the state's aversion to practices that looked like slavery to undermine the authority of their parents. Around 1890, Governor Griffiths was told by a 'native gentleman of great experience' that, because of widespread knowledge of emancipation, 'if you chastise your own child for any act of disobedience rendering necessary a slight castigation, the child will threaten to take you before the District Commissioner'.<sup>42</sup>

The second point is that colonial 'protection' of children was not neutral: it implied conformity to a metropolitan ideal of childhood. Indeed, European observers of African societies

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<sup>39</sup> Acting Provincial Commissioner Grimshaw, Central Province to District Commissioner, Saltpond, 25/6/1909, Slave Children, 1906, ADM 23/1/126, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>40</sup> It later transpired that Satura was living with her mother in the Kumasi Zongo, the 'strangers' quarter. Acting Commissioner, Central Province to Assistant Commissioner of Police, Kumasi, 16/8/1909, Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Getz, 'Unfree Children', 167.

<sup>42</sup> Although caution is required here, because Griffiths was defending the Colony's record on slavery. Letter from W. B. Griffiths to Lord Knutsford, 26/1/1891, 7 in Parliamentary Papers, May 1891 LVII [C.6354] *Correspondence Respecting the Administration of the Laws against Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony*, 1891.

portrayed slavery itself as a perversion of childhood. The missionary Friedrich Ramseyer wrote to the governor in 1904 on the subject of domestic slavery, bemoaning the ‘cruel’ separation of slave children from their parents when estates were broken up following the death of the master. But he then claimed that ‘the proper reason why it has been so difficult for us to get scholars from the people’ was the widespread practice of pawning, implying that the masters were unwilling to invest in education for children who were chattel rather than kin.<sup>43</sup> Measures to protect freed slaves thus became, in part, measures to correct the shortcomings of slave childhoods. Apprenticeship contracts that stipulated a period in formal education are one example. But the transmission of metropolitan anxieties to a colonial setting is perhaps clearest in the state’s approach to gender and sexuality. Around 1907, the apprenticeship policy for freed slaves was modified so that ‘no girl wards should in future be sent out to anyone other than European ladies or religious Missions’, a decision almost certainly motivated by the blurred boundaries between domestic service (the profession to which most girls were apprenticed) and concubinage or marriage.<sup>44</sup> This sexualisation of young girls clashed with the metropolitan idea, increasingly dominant in the nineteenth century, that girlhood should be a time of both innocence and chastity.<sup>45</sup> Implicit in this revised policy was the belief that only Europeans could be trusted to safeguard girls from sexual predation. As we will see in Chapter 3, this gendered approach to colonial policy, and the overwhelming concern with girls’ sexuality, continued into the colonial period.

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<sup>43</sup> Freidrich Ramseyer to Governor, 31/10/1904, Domestic slavery in Ashanti, August 1904-05, ARG 1/2/30/1/2, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>44</sup> Assistant Commissioner, Central Province to Cantonment Magistrate, [illegible], Northern Nigeria, 9/1/1908, ADM 23/1/126, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>45</sup> R. Danielle Egan and Gail L Hawkes, ‘Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, 4 (December 1, 2008): 355–367.

But colonial aversion to childhood's slavery-like characteristics was not uniform throughout the Gold Coast and it was, moreover, a temporary function of the post-emancipation political moment. In 1907, a year before the abolition of slavery and pawnship in Ashanti Region, Chief Yaw Birequa of Oboohun wrote to the chief commissioner claiming that he had paid £9 to redeem two pawned 'boys', Kofi Anotichie and Kobina Anansa, who were then unlawfully seized by Osai Akoto of Fomena, Adansi. Kofi Anotichie was most likely a youth or young man, while Kobina Asansa was probably an adolescent child, old enough to work but not old enough to support himself. Kobina was reportedly found carrying rubber at Obuasi but also testified that he was staying with Kofi Anotichie of his 'own free will' until he was 'old enough to get work and make some money' for himself. A note on this file suggests some official sympathy with the idea that children were free to choose the terms of their service to adults: if the boys refused to return to Yaw Birequa, it said, 'he has only his cruel treatment of them to thank for that'. But the commissioner of South West Ashanti unambiguously saw children as chattel. 'These boys belong to Oboohun Village and cannot throw off their allegiance like they would a cloth', he wrote, 'They must appear before me & show cause why they wish to leave their Chief'. When they did so he instructed them to return to Yaw Birequa. But, in a measure of how socioeconomic forces were undermining both gerontocratic and colonial forms of control over the young, the two boys apparently never arrived. Inquiries were then sent to the chief of Adansi, who reported that Kofi Anotichie and Kobina Anansa had 'passed through Fomena some time ago on their way to the Coast. Their whereabouts at present is not known'.<sup>46</sup> Officials *were* able to compartmentalise African children in this case because, unlike

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<sup>46</sup> Chief Yaw Birequa requesting return of niece [sic] from Osei Akoto of Formina, 1906-07, ARG 1/2/7/3, NAG Kumasi.

in the Colony in 1907, there was no legal imperative to interfere with the matrix of family, labour and the 'ownership' of children.

And once the initial scrutiny associated with abolition had subsided, there is evidence that the agency of individual children became much less of a concern. Amba Attah, a freed slave, was first placed in the care of the Cape Coast Roman Catholic Mission in 1924. She apparently ran away sometime in 1928 and, rather than respecting the wishes of the child to leave the convent, the police commissioner ordered that the girl be 'searched for and sent back'.<sup>47</sup> The commitment to the freedom and autonomy of children in the early colonial period can thus be seen as more a historical accident than a function of any natural sympathy that European officials might have felt towards African children.

## Children as changelings

### Socialization and the early lifecycle

Children in the Gold Coast were frequently ignored or belittled. They were seen as reckless, chaotic and loose-lipped. These qualities were the antithesis of proper adult behaviour, which had to be learned, gradually, over the course of childhood. Children were not necessarily to be condemned for these failings but both they and their adult carers had to be protected from them.<sup>48</sup> Children, particularly the very young, were also considered to be otherworldly. Their loyalties were seen to be split between the spirit and material worlds, and they were thought to have supernatural and even animal characteristics (see Chapter 4). Learning to sit, walk and then talk with adults were developmental milestones that gave children more human

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<sup>47</sup> Registrar, Supreme Court to Commissioner, Central Province, 8/5/1928, ADM 23/1/126, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>48</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 37, 56; M. Fortes and S. L. Fortes, 'Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi', *Africa* 9, 2 (1936): 261; Kaye, *Child Training in Ghana*, 133–58.

characteristics.<sup>49</sup> But, until that time, the very young were viewed with some caution. This had deep religious underpinnings, particularly in societies that believed that the soul (roughly translated) predated one's birth. Field reported that the Ga believed that children had a 'Sky Family' before being born that would remain closer than 'any earthly relatives'.<sup>50</sup> At any time, children might be reclaimed by this family. Children's commitment to, and suitability for, the adult world were thus both seen as suspect.

Chapter 1 sketched out the functional definitions of adulthood, attained by girls upon reaching reproductive maturity and by boys on reaching the economic status to support themselves and perhaps form a household of their own. But the fact that children could be viewed with suspicion hints at the social purpose of childhood as socializing process, marked by many interventions to mould the individual. 'If you don't harass your child', Fortes was told by an elder during his research among the Tallensi in the north east of the colony, 'he will not gain sense'.<sup>51</sup> Thus childhood ended both when the functional criteria of adulthood had been met and when undesirable, childlike traits had been expunged and the individual could be trusted as an adult and kin member.

The socialisation process was long and complex. Ceremonially, childhood was bookended by the celebrations that took place shortly after birth and at puberty. In the first seven days after birth, children were not socialized at all, but kept confined to the home, reflecting uncertainty over whether they belonged to the human or spirit worlds.<sup>52</sup> During this short period, the physical welfare of the child took precedence. He or she was treated with various medical

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<sup>49</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 67; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 65.

<sup>50</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> The period was shorter in the Northern Territories.



tinctures, procedures and ceremonies and, indirectly, by the observation of parental taboos. These post-natal ceremonies, nominally a vestige of tradition, in fact used a bricolage of reagents that drew upon and reflected the history of the colony: snail shells and herbs from the forest economy, peppers from the Columbian exchange, European spirits from the Atlantic trade, palm oil from the post-abolition transition to 'legitimate' commerce and kerosene from the increasingly commodified household production of the colonial-era.<sup>53</sup> If the child survived this first week then he or she was assumed to be human and the socialization process could begin with the 'outdooring' ceremony, when a child's social status caught up with his or her corporeal existence.<sup>54</sup> At the outdooring ceremony, the child was taken outside for the first time and presented to the wider family and community. In some areas, a naming ceremony took place at the same time. The ceremony included celebratory, religious and social aspects: drink and elaborate dress, prayer, the pouring of libations and ritual washing, and gift-giving.<sup>55</sup> But for the child the significance of outdooring was greater still because it marked the end of its 'pre-life' and the beginning of its social existence. In the Asante village of Benim, for example, the child was seen for the first week of its life as potentially just a 'visitor' in

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<sup>53</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 56; Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 18; Kate B. Showers, 'Electrifying Africa: An Environmental History with Policy Implications', *Geografiska Annaler Series B: Human Geography* 93, 3 (2011): 193-221. It is worth noting here both that the socialisation process itself was subject to historical forces and also that the compressed account given here is assembled largely from snapshot evidence of moments of time in which historical forces were also at work, and in ways that are difficult to disentangle. A historical study devoted to infancy, and to the kinds of 'thick description' of outdooring rituals that may be available, could shed more light on these issues.

<sup>54</sup> Doubts about a child's humanity and commitment to the material world could remain, however, and were particularly likely to resurface in the event of chronic illness, developmental problems or persistent misbehaviour. For a contemporary account of the concept, and its possible links to infanticide among the Nankani of Northern Ghana, see Aaron R. Denham, Philip B. Adongo, Nicole Freydborg and Abraham Hodgson, 'Chasing Spirits: Clarifying the Spirit Child Phenomenon and Infanticide in Northern Ghana', *Social Science and Medicine* 71 (2010): 608-15.

<sup>55</sup> The ceremony, which varied hugely in detail, is described in Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doble', 37-8; E. A. Ammah, *Infant Outdooring in Ga Society* (Accra: E. A. Ammah and Sons, 1958); Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 171-3; Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 57-9; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 61-6.

confinement, 'so the eighth day of a child's life is an important occasion. On that day the child is admitted as a full member of the family. He assumes a personality and is given a name. From that day he is no more considered as a stranger.'<sup>56</sup>

The other major ceremony to bookend childhood occurred on reaching puberty. This was particularly important as a means of socializing girls: accelerating and finalizing the division of genders that had begun in early childhood, instructing them as 'women' rather than as girls and advertising their availability, and readiness for, marriage. Ceremonial markers of puberty in general applied only to girls and only in the southern half of the colony. In the Northern Territories, there was no reported celebration of puberty.<sup>57</sup> In his work on the Talensi, Fortes made the striking statement that there was 'no affective or social break to mark a transition from childhood to adulthood', although menstruation remained an important biological marker that a girl could marry.<sup>58</sup> Girls' puberty rites, like the outdooring ceremony, varied a great deal by locality and by ethnic group and have been described in some detail by ethnographers.<sup>59</sup> But the socializing outlines remained broadly similar across the southern half of the colony. The girl's first menstrual cycle was celebrated with a 'special feast', followed by a puberty rite that could last weeks or months.<sup>60</sup> This involved instructing girls in domestic duties and sexual techniques, a period of seclusion, ritual purification and the observation of taboos. The girl was then 'gorgeously dressed and paraded the town' and 'if not already

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<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Manu, 'Child Training in Benim, a Village in Ashanti', Master's Dissertation, University College, Achimota 1953, cited in Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 58. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, Manu's original dissertation was not available in the Balme Library's collections at the University of Ghana.

<sup>57</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 202.

<sup>58</sup> Fortes, *Web of Kinship*, 198.

<sup>59</sup> Puberty rites are described in K. A. Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1950), 33-4; Field, *Akim-Kotoku*, 137-8; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 69-75; Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites*.

<sup>60</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 200.

betrothed was expected to become so soon'.<sup>61</sup> The virginity of the girl was also verified and Kaye, writing of evidence collected in the 1950s, noted that at some unspecified point in the past it had been normal that non-virgins had been 'driven out of the tribe or killed'.<sup>62</sup> As this suggests, both ceremonial practices and processes of socialization were historically constructed phenomena. In the 1950s, for example, while puberty rites remained important in rural areas, they were becoming less important in urban centres, 'little more than a feast... [and] recognition of the girl's availability for marriage'.<sup>63</sup> Rites were also taking place before puberty to avoid the social punishments for pregnancy before they were carried out. For some Christians, meanwhile, confirmation was replacing puberty rites, although the practice remained a syncretic one, incorporating elements of the local coming-of-age ceremony in a church setting.<sup>64</sup>

Boys' puberty was not marked ceremonially in most of the Gold Coast and nor was their sexuality as tightly controlled.<sup>65</sup> One exception to this was boys born to high status families in coastal areas, who were subject to a public coming-of-age ceremony. These rituals were described in all their local variation by the anthropologist Margaret Field, in her research on the Ga people. I will give just one particularly compelling example here, from the town of Nungwa. This rite was designed to make 'the boy cease to be stupid'.<sup>66</sup> The boy had his cloth snatched away, ran to the sea naked and having immersed himself came back to a hut where crabs had been hidden. The hut, Field reported, was 'so small that his stern protrudes, and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>62</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 201. The same punishments were noted by Rattray in 'times not so very remote'. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 201.

<sup>64</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 185.

<sup>65</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 202.

<sup>66</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 192.

while he is in this ignominious pose the populace have license to heap insults upon him, his character, his kinsmen and his personal appearance'.<sup>67</sup> The boy was asked if he had found anything in the hut. 'He has probably found the crabs', Field writes, 'but if he owns to having found them he is an indiscreet and blabbing fellow, unfit to be trusted with grown men's affairs'.<sup>68</sup> Later, 'the old women of the boy's family treat him as if he were dead. For the boy is dead, a grown man is in his place. They wash him and cut his nails as they would do for a corpse. Then he is dressed up magnificently and given a hearty meal'.<sup>69</sup> The idea that the boy died and a man took his place is perhaps misleading because childhood was more of a process than a state; but this Ga rite, and similar ones elsewhere in other coastal areas, are important as watershed moments in the lifecycle, when the liminal humanity of a child was replaced with the full rights and status of an adult.

Despite the apparent importance placed on the ceremonies that bookended childhood, and the subsequent importance that anthropologists attached to documenting them, the socialising process appears much more granular when childhood is examined in detail. Birth and adolescence were simply the two biological markers of a process marked by a number of ceremonies on a smaller scale. Some were designed to coax children over developmental milestones, like weaning or learning to walk.<sup>70</sup> Others ceremonies designed to curb bad behaviours, like excessive crying, bed-wetting, or querulousness. Often these ceremonies invoked the power of peer disapproval.<sup>71</sup> And socialization was also much more diffuse than a strict timetable of ethnographically-catalogued ceremonies might initially suggest. As critics

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 193–4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Kaye, *Bringing Up Children*, 69–77, 97–107.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 74, 87–96.

of the idea of a single 'lifecycle' model have noted, people had to be flexible because their lives were unpredictable and rarely fit into a neat social model; the ceremonies and transitions that marked individual lives thus had to be celebrated with equal flexibility. Thomas Kyei noted an example of this in his autobiography. Born in rural Asante in the early twentieth century, distance kept some elderly relatives away from his outdoor ceremony. But when his maternal great-grandmother met Kyei for the first time, she seemed to recreate aspects of the outdoor ceremony in the greeting ceremony, spitting 'little drops of saliva' on his head and issuing the standard call that he beget a child and name it after her.<sup>72</sup> In this way, as the physical distances between individuals closed, ceremonial and social deficits could also be closed in a relatively informal and unplanned manner.

The work of Meyer Fortes, in particular, suggests another challenge to calendrical, biological or ceremonial models of socialisation. As Fortes realised, educating children in the practical and esoteric details of everyday life did not always depend on explicit instruction by adults but could be achieved by the immersion of children in society, children observing their elders and the young taking the initiative to copy and teach each other, and to explore the ideas and symbols they were encountering in both real and playful scenarios. Writing about childhood among the Talensi, Fortes termed this facet of socialisation 'mimesis'. He cautioned against the fetishisation of 'looking and doing' in writing on 'primitive education', stressing instead the agency and intellectual contribution of the child.<sup>73</sup> Observation and immersion were certainly important. Fortes was told, for example, of the practice of bringing young children

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<sup>72</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 44. This may have been an oblique criticism of Rattray, who had earlier described education in Asante as being 'mostly perhaps' down to immersion and 'unconscious instruction'. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 11.



to shrines to listen and learn 'little by little'.<sup>74</sup> But children took hold of religious ideas, and became socialised as properly Talensi adults, because they explored the religious themes and behaviours they encountered in games with other children, like the construction of play shrines and the performance of sacrifices to them.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, children were socialised to the economic sphere by observing adults at work, performing work themselves and by recreating the adult world in miniature while they played. In one striking example, Fortes observed children aged six to ten mimicking the herding of cattle using locusts and pebbles, breaking off their play sporadically to scare birds out of the adjacent fields.<sup>76</sup> By placing children at the centre of his analysis of socialisation, Fortes foreshadowed the themes of the new social study of childhood and, by challenging the focus on ceremonial occasions, his work also suggests how historians of childhood might in the future approach the problem of how children became adults in colonial Ghana using evidence of children's peer cultures.<sup>77</sup>

### Humanity, death and mourning

The inferior social status, and the liminal humanity, accorded to children can be seen in the limited funeral rites they were granted on death. The evidence does not suggest an absence of emotion about the death of children in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods but mourning *was* less attuned to the child as a corporeal individual. A Ga child who died before its outdoor ceremony received no ceremonial burial; instead, its body was buried 'quietly', after being 'conveyed by back houses to the burial ground'.<sup>78</sup> However, couples who lost their

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<sup>74</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> The unpublished notes of Meyer Fortes, recently deposited at the University of Cambridge, are the most obvious potential set of sources.

<sup>78</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 37-8; see also Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 202.

first child were sequestered away for a week to ‘feast and mourn’ and ‘concentrate their thoughts on the child’, which might then be reborn.<sup>79</sup> H. C. Monrad, who was a Danish chaplain resident in Accra from 1805 to 1809, reported that those Ga who died before performing their coming-of-age custom were buried ‘less honourably...For instance, there is no shooting over them’.<sup>80</sup> Field still reported diminished funeral rites for pre-pubescent children in Ga areas in the 1930s. Elsewhere, Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of independent Ghana, suggested that Akan women avoided mourning their children because of a belief it would cause sterility.<sup>81</sup> In Walewale, in the Northern Territories, children’s bodies were wrapped in a plain white calico and, unlike adults, they were buried outside the family compound without great ceremony.<sup>82</sup>

In Asante, new-borns arrived from the ‘cold’ spirit world and were only loosely bound to the material world for the first eight days of life. They had to be coaxed, by physical and spiritual means, to remain alive. During this period, Rattray said, the infant was ‘scarcely considered as a human being, being looked upon as possibly merely “a ghost child ’ that has come from the spirit world, intending immediately to return’.<sup>83</sup> If the child lived then a naming ceremony was performed and the climb to Asante personhood began. But, if the child died, then a dismissive funeral custom was held:

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<sup>79</sup> Addo, ‘Child Training in Ayikai Doblo’, 36.

<sup>80</sup> H. C. Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast and its Inhabitants*, trans by. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2009), 66.

<sup>81</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957).

<sup>82</sup> Saaka Mahami, interview by Jack Lord, trans. Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010; Sulemana Yakubu, interview by Jack Lord, trans. Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 54.

The little body is then sometimes whipped, it is put in a pot with sharp-cutting elephant grass (*Pennisetum* sp.) and buried near the women's latrine.

The parents dress in holiday attire, partake of ground-nut soup (to show it is a joyful feast) and retire to their chamber and make pretence of lying together. All this is to shame the little stranger ghost that had dared to wander down into this world, and to discourage it returning in that form to endanger the life of a human mother.<sup>84</sup>

We have no way of knowing how Asante parents actually felt about the death of their new-born. A cosmology that explained infant mortality, and even dismissed it as unimportant, could not suppress individual emotions or frustrations. But, equally, it is dangerous to domesticate the past and assume that Asante grieved for infants as individuals. In public, at least, dead new-borns were given the 'deliberate antithesis of funeral rites', their bodies mistreated and interred on polluted ground.<sup>85</sup> Rattray in fact uncovered evidence from burial customs that in the pre-colonial and early colonial period, the period of children not being accepted as fully human extended beyond the first eight days of life. He reported that 'in times not so very remote' children who died before adolescence were buried as *nkuku mma* (pot children), without the ordinary rites, in the village midden.<sup>86</sup> It is tempting to speculate about why Asante children were considered more human, earlier in the lifecycle in the twentieth

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 61.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 61, 68.

century – perhaps a combination of the comparative peace of the colonial period, the decline in the commodified transfers of children and the impact of Christianity – but the reasons are probably impossible to disentangle.

One thing we can say for certain is that coastal, educated and Christian elites were early adopters of public displays of mourning and emotion for the loss of young children as individuals. The deaths of these children were marked both in funeral ceremonies and commemorated in print. Newspaper advertisements appeared for child-sized coffins and shrouds.<sup>87</sup> In 1904, Lily, the youngest daughter of J. C. Bannerman died; her funeral was both ‘largely attended’ and reported in the press.<sup>88</sup> The impact of mission Christianity was crucial but so, too, were new information technologies that could be used to communicate sympathy for the bereaved and also to broadcast, and normalise, grief for a lost child. H. D. Gottfrieds used the pages of the *Gold Coast Leader* to thank friends of the Wesleyan Mission School for the sympathies they had expressed ‘by their letters, telegrams and personal calls’ for the death of his five-year-old son Claude.<sup>89</sup> The ‘poor child’, he explained, was ‘not dead, but gone forward to wait for us’.<sup>90</sup> The *Gold Coast Leader* seemed to develop an editorial line that infant deaths were individual tragedies. Reporting that Mr and Mrs George Amissah had lost their baby in 1906, the paper extended its ‘deep sympathies’.<sup>91</sup> At first glance, this is unsurprising but, in fact, it marked a radical break from the cosmologies of local societies. Attitudes towards children and child death can thus be seen as integral to the ‘respectable’ identities crafted by

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<sup>87</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, 29 November, 1902.

<sup>88</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, 13 August, 1904.

<sup>89</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, 2 September, 1905.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, 3 March, 1906.

literate elites in colonial society.<sup>92</sup> This thesis does not, in general, engage with how the spread of the world religions impacted upon the experience of childhood in the Gold Coast. That subject requires more space, and a different set of sources, to reconstruct. Yet Christianity and Islam were likely to have been crucial to the formation of new ideas about parenting and the nature of the child – and, in the future, these topics may provide a useful way to bridge the frustrating gaps that exist between narratives about ‘local’ and ‘colonial’ ideas about childhood.

### Collective and individual welfare

The liminal humanity and chattel-like status of children combined to justify occasions when the physical well-being of an individual child was sacrificed for the collective good. This, like slavery, was an idea about childhood that brought local societies into direct conflict with colonial law. At its most extreme, the subordination of an individual child’s interest to the collective wellbeing of kin or community led to infanticide. The centrality of human sacrifice to British imperial rhetoric about Asante means that reports of infanticide should be treated with caution.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, however, abandonment and infanticide have been the norm rather than the exception for most human societies, for most of history, so evidence of the phenomenon should not simply be dismissed as British propaganda.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the evidence of infanticide and abandonment in the pre-colonial and early-colonial Gold Coast is compelling,

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<sup>92</sup> The idea of ‘respectability’ as a new form of African honour, based around literacy and Christianity, is discussed in John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 246–261.

<sup>93</sup> On human sacrifice in Asante, see McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*; Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold*; C. Williams, ‘Asante: Human Sacrifice or Capital Punishment? an Assessment of the Period 1807-1874’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1988): 433–441.

<sup>94</sup> For a sample, see Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman, 2005), 18–19; James Z. Lee and Feng Wang, *One Quarter of Humanity: Malthusian Mythology and Chinese Realities, 1700-2000* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Anthony Volk, ‘The Evolution of Childhood’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 4, 3 (2011): 470–494.



though both practices seem to have rapidly diminished in the twentieth century. In general, infants were killed or abandoned for the perceived greater good. This could be motivated by a lack of resources and the hope that a child would be raised better elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> Deformed, disabled or slowly-developing children could be killed because scarce parental resources would be better directed to other siblings.<sup>96</sup> Children could also be killed for religious reasons: because their birth order or their habits were inauspicious or because they embodied some malevolent spirit.<sup>97</sup> In Asante, an informant told Rattray that a child had been sacrificed around 1900 to power a *suman* (a charm, talisman or, in the terminology of the colonial period, a fetish) called Gyabom that warded off 'disembodied human spirits'.<sup>98</sup> The killing was perhaps made easier because newborns were not fully jural beings: children acquired their humanity gradually and most infanticides took place before the milestones of outdoorings after the first week of life and learning to walk sometime in their second year.

While individual cases of infanticide could be prosecuted under the criminal code, widespread ritual infanticide in certain areas brought the very fabric of local societies into direct conflict with colonial rule. An example of this comes from Wenchi in 1912, where a local clerk informed the commissioner of Western Province that a new-born baby had been murdered in accordance with the local practice of killing the ninth child born to a mother, *nkroma*.<sup>99</sup> The

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<sup>95</sup> Baby Afua, 13/6/57, Juvenile Court, Accra, 1956-57, SCT 17/5/302, NAG Accra [henceforth just NAG]; Maternity and Child Welfare. Women's services in the colonies and training of personnel, for report by Dr Mary Blacklock, 1942-43, CO 859/77/11, National Archives, UK [henceforth NAUK].

<sup>96</sup> NRG 8/2/217, NAG Tamale; Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 34; Kaye, *Child Training in Ghana*, 54; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 66.

<sup>97</sup> Allan Wolsey Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast: Their Customs, Religion and Folklore* (London: E. P. Dutton, 1920), 27-9; Kaye, *Child Training in Ghana*, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 99.

<sup>99</sup> *Nkroma* means ninth-born but in this file the same name is used for the practice of killing the ninth born. Fetish custom which necessitates the murder of the 9th child of the same mother, 1912, ARG 1/30/1/11, NAG Kumasi.

clerk's report led to a raid by the colonial authorities, an investigation into the custom and a public proclamation that forbade the practice. The commissioner also threatened that if the custom resurfaced, he would 'not have the least hesitation in destroying every village in Wenchi and burning every stool and fetish that can be found'.<sup>100</sup> *Nkroma* was a long-standing practice in Wenchi, described as 'very ancient' by the linguist and dated by the *omanhene*, or paramount chief, back to the origin of the Wenchi people themselves.<sup>101</sup> The geographical extent of the practice is less clear. The commissioner of Western Province thought that *nkroma* might also exist in the nearby towns of Techiman and Nkoranza, though he had no personal knowledge of this. In other Akan areas the killing of the ninth child was not carried out – but nor was the concept outlandish. Kwame Nkrumah reported the opposite view of the ninth-born child in his home village, Nkroful, on the west coast: rather than being a harbinger of ill-fortune, this child would 'bring good luck'; instead, it was the tenth child who threatened to 'bring misfortune' and thus risked being 'smothered at birth or during early infancy'.<sup>102</sup>

But certainly in Wenchi, *nkroma* seems to have been well established and well organised. Efua Wirichi, the mother of the murdered child, stated that 'Many people have had their ninth child killed like this. I know it'.<sup>103</sup> The killings were delegated to a particular ritual specialist, who came from a single family. When a woman was pregnant with her ninth child she was sent to give birth in the bush. The ritual specialist was summoned only if the baby survived childbirth. She then dug a hole, filled it with water and the child was drowned there – though, when giving evidence, the ritual specialist denied that this last act was her responsibility.<sup>104</sup> The dead child's

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<sup>100</sup> Address to Wenchi chiefs and people, Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Testimony of Kobina Jang and Yao Teku, Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Nkrumah, *The Autobiography*, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Testimony of Efua Wirichi, ARG 1/30/1/11, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>104</sup> Testimony of Ekua Num, Ibid.

father added the detail that they ‘then put the earth on it and stamp on it’.<sup>105</sup> For her services the ritual specialist received one shilling, six pence (formerly three hundred cowries) and an unspecified number of cooking pots. The mother then had to stay in seclusion in the bush for forty days. On her return she had to ‘render thanks to people for what has passed’ and the hut where the child was born was then ‘burnt out’.<sup>106</sup>

Closer examination of *nkroma* reveals why the interests of children (and particularly newborns) were considered secondary to the collective interest of the group and the threat of religious sanction. According to the omanhene, the ninth child was killed to secure the overall population of Wenchi people. He explained that the first of the Wenchi ancestors to emerge from a hole in the ground was named Nkroma but when he saw how many people were following him ‘he shouted “Too many are coming ’ and when they heard it they were alarmed and the majority returned into the ground. It was then determined as he had frightened them back there should never be an ‘Nkroma’ in their country’.<sup>107</sup> The specialist who killed the child echoed these sentiments on fertility but aligned herself with the interests of Wenchi women during pregnancy and childbirth, claiming that she administered her medicine because ‘it helps the mothers to bear them’.<sup>108</sup>

In the public address forbidding the custom in future, the commissioner stated:

I know that none of you wish your children killed; no mother in this world wishes her child killed and I am saving you in future from a disgusting custom...It is dreadful to think of the number of children

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<sup>105</sup> Testimony of Efua Wirichi, Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Testimony of Mr Coomson, Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Testimony of Yao Teku, Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Testimony of Ekua Num, Ibid.

killed who should have grown up into fine men and women and have had children of their own. Mothers may now conceive their ninth child with pride and joy and may look forward to bring up that child into a fine man or woman.<sup>109</sup>

This was an interesting statement, which mixed a distinctly metropolitan rhetoric of children as innocent bringers of joy, with an appeal to the same ‘wealth in people’ ideal of fertility (and the subsequent population of society with adults) that was used to justify the practice in the first place. The impact of this address is hard to judge, but the Commissioner claimed that ‘a feeling of relief was noticeable’, arguing that many had always ‘disapproved and [yet] had their mouths shut by a fetish’.<sup>110</sup> There was certainly a tension between parental attachment and local religious practices that colonial reformers could exploit. The mother of the murdered baby presented herself as a reluctant accomplice in the death of her baby. She also testified that her husband told her that ‘if anyone came to kill the child I must not agree’ – and yet he still wanted the child dead, telling his wife to give it oil so that it would ‘die naturally’.<sup>111</sup> His motives are impossible to disentangle: was he concerned with the suffering of the child, the costs of the ritual or the dishonour of having it performed? We cannot know. But what is clear is that even those who believed in the necessity of *nkroma* were in some way troubled by the realities of carrying the ritual out.

The evidence on infanticide suggests that individual children could literally be sacrificed for the greater good. However the story is perhaps even more complicated than that. Children

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<sup>109</sup> Address to Wenchi chiefs and people, Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Testimony of Efua Wirichi, Ibid.

could also be made to suffer for their own protection, their immediate corporeal interests separated from those of the individual they would become. This is an idea familiar from the dictum 'spare the rod, spoil the child'; in the Gold Coast, however, mistreatment of children in the material world was frequently designed to protect them from spiritual dangers. Societies in the Gold Coast had a radically different view of what 'child welfare' meant. The most striking examples of this come from societies which believed in some form of reincarnation, and in which infants could be deliberately and visibly 'damaged' to make them less likely to return to the land of the unliving. Field reported that among the Ga people of the coastal region, if two or more children had died in one family, the next child to be born would be scarred to ensure its survival. These *gbɔbalɔ* children were 'disfigured with long cuts radiating fanwise from the corners of the eyes and mouth: it will be ashamed to return thus disfigured to the place of the dead'.<sup>112</sup> These children were also treated differently. The parents of a *gbɔbalɔ* child, Field reported, 'take pains to appear not to care whether it dies or not...they often neglect it – or rather make an elaborate show of doing so'.<sup>113</sup> The *gbɔbalɔ* child might publicly be abandoned but later be found by a relative and either taken in or 'smuggled' to his parents. The deceit that a child was unwanted could also cause parents to give *gbɔbalɔ* children foreign, and especially Hausa, names to further disguise them.<sup>114</sup> William Addo reported that in the Ga village of Ayikai Doblo, such children might also be called Odonko (slave) or Obe gyei (you have no name).<sup>115</sup> These children were being presented as the very opposite of Ga normality, as beings not worth clawing back into the spirit world. Ga parents *were* concerned

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<sup>112</sup> Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 177.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> The Hausa were a Muslim trading diaspora, originally from the area of modern-day northern Nigeria and Niger. Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 36.



with the welfare of their child but the doctrine of reincarnation had an uneasy relationship with the welfare of their child's current physical body.

This phenomenon is also evident in the far north of the colony. Again we see the body of a child being hurt as a prophylactic against spiritual danger but, in this case, it is also other children who are being saved and the danger emerges from the otherworldly nature of very young children. Kum Gandah was born in 1927 in Birifu, in what is now the Upper West Region of Ghana. He was branded by a local diviner as a *kyekuɔ*, a child 'identified by the numerous illnesses that besiege them and their unwillingness to live on this earth, however much they are pampered'.<sup>116</sup> These children were thought to be the chiefs of a spirit realm, who only came 'into the human world to lure others back to their kingdom'.<sup>117</sup> In response, Gandah's father 'evolved the idea that if the faces of such children were marked and then they died and returned to the land of reincarnation, they would not be accepted there and would have to return to the land of the living'.<sup>118</sup> Gandah's father marked the faces of such *kyekuɔ* children with a 'sharp knife' and Gandah, at least, viewed this temporary pain as worthwhile because 'more often than not the supposed [*kyekuɔ*] child lived'.<sup>119</sup> This is a reminder of how difficult it is to reconcile the 'modern' ideas of child welfare with traditional ideas about childhood and the nature of the person.<sup>120</sup>

The bodies of children were also used to indicate membership of a community, control the size of its population and enforce particular standards of behaviour. This is particularly well

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<sup>116</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> A very similar phenomenon of making children look and sound 'unattractive' seems to have also been used in Asante areas. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 65.

documented in the Northern Territories. Girls were particularly likely to have their behaviours shaped via adult control of their bodies. Female circumcision was found to be widely, though not universally, practised in the 1930s and took place either when the girl was very young or between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Various reasons were given for the operation: it made giving birth easier; it curbed sexual desire; it proved that girls were ready for marriage; girls who avoided the operation risked being ridiculed as men; and, finally, it was customary.<sup>121</sup> Ethnic belonging, meanwhile, was commonly displayed through the practice of facial and bodily scarification. Between 1912 and 1914, the colonial state sought to document these markings 'tribe' by 'tribe'.<sup>122</sup> Administrators were sent blank outlines of heads and bodies, in the expectation that they would be able to map a particular set of markings to a particular ethnicity. The mapping of the body would thus lead to a taxonomical mapping of the peoples of the Northern Territories. But officials found something rather different. While 'ethnic' markings existed, officials also found scarification practised as medicine or as a situational response to bereavement within a particular family. In some places, markings had been placed on incoming slave children to denote ownership and, post-abolition, the practice was therefore dying out. In others, immigrants placed markings on their offspring that made them indistinguishable from local children. Finally, facial and bodily markings were altered by the 'individual fancy' of the child's mother or even the experimentation, 'without any design at

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<sup>121</sup> Female Excision (Circumcision), 1931-49, NRG 8/2/34, NAG Tamale.

<sup>122</sup> Tribal Marks of Natives, N. W. P., 1912, ADM 56/1/138, NAG; The investigation was published as C. H Armitage, *The Tribal Markings and Marks of Adornment of the Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony* (London: Harrison, 1924), based on a draft report contained in this file.

all', of children themselves.<sup>123</sup> This is a useful reminder that individuals, including the very young, could subvert the social systems that anthropologists described.

## Conclusion

In her study of equatorial Africa, Florence Bernault argues that the colonial encounter initially posed a dramatic challenge to local ideas of the human body. In the nineteenth century, the body was seen as multi-dimensional, permeable and manipulable, both before and after death, for the individual and social good. But, to give just one example, as the colonial state began to monopolise judicial powers over the body in the early twentieth century, local specialists could no longer perform cleansing or punishing rituals on the bodies of suspected criminals.<sup>124</sup> The contrasting ideas about the 'child' held by colonised and coloniser in the Gold Coast in the early twentieth century may have created a similar kind of conflict. As we will see in the next chapter, metropolitan ideas about child welfare had no place for spiritual ideas and, moreover, located the welfare of a child firmly within its individual lifespan and body. This may explain why we see so little information about 'traditional' forms of parenting in archival sources in the later colonial period.

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<sup>123</sup> Report from Tumu District Commissioner, 18/3/1913 and C. Armitage, 'Report on Native Tribal and Other Marks in the North West Provinces', 5/8/1914, ADM 56/1/138, NAG.

<sup>124</sup> Florence Bernault, 'Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History* 47, 2 (2006): 207–239.



## Chapter 3

### Metropolitanism

The previous chapter identified the kin group as the pre-colonial apex of authority over children and argued that the interests of the group outweighed those of an individual child. Children had few rights to balance their onerous obligations to others and occupied a lowly social stratum. But in this chapter I argue that the relationship between children and adult society was redefined by the colonial presence. The chapter charts the rise of a set of laws and institutions which simultaneously gave the colonial state a new authority over children and gave children a set of rights and safeguards that they had not hitherto enjoyed. Colonial officials increasingly believed that African children were threatened by delinquency and other social problems that could only be addressed by self-consciously 'modern' child-centred institutions, by state regulation of the domestic sphere and by weakening kinship power over children. Running in parallel to this was a revolutionary discourse, informed by metropolitan ideas about children and child-rearing, that established the welfare of the child as a good in and of itself and championed a universal, sentimentalised ideal of childhood. Particularly after 1940, adult or, more specifically, *colonial* society was seen to have greater obligations to its children, obligations that extended far beyond the imperative to simply feed and clothe the young.



## Ladidjeo vs. Mensah and the Child Care Society

In 1956, in the Juvenile Court of Accra, an extraordinary trial took place that illustrates both the changing balance between kin and state power over children during the colonial period and the ideological delineation of 'proper' childhoods that lay behind that shift. The case concerned the custody of six-year-old twins, born as Oseni and Osenatu in Accra.<sup>1</sup> The twins' mother died in childbirth and their father, a Nigerian cocoa and kola dealer named Jima Ladidjeo, gave the new-born infants to the Children's Hospital, run by the Child Care Society, with the understanding (or so Ladidjeo claimed) that he could reclaim the children when they were older.<sup>2</sup> It was then 'normal procedure for the Child Care Society to cause announcements to be made in churches for foster parents for destitute children'.<sup>3</sup> In one Presbyterian church the announcements were made 'from the pulpit' by an Ellen Mensah. When no other volunteers were found, the church minister introduced Ellen Mensah and her husband to the hospital and the couple took charge of the children themselves, renaming them Okoe and Akwetey. Ellen Mensah was given hospital cards for each child and, when they reached 'school-going age', was granted a Fit Person order by the Social Welfare Department.<sup>4</sup> This order gave her formal custody over the children and obligated the department to contribute to their upbringing. The twins' natural father visited them five times while they were in the care of the Mensahs; on the fifth occasion Jima Ladidjeo was accompanied the 'Lagos chief' of Accra and wanted to take the children away with him.<sup>5</sup> The Mensahs refused and Ladidjeo

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<sup>1</sup> *Ladidjeo vs. Mensah and the Child Care Society*, 26/7/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>2</sup> The Child Care Society was founded in 1944 by 'a small group of public-spirited Ghanaians' to protect children in 'physical or moral danger' and 'educate the public on proper care of children'. It ran a children's home in Kaneshie, Accra from 1947. Nana Apt, 'Children Without Parents - A Ghanaian Case Study', *Legon Family Research Papers* 4 (1975): 81.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of Mr Quartey-Papafio, Welfare Officer, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Ellen Mensah, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Testimony of Jima Ladidjeo, Ibid.

subsequently applied to the court to alter the Fit Person order and take custody of the twins himself.

Ladidjeo's legal case, however, proved to be incompatible with or irrelevant to the way the court saw fit to regulate childhood and the Mensahs were granted continued custody of the children, with Ladidjeo restricted to visiting rights. Ladidjeo's lawyer framed his case in two ways. The first approach simply drew on the discourse of kin authority and obligation discussed in the previous chapter. 'A father has natural right to children', he told the court, and 'Whether they would be happier with Mrs Mensah does not matter. [A] strong case [must] be shown to override parental rights'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, prior to the Second World War this was the de facto position of a colonial government loath to interfere with native family law. Ladidjeo's second approach was financial. He testified that when he began visiting the children he brought foodstuffs and 'made payments towards their maintenance' of £2 a month, totalling £34.<sup>7</sup> This claim to custody based on financial investment and responsibility echoes the findings of Allman and Tashjian that child-rearing in colonial Asante was increasingly monetised and that parental rights to children were tied to monetary contributions.<sup>8</sup> The Mensahs denied that Ladidjeo had paid them anything at all and the court doubted the authenticity of the receipts he produced, deeming them inadmissible as evidence. The financial question was never cleared up but it was, in any case, a sideshow to the substance of the trial and did not feature in the final judgement of the court. The natural rights of fathers,

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<sup>6</sup> Address by Mr Lassey, *Ladidjeo vs. Mensah*, Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Testimony of Jima Ladidjeo, *Ladidjeo vs. Mensah*, Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Allman and Tashjian's argument relates also to the shifting balance between matrilineal and paternal authority over children. This is less relevant here both because it treats the interests of children as irrelevant and also because the focus of this chapter is on the rival claims of the family and the state over children. Allman and Tashjian, *"I Will Not Eat Stone"*, 85–90.

and their previous contributions to a child's upbringing, were considered of minor importance compared to the court's primary concern, the material and emotional welfare of the children themselves.

The Mensahs' lawyer summed up the case thus: 'The interest the father has in the children counts very much. The interests of the children should also be considered along with the rights of the father'.<sup>9</sup> This approach, sustained throughout the trial and eventually resonating in the final judgement, was more in keeping with the ethos of post-war child-centred institutions than Ladidjeo's application. The fatherly 'interest' the Mensah's lawyer referred to was emotional rather than economic. The court was asked to consider the bond between parent and child not as a natural function of being related but as an active construct of good or bad parenting. Ladidjeo's status as a migrant counted against him here as the children were brought up speaking two local languages, Ga and Twi, in which he was not conversant. Both Ladidjeo and his new wife, also a Nigerian, were forced to admit they could not understand the children or make themselves understood. A probation officer, investigating the twins' current home and the alternative offered by their father, noted that 'to Okoe and Akweley, Mr Ladidjeo is a stranger from nowhere, and they could not care less for him'.<sup>10</sup> Under cross-examination, Ladidjeo was even forced to state that the twins 'do not run away from me'. He also stressed that he 'always played with the children' on visits.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, implicitly carefree play was becoming a more important part of the state-sanctioned 'ideal' childhood.

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<sup>9</sup> Address by Mr Ollennu, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>10</sup> O. and A. Mensah, 26/7/1956, Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Testimony of Jima Ladidjeo, Ibid.

Parents thus had not only to spend time with their children but to spend it *properly*, implicitly attending to the very happiness that Ladidjeo's lawyer dismissed as irrelevant.

The welfare of children was not, however, a neutral concept. Ladidjeo certainly felt that his Islamic faith was being held against him and that the Christian beliefs of the Mensahs were being conflated with good parenting. While the Mensahs' lawyer stressed that his clients 'are Presbyterian Christians and are bringing up the children very properly', Ladidjeo's lawyer felt it necessary to remind the court that 'no case [was] made why children should not be brought up as Moslems if that is the wish of the father'.<sup>12</sup> There was also a presumption that school was the natural place for young children, which as Chapters 6 and 7 will show, was by no means the case even in late-colonial Accra. Witnesses called by Ladidjeo's lawyer stressed that there were good schools that the twins would be sent to if they came to live with their father. Ladidjeo himself insisted that he planned to educate the twins.

But, above all, the welfare of children was seen as incompatible with both absolute and relative poverty. The investigating probation officer described Ladidjeo as living in a 'slum area' with 'appalling' hygiene, in a compound of 'infinitely lower standards' than the twins enjoyed at home with the Mensahs. Moving from one to the other would expose the twins both to 'real physical harm' and the psychological shock of being plunged into relative penury; this, the probation officer concluded, might cause 'a great emotional upset, with serious repercussions on their personalities'. Despite Ladidjeo 'burning with a fatherly emotion', the probation officer noted sadly, his 'good intentions alone are not sufficient'.<sup>13</sup> This damning report on Ladidjeo's potential capabilities as a father seems to have been decisive in the court's final

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<sup>12</sup> Addresses by Mr Ollennu and Mr Lassey, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> O. and A. Mensah, 26/7/1956, Ibid.

judgement that the Mensahs retain custody of the twins, albeit with the 'strong recommendation that every opportunity be given to the applicant and his wife so that the children may get used to them'.<sup>14</sup> The case was exceptional in many ways but the ambivalence of the court's decision – that Ladidjeo be allowed contact with but not custody over his children – is proof of the case's importance. This was not a binary choice between an abusive or neglectful home and a loving and stable family but a careful weighing of the interests and capabilities of the children and their potential guardians. As such, the case clearly delineates what child-centred institutions of the 1940s and 1950s considered desirable in both childhoods and child-rearing and makes explicit the overarching argument of this chapter: that the natural rights of kin to children were considerably diminished by the colonial state's newfound interest in the welfare, and even happiness, of its child subjects.

The remainder of the chapter will examine how and why this shift in the jural status of children took place. The narrative is based around the legal and institutional framework that the state constructed over childhood during the colonial period. But aim is more an intellectual history than an institutional one. I will argue that colonial policy, and in particular the creeping authority of the colonial state over African children, was informed by two interlinked trends in thought about childhood. The first of these trends was the infantilization of children, who were increasingly seen as in need of protection from the moral and physical dangers of the adult world. There was a greater imperative for childhoods to be innocent and carefree, incorporating play and education alongside labour. This was accompanied by a growing belief that children were valuable as individuals and that protecting and promoting a child's welfare was therefore both morally and socially desirable. The second intellectual trend was the

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<sup>14</sup> Judgement in *Ladidjeo vs. Mensah*, *Ibid*.



universalization of children, the growing belief that African children had more in common with their peers in Europe than their parents, and should be raised as such. The foundation of the Department of Social Welfare after the Second World War was an explicit attempt to recreate British child-centred laws and institutions in the colony.

The legal relationship between children and the colonial state can be divided into four distinct periods. The first period, beginning in 1874 and ending before the First World War, was discussed in the previous chapter. During this time the state's interest in children was dominated by the abolition of slavery and pawnship. The Emancipation Act of 1874 and the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1893 carved out a very limited role for the state in the raising of children, but the backdrop of abolition meant that colonial officials had an intense, if brief, interest in children and children's rights. The second period began once the internal and external scrutiny accompanying abolition had faded away and lasted until the end of the First World War. The hands-off spirit of emancipation reasserted itself during this time and childhood generally remained outside the purview of the state. The third legal period saw an increase in state interest in children and child welfare during the 1920s and 1930s, when the government began to address the issues of child labour and juvenile delinquency. Crucially, however, legislation was passed but the state had only minimal capacity for, or interest in, its enforcement. The final period, beginning roughly with the outbreak of the Second World War, was in part a reaction to this gulf between legal framework and social reality. New laws were passed relating to delinquent or neglected children, this time accompanied by the creation or capture of child-centred institutions and the building of state capacity to observe and correct the trajectories of individual childhoods. Throughout the colonial period, metropolitan and international influences shaped legal approaches to children in the Gold Coast. Treaty

obligations, diplomatic pressure and British model legislation all informed law-making in the colony – and all contributed to the state’s increasing universalization of the ‘African’ child.

## The internationalisation of child welfare versus the indifferent or incapable state

In the interwar period there was a growing interest in state provision of welfare for British colonies. As Joanna Lewis has argued, this interest emerged from developments within and outside the Colonial Office. The technical capabilities and possibilities of colonial government seemed to increase at the same time as failings with indirect rule became evident, ‘particularly with regard to delivering social services’.<sup>15</sup> Metropolitan and colonial pressure groups and the League of Nations all lobbied for the state to protect or provide for the welfare of Africans. Simultaneously, however, the ability of the colonial state to deliver effective social services was hampered by the depression and by resistance from within the administration. Many of the initiatives and campaigns that constituted ‘welfare’ were concerned, directly or indirectly, with children: ending slavery and trafficking; stopping forced labour and reforming child labour; providing maternal and infant health services; increasing the scope and provision of education; and tackling the problem of juvenile delinquency. Government action, however, must be situated within the broader history of colonial ideas of childhood in order to see how and why the African child became universalised. With the exception of education, all of the child-centred services or laws were of marginal importance to the colonial state during the interwar period; all were hampered by a lack of interest, state capacity or resources. But for that very reason the idea of the ‘child’ was never seriously interrogated in a colonial context –

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<sup>15</sup> J.E. Lewis, ‘“Tropical East Ends” and the Second World War: Some Contradictions in Colonial Office Welfare Initiatives’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28, 2 (2000): 43–4.

it was much simpler to reuse the metropolitan idea of the child in Africa than it was to disaggregate the stereotype of the 'African' and, in doing so, locate a racially unique 'African child'.

### Maintenance and custody cases

Some of the complexities of interwar thought on the proper relationship between children and the colonial state can be seen in exceptional maintenance and custody cases that came to the attention of officials because they provoked questions about how parental rights and financial responsibilities for children were affected by colonial and international borders.<sup>16</sup> Two contradictory trends emerge from these cases. There was a deep antipathy towards extending state power into the private sphere because of the potential to disrupt 'traditional' kinship structures; this was combined with the recognition that, regardless of how desirable it might be, the state lacked the capacity to intervene in African domesticity. But, simultaneously, a very metropolitan ideal of childhood and child welfare emerges as a subtext. While this discourse rarely stirred the government into action in the interwar period, it does foreshadow the kind of language on child welfare discussed at the beginning of this chapter and it reveals the on-going difficulty that colonial officials had in separating 'African' children from their own ideas of universal childhood.

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<sup>16</sup> Their very survival in the archives makes these cases unusual. Domestic cases involving custody and maintenance disputes were referred in this period to native tribunals. Records of native tribunals are poorly preserved, which makes it difficult to trace the history of childhood through such cases. *Ambah Esson vs Albert J. Davidson*, 26/4/1934 Police Magistrate's Court, Cape Coast, 1934, SCT 23/4/98, NAG is an example of a claim for child maintenance being sent to a native tribunal from a magistrate's court; *Adamu Moshie vs Seidu Bosanga & Fati Bosanga*, 11/3/1953, MAG 12/2/144, MAK is one example where the docket of a trial relating to child maintenance from the Asantehene's courts survives but the trial itself does not. .

In 1923 the director of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children wrote directly to the colonial secretary about the case of an eight-year-old girl fostered by an African cocoa planter from Sekondi, F. Alpha Anthony, to a British couple, the Woods, in Bermondsey, London. Anthony intended sending an agent to London to collect the girl. The Woods were 'loath' to let the girl return but, at a minimum, wanted maintenance arrears to be paid and 'to be satisfied that the child will have a good home and be well cared for'. On the Woods' behalf the NSPCC suggested that the colonial government 'make enquiries as to the position of the parents and the prospects of the child'.<sup>17</sup> The colonial secretary passed the request on to the local district commissioner, who pointed out that he had 'no means' to investigate Anthony's financial position and suggested that if the NSPCC wanted to intervene it could use its 'ample funds to enable Mr Woods to pursue the proper course'. But he also made a trenchant defence of the colonial state's hands-off approach to child-rearing. 'It is no business of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children', he wrote, 'or the government to enquire into the rights or wrongs of a question, which is one for Mr Anthony and Mr and Mrs Woods to decide'.<sup>18</sup> Despite its lack of practical impact this case remains significant because it shows how metropolitan ideals – in this case that a child should be raised in a 'good home' – were seen by child-centred British pressures groups as transferable to the colonies. The case also shows how the history of childhood in the west can be enriched by considering its imperial context; the increasingly internationalist outlook of 'child-saving' organisations will surely be an important area for future research.

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<sup>17</sup> Director, NSPCC to Colonial Secretary, 20/10/1923, Destitutes, 1922-47, WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>18</sup> District Commissioner, Sekondi to Colonial Secretary, 5/12/1923, Ibid.

Two later cases involving transnational childcare from the 1930s echo and expand upon these themes, showing how metropolitan ideas about children filtered through to the colony – and why the idea of the universal child that informed more intrusive state policy after the Second World War had a much earlier presence in colonial politics. One case from 1931 concerned the children of Ama Tawiah, a woman from Kumasi, and Abraham Haig, a Syrian trader. The couple had been married according to ‘native custom’ but in 1929 Abraham Haig married another woman in a Christian ceremony in Syria. He then returned to Kumasi and evicted Ama Tawiah from their house. Ama Tawiah later learnt that Haig wanted to take their children back to Syria. She petitioned the government to stop this, claiming that she was ‘entitled to the indulgence and protection of Government’ in her case.<sup>19</sup> The district commissioner’s court in Kumasi found in Ama Tawiah’s favour, allowing Abraham Haig custody of the children but stopping him from leaving the colony. He was asked to post a substantial bond and, if he defaulted, Ama Tawiah would be able to apply for custody. Protecting traditional kinship rights was central to both Ama Tawiah’s petition and to the decision of the court. Ama Tawiah pointed out that she was ‘an AKAN woman and according to the custom of my race the mother has the prior claim to her children’.<sup>20</sup> The judgement suggested that, in the opinion of both the district commissioner and the Hia chief, on child custody matters ‘native marriage was binding’ on both parties.<sup>21</sup> And yet, in reply to a later petition by Haig, the district commissioner did make clear that the claim of the colonial government over the children was ultimately more compelling than that of the father, stating unequivocally that ‘you have no

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<sup>19</sup> Ama Tawiah to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 1931, Complaint by Ama Tawiah against one A. Haig, Syrian trader, re her children, 1931-1932, ARG 1/7/1/26, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Case heard in District Commissioner’s Court, Kumasi, 27/7/1931, Ibid.



right to take these Children who are British subjects out of the jurisdiction'.<sup>22</sup> When the question of who children belonged to was raised, the answer, in this case at least, was the British imperial state.

A claim of ownership over children also implied a sense of responsibility for them and, indeed, another interesting aspect of this case was Abraham Haig's use of the children's welfare as a bargaining chip. He claimed that the children were 'physically weak' and needed to have an operation in Syria.<sup>23</sup> The adoption of this entirely different register – evoking the rights of *children* rather than adults – is also evident in a final case involving the son of Ofori Dei Twum Ampofo, from Kibi, and his white British wife, Madge. The boy was born in Sheffield but in 1926 Ofori Dei Twum Ampofo returned to the Gold Coast, leaving his wife and son unsupported in England. Assisted by a former member of the Legislative Council, Madge Twum Ampofo appealed in 1934 to the Kibi District Commissioner to force her husband to contribute to the boy's upbringing, which she said was the 'normal thing to do'.<sup>24</sup> But she couched the appeal in terms of her eleven-year-old *son's* interests and hardships, pointing out his need for training to become 'self-dependent' and the 'enormous handicaps' he would face because of 'colour prejudice' in Britain.<sup>25</sup> The district commissioner accepted this reasoning but remained unable to secure maintenance for the boy because Ofori Dei Twum Ampofo was able to convince the court that he had no income – and continued to do so until 1936 when the archival record ends. Ultimately the NSPCC, Abraham Haig and Madge Twum Ampofo were all unable to overcome the indifference or incapacity of the colonial state to secure actions

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<sup>22</sup> District Commissioner, Kumasi to Abraham Haig, January 1932, Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham Haig to District Commissioner, Kumasi, 21/1/1932, Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Madge Twum Ampofo to District Commissioner, Kibi, 1934/35, Maintenance Order against Mr G. O. D. Twum Ampofo. 1934-36, ADM 32/1/107, NAG.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

that were, as they saw it, in the best interests of the children concerned. But their representations to colonial officials show how metropolitan discourses on childhood and child welfare were filtering through to the colony because of the increasingly internationalist outlook of charities and pressure groups in the metropole and because the transnational movement of people created exceptional cases involving children who could not be pigeon-holed as 'African'.

### Child labour

Another area in which metropolitan ideals of childhood began to filter through to Colonial Office policy was on the regulation, amelioration and even abolition of child labour. In Britain, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed what Hugh Cunningham has called the 'adulting of the labour market and of family economies'.<sup>26</sup> Age of entry to the workforce rose and child labour was increasingly segregated in marginal areas of the economy.<sup>27</sup> After the First World War, children continued to work in Britain but 'officialdom denied its extent, overconfident that child labour was a problem which had been solved'.<sup>28</sup> Labour was thus increasingly alien to metropolitan ideals of childhood and this inevitably bled through into thinking about African children. Much of this was perhaps due simply to a failure of imagination by those in the metropole. In his comments on a report on the employment of children in the empire, one Colonial Office official explicitly compared the plight of working children to the easy living of white-collar workers in the metropole. 'I wonder', he wrote, 'for how long many of us in the Colonial Office would stick wheeling loads of 2 cwt. of coal or sugar about the docks for hours at a time for a remuneration of 2 1/2 d. per hour by day and 4

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<sup>26</sup> Cunningham, 'The Decline of Child Labour', 410.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>28</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society*, 181.

1/2 d. per hour by night when the ship is in port, and 1 1/2 d. per hour when it is not!'.<sup>29</sup> Faced with a dearth of information about what childhood in Africa was actually like, British officials fell back on their own experience and expectations; it was therefore shocking if children worked rather than played and learned – and, in this case, if they were not in bed by a certain hour. As we will see, however, officials on the ground were much less susceptible to romanticising the lives of colonial children and were a significant source of resistance to the effective regulation of child labour.

International opinion and treaty obligations were important factors in transforming a general unease with working childhoods into legislation on the ground. The plight of children was an important part of reformist rhetoric on forced labour, as it had earlier been with the abolition of slavery.<sup>30</sup> Frederick Cooper argues that reformers contrasted unfree labour with the 'benign appearance of market transactions'.<sup>31</sup> Yet success in displacing unfree child labour created a new conflict between metropolitan ideals of childhood and a colonial economy in which children were an important part of the workforce. Free child labour therefore came under greater scrutiny in the interwar period. Great Britain ratified International Labour Organisation conventions setting a minimum age for entry to industrial and maritime work in 1921 and colonial legal codes were later brought into line with these obligations.<sup>32</sup> In 1921 and 1924, laws were passed to set the minimum age for children to work at sea as fourteen, bringing 'into force in the Colony the provisions of the draft Convention of the International

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<sup>29</sup> J. Gibbons, *Employment of Children in Industry and other Occupations*, 1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

<sup>30</sup> Kwabena Opare Akurang-Parry, 'Colonial Forced Labor Policies for Road-Building in Southern Ghana and International Anti-Forced Labor Pressures, 1900-1940', *African Economic History*, 28 (2000): 1–25; Akurang-Parry, 'The Loads Are Heavier than Usual'.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Cooper, 'From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse', *American Ethnologist* 16, 4 (1989): 750.

<sup>32</sup> ILOLEX: Database of International Labour Standards, n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>.

Labour Conference'.<sup>33</sup> In 1932, amendments to the Master and Servant Act applied the fourteen-year minimum to 'the admission of children to industrial employment', again applying 'certain International Conventions' to the Gold Coast.<sup>34</sup> There is little evidence, however, that these laws were either rigorously enforced or seriously affected child labour in the Gold Coast. Tellingly, Great Britain did not ratify ILO minimum age conventions on employment in the agricultural and non-industrial sectors that employed the vast majority of working colonial children.<sup>35</sup> It is not clear how important the colonies were in the decision not to ratify these conventions, but in 1939 the Chief Inspector of Labour in the Gold Coast, J. R. Dickinson, made it clear that legislation removing children from these sectors would be unenforceable. Dickinson also expressed a preference for a lower age limit for child employment in industry, suggesting that it was better for them to get a job than 'to remain idle and get into mischief'.<sup>36</sup> The inertia of economically conservative colonial governments is perhaps the most convincing explanation for why metropolitan ideas about working childhoods were applied to the colony but had little impact on children themselves.

Charities were another significant vector for the transmission of metropolitan ideas about working childhoods – and local colonial governments again appear as a conservative force. In June 1931, for example, the Save the Children International Union held a conference on African children in Geneva to investigate questions of infant mortality, education and child

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<sup>33</sup> T. J. Turbett et al., 'West Africa', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 5, 3, Third Series (1923): 147–153; C. Carnegie Brown and Michael F. J. McDonnell, 'West Africa', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 8, 3, Third Series (January 1, 1926): 201–206.

<sup>34</sup> A. G. B. Manson et al., 'West Africa', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 16, 3, Third Series (1934): 154–160.

<sup>35</sup> 'ILOLEX: Database of International Labour Standards, n.d., <https://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1/6/1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

labour and child marriage. This conference has been noted before by historians. Allman suggests that its conclusions and prescriptions ‘avoided the obvious issues of economic exploitation and political expediency’.<sup>37</sup> Dominique Marshall points out that despite the Save the Children International Union’s commitment to ‘universal rights’, the organisation’s close links to the League of Nations left it unable to investigate and criticise as freely as, say, the ILO.<sup>38</sup> But correspondence on the conference shows how its analysis of African childhood was blunted by the colonial governments to which it sent requests for information. This is particularly noticeable on the topic of child labour. The answers sent by the Gold Coast were disingenuous, striving to make child labour in the colony seem as palatable and unusual as possible and also to make an extension of the state’s role in regulating child labour seem unnecessary. Children were distanced from the commercial and ‘colonial’ sectors of the economy. There was said to be no employment in factories and workshops and only ‘a few’ children employed in mining.<sup>39</sup> Children involved in petty commerce worked for their parents only, not for ‘any other employer’. The conditions under which children worked were portrayed as compatible with contemporary ideals of childhood as a time of dependence and education. Although pawning was ‘dying out rapidly’, debtors’ children were ‘always well treated and brought up by the creditor’. Children working as domestics for Europeans were ‘frequently given leave to visit their parents’. Children attending school were ‘not employed in any commercial activities’. As we will see in Chapter 6, many of these assertions were untrue

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<sup>37</sup> Jean Allman, ‘Making Mothers: Missionaries, Medical Officers and Women’s Work in Colonial Asante, 1924–1945’, *History Workshop Journal* 38, 1 (1994): 25.

<sup>38</sup> Dominique Marshall, ‘The Rights of African Children, the Save the Children Fund and Public Opinion in Europe and Ethiopia: The Centre of Child Welfare of Addis Ababa, Spring 1936’, in Siegbert Uhlig, ed., *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Hamburg, July 20-25, 2003*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 296–7.

<sup>39</sup> Children of non-European Origin - Questionnaire re., 1930, ADM 11/1/1052, NAG.



but the significance here is that colonial officials were keen to play down the need for government intervention. On child portage in transport hubs this was made explicit: 'There is no organised inspection service, which would be quite unnecessary'.<sup>40</sup> But officials were also writing with an obvious knowledge of contemporary discourse on children's rights and child labour and intended to pre-empt the concerns that international observers might have.

### Experts and childcare

One final vector for the transmission of metropolitan ideas about childhood was the growing influence in the west of scientific, universal ideas about child-rearing. A corollary to this was the belief that experts in the employ of the state were best placed to educate parents about these methods and – if necessary – intervene directly in raising their children. This body of knowledge was codified in relation to children in the West but it was exported to the colonies largely unchanged. The most obvious example in colonial Africa is the medicalization of childbirth and infancy and the expansion of infant welfare services motivated by high mortality rates among both mothers and children. This phenomenon has been the subject of some study, although, as Masebo argues, infants themselves have typically been 'subsumed...within studies of maternal health'.<sup>41</sup> The first infant welfare clinic in the Gold Coast was opened in Accra in 1923 and came under government control the following year.<sup>42</sup> Government and missionary organisations opened other clinics throughout the colony thereafter. These were generally popular but in some cases also struggled against local

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> O. Masebo, 'Society, State, and Infant Welfare: Negotiating Medical Interventions in Colonial Tanzania, 1920-1950' (PhD, University of Minnesota, 2010), 22; recent examples include Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Allman, 'Making Mothers'.

<sup>42</sup> Patterson, *Health in Colonial Ghana*, 23.

indifference, squabbles over land and funding and accusations of corruption among staff – all signs that infant welfare in the Gold Coast was as much a ‘site of negotiation’ as it was in Tanganyika.<sup>43</sup> But the single greatest constraint was the squeeze on government finances caused by the depression. The number of children attending infant welfare clinics grew from 20,327 in 1925-6 to 135,745 in 1930-1 – but then slumped the following year to 106,861.<sup>44</sup> The depression caused the government to introduce charges for the clinics, terminate the employment of staff and suspend ‘all extension of infant welfare work’ in 1930.<sup>45</sup> Attendance at clinics did not consistently regain its 1930-1 level until 1941.<sup>46</sup>

A similar pattern can be seen in approaches to juvenile delinquency, another area that had become increasingly dominated by scientific and self-consciously modern methods in the metropole. Juvenile delinquency is discussed in greater detail in the next section. Here it is sufficient to note that colonial legislation was modelled on its British forebears but that the depression delayed a significant convergence between the juvenile justice systems in metropole and colony. The first significant legislation on juvenile delinquency in the Gold Coast, the 1928 Children (Care and Reformation) Ordinance, established an industrial home to reform delinquent children but it also gave the state the power to remove ‘deserted...neglected or ill-treated’ children from their homes.<sup>47</sup> However, there was no mechanism to investigate a child’s domestic situation and thus sensibly judge which children were at risk. As a result, the balance of power between the family and the state did not shift

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<sup>43</sup> Masebo, ‘Society, State, and Infant Welfare’, 22; on the local controversies surrounding infant welfare, see Infant Welfare Clinic - Cape Coast, 1938-45, ADM 23/1/976, NAG Cape Coast; Infant Clinic at Keta - Establishment of, 1929, ADM 39/1/52, NAG; Child Welfare Centre, Djodje, 1928-32, ADM 39/1/265, NAG.

<sup>44</sup> Patterson, *Health in Colonial Ghana*, 23-4, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Colonial Secretary, 15/12/1930, ADM 39/1/265, NAG.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, *Health in Colonial Ghana*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Gold Coast Colony, ‘Children (Care and Reformation) Ordinance’, 1928.

significantly until the formation of a probation service in 1944. In fact, further legislation on juvenile delinquency was considered as early as 1930, when the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sidney Webb, appointed a committee to survey and make recommendations on the treatment of juvenile offenders in the colonies. The committee created a draft model bill based on two British pieces of legislation – the Children's Act (1908) and the Probation of Young Offenders Act (1907) – and the Home Office Report of the Departmental Committee on the Treatment of Young Offenders (1927).<sup>48</sup> But in 1932, the Gold Coast requested a delay in any such legislation due to the financial constraints and further modernisation and standardisation of the treatment of juvenile delinquency was delayed until the Second World War.

The interwar period was a significant one for the history of colonial thought about its subjects. Yet the conservatism or incapacity of the colonial state were such that the impact on the history of children was not material until the 1940s. In fact, the archive may even exaggerate the impact of metropolitan discourses in childhood. As the state moved from indifference to cautious interest in children it was those voices most concerned with children that were most likely to be recorded. Equally, the policy conversation was likely to take place with or between people who cared about children – international lobbyists, Welfare Department officials and modernising Governors – and thus even sceptics might adopt the language of child welfare, as the dissembling report on child labour sent to the Save the Children conference showed. Metropolitan ideals of child-rearing and state responsibility for children were, however, a definite presence in the Gold Coast in the interwar period, even if these had only a limited

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<sup>48</sup> Passfield to The Officer Administering the Government of the Gold Coast, 11/9/1930, Reformatory Home for Boys. General., ARG 1/13/1/34, NAG Kumasi.

impact on how the state functioned. This transformation in government's attitude to children would not come until the 1940s, when a perceived crisis of youth peaked just as the 1940 Colonial Welfare and Development Act opened up new state-building possibilities.

## Crisis and capacity building

From the late 1930s, support began to grow for a colonial state capable of monitoring and regulating the lives of its child subjects and during the latter stages of the Second World War the Gold Coast government began to create the necessary legal powers and child-centred institutions. In 1943, Mr E. N. Jones was appointed as Secretary for Social Services and tasked with the creation of a Social Welfare Department, which would develop and administer a juvenile justice system, including courts, penal institutions and a probation service. In 1946, the renamed Department of Social Welfare and Housing was opened. The juvenile justice system was the most important part of the new department and, crucially, its laws and institutions were to be 'based on practice in the United Kingdom'.<sup>49</sup> It was also a system self-consciously built on 'modern theory', concerned with reform rather than just punishment, in which child welfare was 'paramount'.<sup>50</sup> In 1947, the department took over the industrial school, previously run by the Salvation Army, and opened a replacement at Swedru with space for 185 boys. Remand and probation homes were opened in Accra in 1947, in Kumasi in 1948 and work was begun on a home in Sekondi in 1951. Juvenile courts were opened in Accra and Sekondi by 1948 and in Kumasi by 1949. These courts were chaired by the District Magistrate, assisted by two lay magistrates, one male and one female.<sup>51</sup> Again, their procedures were based

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<sup>49</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951* (Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1953), 18.

<sup>50</sup> Social Welfare Department, Pamphlet No.2., n.d., Social Welfare - Juveniles, 1943, ADM 23/1/2626, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>51</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 21.

on British practice. In 1951, although no dedicated juvenile court was established, a Probation Officer was attached to the District Magistrate's Court in Koforidua.<sup>52</sup>

The foundation of a probation service was crucial for the state to extend its authority into the African household and for the transmission of metropolitan ideas about childhood. Welfare officials trained in the United Kingdom and Accra were given the power to monitor and intervene in the home lives of the colony's child subjects. One of their most important tasks was to investigate children accused of crimes and to then advise magistrates on the most appropriate method of punishing, or reforming, juveniles found guilty before the court. But the department was also concerned with child welfare. In 1951, one-third of the children it dealt with were categorised as in need of 'care and protection' rather than having committed an offence – a definition that included runaways and the homeless and indigent but also children whose parents were unwilling or unable to discipline them.<sup>53</sup> The courts, now informed by probation reports, instructed parents to stand surety for their children's behaviour, forced financial contributions from recalcitrant fathers and could remove children from unsuitable homes, placing them in probation homes or in the care of other relatives or a 'fit person'. This substantially altered the legal balance between kin and state authority over children and, because the welfare and reform of the child concerned was supposed to be paramount, it made the rights of children a genuine issue.

These laws and institutions were, for two reasons, overwhelmingly concerned with boys and not girls. First, the post-war wave of 'larceny and destitution' was attributed almost solely to boys. Second, while there were concerns about girls in need of care and protection or subject

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



to moral danger, the department lacked the necessary staff, trained and female, to deal with the problem. A 1951 report suggested that once work with vulnerable girls began, 'a large problem' would become apparent.<sup>54</sup> Concerns about gender and sexuality were, however, important in determining the scope of and need for child-centred welfare services in this period. The momentum for reform came from three areas: the growing sense of social crisis caused by or affecting young people; the perceived inability of indigenous institutions to protect and discipline young Africans; and the increasingly evident lack of capacity in the colonial state to mend this ruptured social fabric. But, crucially, this was not just a question of law and order. Rather the colonial state assumed its new powers as a result of the on-going reconceptualisation of what African childhood had become and what African childhood could be in the future.

### Social problems

Complaints about the young are an almost universal constant in human societies. But, nonetheless, there was a growing sense that a crisis was affecting colonial Africa's youth from the 1930s.<sup>55</sup> The most visible symptom of this crisis was the rising tide of juvenile delinquency. Between 1937 and 1945, the annual number of juveniles brought to court in the Gold Coast increased from 224 to 527.<sup>56</sup> Fourchard has noted that after 1941 juvenile delinquency was effectively 'legislated...into existence' in colonial Lagos as the state became more interested in finding and prosecuting young criminals.<sup>57</sup> A similar pattern is evident in the Gold Coast. Vague fears of a crisis of youth were used to justify opening the Department of Social Welfare

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>55</sup> Waller, 'Rebellious Youth'.

<sup>56</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Fourchard, 'Invention of Juvenile Delinquency', 116.

in the first place and its continued existence was justified by the more textured fears the department could document through its research and daily work.

Much of the most reliable evidence on the delinquency problem comes from this research, beginning with Geoffrey Tooth's 1946 *Survey of Juvenile Delinquency in the Gold Coast*. Tooth's *Survey* was initially intended to examine 'psychosis and neurosis among delinquent children' but he found that the two phenomena were 'very rarely associated'.<sup>58</sup> Like other colonial observers, he instead concluded that urbanisation was the root cause of delinquency. In 1942, the Colonial Office identified an empire-wide 'drift of children and adolescents into town', motivated by the promise of employment, education, consumer goods and adventure.<sup>59</sup> But this demographic shift created a problem. Children in cities were increasingly perceived to be at risk of unemployment and idleness, poverty and vagrancy, premature sexualisation and moral corruption. They were also committing a growing number of crimes. In the Gold Coast in 1945, 67 per cent of convictions against juveniles were for offences committed in major towns.<sup>60</sup> Rural child migrants, over-stimulated by urban living and under-supervised by their relatives, were seen as particularly susceptible to becoming delinquent.<sup>61</sup> In 1946, sixty juvenile offenders were in detention in the Gold Coast and, although 76 per cent of their offences were committed in major towns, only 27 per cent of the offenders had been born there.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Report of the Juvenile Delinquency Sub-Committee, 1942, Juvenile Delinquency, 1941-42, CO 859/73/11, NAUK.

<sup>60</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> K. A Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1950), 84.

<sup>62</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 10.

The crisis in children's behaviour in urban areas was seen to be facilitated by a toxic combination of anonymity, freedom from adult supervision and social spaces that were variously chaotic, threatening and exhilarating. Markets and transport hubs were infested with 'hoards of small and ragged boys' in search of casual work, many of whom ended up pick-pocketing or sleeping rough.<sup>63</sup> Hawking or playing on the streets exposed children to gambling, violence and the dangers of traffic.<sup>64</sup> Modern forms of leisure were seen as particularly dangerous for unsophisticated and impressionable African children. Illicit visits to the cinema encouraged secrecy, truancy and petty theft, while the content of some films was judged as 'definitely harmful'.<sup>65</sup> Children were also attracted to the track because horse-racing seemed like 'their favourite cowboy stories come to life', although young race-goers later became 'interested in betting and gambling for its own sake'.<sup>66</sup> Bars and nightclubs exposed children – and especially schoolgirls – to alcohol, sexual predation and prostitution.<sup>67</sup> Many of these problems seemed less severe when investigated in more detail, but at the height of the delinquency scare the city was certainly perceived as a morally and culturally dubious environment for children to live in. And, as we will see, it was also seen as an environment in which African authority over children was breaking down.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>64</sup> Hawking by girls was not, however, as pressing an issue in the Gold Coast as it was seen to be in colonial Lagos. George, 'Girl Hawkers'.

<sup>65</sup> *Children and the Cinema: A Report on an Enquiry into Cinema Going Among Juveniles in Accra and Kumasi* (Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1954); Extract from Mass Education Report, 1943, British Film Institute - application for grant under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act for investigation into the effect of films on native races, CO 859/46/10, NAUK.

<sup>66</sup> *Problem Children of the Gold Coast* (Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1955), 4–5.

<sup>67</sup> M. L. Clarkson, *Children in Drinking Bars and Nightclubs. A Report on Conditions Observed in Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi* (Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1955).

Although juvenile delinquency was already emerging as a concern in the 1930s, the Second World War was a major turning point. If cities exposed African children to a seductive and alien modernity for which they were unprepared, then the war gave that modernity a more overtly foreign and direct presence. In particular, the stationing of European and American servicemen in the Gold Coast was seen as corrupting local children. Many children attached themselves to army camps where 'habits quite foreign to this country were picked up'. When the war ended these children were 'left in the larger towns, thoroughly unsettled and unwilling to return to the old family life and custom'.<sup>68</sup> In port towns, so-called 'pilot boys' were associated with the twin fears of foreign influence and premature sexualisation. Pilot boys were closely-knit youth gangs whose members slept rough and made a living by 'stealing, gambling, acting as guides to sight-seers, or directing European sailors and soldiers to prostitutes'.<sup>69</sup> In Takoradi, pilot boys adopted the 'mannerisms and dress' of American soldiers.<sup>70</sup> Piloting was thought to be extraordinarily lucrative. Tooth claimed that 'a small boy could, with little effort, earn eighteen shillings a day by haunting the dance halls and bars and effecting introductions to prostitutes'.<sup>71</sup> Moral outrage was fanned by the close links between piloting and the sex trade, which meant that boys were exposed to immoral behaviours, while young girls were drawn into prostitution, often from Nigeria and against their will.<sup>72</sup> Both colonial officials and the local press were seriously concerned about pilot boys and this wartime phenomenon is central to explaining the timing of legislation on delinquency and unlicensed guides.

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<sup>68</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 96.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Saheed Aderinto, 'The Problem of Nigeria is Slavery, Not White Slave Traffic': Globalization and the Politicization of Prostitution in Southern Nigeria, 1921-1955', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 46, 1 (2012): 1-22.

Reforming the state to deal with the crisis of youth was seen to be necessary for both the practicalities of rule and for post-war recovery. Indeed, a more expansive state was perceived as an *opportunity*: rather than just nullifying the threat of the delinquent young, state intervention could harness the promise of children as colonial subjects and perhaps also as post-colonial citizens. A 1945 memorandum on the provision of youth organisations makes this explicit: ‘Today the State has come to realise that it has a duty to provide its Youth with a training in citizenship such as will prepare each individual physically, mentally and spiritually for adult membership of a society, in whose activities each member is required to take an informed and responsible share’.<sup>73</sup> This optimistic view shaped both the preference for a rehabilitative rather than punitive juvenile justice system and a role for the state that extended beyond enforcing law and order and into the previously private matter of raising the young. The memorandum is also striking for its silence on the colonial context of the provision of youth services and is indicative of how much colonial thought dealt with the universalised, rather than African, child. This phenomenon can be also seen in a speech given in 1937 by Chief Commissioner of Ashanti Newlands at the opening of the Kumasi Headquarters of the Boy Scouts Association. The abiding aim of the scout movement, informed by the pursuit of ‘honour’, was ‘to train the youth of the country in good citizenship’. African scouts were not, in theory, to be treated differently to the other ‘two million scouts in the world today’; instead they would receive the same education as ‘the children of every civilized country in the world’. But the governor also made a pointed criticism of the absence of Kumasi’s well-to-do cocoa brokers and farmers at the ceremony because it was ‘people like them’, and not the European,

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<sup>73</sup> Social Welfare. Gold Coast. Report by Mr Alexander Patterson., 1945, Memorandum on Proposals for the Developing Youth Organisations in the Gold Coast, 10/7/1945, CO 859/112/3, NAUK.



who should fund the scout movement.<sup>74</sup> Those whose wealth flowed through international trade routes were seen as partly responsible for funding the metropolitan (and inherently desirable) childhoods that colonial rule made possible. Newlands' comments also show how expansive a project the reform of childhood would inevitably become, as it was as much about changing adult behaviours as moulding children directly.

### African incapacity

The colonial state was seen as crucial to solving the crisis of youth because the indigenous institutions that might have responded were themselves perceived to be under pressure. European officials were particularly concerned that young Africans were becoming 'detribalised' – detached from the traditions, authorities and moral codes that kept delinquent behaviours in check. At the apex of these collective child-rearing mechanisms was 'the family group'.<sup>75</sup> The family and the household were expected to act as a physical and moral barrier to the moral corruption of the young. But during this period, the African family was seen to be failing in an increasing number of its responsibilities as it struggled to adapt to urban conditions and was remade by socio-economic change. During their training, welfare officials were given lectures by Kofi Busia, who served as a district commissioner from 1942 to 1949 and obtained a doctorate in social anthropology in 1947, on the 'the breakdown of the old type family and the emergence of a new family system'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Speech by H. S. Newlands, Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 9/5/1937, Boy Scouts Movement, ARG 1/10/46, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>75</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Training and employment of social welfare workers. Gold Coast, 1950, CO 859/223/5, NAUK. Busia would later serve as President of independent Ghana from 1969 to 1972.

Some of the complaints about the African family echoed those made about the nineteenth-century urban poor in the industrialising West.<sup>77</sup> The urban family, for example, suffered from 'the structure of employment in the Gold Coast', which entailed not just the absence of men from the household but the daily exodus of women to partake in a 'complicated and, in some parts, almost universal system of petty trading'. As a result many children were 'left alone or without sufficient supervision'.<sup>78</sup> Boys, in particular, suffered because they could no longer 'accompany their fathers to the farm or out hunting or fishing'.<sup>79</sup> But other aspects of the crisis of family authority were seen as peculiarly 'African'. Adult authority was stretched by the youthful demographics of the colony. Tooth explained this as part of African societies' 'fundamental drive towards the production of children'.<sup>80</sup> In a 1936 report, Dr Mary Blacklock blamed high levels of promiscuity, and thus 'illegitimacy, often resulting in neglect and abandonment of children'.<sup>81</sup> Detribalisation was also thought to be undermining the ameliorative mechanisms of traditional society. The 'insurance policy' assigning responsibility for an orphaned child's welfare to a particular family member, for example, was thought to be breaking down in 'modern towns' and among 'educated people, where custom is receding'.<sup>82</sup> The practice of mothers and fathers living separately, with children moving back and forth between residences, also created a spatial problem with the household, often raised by probation officers. This might have worked in rural areas but in an urban milieu it meant that children were exposed to the myriad dangers of the city while performing simple chores

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<sup>77</sup> Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 36–42.

<sup>78</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Maternity and Child Welfare. Women's services in the colonies and training of personnel, for report by Dr Mary Blacklock, 1942-43, CO 859/77/11, NAUK.

<sup>82</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 12.

between households and could act unsupervised for long periods while each parent thought that the other was in charge.<sup>83</sup>

Detribalisation has primarily been understood as an impersonal dynamic created by the unstoppable forces of urbanisation and monetisation. But in fact detribalisation can only be fully explained with reference to the evolving relationship between the colonial state and its child subjects. The root cause was that children existed outside – or perhaps between – the dual legal structures of the colony. In 1930, paramount chiefs in the Eastern Province requested the power to send boys ‘convicted before their tribunals’ to the industrial home at Ada. The native tribunals were otherwise helpless when ‘dealing with recalcitrant or criminally inclined children’ because they had no power to ‘administer corporal punishment’; the one alternative, a term in a native prison, was ‘out of the question’.<sup>84</sup> The commissioner of Eastern Province supported the paramount chiefs’ position, but the colonial secretary ruled that such cases should be referred to the court of the district magistrate or commissioner. Rather than the family or clan system of discipline breaking down, the structures of the colonial state hollowed out communal sanctions on other people’s children and made the state seem like the one acceptable solution for the delinquency problem. In 1947, one father felt so strongly about this vacuum of authority that he wrote to the district commissioner of Saltpond about his runaway son’s behaviour, which he feared would otherwise be checked only by violent retribution. He asked the official to commit his son to ‘the school which Govt. has built for the improvement of Gold Coast wretched boys’, and continued that ‘if I do not submit

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<sup>83</sup> For example K.D., 14/12/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG. This citation refers to an individual probation report, identifiable by initials and dates. The same format is used throughout the thesis.

<sup>84</sup> Commissioner, Eastern Province to Colonial Secretary, 26/2/1930, Industrial Homes, 1930-45, ADM 23/1/2434, NAG Cape Coast.

these reports of my son [stealing] before your worship and I leave him to roam here and there as he used to do I am afraid he will be killed by an unknown person one day'.<sup>85</sup>

One final impulse for the colonial state to regulate childhood was that some African approaches to problem children were seen as counter-productive and antithetical to western ideas. Colonial officials (or opinion makers) observed local responses to problem children, found them unacceptable, called on the colonial state as a corrective and thus made the implicit case for the state to tug control over children away from the village and household. Witchcraft accusations were an example of this process at work. In 1937, for example, the Medical Officer at Lawra in the Northern Territories reported the custom of very young children being accused of witchcraft and then ostracised:

One such boy, a bright intelligent child, was almost starved for some years, living mainly by scrounging from rubbish heaps and by petty theft. Some foreigners took an interest in him and he was finally sent to school in another area. He is making good progress and his fierce character is calming; but he retains a fierce hatred of Lawra, and assaults anyone who calls him "Lobi".<sup>86</sup>

The intervention of 'foreigners' was of course significant: not only did they scoop up responsibility for the child, but they set his childhood on the distinctly metropolitan path of formal education. But more interesting was the official's observation that 'any such children as survive, survive to be enemies of society'.<sup>87</sup> The social threat posed by this child – local in

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<sup>85</sup> Basheeruddeen to District Commissioner, Saltpond, 16/7/1947, Juvenile Offenders, 1917-47, ADM 23/1/297, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>86</sup> Points of conflict between native customs and Christian law, 1936-44, NRG 8/19/7, NAG Tamale.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

origin, ostensibly local in its vitriol against Lawra – was in fact perceived as universal. Abuse and neglect, as much as urban immorality, could produce behaviours and individuals that existed beyond the pale – and indeed threatened the pale itself.

Delinquency, then, was seen as a symptom of broader social problems and the solution to delinquency was seen as much broader than the imposition of law and order. Disciplining (and helping) children was also about reforming or rescuing the African family: not only was it ‘scientifically and morally desirable’ for parents to exercise the primary authority over their children, the state could not afford anything else.<sup>88</sup> But for the state to become hands-off, it needed to be able to intervene when the family threatened to fail, something that informed the scope of legislation to deal with children and the way that child-centred institutions functioned. In 1950, the principal of the industrial school cautioned probation officers that they ‘must treat the family as a unit and not concentrate only on the boy’.<sup>89</sup> The law was seen as a vital instrument to reform seemingly intangible aspects of family life. When the Director of Social Welfare wrote in 1951 that ‘making parents, particularly fathers, interested in their children's future will be covered by the new comprehensive legislation’, he signalled an intent to legislate certain ideals about childhood, parenting and the domestic sphere into a dominant position.<sup>90</sup> The state had had the legal power to assign a child to a ‘Fit Person’ since 1928 but it was not until the creation of the probation service that it had the resources and expertise to investigate a child’s family circumstances and thus determine whether he or she needed a more suitable guardian.

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<sup>88</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> First general conference on delinquency held by Department of Social Welfare and Housing, c.1950, Juvenile Offenders, Gold Coast, 1950-51, CO 859/242, NAUK.

<sup>90</sup> Director of Social Welfare to Probation Officer JKA, Sekondi, 28/11/1950, Probation Committee, 1952-54, WRG 47/1/22, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.



## State incapacity

The greatest obstacle to tackling juvenile delinquency was the lack of suitable laws and institutions with which to prosecute and punish young offenders. Separate judicial procedures to deal with juveniles had existed since 1928 when the state passed the Children (Care and Reformation) Ordinance and founded an industrial home for boys. A reformatory had been first mooted in 1906, and then again in 1909, but was never built on cost grounds. The issue was raised once more in 1918 by the paramount chiefs of the Eastern Province. In 1924, the Government entered into negotiations with the Salvation Army, who already managed a reformatory in Nigeria, to open a school in the Gold Coast. Ensign Corbett arrived from Lagos in June 1928 and ran the new institution after it opened in Ada.<sup>91</sup> In 1935, the industrial home was relocated to larger premises in Kintampo, in the far north of the Ashanti Region. But by the Second World War both the reformatory and the judicial treatment of juveniles were considered wholly inadequate.

The first flaw with the existing judicial system was that it failed to keep children totally separate from adults. Because children were increasingly seen as impressionable innocents, even accused juveniles were considered at risk of corruption by criminal African adults. The lack of sufficient child-centred institutions and lengthy judicial procedures meant that children faced terms in custody with adults for trivial offences like 'furious cycling'.<sup>92</sup> Before whipping juveniles fell out of favour, the most common punishment for delinquents was often carried out in prisons, bringing children 'into unnecessarily close contact with adult offenders and prison life'; in 1931, the Supreme Court ordered that future whippings take place in police

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<sup>91</sup> No IV of 1929-30, Correspondence on the Subject of an Industrial Home (Reformatory for Juvenile Offenders) in the Gold Coast, ARG 1/13/1/34, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>92</sup> No. 50, ADM 23/1/2626, NAG Cape Coast.

stations.<sup>93</sup> But police stations were also an imperfect environment for juvenile offenders. This was particularly problematic when waiting for the governor to sign a mandate committing a boy to the industrial home because police stations had 'no proper place to keep a boy of this sort'.<sup>94</sup> Delays could leave a child in the police station for up to two months; and those who had 'the reputation of being a runaway' might be 'locked up in a cell, possibly with adult remand prisoners, or put under physical restraint'.<sup>95</sup> The judicial process itself was increasingly seen as in need of reform. In 1932, a judicial circular suggested that hearings involving juveniles be held at separate times or places, that accused children be granted bail in all but exceptional circumstances and that court procedure be reduced to its 'simplest form' to make it comprehensible to the accused.<sup>96</sup> The post-war juvenile justice system – with its separate institutions, procedures and punishments – was a response to all of these concerns and underlain by the idea that young Africans had to be disciplined and reformed with techniques used on European children rather than those in use on African adults.

A further problem with the pre-war juvenile justice system was that it suffered from a lack of capacity and so juvenile correction was not applied uniformly, but waxed and waned with the availability of penal resources. In 1930, for example, all places at the Ada industrial home were occupied and the colonial secretary instructed magistrates that 'no Mandates should be issued'.<sup>97</sup> When places were free by the following February, the moratorium on admissions was lifted. In 1935, with the construction of a larger industrial home at Kintampo, the Supreme

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<sup>93</sup> No. 27, ADM 23/1/297, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>94</sup> Director of Prisons to Colonial Secretary, 11/2/1930, ADM 23/1/2434, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid; Acting Commissioner Eastern Province to Colonial Secretary, 1/2/1930, Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Judicial Circular, 4 of 1932, Industrial Home at (Ada) Kintampo for Juvenile Offenders, 1929-42, ARG 7/1/34, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>97</sup> Colonial Secretary to Commissioner, Western Province, ADM 23/1/2434, NAG Cape Coast.

Court issued a circular asking magistrates to 'bear in mind' the 'considerable number of vacancies' at the institution.<sup>98</sup> Half a year later, the Supreme Court issued a second circular, warning that the lack of admissions threatened to make the Kintampo home an 'uneconomic proposition', imperilling the Governor's commitment to 'modern ideas as to the treatment of juvenile offenders'.<sup>99</sup> In 1941, magistrates were instructed to check directly with the home whether space was available before issuing a mandate.<sup>100</sup> The much greater resources available to the state were seen as crucial to ensuring that a reformed system would offer a uniformly applied standard of juvenile justice.

The standard of care and rehabilitation in existing penal facilities also left much to be desired. In 1945, it was suggested that the government take direct control of the Kintampo industrial school, due to its 'unsatisfactory features' under Salvation Army management.<sup>101</sup> But the institution's shortcomings had long been a concern. The industrial home was a failure as a disciplined environment because both the staff and the surrounding area were deemed unsuitable. A report on the home in 1936 noted an 'undercurrent of insubordination' among the inmates.<sup>102</sup> In 1940, the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti blamed continuing disciplinary problems on the superintendent, Major Walker, who he described as having 'little strength of character or personality'.<sup>103</sup> Under Walker's leadership discipline was said in 1943 to have 'broken down completely'.<sup>104</sup> Alternative authority figures emerged from among the older

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<sup>98</sup> Supreme Court Circular, 25/2/1935, Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Supreme Court Circular, 16/9/1935, Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Judicial Circular 6 of 1941, ARG 7/1/34, NAG Ashanti.

<sup>101</sup> Oliver Stanley to Governor Burns, 13/3/1945, Social Welfare Work in the Colonies. Gold Coast., 1945, CO 859/112/2, NAUK.

<sup>102</sup> Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, Report on a visit of inspection to the Boys' Home Kintampo on 7th February, 1936, Boys' Home, Kintampo, 1937-44, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>103</sup> Chief Commissioner, Ashanti to Power, 17/12/1940, Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Report of Inspection, 21-2/10/1943, Boys' Industrial Home, Kintampo, ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

residents of the home, including one boy whose skill with locks made him the 'principal teacher of crime'.<sup>105</sup> Walker was replaced shortly after; his successor, Major Bonnet, was reported to have improved spirit and discipline in the school by 1944 but was still 'handicapped' by the school's location in Kintampo and the lack of trained staff.<sup>106</sup>

Complaints about Kintampo reflect how deeply the Second World War was implicated in the juvenile delinquency scare. In 1935, the town was prized for its relative isolation; this would simultaneously stop the boys running away from the home and insulate them from polluting influences. But with the opening of an important military camp during the war the town became a microcosm of the social evils creating a generation of delinquents in major urban areas. The home lay between Kintampo town and the new military lines and it was easy for boys to escape to beg food from the soldiers or to wash their clothes for money. Worse, the military presence was accompanied by 'professional thieves, prostitutes and gin-sellers' and many of the boys absconded in the evenings to gamble and associate with these hangers-on.<sup>107</sup> Particular opprobrium was reserved for prostitutes, demonstrating the constant undercurrent of concern over premature sexualisation, both of boys and girls, in colonial thought on African children. The Salvation Army complained to Accra about the baleful influence that 'the influx of undesirable women' was having on the residents of the home, noting that 'they incite them against discipline, receive stolen goods, bribe the boys to give them farm produce, and are in every way a great nuisance'.<sup>108</sup> Major Walker went even further, implying that at the river which supplied water for both the home and local prostitutes the older boys were exchanging

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<sup>105</sup> District Commissioner, Wenchi to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 19/11/1943, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>106</sup> Chief Commissioner, Ashanti to Director of Education, 19/6/1944, Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> District Commissioner, Wenchi to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 19/11/1943, Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Chief Secretary, Salvation Army, Lagos to Director of Education, 3/8/1943, Ibid.

produce grown on school grounds for sex. 'Yams from farm are exchanged', he wrote, 'small boys for money, big boys other exchange, boys sent in for indecent assault find this a happy hunting ground'.<sup>109</sup> The corrosive influence of wartime Kintampo meant that the 'industrial' home threatened to teach its inmates as much about grift as it did about graft.

Perhaps most shocking of all, just as the home failed to keep Kintampo (and, by extension, contemporary social problems) out, it failed its basic task of keeping the guilty, dangerous and vulnerable in. At least three inmates were suggested for early release from the home between 1936 and 1944. This was not because they were reformed but because they were too difficult to deal with, judged variously as 'incorrigible', 'incurable', rabble-rousing or escape-prone.<sup>110</sup> At least one of these boys was subsequently released – but less than a year later he was sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for stealing a wristwatch in Mampong. A further problem was that when a boy's term ended the Salvation Army home had no legal power to hold him, regardless of his age or suitability for release. This went against the colonial state's belief that children needed discipline and protection. In 1944, the superintendent complained that this release policy was particularly problematic for boys who had been abandoned, one way or another, before being committed to the home.<sup>111</sup> Alexander Patterson's verdict on the home's preparation of boys for their release was damning: 'the boys are discharged, untrained certainly and probably depraved, without aid and guidance to an unfriendly world'.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> One of the many reservations colonial officials had about Walker was his questionable literacy. Report on the Home by Major Walker, 20/10/1943, ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>110</sup> Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, Report on Home, 7/2/1936 and Chief Secretary, Salvation Army to Director of Education, 3/8/1943, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi; ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>111</sup> Major Walker to Director of Education, 19/6/1944, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>112</sup> Extract from Report of Alexander Patterson on the Treatment of Crime on the Gold Coast, c.1944, Ibid.



The fact that many boys were not perceived as ready to leave the home reflected the growing belief that, throughout the juvenile justice system, there was a glaring lack of 'modern' rehabilitative methods. The narrow implication of these cumulative flaws was that the state should not just supervise the home but run it along modern lines. The wider implication was that the state – and more particularly the experts it employed – should oversee the reform and supervision of childhood. This was a significant rewriting of the relationship between children, their families and political authority.

The home was designed to educate as well as punish and, as reform became the dominant philosophy of treating delinquency, dissatisfaction grew with the quality and breadth of its academic and vocational teaching. Agricultural training was initially emphasised to encourage boys to return to rural areas on their release.<sup>113</sup> But the Chief Agricultural Officer complained that European staff knew 'very little about agriculture in general, and even less about local farming conditions' and were incapable of providing the necessary instruction on 'preparing manure and compost' and 'erosion control'.<sup>114</sup> Waller has noted that two imperial panics, over soil erosion and juvenile delinquency, ran in parallel during this period; here, in a measure of the perceived promise of youth and the growing importance of their reform rather than punishment, the two scares became intertwined and the fate of the land linked to the state's task of salvaging the next generation.<sup>115</sup> By the Second World War, the provision of craft training was seen as increasingly important, both to reward boys for good behaviour and to equip them with useful skills in a society where urbanisation could only be ameliorated, not

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<sup>113</sup> Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, Report on a visit of inspection to the Boys' Home Kintampo on 7th February, 1936, Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Chief Agricultural Officer to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 7/2/1942, ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>115</sup> Waller, 'Rebellious Youth', 86.

reversed.<sup>116</sup> But, just as with academic and agricultural training, a lack of specialist staff stopped boys learning any useful skills. The growing emphasis on reform of delinquents was reflected in the fact that the Kintampo home came under the supervision of the Education Department in 1939 but continuing problems with provision meant that by 1943 the 'ideal solution' was seen as direct government control, with an accompanying injection of resources and expertise.<sup>117</sup>

A final problem with the existing judicial system was that the lack of state surveillance of delinquent children, both before and after their incarceration, meant that magistrates were in the dark about the most suitable punishment to hand down and officials were in the dark about whether incarceration actually worked. This was the impulse behind the state expanding its reach into the African family. The gap between state capacity and the 'modern' treatment of delinquents is evident in sentencing advice on juveniles issued in 1932. The court was expected to obtain details of the offender's 'general conduct, home surroundings, school record and medical history' so that it could 'deal with the case in the best interests of the juvenile'.<sup>118</sup> These reports were collected in an ad hoc fashion and placed extra strain on the judicial system. A probation service that could investigate the background of suspected delinquents was seen as a crucial part of a reformed juvenile justice system.<sup>119</sup> This would also address the lack of suitable aftercare provided by the Salvation Army, which had limited resources to place released boys in employment.<sup>120</sup> Initially the Salvation Army networks was expected to play a

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<sup>116</sup> District Commissioner, Wenchi to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 19/11/1943, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>117</sup> Provincial Inspector of Schools, Ashanti to Director of Education, ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>118</sup> Judicial Circular, 4 of 1932, ARG 7/1/34, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>119</sup> Penal. Probation Service in the Colonies., 1941, CO 859/73/5, NAUK.

<sup>120</sup> The Salvation Army encouraged boys to join the armed forces 'wherever possible'. Report on the Home, 25-7/9/1942, ARG 1/13/1/39, NAG Kumasi.

role in providing probation services but, by the time the department was running, these too were to be the preserve of experts.

The state was deemed capable of providing the efficiency and expertise that Salvation Army management lacked. In 1942, Superintendent Garratt of the Kumasi prison argued that the industrial home should be run along 'modern lines' and led by a 'suitably trained officer from the Home Service', drawing on the example of Onderneeming Industrial School in British Guiana to show how an institution could be turned around by replacing amateurs with trained professionals. He was dismissive of the alternative, continued Salvation Army leadership, stating that even the best officers had 'no experience of dealing with juveniles in bulk, no idea of training boys individually on a scientific basis'. This had hampered the running of the home thus far: 'on looking through the files', Garratt complained, 'I find that the Inspector of Schools is the first to talk of "intelligence quotients" and this in 1942!!!'.<sup>121</sup> The rise of the Department of Social Welfare was predicated on the idea that well-meaning amateurs were inferior to trained specialists on the grounds of both cost and effectiveness.<sup>122</sup>

The training of welfare officials and the creation of experts and expertise helps explain why child-centred institutions and laws and ideas of childhood took on metropolitan forms. As a novel class of colonial employee, welfare officers needed training devised and delivered from the metropole. In 1942, the anthropologist Audrey Richards began to co-ordinate a course in Colonial Social Studies from the Colonial Office that would be ready 'after the war' and offer 'training in Colonial matters for experienced social workers in this country' and 'training in

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<sup>121</sup> O. V. Garratt, Superintendent, Kumasi Prison to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 10/6/1942, Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Expertise could also be conflated with race. In 1945, for example, it was suggested that the African in charge of a hostel in Cape Coast should be replaced with a European. CO 859/112/2, NAUK.

welfare work in this country for people from the Colonies'.<sup>123</sup> The London School of Economics was enlisted to provide teaching although because of the war students would be resident at Trinity College, Cambridge. The first course began in 1943. West African students took up eighteen of the available twenty-four spaces, their dominance explained by the relative ease of travel during wartime and the varying attitudes of local colonial states.<sup>124</sup> There were seven students from the Gold Coast on this LSE course; of these, two 'specialised in Probation' and one, Mr Amoo, was trained as an Approved School Master, with the intention that he take over the industrial school then run by the Salvation Army.<sup>125</sup> Amoo took charge of the school in September 1951, at a time of increasing 'Africanisation' of the Gold Coast government.<sup>126</sup>

The course itself combined social and economic theory with classes on more concrete aspects of social welfare. The syllabus resembled a more secular version of that available at the Jan H. Hofmeyr School of Social Work that trained African welfare workers in Johannesburg; this school was run by the South African National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, from whom Richards solicited information in the early stages of planning the course.<sup>127</sup> As this implies, the London course was informed by its colonial context. Indeed, the racial thinking of colonialism was evident in the more theoretical aspects of the course; but racism did not completely dominate and there was room for a more universalist idea of the child to emerge and be brought back to the colony. The psychology unit, for example, examined the racial and

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<sup>123</sup> Memorandum by Audrey Richards, 31/7/1942, Social Welfare Work in the Colonies. Training and employment of social workers, 1942-43, CO 859/75/2, NAUK.

<sup>124</sup> Racial tensions were much more acute in settler colonies, for example, where officials fretted about Africans who knew 'a great deal about a number of subjects and methods the mere existence of which most administrative officers...have not yet heard'. Director of Medical Services, Kenya, August 1943, Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Social welfare. Report on colonial social science course held at LSE., 1945, CO 859/113/2, NAUK.

<sup>126</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 19.

<sup>127</sup> Social Welfare Work in the Colonies. Training and employment of social workers. Africa, 1942-43, CO 859/75/4, NAUK.

national differences in human psychology but it also explored the ‘development of behaviour from infancy to adolescence’ – and, from the admittedly skeletal information on the syllabus, there is no indication that the colonial child was set apart from the European child.<sup>128</sup> This would also fit with Lindstrum’s assessment that ‘most psychologists rejected the notion of an unbridgeable chasm between colonizing and colonized minds’.<sup>129</sup> The idea of colonial exceptionalism is even less evident in the surveys of social services, welfare and administration, which made ‘particular reference to Great Britain’ and included practical observation of British institutions.<sup>130</sup> Students were therefore being taught universal solutions to colonial social problems; the institutions might have to be varied according to local resources but their techniques were seen as applicable to African children who would respond to the same treatments as their European peers. It was expected, moreover, that the students on the course would be a vector for these modern ideas in the colonies. The course, a member of the Juvenile Welfare Sub-Committee wrote, should produce ‘leaders – e.g. two or three per Colony, who would either help European Welfare officers or – more likely – would form the nucleus of a staff at the regional social science courses in the Colonies’.<sup>131</sup>

Indeed, the Gold Coast government rapidly sought an alternative to educating its welfare officers in Great Britain. The Gold Coast had initially declined to send *any* students to the LSE course until it was ‘more practical’.<sup>132</sup> When the colony relented, it was disappointed with the students who returned. A response to Audrey Richards’ report on the course complained that

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<sup>128</sup> Provisional Arrangements for the First Year of the Course in Colonial Social Studies, 1943, CO 859/75/2, NAUK.

<sup>129</sup> Erik Linstrum, ‘The Politics of Psychology in the British Empire, 1898–1960’, *Past & Present* 215, 1 (2012): 199.

<sup>130</sup> Provisional Arrangements for the First Year of the Course in Colonial Social Studies, 1943, CO 859/75/2, NAUK.

<sup>131</sup> Memorandum by Carr Saunders, 1/6/1943, *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> 71, 23/7/1943, *Ibid.*



‘our newly appointed probation officers who took the course have shown a tendency to attempt to apply a scientific diagnosis before setting out to achieve a personal and human relationship between themselves and the probationers under their care’.<sup>133</sup> A local School of Social Welfare opened in Accra in October 1945. When the school first opened there were ten students, nine of whom were former teachers and two of whom were women, selected from 500 applicants. Unlike its equivalent in Cambridge, the Accra school lacked a ‘professional teacher in charge of the theoretical studies’.<sup>134</sup> Nine students graduated in 1946, two becoming probation officers, the remainder becoming assistant welfare officers. By 1950, the school housed twenty residential students. The practical emphasis remained but the Department of Social Welfare now also acknowledged a need for trainees to have ‘good background knowledge of their society, the social problems facing their society and the probable lines of development of their society’.<sup>135</sup> The syllabus closely followed that devised by Audrey Richards, covering social and family structures in the Gold Coast (taught by Dr Kofi Busia), social services in the United Kingdom, systems of local and colonial government and the colonial economy. This was supplemented by practical instruction and visits to relevant facilities. Again, the child-centred institutions, and the model of childhood that informed them, were metropolitan in form: for lack of any detailed local alternative, both were to be transplanted to the colony largely unchanged.

But the rise of social welfare training schools was not simply about empowering a class of experts. Embedded within their expertise was a universalist idea of childhood that shaped the

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<sup>133</sup> CO 859/113/2, NAUK.

<sup>134</sup> CO 859/112/2, NAUK.

<sup>135</sup> Director of Social Welfare and Housing to President, Union des Femmes Coloniales, Brussels, 10/3/1950, CO 859/223/5, NAUK.

rights and jural status of children in the Gold Coast. Indeed, the desire for probation officers to develop 'a personal and human relationship' with the children they supervised hints at the rights to certain 'natural' aspects of childhood – emotional well-being, innocence and carefree play – that the increasingly universalised African child was seen to possess.

## The new ideal of childhood and the limits of reform

While ostensibly a narrow question of law and order, the attempt to address the delinquency problem was actually part of the broader history of colonial thought on childhood. This involved the flow of important metropolitan ideas to the colony – on protecting childhood innocence and on disciplining and training children using 'modern' methods – that increasingly erased the distinction between European and African children. But the ideas discussed so far concerned how adult power over children should be used. This section, by contrast, explores how in the same period children acquired certain positive rights – to emotional support, a loving home background and to safe and carefree play – that constrained and motivated adult authority. This new ideal of childhood had only a limited impact outside of government circles and elite civil society, however, and the section also considers why the idea was so contested and the constraints this placed on those who wanted to reform or modernise childhood in the Gold Coast.

The foundation of the probation service was hugely significant for the jural status of children. For the first time the colonial state was able to glimpse the inner workings of individual African households. And, in an extraordinary extension of state authority into the private sphere, the observations of probation officers were considered expert enough to inform direct interference into the business of child-rearing, up to and including the removal of a child from his or her parents. This is all the more extraordinary because one of the criteria of a suitable

home was one of the most subjective to judge: whether it provided a child with the love and emotional support to which he or she was entitled. This state role overseeing emotional ties within the household was made explicit in literature produced by the department. Neglected or abandoned children needed to be provided with 'a secure and affectionate home atmosphere'. The disadvantages of the 'slum home and the broken home' could be offset if the child felt 'important and precious' to his or her carers.<sup>136</sup>

Close reading of probation reports also shows how evaluating the affection a child received became embedded in the everyday functions of the juvenile justice system. The emotional context of the home and the emotional capabilities of the parents were often used to explain a child becoming delinquent. A probation report on a twelve-year-old whose father had died and whose mother had gone insane while he was an infant noted that 'this hapless boy has never said "papa" or "mama" to anyone'; his delinquent behaviour, moreover, was 'quite in keeping with the behaviour of a child deprived of maternal love and mental health'.<sup>137</sup> Emotions nonetheless had to be finely balanced with the neutral application of parental authority. The failure to achieve that balance was often gendered in probation reports, mothers being judged too emotional and fathers not being emotional enough. The household where the father of a nine-year-old boy was judged 'temperamentally harsh and habitually dipsomaniac' and his mother 'over-protective and ineffective in domestic supervision' was typical.<sup>138</sup> Children's need for parental love also informed the recommendations that probation officers made to the juvenile courts. One Nigerian child living with his father in Accra, for example, was recommended for administrative repatriation to his mother's home

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<sup>136</sup> *Problem Children of the Gold Coast*, 8.

<sup>137</sup> E.A., 19/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>138</sup> A.P., 8/10/1957, *Ibid.*

in Lagos because he suffered from a lack of 'maternal love' and would otherwise forever 'be scheming to run away to the mother'.<sup>139</sup>

Play was another aspect of a child's daily life that probation officers investigated.<sup>140</sup> The presence or absence of playmates in or near the home informed probation officers' decisions over whether a home was suitable for a child to thrive and be happy in.<sup>141</sup> Denying a child access to play and peer companionship could cause delinquency, while restoring these essentials could reform a child or check a slide into bad behaviour. In 1952, the investigation into one 'shy and secretive' fourteen-year-old accused of wounding explained the crime as a result of the boy being unable to 'take things lightly' because he had no 'associates' or 'recreation' outside the home; the suggested solution was the guidance of a probation officer and 'association with other boys like himself in a boys club'.<sup>142</sup> In penal facilities, the provision of play was seen as a crucial reward and safety valve. It is not surprising that play – a natural instinct for children – was seen by probation officers and other colonial officials as a crucial part of childhood. But what is surprising is how the state began to use access to, and quality of, play as a criterion in decisions that affected children as individuals or as a group.

Not all forms of play were created equal, however. Play that spilled from the cloistered home into adult-dominated public spaces was seen as a potential danger to innocent, impressionable and unsupervised children. The ten-year-old described as endlessly playing football 'on the pavement and other isolated lanes' was a concern to both his father and probation officer for this reason.<sup>143</sup> Young children loitering outside bars might want to innocently overhear music

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<sup>139</sup> G.N.B.D., 27/11/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>140</sup> For example, K.A., 18/12/1952, Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> K.D., 14/12/1952, Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> D.A.A., 11/12/1952, Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> A.S., 23/10/1954, Ibid.

and ‘dance and sing among themselves’, but they were simultaneously exposed to the lax morals of urban nightlife.<sup>144</sup> As we will see, the state tried to create sanitised and safe spaces dedicated to children’s play as a remedy to these problems. Some forms of play, like gambling with dice and cards, were perceived as inherently damaging and both a marker and accelerant of moral decline. It was relatively common for children ‘in need of care and protection’ to come to the notice of the probation service after first being arrested for gambling in public.<sup>145</sup> Gambling’s financial motive also flags up another late-colonial judgement: that play should be something separate, undertaken for its own sake or for its formative benefits. The monetisation of urban leisure conflicted with this and there is a general sniffiness in probation reports about children who rejected pure and unmediated forms of play in favour of commodified experiences: visiting the cinema, hiring a bicycle, even buying and eating sweets. This disapproval is explained both by the belief that children were learning to fritter away their money and that those unable to afford such pleasures would be tempted into crime.<sup>146</sup> As we will see in Chapter 6, the idea of play as a separate realm also ran contrary to the experience and desires of children themselves, many of whom managed to combine play and profit.

In an attempt to carve out time and space for urban children to play in moral and physical safety the state became involved in schemes to construct playgrounds after the Second World War. The surviving plans for playground schemes in Accra and Kumasi are fairly detailed and very revealing. Analysing the children’s playground as a consciously constructed space indicates some of the underlying ideas about childhood held by colonial officials and elements

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<sup>144</sup> Clarkson, *Children in Drinking Bars and Nightclubs*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> For example, K.N., E.T.Q. and E.O.D., 14/8/1952. SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>146</sup> *Problem Children of the Gold Coast*, 11.



of civil society. The subsequent debates surrounding the location and use of playgrounds, meanwhile, reveal how contested these newer ideas about childhood were.

The Department of Social Welfare proposed one such playground in 1951 for the market at Kumasi, the Gold Coast's second city. In its proposal, the Department of Social Welfare noted that 'approximately 500 children between the ages of 2 to 7 years spend each day in the market while their mothers trade. They play about in the dirt of the market or sleep on the ground under the stalls. Apart from the bad effect such a life must have on the children's health and upbringing, they are a source of worry to the mothers and other traders.'<sup>147</sup> The Department proposed a facility to cater for between 100 and 150 children that would be 'fenced in, in order to prevent the children from crossing the railway line [that ran directly through the market] and to allow for adequate supervision within the Centre'.<sup>148</sup> The supervision would come from a trained (and by implication educated) leader and assistant. The playground would include not only 'Swings, Slides, [and a] Sandpit etc' but also 'washing and latrine facilities suitable for children', a sick room for emergencies or for isolation in case of 'infectious diseases' and a roofed area and newly planted trees '[t]o protect the children from both the sun and the rain'.<sup>149</sup> At a later meeting it was decided that a 'midday meal...was essential for the welfare of the children'.<sup>150</sup> The cost of this food estimated by Dr Susana Ofori-Atta of the Child Welfare Clinic at 7d per child per day, of which parents were expected to find 6d per day.

We can see here several parallel threads of the attempt to 'modernise' childhood in an African colony. There was to be a physical separation of the spaces demarcated for adult work and

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<sup>147</sup> Proposal by the Department of Social Welfare, 3/2/1951, Children's Play Centre in Kumasi Market, 1951, ARG 1/15/87, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Department of Social Welfare meeting report, 14/3/1951, Ibid.

child leisure. Where previously children had made their own use of adult spaces, by sleeping under tables and playing in the market dirt, they were now to be split off into sanitised child-friendly areas. Children could no longer be trusted not to cross the railway lines when infrequent trains passed, but had to be fenced in and supervised. This supervision, moreover, was to be left to trained or trainee professionals. The children were to entertain themselves using playground equipment familiar to any of the European officials who discussed and approved the scheme. What seems like a simple spatial reorganisation of childhood was in fact underlain by fundamental assumptions about how children should be raised and who was fit to raise them.

Eight years earlier a more convoluted playground building saga began in the colonial capital, Accra. This narrative, too, offers an insight into how elements of local society and the colonial bureaucracy were trying to 'modernise' and 'standardise' colonial childhoods – but it also reveals how contested and complicated a project this was. In 1943, the (unofficial) Children's Playgrounds Committee proposed the building of a playground in James Town, the old heart of downtown Accra. The site would consist of 'Seesaws, Maypole, Pond with shute [sic], Summerhouse or Shelter, all surrounded by a low wall with shrubs planted thereon'. The committee would employ a 'young educated woman, to look after the children', for a salary of £36 to £48 per annum. A watchman would also be employed and the playground would be closed after 7pm and barred to the over-twelves. The committee knew that the governor was 'deeply interested' in playgrounds for children and hoped to find government finance for the

scheme.<sup>151</sup> This playground was initially projected to cost £650 and a further nine smaller playgrounds were expected to cost £60 each.<sup>152</sup>

The Secretary for Social Services first suggested that the Accra Town Council pay for the scheme but, while remaining committed to the principle that local authorities should pay for local amenities, he intimated that the colonial government, via the Central Welfare Committee, could meet half of the capital costs of the larger playground, as the scheme was ‘in the nature of an experiment’.<sup>153</sup> Catalysing the transition towards modern and proper childhoods was seen as a worthwhile investment. But fearing that a ‘precedent’ would be set for central funding of *other* local services, the Secretary rowed back on this commitment and told the council that it alone would have to fund the otherwise ‘praiseworthy’ scheme. This was a decision taken with some regret because, he told the council’s President, the playground would ‘bring happiness to many young persons’.<sup>154</sup> British officials were thus being guided by a universalist definition of child welfare, one that incorporated a right to play: play that was happy and carefree and, for preference, restricted to a sanitised, structured and supervised space.

It was not until 1945, however, that the Accra Town Council was able to fund the playgrounds, allocating £600 to pay for a reduced version of the scheme. Instead of one complex playground and nine smaller ones, the Acting Secretary of Social Services advised the council to ‘put up 3 small grounds in the immediate vicinity of the homes of the children, to leave the organisation

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<sup>151</sup> Minutes of Children’s Playgrounds Committee, 11/6/1943, Children’s Playgrounds, Accra, 1943-46, CSO 28/1/2, NAG.

<sup>152</sup> President, Accra Town Council to Colonial Secretary, 5/8/1943, Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Secretary for Social Services, 19/8/1943, Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Secretary for Social Services to President, Accra Town Council, 16/10/1943, Ibid.

to volunteer bodies and to see how the children and people reacted'.<sup>155</sup> This less ambitious plan drew on the experience of Cape Town, South Africa, where a survey revealed that while only forty children were using a purpose-built 12-acre park, more than a thousand of their peers were 'playing among the traffic in neighbouring streets'.<sup>156</sup> The desire to shape childhoods (or, perhaps, to allow childhoods to flow into an inevitable mould) was thus tempered by disappointing experiences elsewhere in Africa.

At a meeting in May 1945, the Accra Town Council made the decision to begin the playground scheme. Four of five proposed sites were approved, including the 'elaborate' playground at Ababio Square. The decision was not unanimous (six councillors voted for the scheme, two against) and the objections raised to the individual playground sites are revealing. Councillor Halm objected to the Ababio Square playground because the site included a latrine and was in close proximity to the palace of the James Town Mantse, the chief of the indigenous town quarter. The Town Engineer, a European, countered that the latrine would not be 'offensive' as it would be used only by the children while the playground was open. Councillor Akwei, meanwhile, objected to the playground site opposite Ussher Fort because of the dangers presented by 'heavy traffic' on surrounding streets. Akwei was supported by Councillor Odamtten for a more interesting reason: that the 'nudity of the boys and girls' at the playground would shock foreigners on the nearby High Street, the thoroughfare on which visitors 'always collected their first impressions of Accra the capital of the Gold Coast'. The very measure intended to ease local childhoods towards a universal standard would, in other words, show how far away from those standards the average Gold Coast child was. The 'naked'

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<sup>155</sup> Minutes of the Central Welfare Committee, 17/1/1945, Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



children of Ussher Town, an impoverished area of the city, were simply not modern enough to reveal to the world. (Figure 3-1, a council publicity shot of an Accra playground, shows children in school uniform in the foreground and one or two naked or near-naked children at the back of the photograph.) The Ussher Fort playground was the one site not approved at the meeting.<sup>157</sup>



Figure 3-1. 'A typical children's playground'. Photograph from Accra Town Council, *Your Questions Answered* (1948).

But the decision to begin building simply led to local squabbling. In August 1945, the James Town Mantse wrote to the colonial secretary about the nascent building work at Ababio Square. He began by pointing out that the James Town Stool had owned the land 'from time immemorial' and that any government activity was a matter of concern. But the erection of a children's playground was particularly objectionable as it would subject the Mantse's buildings to 'the yelling and applause of an intensely excited throng of children'. The playground would

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<sup>157</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the Accra Town Council, 15/5/1945, Ibid.



disturb the work of the James Town court and council, distress the residents and obstruct the Stool's 'ceremonial and festival' uses of the square. He suggested two alternative sites for the playground on government land, pointed out the dangers of traffic at Ababio Square and finally requested that the 'erection of See-Saws' be stopped.<sup>158</sup> A few days later the President of the Accra Town Council noted that all work at Ababio Square had been suspended because the fishermen who dried their nets on the site were annoyed at the disruption. Work was suspended until the question of ownership and use of the land had been settled.<sup>159</sup>

The colonial secretary canvassed opinion over whether the objections of the James Town Mantse and the fishermen using Ababio Square should be upheld. The district commissioner of Accra eventually advised that the playground should be relocated but his reasoning was subtle and indicative of wider trends in colonial thought that infantilised and sentimentalised local children. He disagreed with the James Town Mantse's points, arguing that Ababio Square was already noisy and that 'the few ceremonies that are held there' could easily take place somewhere else. Crucially, the district commissioner was dismissive of the dignity and pomp of traditionally gerontocratic authorities, stating unambiguously that 'the happiness of children should come first'. His recommendation to site the playground elsewhere was informed in part by economics; although unproductive ceremony got short-shrift, the district commissioner thought that 'it would cause unnecessary hardship to the fishermen' if the playground stopped them drying their nets. But it was also informed by the need to *protect* children, both from the immediate dangers of heavy traffic in the area and from the implied influence of 'the local "toughs" [who] hang around the Seaview Hotel and the Square'. As a

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<sup>158</sup> Nleshi Mantse We to Colonial Secretary, 25/8/1945, Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> President, Accra Town Council, 28/8/1945, Ibid.

secluded and sanitised space, Ababio Square left a lot to be desired.<sup>160</sup> The District Commissioner's view prevailed and the planned playground was relocated near to the nearby London Market.

Another playground was built on leased Crown land, next to the Princess Marie Louise Clinic. The Lands Department had always been cautious about the site as the clinic might need to be extended and the noise of the playground would be problematic for 'an institution where sick children are patients and where quietness is essential'.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, by December 1945 a problem had arisen. The clinic's medical officer wrote to the Director of Medical Services that, in combination with 'the screaming of the infants in the out-patient department [and] the ever-increasing sound of the traffic outside', the 'added burden of the shouts from the playground adjoining the compound make conditions of work well-nigh intolerable'. The Director of Medical Services relayed these concerns to the Colonial Secretary, adding that the clinic's child patients required 'rest and quietness more than any other class of patient' and, further, that there was a danger of 'cross-infection' between children visiting the clinic and 'the presumably healthy children in the contiguous playground'.<sup>162</sup> The Secretary for Social Services, however, was dismissive, suggesting that '[t]he carefree laughter of children at play should be a tonic to others lying in hospital and bombarded by the screams from the outpatients' department'. By contrast, he said, 'the nervous system does rebel at the cacophonous [traffic noise] and juvenile cries of pain, whether anticipatory or real'. He downplayed, too, the danger of infection from the hospital itself.<sup>163</sup> The following month the Colonial Secretary's office informed the Accra

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<sup>160</sup> District Commissioner, Accra to Colonial Secretary, 21/9/1945, Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Illegible for Commissioner of Lands to Colonial Secretary, 27/8/1945, Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Director of Medical Services to Colonial Secretary, 21/12/1945, Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Secretary for Social Services, 28/1/1946, Ibid.

Town Council that the lease would be reviewed after a year.<sup>164</sup> Just a few months later, however, the council decided to shut the playground ‘in the interest of the children at the Princess Marie Louise’s Hospital’.<sup>165</sup>

An official in the Colonial Secretary’s office forecasted, with some exasperation, that no uncontroversial site for a playground would ever be found and suggested that the ‘experiment’ be revisited in a year, when the ‘value and use’ of the playgrounds would be clearer.<sup>166</sup> Self-consciously modernising elements in colonial and municipal government and in Accra civil society had tried to delineate child-centred spaces, focused on carefree play and sheltered from the social and economic demands of the adult world. But their ambitions were dramatically scaled back by financial, political and cultural constraints. By 1948, the Accra Town Council reported that just two playgrounds had been opened, in Christiansborg and James Town. They were popular – but popular with the wrong sort. ‘The playgrounds’, a council publication explained, were ‘often used by adults instead of children, and the swings and see-saws have continuously been broken by persons for whom the playgrounds were never originally intended’.<sup>167</sup> The proposal for a playground in Kumasi was altered to remove the swings and slides because these were, for unstated reasons, ‘unpopular with the parents’.<sup>168</sup> The metropolitan idea of separate child-centred objects and spaces simply broke down in the face of hostility, indifference or incomprehension in the colony.

But perhaps it can also be argued that, for many children, the social and intellectual re-imagination of childhood by adults was irrelevant. As I demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5,

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<sup>164</sup> [Illegible] for Colonial Secretary to President, Accra Town Council, 4/2/1946, Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> President, Accra Town Council to Acting Director of Medical Services, 2/4/1946, Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> K.B.R., 17/1/1946, Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> *Your Questions Answered* (Accra Town Council, 1948), 30.

<sup>168</sup> ARG 1/15/87, NAG Kumasi.

children engaged with colonial modernity through their own initiative and curiosity – and they did so not because of the actions of reformers, local and European, but precisely because those reformers could not hope to isolate and protect the young from the dizzying social and technological change evident in the adult world.

## Conclusion

In her writing on childhoods in colonial Indonesia, Ann Laura Stoler points out that European and métis children were a dangerous group from the perspective of colonial ideology. They were apt to misunderstand colonial categories, to pick up the wrong language or friends and thereby blur the boundaries of their own racial identity – and child-rearing thus came under increasing scrutiny in the nineteenth century as a way of maintaining racial hierarchies.<sup>169</sup> In the colonial Gold Coast, without the burden of a significant European population, an odd inversion of this process occurred: here colonial officials were implicitly discarding racial categories for the young. They saw African childhoods as manageable through the same mechanisms as European childhoods. While the socio-economic conditions in colonial Africa might be different, the children to be governed were not: they had the same impulses and needs and would respond to the same treatments, incentives and punishments. The history of childhood, then, is also an important part of the history of colonial racism. This also suggests some directions for future research: how this discourse was received and responded to by local society and how adults conceived of colonialism through its relationship with their children.

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<sup>169</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 67–70, 112–139.

## Part Two

### The intellectual history of children



## Chapter 4

### Fear and security

There are two major strands of the historiography of childhood: the social and the intellectual. Intellectual histories have concentrated on how adults thought about children: what defined a child, the social value of children and the way that children should be raised. Social histories have concentrated on the experience of children themselves: how, regardless of contemporary discourse, children actually lived. Although these two threads of scholarship have traditionally been distinct most historians of childhood are now trying to unify the intellectual and the social, 'to tease out the relationship between ideas about childhood and the experience of being a child'.<sup>1</sup> In the two chapters that follow I attempt to go a step further and write an emotional and intellectual history of children rather than childhood. This is necessary because children are not just thought *about* – they also think for themselves. It is almost impossible to understand the history of childhood without making some effort to understand the unique *mentalités* of the young: how children thought, their ideas, the way they understood their world and, indeed, where their cognitive worlds began and ended.

In colonial Africa, the emotional and intellectual history of children is important for another reason. It is not just about recovering a forgotten *mentalité* but about reclaiming intellectual immaturity for children. It is often noted that European empires considered their African subjects to be childish: intellectually-stunted, wilful and irrational, in need of tutelage and

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 3.

protection from a more mature, level-headed power.<sup>2</sup> But rather than a literal belief that African adults were mentally indistinguishable from African children, this childishness was shorthand for the derogatory qualities that colonial officials ascribed to their subjects. Despite the racism of many individual officials, a belief in the intellectual equivalence of African adults and children would have been no way to run an empire and, as I argued in Chapter 3, at the level of colonial policy African children were not thought of, let alone treated, in the same way as their parents. But if adult Africans were not childish that still leaves open the question of how African children thought differently from their elders – and that is not a question that should be ignored simply because of the association of cognitive immaturity with pseudo-scientific racism.

The quality of thought that I have tried to isolate in this section of the thesis is ‘childishness’. This term is imperfect but the best available. The first meaning of ‘childish’ – of or related to children – has obvious value for a discussion of how children think. The second, more derogatory meaning requires further explanation. Childishness is associated with petty, simplistic, foolish or immature thought and behaviour. But if we can bypass the disdain of the term, the failure to meet a particular standard of maturity is also why childishness is an indispensable way of understanding how age and generation divide the individual as much as they divide society. Childishness is fundamentally about those qualities of thought that children would grow out of: the miscomprehension of the material world; fears that adults would find laughable; beliefs not grounded in accepted adult cosmologies; being subtly wrong in age-specific ways. Some of these ideas would be left behind; others would leave a residue in

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<sup>2</sup> William B. Cohen, ‘The Colonized as Child: British and French Colonial Rule’, *African Historical Studies* 3, 2 (1970): 427–431; McNee, ‘The Languages of Childhood’.

the adult mind. But childishness vividly shaped the experience of childhood itself and it is crucial in reconstructing how children understood and were affected by the profound historical changes of the colonial period.

The challenge is to tease out the relationship between the biological and chronological certainties of being a child and the contingent aspects of growing up in a particular time and place. The history of childhood emerges from this dual analysis, separating childhoods in the Gold Coast from those elsewhere and separating the experiences of Gold Coast children from those of adults. My argument is that childish thought was conditioned by the unalterable facts of being young. Children in the Gold Coast were small and physically vulnerable. They had a limited store of knowledge and experience on which to draw. They lacked the patience and analytical ability to disentangle short-term phenomena from long-term effects. They were dependent on adults for physical protection and access to information. All of these factors constrained what children could think about, the evidence they could consider and the conclusions they could reach. In combination with the social specifics of childhoods in the Gold Coast they created a childish *mentalité* that was unique to time, place and generation.

The history of *mentalités* has its own methodological complexities and, within that field, colonial children are particularly challenging historical subjects. There are no sources analogous to those used by the first historians of *mentalités*: no records of the Inquisition, no lengthy expository court cases involving children.<sup>3</sup> The sources available are disparate and fragmented: ethnographic accounts; collections of folklore; the written and spoken memories

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (London: Penguin, 1980).

of adults; and, rarest and most valuable of all, letters, drawings and other intellectual production by children themselves. There are particular issues with using these sources to examine childishness in the Gold Coast. Using anthropological material to recover the childish *mentalité* is problematic because, while colonial-era anthropologists looked for complete systems of social practice and belief, children had only an imperfect grasp of the cosmologies of adult society – as, of course, did many adults. The gaps and misunderstandings in children’s knowledge are important and interesting but they are impossible to locate in the prescriptive belief systems that anthropologists described. Folklore has been effectively used to explore European *mentalités* and, while there is a large body of such material for the Gold Coast, it is hard to disentangle the intent of a story from its effect on the audience.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, arguably less problematic to use folktales to explore childish rather than adult thought because the young, a relatively unsophisticated audience, were more likely to take literally a tale an adult might understand as allegory or satire. Adult recollections of childishness, meanwhile, are compromised by the gap between the thought and its retelling; the process of forgetting and self-censorship is an opaque one. Child-authored sources are rare enough that moving from the particular to the general is fraught with epistemological danger.

But, despite these difficulties, it is by no means impossible to reconstruct the childish *mentalité*. It is possible to analyse these disparate sources to converge on an approximation of how children thought and how this changed over time. These are, inevitably, the most speculative, least granular chapters of the thesis. Their subject is very much ‘children’, rather than children of a certain age or from a specific place. Local difference and detail are no doubt

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<sup>4</sup> On the historical use and interpretation of folktales, see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999).

lost, but it is this compromised reconstruction or nothing at all. And, as I argue throughout this thesis, historical analysis on a colony-wide scale is both appropriate and fruitful. This approach does not assume or imply uniformity, but it does acknowledge the shared social forces shaping childhoods in the Gold Coast. And, for all its limitations, writing the emotional and intellectual history of children is worthwhile. However detailed the blueprints of political economy become, the history of childhood will be the poorer if children are considered simply as unthinking cogs in a great machine of kinship and labour. As the next two chapters will demonstrate, children were much more complex and interesting than that: by turns perceptive and curious; frightened and naive; ambitious, confused and quixotic.

This chapter takes a single emotion, fear, as its initial focus. The emotions are a relatively new field of serious historical inquiry, though one that has been bubbling under the surface of the discipline for a long time. As far back as 1941, the historian Lucien Febvre could argue that 'no man concerned with the character of other men can any longer disregard' the emotions.<sup>5</sup> In a survey of the field, William Reddy has argued that, before about 1970, implicitly teleological work on Western Europe, notably Norbert Elias' *Civilizing Process*, focused on the suppression of the emotions and the 'mastery of the self'.<sup>6</sup> Many of the classic works on *mentalités* touched upon the emotions, particularly the prevalence of fear, anxiety and uncertainty in early modern Europe.<sup>7</sup> Emotions did not become a discrete subject of research until the 1980s. Peter and Carol Stearns promoted the practice of 'emotionology' to

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<sup>5</sup> Lucien Febvre, cited in Joanna Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal* 55, 1 (2003), 113.

<sup>6</sup> William M. Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', *Emotion Review* 1, 4 (2009), 303; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000 [1939]).

<sup>7</sup> Peter N. Stearns, 'History of Emotions: Issues of Change and Impact', in Michael Lewis, Jeanette Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Feldman Barrett (eds.) *Handbook of Emotions* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 20-1.



‘distinguish the collective emotional standards of a society from the emotional experiences of individuals and groups’.<sup>8</sup> In methodological terms, this meant a focus on the experience of emotions as found in, say, diaries, rather than the societal codes governing how emotions should be expressed as found in, say, advice manuals.<sup>9</sup> Peter Stearns’ *American Cool*, for example, argued that a taciturn emotional style was leavened in the twentieth century as Americans were able to use leisure activities as new outlets for emotions that they repressed in other social arenas.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Barbara Rosenwein has made a significant theoretical contribution to the historical study of emotion. Just as practitioners of microhistory stressed the ‘heterodoxy’ of emotion and belief in early modern Europe, Rosenwein found that individuals moved between a number of different ‘emotional communities’ – the church, the family, the tavern – on a daily basis, and thus could experience and express emotion in a number of different registers.<sup>11</sup> This is a particularly useful insight when it comes to studying childhood. Children can be analysed as one emotional cohort, whose access to such emotional communities was similarly flexible, but was also mediated, and sometimes also restricted, by their age.

Fear is an interesting subject historically.<sup>12</sup> First, fear is – like childhood itself – a mixture of social and historical construction and biological fact. Fear is also partly learned and partly

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<sup>8</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’, *American Historical Review* 90, 4 (1985), 813.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.; Reddy, ‘Historical Research on the Self and Emotions’, 304. Bourke, however, critiques the idea that emotionology ever actually managed to penetrate the experience rather than then the outward *expression* of emotion. Bourke, ‘Fear and Anxiety’, 119.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century American Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994). For a discussion, see Susan J. Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out’, *Emotion Review* 3, 1 (2011), 118.

<sup>11</sup> Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research’, 118-19; Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Reddy, ‘Historical Research on the Self and Emotions’, 305.

<sup>12</sup> For a recent survey, see Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005).

innate. As a result, childhood fear – again, like childhood itself – lends itself well to interdisciplinary analysis allowing us to ask how children uniquely experienced and understood historical change. On a practical level, the pervasiveness of fear in both the experience and memory of childhood means that there is a surprisingly detailed record of what children were afraid of and why. Fear is a dominant theme of oral histories, of ego documents of various kinds and of ethnographies. Fear also offers an insight into the agency of children in both cultural production and the cognitive modelling of their world. While it is true that much childhood fear was learnt from adults – either as a disciplinary tool or as a by-product of teaching or entertainment – many childhood fears were actually self-generated or reinforced by children: in the stories they told to each other, in bravado and in the object and sanctions of the games they played. Fear was in one sense a cognitive toy, to be played with alone or with others, for fun or with malice, as a test of bravery or to test the unknown from a point of safety. Fear is thus a useful opening into children's peer cultures and the individual mind, both of which are essential to understanding childhood and otherwise almost invisible in the historical record.

The exploration of fear opens onto the broader topic of the intellectual history of children and, in particular, the fundamental questions that children asked about their place in the world: what was it that allowed them to live, what existential dangers did they face and how might they find safety and security? Thinking and feeling are not, of course, the same thing – and there is an inevitable tension between the use of the terms 'emotional' and 'intellectual' history in this chapter, and the one that follows. But nor are thinking and feeling entirely separate. Thoughts are mediated and modified by emotions, as numerous historical studies have shown, and it makes sense to study both in parallel. Most influentially of all, perhaps, Reddy has

explored the part of emotion in shaping the French Revolution – and particularly its mediating role during periods of political violence.<sup>13</sup> Since then, historians of ‘emotion’ have begun to explore the terrain of ‘intellectual’ history, leading to reappraisals of popular theology, consumer capitalism and class identity.<sup>14</sup> Both thinking and feeling, moreover, are embodied phenomena affected by physiology; the two may be in tension, but they are also in constant dialogue, within the body and experience of the individual. Reddy goes even further than this, suggesting that historians have been using an outmoded binary of emotion and thought, when ‘current neuroscience research suggests, however, that the distinction between cognition and affect is artificial’.<sup>15</sup> As I will argue, this has serious implications for the study of childhood because the physical development of a child is to a large extent age-dependent, placing certain constraints on what can be thought or felt.

The first half of the chapter examines how children understood safety and danger to be a function of the fundamental divide between human culture and hostile nature. This conflict between man and his environment reflected local and adult worldviews but it was understood in a peculiarly childish way. I then turn to how the concepts of nature and culture were increasingly influenced by colonialism and modernity. New anxieties about culture emerged and existing fears of nature were reshaped.

## Nature and culture

The most profound source of danger and fear for children in the Gold Coast was nature. The hostility of nature looms large in the *mentalités* of rural societies and is particularly well-

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<sup>13</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: a Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research’, 121.

<sup>15</sup> Reddy, ‘Historical Research on the Self and Emotions’, 312.

documented in the densely-forested Akan regions of the colony where, for example, Asante culture was 'literally hacked out of nature' and remained in constant danger of being reconsumed by the bush.<sup>16</sup> The fundamental division of the world was between the calm and safety of culture and the excitement and danger of nature. Children were as aware of this divide as adults were. In the 1950s, an eight-year-old girl drew her home in the Asante town of Agogo (Figure 4-1). It was ostensibly a picture of the 'inside' of her house but, tellingly, it included a great deal of the outside; her image coincides almost exactly with McCaskie's cognitive model of Asante culture as a place of symmetry and order, carved from the chaos of nature. But the divide between man and his environment was neither static nor permanent. It was a binary created not from the segregation of two realms but through their constant interaction: the irruptions of nature into culture, the colonisation of the bush and the transgression of men who sought to tap its power. The dissolution or retreat of the boundary between nature and culture haunted children and, as a result, the conflict between man and his environment dominated the fears and anxieties of children in the Gold Coast.

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<sup>16</sup> T. C. McCaskie, 'Death and the Asantehene: A Historical Meditation', *Journal of African History* 30, 3 (1989): 421.

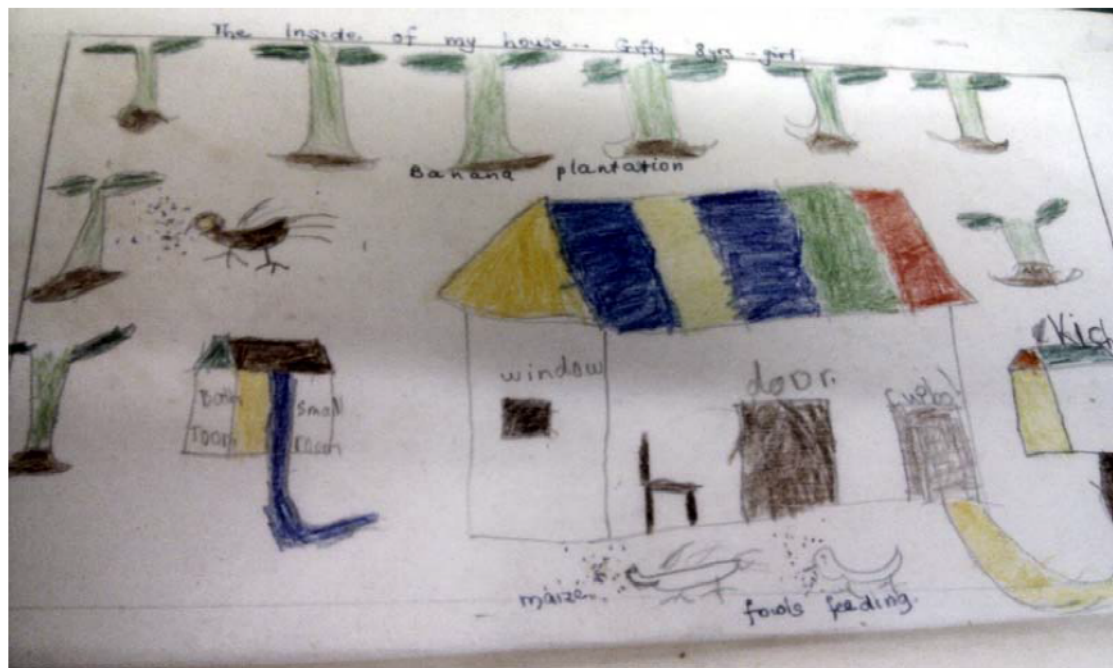


Figure 4-1. Gifty, 'The inside of my house'. Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakyie, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954). Cultivated areas and domesticated animals are included in the 'home'.



This was in part simply a function of enculturation, of children absorbing the existential beliefs of the adult society they grew up in. But it was also based on the very real dangers of the natural world and on the fact that children, relatively small, weak and inexperienced, were perhaps the most vulnerable demographic. The hostile and unpredictable environment curtailed young lives and created terrifying memories for survivors. When an earthquake struck southern Ghana in 1862, seven-year-old Josef Famfantor remembered being plucked from the shaking land by his mother.<sup>17</sup> A newspaper article of 1902 reported a child in the coastal town of Anomabu ‘who succumbed to the effects of the thunder’, while picking crabs on the shore.<sup>18</sup> Setugu Alipoa remembered rains in northern Ghana that destroyed whole houses.<sup>19</sup> In his memoir, Kum Gandah recalled that his younger brother was swept away by a flood but saved before he reached the river. On another occasion, children tending cattle on a plateau were hit by a storm of ‘sand and hailstones’ so fierce that the adults ran to rescue them.<sup>20</sup> In one Asante folk-tale, a distressed infant left in the sun cried, ‘I am about to melt’, but, ignored by her mother, she turned into a fish.<sup>21</sup> The natural world could be a dangerous and frightening place, particularly for children separated from the protection of adults – and, as interviewees in northern Ghana pointed out, in the colonial period the bush, and therefore wild animals, were much closer to home than they are today; indeed, nature *interpenetrated* culture in both time and space and, as such, the fear of the natural world was all the more vivid.

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<sup>17</sup> Sandra E. Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 122.

<sup>18</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, July 5, 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Setugu Alipoa, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 21, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, 187.

## Mobile protagonists

Absorbing the conflict between nature and culture was fundamental to childhood enculturation but the *mentalité* of children was neither a perfect reproduction of adult beliefs, nor historically static. In fact, I argue that children's understanding of the conflict between nature and culture was uniquely 'childish'. In particular, children reframed the battle between man and his environment as one between animate, magical or mechanised protagonists (Figure 4-2). Rather than being a struggle between nature and culture *in toto*, it was a struggle between their mobile and corporeal representatives: animals and monsters on one side, men and machines on the other. This is a subtle but important difference and one that stems from the cognitive difficulty that children have with disentangling complex systems, chains of cause-and-effect and objects from their domains. This chapter will discuss animals and monsters first and then move on to the much more historically variable aspect of men and machinery.

## Animals and monsters

For children in the Gold Coast, the threat of nature to culture was at its most vivid and frightening in the form of wild animals and, relatedly, the monsters, fairies and spirits that shared the wild spaces that animals inhabited. McCaskie argues that in Asante thought animals were metaphors for the power, complexity and capriciousness of nature.<sup>22</sup> True: but what made the childlike interpretation of the animal world distinctive was its leitmotif of fear. For children the animal metaphor was both dominant and real, the threat really did come from

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<sup>22</sup> McCaskie rightly notes that historians are hindered by a lack of individual accounts, meaning that we can only reconstruct a normative Asante feeling towards animals. Here, by focusing just on children's beliefs, a trade-off is possible: losing some of the richness and insight of McCaskie's interpretations for more precision about who we are talking about. T. C. McCaskie, 'People and Animals: Construc(t)ing the Asante Experience', *Africa* 62, 2 (1992): 221–247.

the claws and hunger, the patience and trickery of the animal world. And while adults *also* feared animals, children tended to fear different animals or fear the same ones for different reasons – reasons that were less grounded in complex adult cosmologies than in the immediate, existential threat that animals posed to the vulnerable child.

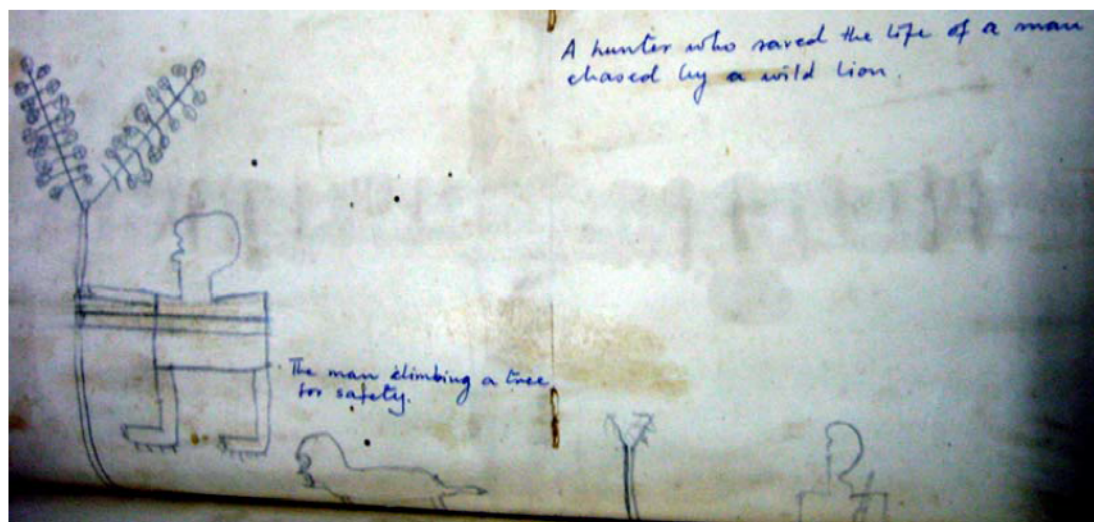


Figure 4-2. Bɔkina Fedriki, 'A hunter who saved the life of a man chased by a wild lion'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956). Three mobile protagonists: the lion, his victim and the hunter (armed with a gun).

A fear of animals and monsters permeates childhood memories, both written and oral, of the Gold Coast. When children were asked to draw their fears by ethnologists in the 1950s, animals were the most common subject. The dangers posed by anthropomorphised animals and supernatural monsters underpinned much recorded folk literature of the period.<sup>23</sup> Saaka Mahami, who grew up in the northern village of Walewale in the 1940s, recalled that wild animals were the main reason that children could not go to the bush.<sup>24</sup> Thomas Kyei, who grew up in Agogo in the early twentieth century, said that the forest was where stories became real. Children were perhaps expected to fear animals, where adults were not. Thomas Kyei fled from a green mamba and hid his 'shame' by telling himself that 'I am not a grown-up yet; I am

<sup>23</sup> Or, in some cases, zoomorphised humans – although the effect on children's fears of these narrative processes may have been indistinguishable. On the importance of shape-shifting narratives, particularly about people from northern savannah regions of the Gold Coast, see John Parker, 'Northern Gothic: Witches, Ghosts and Werewolves in the Savanna Hinterland of the Gold Coast, 1900s-1950s', *Africa* 76, 3 (2006): 352–380.

<sup>24</sup> Saaka Mahami, interview by Jack Lord, trans by. Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010.

not a man anyhow!’<sup>25</sup> Nationalist leader Kwame Nkrumah did not fear wild animals when he journeyed into the forest as a young child but this not because such beasts were not innately frightening but because he was accompanied by, and had ‘complete confidence’ in, his mother.<sup>26</sup>

In the childish imagination a host of animals dwelt, with menace, in the bush. A survey of the many historical sources detailing childhood fears reveals a veritable menagerie, including hyenas, lions, elephants, buffalo, dogs, snakes, scorpions and hawks.<sup>27</sup> Children feared them all. And, although the nature and habitat of the beast might change, childish fears about animals and monsters were common across the colony. The threat could emerge (Figure 4-3, Figure 4-4 and Figure 4-5), like Juliusi’s crocodile, from the water, like Konto’s hawk from the sky or, like Agbovi’s elephant, from the land. The dangers that animals posed and the fear this induced were complex. For the most part children and adults feared *different* animals. Adult anxieties were grounded in religious observance, in the animal as metaphor or vessel for the unknowable, ineffable power of nature. Children seem to have feared animals as physical beings, for the physical threat they *embodied* rather than the spiritual power they might contain. The only overlap between Rattray and McCaskie’s lists of ritually dangerous animals, *sasammoa*, in Asante and those animals feared by children is the elephant. But for children, the threat of the Gold Coast’s increasingly rare megafauna lay in its sheer physicality, encapsulated in the elephant drawn by eight year old Agbovi. Thomas Kyei never saw an

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<sup>25</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Abukari Zebli, interview by Jack Lord, trans by. Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010; Tinaab Basoma, interview by Jack Lord, trans by. Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010; Augustina Oyindzo, ‘Six Case Studies of Children in Anunmle’ (Master’s Dissertation, University College, Legon, 1959); Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 87.



elephant in the wild but thought of the beast as a 'gigantic' edifice that became a vault of flesh and blood when hunted and killed. As a boy he imagined that 'to dress its carcass, openings the size of a door to a large room had to be cut from outside, through which the operators entered the body to remove the entrails'.<sup>28</sup> The mismatch of childish and adult fears may have stemmed from children's exclusion from or miscomprehension of religious ceremonies involving animals or simply from their imperfect grasp of the cosmologies that fuelled, say, adult anxieties about the physically harmless antelopes of the Akan forest.



Figure 4-3. Julius Krampa, 'The crocodile I fear most'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

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<sup>28</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 36.

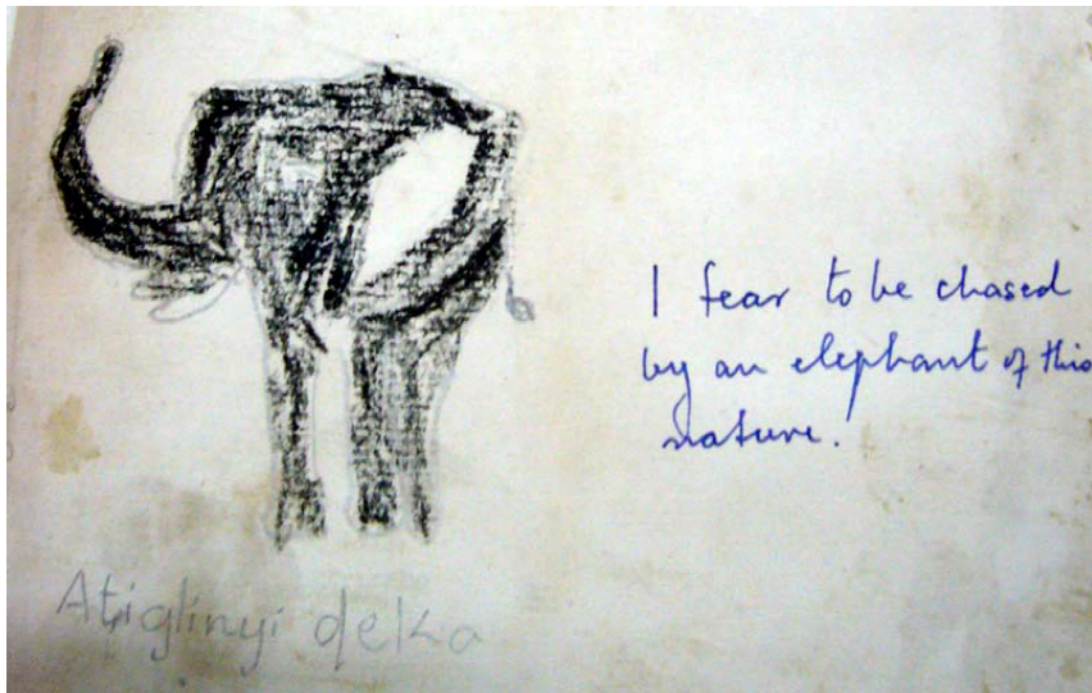


Figure 4-4. Agbovi, 'I fear to be chased by an elephant of this nature'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

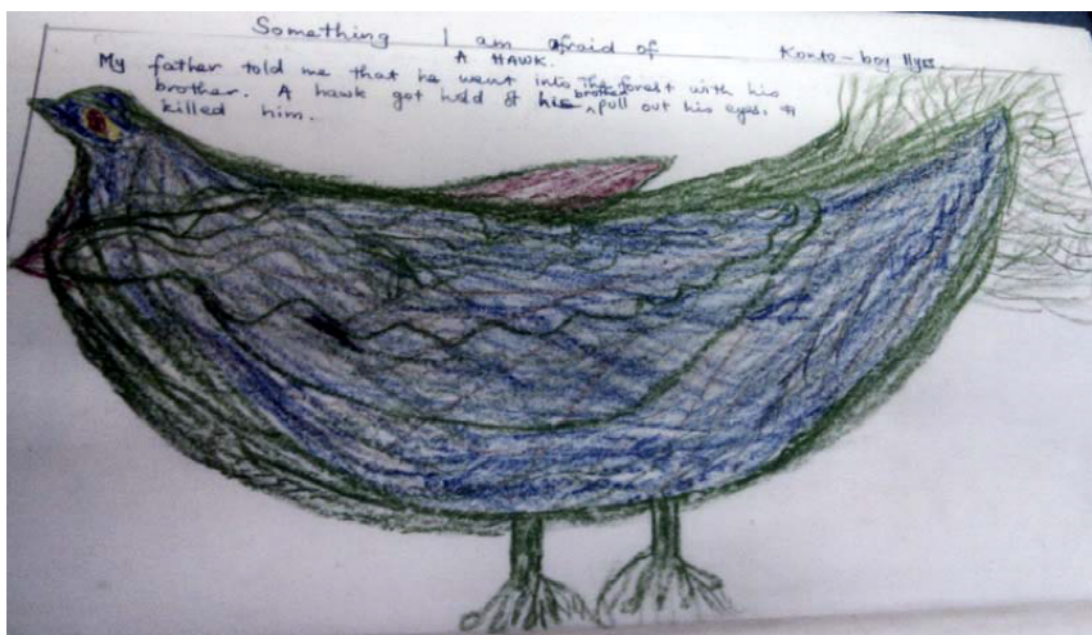


Figure 4-5. Konto, 'A hawk: something I am afraid of'. Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakye, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954).

But the threat that children perceived in animals was not simply or exclusively physical. Some creatures, like six year old Kōsi's snake hiding under a tree (Figure 4-6), relied on trickery and stealth to hurt children. Spiritual dangers were layered upon material ones, even if those layers were less attuned to the subtleties of adult belief and driven, more simply, by the fear of abduction, injury or death. Children grew up absorbing local beliefs and being both entertained and terrorised by folktales of anthropomorphic animals; as such, the threat of animals was at once secular, supernatural *and* personified. A pupil at a Basel Mission school in the nineteenth century, in an essay about Ga religion, identified animals as intermediaries between the local priest and his god; by night, he wrote, they trouped to the field to 'show him what is the needs of the fetish'.<sup>29</sup> Writing about 1950s Asante, Field noted that children knew that animals were witches' familiars 'as surely as our own children know that Santa Claus drives reindeer'.<sup>30</sup> There is a continuum evident between animals and the more overtly supernatural creatures of myth and belief (Figure 4-7), like the Akan *mmoatia*, the dwarves, by turns mischievous and cruel, who Kyei described as rambling 'duck-like in the forest', or the *sasabonsam*, a devilish hybrid of transgressive traits and outright malevolence.<sup>31</sup> In fact, when children thought about animals and monsters perhaps their most unsettling characteristic was their inhumanity, an inhumanity that allowed animals to attack human culture with malice and chilling indifference. This is particularly evident in Rattray's anthology of Akan folktales. In one story, the *mmoatia* simply pinched a girl to death. In another, a disobedient girl met a company of parrots in the forest, whereupon they 'seized the child and

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<sup>29</sup> Essay by H. Malm, Ghana Manuskripte, Miscellaneous, BMA D-10.4, Basel Mission Archive.

<sup>30</sup> Field, *Search for Security*, 426.

<sup>31</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 4–5; McCaskie, *State and Society*, 118–19; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 25–8.



cut off her head', dipping their tails in her blood and dying them red as a 'remembrance of the event' (Figure 4-8).<sup>32</sup>

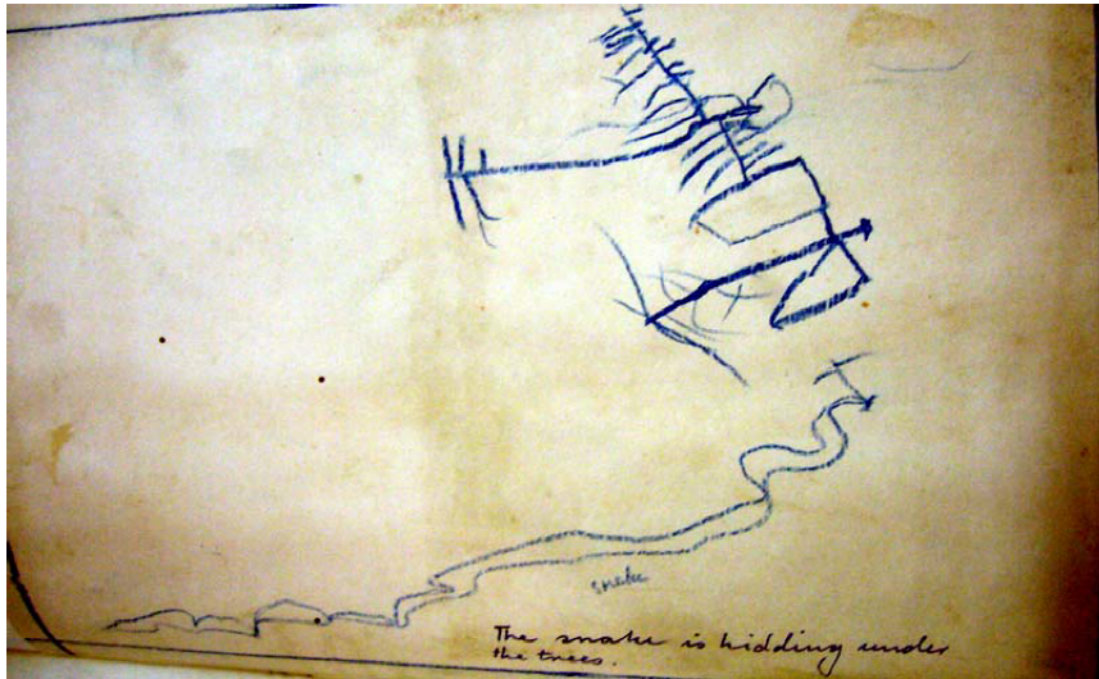


Figure 4-6. Kɔsi, 'The snake is hiding under the trees'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

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<sup>32</sup> Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, 151–3, 464.



Figure 4-7. 'Two fairies [mmoatia] and a Sasabonsam'. Photograph from R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927).



Figure 4-8. 'The parrots cut off her head and dipped their tails in her blood'. Illustration from R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (1930).



The fear of animals and monsters was both pervasive and multi-layered but it was also irrational and came with a peculiarly childish twist. In particular I am going to argue that the threat of animals was more imagined than real. The animal threat was exaggerated because of the way that children learnt about animals; because of the characteristics that children were believed to share with animals; and because children always understand and interact with the world on a shorter timescale than adults do.

A child's fear of being attacked far outweighed the physical threat that animals actually posed. Animals *were* sometimes dangerous and they *could* injure or kill children. Bosman, in one of the earliest written accounts of the Gold Coast, mentioned a 'tyger [i.e., leopard]' killing 'a boy that belong'd to our factor at Sacondie [Sekondi]'.<sup>33</sup> This incident, like the many similar incidents reported since, was no doubt a sensational and memorable tragedy but, nonetheless, the real risk from animals was vanishingly small.<sup>34</sup> Although interviewees in Walewale universally named animals as a childhood fear, none had been attacked themselves or even heard of other children being attacked. In the small number of extant coroner's records from the colonial period, child deaths caused by animals are rare.<sup>35</sup> The colonial government, meanwhile, never investigated or addressed the risks from animals, as it did for nutrition, disease and other causes of child mortality. This exaggerated sense of fear was, of course, even more true of monsters, which were believed to pose a physical threat to children but did not, in fact, exist. Arguing that children were very afraid of not very much is instinctively

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<sup>33</sup> W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea: Divided into the Gold, the Slave and the Ivory Coasts*, 4th ed. (London: Cass & Co, 1967 [1705]), 312.

<sup>34</sup> For an example of a reported death, see *Gold Coast Leader*, May 9, 1903.

<sup>35</sup> Coroner's reports are one of the sources where it is particularly hard to differentiate children from adults. I was unable to find a single identifiable child killed by an animal. There is, however, a notable documentary bias towards towns where animals were less of a risk. Inquest Record Book, Sekondi, 1923-36, SCT 22/10/3, NAG; Inquests, 1934, ADM 23/1/2309, NAG Cape Coast; Inquest Verdict Record Book, Axim, 1934-36, ADM 22/4/62, NAG.

unsurprising but the causes of this misconception of risk are important: they go to the heart of why children thought of the nature-culture conflict differently from adults and they help explain why the young always experience and understand historical change differently from their elders.

There are three major causes of children's exaggerated fear of animals and monsters. The first relates to how and why children learnt about those creatures at all. This stemmed, more generally, from the fact that children accessed, absorbed and manipulated information in very different ways – indeed, markedly inferior or subordinate ways – from adults. Above all, children obtained a great deal of information at second-hand, either because they had not had the time and luck to observe a rare event directly or because their age meant that they were forbidden or unable to do so. Much information therefore arrived through adult intermediaries who were able to manipulate or invent knowledge, sometimes with the express intent of shaping the thoughts and behaviours of their young audience. Children were scared of animals and monsters in part because adults told them to be and because adults spoke with an air of both authority and – it turned out – unreality. Adults certainly had a genuine, and realistic, concern for their children's well-being. In Takyi Afefa's picture (Figure 4-9), a child is menaced by a snake while simultaneously his mother is portrayed, 'crying [and] calling her son'. But often this concern resulted in exaggerated stories simply designed to scare children into behaving properly. Misbehaving children were commonly threatened with attack or kidnap by ghosts, dwarves and other monsters.<sup>36</sup> The hawk in eleven-year-old Konto's drawing (Figure 4-5) was ascribed impossible powers because of a story told by the boy's father: he met

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<sup>36</sup> Vida Anno-Kwakye, 'A Study of Child Training in Agogo' (Master's Dissertation, University College, 1954), 46; Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*.

the bird in the forest, where it pulled out his brother's eyes and killed him. Thomas Kyei, meanwhile, imagined the elephant to be so huge because his information came from the entertaining and self-aggrandising stories of hunters, whose reputation for bravery relied on the perceived danger of their defeated prey.<sup>37</sup>

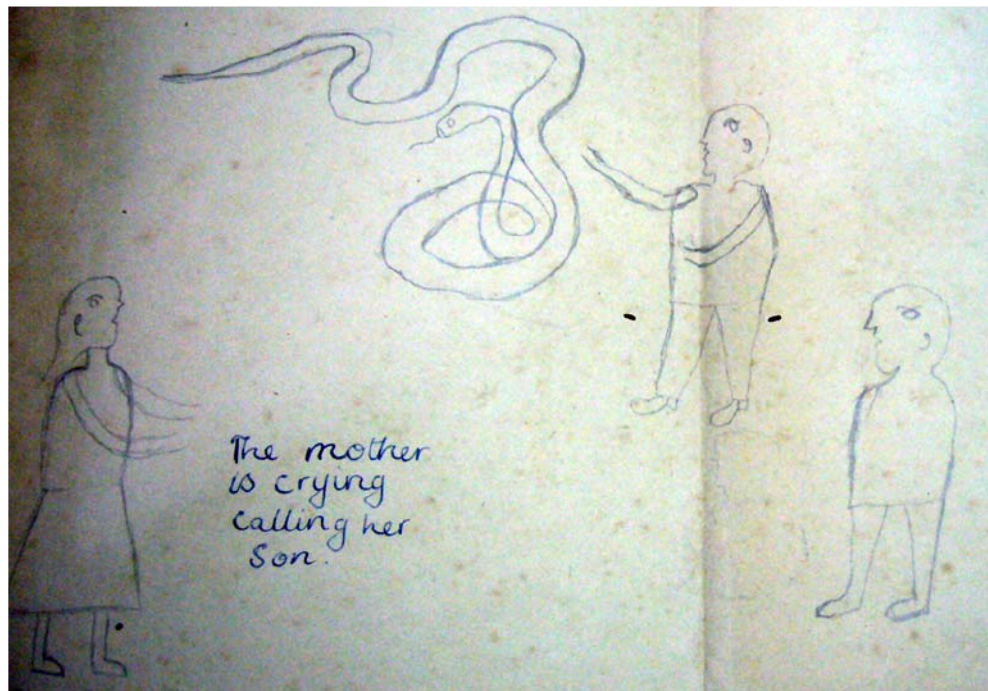


Figure 4-9. Takyi Afefa, 'The child is afraid of the snake'. Drawing from Augustina Oyindzo, *Six Case Studies of Children in Anumle* (1959).

But the argument that a scared child was a safer child is too simplistic. Adults might be the architects of the childish fear of animals but children were involved in both its construction and its elaboration. The anthropologist Margaret Mead, writing about Samoa, argued that irrationality had to be *learned* by children; enculturation in Samoa involved the replacement of children's materialist explanations with animist ones.<sup>38</sup> In the case of wild animals and monsters in the Gold Coast there was little to unlearn because children had few opportunities

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<sup>37</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Mead, 'An Investigation of the Thought of Primitive Children, with Special Reference to Animism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 62 (1932): 173–190.

for direct observation. Children were generally excluded from hunting parties.<sup>39</sup> Sightings of wild animals, particularly megafauna, were rare in human settlements. In cross-species studies it is the *learned* rarity, not the innately known form, of a predator that scares young animals.<sup>40</sup> The rarity of animal encounters also meant that, once suggested by adults, an exaggerated fear of animals was difficult to correct – and, indeed, children had both the means and the motive to exaggerate them further.

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<sup>39</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Melvin Konner, *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 72.



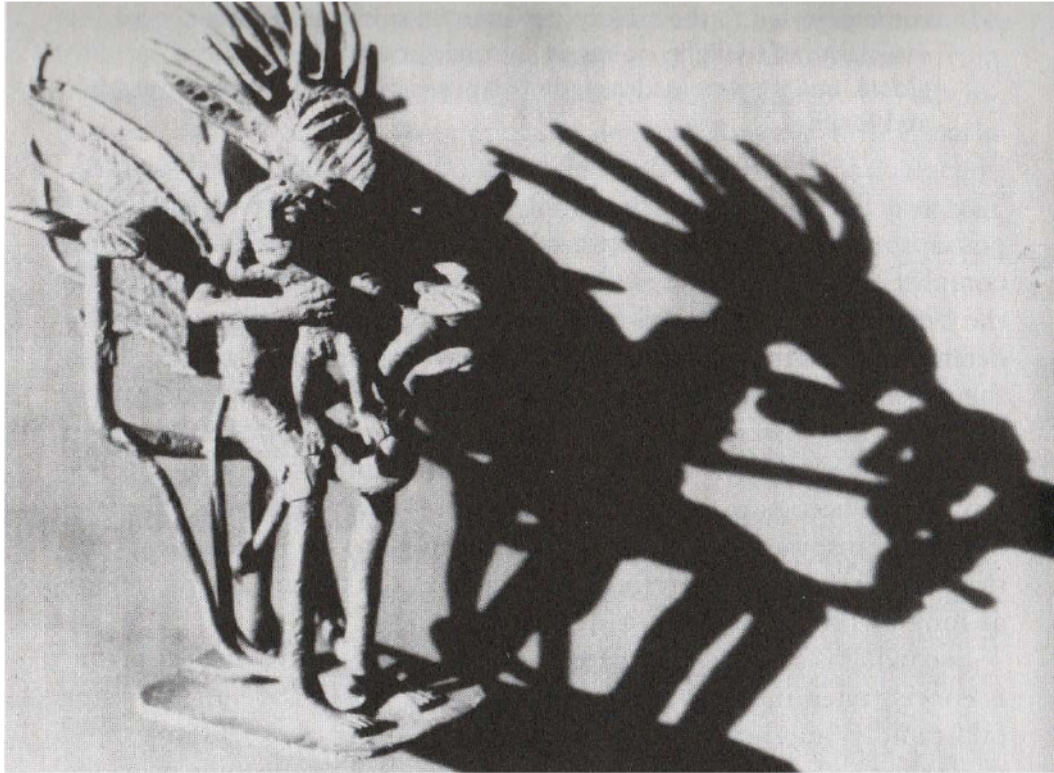


Figure 4-10. Three *sasabonsam*. Illustrations from R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927) and *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (1930) and Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold* (1993).



The lack of empirical evidence left cognitive space for children to embellish and reinvent cautionary tales, rumours and folkloric memes. Children spent their lives not just being told but *telling* stories, to adults and more importantly to each other.<sup>41</sup> A largely non-literate society gave children a licence for invention, evidenced for example, by the mutability of the *sasabonsam* in drawn and plastic art, in ethnographic description and in written memories (Figure 4-10).<sup>42</sup> Supernatural entities were – even more than animals – tabula rasa onto which children could project and play with their fears. And being scared, or exaggerating how scary things were, was an important part of childhood. Terror was entertaining. Facing, and conquering, fear was an important marker of status in children’s peer cultures, particularly during games and while foraging in the bush.<sup>43</sup> For the children who survived these ordeals – i.e., all of them – the more murderous the threat they had faced, the better: making and vanquishing those fears was simply part of growing up and a way of differentiating oneself from younger children.

The second reason for this exaggerated fear of animals relates to widely held beliefs about the nature of children themselves. In his essay on the ‘African child’, Rattray wrote of the ‘extraordinary conviviality which exists between children and beasts’.<sup>44</sup> The totality of evidence in the Gold Coast, from where Rattray drew his folkloric examples, suggests that the anthropologist had this wrong. What Rattray observed in folklore was the putative *closeness* of children and animals, the not-quite-human status of children, and those characteristics,

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<sup>41</sup> Sulemana Yakubu, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010; *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 192.

<sup>42</sup> Compare the written descriptions and illustrations in Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*; Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*.

<sup>43</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 47, 65.

<sup>44</sup> Rattray, ‘The African Child in Proverb, Folklore, and Fact’, 468.

antithetical to culture, that children shared with the beasts of the forest. As argued in Chapter 2, the lowly jural status of children was justified in part by their incomplete humanity, their liminal status between the material and spiritual planes and the uncertainty over their longevity, interest and intent in the human realm. In comparative terms this is not at all unusual.<sup>45</sup> When adults picked out the traits shared by animals and children they were mining that intellectual vein: asking where on the continuum of man and beast the child belonged and defining the process of childhood as the learning and acquisition of 'humanity' in its various aspects.

Ethnographies offer some insight into this intellectual phenomenon. In the Ga village of Ayikai Doblo, a very young child was thought to crawl around 'with domesticated animals, eating their faeces and any dirty thing that comes within his grasp'.<sup>46</sup> Crippled children were ascribed similarly animalistic traits but without the expectation that they would grow out of it.<sup>47</sup> Children were also believed to understand and talk with animals. There was a grain of truth to this. It was children, after all, who spent their working day following domesticated animals around the village, persuading them not to eat or damage other people's property. A child in Agogo told an apocryphal story of Kofi Bad-boy, who was not just conversant with animals but played 'music on the drum for his hens and dogs to dance in the yard'. His mother, on discovering why the compound looked so 'unbecoming', chopped the boy up and 'buried the pieces in the stove'.<sup>48</sup> Bed-wetting created the perfect environment for larval flies to hatch

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<sup>45</sup> The tenuous humanity of children is, in fact, one of the guiding themes of the most comprehensive anthropological survey of childhood. David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> William A. Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo a Village in the Ga State' (Master's Dissertation, University College, Achimota, 1954), 67.

<sup>47</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo'.

<sup>48</sup> Kwabena Twum, cited in Anno-Kwakye, 'Child Training in Agogo', 134.

and, in Ayikai Doblo, bed-wetters over a certain age were publicly ridiculed by their 'playmates', smeared with clay and pushed into the river.<sup>49</sup> Children who retold stories at inappropriate times were told that they might grow a long tail.<sup>50</sup> When a child in a folktale refused to bathe in the stream, the other children taunted him: "Perhaps you have an embryo tail".<sup>51</sup> In the supernatural realm, children were able to understand *mmoatia* and could thus identify when they were disguised as children.<sup>52</sup> What Rattray saw as conviviality was, in fact, the *similarity* of children and animals. This was not, of course, a universal, simple or literal belief – but it was the impression that children received and perhaps the imprecise belief of children themselves.

Rattray, moreover, saw in folklore and belief what *adults* thought of children. His mistake was to assume that children thought of themselves in the same way, that they accepted their part-bestial nature and thus embraced animals as compatriots and equals. Adult beliefs about the conviviality and commonality between animals and children had, if anything, the opposite effect, instilling in children an insecurity about their human status, a desire to grow up and away from the bush, and a concomitant repulsion from the animal and magical denizens of the forest, who resembled children and might drag them back. When children listened to folktales of *mmoatia* changelings and of friendship between leopard and boy (Figure 4-11), they were perhaps confronted by a fearful and unwanted question: who am I, really? When they heard stories of petulant, childish behaviour that provoked animals into revenge attacks on villages or let the chaos of nature disrupt the order of culture, another question was posed:

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<sup>49</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 58; Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 97.

<sup>50</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 192.

<sup>51</sup> Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, 225.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–101.

whose side am I really on?<sup>53</sup> The only response was to fear and reject that animalistic world as children – and then to grow up and denigrate and shame those who could not.

The third and final aspect that exaggerated childish fears of animals was the short time-scale on which children understood the world around them. In adult-time and adult-space, the threat of nature was societal in scale and seasonal in rhythm. It was the village boundary, the built environment, the mosaic of roads, dwellings and cultivated space that was at risk; the battle was measured in the advance of newly felled farms, the retreat of fallowing and abandonment, the sudden thrust of a natural disaster, the slow attrition of disease and dearth. On adult timescales, the clash felt real and immediate, the machinations of siege and response a constant concern. Children did not think in the same way. They were interested in the here-and-now, not in the distant future; in action, not in planning or forethought; to children, long-term processes seemed glacial and uninteresting; they wanted mechanisms of cause-and-effect that resolved in an instant, which were visible and comprehensible and that explained, however inaccurately, how the world worked. For children, not only was nature's siege permanent but nature itself acquired a permanence only apparent on smaller, younger timescales. The bush itself might creak with menace but on childish time-scales it was rooted in place. If a child ran into trouble it was because he, like the boy sucked into the stomach of a palm tree in an Asante folktale, had ventured into the bush and sought it out.<sup>54</sup> The real threat came from elsewhere. The forest was a static landscape, mapped and set in place for the nature-culture conflict to play out on. It was the disturbances on that surface that made the conflict

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 17–19, 81–5, 97–101, 207–11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 49–51.

real, the animate denizens of the forest who coursed across it and fought: the brave hunter and frightened child versus the phantasmic monster and bestial predator.



Figure 4-11. Illustration from R. S. Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (1930).



The most frightening characteristic of animals was thus, quite simply, that they were animate. They were, in effect, the custodians of nature: the eyes of the bush, its hungry breath and stalking paws, watchful, suspicious and vengeful if necessary. Sulemanu Yakuba thought as a child that lions attacked people in Walewale because people had previously attacked them.<sup>55</sup> Awareness was paired with mobility. Children therefore ran the risk of finding trouble and then being unable to escape it (Figure 4-12). Animals were the threat of the bush made live, as hostile as nature but embodied and accelerated into the timeframe of a child. In some cases the combination of speed and physicality gave animals a power so overwhelming it was applied with patience and insouciance, amplifying their threat as it amplified the vulnerability of children. When Setugu Alipoa recalled lions roaring from the trees as he walked from home to town through the bush, it was not that the animals could not catch him but that they were watching, waiting and *letting* him pass.<sup>56</sup> This was nature somnolent but a predator at will, able to wake and choose, strike and damage, a spring and a claw away from an attack on the person. The mobility of animals meant, moreover, that they were able to leave the bush and to threaten the safety of children in the heart of culture. Trespassing animals could even spread insecurity to the home. There is something chilling about eight year old Saul Anɔpansio's drawing (Figure 4-13) of village life in Kpandu Tsakpe, meticulously labelled except for the snake lurking, unnamed and unmentioned, in his father's quarters. By night, children in Akwapim were hushed with the threat that animals were 'going about the town' to eat crying children.<sup>57</sup> The ability of monsters to transgress and intrude was exemplified by the red-backed *sasabonsam*: winged and able to clamber through the trees, he also had telescopic legs,

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<sup>55</sup> Yakubu, 'Sulemana Yakubu - Walewale'.

<sup>56</sup> Alipoa, 'Setugu Alipoa - Walewale'.

<sup>57</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 168.

extendable at will, the appendages of a child-catcher.<sup>58</sup> A fifteen-year-old from Anumle, near Achimota, told another tale of the *sasabonsam*, arriving at night in the village where, tall enough to touch the sky, he stole a girl he found wandering the streets.<sup>59</sup> Other child-catchers included the *mmoatia*, who were called down from their trees by playing children and implored to take other children away. When one child chanted, 'Dwarfs, the music players, who will go home?', the others scattered.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 4–5; Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 27–8.

<sup>59</sup> Augustina A. Oyindzo, 'Six Case Studies of Children in Anunmle' (Master's Dissertation, University College, Legon, 1959), 176.

<sup>60</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 71.



Figure 4-12. Innocent Kofi, 'The man is bitten under by a snake under a big tree'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

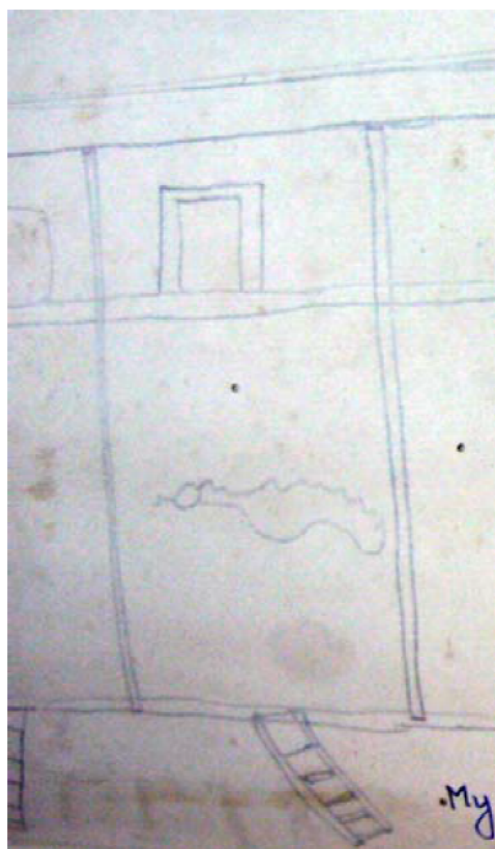
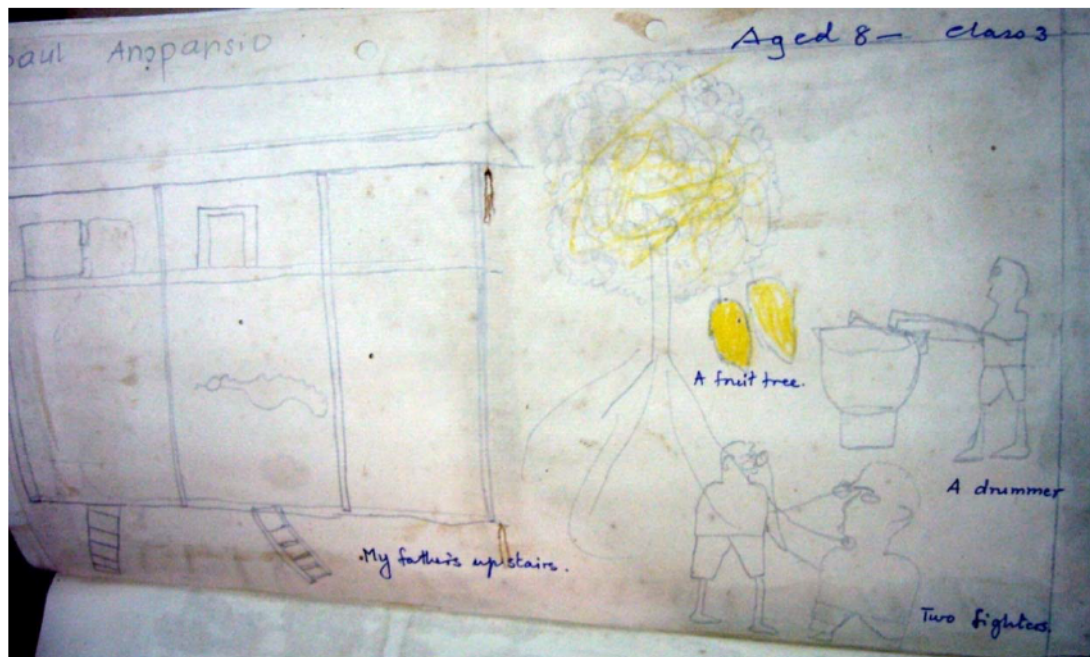


Figure 4-13. Saul Anɔpansio, 'My father's upstairs'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).



Children, then, feared animals instead of nature – or they feared animals as the threat of nature made real. They feared animals in ways that adults did not, and for reasons that adults would not understand. Children feared animals because of universal anxieties and because of the psychology of the developing brain. But children also feared animals in parochial and culturally-specific ways, informed by systems of belief that they were still coming to grips with and that were, in some ways, profoundly troubling.

### Men and machines

This chapter has not yet spoken much about change over time. But the complex of childhood fears has its own history – a history still shaped by the social and biological certainties of being young but also profoundly altered by the colonial encounter. This history comes across most clearly in the converse of children's fears of nature: their confidence in, and celebration of, the things that could keep them safe. Just as children's fear of nature concentrated on the immediate and animate threat of animals and monsters, so their trust in culture was vested in the quick-thinking, fast-moving agents of its expansion and preservation: men and, with increasing frequency in the colonial period, machines.

The most impressive of these agents were hunters, whose mystique, mastery of nature and almost transgressive bravery made them role models and objects of fascination for children. Children, like eight-year-old Opesika Peter (Figure 4-14) who 'dreamt of killing a bird with a gun', wanted to be hunters. In some ways they already *were*. Boys might be excluded from adult hunts but they branched from their agricultural duties to track, trap and kill small animals on their own or with their peers. These small acts of violence were proof of their



growing mastery of nature; the catch was theirs to keep.<sup>61</sup> For youths and adults, legal controls on guns were part of what Richard Waller has termed the colonial 'crisis of maturity' because violence, properly directed, was a marker of male adulthood.<sup>62</sup> For children, it was less of a problem. Their small acts of violence against nature were still possible, using sling shots, bows, wire traps and hunting dogs. Killing small game and birds was viable even in the peri-urban suburbs of Accra. This colonial crisis of maturity thus emerged suddenly and relatively late in life. The clear path through childhood perhaps made it all the more shocking.

The modern analogue of the hunter was the lorry driver. Both professions demanded control of powerful, potentially dangerous forces, both flirted with nature in the service of culture, and children were fascinated by both professions, often aspiring to their mastery and transgressive mystique. But, in reconstructing the childish *mentalité*, more interesting than these modern men are their machines. Children (and particularly, it seems, boys) were as fascinated by cars, trains and lorries as they were by animals. But this was a fascination born more of admiration than fear. Children impersonated cars and lorries while young, admired them in the street, rode them as passengers and mates, soothed them as apprentice fitters and drove them either illicitly or in their imagined future. Motor vehicles proved so alluring for reasons, both functional and psychological, that were unique to children: they alleviated the spatial immobility of being young and small; they addressed the childish fear of separation and distance; and they were quick and mobile enough to engage with children on their shortened cognitive timescales.

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<sup>61</sup> M. Fortes and S. L. Fortes, 'Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi', *Africa* 9, 2 (1936): 237–276.

<sup>62</sup> Waller, 'Rebellious Youth'.

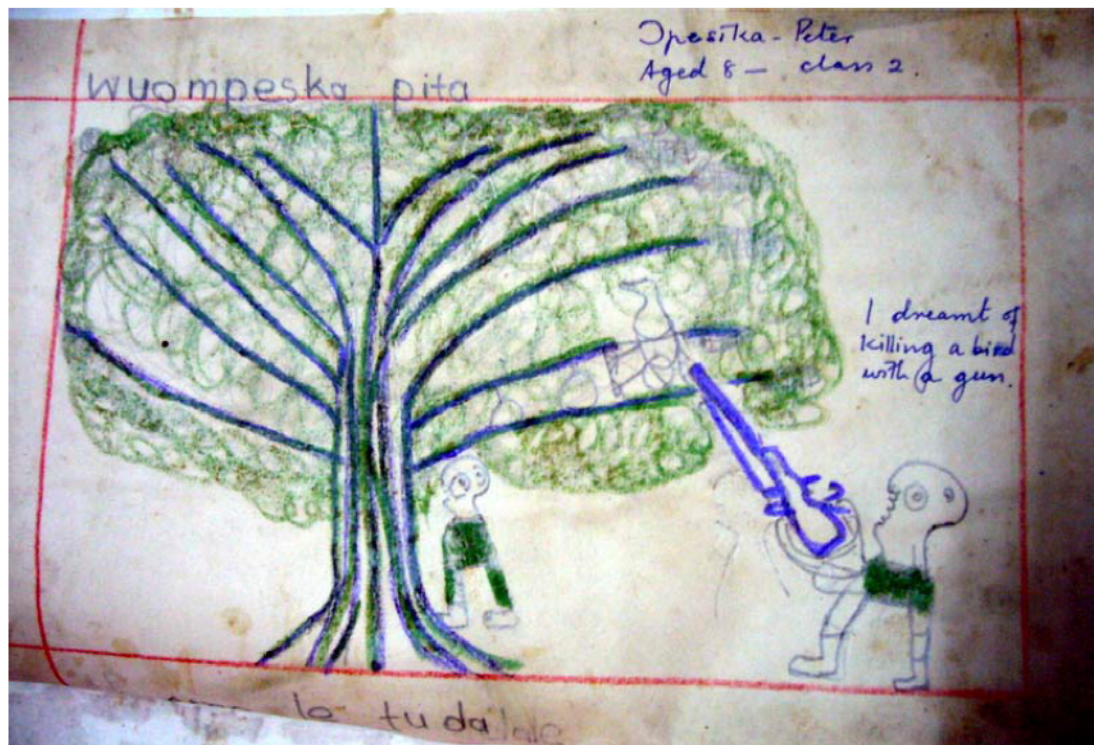


Figure 4-14. Peter, 'I dreamt of killing a bird with a gun'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

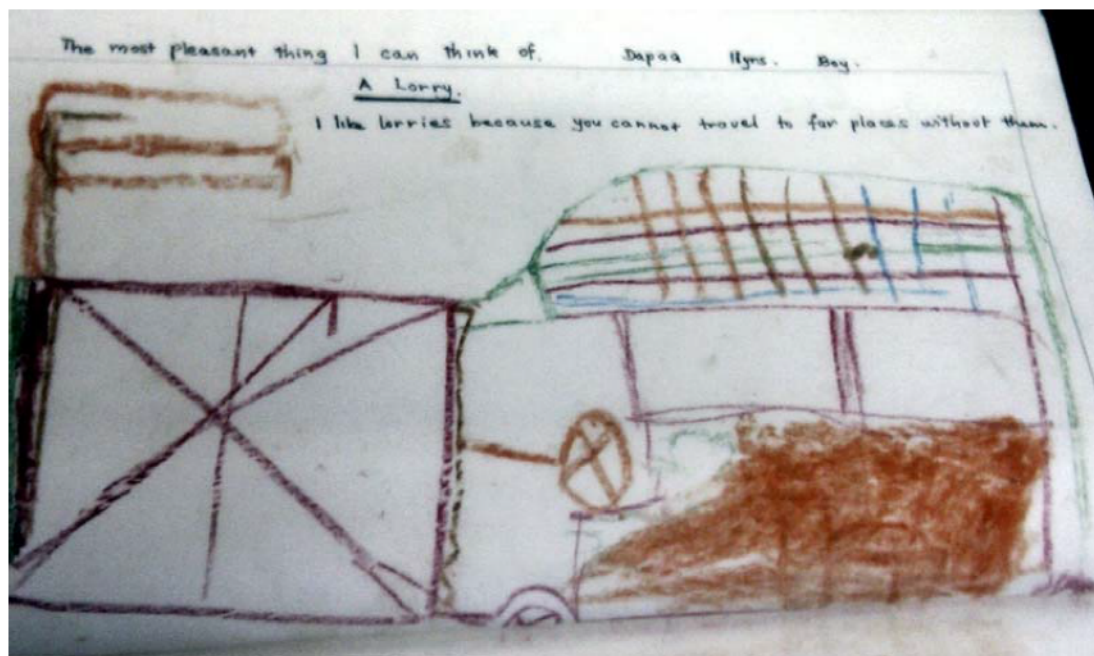


Figure 4-15. Dapaa, 'The most pleasant thing I can think of: a lorry'. Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakye, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954).

When Dapaa, an eleven year old boy from Agogo, drew his favourite thing he chose a lorry (Figure 4-15), explaining in the caption that ‘you cannot travel to far places without them’.<sup>63</sup> For obvious reasons, mechanised transport made distance a much less significant barrier than it once had been. Cars and lorries would have been a common sight in the coastal towns by the 1910s and in the cocoa-growing regions of the colony by the 1920s. The growth in mechanised transport was driven, as this implies, by commercial concerns and regular lorry transport came later to the less developed north and remained relatively patchy and unreliable.<sup>64</sup> The impact of cars and lorries, though highly uneven, was perhaps most dramatic for the young. And, in fact, distance and space are central to the experience and psychology of childhood. Separation anxiety – the fear of being separated from the primary care-giver – is a human constant from the age of six months. This anxiety fuels a key conflict of childhood experience: the need for safety and security causes children to demarcate safe spaces and struggle to stay in them; while the need to grow up pushes children to leave such spaces, test out new ground and continually redefine safety and acceptable risk.

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<sup>63</sup> Dapaa, *A Lorry: the most pleasant thing I can think of*, 1954.

<sup>64</sup> Inez Sutton, ‘Colonial Agricultural Policy: The Non-Development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, 4 (1989): 637–669; H. Laurens Van Der Laan, ‘Modern Inland Transport and the European Trading Firms in Colonial West Africa’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 21, 84 (1981): 547–575.



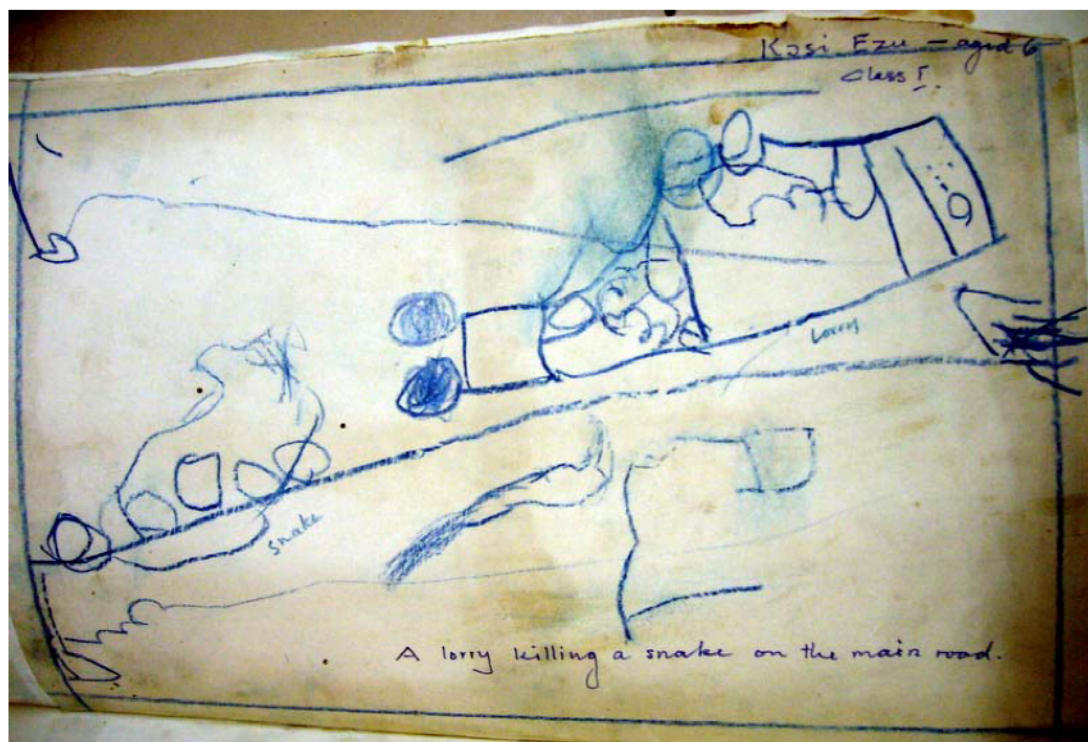


Figure 4-16. Kosi, 'A lorry killing a snake on the main road'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

Separation was, of course, all about distance – and distance was the bane of many childhoods. It left a spatial gap in knowledge. Simply not knowing how to get home was a vulnerability that kept many domestic servants and pawns in their place.<sup>65</sup> Distance made the journey to school or work a chore. Distance stopped children communicating with their families. Distance, in extreme cases, remade children, changing their language, their kinship ties and even their names. Distance created other chores, like fetching water or head portorage. Anything that shrank distance was desirable, and motorised transport did that. Transport hubs and arterial routes, for example, reduced the distances that goods had to be carried in head loads. And even as trains and lorries facilitated the separation of children from their

<sup>65</sup> Chapter 6 discusses some of these points in greater detail. The use of space in analysing childhoods is discussed in Jack Lord, 'Spatial Approaches to the History of Child Labour in Colonial Ghana', *Polyvocia: SOAS Journal of Graduate Research* 2 (2010): 31–45.

families for longer periods, over greater distances, it eased the pain of that trauma, making both the journey and continued contact easier.



Figure 4-17. Mobile cinema in Prampram, c.1960s. Photographs from Jennifer Blaylock, *Mobile Cinema: Ghanaian Politics in Transit* (2011).



Cars and lorries also fitted into the short timescales in which children understood the world. Just as animals were the threat of the bush made live, so vehicles represented the domestication of the bush by speed and the shrinking of distance. Motor vehicles appeared almost as protagonists in the battle against nature: if not human then certainly animated by a petrol spark. Just as animals could intrude into culture, motor vehicles could extrude out of culture, breaking past its boundaries and redrawing them in the distant bush. Locomotives, cars and lorries also appeared as the guardians of road and rail. Like the lorry killing a snake drawn by six-year-old Kosi (Figure 4-16), vehicles could leave nature crushed beneath a blur of thunderous wheels, and sweep road and rail clean with a storm of wind and noise. The construction and maintenance of road and rail was labour-intensive human work but it was frequently supervised by a lorry or rail car, nudging progress along and stepping in when things got tough.<sup>66</sup> These hints of vehicular anthropomorphism were drawn out in play. Children imagined themselves as car and driver at once, holding a biscuit tin lid, negotiating village traffic and impersonating the roll of the engine: ‘vuuuv-vuuuv!’<sup>67</sup>

But, above all else, motorised transport was children’s most profound link to modernity. For adults, cars and lorries had the potential to corrupt children. Working and socialising in a milieu of drivers and lorry parks was an indicator of delinquency and moral corruption for both boys and girls. But for children, vehicles inspired excitement rather than approbation. Children bored of rural life plied back and forth to the city, often by working for their passage or illicitly hanging from the back of lorries.<sup>68</sup> And cars and lorries did not simply offer *access*

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<sup>66</sup>British Instructional Films, *The Harbour* (Pro Patria, 1930), <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=75252>.

<sup>67</sup> Anno-Kwakye, ‘Child Training in Agogo’, 55.

<sup>68</sup> D. M., 2/8/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

to modernity but revealed it from within. Even for spatially immobile children, the government-funded lorry proved a Pandora's Box of colonial modernity: arriving in a village, its back door opened and the future rolled out. The mobile cinema van, originally devised to deliver propaganda during the Second World War, promised excitement and entertainment (Figure 4-17).<sup>69</sup> The medical van, by contrast, aroused suspicion, uncertainty and the prospect of pain (Figure 4-18). The painted slogans emblazoned on lorries, by turns anxious and boasting, portrayed the vehicles as the fulcrum of their drivers' lives. Other slogans – like 'Atomicity' – were abstract allusions to the power, prestige and possibility of advanced technology.<sup>70</sup> The association with power was strengthened by the arrival in motor cars of European officials on tour. Wealth seemed to spill from their vehicles, as it did when migrant workers, some of them children, arrived home wearing nice shoes and carrying gifts.<sup>71</sup> Cars and lorries kindled in the childish imagination a vision of wealth and riches just a journey away.

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<sup>69</sup> Wendell P. Holbrook, 'British Propaganda and the Mobilization of the Gold Coast War Effort, 1939-1945', *Journal of African History* 26, 4 (1985): 347–361; Rosaleen Smyth, 'The British Colonial Film Unit and sub-Saharan Africa, 1939–1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, 3 (1988): 285–298.

<sup>70</sup> Field, *Search for Security*, 134–45.

<sup>71</sup> Captured on film in Jean Rouch (dir.), *Jaguar*, 1967.



Figure 4-18. Cape Coast Red Cross Mobile Clinic, c.1956, INF 10/118, National Archives, UK.

## Colonialism and modernity

The way that children thought about drivers and vehicles was part of a broader trend in the intellectual history of children: the articulation of the childish imagination outwards to the metropole and the fact that children increasingly believed that their safety, security and prosperity depended upon access to things that came from *outside* the Gold Coast. This leads onto a discussion in the following chapter of how children thought about their place as colonial subjects and the colony's place in the systems and hierarchies of the wider world.

### Metropolitan materialism

In the 1870s, William Ayi produced an essay on the link between fierce storms and an offended deity of the Ga people in his native Accra, writing that 'when the sea spoil they said somebody do wrong against her'.<sup>72</sup> His description captures perfectly that stereotypical 'African' philosophy of a nature driven not by empirically-determinable rules but by spite, jealousy and supernatural capriciousness. But, even in the preceding century, while the power of nature was understood as deistic, its unleashing was recast in an entirely new lexicon. When Johannes Rask, a Lutheran priest resident in Accra, saw storms lash the coast in the eighteenth century, thunder was described as hitting the sky like a fusillade of eighteen-pound canons. Rask was told that the summoner of the storm was 'enjoying himself with his *kabuseers*' by firing 'many guns and much powder'.<sup>73</sup> This is an important example of how the twin domains of human culture and hostile nature were shaped by both colonial modernity and local belief. A closer examination of these concepts reveals how the childish *mentalité* was becoming specifically

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<sup>72</sup> School essays on local gods, circa 1870s, in BMA D-10.4, Basel Mission Archive.

<sup>73</sup> *Kabuseer*, normally written *caboceer*, comes from the Portuguese for 'headman'. Johannes Rask, *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea*, trans by. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: African Books Collective, 2009), 78.

colonial. Although anxieties about nature were ever present in the childish imagination, particularly in rural contexts, the converse of this was a valorisation of belligerence *against* nature, of the taming of it through bravery and modernity, both by individuals and by the collective, accretive conquest of a landscape reordered and overwritten by farms, buildings and infrastructure. Most significantly, children understood that this process – and thus their safety and the dominance of culture – increasingly relied on access to what can be termed ‘metropolitan materialism’: the amalgam of imperial-origin technologies, techniques and materials that refigured political power, military prowess, the display of social status and productive capacity on the Gold Coast and its hinterland in the era of Atlantic trade.

In a multipolar world, the definition of the word ‘metropolis’ was complex, tending to both shift over time and space; deciding on *the* metropolis was also an ideological, political and commercial process tied to the power, prestige and trajectory of empires. This uncertainty requires some attention to the tension between the global and metropolitan forms of materialism that children encountered. After the opening of Atlantic trade routes, Britain was just one European presence among many on the Gold Coast, albeit one that increasingly dominated the political and commercial sphere in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the coastal factories which had once belonged to Britain's rivals were a tangible reminder of the presence in the Gold Coast of multiple metropolises. Missionaries from continental Europe, meanwhile, presented a challenge to what was metropolitan in terms of clothes, language, names and building styles. But, despite these inevitable nuances, the British imperial metropole remained the dominant influence in material culture, simply because it enjoyed so many territorial, commercial and ideological advantages as the colonial power. When Thomas Kyei ate biscuits as a child, for example, he described these as coming from ‘world-famed biscuit makers



Huntley and Palmers and Peak Frean & Co'.<sup>74</sup> That said, the very fact that Britain was the colonial power could make alternative sources of modernity attractive to Africans, particularly as British imperial hegemony seemed to wane. The most revolutionary in intent, if not in form, of these alternative models of the metropole and modernity was perhaps the independent black capitalism that the followers of Marcus Garvey promised would redeem Africa.<sup>75</sup> A similarly individualistic religious ethic can be seen in the Faith Tabernacle Congregation. This Philadelphia-based African American church found its way to the Gold Coast, primarily via mail order. It flourished in the wake of the influenza pandemic of 1918 and was popular among migrant cocoa workers.<sup>76</sup> The draw of North America was perhaps strongest in the cultural sphere, particularly music and movies. But this still complicates the idea of metropolitan materialism because young people drew on these influences to create the material aspects of their own popular cultures, most famously in Africa's 'cult of the cowboy'.<sup>77</sup> And yet, for all the seductive power of North American culture, the Gold Coast remained a British colony. The American films that Africans watched passed through British distribution channels and, in some cases, were released with their alternative British titles.<sup>78</sup> But, perhaps most significant of all, the metropole meant the imperial metropole because it was British wealth and power

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<sup>74</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 137. On the wider issue of consumerism, see Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>75</sup> Discussed most recently, in the wider context of American ideas and personalities in South Africa, in Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Adam Mohr, 'Capitalism, Chaos, and Christian Healing: Faith Tabernacle Congregation in Southern Colonial Ghana, 1918–26', *Journal of African History* 52, 1 (2011): 63–83.

<sup>77</sup> On the cult of the cowboy in urban Africa, see Charles Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia', *American Historical Review* 106, 1 (2001): 81–105; de Boeck, 'Kinshasa: Tales of the "Invisible City"'; Burton, 'Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy'; Heap, 'Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island'. Complaints about North American style and slang polluting local culture in the Gold Coast were discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, *Children and the Cinema*.

that children were most often exposed to and was directly associated with the exercise of colonial power that they experienced on a daily basis.

The battle between nature and culture so central to Asante identity was, above all, an agricultural one. This conflict was profoundly affected by metropolitan materialism. In folklore, the power of the hoe was attributed to its original owner, the anthropomorphised porcupine, but the tool was subsequently taken overseas, studied, replicated, and then mass-produced in the land of 'White-men-far'.<sup>79</sup> The cocoa boom from the 1890s changed agriculture profoundly but the significance lay less in the new crops and techniques than in the irruptions of metropolitan materialism that enabled the articulation coastward of the rural landscape: the transport hubs, busy with commerce and machinery, that so fascinated Thomas Kyei as a child; and the lorries and weighing equipment of cocoa buyers driving to farms to conduct their business.<sup>80</sup> Everyday experience led children to identify the metropole as the source of rural inflows of goods and commodities, considered both novel and superior to local products. While delivering cocoa to Asokore, Kyei 'overheard [that] all the good things in the shops...such as cloths, cutlasses, enamel basins, sardines, sewing machines, sugar, talc powder, pomade, felt hats...came from the place Aburokyire, the country of the "White-man"'.<sup>81</sup> After a visit from the Chief Commissioner, Kyei and his friends immediately rushed to find the detritus of his visit: soda canisters, tins and jars. They kept these things as 'playthings and mementos', perhaps cementing the relationship between western-style consumption, power and prestige.<sup>82</sup> The experiences of rural children were in a sense very local but their physical

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<sup>79</sup> Rattray, *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 27–9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

parochialism did not preclude the cognitive creation and exploration, on a much wider scale, of imperial and economic hierarchies.

The built environment was the bulwark between man and nature; it was central to how children understood the divide between culture and chaos, primarily due to the protection it offered from the elements and the weather. European building materials and techniques improved the ability of culture to withstand that threat and it was perhaps here that children first made the link between nature and metropolitan modernity. Rask noted that when fierce storms hit, ‘nothing less than high buildings or half-timbered buildings can survive them’.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the ‘storey [i.e., multi-storied] building’ was a marker of both prestige and the taming of nature – and it was a marker inseparable from colonial power and Atlantic trading wealth. When ten year old Daaku, a boy from Agogo in Ashanti Region, was asked to make a wish by an ethnographer he requested a storey house, noting that he would use the rent ‘for building another building’.<sup>84</sup> During games, children sang, ‘Soyiriwa, Kwasi white-man lives on a storey house, and is making shirts, and is shaking himself, Soyiriwa!’.<sup>85</sup>

Children did not just witness these changes to the built environment from afar; they lived in and through them. Children lived in western-style housing built privately in coastal areas in the early twentieth century. Later in the twentieth century, some children lived in state-led developments built for government workers or to re-house the urban poor. This was part of a conscious colonial effort to reshape the city along contemporary lines, using metropolitan styles modified for local conditions. The post-war architectural ethos of ‘tropical modernism’

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<sup>83</sup> Rask, *Description of a Journey to and from Guinea*, 67.

<sup>84</sup> Anno-Kwakye, ‘Child Training in Agogo’, 134.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–8.

was motivated by the uniquely hostile equatorial environment and the assumption that this was best combated by modern techniques and materials from the metropole. The most influential architects in this school were Fry and Drew; theirs was a project that spoke not just to an enlightened, tropical future but to the very childlike need for ‘a sense of secure community’.<sup>86</sup> By the 1940s, the Colonial Secretary already claimed that Accra’s residential areas were a ‘picture of contemporary houses designed for the climate on the coast’.<sup>87</sup> For the children of government employees, life in European-style housing was perhaps part of a package of modernity that included toys, language and dress (Figure 4-19).<sup>88</sup> In the slums, children lived in houses of swish and timber, but also under corrugated iron roofs, balanced on walls made from foraged and recycled wood, metal and even cardboard; in James Town, Accra, the older stock of storey buildings became housing for the poor.<sup>89</sup> The Gold Coast’s elite schools were built and designed by modernist architects. Fry and Drew alone built or extended ten secondary schools and teacher training colleges in the Gold Coast after the Second World War.<sup>90</sup> On a much smaller scale children resident or educated in government or mission institutions were involved in the construction of their own buildings that, while less revolutionary than modernist structures, were still recognisably European in style.<sup>91</sup>

The fabricated world became part of the experience and process of growing up and it is a vital part of the history of childhood in the Gold Coast. Learning to walk was a major transition in

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<sup>86</sup> R. W Liscombe, ‘Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa: The Work of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, 1946-56’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, 2 (2006): 197–200; On the work of Fry and Drew in Kumasi, see also McCaskie, *Asante Identities*, 201–215.

<sup>87</sup> British Empire Collection of Photographs, INF 10/131, NAUK.

<sup>88</sup> On such ‘consumption clusters’, see Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> INF 10/131, NAUK; Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 164–92.

<sup>90</sup> Liscombe, ‘Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa’, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Girls Remand Home, Sekondi, 58 1955, WRG 47/1/1, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi; Social Welfare Work in the Colonies. West Africa - Gold Coast. Report by Mr A. Patterson., 1944, CO 859/123/1, NAUK; Site for Boys’ Industrial School - Pong Tamale, 1938, NRG 8/10/24, NAG Tamale.

a child's life, one that removed him from the milieu of animals to that of people, and which began the long transition towards physical independence from adults. According to Addo, in Ayikai Doblo children learnt to stand and then walk by grasping onto chairs, tables and kerosene tins.<sup>92</sup> Children literally hauled themselves into personhood with objects of material culture and, in particular, objects associated with the more permanent curtailment of nature in the colonial period. As part of the infantilisation process discussed in Chapter 3, artificial barriers (Figure 4-20) were used to hem children into certain spaces and seal off dangerous areas.<sup>93</sup> The mastery of walking also had new criteria. By the age of three or four, children in Agogo were expected to know how to cross roads safely, avoiding the cars and lorries that plied back and forth to the railway junction at Konongo.<sup>94</sup> This immersion in a fabricated, domesticated world continued throughout childhood and it increasingly marked children out from nature, and from the experiences of the pre-colonial generation. Children, most noticeably, salvaged tins, metal and boards to create toys and tools, reshaping the quotidian worlds of work, play and consumption.<sup>95</sup> This is, however, evidence more of children's engagement with modernity than with *colonial* modernity: uncovering how children thought about the metropole requires other types of evidence that are discussed further in the following chapter.

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<sup>92</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 63.

<sup>93</sup> Inquests on A. K., 1930, and A. D., 1934, ADM 23/1/2309, NAG Cape Coast; ARG 1/15/87, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>94</sup> Anno-Kwakye, 'Child Training in Agogo', 112.

<sup>95</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 174–9, 190–3.





Figure 4-19. 'Ghanaian Personnel Officer with the youngest member of his family in his flat', c.1950s, INF 10/131, National Archives, UK.



Figure 4-20. Kaneshie Children's Home, c. 1950s, INF 10/118, National Archives, UK.

## The dialectics of fear

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that childhood fear was both a constant and a construct, a childish thing experienced in terms unique to both age and *the* age. In the Gold Coast, that fear was rooted in nature and kept in check by culture. Neither concept was static. As we have seen, the extraversion of material culture was accompanied by nascent ideas of metropole and colony, relative riches and penury and the extraversion, in turn, of childish imagination and ambition. But in parallel to that redefinition of culture, fear itself – that constant and construct – was uprooted from the soil and from the wilds, defanged, reset in urban concrete, petrol and steam, and textured by colonial authority. The sources of fear were not reversed but they were diversified as a dialectic between nature, culture, safety and anxiety played out over the colonial period.

First of all, as metropolitan materialism was woven into the fabric of everyday life, children recognised and began to fear the dangers inherent in this newly mechanised realm. The simplest of built environments created danger, as seven-year-old Afra's nightmare of being trapped down a well seemed to recognise (Figure 4-21).<sup>96</sup> But in the colonial period these fears perhaps took on a new intensity. It took great power to create and hold together twentieth-century material culture and, if the system frayed and failed, the release of this stored energy could be as dangerous and deadly as anything nature might deliver. Metropolitan materialism could kill the unwary child, even as it made him safer from nature. There are, of course, no comprehensive statistics on child mortality, still less on the specific causes of death. But

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<sup>96</sup> The archetypal fear of a child falling down a hole is interesting here because it reverses that common myth of African ethnogenesis, an autochthonous people emerging from the ground. If childhood was about acquiring humanity and social belonging then here was the terminal failure of that process. On the Asante case, see Agyeman Prempeh, *The History of Ashanti Kings and the Whole Country Itself and Other Writings*, ed by. A. Adu Boahen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).



coroner's records and newspaper reports do reveal that there were new ways to die, as well as new ways to live: a saltpetre explosion, drinking carbolic, a car accident, being crushed between locomotive and railway buffers, collapsing walls and – yes – falling down an unprotected well.<sup>97</sup> Lorries, cars and trains were emblematic of these new dangers. But, as Bibi Xenko's drawing shows (Figure 4-22), the dangers of culture were also a product of human agency, a failure to master the binding but rebellious forces of metropolitan materialism. His detailed illustration of the 'most unpleasant thing' he had ever seen shows a fatal lorry accident, but also labels one driver as bad and another, uninvolved in the incident, as good. To these physical risks were added childish fears of bureaucracy and power, personified in various colonial and para-colonial figures: the teacher, the white man, the sanitation inspector and the syringe-wielding doctor.<sup>98</sup> These fears of culture by no means occluded fears of nature – those vivid pictures of animals date, after all, from the 1950s – but new anxieties were certainly created as children observed, and tried to make sense of, the achievements and limitations of metropolitan materialism.

There is evidence, too, that some children began to think of nature in a new light. They saw a radical new connection between man and nature, based not on antagonism but on hushed contemplation and the ordered, scientific curation and manipulation of the natural world. Kwame Nkrumah – by his own account an unusual child – spent 'hours on end quietly observing the birds and the lesser animals of the forest and listening to their numerous and varied calls'. He wanted 'to touch and caress' these animals and, to that end, 'devised a means

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<sup>97</sup> ADM 23/1/2309, NAG Cape Coast; SCT 22/10/3, NAG; *Gold Coast Leader*, July 5, 1902, 2 May 1903 and 25 October 1903.

<sup>98</sup> Children's encounters with imperial power are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

to trap them – not to kill but to bring home as pets’.<sup>99</sup> Pet-keeping Europeans may have influenced children working in domestic service.<sup>100</sup> Thomas Kyei, a devoted Presbyterian, differed from his playmates in abhorring their purposeless killing of animals and celebrations of cruelty. For him, the forest, despite the tremors of fear it instilled, was a place of curiosity, wonder and longing.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Nkrumah, *The Autobiography*, 7.

<sup>100</sup> One South African in the 1940s, for example, fought against wartime privation to secure passage for a pet monkey to Cape Town, where a pet dog was waiting for him, and where they might ‘all be together again’. Monkeys, 1943, WRG 15/1/102, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>101</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 182–4.



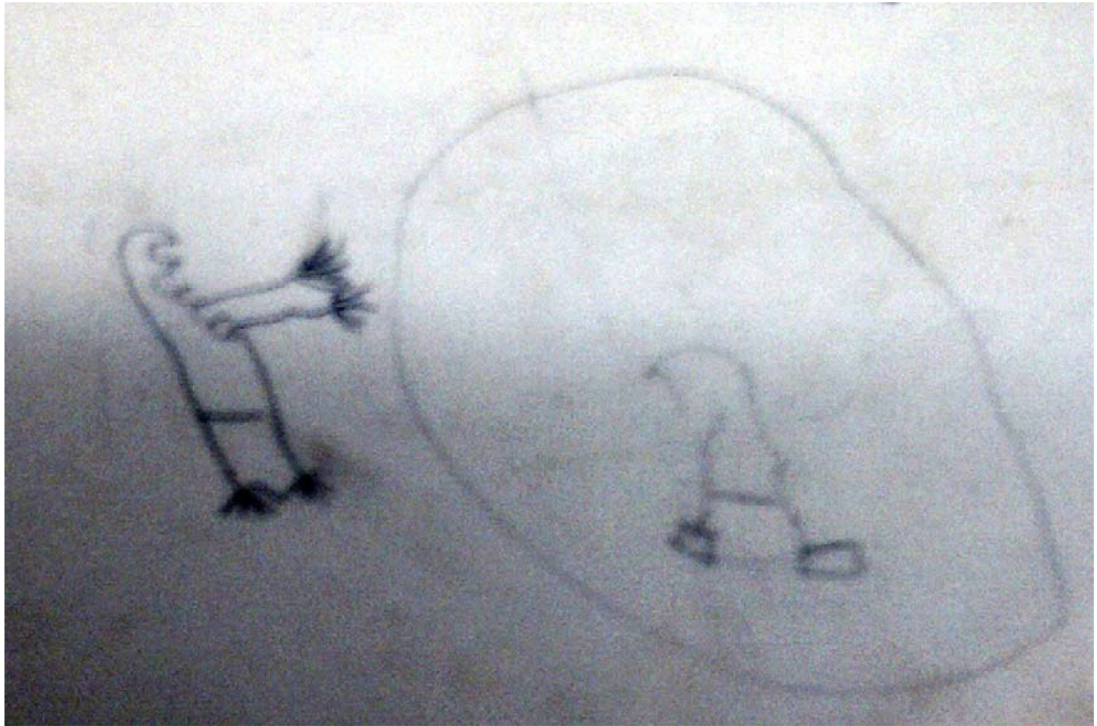


Figure 4-21. Afra, 'A dream'. Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakye, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954). The two-dimensional perspective makes the child seem even more helpless.

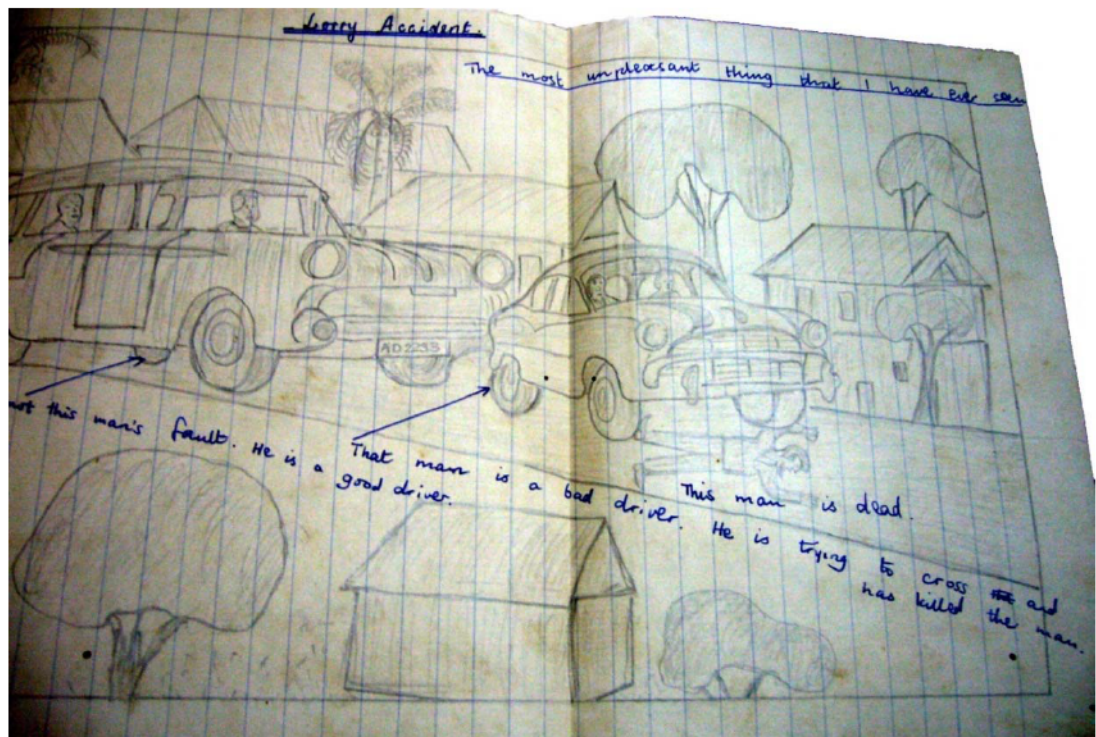


Figure 4-22. Bibi Xenko, 'Lorry accident'. Drawing from Augustina Oyindzo, *Six Case Studies of Children in Anumle* (1959).



Figure 4-23. 'Mrs Haggis, at the Mfantshipim Secondary Grammar School, Cape Coast, shows a biology class the skeleton of a rabbit', 1956, INF 10/121, National Archives, UK.

Schools and churches were an important vector for ideas on the natural world. Kyei was influenced by the hymn *All Creatures Great and Small* and the idea that nature was God's creation rather than something intrinsically external and hostile to man. Schools taught 'nature' as a discrete academic subject (Figure 4-23).<sup>102</sup> Nature Study classes at Bejamsu Native Authority Day School took place – 'correctly' – in the open air; in 1948, the school inspector found the class 'full of information on the palm tree'.<sup>103</sup> On a 1950 tour of the nearby Tapa Day School, the school inspector noted approvingly that there was 'a good collection of horns,

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<sup>102</sup> J. S Dunn, *Nature Study: Notes on Teaching and Suggestions for Syllabuses for Gold Coast Schools*, 3rd ed. (Cape Coast: Methodist Book Depot, 1955).

<sup>103</sup> ADM 39/1/100, NAG.



beaks, and feathers all appropriately labelled'.<sup>104</sup> This was nature as abstract edification, rather than practical warning or instruction, nature as a display for humans rather than a threat to them. But it should be stressed that the idea that nature was a pleasant spectacle, and that animals were something to be petted or studied, remained an unusual one. As we have seen, childish fears of animals were endemic – but a suggestive report on the cinema in Nigeria also found that the cartoon animals in *Snow White* were appreciated more by English adults than by African children.<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps the real genesis of this new idea was economic. Education offered alternative routes to social mobility. These did not require nature to be directly fought or tamed, either for agricultural reward or to preserve the integrity of human spaces. Reading, writing and manipulating figures and bureaucratic procedures began to reverse the sheer physicality of honour, prestige and success. This new paradigm is evident in a letter from Solomon Yaw Duryson, a secondary school student from Tafo in Asante. In an appeal for funds he told the Asanteman Council that only a continued education would secure his future because, 'I am so small and will never have any job to do'. Curtailing his education would leave Solomon as a burden on his mother: 'whenever I see her', he confessed, 'I overflow my tears'.<sup>106</sup> Cognitive routes to success and labour in apparently secure areas of culture opened up new ways of thinking about nature, which might surround or adorn culture without being an existential threat to it. This was particularly true of cities, the ultimate site of culture. In the colonial era,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Films - Educational showing of films to schoolchildren in Nigeria, 1940, CO 859/22/15, NAUK.

<sup>106</sup> There is some ambiguity here about whether being 'small' would keep him out of manual or clerical labour. If it was the latter then this shows how the older lexicon of physicality was (and indeed still is) used to describe newer cognitive determinants of fitness and success. Letter from Solomon Yaw Duryson to Asanteman Council, 7/3/1953. Secondary Scholarships, 1951-55, MAG 21/15/19, MAK.

at least, major cities were spaces where the physical dangers facing unaccompanied children were in part replaced by moral ones, and where hunger and charity were more likely outcomes than starvation and a lonely death.<sup>107</sup> Two trends cemented the relationship between changing political economy and novel ideas about nature. First, the apparent success of metropolitan materialism created a growing confidence that nature could not just be kept at bay but controlled and manipulated for human betterment. And, second, the fact that education lifted some childhoods *out* of nature, as preparation for working lives of cognitive rather than manual labour, created a powerful sense of nostalgia for what, even as children, they had left behind. Kum Gandah, for example, spent his early school days longing for nothing more than life as a shepherd boy.<sup>108</sup> But the limits of these new ideas stemmed from the same sources (discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7). Most children would not grow into the rarefied world of clerical labour, while ostensibly urban children were both a minority of the population and often had extensive links to, and experiences of, rural life. Nature remained an existential threat throughout the colonial period and it retained a vivid hold on the childish imagination for that reason.

## Conclusion

The emotions addressed here were not the sum total of the childish *mentalité*. In particular, there were other fears, probably pervasive ones, which are hinted at in the historical record. Chief among these were disease, hunger and the broader concept of death – all of which

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<sup>107</sup> Some communities of children living alone are discussed in Chapter 6, but it was a phenomenon common to all of the Gold Coast's urban centres. For an overview, see *Problem Children of the Gold Coast*; The notion of urban poverty, particularly as is impacted on the vulnerable young, is discussed in Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 164–92.

<sup>108</sup> Both Gandah and Kyei wrote of the nostalgia or wonder about nature that they felt as children, though whether this was an adult rewriting of memory is impossible to say. Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*; Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*.

haunted and curtailed childhoods in the colonial period. The rather narrow focus on fear, admiration and ambition in this chapter is primarily due to source constraints. Child-authored sources are important but there are only so many things a child can draw, vocalise or write. The aspects of childish thought that I have discussed here are those that were relatively easy for children to express or for the historian to infer from children's more muted appearances in the historical record. It is easier, too, to find emotions in adult memories when these were genuinely *childish* ones, emotions grown out of and thus recallable from a safe chronological and psychological distance. Indeed, perhaps the historical *mentalité* I have identified here is extractable from the present precisely because – in an age of urbanisation, traffic jams and wildlife depopulation – contemporary Ghana has itself outgrown certain colonial-era anxieties and wonders. But the passage of time, for an individual or for society as a whole, has not erased or invalidated every idea that colonial children held. Ghana has not, for example, outgrown a fear of death and dearth in childhood. These are fears that many adult Ghanaians still hold for their own children and grandchildren – fears grounded in material conditions and too often realised. These emotions are hard to talk about, rarely documented and difficult to analyse historically. They are no less real for that but their persistence into adulthood and into the present day perhaps mean that these thoughts are neither particularly colonial nor particularly childish.



## Chapter 5

### Empire and Authority

Chapters 2 and 3 described how colonial institutions and metropolitan ideas partially dismantled and rebuilt the scaffolding of power and authority surrounding childhood in the Gold Coast between 1900 and 1957. But those chapters were constructed from the outside of childhood, looking in, both in terms of the age of their protagonists and in the origins and focus of their source material. As important as the new power structures of empire were, they must be analysed in dialogue with the subjects of that power: children. This chapter steps outside the institutional contours of the archive and considers the effect rather than the intent of colonial policy. Its overarching concern is to reconstruct children's quotidian experience of power and assess the extent to which their lives and minds were colonial or colonised. What did it feel like to be a child subject of the colonial state? Were children affected by or oblivious to the new powers shaping their and their parents' lives? How aware were children of growing up on the Atlantic edge of empire and not at its metropolitan centre? What did children make of the differentials of race, wealth, gender and power embedded in the colonial project? And did children interact with the adult political world during the period of colonial rule and decolonisation?

My argument is that children's encounters with authority and empire were profoundly different from those of adults. This difference stemmed from the inherent 'smallness' of children: in physique, social status, analytical ability and, above all, in experience. This is an

extension of the argument made in Chapter 4, that children constructed a causative model of the natural world based on what they saw and heard, the accuracy and intricacy of which was constrained by their social and biological age. The same was true of children's encounters with authority and empire in the colonial period. Children most feared, and most resisted, the types of power they encountered most often and that were thus the most comprehensible. Similarly, children understood 'difference' based on their experience and observation of imperial and non-imperial hierarchies. This egocentric construction of the world made it difficult for children to connect the dots between individual instances of power and difference into a broader framework of what empire meant, much less develop it into a critique or mode of anti-colonial 'resistance'. Although often acute observers of colonial society, children were largely apolitical, cut off from this adult realm by their lack of experience and the short time-frame in which they engaged with the world around them. For a demographic primarily concerned with the present and the physicality of the moment, politics was simply too tectonic and too abstract to engage with on a serious level. This chapter will explore authority and empire by first considering the types of power that children most frequently encountered: domestic discipline and local hierarchies. It will then move on to consider the specifically colonial context. A discussion of children's understanding of the difference between the metropole and its periphery is followed by an analysis of the ways in which children engaged with, resisted or acquiesced to colonial forms of power.

## The limits of experience: domestic authority, violence and local hierarchies

Chapter 2 argued that in Gold Coast society a fundamental line of authority ran from old to young. Children were expected to both serve and respect adults and would be punished if they failed to do so – this punishment was predicated upon the physical superiority of adults to children. Indeed, corporal punishment in various forms was one of the main methods of disciplining, forming and reforming the young. This included beating children by hand, cane or whip. But chemical punishments, relying on the irritants in common foodstuffs, were also used. Chillies and ginger were applied to orifices and appendages to dissuade behaviours ranging from masturbation to theft.<sup>1</sup> The colonial criminal code enshrined the right for parents and guardians to use corporal punishments as long as the corrective blow did not ‘wound’ the child.<sup>2</sup> The threat and fear of violence, however, was as important as its use.<sup>3</sup> This type of physical discipline was children’s most frequent encounter with adult power and it was very local in scope and corporeal in effect, most commonly involving the exertion of authority by parents in the household and, later, teachers in the classroom.

But punishment is not a universal constant. Even this aspect of childhood experience has a history of its own.<sup>4</sup> This history can be only briefly explored here. Chemical discipline, for example, relied on the arrival of chilli during the Columbian Exchange of flora from the sixteenth century onwards. By the 1950s, Barrington Kaye suggested that chilli-based

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<sup>1</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 140–4.

<sup>2</sup> Gold Coast Government, *The Laws of the Gold Coast, Containing the Ordinances of the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, the Northern Territories, and Togoland Under United Kingdom Trusteeship, Enacted on or Before the 31st Day of December 1951* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1954), 295.

<sup>3</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 140–4.

<sup>4</sup> Discipline has been a subject of serious historical inquiry, ranging from the condemnatory and teleological work of deMause to Foucauldian research on institutional discipline. Lloyd DeMause, *The History of Childhood* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995); Gleason, ‘Disciplining the Student Body’.

punishments were being replaced by more ‘modern’ methods of discipline.<sup>5</sup> But this is doubtful. The memory and the threat certainly loomed large enough in Agogo that, when asked to draw ‘the most unpleasant thing I can think of’, two eight-year-old girls depicted a field of pepper bushes (Figure 5-1). One artist elaborated via a dictated caption: ‘I hate and fear pepper because it is pushed into my anus. It burns terribly’. The other girl added simply that ‘it makes me cry’. More broadly, corporal punishment remained the dominant mode of discipline despite the arrival of the countervailing ideas and institutions discussed in Chapter 3. It is obvious from autobiographical and archival evidence that parents continued physically to punish their children. Beatings also dominate childhood memories of the schoolroom. Corporal punishment was vigorously defended in newspapers as the only effective prophylactic against moral degeneration. This discourse included articles reprinted from British newspapers, a useful reminder that, *pace* the argument in Chapter 3, the transmission of metropolitan ideas (or their selective importation) into the Gold Coast could reinforce rather than transform local philosophies of childhood.<sup>6</sup> The physicality of punishment was echoed by the state. Caning was the courts’ default punishment and corrective for children until opinion turned against it in the 1940s; even then, the cane was a common sentence for the courts to hand down and probably remained the most common option in areas with no dedicated juvenile justice institutions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 140–144.

<sup>6</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, July 30, 1904; *Gold Coast Leader*, February 11, 1905.

<sup>7</sup> On shifting opinion about corporal punishment see, for example, CO 859/73/5, NAUK.

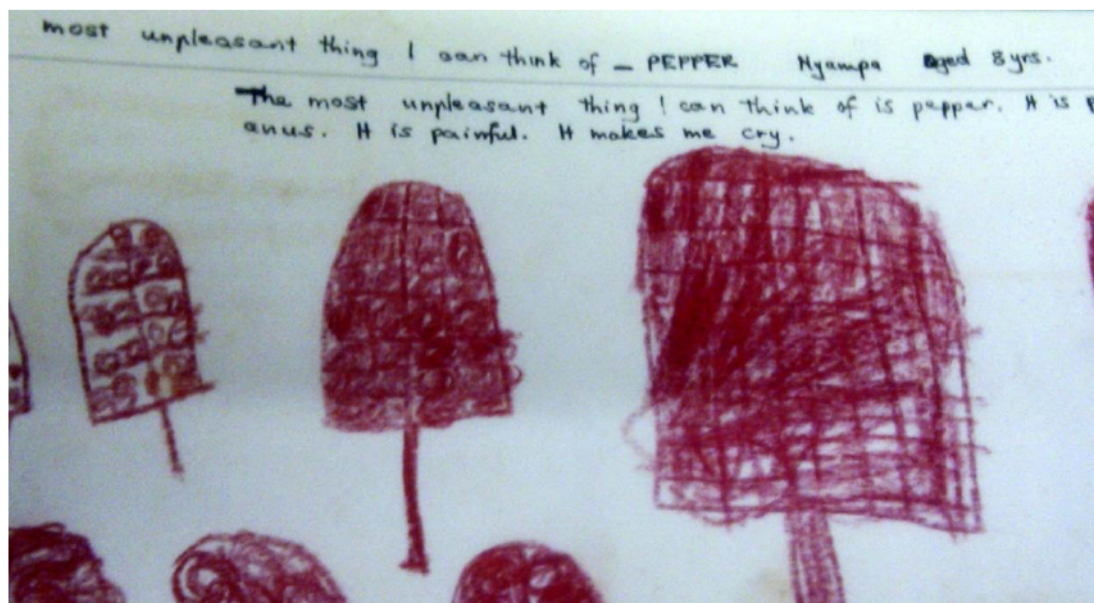


Figure 5-1. Nyampa, 'The most unpleasant thing I can think of – PEPPER'. Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakye, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954).

Colonial rule also had an impact on this type of domestic corporal discipline, affecting both the methods by which children were disciplined and the identity of their disciplinarians. As Chapter 3 showed, a host of new ideologies, laws and institutions created novel types of authority over the young, in turn reducing or balancing kin-based power over children. New authority figures were also created, at least in the more urban environments where colonial rule was consolidated. Sanitation officers were supposed to register births and, more pertinently, stop the practice of young children defecating inside their home compound.<sup>8</sup> Instead children were expected to use public latrines: often dark, dank and frightening places, best visited in peer groups or avoided altogether.<sup>9</sup> Medical personnel could administer painful injections. Teachers used the cane to quiet and discipline the classroom. Some parents even

<sup>8</sup> On their role in registering births, see Registration of Births, Deaths and Burials, 1912-48, ADM 23/1/664, NAG Cape Coast; Regulation of births, Akim Abuakwa, 1919-1920, ADM 11/1/1635, NAG.

<sup>9</sup> Anno-Kwakye, 'Child Training in Agogo', 37-9.



asked teachers to cane children on their behalf.<sup>10</sup> The power these figures had was much more sporadic, exotic and mysterious than that which children encountered within their care networks. But for that very reason, the disturbing and frightening powers of these para-colonial figures had an effect on the quotidian discipline of the home. Just as parents invoked the spectre of animals or monsters, these new authority figures became disciplinary bogeymen, as adults used the threat of external escalation to buttress their domestic authority. In the 1950s, for example, parents were observed impersonating the sanitation inspector from the other side of a closed door.<sup>11</sup> Anno-Kwakye witnessed a church service in Agogo where the minister pleaded with parents not to threaten their children with doctors' injections lest it frighten them away from essential medical treatments.<sup>12</sup> The discipline to which children were most frequently subject was thus not colonial but it was, at least, partially colonised.

But regardless of the shifting legal landscape or the disciplinary phantasms that parents might conjure up, the power applied instantly by individuals in homes and classrooms remained much more important to childhood experience than the formal powers of the state. The expansive late-colonial state described in Chapter 3 wielded power over some children for precisely that reason. Many of the children defined as being 'exposed to moral or physical danger' in the 1950s were runaways, who had very often fled from a prospective beating at home and then disappeared into Accra's anonymous and sporadically policed urban ecologies: the beach, markets, lorry parks and after-hours commercial premises. A typical case is the thirteen-year-old Kumasi girl who went out to sell goods one evening, was caught in a rainstorm until late at night and 'knowing full well that her father would beat her', ran away

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<sup>10</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 181–2, 186–8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Anno-Kwakye, 'Child Training in Agogo', 95–6.

to Accra where she was picked up by the authorities.<sup>13</sup> Runaways might have ended up enjoying the 'friendship' of a probation officer or the calming influence of a probation home but they fell within the ambit of the state precisely because they feared the more pressing threat of domestic discipline.

This phenomenon also raises an important caveat about the nature of kin- or household-based power over children. Although often portrayed as a tyrannical and absolutist form of authority, this adult power was not just exerted, it had to be submitted to. The inherent vulnerabilities of being a child of course made this more likely but it was by no means automatic. The available evidence suggests that the severity of physical discipline was always tempered by a moral economy of punishment overseen by both adults and children. Escape was the most emphatic rejection of adult authority, and children fled (even if only temporarily) unjustly abusive parents, relatives, guardians, masters and employers. Modern transport and the anonymity of cities made such escapes easier and more sustainable. Other children simply pled for clemency or played one adult off against another, a tactic made easier by the multi-nodal households that allowed children to choose between disciplinary environments. And adults could also use their own initiative to stop harsh punishment, motivated either by community sanction or, from the late-1940s, by the judgement of the colonial state.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that children primarily experienced power as a corporeal, short-term and local phenomenon did not, however, isolate them from the broader structures of social authority. Historians of childhood have portrayed children as surprisingly sophisticated observers of

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<sup>13</sup> A.H., 26/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>14</sup> Probation reports frequently bemoaned the behavioural effect of a child choosing to live with the 'easier' parent or guardian. The importance of multi-nodal households is discussed in Chapter 6.

society, who grasped complex, and at times very fluid, social hierarchies and incorporated them into their patterns of play and peer relations.<sup>15</sup> Although girls are largely absent from this part of the thesis because of a lack of sources, children's understanding of social hierarchies can be seen particularly clearly in the Gold Coast with respect to gender. Fortes made the argument that children began to prepare themselves for the correct gender roles through play in his work on the Tallensi people of the Northern Territories.<sup>16</sup> Children may have been even more critical than this implies, aware of how gender relations were changing and how they might work this to their advantage. Figure 5-2 can be seen as just a picture of a man and a woman; it could also be seen as evidence of a girl beginning to notice the consequences of unequal consumption within the household. In 1954, William Addo studied childhood in a village in the Ga village of Ayikai Doblo. He observed girls aged ten to fourteen who gossiped on their way to the river to fetch water. 'Their conversation each time', he wrote, 'was about men'.<sup>17</sup> One girl was recorded saying: 'now-a-days husbands in this village are becoming quite useless... [They] leave their wives to work and earn their keep. The women are now assuming the responsibilities of the men. Young men are also trying to copy the old ones...I will never marry from this village'.<sup>18</sup> This girl clearly understood how her village was being affected by the pull of migrant work in Accra and in cocoa-growing regions of the colony, and how this, in turn, offered young men opportunities that placed a strain upon existing systems of marriage. Her world, moreover, was not simply dominated by her daily round of chores or the

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<sup>15</sup> For a representative selection of recent work, see Figs, *The Whisperers*; Kelly, *Children's World*; Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 44–64; The gendering of play is frequently noted in the anthropological literature and in oral testimony. A colony-wide survey is presented in Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 190–3.

<sup>17</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 101–2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

threat of punishment if she failed to complete it: she was already looking out from the village and planning her adult life. As this brief exploration of quotidian forms of discipline and hierarchy implies, it is very difficult to separate 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of power or to divorce either from their historical context. With that in mind, this chapter now turns to the question of how children understood and reacted to the authorities and hierarchies explicitly associated with colonial rule.

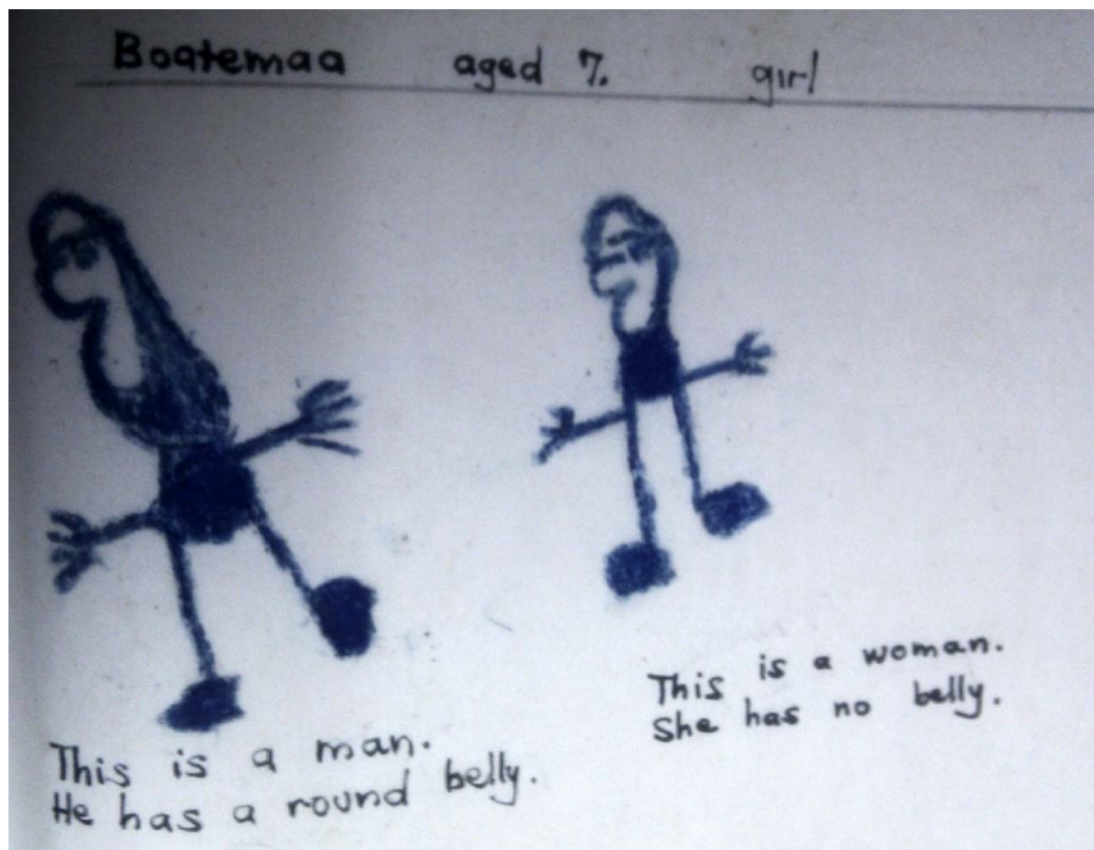


Figure 5-2. Boatemaa, 'This is a man. He has a round belly. This is a woman. She has no belly.' Drawing from Vida Anno-Kwakye, *A Study of Child Training in Agogo* (1954).

## From the colony to the world

Children engaged with colonialism in very different ways from adults, both because their worldviews emerged from the self, the body and the instant, and because of how colonial rule intersected or failed to intersect with childhood experience. Chapter 4 argued that children in



colonial Ghana had a growing confidence that human culture could provide shelter, security, control and prosperity. But it was a new kind of culture, inseparable from colonial modernity and, as such, it was accompanied in the childish *mentalité* by the nascent concepts – often vague, naive or outright wrong – of the colony, the metropole and the system of the world. Asking to what extent the childish *mentalité* was colonial – or colonised – requires, first of all, an analysis of how children perceived difference. That is: did children understand the metropole and periphery to be places different in both location and in character? The evidence suggests that they did and that the dividing line was based on material wealth. At the same time, however, there is little evidence that children saw this inegalitarian distribution of wealth as contingent (or certainly not as something that they could change) but some children did engage with this inequality and attempt to exploit it to their own ends.

In much the same way as childish conceptions of nature and modernity were invested in people or creatures, children thought of, and were introduced to, metropolitan wealth as being in the possession and gift of individuals. Metropole and periphery were seen not just as different places but as places that produced different kinds of people. There is ample evidence that children recognised westerners as different from them because of clothing styles or skin colour. The parental use of white people, and not just white authority figures, as disciplinary bogeymen also suggests that children associated westerners with power. But, most significantly, people from the metropole were understood to have access to different types and levels of wealth – and it was, moreover, a very personal and disruptive kind of wealth that cemented the difference between metropole and periphery in the childish *mentalité*. Thus children encountered European adults as the harbingers of novel technologies like the ‘pamphengas Lantern’, as visitors who replaced schoolwork with ‘sports, amusements, tea and



distribution of prizes', as the purchasers of western toys, and (Figure 5-3) as kindly benefactors and distributors of charity.<sup>19</sup> Such personal observations were reinforced by patterns of consumption, print and cinematic culture, school curricula and rumour. At a very basic level, then, the metropole and its citizens were associated with modernity and material wealth – and all the difference, exceptionalism, novelty and power that entailed.

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<sup>19</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, 10 January 1903 and 24 January 1903.



Figure 5-3. 'The fairy queen, Diana Carlisle, who is 8 years old (seen underneath a Christmas tree) distributes gifts to children at the party. A cripple, Samuel Lartey, who had been conveyed from the Child Care Home at Kaneshie [in Accra] receives his gift from the fairy queen', INF 10/127, National Archives, UK.

### Mail fraud: connections, exchange and constructions of metropole and periphery

Children clearly saw the metropole as very different from their own homes: a place of material riches, novelty and power. But there is also evidence that some children tried to exploit this disparity with the metropole and siphon off a portion of its wealth for their own benefit. The transfer of wealth to a child in the Gold Coast required, however, a point of contact with the metropole and, given that the colonial state was built on a shoestring and largely indifferent

towards children, these were difficult to come by. In places where a European presence was relatively normal, children certainly tried to take advantage of interpersonal contact. One example of this phenomenon was begging. In 1944, the District Engineer complained to the Winneba Welfare Committee about 'schoolchildren and children begging in public', noting that 'it was impossible for a European to appear in the native areas of Winneba town without being surrounded by a pack of children all of whom demanded to be given a sum of 3d'.<sup>20</sup> The childish *mentalité* behind these encounters is not difficult to detect: the European was separate, he had wealth and he might be willing to part with some of it. But most children did not have the opportunity to ask Europeans for money – one alternative for literate children was to reach out directly to the metropole.

For a small number of children, literacy and the steamship postal service that from the 1850s connected the Gold Coast to Britain provided a conduit to the metropole through which wealth and information could flow. As so often when writing the history of children, this is a phenomenon documented because of adult concerns, in this case over 'the pernicious art of commercial correspondence'.<sup>21</sup> As reported in the Gold Coast press, from at least the early 1900s 'school children' in coastal towns indulged in 'writing to England for samples, catalogues &c.'. <sup>22</sup> They often used false names and adopted the personae of businessmen who needed both price lists and samples of the merchandise before committing to a larger order – a transaction that would never actually take place.<sup>23</sup> Some were thought to be colluding, by some mysterious means, with 'English lads in City offices'.<sup>24</sup> The focal point of this fraud was

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<sup>20</sup> ADM 23/1/2626, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>21</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *Gold Coast Leader*, February 4, 1911.

<sup>22</sup> 'General News - Sekundi', *Gold Coast Leader*, April 11, 1903.

<sup>23</sup> 'Boys at the Post Office', *Gold Coast Leader*, February 21, 1903.

<sup>24</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *Gold Coast Leader*, February 4, 1911.

the post office, where boys apparently swarmed like ‘humming bees’ to pick up their own mail and tamper with that of others.<sup>25</sup> One editorial in the *Gold Coast Leader* suggested that the clerks identify and detain letters to obviously fictitious persons and that policemen stop boys from entering the letter room altogether.<sup>26</sup> The practice was, indeed, treated as a crime. Two schoolboys in Sekondi, for example, were charged in 1903 with ‘making false declarations in Customs to obtain goods belonging to another party, and with the intent to defraud the Government’.<sup>27</sup> This trans-Atlantic correspondence demonstrates how children exploited literacy, communication technologies and international trading practices to obtain a portion of metropolitan wealth. It also shows that, while the internet fraud that West Africa is notorious for is new, the paradigm of using information technologies to exploit international disparities of wealth is much older.<sup>28</sup> But, while this scam was intelligent and enterprising, it does not tell us much more about the imagined metropole than the example of begging did: the West was simply a source of wealth to be tapped. For a more nuanced examination of the childish metropole, we must leave behind the formulaic languages and practices of business fraud and look towards the more personalised correspondence sent between children in the Gold Coast and Britain.

It is impossible to gauge the scale of letter-writing between children in the imperial metropole and its periphery but it was extensive enough (or caused enough of a concern) to show up in both newspaper and archival records throughout the colonial period. Correspondence with British scouts is particularly well documented because, in the 1920s, batches of suspicious

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Letter from ‘Assu’’, *Gold Coast Leader*, October 18, 1902; ‘Boys at the Post Office’.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Boys at the Post Office’ *Gold Coast Leader*, February 21, 1903..

<sup>27</sup> ‘General News - Sekundi’ *Gold Coast Leader*, April 11, 1903..

<sup>28</sup> Known as *Sakawa* in Ghana and 419 in Nigeria.



letters from the Gold Coast ended up on the desk of the Commissioner for Overseas – who was reportedly ‘very annoyed’.<sup>29</sup> Before children in the Gold Coast could write to their peers in Britain they needed a name and an address. There were both legitimate and more cunning ways to obtain these: enrolling in a school pen pal program, for example, or cribbing the information from the pages of scout newspaper *The Rover*. This aroused adult concern in part because the idiosyncratic language might confuse the reader and embarrass the writer and, more significantly, because the pen letter often blurred into the begging letter or fraudulent proposition. The *Gold Coast Leader* reproduced a sample letter ‘intercepted’ by a gentleman in 1911:

Dear Friend – With much pleasure to let you hear of me again as I was not in town about one month ago. Try and let me have your photo. Please you send requirements on the receipt and oblige. Please tell your familyies [sic] to write me soon as you said. Hope this will reach you well closing with my best wishes to self all your familyies. – I am your dearest, J. K. Dadzie.<sup>30</sup>

This was a letter written in the spirit of friendship but it was also underlain by the prospect of a mutually beneficial exchange and imbued with expectations of modernity.

In these letters British children were typically offered an exchange of African goods for European ones. The contents of these prospective transactions reveal a great deal about childish, but surprisingly sophisticated, constructions of both metropole and periphery.

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<sup>29</sup> Supreme Council Boy Scouts and Girl Guides Association, 1922-1943, ADM 23/1/420, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Editorial Notes’, *Gold Coast Leader*, February 4, 1911.



British children were asked to send paper, handkerchiefs, fountain pens, newspapers, school primers, prayer books and bibles, calendars, photographs and miscellaneous presents. In return they would be promised monkey skins, ostrich feathers, parrots, beads and nuts.<sup>31</sup> Some English girls were offered 'a fine set of Golden Curiosities'.<sup>32</sup> At the most basic level these prospective exchanges mirrored international trade flows and the perceived economic roles and resource endowments of metropole and periphery: Europe as provider of finished goods, knowledge and modernity and Africa as a place of great mineral and natural wealth and exotic, primitive manufactures. But there was more to these propositions. The letters emphasised goods that a European might *want* to send to Africa and that chimed with the benefaction of empire: paper and pens for the aspiring scholar, prayer books for the rescued heathen. And, equally, there was a sense in which Africa was being marketed, shaped to conform to childish imaginaries of the continent in the metropole: a place that offered the exotic fauna of the safari and the limitless gold of adventure stories.<sup>33</sup> But there is evidence, too, that these proposals were not just a trick, that the British child was not seen simply as a mark but as a collaborator who really would benefit from this mutual exchange. The prospective exchange of newspapers and photographs for animal exotica, for example, suggests that the letter writers were motivated, at least in part, by curiosity and that they played upon the (assumed) curiosity of their correspondent and a shared desire to swap the usual for the unusual. And, contrary to the assumptions of the British scouting hierarchy, the proposed transactions were not simply

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<sup>31</sup> W. Esuman-Gwira Sekyi, 'The English Correspondence of the Gold Coast Boys', *Gold Coast Leader*, February 11, 1911; Boy Scouts Association, Northern Territories, ADM 56/1/317, NAG; Boy Scouts, Obuasi, ARG 7/10/1, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>32</sup> Sekyi, a prominent lawyer, also suggested, with no little sarcasm, that local boys believed English girls to be a 'species of angels'. Esuman-Gwira Sekyi, 'English Correspondence', *Gold Coast Leader*, February 11, 1911.

<sup>33</sup> These ideas may have been transmitted to the Gold Coast in publications like *The Rover*.

fraudulent. There are records from the 1940s and 1950s of children in the Gold Coast trying, but failing, to send goods to their counterparts in the metropole. In 1948, for example, the schoolboy J. S. Mensah wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti: 'I want to send only one monkey skin to a friend in England and I am applying for an export license form'.<sup>34</sup> Children who took a less bureaucratic route may have been more successful. Contact between children in the metropole and the periphery was thus not simply about fraud or charity. It was driven by complex ideas about what defined and divided place and what children continued to have in common.

#### Piloting: ambition, aspiration and imperial networks

Another intriguing encounter between metropole and the childish periphery is that between local 'pilot boys' and European sailors and servicemen in the port cities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi during and after the Second World War. This is an encounter that, again, demonstrates how children thought about metropolitan wealth but also offers an insight into how this shaped childish ambition and aspiration. Pilot boys were children and youths, aged roughly twelve to twenty, who, having migrated into the cities or run away from their urban homes, lived in gangs without adult supervision. Most had little or no education. They made a living as underworld intermediaries, 'piloting' newly arrived or stationed Europeans between the delights and dangers of West African nightlife. Most profitably, pilot boys acted as matchmakers between westerners and prostitutes, earning up to a 40 per cent cut of the fee.<sup>35</sup> They were a source of moral panic and corruption, associated not just with the sex industry

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<sup>34</sup> Monkey Skins, 1943-51, ARG 1/1/203, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>35</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 96-8; Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 2; Pilot Boys in Takoradi Area, 1948, WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi; On the Nigerian equivalent of pilots, the boma boys, see Fourchard, 'Invention of Juvenile Delinquency'; Heap, 'Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island'.

but with 'hooliganism, gambling and petty-thieving' – all things, indeed, 'ominous of a wretched future'.<sup>36</sup> Most contemporary observers thought that pilot boys took up their trade simply for the money. Geoffrey Tooth, a psychiatrist who studied delinquency in the Gold Coast, claimed that 'a small boy could, with little effort, earn eighteen shillings a day by haunting the dance halls and bars and effecting introductions to prostitutes'.<sup>37</sup> Busia noted that in Sekondi-Takoradi, the search for profit turned into predation, as pilot boys stole from their drunken clients. More sympathetically, historians of delinquency in Nigeria have seen piloting as a response to urban poverty and a lack of other economic opportunities.<sup>38</sup>

But a nuanced investigation by a Senior Welfare Officer in Sekondi-Takoradi reveals another motive, shaped by a hazy, childish understanding of imperial and economic hierarchies, behind children becoming pilots.<sup>39</sup> Piloting was *not* just about acquisitive criminality. Pilot boys also worked in the legitimate economy as casual, manual labourers on the docks.<sup>40</sup> But, simultaneously, pilot boys disdained *other* work in Sekondi-Takoradi. They did so not for immediately financial reasons but because the harbour in Sekondi-Takoradi – like the Post Office in Cape Coast – was a node in the Atlantic network, a point of contact and exchange, a source of metropolitan wealth and possibility, where information might be found and ambitions realised. Piloting work was motivated, perhaps above all else, by fantasies of escape; the harbour promised both vessel and conduit for that end.<sup>41</sup> The authorities fought a constant

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<sup>36</sup> WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi; Press résumé, February 1945, CO 859/112/2, NAUK.

<sup>37</sup> When compared to wages elsewhere (see Chapter 6) this figure is improbably high and no doubt masks the extreme variability of this type of income. Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Fourchard, 'Invention of Juvenile Delinquency', 124–6; Heap, 'Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island', 58–61.

<sup>39</sup> WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>40</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> On the pervasive fantasy of escape held by adults in contemporary Togo, see Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

battle against young workers who used access to the port to become stowaways. Pilot boys, moreover, saw guiding sailors through the underworld primarily as ‘a means to an end’. The ‘real aim’ of these boys was ‘to make all the contacts possible so that they might be enabled to become seamen or, preferably, to proceed to the United Kingdom or America where they may settle’.<sup>42</sup> Pilot boys wanted ‘all the thrills of an adventurous life’ but – having heard ‘alluring stories...that life abroad is comparatively easier and more lucrative than life in their own country’ – they also wanted the security and prosperity promised by the metropole. A later report, published in 1953, noted that acquiring ‘the language and habits’ of foreign sailors left pilot boys isolated from local society, with a disposition and skill set that made them ‘unemployable except on ships’.<sup>43</sup> Pilot boys are perhaps the most extreme example of the extraversion of the childish imagination but, nonetheless, the phenomenon allows us some insight into how children’s intellectual horizons and ambitions reached beyond the Gold Coast in the colonial period.

There is an important, but more unknowable, gender dimension to the way that piloting shaped childish constructions of the metropole due to girls’ involvement in the sex trade. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, there were reports of young Nigerian girls being trafficked to work as prostitutes in Accra.<sup>44</sup> More than a third of prostitutes in Accra in the 1950s had a young ‘maidservant’ living with them, some of whom were also described as ‘apprentices’.<sup>45</sup> Girls then, would have encountered Europeans within the sex trade and observed the

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<sup>42</sup> The presence of America here is a reminder that the ‘metropole’ was not a single or unchanging Atlantic node. WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Traffic in Women and Children. West Africa, 1941-43, CO 859/60/7, NAUK.

<sup>45</sup> Ioné Acquah, *Accra Survey: A Social Survey of the Capital of Ghana, 1953-1956* (London: London University Press, 1958), 73.

disparities of wealth and power between metropolitan citizen and colonial subject and between European men and African women – but what they made of this is, based on archival sources, impossible to say.

### Information flows

Knowledge about the metropole, and the constructions of place and identity that ensued, were reliant on the acquisition and processing of information. Information flows changed radically in the colonial period and this was pivotal to the creation of the childish idea of the metropole. Children did not just learn from local adults but had access to stores – written, aural and visual – of external knowledge and opinion. But this also leads to an important caveat about the foregoing discussion. Access to these new flows of information was highly uneven, as was the semantic quality of the information itself. This fact, and the nature of the available evidence, means that reconstructions of the childish idea of the metropole pertain to small and exceptional groups of children. Generalising is difficult and inevitably speculative.

The evidence presented thus far has dealt with schoolchildren (or at least workably literate former schoolchildren) and other young people in unusually close contact with the metropole. Literate, urban children were certainly more likely to hear about the metropole because information about the outside world was commonly transmitted in writing towards centres of print culture and colonial administration. The childish imagination – whether literate or illiterate – was also fed by sources of visual and aural information: photographs, advertisements, the cinema, stories and rumour. Even these sources of information about and contact with the metropole were likely more effective for literate children. And information about the metropole was more readily available, to more children, in the later colonial period as contact with empire and the system of the world became more persistent and pervasive. But



this does not mean throwing out the patchy evidence available as being simply unrepresentative. Children's most important conduits for information were probably other children. Even unusual information was likely transmitted and distorted around children's peer networks – and degraded, uneven information itself offers a useful insight into the childish *mentalité*.

It is crucial to note that the childish view of metropolitan power was not necessarily correct or complete: why would it be when flows of information about the metropole were so patchy, asymmetrical and unreliable? The ambitions of pilot boys were apparently based on 'false ideas about life elsewhere'.<sup>46</sup> Commercial correspondents were cautioned that 'there is a great difference between the England and the English one reads about, and the England and the English one actually sees'.<sup>47</sup> What books, schools, films, advertising and institutions missed out, children had to either fill in with local detail, imagination and hearsay, or leave as a tantalising blank in their knowledge. Children's drawings are again a useful source on this. Their pictures reveal a fascination with metropolitan culture and power but, simultaneously, they point to the incomplete understanding that children had of these concepts, the enduring hold of their own experience and the local filters through which they imagined the West. In a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II (Figure 5-4) drawn by an Ewe ten year old in 1956, the monarch was a melange of European and West African pageantry: her robes and crown had the vivid spectrum of *kente* cloth and her sceptre was reminiscent of a linguist's staff. Other pictures hint at the absolute limits of childish understanding. One child dreamt (Figure 5-5) of 'sailing in l[a]unch to England' but his imagined (or perhaps remembered) vessel was improbably

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<sup>46</sup> WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>47</sup> Esuman-Gwira Sekyi, 'English Correspondence'.

equipped for an ocean voyage. And of the metropolitan destination there was no sign: was England simply unfathomable for the artist? The incompleteness of the imagined metropole is, however, important when thinking about the historical and intellectual agency of children. The extraversion of childish dreams and imagination and the childish view of imperial and global hierarchies were perhaps more self-taught and emanant than imposed by adults or outsiders. The childish *mentalité* was colonial but not, in any meaningful sense, colonised.

But, in part, it was the protean, inaccurate nature of the imagined metropole that gave it its power. The metropole was a dream that would never disappoint because it would never be realised. The childish vision of the metropole was not tethered by the dialectic between expectation and experience; a northern child might return home and dismiss Kumasi as a ‘big bush’ but similar disappointments with the metropole did not get fed back into the imperial periphery.<sup>48</sup> But the power of the imagined metropole also came from the kernel of material truth on which it was based. This was a childish vision based on something imagined *and* something real: the metropole, shimmering and golden on the horizon, but also a genuine transaction (witnessed, rumoured or experienced) rooted in commercial exchange or in the performative aspects of giving and receiving, of benevolence and need, or of demonstration and appreciation. For children in the Gold Coast, the encounter with modernity was simultaneously an encounter with empire, inequality and difference.

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<sup>48</sup> Abukari Zeblim, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010.



Figure 5-4. Bote, 'Queen Elizabeth'. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).





Figure 5-5. Bibi Xenko, 'A dream about launch'. Drawing from Augustina Oyindzo, *Six Case Studies of Children in Anumle* (1959).

## Colonial hierarchies and politics

Children could, then, be very aware of the gulf between the places and peoples of metropole and colony. But difference was just one aspect of the imperial project and colonial power. This chapter now turns to the question of whether children in the Gold Coast understood and engaged with political power within the colony. Africanist historiography has tried to restore agency to African (and particularly to subaltern African) historical 'subjects'. It makes sense, therefore, to pose a series of interlinked questions, not just about the novel or uniquely imperial powers wielded over children but also about how children understood, reacted to and even resisted those authorities. Some children also understood that the metropole and the colonial state exercised overarching power in the Gold Coast, just as they understood the metropole to be a place of greater wealth and material modernity than their natal home. The

available evidence suggests, however, that these disparities of wealth and power were *not* seen as contingent. The recognition of inequality was not the same as a critique of inequality. But, equally, adult movements, especially nationalism, were not seen as contingent either. Both social structure and the momentum to change social structures were understood and accepted as is and, in large part, this was because societal change did not fit into the short timescale in which children engaged with the world around them.

Scattered evidence from the 1930s onwards suggests that educated children had a relatively sophisticated understanding of where power lay and how it was exercised in the colonial Gold Coast.<sup>49</sup> The previous section argued that Europeans were seen as powerful and wealthy but children with a more nuanced take on adult authority are also visible in the historical record. One girl in 1950s Agogo, for example, was observed playing hospital with dolls provided by an ethnographer. The child recreated not just the missionary doctor and his patient but the local nurse whose translation made a westerner's medical expertise usable in a colonial context.<sup>50</sup> Further evidence survives because some children wrote to the authorities in the colonial period to request scholarships or other financial assistance. A series of letters from orphans to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, for example, is preserved in the regional archive. These letters pleaded for the direct intercession of the region's highest British official into the child's life. One child appealed to the traditional adult-child relationship described in Chapter 2, asking that the Chief Commissioner 'take me forever or send me to any work you

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<sup>49</sup> There is a lack of evidence about illiterate children in the colonial period and, given the politics of memory surrounding colonialism, this gap is not satisfactorily filled with the testimony of adults.

<sup>50</sup> Anno-Kwakyie, 'Child Training in Agogo', 135–6; On the influence of such colonial intermediaries, see Benjamin N Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L Roberts, (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).



like'. But others updated their appeals to the colonial environment. One promised to 'sacrifice' himself for the government; others pledged to become soldiers in the colonial army. One of these boys also vested all the putative qualities of empire in the Chief Commissioner, 'a man of great acquirements, a doctor... [with] a cosmopolitan education', who had shown 'kindness to we poor sons of Africa', with 'no demarcations of race'.<sup>51</sup>

This stratagem of tailoring the message for its audience is also evident in letters from older children requesting scholarships from the Asanteman Council to attend secondary school in the 1950s.<sup>52</sup> These appeals to local authority were couched in slightly different terms than those to European officials. The letter-writers emphasised their ethnic origins; one boy, for example, stressed that he was 'really Ashanti born'.<sup>53</sup> The benefits of bestowing an education, moreover, would flow not to the colony but to the Asanteman. One boy promised that a continued education would make him 'more useful to the tribe'.<sup>54</sup> A collective letter from Asante students at Achimota College, Accra's prestigious state secondary school opened in 1927, suggested that an increase in funding would be 'very reputable and beneficial to the whole of the Asante State'.<sup>55</sup> The benefactor lauded for his power and generosity, meanwhile, was the Asantehene rather than the Chief Commissioner. One student lamented that 'without the help of "Nananom" [i.e., the Asantehene], I will never succeed'.<sup>56</sup> In both the orphan and scholarship letters, threats were sometimes issued alongside pleas for help. One orphan made a veiled threat to public order: 'If I kill someone', he wrote, 'don't ask'.<sup>57</sup> A pupil at the Presbyterian

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<sup>51</sup> Letters from J.A. to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 2/1/1943 and n.d., Orphans, 1943-52, ARG 1/1/206, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>52</sup> The Asanteman Council was the leading native authority in the colonial Ashanti Region.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from G.M.B. to Asanteman Council, 27/12/1952, MAG 21/15/19, MAK.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from E.O.A. to Asanteman Council, 24/11/1953, Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Asanteman Council Students to Asanteman Council, 19/3/1954, Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from S.Y.D. to Asanteman Council, 7/3/1953, Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> K.B. to Chief Commissioner, 4/10/1945, ARG 1/1/206, NAG Kumasi.

Secondary School promised that without a continued education, he would be 'undone, that is I shall become a vagabond'.<sup>58</sup> These letters chimed with widespread fears of crime in post-war Ashanti being committed by educated but unemployed young men.<sup>59</sup> A boy from Wenchi, meanwhile, suggested that funding his education would cure existing political disorder. 'I am sure', he wrote, 'that if I am awarded a scholarship the disturbances in the town may stop and they [the adults] will realize what the Council is doing for the town's benefit'.<sup>60</sup>

If children understood power, did they necessarily engage with or resist it? Africanist historians have long searched for evidence of agency in their historical subjects. When looking for agency among subaltern groups, resistance is often what has emerged or, at least, engaged the attention of historians. More recently, historians have noted the difficulties of identifying resistance and the binary view of power that the search for resistance can promote.<sup>61</sup> The evidence relating to children in the Gold Coast is ambiguous. There are certainly examples of truculent behaviour directed at representatives of the colonial state. But the identity of these authority figures seems to have been largely incidental and was balanced by a lack of a wider understanding or political motive and a rather overawed, even fawning, response to figureheads of imperial power. Nonetheless, these encounters with European authority were woven into the fabric of colonial childhoods and are worth exploring in some detail. The constraints of the archival record mean that the following discussion is largely restricted to the

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<sup>58</sup> Letter from E.P.A. to Asanteman Council, 11/6/1951, MAG 21/15/19, MAK.

<sup>59</sup> Robbery in Ashanti, 1936-39, ARG 1/1/169, NAG Kumasi; Robberies in Ashanti. Combatting of., 1947-49, ARG 1/1/235, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from J.A.Y.A. to Asanteman Council, 27/10/1955, MAG 21/15/19, MAK.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Allina-Pisano, 'Resistance and the Social History of Africa', *Journal of Social History* 37, 1 (2003): 187-198; F. Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review* 99, 5 (1994): 1516-1545; J. Abbink, Mirjam de Bruijn, and Klaas van Walraven, eds., *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Boston: Brill, 2003).

1940s and 1950s – not coincidentally this was also a period that saw an increasingly radical and broad-based adult critique of colonial power.<sup>62</sup>

Records from the juvenile justice system provide some interesting details on possible resistance by children to colonial power. This was in part because children were direct participants in the judicial process. When brought before the court, children almost always seem to have represented themselves. A ten-year-old accused of stealing a baby's dress in 1952 'made a brilliant defence and proved the charge only a concoction'.<sup>63</sup> In 1955, four boys caught gambling in the street attacked the honesty, integrity and competence of their apprehenders. 'I can write', one policeman was forced to defend himself; another denied 'let[ing] one of you flee because I was friendly with that person'.<sup>64</sup> Children could also subvert the probation reports set before the court. Some were uncommunicative when interviewed by a probation officer. Others were wilfully misleading, like one 'notorious liar' who obstructed the investigation by giving the wrong directions to his house, frustrating attempts to interview the boy's family.<sup>65</sup> Another boy erroneously claimed that he was apprenticed as a carpenter, suggesting that he sought better treatment by claiming to live up to local ideals of a 'useful' childhood.<sup>66</sup> This type of resistance was particularly tempting for migrants or runaways because of the asymmetry of information between probation officer and probationer. In 1954, for example, the court was obliged to commit one child to the Industrial School after he assumed a false name 'to protect his identity' and refused to reveal the exact location of his

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<sup>62</sup> On the political environment in this period, see Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1993); Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-60* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> N.Q.Q., 30/5/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>64</sup> Case 9618, 29/9/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>65</sup> I.M., 3/6/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>66</sup> P.W.T., 9/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

home village.<sup>67</sup> Before and after the judicial process ran its course, children planned and effected escapes from police stations, remand and probation homes, industrial schools and borstals.<sup>68</sup> These are examples of children taking the initiative, but adults, too, could prompt children into reacting to power. One seven-year-old initially admitted to the police that he had been throwing stones but, according to his probation officer, the boy changed his story in court after being 'schooled by his parents'.<sup>69</sup> Away from the judicial system, children were sometimes asked to mislead the tax collector about where their parents were.<sup>70</sup>

These examples of resistance are reminiscent of those attributed to slaves against their masters or colonial subjects against European officials and employers but, while the actions of children were recorded, the motives for and cognitive basis of those actions remain obscure. This raises some difficult questions. How does telling a lie to a parent differ from telling a lie to a colonial official? Is parental power resisted in ways different from colonial power? And to what extent can historians inscribe motive onto the actions of children that were observed by adults? It appears that children rarely differentiated power by its source. The power that children experienced and understood was above all a physical one, felt in a fleeting and sporadic fashion. Understood in this way, children did resist power that coincided, temporally, with colonial rule but their resistance is hard to define as an explicitly anti-colonial phenomenon.

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<sup>67</sup> K.A., 21/10/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>68</sup> However, it is a measure of the dangers involved in claims of 'resistance' that one eleven-year-old – 'not a bad egg' – informed the warden about two other boys planning to escape from the Remand Home in Accra. M.G., 25/4/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG; Other escapes are detailed in, for example, K.A., 2/9/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>69</sup> J.T.A., 16/11/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>70</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 172.

## Generation, politics and nationalism

How did children understand and respond to the nationalist foment of the late-colonial period – or to the politics and powers that constrained, on an abstract scale, the contours of their lives? The evidence suggests that, while children were not unthinking, and while they would stand up for their interests if the situation demanded it, they were not seriously political or politicised, at least on a colonial scale. It is perhaps surprising how parochial children's concerns about power were, how tied to the body, the self and the instant. This returns us to the idea discussed in Chapter 4 that children interacted with the world on a shorter timescale than adults did. For children wrestling with a conceptual model of the world built on instant and observed causation, the political sphere was perhaps too complex to be understood, the temporal gap between social structure and the resolution of individual events was too wide to comprehend and too abstract to resent and resist. For children, power was ever-present, embodied and reactive, lashing out for recent infractions rather than contextualised within a semi-permanent (but permanently changeable) power structure. It is perhaps for this reason that archival traces of children being 'political' often turn out, on closer inspection, to be examples of children reacting to temporary bursts of pain, discomfort or excitement. But did children nonetheless present a wider, more sustained threat to social order? Two aspects will be considered here: first, the threat of children to generational order, felt most acutely amongst adults at the local level; and, second, the threat children posed to imperial order and their involvement in nationalist or anti-colonial movements.

In 1950, Mr Russell, the Assistant Director of Medical Services in Ashanti, wrote to his counterpart in the Education Department to suggest that schoolchildren wore sandals in school to stop the spread of yaws, ulcers and hookworm. This was a potentially sensitive matter



because, as Chapter 2 noted, the right to wear clothing was determined by age, status and social context. Russell, however, argued that there was no reason why ‘the customary politeness whereby sandals are removed by the lower orders on entering the rooms of senior persons of higher rank need be applied to the schools’.<sup>71</sup> The request was passed to the office of the Asantehene who referred it to the Executive Council for consideration. But, in the public debate that followed, Russell’s suggestion mutated into something much more incendiary: that ‘children should be exempted from the courtesy of pulling off their sandals on approach to an elder or chief as had hitherto been the case’. Russell protested to the Public Relations Department that he had been misquoted and would be ‘the last person’ to subvert either ‘the custom of their Country’ or ‘normal good manners’.<sup>72</sup> Four months after Russell floated the idea of sandals for schoolchildren, the Council rejected his plan on cost grounds. The scandal was much ado about nothing but the misinterpretation of Russell’s idea gained traction precisely because it spoke to contemporary anxieties that children were being accelerated through the proper stages of childhood and thereby gaining a premature autonomy and authority. The natural order of generational power was being upended and the young would rule the old.<sup>73</sup> It pays to be sceptical about adult claims that a particular generation of children and youths were uniquely wilful, disobedient and disrespectful, simply because complaints about young people are so common. But there are, nonetheless, indications that children were grasping and exercising new kinds of authority over adults and that they were facilitated by generationally-unique social and economic shifts in the colonial period.

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<sup>71</sup> Russell to Assistant Director of Education, 20/2/1950, Wearing of sandals - school children, 1950, MAG 21/1/134, MAK.

<sup>72</sup> Russell to Public Relations Department, 2/3/1950, Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> I would locate this phenomenon earlier in the life-cycle than ‘youth’, as Waller argues in ‘Rebellious Youth’.

There were two ways in which lines of authority ran from young to old in the colonial period. The first was that children could exert power over adults as an extension of some other adult authority. In one sense this was not new at all. An Akan proverb, for example, suggested that anyone who was greeted at the village edge (*kurotia*) by children throwing stones should immediately apologise to the elders, the assumption being that children were conduits for the authority and opinions of those who raised them.<sup>74</sup> But, of course, children were *not* just being raised by their families, or even villages, in the colonial period and these new authorities also reached out through children into local society. Children were not just taught new techniques of, say, hygiene or knot-tying but expected to teach others. The annual report of the Scout Association, for example, noted that boys had been roaming their communities ticking people off for their lax standards of sanitation.<sup>75</sup> Scouts are perhaps the ultimate example of children being used as vessels for other people's authority, in part because the movement was supposed to mould colonial boys into modernising imperial citizens and in part because their uniforms and pageantry mimicked imperial forms of power.<sup>76</sup> Despite laws forbidding scouts to impersonate government officials (and non-scouts from wearing scout uniforms), authorised and unauthorised troops were used by some Asante chiefs in the 1930s as auxiliary police forces: effecting illegal arrests, executing the will of the tribunal and apparently even extorting money on their behalf.<sup>77</sup> The colonial state was however sometimes prepared to turn a blind eye to such infractions of the law. Scouts were used as messengers in the immediate aftermath

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<sup>74</sup> Note, too, that this policing of the *kurotia* - that liminal no-man's land between nature and culture - reinforces the association of children with the wild and the chaotic. Kofi Asare Opoku, *Hearing and Keeping: Akan Proverbs* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1997), 43.

<sup>75</sup> Boy Scouts Annual Reports, CSO 28/4/5, NAG; see also Social Services Rendered By Schoolboys, 1943, CSO 28/7/1, NAG.

<sup>76</sup> On the imperial and African context of scouting, and the efforts of Europeans to control the movement, see Parsons, *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement*.

<sup>77</sup> ARG 1/10/46, NAG Kumasi; ARG 7/10/1, NAG Kumasi.

of the outbreak of the Second World War. In one stirring example of derring-do, two scouts in Nsawam stumbled upon a graverobber, alerted the authorities and then helped to carry out an arrest, for which they were awarded scouting's highest honour in 1945.<sup>78</sup>

The second aspect of this generational reversal of power was that children were literally natives of colonial modernity and, as such, often had a firmer grip on the social and technological flux of the first half of the twentieth century. As education became more common, for example, the lines of intellectual credibility that ran from adult to child discussed in Chapter 4 began to falter. New asymmetries of information gathering, manipulation and dissemination sprang up; the axis was redefined, *de facto*, by age. This could result in predatory behaviours, like the urban children who haunted the railway station in Accra, selling expired railway tickets to illiterate farmers.<sup>79</sup> Or, another example, the fourteen-year-old who took advantage of his illiterate father, 'mishandled' the takings in the family shop and 'made use of the money by ordering cameras and footballs from the United Kingdom'.<sup>80</sup> Or it could result in co-operative, mutually-beneficial behaviours that nonetheless changed the way that children were seen, and saw themselves, in relation to their elders: the child who wrote letters or rendered accounts for the family business, for example, or the child engaged in Mass Education campaigns to teach adults to read (Figure 5-6).

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<sup>78</sup> Boy Scouts, 1941-47, CSO 28/4/1, NAG; the subsequent trial on 6/7/1945 is detailed in Nsawam District Magistrate's Court, SCT 8/5/48, NAG.

<sup>79</sup> B.T., 1/4/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>80</sup> S.E., 26/4/1956, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

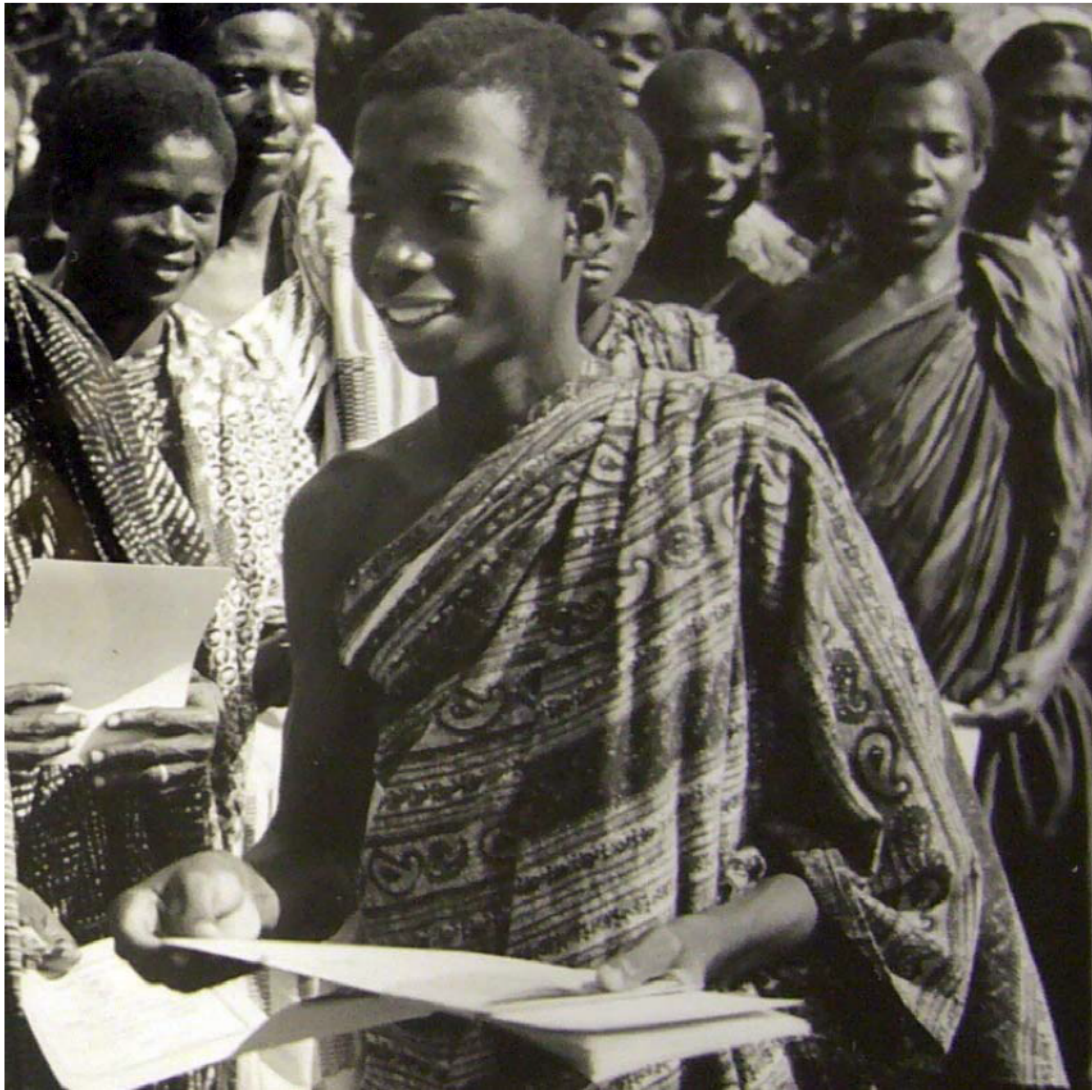


Figure 5-6. Mass education campaign, c.1950s, INF 10/121, National Archives, UK.

These challenges to generational order were, however, small in scale and effect. Of greater concern to colonial observers was the politicisation of children, particularly school pupils, after the Second World War. The archival evidence of children's involvement in political protest is in fact fragmentary and inconclusive. Children are very visible in films and photographs of nationalist protest and activism in this period.<sup>81</sup> But physical proximity to

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, footage of CPP rallies in the Jean Rouch film *Jaguar*.



adults is not proof of children's involvement in the adult world.<sup>82</sup> Further details can be found in legal records. In 1956, for example, a twelve-year-old boy was charged with being part of a crowd of children throwing stones at a 'propaganda van' of the opposition National Liberation Movement in Bukom Square, Accra; the boy was found not guilty and no further details of the events were recorded.<sup>83</sup> One probation officer discovered that during the 1948 Accra riots his charge – then eleven years old – had been shot in the leg. But the 'stray bullet' wounded the boy while he was 'roaming about' rather than participating in the unrest, suggesting that children may have observed political foment only from its periphery.<sup>84</sup> Some observers explicitly linked political disorder to delinquent behaviour. One child was described as having arrived in Accra when 'hooliganism was at its height' and, 'impressed by the revolt of the period', he 'learnt to smoke and drink in beer bars'.<sup>85</sup> But there is little evidence to support this as a general trend and it would certainly be a mistake to recategorise juvenile criminality or anti-social behaviour as an inchoate protest against colonialism.<sup>86</sup>

If subaltern forms of resistance are unconvincing, what about more traditional political activity? Historians of East and South Africa have identified schools as sites of political awakening and organisation for older children, who were then able to pull younger children along in their wake.<sup>87</sup> The Watson Commission on the 1948 riots did comment on the dangerous precedent set by the 'the disorders and strikes that occurred in some schools and in Achimota during the disturbances'. These actions were likened to a 'virus': insidious,

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<sup>82</sup> This is a methodological weakness of Ariés' use of paintings in the foundational text of the historiography of childhood, *Centuries of Childhood*.

<sup>83</sup> Case 6539, 12th Dec, 1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>84</sup> K.B., 10/3/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>85</sup> P.A., 25/2/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>86</sup> Contrast this with the Soweto Uprising, where the seemingly criminal actions of youth gangs blurred into politically-directed violence. Glaser, *Bo Tsotsi*.

<sup>87</sup> Glaser, "We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis"; Summers, 'Subterranean Evil and Tumultuous Riot'.



infectious and in danger of spreading. But the Watson Commission also expressed disquiet that African witnesses had not fully appreciated the 'the dangers of such occurrences'.<sup>88</sup> There were two mutually-reinforcing reasons for such local insouciance in regard to politicised children. First, ideas about the relationship of age to seniority, power and wisdom made it hard to even conceive of children as political agents; any threat to power was thus transient, an insignificant ripple in the natural order. Second, those African observers may have accurately gauged that children were apolitical (though not apathetic) during the events of 1948. Both themes emerge in archival records relating to an ostensibly political irruption of children in Ashanti, a year after the riots that had convulsed the colony.

The procession of the new Governor, Sir Charles Arden Clarke, through central Kumasi in 1949 is a useful example of the illusory nature of children's political involvement. In response to allegations that the Governor's reception was marred by 'rank indiscipline in the Kumasi Division Primary School', the school board convened an investigation into the event, welcoming the chance to root out 'this growing cancer which will eat the heart of child-morality'.<sup>89</sup> The indiscipline surrounded the 'rough' reception the Governor met from the school pupils who, arrayed along the parade route by their schoolmasters, supposedly responded to the dignitary's arrival with a chorus of hooting and booing. The investigation tried to link the disorder to, first, the politicisation of children by their teachers and, second, to the activities of secret societies run by the pupils themselves; the air was thick with nationalist conspiracy and party rivalry and, in this adult realm, children were either dupes or

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<sup>88</sup> Great Britain, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast 1948* (London: Colonial Office, 1948), 67.

<sup>89</sup> Report of the Board of Governors of the Kumasi Division Primary School of the investigation into the behaviour of the pupils of the school on parade during His Excellency the Governor's Visit to Kumasi on September 27. 1949, MAG 1/15/16, MAK.

interlopers. But this, it turned out, was all a mirage. The charges were fatuous, the disorder entirely incidental, the teachers uninterested in winning youthful acolytes, and those secret societies more concerned with the moral economy of the schoolroom than with any post-colonial settlement.

Arden-Clarke arrived in Kumasi on 27 September 1949. The streets were busy with spectators long before the Governor made his approach to the Assembly Hall. Schools shepherded their pupils to separate vantage points and settled in for the wait. The first instance of disorder occurred when, with no Governor in sight, the pupils of Kumasi Division Primary School (KDPS) began to flag from 'long-standing tiredness' and then sat or squatted on the road without asking a teacher for permission. A policeman approached – 'bossingly' – and ordered or physically pushed them to stand up, at which point the children responded by booing.<sup>90</sup> Sometime later a man appeared on horseback, 'dressed like a cowboy', with a label on his body that read "We demand S.G. [Self Government], nothing more, nothing less".<sup>91</sup> The rider then engaged in an 'uncurbed display' that included 'audaciously instructing the children to say "S.G."', while their teachers 'warned them not to mind him'.<sup>92</sup> The actions of the 'funny horseman' caused 'a great deal of laughter and noise', but nothing that witnesses could properly describe as disorder or disturbances.<sup>93</sup> The horseman's behaviour was investigated as the catalyst for the final incident of disorder, and the initial cause of the complaint, the allegedly rough reception given to the Governor. But witness testimony suggests that this accusation was groundless. There was no hooting (a serious sign of disrespect) at the

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<sup>90</sup> Testimony of Mr Hemens, Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Testimony of Mr Bosompen and Mr Gambrah, Ibid. 'Self-Government Now' was the slogan of Nkrumah's newly-formed Convention People's Party.

<sup>92</sup> Testimony of Mr Gambrah, Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Testimony of Miss Cobbina, Miss Lyall, Mr Bosempen and Mr Gambrah, Ibid.

Governor's procession but instead 'a yell of joy from the children when they saw the first car'. Some children mistook the Chief Commissioner for the Governor and 'they yelled in approbation and waved'. But when the Governor himself passed 'there was no rough noise'.<sup>94</sup>

How, then, should this instance of 'disorder' be interpreted? Clearly it had a real impact on concerned adults at the time but its historical significance lies in the (largely negative) findings it points towards regarding children's intellectual engagement with colonial power. The imperial context did not cause children to experience and react to power in fundamentally different ways. When the children took exception to the policeman they were not reacting to him as a representative of the colonial state but as someone who, on a single occasion, overstepped his authority and made them physically uncomfortable. When children laughed and cheered at the S.G. cowboy they were reacting to a novel, amusing and outrageous sight – and to an apparition, moreover, who exhorted them to misbehave and subvert the authority of their teachers. Perhaps some children were swept up momentarily by anti-colonial sentiment but theirs was not a well-rounded critique of imperial power.<sup>95</sup> One witness reported that as the horseman 'passed to and fro, sometimes furiously...the children said "S.G." is coming'.<sup>96</sup> Here was another idea that, like the concepts of nature and modernity discussed in Chapter 4, was made corporeal and mobile in the childish mind: a slogan embodied and dressed up; Self Government was cheered, yes, but probably not well understood. The *positive* reaction to the Governor's appearance, meanwhile, was consistent with other evidence

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<sup>94</sup> Testimony of Mr Hemens, Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> This is not to say that political awareness is necessary to effect political change. As the oral testimonies collected by Pohlandt-McCormick show, the Soweto Uprising reached critical mass because children who did not understand the concept of protest were swept into the initial march and politicised by the momentum of the Uprising itself. *'I Saw a Nightmare...' Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976.*

<sup>96</sup> Testimony of Mr Lartey, MAG 1/15/16, MAK.

(discussed further below) of how children reacted to figures of authority who possessed or symbolised great power but who, nonetheless, never directly exerted that power over children.

But, even if the ‘disorder’ was superficial, insular or entirely invented, what of the school politics it was supposed to have emerged from – was this, too, a product of paranoid imagination? It was in the ‘secret societies’ that children appeared most political.<sup>97</sup> But theirs was a peculiar kind of politics, superficially echoing the late-colonial foment of adult nationalism but, beneath the surface, insular and short-termist. There were two societies at the KDPS, the Young Conventionists and the Union Society. The name of the first of these societies was thought to be a reference to Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party. But the investigation found no evidence that either society functioned as a youth wing of a nationalist party or that parties were recruiting in schools, despite many teachers being party activists. Indeed, adults seemed uninterested in children as political actors. One teacher explained that, despite his support of Nkrumah’s CPP, he had ‘never made the children catch the feeling’.<sup>98</sup> On the day of the parade itself another teacher, a member of both the CPP and the Asante Youth Association, went as far as abandoning his class before the Governor arrived, ‘to avoid any association with any untoward act by the Schools or by the Spectators’ – although, he admitted, ‘I really did not know why I anticipated this’.<sup>99</sup> As for the societies themselves, their activities were mundane and conservative. They pushed for children’s rights but seemed to accept both their place in the school system and their duties to it. The KDPS societies were dedicated to the ‘weal of the class’. They opposed collective punishments, joined together to

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<sup>97</sup> Despite being drawn from the oldest pupils in the school, the secret society members were still explicitly described as children.

<sup>98</sup> Testimony of Mr Afiensu, MAG 1/15/16, MAK.

<sup>99</sup> Testimony of B. K. Poku, Ibid.

complete punishments assigned to individuals and protested against class teachers contracting out their disciplinary duties to other members of staff. But the societies also tried to control the behaviour of their own members, acting to 'check boys such as pay no attention to teaching' and expelling boys who failed to abide by the rules.<sup>100</sup> Even this hint of political activity, however, provoked a strong reaction from the school authorities. The assembled pupils were lectured that 'they were too young to engage their minds in politics; that politics is a subject for the old and experienced; that theirs was to pursue the course of learning at school for which their parents have sent them'. The societies had, in fact, barely peeked beyond the classroom to the colonial and imperial context, so when the children subsequently 'promised to take the advice seriously', they probably meant it.<sup>101</sup>

But what is clear from this incident is that childhoods were never isolated from wider society. Even if children were uncomprehending of or indifferent to the political struggles unfolding around them, the history of colony and empire still coloured their lives. Nowhere is this ambiguous phenomenon clearer than in the excitement and pomp surrounding Ghanaian independence in 1957. Children were prominent in the iconography of decolonisation simply because of the metaphor that a new country was being born (Figure 5-7). But they were inevitably involved in decolonisation, too, even if it was the excitement rather than the political importance of that moment that swept them along. Accra, in particular, became an even more alluring destination than normal. A spate of runaways came to the attention of the probation

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<sup>100</sup> Testimony of Kwasi Buakye, *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*



service in 1957 after children absconded to the capital to see the celebrations or the ‘wonderful decorations in Accra’.<sup>102</sup> But theirs was not a notably political excitement.



Figure 5-7. BP (West Africa) Advert. A young man welcomes Independence. Printed in the *Sunday Mirror*, 1957.

Another example of the peculiarly childlike appreciation of this epochal political moment comes from a schoolboy's account of the March 1957 visit of the Duchess of Kent to the Gold Coast. This event caught the imagination of Charles Okine, a middle school pupil, much more fervently than Ghana's imminent independence, which the royal visit was intended to celebrate. In a letter flushed with excitement, Okine told the children's page of the *Sunday Mirror* about his building anticipation over the previous months, weeks and days. Finally, on the eve of the visit, he spent the night on a 'sleepless pillow' before rising at 3.30am to troop to the airport with his flag.<sup>103</sup> The Duchess's plane, perhaps the ultimate symbol of metropolitan

<sup>102</sup> Y.B., 4/4/1957 and K.T., 26/3/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>103</sup> Uncle Tom, 'Impressions of the Visit of the Duchess of Kent', *Sunday Mirror*, March 10, 1957.

materialism, arrived with a ‘mighty humming’.<sup>104</sup> Two years later a different schoolboy, Bibi Xenko, drew the plane in flight, ‘H.R.H.’ inscribed on its body and a waving crowd below, remembering it as ‘the most pleasant thing that I have ever seen in my life’.<sup>105</sup> When the Duchess stepped onto Ghanaian soil, Okine reacted simply: ‘Oh, what a beauty!’<sup>106</sup> Power certainly fascinated children but fascination did not equate to an uncritical acceptance of power. Even in thrall to royal glamour, Charles Okine was more discerning than his breathless prose suggests. It was not simply the Duchess’s plane that impressed him, nor was it her direct aura of power and wealth. Instead, Okine chose to note her conformity to *his* ideals of poise and behaviour; he approved of both her ‘simplicity’ and the “‘I-am-pleased-to be-in-Ghanaland-on-an-occasion-such-as-this” expression on her face’.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

For all its limitations, the intellectual history of children is still worth pursuing. The overarching lesson of this chapter is that childhood intimately shapes patterns of thought. Childhood imposes certain physiological and psychological parameters on what children think about and how those thoughts are formed. But these thoughts are also textured by experiences of childhood that are very specific to time and place. Above all, we see evidence of children wrestling to understand their place in the world. Whether they were thinking about how humans were separated from the natural world, or marvelling at how modernity might temper the dangers of childhood, or considering how the interests, resources and prospects of children and people from elsewhere in the world differed from their own, children in the Gold

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Bibi Xenko, ‘The Duchess of York arriving: the most pleasant thing I have seen in my life’. Drawing from Oyindzo, ‘Six Case Studies of Children in Anumle’.

<sup>106</sup> Uncle Tom, ‘Impressions of the Visit of the Duchess of Kent’, March 10, 1957.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Coast displayed a vivid curiosity towards the time and place in which they lived. Children on the imperial periphery grew up in a period of great historical transformation but theirs were lives not just lived but thought about, often with anxiety and with trepidation, but also with excitement, hope and interest. Examining their intellectual history reveals African children as significantly more complex beings than the ciphers or victims they are often assumed to be, whose thoughts were shaped by history, but whose minds remained their own.

## Part Three

### The economics of childhood

## Chapter 6

### Production

Work was a central experience of colonial childhoods. In this chapter I argue that child labour was transformed in the colonial period and remained an integral part of the economy. The first section examines how children were exploited in those economic sectors closely associated with colonialism: mining and industry, government service and employment in foreigners' homes. The chapter then turns to the role of children in the 'African' economy, primarily domestic labour, commerce and agricultural production, including the cocoa export industry. The second section outlines the changes and, perhaps more striking, the continuities in the use of child labour in the rural economy. The third section explores the more radical changes that occurred in urban areas. The final section assesses what made child labour uniquely important to the colonial economy and explores how the experiences of working children differed from those of working adults.

#### Child labour in the 'colonial' economy

Although I argued earlier that historians have over-emphasised the 'colonial' aspects of the history of child labour in Africa, it remains crucial to document children who worked for European firms, families and states in the twentieth century. At the most basic level, the phenomenon is one of the clearest examples of historical change in child labour practices. But children's involvement in the colonial sector of the economy is also a difficult subject to analyse. Perhaps due to growing metropolitan and international distaste for child labour (see



Chapter 3), children employed by Europeans tend to appear in the archives obliquely or accidentally. The evidence that survives is partial, patchy and impressionistic. There are no statistical overviews that can give us a sense of the scale of child labour, nor do records survive from individual firms. Unlike in colonial Zimbabwe, where there is sustained evidence of children working in settler agriculture, it is rather dangerous to judge the reliance of the colonial economy on child labour from the fragmentary information that survives about the Gold Coast.<sup>1</sup> In this section I collate evidence from several colonial sectors of the economy – the mining industry, expatriate firms and concessions, government and public works, and domestic labour in European households – that, collectively, suggest that the sight of an African child working for a European would have been an unsurprising one. The evidence is too piecemeal to explore the counter-factual of whether the ‘colonial’ economy could have functioned without African children to work in it – but certainly without them the ‘colonial’ economy would have looked very different.

It is hard not to balk at the idea of a child working down a mine. To labour in darkness, in dangerous and claustrophobic conditions, is bad enough – to do so behalf of big capital multiplies the offence to contemporary ideals of childhood. Perhaps for this reason, the use of child labour in mining has attracted significant comment from campaigners, from Engels onwards, and historians alike.<sup>2</sup> Already a staple of the historiography of western child labour, mining has now begun to attract the attention of Africanists. Van Onselen, Grier and Cleveland have shown how children in Southern Rhodesia and Angola were involved in both

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<sup>1</sup> Grier, *Invisible Hands*.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, trans by. Florence K. Wischnewetzky (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008 [1845/1885]), 241–60.

the direct production of ores and in ancillary roles around the mines.<sup>3</sup> In the Gold Coast, while there is little evidence that children were involved in underground work in the twentieth century, mining companies certainly profited from child labour.<sup>4</sup> In a 1930 document that was explicitly designed to play down the significance of child labour in the Gold Coast (see Chapter 3), an official admitted that ‘a few boys and girls are employed in the Mines’.<sup>5</sup> In 1939, the Chief Inspector of Labour, J. R. Dickinson, made a more detailed statement about the industry, prompted by a circular from Malcolm MacDonald in the Colonial Office on child labour in the colonies.<sup>6</sup> Dickinson admitted that the labour laws that banned the employment of under-fourteens in industrial settings were ‘generally unknown’. The mining industry even had a legacy regulation that allowed women and boys aged twelve to fourteen to be employed in surface work with written permission from the labour inspector – though it was also said that ‘in practice permission is never given’. Regardless, children seem to have readily found work above ground. Boys were employed by mines as ‘grass cutters, water boys, messengers, apprentices and the like’. Girls, meanwhile, were employed as ‘diamond sorters and cooks’. Following Dickinson’s investigations, the mining companies apparently agreed to put ‘their houses in order’.<sup>7</sup> By employing children in low-skilled roles, the mining sector was able to

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<sup>3</sup> Todd Cleveland, ‘Minors in Name Only: Child Laborers on the Diamond Mines of the Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (Diamang), 1917-1975’, *Journal of Family History* 35, 1 (2010): 91–110; Beverly Grier, ‘Invisible Hands: The Political Economy of Child Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1930’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, 1 (1994): 39–40; Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 124–5.

<sup>4</sup> The death of 41 ‘boys’ in a mining accident near Sekondi in 1931 probably refers to young men and is an example of the frequent slippage in age-related terminology discussed in Chapter 1. Inquest, 5/6/1934, SCT 22/10/3, NAG. Given the evidence from elsewhere in Africa, it is doubtful that there was no use at all of child labour in underground mining. District-level records may reveal more information but there was, for example, no mention of child labour in reports that I surveyed from the gold mining town of Obuasi dated between 1926 and 1951: Obuasi Reports, ARG 7/20/1-10, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>5</sup> Questionnaire sent regarding Congress in Geneva 1931 on children of non-European origin, 7/3/1930, ADM 11/1/1052, NAG.

<sup>6</sup> Colonial Office Circular from Malcolm MacDonald, 29/9/1938, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

<sup>7</sup> J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1/6/1939, *Ibid.*

deploy stronger, more productive and more expensive adult labour elsewhere. As the rest of this chapter will show, a similar pattern is evident in the use of children in African-dominated sectors of the economy.

Expatriate firms were also increasingly important in brokering the export trade in agricultural products. Trading companies benefitted from the existing use of children as porters to transfer goods to their commercial stations. But they also employed children directly. Figure 6-1 shows a young boy in the yard of the Basel Mission Trading Company, circa 1905, in Accra. His exact role is unclear but he is wearing the same uniform as other workers in the yard, suggesting that he is more than just a bystander. Further evidence comes from 1930, when it was reported that 'in a few commercial towns Kroo boys are employed in handling cargo in the factories'.<sup>8</sup> Particularly in the early twentieth century, child labour was also used in the direct production of goods for export. Figure 6-2 and Figure 6-3 show adolescent children employed on a coffee plantation and cutting and hauling timber. There are some problems with designating the use of child labour in these sectors as specifically 'colonial', however. One is that the surviving evidence is often ambiguous. The photograph of an adolescent girl weaving cotton in the British National Archives, for example, might be an offshoot of either the small pre-existing cotton industry or one of the experimental schemes funded by Europeans in the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, evidence of European firms using child labourers to grow

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<sup>8</sup> Questionnaire sent regarding Congress in Geneva 1931 on children of non-European origin, 7/3/1930, ADM 11/1/1052, NAG. The Kroo were migrant community from Liberia who often worked as dockers and surf-boats in the coastal towns.

<sup>9</sup> *Girl spinning Cotton.*, n.d., CO 1069/34/109, NAUK; On the history of European attempts to commercialise cotton agriculture from the mid-nineteenth century, see R. E Dumett, 'Obstacles to Government-Assisted Agricultural Development in West Africa: Cotton-Growing Experimentation in Ghana in the Early Twentieth Century', *Agricultural History Review* 23, 2 (1975): 156–172; B. M Ratcliffe, 'Cotton Imperialism: Manchester Merchants and Cotton Cultivation in West Africa in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *African Economic History*, 11 (1982): 87–113.

newer crops perhaps survives because these enterprises were experimental and relatively well documented – and not because their labour practices were exceptional. Later in the colonial period, production of cocoa increased rapidly thanks to African peasant producers, who themselves relied heavily on child labour. The ‘coloniality’ of child labour in this sector thus emerges less from direct employment by Europeans than from the product concerned being destined for export.

As well as acquiescing to the employment of children in various industries, the colonial state itself made use of child labour, albeit in a limited way and less often as the colonial period progressed. The employment of children was generally ad hoc and short term. Money was sometimes the motivation. In 1930s Lawra, in the far north of the Northern Territories, boys at the junior school printed tax tickets for the native authority to save the cost of having them printed in the south; this continued until 1939, when one of the boys was employed full-time in the role because he was ‘too big’ to carry on to middle school.<sup>10</sup> Crises in the availability of adult labour also caused the state to employ children temporarily, as with the use of Boy Scouts as messengers in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> In Winneba in 1913, officers noted that the Public Works Department employed children aged ten to thirteen to carry thirty-pound loads of sand.<sup>12</sup> In Cape Coast it was reported in 1931 that the Public Works Department made infrequent use of child labour to build and maintain roads.<sup>13</sup> Tidying up roads and paths was already a common job for children and, as this implies, one reason for the colonial state’s use of child labour was the preference for mobilising

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<sup>10</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> ARG 1/10/46, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>12</sup> District Commissioner, Winneba, to Commissioner, Central Province, 14/1/1914, Child Labour, 1931 1912, ADM 23/1/207, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>13</sup> District Commissioner, Cape Coast to Commissioner, Central Province, 24/8/1931, Ibid.



existing forms of labour rather than inventing entirely new ones. Indeed, the presence of children in the colonial workforce may have largely been the result of state employees continuing to rely on children as mates or helpers, like fifteen-year-old Salifu Busanga, who was employed directly by a sanitation labourer in Accra until the older man dismissed him for laziness and dishonesty.<sup>14</sup> And, as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7, as late as the 1950s foreign firms and state enterprises employed adolescent apprentices in their workshops.

Children were perhaps more important to European employees of the colonial state than they were to the direct functioning of the colonial state itself. European, Indian, Syrian and Lebanese contractors, civil servants, missionaries and businessmen frequently employed African children to work in their homes. Boys tended to be employed to do cleaning, gardening and laundry. Girls tended to be employed as cooks and nursemaids.<sup>15</sup> American soldiers stationed in Takoradi during the Second World War paid boys a few shilling a week to tidy their quarters, shine their shoes and do their laundry.<sup>16</sup> Unlike in other sectors of the 'colonial' economy, the use of children in domestic service may have increased over the colonial period as the expatriate population grew. The European home in the Gold Coast is a rather opaque, but intriguing, workplace. Figure 6-4 and Figure 6-5, photographs of the Basel missionaries Friedrich and Rosa Ramseyer with two houseboys, show that children working as domestic servants were placed in unusually intimate contact with European adults and, simultaneously, expected to conform to distinctively European standards of dress and

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<sup>14</sup> S.B., 20/11/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>15</sup> S.B., 20/11/1952, Ibid.; Y.F., 24/2/1955; A.G., 10/3/1955; E.D., 16/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; S.A., 3/1/1957; M.G., 14/5/1957; A.K., 24/11/1955, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>16</sup> Diary of Bernice B. McCormack, 1942-1944, *The Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project*, n.d., <http://library.uncg.edu/dp/wv/results34.aspx?i=5067&s=3>.



decorum. Although there are few detailed sources on working conditions, domestic service would be an interesting topic for future oral history research.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 6-1. Basel Mission Trading Company Accra yard, with [Mr] Hafermalz, c.1904-5, QU-30.003.0137, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

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<sup>17</sup> Children employed by Europeans may have been important vectors for the ideas about metropole and colony discussed in Chapter 5. The European household may also have been an unusually tense working environment, in which all the racial tensions of colonialism were played out in miniature, as described in Ferdinand Oyono, *Houseboy*, trans. by John Reed (London: Heinemann, 1990).



Figure 6-2. Curing House and Water Supply Vats, Miller Bros. coffee plantation, Kubi Kur, n.d., CO 1069/34/11, National Archives, UK.



Figure 6-3. 'Timber Cutting - Hauling a dressed log through bush en route for Creek. Series No.8.', n.d. CO 1069/34/17, National Archives, UK.





Figure 6-4. Friedrich Ramseyer, 'Mrs Ramseyer and a house-boy picking roses in the garden', c.1896-1906, QD-32.024.0138, Basel Mission Picture Archive.



Fig 6-5. Friedrich Ramseyer, 'My room - last one to the left on the second floor. Lunch time eating fufu, Kofi bringing me eggs to replace meat', 1896-1906. QD-30.044.0087, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

## Children in the rural economy

The colonial Gold Coast remained a largely rural society and economy and, as such, the most common forms of child labour related to agriculture, food production and domestic chores. Although the rural sector is the least documented part of the economy, we can still reconstruct the role that child labourers played. Children were involved at every stage of the rural production process. They were often confined to the low-skill, and therefore low-status, tasks commensurate with their relative lack of strength and experience. Children were involved in direct production but also in enabling roles – chores, childcare and maintenance of the homestead – that allowed adults to concentrate on labour that required greater strength or skill. Rural work also gave children a significant autonomy: to combine work with play or to refashion work as play and to work for themselves or without supervision (discussed in the next chapter).

Food farming was a crucial task for children. Children were useful on farms long before they were strong. This is evident in many sources but a particularly striking example was two boys living in Dunkwa in 1934, whose father was involved in an accident on the farm. They were not strong enough to carry him back and had to fetch an older male relative, by which time their father was unconscious and could not be saved.<sup>18</sup> Children's agricultural duties included weeding, harvesting and transporting crops, carrying tools and supplies to the farm (Figure 6-6) and generally assisting stronger and more capable adults.<sup>19</sup> For the most part children worked for their own families or for the household in which they lived. But it was not only households that required food and, in the colonial period, children were used by mission

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<sup>18</sup> ADM 23/1/2309, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>19</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 194–9.

stations and schools to grow produce (Figure 6-7). As children grew older they were given more complex tasks and more autonomy to work for themselves. Agriculture in the Gold Coast was highly gendered but, in general, children's low-skill and low-status agricultural roles were quite flexible until about the age of ten; at this point they took on other, gender-specific, tasks in the household and, increasingly, did the work of men and women in the fields.<sup>20</sup> One crucial gender distinction was in the marketing of produce, which was usually the responsibility of girls rather than boys. Girls were encouraged to trade on their own, and went further afield as they grew older (see Chapter 7).

Agriculture was not a timeless industry. Cash crop farming displaced some subsistence cultivation and created new roles in planting, harvesting and processing, as well as ancillary jobs in transportation. Figure 6-8 to Figure 6-10, from the Basel Mission archives, show the use of child labour in the palm oil trade at the turn of the century. Children were used to process nuts into oil and to transport the finished product, both to local markets and to coastal factories. In the twentieth century, the cocoa boom had a similar impact. Children were used on family farms and, less commonly, also worked for non-kin employees. The communal task of splitting cocoa pods was described by Kyei as 'a grand occasion of reciprocal service'.<sup>21</sup> Children were again used to transport cocoa but the rise of lorries and the railroad meant that long-distance portage became less common than carrying the crop to local or regional transport hubs.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 62–4.

<sup>21</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 26–7.

<sup>22</sup> Commissioner, Central Province to Colonial Secretary, 31/4/1914, ADM 23/1/207, NAG Cape Coast; Akurang-Parry, 'The Loads Are Heavier than Usual'.



Rural child labour was subject to significant regional differentiation. On the coast, marine fishing was the economic mainstay. What is striking here is the delayed entry of children into direct production. Boys did not join their fathers on board fishing boats until they were ten to twelve years old because of the strength required to work the nets and the dangers posed by the sea.<sup>23</sup> Girls were excluded from marine fishing altogether. In safer riverine areas children, including girls, were more directly involved in fishing, sometimes without adult supervision.<sup>24</sup> But, in both coastal and riverine environments, younger children played important supporting roles in the fishing industry. As Figure 6-11 shows, children were used to pull in nets from the beach, an example of how the relative weakness of individual children could be offset by using lots of them to achieve a particular task. On the busier fishing beaches around Accra, helping with nets and equipment and moving the catch on to markets or to waiting transport were popular ways for children to earn a casual wage.<sup>25</sup> Just as with the products of agriculture, children processed the fishing catch, for example by applying heat to remove shells.<sup>26</sup>

Animal husbandry was also important. In areas of mixed farming, children were often responsible for poultry and small livestock: letting the animals out in the morning, loosely supervising them during the day and putting them back in the evening.<sup>27</sup> In the pastoral societies of the Northern Territories, boys herded cattle for long periods in distant pastures.<sup>28</sup> As with other forms of rural child labour, children worked further from adults as they got older and took responsibility for teaching and supervising younger children. Although

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<sup>23</sup> *Preliminary Report of a Social Survey of Egya I* (Legon, Ghana: University College of Ghana, 1960), 92.

<sup>24</sup> *Shell Fishers, Volta River*, n.d., CO 1069/34/112, NAUK.

<sup>25</sup> E.A., 28/10/1954; E.D.L., 28/10/1954; K.G., 28/7/1955; A.L., 4/8/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG. As elsewhere in the thesis, these are references to probation reports.

<sup>26</sup> *Shell fishing, Volta River. Applying heat to extract fish from shells*, n.d., CO 1069/34/109, NAUK.

<sup>27</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 198.

<sup>28</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 21–5.

herding was a marker of growing maturity in pastoral societies, the varying cultures of labour in the Gold Coast meant that what could be a source of pride in one region could elicit mockery in another. In Ashanti, for example, cattle were associated with parasitic insects and, Kyei recalled, a northern child seen herding by his Asante peers would be taunted with a chant of 'little, little jigger parasite'.<sup>29</sup> This is a useful reminder that any natural affinity working children might feel for each other still had to struggle against ingrained cultural prejudice and perhaps also an instinct for cruelty.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 98.

<sup>30</sup> An interesting parallel exists here with nineteenth-century France, where non-kin shepherd boys were associated with the 'wild' and 'supernatural'. Colin Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France: Work, Health, and Education Among the 'Classes Populaires'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56–7.



Figure 6-6. Rudolf Fisch, 'Farmers on the way to work, with tools and with their favourite animals', 1907-1908. D-30.21.001, Basel Mission Picture Archive.



Figure 6-7. Wilhelm Erhardt, 'Obemyemi school-children working in the school yard', c.1899-1912. D-30.07.032, Basel Mission Picture Archive.



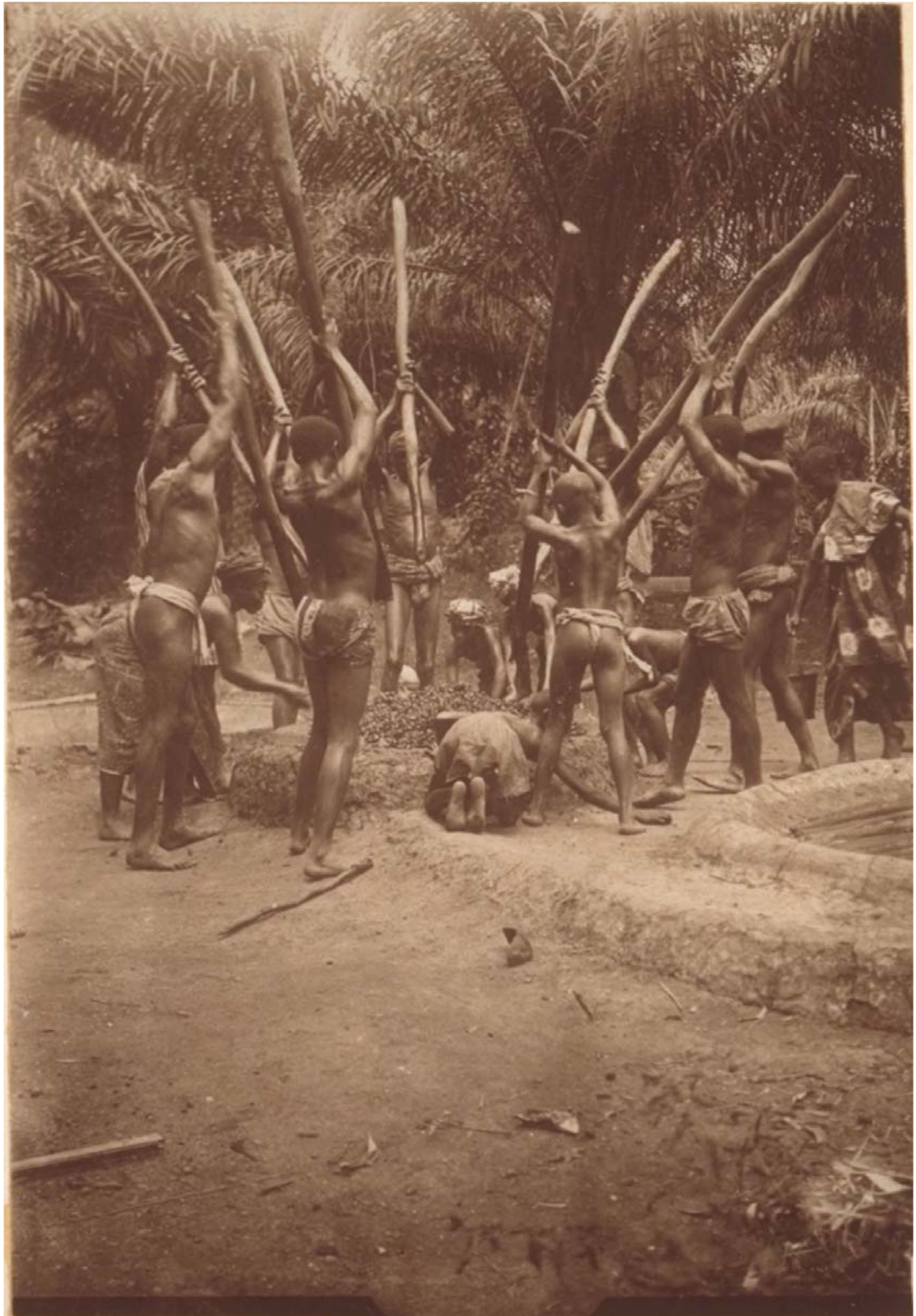


Figure 6-8. Wilhelm Erhardt, 'Krobo farms; pounding palm-nuts', c.1899-1912. D-30.08.025, Basel Mission Picture Archive.



Figure 6-9. Gg. Edmond Perregaux, 'Women carrying palm oil to the market', c.1891-1905. QD-32.023.0573, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

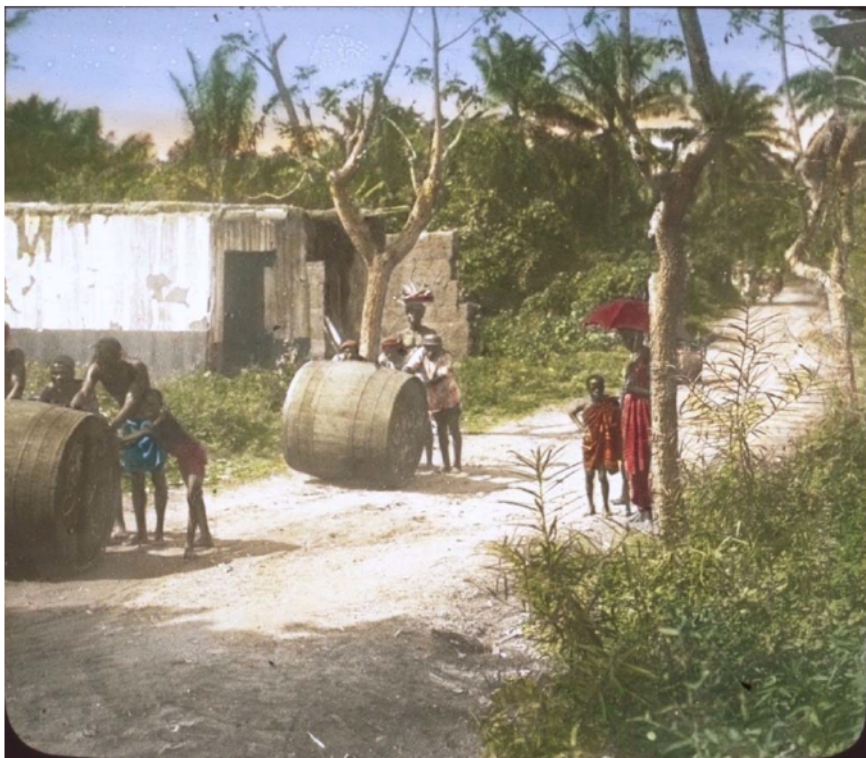


Figure 6-10. 'Barrels full of palm oil are rolled along the road to the coast'. QD-34.001.0019, Basel Mission Picture Archive.





Figure 6-11. 'Pulling up the Great Net', 1925. QD-30.012.0024, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

Food production by children also included foraging and small-scale hunting. In some cases this was supervised by adults, like the search for edible snails undertaken by Asante women, young men and children. As with agriculture, children were assigned the easier tasks of a multi-stage process. Children were allowed to perform the 'straightforward operation' of shelling and skewering snails for cooking, but the subsequent stretching and flattening of the snails required the 'expert handling' of adult men.<sup>31</sup> Boys acted as carriers on hunting trips by adult males.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps more interesting are descriptions of groups of boys hunting autonomously. These children used complex techniques, adopted an age-based hierarchy and disciplined poor workers – all without the intervention of adults. Thomas Kyei provided a vivid description of trapping birds in rural Ashanti. As well as 'bow and chord traps', Kyei's group coated strings and sticks with treated latex and then laid these across a pool of water to

<sup>31</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 85–7.

<sup>32</sup> Abukari Zeblim, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010.

catch bathing birds. Kyei, 'being the youngest', took the least skilled role carrying the pot of crude rubber. The group had to maintain 'absolute silence' when checking on the traps; failure to do so could lead to punishment by 'birching and possible exclusion from future operations'.<sup>33</sup> Any trapped birds were quickly killed, plucked and taken home for meals. Important here is that children were responsible not just for carrying out the task without adult prompting or supervision but for training the *next* generation of children to trap birds in the forest. Fortes noted this in Tallensi society, where boys hunted for birds and small mammals in groups and where bowcraft was taught by older, but still pre-adolescent, members of the group. When these boys reached eleven or twelve years of age, they carried out minor tasks in the hunts of adult males.<sup>34</sup>

Although child labour varied greatly by region, a universal feature of working childhoods was the imperative to keep the household running smoothly and to maintain the physical integrity of both the home and communal spaces. From a very young age, children were expected to help with household chores like cooking, cleaning and carrying.<sup>35</sup> Intra-sibling care was extremely important because restricting the mobility of younger children (Figure 6-12) allowed women to work unencumbered outside the home.<sup>36</sup> Children also helped to build and repair walls and roofs. In Asante, girls and their mothers dug and carried the reddish clay that was used to make and maintain floors.<sup>37</sup> In Walewale, boys cut grass to mend roofs.<sup>38</sup> As boys grew older their work tended to take them away from domestic duties, while girls took on

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<sup>33</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 185.

<sup>34</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 194–99.

<sup>36</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 177.

<sup>38</sup> Saaka Mahami, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010.

greater responsibilities within the home, including supervising the work of younger children. Children also cared for public spaces. They swept the streets and picked up rubbish. In Agogo, children cleaned the communal latrines; boys were responsible for the men's facilities and girls for the women's.<sup>39</sup>

Change in the rural economy over the colonial period was perhaps less dramatic than it appears. Children working on adult farms undertook similar tasks regardless of the ultimate harvest: low-skilled, low-status and often designed to free up the labour of adults. Even urbanisation, which seemed to lift many children out of the rural economy altogether, was not a decisive break. The prevalence of peri-urban agriculture and temporary migration to rural areas meant that many city children remained involved in cultivation.<sup>40</sup> Northern migrants continued to herd cattle in towns.<sup>41</sup> Foraging and hunting were still possible in the peri-urban suburbs of Accra.<sup>42</sup> Fishing remained important to the economies of the Gold Coast's largest coastal towns. There is a broad continuity, evident over both time and space, in the kinds of domestic work that children did. But continuity can itself be significant, particularly in the context of rapid change elsewhere. The household's need for child labour, for example, seems to have changed little despite the competing demands of schooling. While a minority of children benefited from special treatment because they were in school, most were expected to compete the same onerous round of chores as their parents had done, leading to frequent complaints about over-worked children under-performing in the classroom.<sup>43</sup> This invites speculation about the role that child labour played in a possible 'industrious revolution' – the

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<sup>39</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> A.M., 9/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>41</sup> J.A., 16/10/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>42</sup> B.L., 27/10/1955; A.K.B., 29/12/1955; A.L., 24/1/1956, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>43</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 52; Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 194.

phenomenon of households working harder to purchase more, thus stimulating economic growth – in colonial West Africa.<sup>44</sup> Were children working harder in the home so that parents could afford to purchase them a ‘modern’ childhood – a childhood that would require them to work still harder in school?

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<sup>44</sup> An industrious revolution was first proposed for seventeenth century Europe by De Vries but later suggested by Bayly to be much wider in geographical scope and crucial to the emergence of, and interconnections between, the modern world. A twentieth-century equivalent in colonial Africa has not been explored explicitly by historians but the parallels with the rest of the world are striking. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 50–59; Jan De Vries, ‘The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution’, *The Journal of Economic History* 54, 2 (June 1994): 249–270; Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*.





Figure 6-12. Wilhelm Ananda Stamm, 'African children', 1928. D-30.64.086, Basel Mission Picture Archive.



## Urban child labour

The work of children in the urban economy is much better documented than it is in rural areas. In particular, probation records offer a vivid and detailed insight into various aspects of urban child labour: the kinds of work that children did; their reasons for taking up work; and their rewards for doing so. The methodological problems of relying heavily on probation reports were discussed in Chapter 1 but, with regards to child labour, these sources are probably not particularly unrepresentative. First, the commonness of child labour in probation reports matches the findings of more impressionistic or over-arching sources that work was simply a part of urban childhood. In her 1954 survey of Accra, for example, Acquah found that even among schoolchildren, 36 per cent were 'gainfully employed'.<sup>45</sup> Second, work was rarely seen as a cause or marker of delinquency by probation officers; work was, instead, just one aspect of the child's daily life that it was necessary to record.<sup>46</sup> The child labour that probation reports describe is thus not particularly unusual – but the descriptions are uniquely tied to individual lives and grounded in local detail that can only enrich the history of working childhoods. In this section, I first examine the emergence of new jobs for children in urban areas; I then explore the pull of the city for child migrants from rural areas of the Gold Coast and other colonies; and, finally, I analyse data on child wages to estimate the productivity and importance of children to the economy.

## Work and employment in the city

The gradual changes in the rural economy contrasted with a much more dramatic profusion of child labour roles in the commercial and particularly urban economy. Not all of these jobs

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<sup>45</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 76.

<sup>46</sup> An exception to this was children working in the leisure industry because bars, cinemas and racetracks were closely associated with various forms of immoral behaviour.

were waged but they were connected to the growing monetisation of colonial cities, and most of these jobs were new, if not identifiably 'colonial'. Children were employed in transport, petty commerce, domestic services and the urban leisure industry. As we will see in Chapter 7, large numbers of children also worked in the craft industries that were expanding as the Gold Coast's urban economies diversified. There is evidence from all of these sectors that children worked for non-kin employers as well as within their own families. With the exception of household labour and domestic service, few children under the age of twelve were employed full-time – and only a vanishingly small number of children under the age of ten were given jobs in the urban economy.

The growth of modern transport technology and the huge expansion of the internal cargo trade created various ancillary roles for children. The drivers of goods and passenger vehicles were assisted by youthful 'mates', who dealt with fares, passengers and cargo (see Figure 6-13 and Figure 6-14). These boys frequently aspired to become drivers themselves.<sup>47</sup> Employment as carriers and general labourers was common at transport hubs and commercial centres: railway stations, lorry parks, markets, harbours and fishing beaches.<sup>48</sup> The work of head-loading goods and loading or unloading vehicles was demanding and financially unrewarding; but those children capable of the work – mainly adolescent males – seemed to seek it out with enthusiasm.<sup>49</sup> Porterage was casual and could fit around the other demands on children's time, and that informality also gave children the freedom to work when and how they wanted and to keep their earnings for themselves. Children involved in porterage were also caught up in

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<sup>47</sup> L.Y., 17/7/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>48</sup> A.L.A., 28/8/1952, Ibid.; A.M., 5/8/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; WRG 24/1/323, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>49</sup> In contemporary Ghana, adolescent girls are commonly employed as carriers in markets so this interpretation of porterage as a primarily male phenomenon may be a result of documentary bias.

conflicts over the meaning and decorum of public space. In 1952, a police search of the railway station led to eighteen alleged child porters being charged with loitering on railway premises. The language of the subsequent trial suggests that the crackdown was motivated by the competitive, chaotic and vaguely threatening nature of the portage business and the desire to bar it from respectable commercial spaces.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Case 6005, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.



Figure 6-13. Still from Jean Rouch (dir.), *Jaguar* (1967).



Figure 6-14. 'Accra: Martini lorries. Despatch department in the courtyard', 1915. QU-30.003.0232, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

The other very visible use of child labour at markets and stations was in petty commerce. Hawking by children at transport termini is most obvious in large cities like Accra but there is also evidence of the practice in smaller towns (see Figure 6-15), where travellers had the same needs even if the market was significantly smaller.<sup>51</sup> In fact petty commerce by children permeated almost all well-peopled spaces. This could take the form of children hawking head-loaded goods to passers-by or, alternatively, children being left in charge of permanent stalls or shops. Thirteen-year-old Muranoh Alabi, for example, sold firewood outside his home and had to 'render account daily'.<sup>52</sup> The use of children in commerce had a long history even outside the urban, cash economy. In rural Ashanti, Thomas Kyei's grandmother sent him into the village to barter vegetables for salt.<sup>53</sup> But in colonial Accra goods were now more likely than before to be sold on behalf of people outside a child's kin network, either on commission or a wage. One striking case involved twelve-year-old Christina Bonney, who collected 'foodstuffs from people to sell and never gave them back their money', telling her parents that this was because she was a 'witch' and 'over-powered by the spirits'.<sup>54</sup> Children in cities were also selling new kinds of goods: ice-cream, newspapers, ready-cooked food, cosmetics and miscellaneous 'fancy goods'.<sup>55</sup> Girls were particularly important to urban petty commerce but, unlike in colonial Lagos, there was no great outcry about the moral and physical dangers to which they were exposed.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See also the photos of Bawku lorry park in Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, f.208.

<sup>52</sup> M.A., 15/7/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>53</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> C.B., 7/8/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>55</sup> ADM 11/1/1052, NAG; M.A., 3/2/1955; A.T., 28/4/1955; A.T., 29/9/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>56</sup> George, 'Girl Hawkers'.



The expansion of the local elite and male migrant populations also led to a greater commoditisation of domesticity. This included the hawking of prepared food, the provision of laundry services and opportunities for paid service within the home.<sup>57</sup> Mercy Yaa left school after one year ‘for no just reason’, and began a career in domestic service for local miners; by the age of fifteen she had migrated from Akim Abuakwa and was ‘registered at the Accra Labour Exchange as a nursemaid’.<sup>58</sup> More commonly, however, children worked without compensation in the house of a relative or, with less frequency, in a non-kin household. This was a particularly common way for rural children to come to the city.<sup>59</sup> Importantly this was a transaction between adults for the labour of children, in which domestic service was exchanged for a cash payment to the parents or as a *quid pro quo* for the child’s education or training in town. This is evidence that the idea of children being a store of wealth and work discussed in Chapter 2 did not disappear over the colonial period; and, as we will see in the final section of this chapter, the transactional way that many children arrived in the city left them uniquely vulnerable as workers.

Children were also employed in the rapidly expanding urban leisure industry. Boys could find casual work as caddies and ball boys for golfers and tennis players.<sup>60</sup> Children were employed in bars and nightclubs.<sup>61</sup> A few older children also worked as musicians to entertain customers.<sup>62</sup> Cinemas attracted a great many child patrons but also employed children as assistants and cleaners.<sup>63</sup> Children also sold food, sweets and ice cream to audiences in or

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<sup>57</sup> A.F., 17/7/1952; O.C., 16/10/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; J.K., 13/3/1956, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>58</sup> M.Y.D., 23/9/1953, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>59</sup> G.Z., 11/12/1952, Ibid.; A.A., 16/6/1955; E.D., 16/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>60</sup> F.A., 29/10/1953, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> J.A.N.A., 30/12/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>62</sup> B.T.A., 14/7/1955; A.P., 5/1/1956, Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> K.D., 10/3/1955; O.A., 30/6/1955; J.D.N., 1/5/1956, Ibid.

nearby the cinema.<sup>64</sup> The implication in many probation reports is that children were attracted to this work because of the reflected glamour of the film industry and the chance to watch free films.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, the customers of children in the urban leisure sector were often other children. This is the case with bicycle-hiring businesses that employed children as assistants. Many of their customers were children, who tended to hire a bicycle for a brief thrill rather than as practical transport; such children often appear in probation reports because they could not bring themselves to return the vehicle they had hired.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 6-15. Hermann Emil Henking, 'Lorry with teachers from Agogo', c.1931-1945. D-30.63.046, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

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<sup>64</sup> D.L., 18/12/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; J.L.O., 18/11/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>65</sup> A.M., 8/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>66</sup> K.K., 30/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; E.J.M., 19/7/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

## Migrations

Many of the children who lived and worked in the Gold Coast's cities were born elsewhere. Most migrated with family members or other adults but in the late colonial period there were a number of boys who lived outside any recognisable family unit and survived solely on their wages. The experiences of this group reveal a great deal about the agency of children in the colonial economy, the motives of those who worked and the way that children thought about their relative prospects in city and country. It was not a luxurious life: children were able to survive independently because they reduced their expenditure to a minimum and had no dependents. Their diets centred on cheap, starchy foods.<sup>67</sup> Rented accommodation was shared with many others and often crowded and unhygienic.<sup>68</sup> Others were effectively vagrants, sleeping at the beach, on store verandas and at open-air cinemas.<sup>69</sup> Independent children were also vulnerable to adverse shocks to their livelihoods because they usually had no adult care network to fall back on and were too young to have dependents work on their behalf.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, independent child migration was an on-going, apparently successful phenomenon.

Many migrants travelled south from the impoverished savannah regions of the Northern Territories or from French colonies to find employment in the largest towns, Accra and Kumasi. The journey itself was a working one. Boys worked for their lodgings, food and transport en route or were employed to drive cattle to markets in the south.<sup>71</sup> The motives for

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<sup>67</sup> K.A., 6/11/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>68</sup> L.Z., 29/10/1953, Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> O.L., 23/9/1954, Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> H.A., 20/8/1953 Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> H.A., 20/8/1953, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1/6/1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

independent child migration were commonly financial and predicated, moreover, on the idea that that it was much easier to earn in a large city than in one's rural home. Interviewees in northern Ghana spoke of the poverty and hunger that compelled them to leave, and also of the greater opportunities they expected to find in more affluent southern parts of the colony.<sup>72</sup> A fifteen-year-old documented in the probation reports left the northern frontier town of Navrongo for Kumasi and then Accra to 'seek fortune'.<sup>73</sup> Another boy left French-ruled Upper Volta for the Gold Coast with the expectation of 'making quick money' but, like many others, he found himself 'disillusioned with the stark realities'.<sup>74</sup> Often the intent was to save money and send or take it home. Some children from French territories came to Accra with the express intention of raising funds to pay colonial taxes on their return.<sup>75</sup>

But Accra also held other attractions. In 1956, the probation service investigated Jajey, a thirteen-year-old boy who had run away from French Soudan (present-day Mali) to Accra. He was described as 'a simple country boy enticed away from the security of parental care by a childish curiosity engendered by travellers' tales'. Once in the city he encountered by chance his older brother, who put him to minding cattle. But Jajey was 'bent on drinking life to the lees in the hustles of Accra' and ran away again, living by himself and working as a porter for four months.<sup>76</sup> Jajey's probation officer was alluding to Tennyson's poem *Odysseus*, in which the ageing protagonist also complains of 'How dull it is to pause, to make an end,/To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!'<sup>77</sup> Despite being at the opposite end of the life-cycle, many

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<sup>72</sup>Tinaab Basoama, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010; Abukari Zeblim, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010.

<sup>73</sup>J.G., 20/12/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>74</sup>M.G., 14/5/1957, Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>L.Z., 29/10/1953, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>76</sup>J.A., 7/8/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>77</sup>Ulysses by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1833 (first published in 1842), *The Poetry Foundation*,



child migrants seem to have thought in similar terms: they were desperate for the excitement of the city and unwilling to wait for a time, later in life, when migration would have been easier and perhaps also duller. Fifteen-year-old Mama expected to find a 'sophisticated life' in Accra.<sup>78</sup> Fourteen-year-old Allasan left Navrongo for the comparative 'gaiety' of the capital.<sup>79</sup> The lure of city life was so great that in 1952 the Gold Coast Film Unit produced *The Boy Kumasenu*, a cautionary tale of a boy tempted to leave his fishing village and nearly ruined by the dangers of Accra.<sup>80</sup> *The Boy Kumasenu* was so popular, however, that its release seemed to increase the allure of cities with large cinemas: when the probation service investigated thirteen-year-old Josiah, they discovered that he had run away to Accra specifically to watch the film.<sup>81</sup>

In some cases parents gave their permission for a child to migrate and provided funds for them to do so. Fourteen-year-old Isaaka was given £3 by his father to migrate to Accra from French Togoland.<sup>82</sup> But more often these migrations were planned and carried out in secret from concerned or disapproving parents. Adults were sometimes important in facilitating migration. Unscrupulous cattle dealers were reported to be hiring boys as herders but then abandoning them, destitute, in towns like Prang.<sup>83</sup> More helpfully, chiefs in migrant communities helped children find work when they arrived in large towns.<sup>84</sup> But the agency

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<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174659#poem>.

<sup>78</sup> M.G., 14/5/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>79</sup> A.G., 17/11/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>80</sup> Graham (dir.), *The Boy Kumasenu*; for background on the film, see *The Boy Kumasenu, Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, 2010, <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/332>.

<sup>81</sup> J.K.O., 10/3/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>82</sup> I.H., 16/4/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>83</sup> J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1/6/1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

<sup>84</sup> Abukari Zebli, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 22, 2010.



and initiative of the child migrants was often decisive. Two boys from Niamey, capital of present-day Niger, aged twelve and fourteen, were advised against migrating by their parents but ‘conspired’ to leave for Accra regardless.<sup>85</sup> And, having migrated once, children and youths could return to their home and persuade others to follow in their footsteps, egging them on with exaggerated tales of how exciting and lucrative city life could be.

## Productivity

Table 1 uses data extracted from probation records to show cash wages paid to children between 1946 and 1957. The data set is small because wages were rarely recorded, but there is enough overlap in trades and ages to suggest that these figures are roughly accurate. The wage data can therefore be used to estimate the earnings potential of children compared to adults; the ‘shadow price’ of the unpaid labour that children continued to do for the household; and the relative importance of child labor to the family economy.

Converting daily to monthly wage rates in this dataset is problematic. The most optimistic scenario is that a child paid 2s. to 3s. per day in casual work could expect to earn £2. 10s. to £3. 15s. in a month.<sup>86</sup> This is broadly comparable to those on a regular monthly wage, but casual laborers had no guaranteed minimum income and were vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment. In addition to the data in Table 1, the Accra social survey found that employed schoolchildren could earn between 10s. and £2. 10s. per month; the earnings potential of children without educational commitments was presumably higher.<sup>87</sup> There are two anomalously high wage rates in Table 1: a fourteen-year-old musician earning £7 a month

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<sup>85</sup> A.Y., 20/10/1955; M.A., 20/10/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>86</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 66–7.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

and a sawyer aged fourteen or fifteen earning £6 a month. In both of these probation reports the subject's age is somewhat doubtful and the data may therefore not reflect the earnings of a child at all.

**Table 6-1.** Cash wages paid to children detailed in Accra probation reports, 1946-57.

Probation report date	Gender	Age	Job	Pay	Place
02/09/1946	M	14	Horse boy	11d./day	Accra
02/09/1946	M	14	Bar boy near Lorry Park	7s. 6d./month	Accra
17/07/1952	M	13	Domestic assistant	£ 2. 10s./month	Accra
28/08/1952	M	13	Carrier at railway station	1s.-1s. 6d./day	Accra
30/10/1952	M	14	Labourer on beach	2-4s./day	Accra
08/01/1953	M	15	Making Dutch stoves	5-20s./day	Kokompe, Accra
23/08/1953	F	13	Cooking for miners	4s. 6d./day	Akwatia
23/08/1953	F	15	Nursemaid	£4/month	Akwatia
29/10/1953	M	13	Catching tennis balls	6d./day	Accra
29/10/1953	M	13	Carrier	2s./day	Accra
25/02/1954	M	12	Selling bread	15% commission	Achimota
20/05/1954	M	15	Houseboy	£2.10s.- £4/month	Accra
20/05/1954	M	13	Stable boy	£2/month	Accra
12/08/1954	M	15	Mason	4s. 6d./day	Tema
14/10/1954	M	12	Houseboy	£ 2. 10s/month	Kumasi
14/10/1954	M	14	Odd jobs	2-3s./day	Accra
14/10/1954	F	15	Unknown, Quality Press	£2. 10/month	Accra
14/10/1954	M	14	Steward	£4/month	Accra
29/10/1954	M	15	Labourer	3s./day	Accra
29/10/1954	M	13	Carrier	2-3s./day	Accra
06/11/1954	M	14	Fisherboy	4-5s./week	Accra
20/10/1955	M	14	Carrier	4-6s./day	Makola Market, Accra
27/10/1955	M	14/15	Sawyer	£6/month	Kankan

Probation report date	Gender	Age	Job	Pay	Place
17/11/1955	F	14	Labourer	30s./week [?]	Achimota
24/11/1955	F	14	Governess	£5/month	Cantonments, Accra
20/09/1956	M	14	Carrier	6d.-4s./day	Bawku
20/11/1956	M	15	Driver's Mate	2s. 6d./day	Accra
20/11/1956	M	13	Baker's assistant	£3/month	Accra
29/11/1956	M	13	Houseboy	3s. 6d./day	Tema
04/12/1956	M	15	Domestic helper	£3/month	Accra
03/01/1957	M	14	Bread seller	£3/month	Accra
10/01/1957	M	14	Ice cream seller	£1/week	Accra
28/02/1957	M	14	Musician	£7/month	Kokompe, Accra
26/03/1957	M	11	Steward boy at chop bar	30s./month	Lorry Park, Kumasi
04/04/1957	M	13	Shoe shine boy	6-10s./day	Kumasi
16/04/1957	M	14	Labourer for sand contractor	4s. 6d./day	Accra New Town
16/04/1957	M	14	Carrier	2s. 6d./day	Accra
16/04/1957	M	14	Carrier	2s. 6d./day	Accra
08/08/1957	M	15	Carrier	2s./day	Accra
08/10/1957	M	11	Cinema hand	30s./month	Nima, Accra

Although more data would be helpful, we can draw some conclusions from Table 1. First, there was very little demand for child workers under the age of twelve. Second, it is reasonable to estimate that a twelve-to-fifteen-year-old child employed full time in the cash economy could earn between £2 and £3 and probably no more than £4 in a month. This was significantly lower than adult wages. The ethnographer Jean Rouch found that adult Zabrama migrants working as porters or labourers in Accra could earn, on average, three to six shillings a day and as much as ten shillings a day. But based on a small sample of individual Zabrama children in the probation reports, wages were much smaller: perhaps between half and two-thirds of an

average adult wage, and only a fifth of the highest reported wage.<sup>88</sup> The gap for skilled work was probably wider still. This is unsurprising because adults were stronger and more experienced and because children undertook low-wage work – perhaps perceived as exploitative by contemporaries and historians – as a means of accumulating skills and future opportunities. Although children earned considerably less than adults, their wages were far from trivial. Using the data in Table 1 and government figures on household budgets in Accra, a thirteen-year-old in the cash economy could perhaps increase the wage income of the household by up to a third or undertake household labour of an equivalent value.<sup>89</sup>

The economic value of children is made more difficult to quantify because the Gold Coast labour market was not fully cash based. Children under twelve seem to rarely have had jobs in the cash economy, but they worked within the household from a much younger age.<sup>90</sup> Their labour could allow more productive adults or older children to work elsewhere or contribute directly to some domestic enterprise, but the lack of wage earners under twelve makes the equivalent value of this labour uncertain. For older children, payment for extra-familial child labour was often in both cash and kind: the remuneration in Table 1 is therefore likely to underestimate real earnings and productivity. Thirteen-year-old Adotey Sackey, for example, washed the pots of food sellers in return for their late night ‘remnants of cooked rice and stew’.<sup>91</sup> Board and lodgings were often integral to domestic service and apprenticeships.

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<sup>88</sup> Jean Rouch, ‘Migrations au Ghana’, *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 26 (1956): 129. The Zabrama were a significant migrant community, originating from the west of French-ruled Niger.

<sup>89</sup> Gold Coast Office of the Government Statistician, 1953 Accra Survey of Household Budgets, Statistical and Economic Papers, 2, 1953, ADM 7/18/3, NAG; for details on these calculations, see Jack Lord, ‘Child Labor in the Gold Coast: The Economics of Work, Education, and the Family in Late-Colonial African Childhoods, c. 1940-57’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 4, 1 (2011): 102.

<sup>90</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 194.

<sup>91</sup> A.S., 6/5/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

Kwabena Mensah, an eleven-year-old apprentice carpenter, was given money to buy two meals a day but slept and took his evening meal in his master's house.<sup>92</sup> This made extra-familial child labour more lucrative than it initially appears because non-cash payments eased the burden of care on the natal household. And children, especially migrant children, were more receptive to such remuneration because they were socially and physically vulnerable outside adult care networks, for which payment in kind acted as a partial substitute. Thirteen-year-old H. Abdulai, for example, traveled with other migrants from Gao in French Soudan to Cotonou in Dahomey and then on to the Gold Coast by himself, working as a laborer for 'boarding and lodging from some tribesmen'.<sup>93</sup> But, conversely, those children ensconced within adult care networks that did not require them to work, like the thirteen-year-old boy who earned 6d. a day as a tennis ball boy, could accept trivial cash wages without needing such payment in kind.<sup>94</sup> The existence of more leisured childhoods, then, could make it harder for other children to make a living.

## The nature of children's work

Shifts in the colonial economy therefore affected child labour, changing the kinds of work children did, the places they worked in and the people they worked for. But how did children's work differ from adult work and how did the experience of working differ for children and adults? In this section, I address Grier's second critique of Africanist scholarship on child labour: that the subject is not just under-researched but 'under-theorized'.<sup>95</sup> I explore what made child labour unique and, specifically, how the social and biological characteristics of

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<sup>92</sup> K.M., 6/5/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>93</sup> H.A., 20/8/1953, Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> F.A., 29/10/1953, Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Grier, *Invisible Hands*, 2.



children impacted upon both the types of jobs that they undertook and their subsequent experiences in the workplace. First, I argue that child labour was 'interstitial'. Children's relatively low productivity meant that they were used to fill in the gaps of an economy where adults remained the most important workers. Crucially, however, new gaps emerged as the colonial economy became increasingly mechanised, commercialised and urban, and the number of 'small jobs' that children could be assigned thus multiplied rather than declined. Second, children remained much more vulnerable as workers than adults. This vulnerability manifested itself in ways specific to time and place but stemmed, ultimately, from children's comparative physical weakness and their lack of social connections and knowledge. Third, children were often able to combine or interpenetrate play with work, carving out that aspect of a 'childhood' during and between periods of economic activity.

### Interstitiality

Humphries has argued that child labour in industrialising economies was 'often the consequence of failed or incomplete mechanization'; rather than reducing demand for child labour, the invention or slow diffusion of technologies could create new jobs for children to keep production going.<sup>96</sup> I would go further and suggest that plugging the gaps in economic production is a fundamental characteristic of child labour and that those gaps can be a function of both disruptive technology and faltering labour supply. Child labour in the Gold Coast filled the economic interstices that emerged during a transformative half century. The economy was affected by the boom in cocoa production, the decline of slavery and the rise of waged labour, the growth of the colonial state and the introduction of mechanised transport. Society, meanwhile, was becoming more urban, literate and commodified. As these

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<sup>96</sup> Humphries, 'Child Labor', 182.

transformations rippled through the Gold Coast, new gaps in the colonial economy emerged, old gaps remained, and child labour became more public and perhaps more pervasive as the little jobs needed to keep the economy running multiplied. Detailed sources on how children worked are largely restricted to the late-colonial period in urban areas but there is enough evidence to suggest that in earlier periods, and in rural areas, children would have played a similar gap-filling role.

The most significant interstitial jobs for children involved the transportation of goods from one place to another. The most visible example of this was described earlier in this chapter: the throng of children who eked out pennies by carrying loads at the colony's many transport hubs and transit points. Opportunities for children arose because of, not despite, the mechanization of transport.<sup>97</sup> The volume of goods that could be transported increased but transport hubs were also termini, the point at which mass-transit systems broke down or were interrupted and an onward journey or a change of vehicle required the resumption of an older practice: portage. But crucially this was short-term, short-distance portage that was not unduly handicapped by the relative weakness of child workers or their dependence on adult care networks. Less noticeable, but even more important to the household economy, was the transport of goods and materials back-and-forth between points of production, sale and storage. Jobs like carrying palm wine to a nearby stall, transporting stools from a carpenter's workshop to sell in central Accra or transporting tools to the family farm were all unglamorous but essential.<sup>98</sup> Portage was particularly important in commerce; in addition to hawking in

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<sup>97</sup> Humphries points out that increased coal production in Britain before the railways led to growing demand for child labour for transport. Edgerton notes that the railways increased the demand for horses in various support roles in early twentieth-century Britain. Ibid., 181–2; David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33.

<sup>98</sup> D.T.O., 5/5/1955; K.O., 17/3/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

streets and markets, children like twelve-year-old Molai, who sold copies of the *Daily Graphic* house-to-house before school, also delivered goods direct to customers.<sup>99</sup> The use of children as beasts of burden is precisely the kind of labour made invisible by its ubiquity and that Grier argues should now be taken seriously by historians.

Children also found employment servicing the infrastructural gaps in the colonial economy: the shortage of public utilities, the inaccessibility of financial services and the cumbersome means of communication. Providing the household with its basic raw materials – water, fuel and food – was extremely important in cities.<sup>100</sup> In particular, children were used to bridge the gap between imperfect distribution networks and individual properties. Figure 6-16, a photograph from Kumasi, shows children engaging in the archetypal chore of collecting water from communal facilities. This was vital work and it had knock-on effects on other aspects of childhood experience. Fetching water for ‘elderly or respected people’ bound children to other members of urban communities.<sup>101</sup> The errand made other children late for school.<sup>102</sup> In fact the chore was so dominant that one boy appeared in juvenile court after stealing enough wood ‘to build a miniature truck’ to transport the water containers.<sup>103</sup> Children also collected water in rural areas but perhaps what differentiated this kind of activity in cities was the competition and camaraderie created by the sheer concentration of children carrying out identical chores at the same time.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> M.A., 3/2/1955, Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> ADM 11/1/1052, NAG.

<sup>101</sup> A. A Taylor, *Sam Jonah and the Remaking of Ashanti* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Macmillan, 2006), 24–5.

<sup>102</sup> T.T., 25/11/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>103</sup> Q.B.T., 2/10/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>104</sup> For rural evidence, see Rudolf Fisch, *Women and children at the water place with vessels to collect water*, January 1, 1885, D-30.09.061, Basel Mission Picture Archive; Case 1423, 24/2/1955, details an assault that took place at a stand-pipe in Accra as this competition boiled over. SCT 17/5/301, NAG.





Figure 6-16. 'Children at the water-taps, Kumase', c.1925-1931, D-30.62.005, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

Grier has pointed out that studying child labour can illuminate much broader historical questions. I was struck by this while conducting archival research in Accra, where the water supply is less communal than it was but still not very robust. When the taps run dry for a prolonged period, the city looks, sounds and smells very different. Accra is redder with dust and more short-tempered. Eventually the authorities take pity and send mobile water tankers into residential areas. The city changes again; suddenly its streets seem more youthful and its youths more purposeful. Children flow towards the municipal water trucks and stagger back home, noisy and playful on the way there, careful and recriminatory on the way back. This temporary recourse to child labour is a reminder of how much the presence and purpose of children affects the public life of cities; and it is a flashback to the colonial period when labour, rather than schooling, was most likely to propel, funnel and colour the movement of children through public space. But it is a caution, too, on the limits of historical reconstruction;



however evocative a photograph like Figure 6-16 might be, it hints at an atmosphere we can only partly capture.

The use of children as literal hewers of wood and drawers of water is perhaps not surprising. But child labour also filled in the less visible interstices of the colonial economy. Children were used to conduct financial transactions, including making payments, collecting debts and even taking out loans. These tasks survive in probation reports because some children invented demands from their parents or misused the funds they collected. Kwame, the ten-year-old son of a tinsmith, 'collected amounts due to his father frequently and made use of the money without his father's permission'.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps this was a continuation of pre-colonial practices, in which children were used to transport gifts between families. Again this is a phenomenon documented because of children abusing the trust placed in them, like Kwasi who 'cleverly' sold the chickens given to him for his uncle. This theft only came to light when the uncle was 'queried for not having shown gratefulness for the hens'.<sup>106</sup> As this implies children were also crucial vectors for the exchange of information in an economy that remained mainly oral, and in which there was limited access to postal services and telecommunications. One crucial task was simply to pass on messages about prices, sales and the whereabouts of goods and people.<sup>107</sup> But the rise of schooling created a generational imbalance that was exploited by some children. Fourteen-year-old Stephen, for example, was able to misrepresent the sales made in the family shop, 'the father being illiterate', and spend the money himself.<sup>108</sup> By contrast, Kum Gandah helped his father by keeping a written record of the gifts he had given and received.

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<sup>105</sup> A.K.S.M., 25/11/1954; K.A., 23/12/1954; P.T.F., 9/6/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; K.N., 9/5/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>106</sup> K.K., 10/2/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>107</sup> K.O., 17/3/1955; J.A., 18/8/1955, Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> S.E., 26/4/1956, Ibid.

The kinds of interstitial tasks that children undertook also explain why child labour was often temporally irregular. Jobs as carriers, messengers and errand runners simply involved a lot of waiting around. This, in turn, illuminates why the working childhood could coexist with complaints about the idle, listless and loitering young. One probation officer described a boy living in Ada as being simultaneously idle and at work: Donu, then aged about twelve, apparently 'idled about at the riverside and carried loads from the launch station for pennies'.<sup>109</sup> Children were not always needed, but they needed to be ready – and, though adult observers, European or African, might struggle with the concept, this too was a kind of work.

The economic interstices created by urbanisation, mechanisation and monetisation probably all had nineteenth-century precedents, but these gaps became more pronounced in the colonial period. By contrast, the way that children slotted into gaps in the supply of adult, and particularly household, labour was relatively well-established. Households relied heavily on child workers in part because they had a limited, inflexible supply of unwaged labour to draw upon. Children could step into a breach caused by death, illness or absenteeism. The orphan Ama Mansah, thirteen, did 'the cooking in the house assisted by her younger sister'.<sup>110</sup> Yao Poku was sent to guard his uncle's Kumasi store after his watchman failed to arrive and, after wounding a boy he found sleeping on its veranda, ended up in a reformatory home.<sup>111</sup> In some cases, child 'labour' simply provided a physical presence. Thirteen-year-old Ali, for example, slept at his uncle's tailoring shop to protect the sewing machines from being 'tampered with by marauders in the night'.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> D.N., 2/8/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>110</sup> A.M., 30/10/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>111</sup> Report on I.G.P. vs: Yao Poku, 18/1/1935, ARG 1/13/1/38.

<sup>112</sup> A.H., 8/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

Child labour could also release more productive adults from menial responsibilities. I argued earlier that there was no market in waged labour for children under twelve; but young children remained economically important because their labour could free others to work in paid roles that required an adult's strength or skill. Ten-year-old Kwabena would almost certainly have been unable to earn a wage himself in the small town of Kade but his father was able to work for the Public Works Department because Kwabena could fill in on the family's 'small foodstuffs farm'.<sup>113</sup> Child labour could also make adult labour more productive by filling the less-skilled roles in household enterprises or by extending the entrepreneurial reach of the household further into the urban economy. Ten-year-old Ashie Addy's mother extracted more profit from her bar by sending her ten year old son into the streets to sell cooked food.<sup>114</sup> Intra-sibling childcare began at an early age and was crucial to freeing up adult labour. One of Kyei's earliest memories in rural Ashanti was of keeping the flies away from his infant brother while his mother went to build a farm.<sup>115</sup> The localised use of child labour – particularly in restricting the mobility of other children, thereby increasing the mobility of adults – was therefore integral to the creation of much wider economic spaces, in this case the village-agricultural complex.

The idea that child labour filled in the gaps in the household economy leads on to wider questions about the history of the family in the Gold Coast. Here, the most important aspect of the 'household' in colonial Ghana is that it was not singular, permanent or always kin-based. Polygamy, complex kin networks and migration created dispersed, multi-nodal households: child labour was part of the web that held the disparate 'household' together and this had a

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<sup>113</sup> K.B., 12/7/1956, Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> M.A.A., 7/1/1953, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>115</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 1.

profound effect on the topology of childhood in the Gold Coast. At the local level, households could be polygamous but not always contiguous, so that children's domestic labour could spill outside the physical confines of the home. When Kyei undertook chores for his father, for example, he moved between separate buildings, in separate districts of Agogo, occupied by his mother, his father and his father's other wife.<sup>116</sup> This made children's domestic work a significantly more public and visible undertaking than is implied in the 'big house' or nuclear models of household structure posited for pre-industrial Europe.<sup>117</sup> Matriliney also meant that the primary focus of children's labour might change during childhood, shifting, for example, to serve the interests of a maternal uncle rather than those of the father.<sup>118</sup> The multi-nodal household was thus central to the distinctive, shifting topology of child labour in the Gold Coast.

But the household existed on a much larger scale than the village and the circulation of children between its various nodes remained crucial in binding it together as a viable economic unit. Migration and greater spatial mobility in the twentieth century created, or more likely extended, one particular form of interstitial child labour: the 'circulation' of children through networks of geographically dispersed kin – and, to a lesser extent, non-kin – households. Fosterage and circulation have been researched quite extensively by Africanist scholars.<sup>119</sup> In part, the phenomenon was a matter of choice, stemming from the belief that parents lacked the necessary grit to discipline their own children firmly enough. But, in terms of filling in the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>117</sup> Hareven, 'History of the Family'.

<sup>118</sup> Allman and Tashjian, "*I Will Not Eat Stone*", 85–125.

<sup>119</sup> Nicolas Argenti, 'Things That Don't Come by the Road: Folktales, Fosterage, and Memories of Slavery in the Cameroon Grassfields', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 2 (2010): 224–254; Esther Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Jack Goody and Esther Goody, 'The Circulation of Women and Children in Northern Ghana', *Man* 2, 2 (1967): 226–248.

economic gaps in household production, circulation was also a natural consequence of the idea discussed in Chapter 2 that children were a transactable store of wealth and work and could thus be used to make up shortfalls in labour and capital caused by misfortune, commercial opportunity or the natural lifecycle of the household. This is most obvious in the case of unfree child labour. In the 1890s and early-1900s, Grier argues that there was an increase in the pawning and trafficking of children, and particularly girls, to the south and that this provided labour and capital for the expansion of cash crop cultivation.<sup>120</sup> But the idea of children as a store of wealth survived abolition and the crackdown on illegal slavery and, in this context, it is not particularly surprising that Coe found that fosterage in Akuapem came to be conceptualized in terms of debt or that Allman and Tashjian found that parental claims and obligations in Asante were increasingly monetised.<sup>121</sup> Even in the 1950s, the most common reason for children to begin circulating was to fulfil another household's need for labour. A typical case from probation records is the uncle who took twelve-year-old Kwaku Kwame to Akim Manso because he 'thought the boy would be useful'.<sup>122</sup> Bereavement or impoverishment could also push children out of their natal home.<sup>123</sup> Other children were sent to households that promised a better standard of care or discipline.<sup>124</sup> Still others left in search of training, employment, or education in urban areas (see Chapter 7).

In a recent critique, Alber has suggested that functionalist explanations for the prevalence of fosterage in West Africa are insufficient because they ignore 'how parenthood practices are

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<sup>120</sup> Grier, *Pawns, Porters and Petty Traders*.

<sup>121</sup> Cati Coe, 'How Debt Became Care: Child Pawning and Its Transformations in Akuapem, the Gold Coast, 1874–1929', *Africa* 82, 02 (2012): 287–311; Allman and Tashjian, "I Will Not Eat Stone".

<sup>122</sup> K. K., 27/5/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>123</sup> N. A. T., 6/5/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>124</sup> O. F., 4/12/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.



embedded within social norms'.<sup>125</sup> But, even within the narrow context of understanding how child labour made the household or the urban economy work more efficiently, the kinds of functionalist explanations for the interstitiality of child labour that I outlined above are insufficient. It is easy to forget that the interests of the child are not always perfectly aligned with those of the household. The individual experiences of children, moreover, are easily lost.

## Vulnerability

For all that child labour was an essential lubricant for the household and colonial economies, we should not forget that the experience of child labour was often dangerous, damaging and dispiriting, not to mention exploitative and unpleasant. The public nature of many children's workplaces exposed them to the sexual and social predation of adults, particularly strangers. The private workplace, meanwhile, could be a place of violent discipline and thankless labour. Work was often poorly paid and children did not have access to collective bargaining or labour legislation to the same extent as adults did. Many of the dangers that children faced in the workplace were in fact caused or exacerbated by the inherent disadvantages of childhood: physical weakness, ignorance and limited social connections all hindered the ability of children to either resist maltreatment at work or to survive alone.

Although there was a broad continuity in the causes of vulnerability, children kept as slaves faced some unique challenges. Getz has noted that children were largely ignored in emancipation policy because they were considered 'highly unlikely to liberate themselves'.<sup>126</sup> In 1891, Governor Griffiths disingenuously claimed that alleged slave children were 'free to

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<sup>125</sup> Erdmute Alber, 'Denying Biological Parenthood: Fosterage in Northern Benin', *Ethnos* 68, 4 (2003): 488.

<sup>126</sup> Getz, 'Unfree Children', 163.

leave these households when ill-treated and go elsewhere if they choose to do so'.<sup>127</sup> But this ignored how legal freedom was undermined by the biological and social constraints of childhood; these constraints, moreover, explain why unfree child labour continued into the colonial period. As Getz argues, a child slave population that was increasingly female and imported from the north lacked the necessary alternatives to the adult care network that enslavement provided: waged labour, kinship ties and access to land.<sup>128</sup> Physical weakness played a part: living alone was simply too perilous. But a lack of knowledge was also critical. The younger a child was, the less likely she knew who she was or where she came from, something that severely limited the possibility of escape. Atawa Busanga, who was enslaved in the 1930s, was asked at the trial of her captor, Kwaku Anin, why she had not tried to escape. She replied: 'I did not know the road, if I had known the road I should have run away'.<sup>129</sup> Other children could not name or remember their relatives and appear in the historical record only because they were spotted by chance by an adult who knew them. In 1887, three years after she was purchased in Lagos, a slave girl was sent into town on an errand and recognised by her mother.<sup>130</sup> In 1907, six years after being pawned without his parents' knowledge, a 'small boy' was spotted near Techiman by his sister and returned to his family.<sup>131</sup> Children, whose identities were fragile and incomplete, were perhaps more easily alienated from their former lives than enslaved adults and also less able to envision a future beyond their master's household. In 1890, the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society reported the case of a freed slave

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<sup>127</sup> No. 7, W. B. Griffith to Lord Knutsford, 26/1/1891, Parliamentary Papers, C.6354.

<sup>128</sup> Trevor R. Getz, 'The Case for Africans: The Role of Slaves and Masters in Emancipation on the Gold Coast, 1874–1900', *Slavery & Abolition* 21, 1 (2000): 128–145; Getz, 'Unfree Children'.

<sup>129</sup> Domestic Slavery - Slave Dealing, 1937, NRG 8/2/205, NAG Tamale.

<sup>130</sup> Enc. 2 in 7, *Regina v. Ellen Quartey*, 20/6/1890, Parliamentary Papers, C.6354.

<sup>131</sup> Enquiry respecting a boy Kweku Pramang pawned to Kwesi Adaye for £18 by one Boshie, 1907, ARG 1/2/30/1/3, NAG Kumasi.

girl in the temporary care of a prison warder who was ‘enticed away’ by her former owner and could not be retrieved.<sup>132</sup> In 1937, Atawa Busanga’s sister, also a slave of Kwaku Anin, chose to remain with and marry her master after his trial.<sup>133</sup> These cases suggest how hegemonic slavery was for children; without a care network of their own, it was hard to conceive of an independent freedom and, even presented with the choice, the unknown and uncertain perhaps seemed *worse* than the familiarity of servitude.

Although slavery declined dramatically in the colonial period, growing up outside one’s natal household remained a common childhood experience. The circulation of children was a flexible and necessary response to the uncertainties of colonial life but my argument here is that it was not always a positive experience for the child concerned, particularly in urban areas. The circulation of children probably had its lineage in pawning and other forms of unfree labour. In his survey of Sekondi-Takoradi in the 1940s, Busia reported that pawning was an on-going source of ‘housemaids’.<sup>134</sup> In 1950s Accra, Adoley Adotey was described as being ‘given’ to a relative as a servant: this verb recurs again and again in probation reports.<sup>135</sup> Children were socially vulnerable outside of their natal home because of their low status, particularly in non-kin households. Their labour was unpaid and they were also likely to receive inferior food and accommodation and were often mistreated.<sup>136</sup> Promises of education or training were not always kept.<sup>137</sup> Increasingly in the twentieth century, transport technology and literacy could help mitigate such abuses. Children who felt mistreated often ran away or,

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<sup>132</sup> Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society to Colonial Office, 11/9/1890, Parliamentary Papers, C.6354.

<sup>133</sup> NRG 8/2/205, NAG Tamale.

<sup>134</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 35.

<sup>135</sup> A.A., 11/10/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>136</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 1–2.

less commonly, communicated with someone more sympathetic. Isaac Sackey, for example, wrote to his parents to complain about the lengthy walk to school.<sup>138</sup>

As waged domestic labour became more common, children who worked but did not live in a household suffered from similar vulnerabilities. These children faced difficulties because existing networks of trust and reputation in the workplace both pre-dated their arrival and were often overlaid by bonds of kinship. When things went wrong, therefore, children were most likely to be seen as intruders and newcomers. This can be seen in the 1955 case from Accra of Ashong Kwasi, a houseboy, who was found not guilty of stealing the school fees that his employer, a teacher named Abraham Tey Nortey, claimed to keep under his mattress. Nortey's niece, Comfort, also worked as a maid in the house. Joy, a 'housewife' who lived with Nortey, made the two children read aloud from the bible 'to detect who stole the money' and, for reasons not stated, Kwasi was deemed the guilty party. When Kwasi was accused of the crime he was beaten by both Nortey and Joy, leaving marks on the boy's back. While he was being beaten Kwasi begged Joy to go and ask his mother whether he had stolen the money. Ultimately the court decided that it was 'doubtful' whether Nortey had even placed the money under his mattress, let alone that Kwasi had stolen it.<sup>139</sup> Yet the case is still instructive. Being employed in someone else's house meant that children were exposed to corporal punishment by non-kin adults and, as an aside, being literate exposed them to being incriminated using the magical power of a book. It was easier to scapegoat a child outsider than to blame an adult resident in the house or a child linked by blood to the household. Kwasi's plaintive appeal to

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<sup>138</sup> I.S., 29/7/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>139</sup> Case 2365, 7/4/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

fetch his mother, an adult who did know his character, is indicative of how valuable social capital could be for children in the workplace.

Indeed, a lack of social capital and knowledge made migrant and independent children particularly vulnerable. The poverty of such children has already been discussed but the case of twelve-year-old Moro Dagomba shows how children's status as newcomers affected their access to social capital. Moro had been running away from Yendi in search of his parents since the age of ten and, when encountered by the probation service in 1956, he had been in Accra for a couple of months, sleeping at the market with other labourers. His probation officer's description of a boy who 'just lives precariously' is perhaps the most apt summary of an independent childhood. But Moro's life was made harder because he had 'no friends', in the sense that, as a stranger to Accra, he lacked a network of adult caregivers.<sup>140</sup> In fact, as newcomers, migrant children inherited the reputation of their associates. This can be seen in the case of two boys, Amadu aged twelve and Musah aged fourteen, who travelled from Niamey to Accra in 1955. They worked as porters in Makola market, where they met and went to stay with a man called Chirikwarli, also from Niamey. Unbeknown to Amadu and Musah, however, Chirikwarli had a criminal reputation and other northern migrants refused to have anything to do with the boys because of his 'notoriety' and potential influence over them. The two boys determined to return to Niamey but before they could save up their transport costs they were arrested for pick-pocketing.<sup>141</sup> In another case, a nine-year-old boy from Lagos decided to leave Lanyoku, the man who had first 'enticed' him to Accra, and instead 'attached himself to a street vulcanizer'. In retaliation Lanyoku spread the rumour that the boy was

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<sup>140</sup> M.D., 12/7/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>141</sup> M.A. and A.Y., 20/10/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.



thievish; the ostracised child struggled to survive alone and subsequently came to the attention of welfare officials.<sup>142</sup> Migrant networks could therefore just as easily exclude children as include them. Children were also more imperilled than adults by such exclusion and they were more likely to make the objectively bad decisions that led to exclusion because they lacked the information, and perhaps also the judgement, that adults in migrant communities had access to.

Even children born in Accra were handicapped by the size of the market in which they worked and the anonymity this created. Children had simply not had time to build up networks of trust and reputation with others and this left them vulnerable to the unscrupulous. In Accra in 1955, for example, a girl named Esther was found not guilty of stealing money from a house where she had been selling pomade. After she made her sale, Esther was followed by the complainant's husband. She testified that he caught up with her on the street and 'dipped his hand in my cover shoulder, when he brought out the hand he produced the handkerchief and said I had stolen his wife's money'.<sup>143</sup> Esther was found not guilty after another witness testified that he had seen the husband holding the handkerchief before he made the accusation. Nonetheless it is clear that the husband *expected* that his word would be believed over the testimony of a young girl whom nobody knew. He also felt entitled to search inside the girl's clothes to 'find' the money, perhaps a measure of how girls involved in petty commerce were both subservient to their customers and also lost control of their body.

Public workplaces also made children vulnerable to other children. This can be seen in a case from the town of Ntonsu in 1935, in which an eleven-year-old girl was raped by two older

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<sup>142</sup> B.T.A., 14/7/1955, Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Case 7713, 18/8/1955, Ibid.

schoolboys. The girl lived with a petty trader in Ntonsu and spent her evenings roaming the town selling packets of matches. The girl reported that one of her attackers called to her as he stood outside his father's house: "Afua bring your matches for me to buy some". I went to him with the matches. Nsonawah took my hand and took me to a room in his father's house. There was nobody in the house at the time.'<sup>144</sup> She was then gagged and raped by the two boys. This crime was unusual but it does show how street commerce placed children into subtle hierarchies of power. The boy held out the prospect of a sale to make her obey his instructions and his power as a consumer was compounded by his age and gender. The fact that the boys were explicitly identified as schoolboys is also significant. Formal education textured the hierarchies that existed between children because access to schooling was predicated on wealth, conferred a certain social status and gave 'leisure' a rigid temporal structure, dividing children at certain times into probable workers or consumers.

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<sup>144</sup> Statement by A.F., 6/5/1935, Industrial Home, ARG 1/13/1/38, NAG Kumasi.



Figure 6-17. Information Services Department, 'Native children act out shopping at a chemists shop', c.1950. CO 1069/43/61, National Archives, UK.

The cases discussed in this section were perhaps extreme and unusual but they show, nonetheless, the vulnerabilities that all working children suffered from, even if this was more likely to end in unpleasant conditions than in violence or a court appearance. These vulnerabilities were not, however, always particularly 'colonial', or even very specific to time and place. Instead they emerged from the constraints of being a child: the disadvantages conferred by being small and relatively new to the world. Although this section has focused on the darker side of child labour, it is wrong to stereotype a working childhood as inherently and inevitably undesirable.





Figure 6-18. 'A wrestling match – with an eye on the goat lest it wander into the growing crops'. Photograph from M. Fortes, *Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland* (1938).

## Work and play

The reality of child labour becomes considerably more complex when we connect it to the social outcomes of work by children. There is a sense that child labour, however onerous or complex it might be, was not taken entirely seriously by adults in the Gold Coast. Thomas Kyei, who described the skill, care and seriousness that children applied to trapping birds, could still undersell the task as a 'profitable pastime' and a 'game'.<sup>145</sup> A probation officer in 1957 noted that his eleven-year-old charge scavenged and then sold aluminium scrap from the local rubbish tip, but dismissed this as simply a 'hobby'.<sup>146</sup> Adult indifference to children's labour was a double-edged sword. Although children might suffer from a lack of pay, protection and appreciation, the inattention of adults also allowed children to carve out a unique autonomy, real and entirely imagined, in the workplace itself.

Children were often able to combine work with play. This was partly because children often laboured on the social and physical margins of the adult world, and thus adult supervision was distant or non-existent, and it was partly because children's duties were so sporadic or undemanding, and periods of labour could thus alternate with or intermingle with periods of relaxation. This is perhaps clearest in pastoral societies, where boys tended cattle far from the village. Gandah recalled cattle-herding co-existing with informal wrestling tournaments that matched boys of similar sizes in a test of strength.<sup>147</sup> A colonial report even claimed that the desire to play while herding meant that northern boys did the job 'very badly'.<sup>148</sup> Elsewhere in the rural economy, foraging and hunting blurred the line between work and play. A similar

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<sup>145</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 185.

<sup>146</sup> A.M., 8/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>147</sup> Gandah, *The Silent Rebel*, 22–3.

<sup>148</sup> J. R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1/6/1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.



pattern holds for children undertaking non-agricultural work. Children built 'lorries': poles of wood with wheels at one end and hooks at the other. A lorry was both toy and tool, something that could be pushed around for fun and used to transport water and other items for household chores.<sup>149</sup> Intra-sibling care facilitated play by both parties (see Figure 6-12).<sup>150</sup>

Integrating play into the historical analysis of children's work reaffirms the agency that many children displayed in the labour process. Refusal and physical withdrawal have been noted by Africanist historians as important modes of resistance to the labour demands of colonial rule. These methods were less open to children in the Gold Coast. The reliance of working children on adult care networks made it harder to flee from labour or to refuse offers of work. Their relative physical weakness meant that children obviously shirking their duties risked violent retribution. The obligations of kinship were so engrained that withdrawing their labour from the household was rarely a viable option for children because the social and emotional sanctions were too harsh.<sup>151</sup> But play offered a different kind of withdrawal from the tedium of labour, one more cognitive than spatial. It could involve the withdrawal of attention – though, as in Figure 6-18, keeping one eye on the task at hand – or it could involve the wholesale re-imagination of a chore, as with the use of lorries to transport water. This co-existence of work and imaginative play may be one of the things to differentiate child labour from adult labour. And it also raises the possibility of reinterpreting more regimented workplaces if, in the future, historians can reconstruct the peer cultures of children who worked in mines, factories or expatriate households.

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<sup>149</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 191.

<sup>150</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*.

<sup>151</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 198–9.

But just as play could not be wholly excluded from a working childhood, play was not totally innocent of work. Indeed, children's imaginative play was often itself concerned with mimicking, practising and even doing work. In his study of education among the colonial Tallensi in the 1930s, Fortes argued that play was an imaginative engagement with the adult world, a rehearsal and a form of education, practised by both individuals and peer groups.<sup>152</sup> Tallensi children played at farming, hunting and keeping house. These forms of play could be abstract and entirely imaginative, like building miniature houses with walls of dirt and water, or these forms of play could have useful by-products, like the supervision of young children or weeding. Interviewees in Walewale described similar types of play.<sup>153</sup> Because play so often involved copying the work of adults or older children, it was also one of the first arenas in which gender differences emerged during childhood.

Fortes' insight that children at play were performing the roles expected of them as adults also suggests how the history of childhood intersects with economic history. While Fortes was concerned with children's engagement with traditional agriculture and domestic labour in rural areas, evidence from elsewhere shows how imaginative play reflected economic change in the colonial period. As mentioned in Chapter 4, motor transport was an important theme in play. Children pretended to be cars and built wooden models of vehicles. Collaborative games involved children acting as both lorry drivers and passengers.<sup>154</sup> Interviews suggest, however, that children in the north did not use wheeled toys, almost certainly because cars were a much less common sight. Commerce was also an important theme of play. Figure 6-17 shows children pretending to run a pharmacy, complete with empty bottles as props and a

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<sup>152</sup> Fortes, *Education in Taleland*, 49.

<sup>153</sup> Mahami, 'Saaka Mahami - Walewale'.

<sup>154</sup> Anno-Kwakye, 'Child Training in Agogo', 56.

neatly written price list.<sup>155</sup> This suggests one final point about how play reflected historical change: while Fortes' examples showed children pretending to be economic producers, the scenarios of the pharmacy and passenger lorry also allowed children to rehearse their roles as economic consumers. Play thus allowed children to practise the complex interactions they would need to master in the increasingly commodified colonial economy.

## Conclusion

Children, then, played a variety of roles in the Gold Coast's economy. Without ever being the strongest, the most skilled or the most highly valued of workers, children nonetheless appear to be involved at every level of the production process and in every major economic sector. This makes the neglect of child labour in Ghanaian historiography all the more surprising. It has particular implications for interpretations of the late-colonial and post-colonial periods, when schooling became more widespread and more common. The immediate impact of children being withdrawn from the labour force to go to school will surely require more attention in the future. The evidence of this chapter also shows that child labour was normal. While the 'colonial' sectors of the economy certainly benefitted from the use of child labour, this was a continuation of labour practices in the 'African' economy rather than a historical aberration. For that reason, it is important to separate moral judgements about the desirability of child labour from historical analysis of why the phenomenon was so persistent in societies like the Gold Coast. Indeed, as the next chapter will show, child labour was so normal that,

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<sup>155</sup> Given the source of the photograph, the Colonial Information Service, and the complexity of the set-up, there is some uncertainty about how posed the image is and the extent to which adults facilitated the game – but such is the importance of adult intermediation and suggestion during childhood that the origin of the game perhaps matters less than the fact that it is being played at all.

rather than being simply a form of exploitation, working was an integral part of growing up and a means of bridging the gap between economic childhood and economic adulthood.

## Chapter 7

### Accumulation

Chapter 6 argued that child labour is too complex a historical phenomenon to analyse simply in terms of exploitation. In this chapter I situate child labour firmly within its social, and even moral, purpose, arguing that much of the work that children undertook was ‘accumulative’ rather than exploitative. Childhood in colonial Ghana was an accretive process, not just a biological, chronological or social state, and accumulative labour was a key part of those processual childhoods. Work – whether undertaken on a family farm or in the street, a classroom or an artisan’s workshop – allowed children to accumulate capital in its various forms. From a young age children accumulated tangible capital in the form of money, land, livestock and goods; human capital in the form of skills, knowledge, literacy and numeracy; and social capital in the form of relationships, community networks and cultural belonging. The accumulative labour that made this possible bridged the economic gap between childhood and adulthood and it is impossible to analyse the changing nature of child labour in the colonial period without bearing this social purpose in mind.

The chapter will explore the history of childhood accumulation in terms of tangible and then human forms of capital. The ways in which children acquired social and cultural capital are mentioned only briefly here.<sup>1</sup> The history of interpersonal relationships and social capital

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.



requires a set of sources and methodological approaches that either do not exist or are beyond the scope of this project. Similarly, although Bourdieu's notion of habitus (cultural capital) is useful in understanding, for example, the interaction of some children with authority and empire discussed in Chapter 5, it falls beyond the narrowly economic definition of human capital I am interested in here.

The accumulation of tangible forms of capital by children has been largely ignored in existing Africanist historiography. This is largely, I think, because the 'child' imagined or implied in much Africanist historical writing is a simulacrum of a western-ideal rather than a product and agent of history. Looking at the phenomenon of children accumulating tangible forms of capital allows for a much subtler concept of childhood and child labour. Working children, I argue, were not simply exploited innocents. Rather, they often worked for themselves and to build for their futures. The second half of this chapter, on the accumulation of human capital by children, engages with, and challenges, existing historiography much more closely. I argue that the advent and expansion of formal schooling in colonial Africa did not transform the childhood accumulation of human capital as completely or as quickly as studies of education have suggested. In a case study of apprenticeships I show that the history of children's accumulation of human capital is much more complex than a teleological conversion to institutional education. And, in a more critical appraisal of formal education, I demonstrate that schools were ill-equipped to build certain kinds of human capital and that the human capital that schools did transmit was no panacea for social advancement in the colonial economy.

## Tangible capital

During the colonial period in the Gold Coast, many children were able to accumulate tangible forms of capital through their own labour and for their own benefit. This section begins with a discussion of the philosophical foundation for childhood accumulation: a strong tradition of property rights for children that contrasted with their otherwise inferior jural status (outlined in Chapter 2). I explore how this legal framework allowed children to own, store and trade in tangible forms of capital and how children subsequently understood and experienced possessions and money. I then discuss the functional foundation for, and the mechanics of, childhood accumulation: its link with economic forms of adulthood, the means by which children acquired wealth and the form this accumulated capital took in the colonial period. I argue that childhood accumulation was a continuation of a pre-colonial phenomenon, refigured rather than invented in the twentieth century. In the colonial period, the types of tangible capital that children accumulated began subtly to shift, as did the acquisitive methods that children could employ. But, due largely to the social and biological constraints of youth, other aspects of accumulation were relatively stable: the scale of accumulation remained small and it was often predicated on the assistance of an adult care network. The small-scale of accumulation does not diminish its importance. As Gracia Clarke has argued of Asante market women, accumulation even by adults was a case of *kakrakakra* (little by little). This chapter aims to show that that gradual accretion of wealth began in childhood.<sup>2</sup> There are signs, too, that structural changes in the economy and the spread of education made it more difficult and less relevant for children to accumulate tangible forms of capital in the colonial period.

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<sup>2</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*.

## Property rights and philosophy

Accumulation by children was underpinned by a particular set of ideas on the economic shape and purpose of childhood. Children were almost inevitably the most junior members of a productive unit – in the colonial period most often a kin-based household – but they still retained certain rights over property and their own labour that allowed for a measure of economic independence and accumulation. Despite significant practical variation, the basic tenets of this philosophy seem to have been common to various ethnic groups in the Gold Coast.

The fundamental basis for accumulation was the right to own, acquire and dispose of property on an individual basis. Anthropological observers noted that children had similar property rights to adults. Rattray wrote of colonial Asante that ‘every Ashanti child, even today, will have his or her own particular hen, or pig, or sheep...and woe betide any father, mother, or King who, without reasonable cause, tries to take it away. A great principle is at stake – the inviolability, under all normal circumstances, of personal private property.’<sup>3</sup> This principle extended down to an apparently trivial level. Surveys of late colonial child-rearing found that children were considered to be the rightful owners of their few possessions. In particular, parents were ‘careful not to destroy’ homemade toys, and tolerated their children’s scavenged collections of ‘miscellaneous waste materials’.<sup>4</sup> In Accra, it was only the aesthetic and hygienic challenge of children retrieving unappealing items from ‘public dustbins’ that motivated parents to break up these collections.<sup>5</sup> As we will see, these property rights grew out of rural

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<sup>3</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 337.

<sup>4</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 174, 179.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

economies in which children were able, and expected, to accumulate tangible forms of capital through their own labour.

Rights to property also implied a converse respect for the rights of others and, indeed, instilling this value was an important part of child-rearing, enforced with often violent punishment.<sup>6</sup> In Aburi in Akuapem, children were expected to have internalised this notion by ten years of age, after which they would be ‘considered a thief’ if they took something that did not belong to them.<sup>7</sup> Recidivists were punished – and marked – by having hot pepper rubbed into cuts on their fingertips.<sup>8</sup> Some colonial observers posited that a decline in these so-called ‘tribal’ or ‘clan’ forms of discipline and training had lessened respect for private property and made petty theft ‘fair game’.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, from the 1940s the juvenile justice system was seen and used as a corrective for children with insufficient respect for property rights. Robert Owusu, for example, was caught in receipt of stolen cigarettes. His probation officer suggested that the boy ‘might have regarded it as a mere childish escapade’ and that a court warning would ‘cultivate respect for other people’s property henceforth’.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge of ownership and property rights was also functionally important for working children because, as discussed in Chapter 6, child labour was frequently undertaken at the physical periphery of economic production and in places where the worlds of child and adult work overlapped. As such, children often worked at the nexus of private enterprise and public space. Labouring outside the home therefore constantly threw up questions of ownership,

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<sup>6</sup> Probation records contain frequent evidence of violent punishments by parents but, as theft constituted the overwhelming majority of juvenile offences, we can be sure that some children remained unconvinced by the sanctity of private property.

<sup>7</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 176.

<sup>8</sup> The practice was said to be ‘dying out’ in some places by the 1950s. *Ibid.*, 176–7.

<sup>9</sup> Tooth, *Juvenile Delinquency*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> R.O, 6/3/1956, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.



meaning that children needed to both protect their own property rights and not infringe on those of others.<sup>11</sup> Children tending livestock on common lands, for example, faced harsh punishments if the animals grazed on forbidden areas. It was necessary, too, to track the ownership of animals, their produce and progeny; as Figure 7-1 shows, this could be a source of tension among children.



Figure 7-1. Felix Addo, ‘Two boys fighting over eggs found near a house in a village’. Drawing from Ambrose Dzidze, *Child Training in Kpandu Tsakpe within the Akpini State* (1956).

But property rights were of particular concern in increasingly monetised urban economies, where the commons on which much rural labour took place was considerably reduced. Legal records from the 1950s show how a failure to grasp the niceties of ownership could land children in trouble, either with the authorities or their peers. In 1955, for example, an eight-year-old girl was charged with assault after having attacked two older girls who had occupied

<sup>11</sup> The socialising aspects of this phenomenon, as well as some of the tensions it created in urban spaces, are discussed in Lord, ‘Spatial Approaches’, 36–7.



her orange vendor's stall and told her that the Ga (Accra's indigenous ethnic group) were 'prostitutes and other abusive words'.<sup>12</sup> Other children seemed confused by notions of private property in public space, assuming that damaged, broken or apparently ownerless items could be taken for their own use: unchaperoned boards, a length of iron, a rail clip and a car radiator in disrepair all led children astray.<sup>13</sup> Ten-year-old Kwame, who found £9.10/ on a lorry and simply 'considered it a windfall', made the source of this confusion explicit: 'I did not take the money from anybody's house', he told his probation officer, 'It is not my intention to steal somebody's money'.<sup>14</sup> Compared to the clearly delineated private realm, where inclusion implied ownership, both the provenance and title of objects in the public sphere were ambiguous and therefore dangerous. But the distinction between ownerless and owned still had to be made and this was a skill children were expected to learn from a young age. The increasingly monetised economy also meant that when children engaged with ideas of property rights and ownership they simultaneously had to engage with the concepts of fungibility and the abstract storage of value. For example, nine-year-old Kwabena used stolen money to 'dash' his acquaintances and apparently 'felt "big" in so doing'.<sup>15</sup> The investigating probation officer concluded that the boy could not 'know the value of money'. But, in fact, by associating money, rather than age or kinship, with wealth and social status, Kwabena demonstrated a keen understanding of how money was changing in form and function in the colonial period.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Case 12300, SCT 17/5/301.

<sup>13</sup> T.T., 15/11/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; N.A.N., 21/7/1954, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>14</sup> K.B., 12/7/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>15</sup> 'Dash' meaning to tip, bribe or otherwise redistribute wealth.

<sup>16</sup> K.Y., 27/8/1953, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

## Land, livestock, goods and money

Property rights for children were well defined because children were more likely to earn, make or otherwise acquire tangible forms of wealth than they were to be given them outright. Few parents in the 1950s, for example, bought toys for their offspring – in part because children were seen as instinctively destructive.<sup>17</sup> Accumulation was often only possible because children retained significant rights over their own labour. Children, like junior adults, had economic obligations to the household but these obligations did not encompass all labour that children performed. This is perhaps clearest in food production. In Tallensi society, which suffered endemic food shortages, children had apparently exclusive access to two extra food sources. They could scour harvested fields for unfound groundnuts and they could hunt with ‘miniature bows and arrows’ for ‘field and domestic mice, a species of toad, and harmless snakes’.<sup>18</sup> Crucially, the rewards for this labour accrued to individual children rather than being absorbed by the household. And nor did this labour reduce the obligations of the household to its youngest members. No amount of foraging affected how much food children received at communal meals, even at times of extreme hunger and even though children often received food at the expense of adults.<sup>19</sup>

In rural economies, these rights to labour facilitated the childhood accumulation of the basis of agricultural wealth: land and livestock. This required some degree of competence and so, as Bosman observed of the late seventeenth century, a child was bred ‘to his vocation very early’.<sup>20</sup> Children were expected, and able, rapidly to acquire the skills necessary for food production

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<sup>17</sup> This was a destructiveness driven more by curiosity than malice. Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 174, 178.

<sup>18</sup> Fortes and Fortes, ‘Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi’, 251, 253, 257.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>20</sup> Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 123.

between the ages of eight and twelve. Thereafter, or in some cases simultaneously, many children were given a plot of land to farm for themselves.<sup>21</sup> The phenomenon of children as young as eight farming alone seems to have been common across the colony; it was undertaken as much to learn by experimentation as to accumulate tangible capital, but the outcome was that children were producing agricultural wealth by and for themselves. In Taleland, any crops that a Tallensi boy might grow independently were 'absolutely his own'.<sup>22</sup> A similar pattern is visible in animal rearing. The Forteses described how the accumulation of poultry by a Tallensi boy 'lays the foundations for the economic independence which he gradually reaches in the course of years'.<sup>23</sup> Children tending the livestock of others were often rewarded with a share of the animals' offspring. In Asante, a child tending a goat was rewarded with its kid the third time the animal gave birth.<sup>24</sup> The rights that children had to their labour, however, remained limited in scale and effect. Field found that in Ga agricultural families, for example, it was not until the age of fifteen that boys were given one day a week to farm on their own account. Even then, boys had residual obligations to their family: only 'a rough boy who has no respect', Field was told, 'takes the whole for himself'.<sup>25</sup>

Rattray and Fortes both expressed a peculiarly metropolitan surprise that children had – and exercised – rights over property and labour. Yet the fact that these legal principles applied to children as well as adults is less a strange anomaly than a reflection of the commonplace accumulation that took place during childhood and the social purpose of this accumulated

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<sup>21</sup> On the shallow but rapid learning curve of many food-producing economies, see Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood*, 245–50; Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 194–8.

<sup>22</sup> Fortes and Fortes, 'Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi', 244.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 301; and, on evidence from 1950s Walewale, Saaka Mahami, interview by Jack Lord, trans. by Robert Kwame Botaeng, Walewale, September 23, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Field, *Social Organization of the Gã People*, 54.

wealth. The intended uses of this capital suggest a strong link between successful childhood accumulation and the eventual attainment of adulthood – although the evidence is overwhelmingly concerned with male accumulation and manhood.<sup>26</sup> In 1954, nine-year-old Ebenezer was arrested after stealing both the school fees and ‘building fund money’ of a cousin.<sup>27</sup> In the village of Tutu in Akuapem, some children were described as ‘able to build up a reasonable capital of their own before getting married’.<sup>28</sup> One of Gracia Clarke’s female informants in Kumasi used to weed farms with other girls to buy cloth: “When you get two cloths, as a young girl, you are happy”, she said, “Eh! When I married my husband at the village, I even had about four cloths”.<sup>29</sup> Her testimony stressed the importance of such small-scale, *kakrakakra*, accumulation to the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Rattray also reported of Asante that a father was expected to put aside some of the profits earned through his son’s labour to ‘help to pay the marriage expenses of his son or any taxes or claims made against him’.<sup>30</sup>

The transition away from the physical, social and economic dependence of childhood was a significant rupture in the lifecycle of both individuals and households. Unsurprisingly, the process created friction between and within generations. In Ewe areas in the nineteenth century, the missionary Johannes Merz suggested that once a child began to farm independently, aged eight to ten years old, ‘all too frequently. . . the child begins to refuse to obey the parents’.<sup>31</sup> In Lobi areas of the Northern Territories, children were not allowed to

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<sup>26</sup> As we will see, girls did accumulate tangible forms of capital but it is much less clear how this affected social transitions between childhood and adulthood.

<sup>27</sup> E.A.L, 14/10/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>28</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 197.

<sup>29</sup> Maame Nkrumah, cited in Clark, *African Market Women*, 204–5.

<sup>30</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Sandra E Greene and Johannes Merz, eds., ‘Come Over and Help Us! The Life Journey of Lydia Yawo, a Freed Slave’, in Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery*, 108.

farm alone until they had received the facial scarification that signified maturity. In this way, the process of childhood accumulation was slowed by the promise of ethnic belonging – and by the implicit threat of exclusion.<sup>32</sup> In Ga areas, meanwhile, hackles were raised when accumulation was pre-empted by other aspects of maturity. Field wrote that Ga boys still ‘in small money’ might be forced to marry after an unexpected pregnancy but older siblings ‘will feel themselves imposed upon by the presumptuous younger and will make him work much harder and do much extra fagging for them’.<sup>33</sup> The fruits of childhood accumulation, then, were associated with the most significant markers of adulthood: landed property, leadership of a household and relative economic independence. But accumulation was not a smooth process, as it created tensions over indiscipline, wilfulness, economic freedom and the household fission these portended.

How did rights over property and labour lead to the accumulation of tangible capital by children? Most commonly, accumulation in agricultural economies required the agency of the child, combined with a parental contribution either as a gift or a loan. This seed capital was vital and, indeed, was built into social models of proper parenting. Families, as Clarke has argued, were providers of capital, connections and expertise.<sup>34</sup> Colonial-era anthropologists typically characterized the provision of tangible capital to children as a parochial and insular part of village or kin economies but there is also evidence that the practice was adapted to the cash crop revolution in the Gold Coast. In 1950s Ayikai Doblo, a Ga village just inland of Accra, Addo was told of ‘a great many’ boys, aged thirteen to fifteen, whose fathers gave them

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<sup>32</sup> Tribal Marks of Natives, N. W. P., 1912, ADM 56/1/138, NAG.

<sup>33</sup> Field, *Social Organization of the Gã People*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*, 220.



between £10 and £20 to 'make their fortune' in Ashanti Region as cocoa farmers.<sup>35</sup> Although Tallensi boys may have been given their first chickens, the accumulation of more relied on husbandry or proceeds from the sale of crops – particularly groundnuts – grown on borrowed land.<sup>36</sup> But here a note of caution is necessary. Without a parental contribution, or separated from an adult care network, it was more difficult for children to engage in accumulative labour. One informant in Walewale, whose father died when he was a baby, received nothing at all for tending the livestock of his uncle; another had no capital to acquire chickens of his own. In agriculture, meanwhile, the freedom to experiment alone also meant the freedom to fail and, without the insurance of an adult care network, this was risky.<sup>37</sup> It is also reasonable to assume, although there is little direct evidence, that child slaves, pawns and other low-status dependents were much less likely to have the freedoms or seed capital necessary to accumulate tangible forms of wealth.

Children also exercised their economic agency and their rights to accumulate property in the commercial economy. Again, the initial capital was often provided by a living parent or as an inheritance, but the impetus thereafter came from the child. In Ashanti, Rattray wrote that a father might 'hand his son some capital with which to trade on his own account'.<sup>38</sup> In Taleland, the business of rearing poultry went beyond subsistence: 'even a small boy', the Forteses wrote, 'can dispose of his poultry freely'.<sup>39</sup> In 1953, a girl named Mercy's mother told the probation service that she intended 'starting her [daughter] off in selling plates etc'.<sup>40</sup> Among female

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<sup>35</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 83.

<sup>36</sup> Fortes and Fortes, 'Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi', 244.

<sup>37</sup> A similar argument can be made for marine fishing, where incompetence could be fatal. There is, in fact, little evidence of a childhood accumulation in this sector – though this may also be due to a lack of documentation.

<sup>38</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Fortes and Fortes, 'Food in the Domestic Economy of the Tallensi', 250.

<sup>40</sup> M.Y.D., 23/10/1953, SCT 17/5/300.

traders in Accra, young teenagers were granted credit with expatriate companies thanks to their mothers' connections and, eventually, the pass books used were passed from mother to daughter.<sup>41</sup>

Accumulation through commerce was not, therefore, strictly a male phenomenon. Trading, in particular, was dominated by women, and the accumulation of goods and credit was integral to their profession. When trading goods on credit from expatriate companies, the commission earned was added to the initial security, enabling a greater volume of goods to be withdrawn and sold. One of Accra's most successful post-war traders began her career aged fourteen, 'trading on her own in beads and silk handkerchiefs. Because of her mother she was invited to trade with the firm Swanzy and Miller after she had deposited some Aggrey beads with them'.<sup>42</sup> It occurred on a smaller scale too. Christina Addo left school at thirteen 'on her own accord to sell the wares of her late mother' and continued trading thereafter.<sup>43</sup> In rural Akuapem, girls aged ten to eighteen were 'encouraged to trade on a very small scale', making round-trips of thirty to a hundred miles to buy and sell goods 'at a profit'.<sup>44</sup> Not all children would turn into successful traders, of course, and nor was this a risk-free profession. In 1954, for example, Sampson Wiah began selling ice cream 'on a commission basis' but 'sustained a loss of 20/- on this business' – a debt that his uncle refused to clear.<sup>45</sup> Accumulation via trade also required commitment, discipline and the restraint and foresight to plan for the future by foregoing instant gratification. Psychological research suggests that this is harder for children than it is for adults; indeed, this was reflected in local beliefs that children were 'hot', reckless and

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<sup>41</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> C.N.A., 26/11/1953, SCT 17/5/300.

<sup>44</sup> Kaye, *Bringing up Children in Ghana*, 197.

<sup>45</sup> Sampson Wiah, 10 June 1954, SCT 17/5/300.

unthinking. Girls like Afua Aduwa – who failed to make any headway in trading because she ‘used the money she realized from her sales to buy whatever she liked’ – were probably common and this was a significant limiting factor in the scale of childhood accumulation.<sup>46</sup>

Migration – alone or with others – was another important avenue of accumulative labour by children. Recall, from Chapter 6, that there was a strong market for waged child labour and, further, that some children migrated independently from French colonies to pay taxes from their earnings in Accra: children aged twelve and over could therefore potentially accumulate money above and beyond their subsistence, albeit with difficulty and at the cost of great personal privation. Interviewees in Walewale suggested that children did not return from migrant work in Asante or Accra with much money – in fact they described themselves as returning because they were poor or had run out of cash – but they *did* arrive home with other forms of accumulated wealth, most often in the form of shoes, clothing and cloth.<sup>47</sup> A returning child might wear these goods himself, thereby both projecting status and fuelling the next generation of child migrants’ fantasies of escape. Or the accumulated wealth could be redistributed as presents to family members who, although often unaware of or opposed to their children’s migration, were pleased (and perhaps proud) to welcome them back. Tangible capital, then, was convertible to social capital and it allowed the generosity and reciprocity that lubricated kinship systems to work despite the delays and distance caused by migration.

The accumulation of tangible capital discussed thus far required the agency of the child concerned. But there is evidence that children could accumulate capital in an entirely passive

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<sup>46</sup> A.A., 22/5/1956, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>47</sup> Shoes as a misappropriated symbol of adulthood, are a recurring motif in the history of childhood in colonial Ghana, see Chapter 5.

manner and – more speculatively – that passive forms of accumulation gained in relative importance in the colonial period. This was the case with the Asante practice of *etiyidie*, in which a father pledged a sheep and gold dust to his four or five year old son, and then handed over the ‘progeny of the sheep and any interest or profit derived from the gold’ when the son set up his own house.<sup>48</sup> However, *bragorɔ*, the nubility rite for Asante girls, illustrates how children influenced even passive accumulation. On her transition to maturity the value of gifts a girl received was correlated to the behaviour and work-ethic she displayed during childhood.<sup>49</sup> Another instance of passive accumulation was observed by Field among the Manya Krobo in the 1940s. The ‘typical farmer’ had interests in several cultivated plots, incorporating his own land and also that ‘bought for his own growing boys’.<sup>50</sup> The use of this land for cocoa and oil palm suggests that passive forms of accumulation had adapted to the growing importance of cash crops since the mid-nineteenth century. Other evidence of accumulation on behalf of children, meanwhile, suggests the growing importance of money. Abraham Adotei Allotey, a Ga trader and auctioneer, opened Post Office bank accounts for both his school-age son and grandson: ‘to encourage them to save he usually added as much as each saved to his savings’.<sup>51</sup> There is no indication that either child had an independent income so this, too, can probably be classified as passive accumulation. At the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial government reported that ‘penny banks’ had been established in schools and had, by 1893, 700 depositors and £44 worth of assets.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Clark, *African Market Women*, 134, 143, 232.

<sup>50</sup> M. J. Field, ‘The Agricultural System of the Manya-Krobo of the Gold Coast’, *Africa* 14, 2 (1943): 59.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Allotey, report, 24/6/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>52</sup> *Gold Coast Annual Report for 1893*, 1895.

The origins and subsequent trends of childhood accumulation, however, remain complex and obscure. The phenomenon invites speculation and suggests interesting possibilities for future research. One interpretation is that passive accumulation by children is best understood as a vector of multi-generational accumulation at the level of the household or kin. In this formulation, the transmission of wealth might circumvent – on a small scale – seemingly hegemonic patterns of inheritance and appropriation. Gifts to children from living parents might avoid death duties, which, in pre-colonial Asante, were a source of tension between private citizens and the state.<sup>53</sup> Bequests by parents to their biological children, meanwhile, might reduce the claims of maternal relations on an estate. Here it might be useful to investigate the impact of Christian debates about inheritance practices affected childhood in the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> One other possibility, for which a substantial amount of implicit evidence exists, is that passive accumulation grew in importance relative to active accumulation because of structural changes in the colonial economy. Crops like cocoa and oil palm required longer to reach their full potential yield than did annual crops or livestock so, as Field observed of Many-Krobo society, children may have been the intended beneficiaries of an investment cycle that began before they were able to work independently. But, as suggested by the appearance of cocoa and groundnuts in the childhood strategies of accumulation discussed above, the cash crop economy also opened up new avenues of

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<sup>53</sup> On the subject of death duties, see K. Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akonkofo: A Non-Literate Sub-Elite, 1900-1930', *Africa* 56, 1 (1986): 25–31; T. C. McCaskie, 'Office, Land and Subjects in the History of the Manwere Fekuo of Kumase: An Essay in the Political Economy of the Asante State', *Journal of African History* 21, 2 (1980): 189–208; T. C. McCaskie, 'Accumulation, Wealth and Belief in Asante History: I. To the Close of the Nineteenth Century', *Africa* 53, 1 (1983): 23–43; T. C. McCaskie, 'Accumulation: Wealth and Belief in Asante History: II The Twentieth Century', *Africa* 56, 1 (1986): 3–23.

<sup>54</sup> For a sample of some of these debates, that refer to strengthening the ties between parents and children, see Marriage - suggestions and recommendations of Mr J. M. Sarbah in relation to, 1909, ADM 11/1/1457, NAG.



accumulation, rather than shutting down 'traditional' routes through childhood. Much more significant for the restructuring of childhood accumulation were the growth of educational opportunities and a market in labour. These may have fostered alternative activities and ambitions, reducing the importance of both active accumulation and the accumulation of tangible wealth *in toto* relative to human and social capital. Indeed, the remainder of this chapter will deal with historical changes in how children acquired the skills that made tangible forms of wealth useful or, alternatively, would later allow children to make a living even without capital of their own.

## Human capital

One of the primary things separating children from adults is competence. Adults can do things that children cannot, not just because they are stronger, smarter and more socially established, but because they know *how* to do them. But that competence does not arrive as a single revelation: it is learnt during childhood. This section will explore how children accumulated the human capital that made them economically useful during both childhood and adulthood. The focus is on human capital formation outside the agricultural sector: a discussion of apprenticeships is followed by an appraisal of formal schooling.<sup>55</sup>

The idea that children in the Gold Coast could and should accumulate human capital was underpinned by one shared belief about what it meant to be a child and to become an adult: that childhood was a formative experience, one that was preparatory but not wholly predetermined. Conception, pregnancy and post-partum childhood all had a role in forging

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<sup>55</sup> This is because food-production skills tend to vary less historically (or at least be less documented) than the more complex skill-sets of, for example, craft trades or cognitive labour. As noted in the previous section, agricultural skills tended to be learnt by imitation and experimentation, a process marked by frequent individual failure.

the adult - and, in particular, the adult 'fit, in every respect, to live in the world'.<sup>56</sup> Childhood was not a barren temporal stretch spent waiting for adulthood: events (or non-events) could shape the child's future self. The Tallensi concept of destiny can tell us a little more about how the uncertainty and agency inherent in childhood contributed to the accumulation of human capital. Fortes found that Tale men possessed two distinct destinies: one acquired and fixed at birth and the other revealed only in 'childhood or early manhood' through some event or chain of events.<sup>57</sup> The philosophical significance of this belief is that it identifies a unique childhood as producing a unique individual. That is very different from the metropolitan model of childhood that produced unique individuals from relatively uniform institutionalised childhoods.

The divergence between Tale and metropolitan ideas about childhood in fact mirrors the split between the accumulation of 'generic' and 'firm-specific' human capital. Skills like literacy are defined as generic human capital: widely useful, transferrable from one context to another and normally learnt in schools or other educational institutions. Skills like gold-smithing or cocoa cultivation are defined as firm-specific human capital: most commonly learnt while working, essential for a particular profession but of little use when transferred out of that specific context.<sup>58</sup> How did the balance between generic and firm-specific human capital shift in the colonial period, given the spread of education and structural changes in the economy? It is certainly true that generic skills like literacy opened up the professions of 'clerk, teacher,

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<sup>56</sup> Kyei, *Our Days Dwindle*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> For a historical discussion of the division of generic and specific forms of human capital, and the shifting balance between the two, see Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 128–31.

shopkeeper, or cocoa broker'.<sup>59</sup> But the Gold Coast remained a primarily rural and agricultural economy and, as such, the demand for firm-specific human capital remained dominant. Moreover, novel technical trades associated with urbanisation and the mechanisation of transport required specialist knowledge and skills that could be learnt without the generic skills that formal education provided. This meant that children continued to accumulate firm-specific (and indeed generic) human capital outside formal education throughout the colonial period. The childhood accumulation of human capital has a complex history. There was no simple or teleological transition from children accumulating firm-specific skills in the workplace to children accumulating generic skills in educational institutions. As the first half of this section shows, apprenticeships in skilled technical trades have an important history of their own. And, as I demonstrate in the concluding half of this section, the idea that children should go to school to accumulate generic human capital was not universally held nor always compatible with economic reality.

### Apprenticeships

The best documented aspect of children's accumulation of firm-specific human capital is the use of apprenticeships. An apprenticeship is defined here as a semi-formal learning arrangement, in which a child worked in a market-oriented and specialised profession under the tutelage of a skilled adult. This excludes most agricultural activities and paid or unpaid domestic work. There are inevitably grey areas when categorising apprenticeships and other

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<sup>59</sup> Allman and Tashjian, *"I Will Not Eat Stone"*, 90.

forms of child labour, but where such ambiguity exists I have been guided by the available sources and contemporary opinion.<sup>60</sup>

The following analysis of apprenticeships is based on qualitative material from the archives and a quantitative dataset drawn from 51 apprenticeships detailed in probation reports from Accra written between 1954 and 1957. This dataset quantifies the age at which an apprenticeship began, the trade learnt, the relationship between the master and apprentice, the domestic arrangements during the apprenticeship and the educational-level attained before the apprenticeship began. In addition to the general methodological issues involved in using probation reports as a source discussed in Chapter 1, there are other problems with this particular dataset. The snapshot nature of the data is likely to push the average ages at which apprenticeships began artificially downwards, that is, we might know that a thirteen-year-old was not apprenticed at the time of his interview but have no way of knowing if he began one later. And because probation officers frequently identified a 'broken home' or lack of parental authority as a cause of delinquency, there might be a documentary bias towards apprenticeships conducted away from home or with non-kin adults. This links to a more general problem with extracting quantitative data from essentially qualitative sources. The bureaucratic procedures of the probation service did not demand specific information about apprenticeships, so documentation of the phenomenon relied on the discretion of the probation officer involved. This means that the data is uneven, with the precise identity of the master, for example, often unreported. It is also difficult to know what information the

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<sup>60</sup> Gender is perhaps the biggest definitional problem in that boys are often seen as working to learn, whereas girls simply work. Girls trading under the supervision of an older, established trader were in many senses apprenticed to that profession. But because the practice was so tied up with the accumulation of tangible capital, and because the ultimate intent was for a girl to trade independently rather than sell her labour, I have analysed this phenomenon separately.

probation officer chose to elicit or withhold and the distorting effect that this may have on the aggregated data. Despite these difficulties, however, the quantitative material is a useful counterpart to other impressionistic observations; at the very least this data complicates the idea of a single model of apprenticeship and reinforces other evidence of historical change within the institution.

Apprenticeships were the most significant avenue for children to accumulate specialised and marketable human capital. The practice was used to train the next generation of workers in specialist trades ranging from pottery to smithing and carpentry. In 1943, the then Commissioner of Labour estimated that on average each skilled worker had one apprentice working under him, suggesting that the apprenticeship system was the most important method of reproducing the non-agricultural skilled labour force in the late-colonial period.<sup>61</sup> Apprenticeships were, however, an overwhelmingly male phenomenon. Only one female apprentice is detailed in the 1950s dataset. Normatively, this was also the case at the beginning of the twentieth century, simply because craft trades (or, more broadly, *monetised* trades) were dominated by men. However in industries dominated by women, such as pottery in Asante, girls were inducted into the profession via apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships tended to begin later in life than child labour (and thus learning) in agriculture or fishing. While children learnt to farm or fish from about eight years old, most contemporary observers identified apprentices as beginning a trade between twelve and fourteen years of age. Figure 7-2 shows the age at which apprenticeships began for the sample

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<sup>61</sup> Although generally positive about the apprenticeship system, the Commissioner noted that the existence of trainee washermen was something that ‘many of us know to our cost’, offering a tantalising glimpse of the kinds of tensions that built up when children’s work closely affected Europeans. St. J. Eyre-Smith, Commissioner of Labour, Memorandum on the Gold Coast Apprenticeship System, Contracts of apprenticeships, 1943, CO 859/59/5, NAUK.



of children from 1950s Accra. Fifty-four per cent of these apprenticeships began between the ages of twelve and fourteen; 31 per cent began under the age of twelve; 16 per cent of the apprentices began aged fifteen or over. But there was also a wide variation in the age at which apprenticeships began by trade. Children were apprenticed at a much younger age to less skilled and less physical professions; trades like blacksmithing and masonry were restricted to older, more developed children. Given that these were physiological constraints, age differentials by trade were probably constant over the colonial period. The advent of formal schooling had the potential to push apprenticeships back until later in life but the evidence suggests that this shift did not occur, for reasons discussed later in this section.

At first blush, apprenticeships seem an organic and rather obvious way for an economy without widespread formal schooling to train its workforce. While this is true, apprenticeships are still subject to wide historical variation. One colonial observer noted that apprenticeships pre-dated the colonial period and had been 'evolved by Africans themselves'.<sup>62</sup> This evolution was however catalysed by contact with the Atlantic, and later colonial, economy. At the most basic level of analysis, as the economy of the Gold Coast changed children were apprenticed to new trades, while apprenticeships in others faded in importance. A three-stage chronology of apprenticeships is evident in the Gold Coast. The three phases bleed into one another and co-exist but, nonetheless, each has a distinct economic focus and discrete spatial and organisational characteristics. The first phase has its roots in West Africa's pre-colonial agrarian past and, in most parts of the Gold Coast, remained the preeminent mode of apprenticeship throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Apprenticeships in this period taught,

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<sup>62</sup> J. R. Dickinson, Memorandum on Juvenile Labour, 1939, CO 859/11/6, NAUK.

<sup>63</sup> Dating the emergence of sedentary society, and thus specialised craft production, is difficult but recent research suggests that, *pace* Wilks, settlement of the Akan forest pre-dated the Atlantic catalyst of the

and ensured the continuation of, crafts like pottery, weaving, smithing and wood-carving. Children were apprenticed into spiritual as well as plastic crafts. None of these 'traditional' crafts disappeared, but in the Atlantic-era, a new phase of apprenticeship emerged. Children were now apprenticed into novel professions, introduced to serve the Atlantic trade or the consumption needs of European factories: carpentry, masonry, plastering and cooperage among them.<sup>64</sup> In the twentieth-century, new types of apprenticeship again appeared, this time associated with the mechanisation of the economy, particularly the transport sector. In addition to all of the trades previously mentioned, children now also learnt to be fitters, electricians and drivers. Figure 7-3 shows the distribution of apprenticeships by trade in 1950s Accra. The accuracy of these ratios is doubtful, due to the aforementioned limitations of the source data, but the *diversity* of the apprenticeships available at mid-century is still striking.<sup>65</sup> Chapter 6 demonstrated that economic change created new jobs for children in the colonial period but shifts in patterns of apprenticeship show something rather different. Children were not simply put to work and exploited. Rather the accumulative labour of children was itself deeply implicated in the creation and reproduction of the colonial workforce.

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late-fifteenth century. Gérard L. Chouin and Christopher R. Decorse, 'Prelude to the Atlantic Trade: New Perspectives on Southern Ghana's Pre-Atlantic History (800-1500)', *Journal of African History* 51, 2 (2010): 123–145.

<sup>64</sup> A. B. Quartey-Papafio, 'Apprenticeship amongst the Gas', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 13, 52 (July 1914): 419.

<sup>65</sup> It is, however, a peculiarly *urban* diversity. Trades like pottery and weaving are entirely absent despite their continuing importance to the economy as a whole.

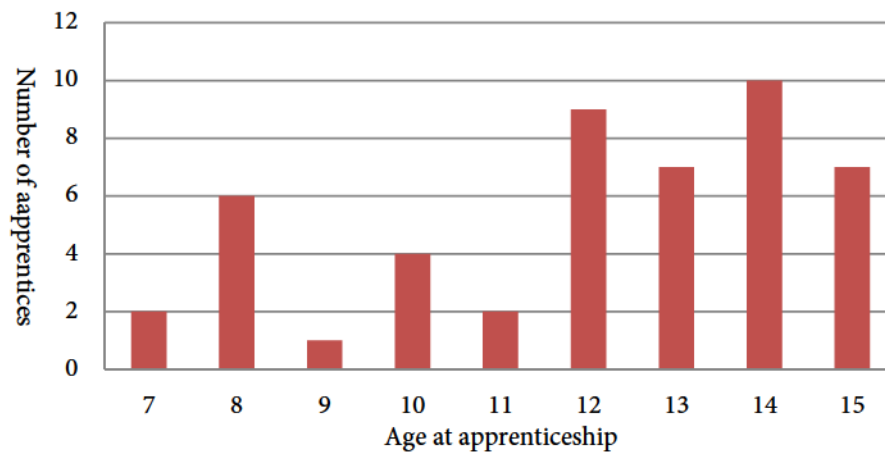


Figure 7-2. Age at which apprenticeships began, c.1950s.

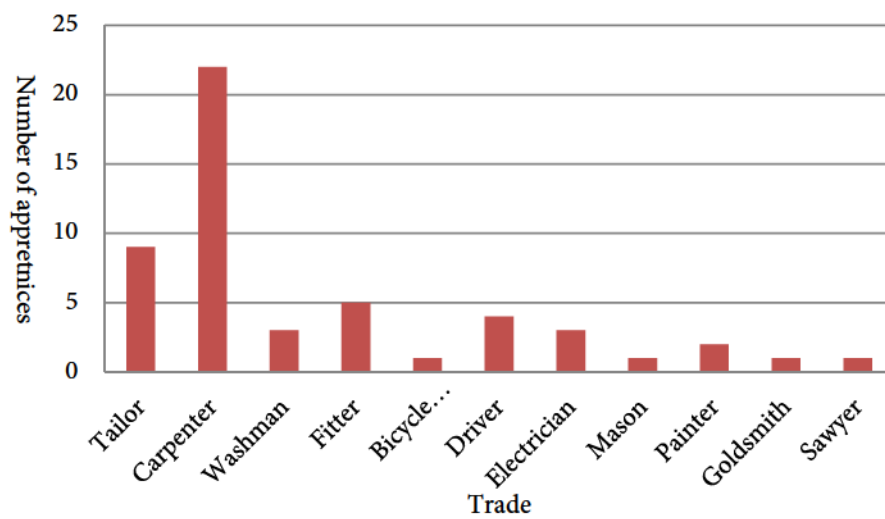


Figure 7-3. Distribution of apprenticeships by trade, c.1950s

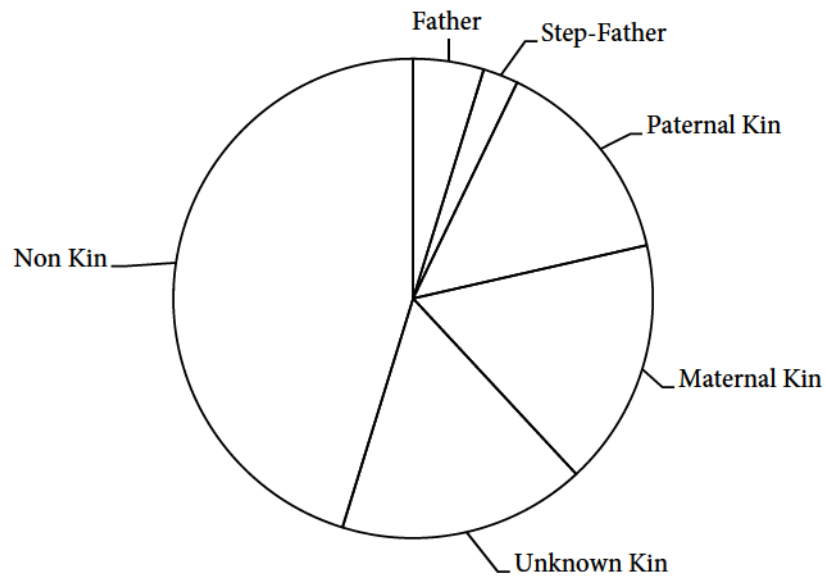


Figure 7-4. Relationship of master to apprentice, c.1950s.

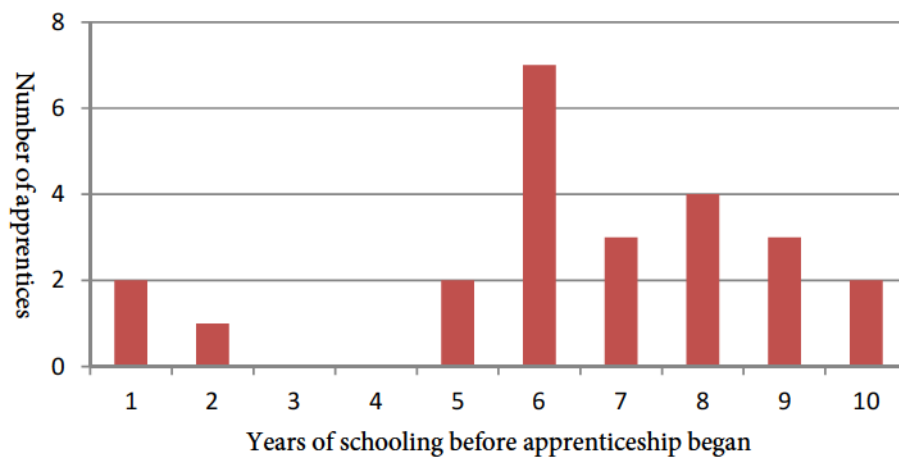


Figure 7-5. Years of education received by children who attended school prior to apprenticeship.

## Organisation

But historical change was not just about emerging professions: the internal form and function of apprenticeships also changed. Apprenticeship underwent significant spatial

transformations. These related, first of all, to the mobility of apprentices and to the translocal nature of markets for juvenile labour. Roughly speaking, in the nineteenth century mobility dramatically increased for a small number of apprentices from the coast, particularly those from Ga and Fante areas; in the same period, the translocal network for juvenile labour extended the length of the West African littoral. In the twentieth century, many more apprentices, including those from the interior, experienced such increased mobility but, simultaneously, the commonplace meaning of translocalism shrank within and expanded inside the colonial borders of the Gold Coast.

Normatively we might think of pre-colonial apprenticeships in 'traditional' crafts as being defiantly local in form: arranged within a family, conducted nearby and intended to train a skilled worker for the apprentice's natal village or community. This is certainly the apprenticeship model described (or projected back into the past) by anthropological and colonial observers. Rattray, for example, observed that pottery in Asante was a 'hereditary craft. . . handed down from mother to daughter'; such apprenticeships were particularly clustered in craft villages like Taffo but, because of the familial nature of the trade, girls could begin their training as 'quite small children'.<sup>66</sup> Structural factors were, indeed, a very real constraint on the topography of apprenticeships. The limited economic specialisation of overwhelmingly agrarian economies, infrastructural constraints and political fragmentation all meant that spatial mobility for apprentices was low and markets for apprenticed labour restricted. As a result, apprenticeships were relatively evenly distributed and low in density. In

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<sup>66</sup> Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 301.



more peripheral, subsistence-oriented areas, this pattern of apprenticeship probably remained dominant into the twentieth century.

But, as Matory has argued in the context of religion, it is quite wrong to assume that translocalism is either new or always the result of parochial and bounded societies being disturbed by some exogenous shock.<sup>67</sup> Rather a region like West Africa (or an arbitrary geographic entity like the Gold Coast) is better understood as a honeycomb of individual societies, *made* individual by their permeable and symbiotic links to others. Translocalism is therefore built into and sustains the entire structure. Thus, set against the localism of family- or village-level apprenticeships was the tendency for those in more specialised crafts to gravitate towards political and economic centres. In pre-colonial Asante, for example, ‘young children attached to Chiefs’ treasuries were...systematically taught the weights used for gold-dust’.<sup>68</sup> Asante (or more precisely urban Kumasi) was also served by diasporic communities of craftsmen, traders, scholars and religious entrepreneurs – communities which may have been reproduced, and reaffirmed as diasporas, by the kinds of translocal apprenticeships more obviously associated with exogenous political and technological revolutions. The increased mobility of nineteenth and twentieth century apprentices that emerges in the following discussion may therefore be an artefact of the epistemological problem that much of the information historians have on pre-colonial Africa arises from systems of knowledge production, especially ethnography, predicated on African societies being discrete, introverted and in effect timeless. What we perceive as change over time may just be the novel documentation of translocal interaction over *space*. Mobility in the colonial period therefore

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<sup>67</sup> James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 11.

might represent the reorientation of existing phenomena, rather than an exogenously generated revolution in the spatial characteristics of accumulative child labour.

Nonetheless, in areas with a strong European presence or strong links to the export economy, the introduction of new craft trades was accompanied by a spatial reorientation of some apprenticeships. These apprenticeships were clustered on the coast, originating in and propagating from the European factories. Later, Christian mission stations were epicentres of craft skills and increasingly located in the interior of the Gold Coast. In that sense, we see the extraversion of important nodes in the network of child labour, as children were drawn for training to European rather than African centres of power and wealth. But this period also saw a dramatic increase in the immediate and future mobility of apprentices. Transport technology and trading routes inserted apprentices into a labour market that spanned the European coastal presence eastwards as far as the Congo. Making trips to work in other European factories in Cameroon, Congo and particularly Nigeria became an important part of apprenticeship on the Gold Coast and a way of fulfilling, and ending, the obligations of an apprentice to his master.<sup>69</sup> It seems likely that those who travelled and worked elsewhere were older apprentices rather than young children.<sup>70</sup> But, nonetheless, the fact that lucrative migrant work was the culmination of accumulative child labour shows how, even at this early stage, the extraversion of the Gold Coast's economy was broadening some children's horizon of the possible far beyond the local or the colonial.

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<sup>69</sup> Quartey-Papafio, 'Apprenticeship amongst the Gas', 20–22; for details of apprentices' trips along the coast see *Jacob Ankrah v. Aryee Kumah*, 1891, Divisional Court Civil Record Book, 1889–91, Part 2, SCT 2/4/17, NAG.

<sup>70</sup> Although, given that the words 'boy' and 'apprentice' are almost age-neutral in European writing on Africa in this period, this is by no means certain.

West African translocalism was diminished but not destroyed by partition and territorial rule. Regional migration by child labourers was, as we have seen, relatively common but there is also evidence of apprentices maintaining their regional mobility. One fourteen-year-old Nigerian boy, investigated by the probation service in 1957, was trained as a goldsmith in Lagos; he then decided to join an older brother already working in Abidjan but, en route, found employment at a gold workshop in Accra.<sup>71</sup> But, while specialist skills might allow some juvenile workers to travel between the great cities of colonial West Africa, regional mobility of this type was dwarfed in size and significance by mobility within individual colonies. Littoral migrations became less common as the linguistic and political barriers of partition fragmented the Atlantic labour market into relatively discrete colonial ones. Though rarely, if ever, enforced, it was even an offence under the Labour Ordinance to take an apprentice outside the Gold Coast without the permission of the District Commissioner or Labour Officer.<sup>72</sup> But migration to or between urban centres within the Gold Coast to undertake apprenticeships became more common and, more significantly, towns and cities drew apprentices from across the colony rather than just the coastal strip.<sup>73</sup> Both mechanised transport and the dispersed, multi-nodal households (and thus child care networks) created by migration created made it easier for children to serve apprenticeships in unfamiliar urban areas.

In fact these twentieth-century changes in the mobility of apprentices also shed light on the moral debate over whether child labour is inherently exploitative and coercive. Over the colonial period, apprenticeship became a more overtly economic institution: less heritable,

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<sup>71</sup> Evidence on apprentices migrating into the Gold Coast is much more likely to be preserved in judicial records from Accra. M.A., 4/4/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>72</sup> Gold Coast Government, *Laws of the Gold Coast, 1951*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Although as already noted, northern children in cities were much less likely and able to engage in accumulative labour than were children from the forest regions of the Gold Coast.

more competitive, open and market-oriented; less spiritual and rooted in family tradition, more utilitarian in form and function. In general, these changes benefitted apprentices, and children who aspired to become apprentices, because they had more choice, more bargaining power and could appeal to multiple authorities. The equation of apprenticeships supervised by strangers or at least non-kin adults with more autonomy and better conditions is counter-intuitive. But the point made in Chapter 1 stands: the family is a coalition of individuals whose interests do not always coincide and the strategies of its decision makers do not easily accommodate the quixotic ambitions of the household's junior members. The possibility of acting outside familial constraints was a significant change to the economics of childhood.

One of the most important organisational changes to the apprenticeship system was the declining importance of apprenticeships undertaken within the immediate family. In the 1950s, Acquah argued that children 'traditionally. . . follow the occupations of their parents'.<sup>74</sup> The inheritance of skilled vocations is also the normative model in other anthropological sources. Even when a child did take up a new profession, this was apparently at the behest of the father. As argued in Chapter 2, I am sceptical about the inflexibility of colonial-era anthropological models, and the omission of individual agency and social rule-breaking these imply. But, nonetheless, the scale of children's choices over apprenticeships, and their autonomy outside the family, does seem to have increased in the colonial period. Figure 7-4 shows the relationship between masters and apprentices in the 1950s dataset. Fully 45 per cent of these apprentices were supervised by a non-kin adult. Fifty-five per cent were supervised by a member of the child's family, but only 14 per cent of these by a parent. In 58 per cent of apprenticeships the child left his current home to live with his master or an alternative

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<sup>74</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 74.

guardian. This is a surprising set of statistics, quite at odds with the (admittedly sparsely documented) traditional norm. But probation reports do not portray apprenticeships with non-kin or distantly related adults as unusual so this data probably does capture a real change in the organisation of apprenticeships. The main reason that children were more likely to follow their own ambitions was simply the efflorescence of skilled professions in the colonial period. The new diversity of trades and the critical mass of potential masters, both kin and non-kin, increased the social mobility and autonomy of child apprentices in towns. Boys like Kofi Appiah, who 'refused' to continue schooling and instead 'chose carpentry and also the master he would like to stay with', are relatively common in probation reports.<sup>75</sup> The possibility of urban migration also made rural children more wilful. In the Ga village of Ayikai Doblo in the 1950s, Addo found that boys occasionally defied their father's choice of trade and absconded to Accra to find an apprenticeship and pursue their own ambitions.<sup>76</sup> The extended household, of course, remained an important site of training and, as we will see, the family remained vital in organising and financing apprenticeships but the new uncertainty over what profession a child would be apprenticed to, and with whom, was a very real and important phenomenon.

The conditions that children experienced during apprenticeships also improved. Quartey-Papafio's survey of Ga apprenticeship at the turn of the twentieth century portrayed apprenticeships of the past as akin to 'perpetual servitude'.<sup>77</sup> In the colonial period, the indeterminate length of apprenticeships was addressed by the abolition of slavery and labour

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<sup>75</sup> K.A., 2/9/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>76</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 85.

<sup>77</sup> Quartey-Papafio, 'Apprenticeship amongst the Gas', 420.



laws that limited apprenticeships to a term of five years.<sup>78</sup> But much more important were economic factors: the profusion of masters, the subsequent competition for apprentices and the ability of skilled children and youths to earn a wage in the colony's expanding labour market. Quartey-Papafio made precisely this argument with regard to craft trades introduced, and then required, by European coastal factories, but the process accelerated in the colonial period. These factors made children more likely to terminate apprenticeships they disliked, either by running away or by finding a new master; to resist poor treatment; and to demand compensation for their labour. Apprenticeships, moreover, offered an alternative source of adult protection to children who left their families and who were physically and socially vulnerable outside a care network.

This is not to say, however, that the life of an apprentice in the colonial period was an easy one. Apprenticeships were perceived as a serious commitment for both master and child. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ga societies, a boy's father provided the prospective master with 'a flask or two of rum as evidence of the sincerity of his intention' – and there was a financial penalty if a boy completed his training but then chose not to fulfil his customary obligations to his master.<sup>79</sup> Discipline was harsh and physical, just as it was for the working children discussed in Chapter 6. Lazy, reluctant or disruptive apprentices were often dismissed. The apprentice had a triple burden: fulfilling his duties to his master; meeting the expectations of his parents; and balancing these requirements with the advancement of his own interest and ambition. But, equally, an apprentice was not simply a source of cheap labour. The obligation to provide proper training was enforced by both parents and, by the

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<sup>78</sup> Gold Coast Government, *Laws of the Gold Coast*, 1951, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Quartey-Papafio, 'Apprenticeship amongst the Gas', 19–21.

1950s, by the juvenile courts. Kwadjo Awudee, for example, apprenticed an eleven year old boy as a mason but, after running into financial difficulties, used him as a farmhand. After the intervention of a probation officer he 'realized his mistake' and agreed to return the boy to his parents.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, in the colonial period apprenticeships became more overtly economic, particularly in newer trades and in urban areas. This rationalisation or secularisation is important because apprenticeships were not simply an economic institution – or, at least, religion and belief were incorporated into economic practice. Apprentices were not just taught mastery of tangible skills but techniques to marshal the intangible, spiritual forces that, in local cosmologies, could facilitate or frustrate human intervention on the material plane. Thus apprentices had to acquire ancestral blessing or a particular medicine to expedite physical work. Quartey-Papafio wrote that craftsmen made 'little fetishes' of their tools, which were then used in the induction of new apprentices.<sup>81</sup> Eyre-Smith in fact portrayed the spiritual aspect of apprenticeships as closing off professions to kin outsiders because 'patent rights' to craft techniques 'were protected from infringement by the ancestral spirits of the family'. A craftsman could not succeed without this spiritual sanction, 'no matter how skilled he might be'.<sup>82</sup> This restricted entry to the profession but also lessened the autonomy of the child to learn outside the kin group or choose another trade. The spiritual, irrational dimension to apprenticeships did not disappear in the colonial period.<sup>83</sup> A 1930 report from Gonja, for example, noted that

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<sup>80</sup> K.K., 2/9/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>81</sup> Quartey-Papafio, 'Apprenticeship amongst the Gas', 419.

<sup>82</sup> CO 859/59/5, NAUK.

<sup>83</sup> Given the historiography and contemporary documentation on African belief this should not be surprising. On the incorporation of twentieth-century modernity into 'traditional' religion, see Field, *Search for Security*; Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*; Jean Rouch (dir.), in his *Les Maîtres Fous*, 1954; Piot brings this analysis into the age of mobile phone transmitters and passenger air travel, *Nostalgia for the Future*.

apprentice gravediggers had to be buried naked with a corpse to gain immunity from the potentially fatal consequences of touching the dead.<sup>84</sup> But spirituality did decline in importance. By the 1940s, 'pagan religious elements' had 'almost disappeared' in trades of European origin.<sup>85</sup> Probation reports portray apprenticeships as purely economic arrangements, although this may simply be because these documents occluded anything that disrupted the explanatory paradigms of rational bureaucracy. But what is certain is that the economic purpose of apprenticeships, and their financial intermediation, came to the fore in the colonial period.

An apprenticeship was an investment in a child's future and it needs to be understood as a transaction between a master, the prospective apprentice and the child's family. But sparse documentation makes it impossible to generalise about the financial arrangements involved, still less trace change over time. We can, however, sketch out the most common arrangements and those aspects subject to wide variation. Most involved a fee being paid by the child's family to the master, either as the apprenticeship began, ended or both. The fee was increasingly monetised rather than paid in kind, in part because of the shift towards extra-household apprenticeships. The size of the fee varied, allowing particularly skilled masters to demand a premium. A 1943 government scheme to fund apprenticeships for wayward youth offered masters £2-10/- at the beginning of the apprenticeship and £25 after four years of tuition.<sup>86</sup> Eyre-Smith estimated the apprenticeship fee at this time as commonly being between £7 and £25.<sup>87</sup> Parents might also have to provide equipment for the apprenticeship itself. One

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<sup>84</sup> SP PC to Medical Service, Tamale, 16/6/1930, Female Excision (Circumcision), 49 1931, NRG 8/2/34, NAG Tamale.

<sup>85</sup> CO 859/59/5, NAUK.

<sup>86</sup> ADM 23/1/2626, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>87</sup> CO 859/59/5, NAUK.

Dagomba boy in the probation reports had a loom made for him so that he could learn weaving in Tamale; more modern trades, by contrast, had equipment that had to be bought, not built.<sup>88</sup> The considerable outlay an apprenticeship required meant that parents had to make a careful judgement about whether the investment would pay off, something that, as probation records show, sat awkwardly with the discourse on child rights emerging in the 1940s and 50s. The decision of one set of parents not to train their epileptic son, as they had his healthy siblings, was portrayed by the investigating officer as neglectful rather than an expression of the harsh economic realities of childhood in colonial Africa.<sup>89</sup>

Financial arrangements during apprenticeships were also varied but increasingly monetised during the colonial period. Children learning a trade were compensated for their labour with some, none or all of board, lodgings, clothing, equipment, raw materials, pocket money or an outright wage. Nowhere did this add up to a lavish remuneration: wages tended to be low, provisions meagre and accommodation cramped and shared. But this was, nonetheless, accumulative rather than simply exploitative labour, undertaken with the expectation that conditions would improve. In general, the shadow wage of an apprentice increased as he became more skilled – and what might begin as a regular transfer from the apprentice's family to the master became a payment, in cash or in kind, from the master to his increasingly capable pupil. The contract offered by Gold Coast Railways in 1905 was perhaps typical of non-residential apprenticeships. For the first six months apprentices received no pay, just a 3d a day 'subsistence allowance'; after this probationary period apprentices were paid 1 shilling a day for the first year, rising in increments to 2 shillings a day in the fifth and final year of the

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<sup>88</sup> M.D., 29/10/1954 and, on purchased equipment, E.S., 6/10/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG.

<sup>89</sup> A.K.A., 29/9/1955, Ibid.

apprenticeship.<sup>90</sup> Informal apprenticeships are not documented in such detail but anecdotal evidence suggests a similar pattern. This evidence that children were engaged in accumulative labour suggests an alternative explanation for the fee paid to a master at the end of apprenticeship: it was not just payment for services rendered but compensation for the emergence of a competitor.

### Colonial impact

In the twentieth century, the apprenticeship system was also altered by the specifically colonial political and economic environment. This arose, firstly, because the state and large expatriate concerns became important economic forces. And, secondly, because the government attempted to directly regulate and control apprenticeships and thereby shape the reproduction of skilled labour.

The emergence of factories and mission stations as centres of craft training has already been mentioned but the colonisation of the twentieth-century economy had a further organisational impact, changing not just where but in what setting apprentices learnt their trade. The workshop of an independent artisan remained the most important site for technical training but some apprenticeships were also folded into the workforces and workplaces of larger concerns, including commercial enterprises and government departments. The apprentice was not typically a formal employee but rather attached to a master who was employed there; if the master moved on, he would take his apprentice with him. The state sector appears to have made extensive use – directly or indirectly – of apprenticed juvenile labour. The Public Works Department employed apprentice masons; the Transport

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<sup>90</sup> Advert for 'Apprentices in Workshops', *Gold Coast Leader*, July 30, 1904.



Department engaged apprentice fitters; apprentice carpenters worked in the Tsetse Control Department; and miscellaneous other branches of government used the services of apprentice clerks and messenger boys. In the private sector, meanwhile, records indicate that the United Africa Company and the Basel Union Trading Company employed apprenticed labour.<sup>91</sup> The practice was probably more widespread but, given its dubious legality, rarely documented. In addition to sanctioning or turning a blind eye towards technical learning within large workplaces, the colonial state also institutionalised and isolated apprenticeships in technical schools, removing the one-to-one link between master and apprentice and divorcing such accumulative labour from its commercial context. As we will see, institutional apprenticeships were less effective as a result.

But colonialism was a political phenomenon as well as an economic one and, indeed, apprenticeships fell within the legal purview of the state. The criminal code gave the master the same disciplinary power over an apprentice – the right to use ‘a blow or other force, not in any case extending to a wound or grievous harm . . . for the purpose of correction’ – as a parent had over his or her child.<sup>92</sup> Labour laws gave the colonial state a more proactive role in apprenticeships, restricting them to children aged twelve and upwards and requiring that each be enacted by a deed approved by a district commissioner or labour officer.<sup>93</sup> The data in Figure 7-2 shows that legal restrictions were no barrier to the apprenticeship of young children and, indeed, there is little evidence that the colonial state sought to enforce the laws relating to the inner workings of the system. But it is still worth dwelling on the direct, if ineffective,

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<sup>91</sup> E.A., 28/10/1954; S.O.T., 8/9/1955; Y.T., 6/10/1955, SCT 17/5/301, NAG; E.K., 26/6/1956; P.D., 20/11/1956, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>92</sup> Gold Coast Government, *Laws of the Gold Coast, 1951*, 295.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–30.

role of the colonial state in regulating, facilitating and replacing apprenticeships because it tells us something about both the ambiguous relationship between government and child labour in the Gold Coast and the practice of apprenticeship itself.

In addition to regulation, the state tried to complement or replace apprenticeships with practical training in specialist educational institutions. Government trade schools were first mandated in the Gold Coast in 1921 and offered, in various forms, vocational training thereafter.<sup>94</sup> The Industrial School, designed to teach habitual juvenile offenders a trade, was opened at Swedru in 1947.<sup>95</sup> But these state-run apprenticeships were badly flawed and these flaws illustrate two important points. First, apprenticeships were not just about learning new skills but linked to other forms of capital accumulation. And, this, in turn, reinforces the idea that the colonial state accommodated existing patterns of child labour and lacked both the capacity and understanding necessary for serious reform of the phenomenon.

The single largest flaw with technical schools and their penal equivalents was that these institutions were concerned with teaching a trade but did not provide the means to practise it independently. B. Lawani, for example, learnt shoemaking during his four years at the Swedru Industrial School but when he was released he had to weave mats with his father, who 'could not buy the necessary tools for him'.<sup>96</sup> Lawani was left feeling 'unloved' and 'thwarted' and his probation officer recommended that he was apprenticed, effectively for a second time, until

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<sup>94</sup> Junior Trade Schools, 1927, ADM 5/4/11, NAG; Trade Schools - whether they have proved of value commensurate with expense incurred, 1931, ADM 11/1/1288, NAG.

<sup>95</sup> Its predecessor, the industrial home run by the Salvation Army, did not offer technical training beyond practical experience in agriculture due to a lack of qualified staff. Industrial home for Juvenile Offenders, 1934-44, ARG 1/13/1/37, NAG Kumasi; Industrial home for Juvenile Offenders, 1934-39, ARG 1/13/1/38, NAG Kumasi; *Report of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, 1946-1951*, 29.

<sup>96</sup> B.L., 18/12/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

he could 'stand on his own'.<sup>97</sup> Not owning, or earning, their own tools was a particular drawback for newly released boys who had learnt carpentry or tailoring because the requisite equipment was often too expensive for parents to provide. A report from 1951 admitted having 'no constructive suggestion' about how this problem could be overcome.<sup>98</sup> Welfare officers in Sekondi apparently negotiated with parents and masters over who would provide the tools for boys newly released on probation.<sup>99</sup> In 1956, meanwhile, boys in the third year of their apprenticeships at the Bawku Vocational Centre were failing to find work during the holidays 'because they did not have the tools'.<sup>100</sup> As mentioned above, apprentices were normally given the necessary equipment by their families (the availability of tools often determining the choice of trade) or else they earned it during the course of their apprenticeship. The forced nature of penal apprenticeships, the high cost of technical schools and the isolation of both from the commercial economy seems to have made this harder when children learnt their trade in institutions.

This problem might have been reduced if graduates of technical education could rely on the labour market as an alternative to working as independent artisans. But potential employers shied away from the cost of their labour and the quality of their work. This was the case even in the 'colonial' sector of the economy that, a cynic might argue, technical institutions were designed to serve. An engineer in the Public Works Department suggested in 1931 that trade school graduates had skills equivalent to apprentices who had trained for just one year in the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> W. W. Llewellyn, *Methods and Treatment of Young Offenders in the Gold Coast*, 1951, CO 859/242, NAUK.

<sup>99</sup> WRG 47/1/22, NAG Sekondi-Takoradi.

<sup>100</sup> Trade School - Trade Training Centre, 56 1947, NRG 8/9/22, NAG Tamale.

workplace.<sup>101</sup> This sentiment was echoed by engineers in the mining and state sectors in Eyre-Smith's 1943 report on apprenticeships. Learning technical skills in a scholastic environment, moreover, created cultural problems in the workplace. The Acting Provincial Engineer in Koforidua cautioned in 1931 that the intelligence of trade school graduates was 'often offset by a "swell headed" attitude towards the headmen over them'.<sup>102</sup> In 1943, the Commissioner of Labour was warned that boys educated in vocational schools often thought of themselves as 'finished products' and resented the authority of an illiterate master.<sup>103</sup>

As well as providing technical education, the state also tried to facilitate apprenticeships, from the 1940s onwards, particularly for troubled youth. This was simultaneously an attempt to transform apprenticeship from a personalised and economic institution to an instrument of social reform. These policies were never successfully put into practice. In 1943, for example, officials in the Central Province began writing to local chiefs, soliciting a list of 'craftsmen who are interested and desirous of co-operating in the social welfare for the apprenticeship of homeless youths etc'. By October, only one list had been submitted – and even this was dismissed by the District Commissioner as 'the usual attitude of exploitation where Government funds are concerned'. The pledge of one willing participant illuminates both the intent of the state and the reason the scheme was a failure. S. S. Ayetey wanted to join to fulfil his 'duty to help to rebuilding our Empire' – but most potential masters were not willing to transform the economic institution of apprenticeship into a tool of social reform, particularly when it required them to teach the unproven, unpromising youngsters that so concerned the

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<sup>101</sup> Secretary for Native Affairs to Colonial Secretary, 22/6/31, ADM 11/1/1288, NAG.

<sup>102</sup> G. C. Cuthbert, *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> St. J. Eyre-Smith, Commissioner of Labour, Memorandum on the Gold Coast Apprenticeship System, CO 859/59/5, NAUK.

state.<sup>104</sup> Even in the 1950s, when the probation service routinely tried to influence a child's training to deter future criminal activity, the initiative for and practical organisation of an apprenticeship tended to come from the guardian rather than the probation officer and the overriding motive was perhaps to *minimise* the control that the juvenile justice system would have over the child henceforth. The colonial state, then, lacked both the political capital and personal connections to substantially transform the system of apprenticeship.

The impact of formal, non-vocational education on children's acquisition of human capital will be discussed in more detail in the next section but it is worth considering the direct impact of schooling on apprenticeships. First of all, apprenticeships and schooling were very difficult to undertake concurrently. Of all the apprenticeships described in 1950s probation reports, only two ran in parallel to schooling. One of these, in goldsmithing, was abandoned so that the twelve-year-old could concentrate on his education; the other, in tailoring, was still ongoing at the time of the probation service's investigation.<sup>105</sup> But, by providing children with generic human capital, schooling may have changed apprenticeships in other ways. As early as 1904, the Gold Coast Government Railways required its apprentices into the trades of fitting, turning, blacksmithing and carpentry to be literate and preferably also numerate.<sup>106</sup> An anonymous colonial official stated in 1931 that since 'at least' 1920, children had 'prefer[red] to attend school first' before learning a trade.<sup>107</sup> Indeed by the 1950s, the rapid growth in primary education meant that many children finished schooling at precisely the age at which

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<sup>104</sup> ADM 23/1/2626, NAG Cape Coast.

<sup>105</sup> A.D., 8/10/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG; A.H., 8/10/1957, SCT 17/5/302, NAG.

<sup>106</sup> *Gold Coast Leader*, July 30, 1904.

<sup>107</sup> As stated in Chapter 3, this source is problematic, designed more to assuage international opinion than to accurately portray the use of child labour in the Gold Coast. Any claims about how African childhood was converging with metropolitan ideals of childhood (in this case the moral and utilitarian superiority of formal education) should be treated with caution. ADM 11/1/1052, NAG.



most apprenticeships began. As a result, children entering skilled manual professions in this period were much more likely to have received a formal education than were their counterparts apprenticed before World War Two.

Quantitative data on apprenticeships in 1950s probation records bears this analysis out but also suggests the need for caution in describing the impact of formal education as revolutionary. Sixty per cent of apprentices in the probation reports had at least some schooling before learning a trade. Figure 7-5 shows how many years of education apprentices who attended school received prior to learning their trade.<sup>108</sup> Most commonly children were completing their primary, or in some cases middle, school education and then becoming apprentices. Transitions from post-primary education to apprenticeships became progressively less common because the better grasp these children had over generic skills was countered by the increased cost of their continued schooling and a lack of experience in the trade itself. In his survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, Busia provided qualitative evidence of this phenomenon in the late 1940s. Busia recorded several case studies of school-leavers aged sixteen to eighteen who aspired to technical jobs but who had yet to find employment or further training. Crucially, they had no practical experience and were competing against children who had been apprenticed to such careers from as young as ten years old.<sup>109</sup> At some point, then, the pursuit of generic human capital began to shut down the traditional apprenticeship route and thus impede the acquisition of firm-specific human capital necessary for a career in skilled manual work. Formal education certainly changed the institution of apprenticeship and patterns of child labour but it was far from a revolution and probably did

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<sup>108</sup> Precise figures were rarely recorded so this data is drawn from a smaller sample of apprenticeships.

<sup>109</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 59–62.

not significantly delay the beginning of apprenticeships for most children: that transition would not occur until after Ghanaian independence.<sup>110</sup>

## The move to schooling

The transformative effect of literacy and schooling is a thread that runs through the history of childhood in the Gold Coast, affecting both individuals and the peer cultures of children, schooled and unschooled alike. It is hard to imagine a more profound rupture in childhood experience. The arrival of institutional education changed the temporal and geographical structure of childhood, the nature of adult authority, the cultural and semantic information a child had access to, the physical appearance of children and the social status of the young vis-à-vis their peers and their elders. For all that education was a minority pursuit, it had a disproportionate impact that has rightly been emphasised in existing historiography. In this section, however, I argue that the economic rationale for the success of education – that schooling created social mobility through the superior provision of human capital – has been overplayed. The accumulative aspect of the economic process of childhood was not changed as radically or as completely as existing analyses of education suggest.

And yet the Gold Coast was perhaps more likely than other African territories to embrace the ‘educative’ model of childhood, in which schooling was pivotal to the accumulation of human capital, because of the colony’s long-standing encounter with western-style schooling and the

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<sup>110</sup> By 1968, when a University of Ghana project surveyed apprenticeships by workplace, more than half of those then apprenticed as goldsmith, tailors, carpenters and fitters had begun to learn their trade after the age of sixteen. The opaque methodology and lack of disaggregated figures makes it hard to draw detailed comparisons with the data from probation reports but this research strongly suggests that the age of apprenticeships and the importance of education was creeping up by the late-1960s. Margaret Peil, ‘The Apprenticeship System in Accra’, *Africa* 40, 2 (1970): 137–150.

relatively rapid and pioneering spread of educational institutions.<sup>111</sup> Education was certainly central to many individual childhoods in the Gold Coast and the ideals of an educative childhood had a wider social resonance; elites, in particular, pushed restlessly for the expansion and improvement of schooling in the colony.<sup>112</sup> But a counter-narrative is easy to discern. Only a minority of colonial subjects received an education: most of them were male, lived in the urban centres in the south of the colony and were born in the late colonial period. Even in 1950s Accra, where education was most common, probation records are replete with examples of how an educative model of childhood could clash with individual ambition and enthusiasm, economic opportunity and necessity, or secular and spiritual belief.<sup>113</sup> The argument of this section is that the provision and uptake of education outstripped changes to the necessary economic fabric of childhood. By the 1940s, at least, extended periods of schooling were contributing to Waller's 'crisis of confidence in the promise of maturity' as often as they offered an alternative route to economic adulthood.<sup>114</sup> This is not to say that colonial Africa was not 'ready' for metropolitan-style educative childhoods but rather to admit that such a dramatic change inevitably created social tensions and generated problems that affected both individual children and their generational cohort.

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<sup>111</sup> Graham, *The History of Education in Ghana*; on the wider African situation, see Andrew Roberts, 'African Cross-currents', in Andrew Roberts, (ed.), *The Colonial Moment in Africa: Essays on the Movement of Minds and Materials, 1900-1940*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 223–66.

<sup>112</sup> Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 1–63; for an example of early twentieth century debates in the local press, see 'Scrutineer', *Gold Coast Leader*, April 25, 1903.

<sup>113</sup> For example A.K., 22/7/1954, L.B., 8/10/1954, E.L., 14/10/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>114</sup> Waller, 'Rebellious Youth', 80.

## Drawbacks and disappointments of formal education

As Chapter 6 argued, child labour was integral to the economic flexibility and viability of the household and wider kin groupings. Education therefore imposed a dual cost, reducing the supply of labour available to the household and siphoning off its other income. Many children combined education with work. In 1954, a survey covering a quarter of Accra's schoolchildren found that 36 per cent were 'gainfully employed' – but this probably significantly underestimated the number of children who actually worked.<sup>115</sup> Work could be undertaken with the express intention of continuing education but more often such labour seems to have been a complement to other household income, an investment in some domestic enterprise or a vocational alternative to academic learning.<sup>116</sup> Education had therefore not replaced work for many children in the Gold Coast but ran in parallel with it. But this co-existence was often uneasy because the continued use of child labour was not reflected in either the education system or in the model of childhood that informed it.

The education system, driven by the metropolitan model of childhood, made it difficult to combine learning with alternative, often essential activities. The colonial school system adopted a model of standardised testing within a grade system based on age. This assumed both consistent attendance and steady academic and chronological progression through school. The rigidities of the system were probably necessary for the rapid expansion of schooling in the late colonial period, but they also made schooling more difficult and costly

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<sup>115</sup> This figure excludes unpaid domestic labour, probably underestimates those children employed in family enterprises and may not include persistent truants or the unemployed. Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 76.

<sup>116</sup> For example, A.K.O., 11/2/1954, T.K., 10/6/1954, S.A., 24/6/1954 SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

for those whose childhoods did not conform to the educative model.<sup>117</sup> The need to work competed for the time of schoolchildren and this, Busia noted of the port town Sekondi-Takoradi, left most schoolchildren 'underslept...causing strain and discouragement to pupils and teachers alike'.<sup>118</sup> The temporal rigidity of the school day and school terms also conflicted with the fact that that demand for child labour was intermittent and the supply of child labour had to be instantaneously elastic. The colonial education system, then, was poor at accommodating the need for many children to work. Unsurprisingly, attendance was often infrequent or piecemeal – and it is also important to remember that raw statistics on enrolment do not measure the engagement with school life or the quality of education it provided.

But the colonial education system also struggled to reintegrate children whose education was disrupted. An interrupted or suspended education was common because a child's education was often hostage to the inconstant fortunes of the household and the colonial economy. Those who dropped out of school temporarily faced considerable pressure because children were expected to have a level of educational attainment commensurate with their age. The pressure was, firstly, academic because failure to reach the required level could lead to dismissal from school.<sup>119</sup> Temporary breaks could easily become permanent and presage greater personal turmoil. Busia interviewed Takoradi's vagrant 'pilot' boys and found that they were often 'forced to be idle owing to the break in their schooling'.<sup>120</sup> But the pressure also had a social element. In 1952, for example, Samuel Amoako Codjoe was described as 'too old for

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<sup>117</sup> School enrolment, which was very different from regular attendance, almost trebled between 1940 and 1950. Foster, *Education and Social Change*, 113.

<sup>118</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 52.

<sup>119</sup> I.M., 18/12/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>120</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 98.



his class' after a two year break in his schooling caused by the death of his father.<sup>121</sup> Frequent comments by probation officers that children were 'too old' suggest that the idea of educational attainment being directly linked to age was gaining currency, at least among the literate minority. Many children encountered these pressures because illness, bereavement or financial necessity often led to cutbacks in discretionary spending on education, even if this was restored as circumstances improved or the child was integrated into alternative care networks.

Migration – integral to the colonial economy and a key familial response to temporary or permanent setbacks – was also a common and disruptive childhood experience. Migration affected whole families but children also migrated alone or, more commonly, among geographically dispersed kin networks. Changing schools was unsettling and perhaps also a difficult bureaucratic process.<sup>122</sup> And for those coming from further afield, the replacement of English with vernacular instruction was a real problem. Kwaku Badu, an eleven-year-old Efutu from Winneba, began school in his hometown but was later sent to his brother in Accra. Kwaku could not speak Ga, the indigenous language of the capital, and his teacher reported that this 'hampers his work'.<sup>123</sup> The colonial education system, then, was informed by an educative model of childhood and it often failed to accommodate the needs of children and their families because it did not recognise either the continuing economic role of children or the fact that education was vulnerable to familial hardship and the dynamics of the economy.

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<sup>121</sup> S.O.C., 2/10/1952, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>122</sup> K.M., 24/6/1954, Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> K.B., 13/11/1952, Ibid.

These failings were compounded by the uncertain return on an investment in a child's education.

Acquiring an education required sacrifice, commitment and good fortune. Such an investment in a child makes sense in a society where an educative model of childhood enhances, but defers, socio-economic success. It is dangerous to assume that this was the case in the Gold Coast. Indeed, there is significant evidence that literacy and education did not necessarily translate into individual advancement, and that their perceived importance exaggerated structural changes in colonial society that were, in fact, slower and more complex than contemporary and historiographical analyses allowed. The drawbacks and frustrated hopes of an educative childhood materialised during young adulthood, but they are vital in analysing the choices made earlier in life and their longitudinal impact on the individual and society.

The limits of education, and the frustrations this could engender, are vividly expressed in a letter from the orphan J. W. Y. Aidoo, who wrote directly to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti in 1946. Aidoo was orphaned at the age of ten and, despite having 'no relatives on either side who could help', he continued with his education by working as a tinsmith.<sup>124</sup> But by 1946 Aidoo's wider ambitions were frustrated. He had failed to find work in one of the 'trustworthy departments where boys with Primary School Certificates have the chance', and now felt unable to 'prestige and ameliorate [his] condition'.<sup>125</sup> Aidoo complained that the market for literate labour was nepotistic and corrupt:

Your honour, I have applied for many vacant posts, but I was not offered. It is not a question of education that I was not given the post

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<sup>124</sup> Letter from J. W. Y. Aidoo, 2/1/1946, ARG 1/1/206, NAG Kumasi.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

no! It is a question of rich parents [and] relatives. There are not even two people who are my relatives in the departments who would plead for one. In fact, Your Honour, I am very poor of which one must pity and cannot help despising. Your Honour, if not by the kindness of mere acquaintances it will be hard for me to get even my daily bread.<sup>126</sup>

Aidoo was no isolated case: unemployment was the major social problem facing school leavers, although it is difficult to quantify and analyse in detail due to a lack of data. Acquah reported that in Accra ‘many educated females remain a financial burden on their parents until they marry’.<sup>127</sup> Busia met tearful parents who bewailed their still dependent children and told of hefty bribes to even have a job application considered.<sup>128</sup> A month-long survey of the Accra Labour Exchange in 1954 found that literate workers in Accra made up 10.4 percent of applicants, a level of unemployment commensurate with their share of the workforce.<sup>129</sup> There is also evidence that clerical unemployment tended to be long-term: there were not just fewer casual opportunities for clerical work but, the Labour Department claimed, ‘literate applicants considered manual work to be beneath their dignity and would in no circumstances accept such employment as a temporary measure’.<sup>130</sup>

Education could open doors to the intensely competitive literate economy but it did not guarantee employment or success, and it is these limitations and drawbacks that have been downplayed in existing historiography. Foster argued that the increased demand for education

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 69.

<sup>128</sup> Busia, *Sekondi-Takoradi*, 63.

<sup>129</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 77–8.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 77.

in the late colonial period was driven by a teleological process of economic modernisation and bureaucratisation, driven by and dependent upon the creation of a skilled and literate workforce.<sup>131</sup> But Foster overestimated the importance of literacy and literate work. The 1948 census found just 8 percent of the workforce employed in clerical or other literate professions.<sup>132</sup> The expansion of education had far outstripped the availability of clerical work by the 1950s and rewards to the individual were less dramatic than in earlier periods. Remuneration in the upper echelons of the civil service and the commercial economy was very high by local standards, but most clerks struggled at lower pay grades, where wages were comparable to skilled technical work.<sup>133</sup>

Foster also underestimated the importance of non-written technological change and of skilled manual labour. Foster used census data to argue that ‘demand for technicians and craftsmen was never high’.<sup>134</sup> But this claim probably arises from an inaccurate – but unstated – definition of skilled manual work. The profession of ‘fitter’ – a skilled occupation directly tied to technological change – is almost certainly excluded. In 1948 there were approximately 4,800 fitters across the mining, manufacturing, and transport sectors: this was only 25 per cent less than the number of commercial clerks, the largest literate profession in the Gold Coast, and almost 50 per cent *more* than either teachers or civil servants.<sup>135</sup> Even in 1960, 51 per cent of middle school children aspired to skilled and artisanal work in adulthood.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, as Chapter 6 demonstrated, the cash economy also offered immediate alternatives to education

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<sup>131</sup> Foster, *Education and Social Change*, 133–41.

<sup>132</sup> Occupations were recorded only in areas with a ‘reasonable proportion of literate persons’, meaning that this figure is itself inflated and the agricultural sector undercounted. Gold Coast Census Office, *Census of Population, 1948. Report and Tables*. (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1950), 8, 371.

<sup>133</sup> Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 66–7.

<sup>134</sup> Foster, *Education and Social Change*, 133.

<sup>135</sup> Gold Coast Census Office, *Census of Population, 1948*, 389–93.

<sup>136</sup> Foster, *Education and Social Change*, 207.

for children in the transport trade, street commerce, urban leisure industry and domestic service. Many of these jobs had limited long-term prospects and offered scant reward, but they demonstrate that the economy was changing in ways other than bureaucratisation, and that not every new job required a literate employee.

The benefits of education were not, of course, restricted to those in or aspiring to clerical work. But did literacy really make one a more successful trader, carpenter or engineer? Children continued to enter apprenticeships at an early age, suggesting that a sustained education was not perceived as a prerequisite for success, either by masters within the trade or by those children who left schooling behind.<sup>137</sup> Two theoretical insights shed light on this phenomenon: that writing must be seen as a powerful transformative technology and that older or non-optimal technologies can be both viable and enduring.<sup>138</sup> The key questions for the colonial Gold Coast, therefore, are whether acceptable alternatives to written technologies existed and whether a childhood investment in education was necessary for a successful non-clerical enterprise or career.

These are difficult questions to answer definitively, but there is some evidence that viable alternatives to writing existed and that education was of dubious value. The widespread use of non-written technologies in the colonial economy is certainly plausible. Despite low literacy rates, nineteenth-century coastal communities sustained diversified urban economies and a high level of commercial activity in both the interior and Atlantic zones.<sup>139</sup> In 1926 an imperial report noted that the colony's newspapers published shipping news and sundry financial

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<sup>137</sup> This was true for both long-standing trades and newer professions like fitting.

<sup>138</sup> Jack Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old*.

<sup>139</sup> E. Reynolds, 'The Rise and Fall of an African Merchant Class on the Gold Coast, 1830-1874', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 54 (1973): 253-64.



statistics, but also that ‘illiterate cocoa farmers’ had adopted and partially funded an ‘excellent’ telephone network in the cocoa belt.<sup>140</sup> The existence of professional letter writers and street corner lawyers suggest that the demand for written technologies could be satisfied on an ad hoc basis. Most contracts and debts probably remained oral, and agricultural and ecological knowledge was stored in memory, not writing.

In any event, a school level education may not have been sufficient for those tasks that did demand literacy. Literacy certainly allowed access to various bureaucratic institutions and procedures, but it did not imply mastery of them. Francis Allotey, aged fourteen, was falsely charged with forgery after withdrawing money from his brother’s post office savings account. Customers had to prove their identity with a thumbprint but withdrawals also required a form, and, despite being an ‘above average’ pupil in his seventh year of schooling, Allotey needed help from a professional letter writer to fill it out.<sup>141</sup> More evidence comes from letters from children in Ashanti Region – roughly the territory of the most powerful Akan pre-colonial state, Asante – applying for licenses to export monkey skins to friends in England. These letters are extant precisely because they were sent to the wrong departments. One boy was reprimanded for confusing an export license with an import license. He wrote a subsequent letter, pleading that ‘a little consideration should be offered to me for not saying the right thing’.<sup>142</sup> Given the high cost of an education, an imperfect ability to manipulate the literate institutions of government and commerce may have been an insufficient reward. And, as the existence of full-time letter writers suggests, it made sense for many to ignore or curtail

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<sup>140</sup> Government of Great Britain, *Report by The Hon. W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, M.P. on his Visit to West Africa during the Year 1926*, Cmd. 2744 (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1926), 173–4.

<sup>141</sup> F.A., 24/6/1954, SCT 17/5/300, NAG.

<sup>142</sup> Letter from S. E. Graham to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 26/5/1951, ARG 1/1/203, NAG Kumasi.

schooling and take advantage of the inevitable division of labour in a society with a literate minority. A childhood education, in sum, was an investment where rewards were uncertain and often exaggerated. The advent and expansion of formal schooling did not replace existing forms of human capital accumulation during childhood and nor could it fulfil all of the human capital requirements of a successful economic childhood.

## Conclusion

Childhood is, by definition, a social status that comes to an end. But in the Gold Coast the endpoint of childhood was not always clearly or narrowly defined. Nor was the endpoint reached at the same time by every child, with the same measure of success. Childhood was fundamentally about the struggle *not* to be a child and the struggle over the kind of adult the child would become. Children were deeply involved in this process and their accumulative labour was central to paving a route between economic childhood and economic adulthood. As this chapter has shown, the phenomenon of capital accumulation by children is a product of history, and one that changed with great speed and dramatic effect in the colonial period. But, rather than just a historical relic, accumulation by children feeds into broader analytical issues surrounding childhood. It provides new evidence on how childhood is shaped by social and economic forces outside the control, and even understanding, of individuals. But, at the same time, it provides new ways of thinking about children: first, as social agents, rather than victims buffeted by historical forces or prodded into action by their elders; and, second, as aspiring adults, concerned as much with the promise of the future as with the toil of the present.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

This thesis has shown that childhood on the Gold Coast was very much a product of history. Far from being a ritual passage that remained unchanged, even as the society that sustained it underwent dramatic transformations, childhood was shaped by the same historical forces that created, sustained and eventually destroyed colonialism. The childhoods described in this thesis did not simply run in parallel with the colonial period in the Gold Coast, they were inseparable from it. And yet while childhoods in the Gold Coast have to be described as 'colonial', children themselves cannot be described as wholly 'colonised'. The thesis has shown that children were not simply the mute appendages of adult households, tugged along by the forces of adult history. Children in the Gold Coast variously interpreted, reacted to and made history and, while their actions were often mediated by their age, this makes them more, not less, worthy of study.

How, then, did childhood change over the colonial period? What are the answers to the research questions that first motivated this study? First of all, the relationship between children and adult society was altered substantially by the colonial presence. The overarching change was that the colonial state moved from a position of indifference towards African children to claiming the legal right, moral responsibility and practical motivation to supervise, and intervene in, their upbringing. But this extension of government into the private sphere was not a simple process. Chapter 2 argued that Gold Coast societies and colonial officials conceived of children in fundamentally different ways and this inevitably led to conflict, and

thus to the first redefinition of the relationship between children and adult society in the colony. Children in the Gold Coast were thought of as a store of wealth and work, they were thought of as less 'human' than adults and they had fewer social rights. In the early twentieth century, colonial officials therefore encountered various practices – slavery, pawning and child sacrifice – that led to conflicts with British law and metropolitan ideas about what childhood should be. Once these affronts to British sensibilities had disappeared from view, the indifference of the colonial state towards children once again reasserted itself from the 1920s.

Chapter 3 argued that the colonial state again shifted towards a more interventionist stance towards childhood after the Second World War, influenced by a universalist idea of the 'child' and child welfare and a consequent blurring of the racial boundaries between the 'African' and 'European' child. The colonial state was also influenced by social problems that seemed to reach crisis proportions during the war years. Chief among these was the problem of urbanised youth. Young Africans were perceived as particularly corruptible in urban settings and the African family unsuited to correcting the failures of its children. And yet the solutions proposed to these 'African' problems were universal in nature, imported from the metropole and self-consciously modern in their approach. The institutions, legal powers and systems of surveillance that the colonial state put in place after the Second World War created a dramatic shift in the relationship between children and adult society and, in particular, the question of who a child ultimately 'belonged' to.

Part Two of the thesis showed that the colonial encounter had a profound effect on the intellectual and emotional history of children themselves, and that ideas about imperial wealth and power, while not always accurate, began to have a deep impact on the fears, hopes, ambitions and peer cultures of children in the Gold Coast. Chapter 3 explored how the fears

of children differed from those of adults because of their age. In the Gold Coast, childhood fears, like adult fears, were grounded in the cosmology of local society but, because children had an imperfect grasp of these cosmologies, they tended to emerge in slightly different ways. Thus, while nature was a source of anxiety throughout society, children tended to fear animals in particular, and were more scared of physically threatening animals than the ritually dangerous animals that concerned adults. New kinds of fear were also emerging in the colonial period. Some of these can be explicitly tied to the imperial presence, like a fear of colonial or para-colonial authority figures, while others were linked to the mechanization of the economy.

Chapter 4 explored children's understanding of imperialism. It showed that children thought of the colony and the imperial metropole as distinct kinds of places, inhabited by distinct kinds of people. They built up these ideas through direct and indirect contact with the colonial state, with individual Europeans and with the networks of Atlantic commerce that spread into the colonial interior. Children thought of the metropole as a place of relative riches and this began to shape their ambitions for the future. But knowledge of the metropole, like children's understanding of power and politics, was often somewhat vague. 'Power' was, for children, largely something exerted by authority figures, on physical bodies, over short time-scales. The ferment, complexity and abstraction of adult politics seem to have impinged on children's worlds only at moments of particular excitement.

The thesis also showed that work remained a key aspect of childhood experience. Chapter 5 set out to examine the historical trajectory of child labour in the colonial period. It showed that most children in the Gold Coast remained employed in the rural economy but that this sector was a dynamic one. The cocoa boom, in particular, created new roles for children, but existing jobs in food and domestic production remained important. The colonisation of the



economy also created a host of new employment opportunities for children in and around the homes and businesses of Europeans. Urbanisation was also crucial in changing the nature of child labour. Children in cities found work created by the commodification of household production, the spread of small-scale street commerce and the mechanisation of the transport sector. By the end of the colonial period, few children would have grown up without having 'worked' in some sense; child labour was remade, and certainly not side-lined, by the imperial presence.

The argument of Chapter 6, however, was that not all of this child labour was simply 'exploitative'; rather, it allowed children to accumulate wealth for themselves, thus bridging the gap between economic childhood and economic adulthood. This phenomenon was rooted in a strong respect for the property rights of individual children and the idea that children in rural areas would, from an early age, work partly for themselves, allowing children to slowly accumulate livestock, cash and tradable goods. Apprenticeships were another form of 'accumulative labour' that allowed children to acquire valuable skills. In the colonial period, apprenticeships became more monetised, less tied to the family and spread to new trades. The expansion of education during the colonial period did not displace the social purpose that child labour served. For many children, therefore, western-style education was not a panacea and, indeed, going to school could create problems, in both the short- and long-term, for children who were expected to work during childhood.



Figure 8-1. Wilhelm Ananda Stamm, 'Children playing at being fetish dancers', c.1927-38, D-30.63.098, Basel Mission Picture Archive.

The two photographs that illustrate the remainder of this conclusion present two very different sides of childhood in the Gold Coast and illustrate some of the less obvious themes of thesis, as well as suggesting some future avenues for research. Figure 8-1 is of a group of boys pretending to be 'fetish dancers' in an unidentified village in the interwar period. Figure 8-2, taken in the 1950s, is of another group of boys perusing film posters outside a cinema in Accra. These photographs certainly do not show that 'traditional' childhoods became 'modern' ones over the colonial period, but they do highlight some of the major themes of the thesis.



Figure 8-2. 'Outside the cinema'. Photograph from Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, *Problem Children of the Gold Coast* (1955).



Figures 8-1 and 8-2 are the outcome of African children literally coming under a European lens. Figuratively speaking, this was also the subject of the first part of the thesis. But the very different subjects of these photographs also reflect the different ways in which African children became objects of concern for the government in the early and later colonial periods. The photograph in Figure 8-1, of a playful fetish dance, is typical of its era in its focus on the exotic. The photographer, Wilhelm Stamm, was perhaps new to the Gold Coast and in this image he seems keen to document an aspect of African childhood that diverged from European norms. Similarly, when the colonial state was establishing and consolidating its rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African childhoods were of little interest unless they appeared truly unconscionable. As Chapter 2 showed, it was not children's dancing that attracted the attention of the colonial state but the transfer of children as property and the custom of infanticide. These were practices that attacked the very basis of law and order and had to be stamped out.

The exotic aspects of African childhoods exemplified in Figure 8-1 never disappeared. As we have seen, the colonial state employed anthropologists who documented in exhaustive detail aspects of indigenous belief and child-rearing practices that must have seemed outlandish and incomprehensible to European eyes. Yet, as Chapter 4 showed, when the state's interest in African children increased, it sought to apply a range of metropolitan solutions to crises in the colony. Increasingly, the colonial state saw 'problems' like that depicted in Figure 8-2: inveterate cinema-goers were urban, modern and could be saved through careful investigation and the application of expertise. The cinema was just one urban space among many that were seen as dangerous for children. African beliefs about childhood were not considered

particularly relevant because they did not fit in with the way that social problems were governed and investigated.

These photographs also illuminate themes from the intellectual history of children. The children in Figure 8-1 were, like those who I discussed in Chapter 4, engaging with the supernatural world and exploring adult cosmologies. They were probably recreating a religious ceremony that they had seen performed by adults, no doubt adding their own imperfections and innovations as the memory was transformed into the game. The adult ceremonies that children witnessed could also be very frightening, and the ceremonies could be designed to combat very worrying phenomena. Figure 8-1 may also be evidence, then, of children dealing, in the daylight and among friends, with new experiences that they had found unsettling but compelling. But it is important not to compartmentalise the subjects of Figure 8-1 into a purely traditional mode of childhood. Several of those children, after all, had stopped dancing to stare straight down the lens of Willhelm Stamm: theirs was a world in which magic and cameras could coexist. The children in Figure 8-2, meanwhile, may have been looking at the poster for a film that would elicit some new fear, with no precedent in local cosmology or, alternatively, that made unexpected connections with indigenous beliefs. (*Batman*, the poster for which is on the bottom right of the photograph, seems a likely candidate.)

These photographs are both depictions of children at leisure but they suggest some final thoughts about child labour. The children in Figure 8-1 probably made their own fetish dancer outfits from found or gifted local materials. The children in Figure 8-2, by contrast, were planning to buy their entertainment ready-made, though no doubt much of the fun was in the raucous atmosphere of the cinema and the retelling of the tale when the film was over. Many children worked to pay for the cinema. The right to go to the movies was certainly contingent



on completing domestic chores. Those that could afford tickets would buy sweets, fruits and ice cream from child hawkers on their way to the cinema and enter to find children working inside. And, while the cinema itself has little to do with the phenomenon of accumulation discussed in Chapter 7, film-going was precisely the kind of luxury that young people in the late colonial period were thought to be frittering their time and money away on, at the expense of the serious business of growing up.

But these pictures are equally interesting for what they suggest about the potential for the historiography of childhood in Africa in the future. This thesis is a first step in reconstructing the experience of children in the Gold Coast and writing it involved making some hard choices about what to leave out. Some of these choices were enforced. One thing that unites Figure 8-1 and Figure 8-2 is that they depict all-male groups. It was common during my research to find that a source supposedly about children was actually a source about boys; the relative absence of girls from the historical record was frustrating. Age should remain the primary analytical axis of the history of childhood but, as the chapters on child labour showed, having sources rich enough to add gender to that analysis is enormously helpful. Oral testimony will surely be crucial to integrating the histories of girlhood and childhood in the Gold Coast.

The depiction of groups of children with no adult presence bar the photographer behind the camera suggests how important the peer cultures of children are likely to be in future research. The relationships children formed with their siblings and peers must have been crucial when it came to explaining and coping with the world. How much evidence about colonial childhood might we be able to extract from the games children played, the songs they sang and the jokes they told each other? We saw some scattered evidence of the influence of peer cultures in the material on the intellectual history of children. But, for the most part, the child

of the archives is an individual or is described in relationship to the adults in his or her life. Populating the history of childhood with children, plural, may again require stepping outside the confines of the archive.

At the very beginning of this thesis, I argued that there is an unusually deep literature on the social history of the Gold Coast. Building historical knowledge about children, as this thesis has done, strengthens our analysis of colonial society and enriches that literature. We know more about who ordinary men and women in the Gold Coast shared their domestic lives with. We know more about who those ordinary men and women were before they grew up. But, most importantly, we have seen that children are worth studying in their own right: constrained by the adult world, yes, but always pushing against those constraints in interesting ways. Further research on this topic will no doubt be undertaken and some of the arguments of this thesis will need to be nuanced as historians recover more detail about childhoods in less documented parts of the colony. But I hope that future scholars of the subject will look at this first survey of childhood in the Gold Coast and bear in mind the Ga proverb about punishment and forgiveness: 'When a child defecates on your thigh, that part is cleaned but not cut off'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Addo, 'Child Training in Ayikai Doblo', 84.

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