Searching for the Everyday in African Childhoods

Edited by

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Searching for the everyday in African childhoods: introduction

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Abstract: Much attention on childhoods and children's lives in sub–Saharan Africa has focused on marginalised childhoods or children living in difficult circumstances. While the focus of these studies is valid, they have arguably contributed to portraying African childhoods in a rather negative and pessimistic light. Such an overwhelming focus on the challenges that much of the continent and its peoples face is problematic not least because it becomes the focus of many of the publications that are produced about the continent which are, then, in turn, consumed not only by academic colleagues, but also by students and other members of the public. The resulting outcome, then, is that the knowledge that is produced and then consumed about childhoods in sub–Saharan Africa by those living elsewhere is one which is characterised by lacks. Therefore, this special issue on African childhoods seeks to counter such dominant narratives that exist relating to childhoods and children's lives in sub–Saharan Africa and instead, foreground the mundane and everyday existence of a range of children's lives. By adopting such an approach this special issue contributes to illustrating the multiplicity of childhoods that exist on the continent. It is our hope that this will, in turn, highlight the pluralities of contemporary African childhoods and facilitate the process of moving beyond a one-dimensional understanding of childhoods and children's lives in the region.

Keywords: childhood/children's lives, the everyday, mundanities of children's lives, Afro pessimism, sub-Saharan Africa.

Note on the authors: see end of article.

Introduction

Dominant portrayals of African childhoods: challenging a narrative of lacks

In recent decades there has been a proliferation of publications focusing on childhoods and children's lives in sub-Saharan Africa which have contributed to expanding understandings of childhoods globally. However, much of this literature on children's lives on the continent has focused on marginalised childhoods or children living in difficult circumstances (Punch 2003; Ensor 2012; Ansell 2016; Twum-Danso Imoh 2016). A review of literature focusing on children's lives in Africa reveals the extent to which the lives of street children, child workers, HIV/AIDS orphans, and child migrants, often unaccompanied, feature as key themes. Focusing on such challenges is not invalid or unwarranted. Given that Africa remains the poorest continent in the world today, it is important to interrogate, investigate and shed light on the challenges many children face in the region, the reasons behind them and possibly indicate interventions required in order to improve the outcomes for children and their families. Indeed, influencing social policy either locally or globally has to be understood as a primary motivation behind such depictions of African childhoods.

However, at the same time as recognising the need to focus on the challenges many children face on the continent, it must be acknowledged that the publications that foreground these portrayals and experiences, and the attendant studies upon which they are based, have arguably contributed to portraying African childhoods in a rather negative and pessimistic light. This is supported by others including Ensor (2012: 21) who states:

> The limited corpus of reliable research on Africa's youngest citizens has tended to adopt a negative outlook. Given African's turbulent realities, this pessimistic viewpoint is not entirely unwarranted, but [such generalizations] fails to acknowledge encouraging current trends towards brighter possibilities.

In some instances, a pessimistic slant on Africa-centred research has been positively demanded in some circles. Punch (2015) refers to the experience of human geographer, Matthew Benwell, who undertook his PhD research on children's outdoor mobilities in a middle-class suburb in Cape Town, South Africa (see Benwell 2009). As he presented his research in various fora in the years after completing his PhD, he was frequently asked why he chose to not locate his study in a more economically deprived township in Cape Town (in Punch 2015). For those asking these questions, the fact that a Western researcher could travel to an African country and undertake research which did not involve the most deprived or in need was a real puzzle.

Such an overwhelming focus on the challenges that much of the continent and its children face is problematic, not least because they become the focus of many of the

Africa-centred publications that are produced about the continent which are, then, in turn, consumed not only by academic colleagues, but also by students and the general public in other countries, including children themselves. The resulting outcome, then, is that the knowledge that is produced, and then consumed, about childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa is one which is characterised by 'lacks' (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016). This leads to a situation whereby the dominant, if not the only, image, that many people living outside of the continent have about children's lives in Africa is negative. This is something that one of the editors (Twum-Danso Imoh) who is based at an institution in the UK has observed over the years in the way both her undergraduate and postgraduate students discuss children's lives in Africa both in class and in written assessments. The impression gleaned from these interactions and written coursework is that many students in the UK hold deep assumptions about what life is like in Africa and are clear in their minds that the lives of African children can not be at all similar to the lives of children in their own context. When Twum-Danso Imoh tries to challenge these assumptions, there remain a significant number of students who, by the end of the course, struggle to consider the existence of the pluralities of childhoods on the continent and continue to use this deficit understanding of African childhoods to generalise about the whole continent.

Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, illuminates the impact of this one-dimensional knowledge production about Africa on Africans when they venture beyond the continent and meet others from different countries. Specifically, in her Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) talk filmed in October 2009, she recollects her encounter with her American roommate when she first arrived as a student in the US at the age of 19:

> What struck me was this: she had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronising, well meaning, pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her, in any way. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity. No possibility of a connection as human equals.

This is what Adichie calls the danger of the single story because it is based on stereotypes and, as she goes on to say, 'the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story' (Adichie 2009).

Foregrounding the everyday in African childhoods

Like Adichie we, as academics with African heritage, notably Ghanaian heritage, have also noted the damaging consequences of the single story about Africa through both our work and in our personal lives. Through our work, we have observed the limited and

partial insights this single story provides about children's lives on the continent and the exclusionary consequences it can lead to, especially for those children whose lives are not, in some way, characterised by a 'lack' of some kind. In particular, it has led to a situation whereby the mundanities of the everyday lives of many children, which consists of various forms of learning, play, religious activities, family life and friendships, are overlooked in favour of narratives that centre around 'difficulties' and the 'extremities' of existence.

The importance of the everyday, which has long been recognised in anthropology and has experienced something of a revival in sociology in recent years (Jakobsen 2009), underpins what we, as editors, sought to achieve with this special issue. Specifically, our aim was to focus on 'the pedestrian and mundane life that is so commonly recurrent that its participants scarcely notice it' (Gouldner 1975: 422). Given this objective, the proposal we produced for the special issue sought to explore the everyday life activities and interactions of children in diverse parts of the continent. We hoped that such a focus would not only provide insights into the ordinary lives of children, which go beyond a focus on extremities and difficulties, but also 'allow everyday life to question our understanding of the world' (Highmore 2002: 3). Put another way, we hoped that such a focus would lead others to question the dominant understandings they have about how children live their lives on a daily basis in sub-Saharan Africa and go further to identify new ways of conceptualising or theorising African childhoods that not only explore the difficulties of existence many children experience, but also devote attention to the everyday, mundane or ordinary aspects of children's lives on the continent regardless of their geographical location, gender and socio-economic status.

Issue aims and objectives

Therefore, this special issue on African childhoods sought to counter existing dominant narratives relating to childhoods and children's lives in sub-Saharan Africa and instead, foreground the mundane and everyday existence of a range of children's lives. In doing this we hoped that it would illuminate the multiplicity or the plurality of childhood experiences on the continent and facilitate the process of moving beyond a one-dimensional understanding of childhoods and children's lives in the region. In issuing our call for papers we encouraged all submissions to move beyond the narrative of 'lacks' and instead, explore and analyse the mundanities of the everyday lives of diverse groups of children on the continent.

The response we received following our call was tremendous. 41 abstracts highlighting different aspects of children's lives across sub-Saharan Africa were submitted. A review of these abstracts indicated the extent to which academic research, especially produced by researchers on the continent, foregrounded these everyday experiences.

Interestingly, of the 41 abstracts we received we noted that 19 of the articles were written or had been co-written by individuals based in institutions on the continent. More than half of this figure were articles written by academics based in Ghana. This may be explained by the fact that all three editors are from Ghana, with two of them (Tetteh and Oduro) currently based in academic institutions in that country. This background of the editors likely accounts for the significant number of articles received from Ghana. As a result of this and the quality of the abstracts received, we proposed to the Editors of the *Journal of the British Academy* that instead of producing one supplementary issue focusing on Africa, we would instead produce two, one focusing on Africa as per our original intention, and a second issue drawing on the same themes of everyday life, but with a much narrower focus on Ghana. Thus, following the review of abstracts, we ended up with 26 articles across the two issues. Of this 26, ten were written or co-written by Ghana-based academics, six consisted of writing teams with at least one author based at an institution in an African country other than Ghana and the remainder consisted of those who were based elsewhere even if they were of African heritage. Despite a promising start, by the time the deadline for first drafts approached, we failed to receive submissions from a number of authors, some of whom were based in African institutions. This was not the case for Ghana though as almost all of those we had selected submitted their first draft. Of the seven we received four were returned to the authors for further revisions before being sent out to review. Three of these were later resubmitted. However, as editors we decided against proceeding with two of these articles as the revisions made were not sufficient for these articles to be subjected to external review. Further non-submissions were observed following reviewers' reports. This resulted in only two submissions from academics based at institutions in Ghana (Wilson and Ennin). As only one of these was meant to be part of the Ghana-focused supplementary issue along with another article offered by a contributor based outside of Ghana, we realised that it would not be possible for us to proceed with our planned supplementary issue focusing specifically on Ghana. Therefore, we reverted to our original plan of having one single issue.

Producing a special issue on Africa with few submissions from academics based in Africa: some reflections

This initial huge response, but eventual lack of final articles from academics based in Ghana as well as elsewhere such as Nigeria and South Africa, raised some questions for us which we spent time reflecting upon and discussing as an editorial team. In particular, we were puzzled by the failure of authors to submit first drafts or to submit revised drafts given the extreme pressure that exists on academics in African

institutions and elsewhere to publish. Our informal discussions highlighted issues relating to the workload of academics in public universities in Ghana and elsewhere on the continent. In Ghana in particular, we noted that many of our colleagues, especially those in the humanities and social sciences, teach a minimum of two-four courses each semester with very large class sizes (some as large as 300 students). This situation is often compounded by administrative duties and student supervision which has also increased due to the increasing student populations at many institutions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered academic calendars and complicated teaching and learning for academics and students respectively. This burden of work leaves many academics little room for research and publications. From our experience, we noted that female academics bore the brunt of this burden of work as they were caught in the web of a double-shift—having to navigate the academic and administrative workload as well as juggle their familial and care responsibilities, drawing on their limited time and energies. From our interactions with some of those whose articles have ended up in the final output we noted how determined they had to be to ensure that they revised and resubmitted their article. The strategies they adopted included going back to the office after close of work and staying late in the office despite the risks associated with being on campus late at night. Some also made alternative child-care arrangements in the evenings and weekends in order to be able to submit the various versions of their article.

For us this raises a bigger issue about the lack of representation of African-based academics in knowledge production processes more generally and how this can be tackled. In our discussions the opinions of the two editors based in Ghana (Tetteh and Oduro) are clear: there is need for institutions on the continent to take deliberate steps to reduce the workload of academics, especially those who are women and early career. This is particularly crucial if these institutions are going to continue foregrounding research funding and publications in their promotion processes. Such support should include a reduction in teaching loads and the number of assessments offered to students, funded writing workshops, well-structured mentoring programmes and substantial periods of research leave that individuals can apply for at regular intervals. This is key to catapulting the many 'works-in-progress' papers that many academics in this context have (which is, in essence, what these un-returned papers we expected to receive, have become) into fully fledged publications that are able to contribute to relevant bodies of literature in their field. In reviewing the articles that we have included in our final output, three are outcomes of collaborations between African-based researchers and those based in the UK or Canada. This may be an indication that co-authorship involving academics from multiple contexts may be a strategy that may assist authors dealing with heavy workloads or those who are in the early stages of their career and hence, less familiar with journal publishing processes.

There is also work for editorial teams to do. For some of our contributors, the feedback we provided was not only through email exchanges. In some cases, zoom calls were arranged to provide further guidance and support. Additionally, bearing in mind that some of the authors contributing to this special issue were writing in a language which was not their first and probably not their second, the process of editing this special issue involved a commitment, from the outset, to undertake close language editing once the final versions had been produced. This involved, in the early stages, focusing on the substantive arguments of the article and encouraging reviewers to do the same, with the understanding that issues of language will be addressed before submission to the copyeditor. It also involved a commitment from the *Journal of the British Academy* that they would undertake additional language editing to supplement that which the editors had committed to undertake. Hence, the process of putting together this special issue has revealed the need to build in extra time in the publication process to engage authors whose articles have been recognised as having potential in dialogue about their submission whether it is in relation to the substantive argument or whether it is about language expression. The need for extra time must be accompanied by the need to be patient, collaborative and supportive in order to help authors whose articles are recognised as having the potential to contribute to relevant bodies of literature within childhood studies, to be able to submit their articles. These behaviours were not only exhibited by us as special issue editors, but they were also demonstrated by the staff co-ordinating the articles for the *Journal of the British Academy.*

Overview of articles

As a result of these challenges the scope of the special issue has varied from what we thought it would be at the point we reviewed the numerous abstracts we received. However, the submissions we do have reveal fascinating insights into the everyday lives of children in diverse contexts on the continent. The 13 articles that have ended up in our special issue speak to a number of themes that are central to the study of childhood. These themes, which we have used to divide the articles into sub sections, can be categorised as follows:

1   Caring and Belonging in Everyday African Childhoods;
2   Children's Recreation as an Everyday Activity;
3   Foregrounding Indigenous and Religious Beliefs in Socialisation Practices;
4   Literary Depictions of Everyday African Childhoods.

The first theme of care and belonging is captured by two articles. Thea Shahrokh (2022) explores the ways in which young migrants navigate the everyday realities

of xenophobia in South Africa through a focus on caring relationships established by peers and siblings as a response to the precarity they face. The other article that speaks to this theme, by Nicola Jones and her colleagues (Jones *et al.* 2022), examines the factors that influence and shape adolescent friendship networks in an attempt to counter the dominant 'crisis childhoods' framing of adolescent peer networks. In this way they also show the importance of children's cultures and how peer networks shape adolescent development and wellbeing.

The sub section of children's recreation as an everyday activity, which consists of three articles starts off with an article by Shelene Gentz *et al*. (2022) who seek to demonstrate how children spend their free time out of school and the implications for children's subjective wellbeing by drawing on data from Wave 3 of the International Survey of Children's Wellbeing. Following this are two articles which are similar in a number of respects and focus specifically on children and play in Sao Tome and Principe and Mozambique respectively. The first of these articles by Marlene Barra (2022) centres around children living in a country which is located at latitude zero of the equator who have to navigate the challenges associated with not only being a child in an adult-centric context, but also being young African individuals in a world dominated by notions of childhood informed by Western European norms and values. The second of these play-focused articles by Marina Pastore (2022) aims to generate insights into children as social cultural beings who exhibit agency through the play in which they engage in three communities in Mozambique.

Another theme that emerged in this collection of articles centres around the importance of recognising indigenous belief systems or religion in understanding African socialisation practices. Evelyn Corrado (2022) adopts a decolonising approach and draws on the East African concept of Harambee to call for the importance of indigenous knowledges that are often transmitted in homes and wider communities in helping children to learn within the institution of the school. The importance of indigenous knowledge continues as a central feature of discussion in Bukola Onyinloye's article (Onyinloye 2022) on children's everyday work experiences in rural Muslim Yoruba communities in North Central Nigeria in which she explores the ethnotheories of parents in rural Northern Nigeria and their role in the organisation of children's everyday work. In contrast, Franziska Fay (2022) focuses on the intersection between Islamic religion and socialisation in Zanzibar to examine how conceptions of the ordinary are reflected in early socialisation practices of Muslim children's lives. This is followed by Alex Wilson's contextual article (Wilson 2022) which outlines childhood constructions within the worldview of the Fantse people of Central Ghana and argues that such belief systems, although often ignored by government institutions, could facilitate the implementation of global child-focused laws due to the synergies that exist between understandings of childhood within this belief system and elements of global notions of childhood. Ruby Quantson Davis (2022) adopts a narrative approach and foregrounds the importance

of indigenous knowledge to illuminate the role of children as peacemakers in transforming everyday conflict in Ghana to counter the often popular and negative image of African child soldiers. The final article in this section by Emmerentia Leonard and her colleagues (Leonard *et al.* 2022) draw on the concept of Ubuntu to demonstrate how this notion informs understandings of family within the context of Namibia and how that, in turn, shapes attitudes to the practice of kinship fosterage.

While the first three sections of the special issue have drawn on perspectives from within the social sciences, the final section adopts a literary approach to generate insights about the mundanities of growing up in Africa. Theresah Patrine Ennin (2022) explores the pluralities of childhoods by providing a reflection and commentary on the autobiographical accounts of two West African novelists—Camara Laye and Wole Soyinka—and presents these in juxtaposition to the dominant narratives of lack, slavery, colonialism, and vulnerability which are often depicted in literary texts focusing on children's lives on the continent. Finally, Veronica Barnsley (2022) undertakes a survey of several novels to explore the pluralities of contemporary African childhoods which go beyond simple imageries of child victims to be rescued or 'prematurely grown-up' child workers to be pitied. Barnsley ends her article hopeful that despite the 'the paucity of happy endings in African literature,' we can look forward to a 'plenitude of new beginnings.'

This hope resonates with the aim of the editors in the sense that this special issue will contribute to 'new beginnings' through encouraging reconceptualisations of African childhoods which not only consider the precarity of life for those living in difficult circumstances, but also takes into account the mundane everyday lives of the diverse groups of children that can be identified across the continent if we care to look closely enough.

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Caring and belonging in everyday African childhoods

Finding 'belonging' in the caring relationships of young people with migration experiences in South Africa

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Abstract: Young people with migration experiences in South Africa are navigating the everyday realities of a socially divided context, within which xenophobia is often marked. Countering narratives of individualisation and criminalisation of young migrants, this article explores caring relationships as a response to precarity. Drawing from participatory arts and story-based research with young people with migration experiences aged 14–25, this article explores the landscapes of care they are establishing with peers and siblings. It argues that young people are expressing and enacting care, for, with and about, others to build belonging and drive social change. This is an underexplored area and provides important insight into the meaning of everyday care and caring relationships as driven by young people themselves.

Keywords: Young people, migration, belonging, care, participatory research.

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Introduction

Narratives about young people with migration experiences in research rarely incorporate their expressions of care and construction of belonging. Within studies on African youth migration, engagement with young lives is often from the perspective of what they lack, the pain of their experience, their perceived victimhood, or their lack of acceptance in society (Opfermann 2019; Mahati & Palmary 2018; Orgocka 2012). By focusing on experiences of victimhood and trauma, constructions of vulnerability are being centred. For young people with migration experiences, these identities of vulnerability risk creating hierarchies regarding who is more or less deserving of protection and care within society. Young people with migration experiences are being reduced to a single story (Ngozi Adichie 2009), and their whole selves and the multiplicities of their lives become silenced (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016). Not only does this undermine their agency, it also limits the possibilities of knowing about the generative aspects of their lives, such as where they find care, support, love and growth.

This article explores young people's expressions and enactments of care at personal, relational, and political levels within the South African context. Histories of colonialism and apartheid, and dominant narratives of intergenerational trauma and persistent violence make South Africa an important context for challenging reductive ideas of lack and victimhood. For young people with migration experiences, this intersects with the politics of belonging and experiences of exclusion and marginality, reinforced in public and political discourse through xenophobic stereotypes. The research shared in this article, presents knowledge created by young people with migration experiences aged 14–25 who co-created a participatory arts and story-based research project between 2017 and 2019 in Cape Town, South Africa. Young people's own narratives, including of their efforts to build their lives in new environments, do not centre on what they lack, they instead explore their complex and multiple caring relationships, in particular with peers and siblings. Care, in this context is understood from the perspectives of young people themselves, which focuses on peer support and friendship in their everyday lives. Their understanding of care is grounded in a relational experience, the interaction between people, and how this relates to a sense of feeling accepted, and having a place in the world.

Within research with young migrants in Europe, caring relationships between children and young people have gained greater visibility, including in response to inadequate care and protection within social welfare regimes (Rosen *et al.* 2019; De-Graeve & Bex 2017). Research on young people's role within caring relationships and networks in southern Africa has primarily focused on young people's caring capacities within extended kinship networks such as between children and relatives within households affected by HIV and AIDS (Robson *et al.* 2006; Young & Ansell 2003). This research also recognises care as an expression of young people's agency

within precarious circumstances, including as a factor driving their migration (Ansell 2009; Aitken 2001; Ofosu-Kusi 2017). Care between young people themselves, as peer support, as friendship and community building is however, underexplored. In her research with street-connected young people in South Africa, van Blerk (2012) argues that emphasis is placed on their being different, and out of place, as opposed to the interdependencies they hold within family and friendship networks. The result was that young people's aspirations for, and enactments of, care were made invisible, and consequently, this part of their lifeworld was silenced.

The silencing of these caring relationships takes on particular pertinence for young people with migration experiences in the South African context, where high levels of xenophobia exist (Hlatshwayo & Vally 2014; Cooper 2009). Young people with migration experiences find themselves constructed in relation to identities with a perceived threat (Cooper 2009). Research on the South Africa-Zimbabwe border highlighted that young Zimbabwean women who reported experiences of sexual violence found their own behaviour being policed, and their morality questioned by service providers (Mahati & Palmary 2018). Within this context, young people with experiences of migrating within (such as rural to urban migration) and from outside of South Africa are less likely to have improved life chances (Hall *et al*. 2015). Those arriving in the country without support networks face multiple barriers to their inclusion and well-being, including language, insecurity and violence, inadequate housing and restricted access to education and healthcare (Magqibelo *et al*. 2016; Willie & Mfubu 2016; Opfermann 2019).

This article presents an analysis of the narrations and experiences of young people with migration experiences shared within a participatory arts-based research project. This approach was chosen as part of a commitment to decolonising research. Being participatory meant that young people chose the research methods, and shaped the focus of the inquiry. The resulting overarching research question was to explore in what ways young people with migration experiences navigate identities and build belonging through their expressions of agency? Why, and how? In exploring this question, young people were particularly interested in how and why caring relationships take on a particular power as they navigate uncertain and unequal realities.

In undertaking the participatory research with young people as co-creators of knowledge, I followed Cooper *et al.*'s (2018: 40) argument for establishing youth studies for the Global South as an area of scholarship, within which, the 'loci of enunciation needs to become part of interpreting the meaning, relevance and usefulness of knowledge'. This means that understanding how care and belonging are entangled should be generated from within young people's situated knowledge. In this study, this enunciation was facilitated through arts and story-based research to support contextualised, and culturally specific self-expression by young people.

In generating situated and self-determined knowledge, notions of 'childhood' and 'youth', understood as universal and 'natural', are also being deconstructed and reconstructed as context-dependent, multiple (Ofosu-Kusi 2017; Huijsmans 2011; James & Prout 2015; 1990) and decolonised (Cannella & Viruru 2004; Cooper, Swartz & Mahali 2018). This article contributes new empirical knowledge grounded in young people's subjectivities, on the complexity of caring relationships between peers and siblings with experiences of migration. The relational emphasis of the knowledge produced counters narratives that individualise and 'other' young people with migration experiences, and which rarely connect them to friends, care and the building of community.

Within this article, I first review literature which critically discusses the concept of agency from a situated perspective. From this, I argue that understanding agency as social navigation can provide nuanced insight into young people's expressions of self within the world. I then explore literature on the concept of care, as a particular enactment of agency centred by young people, and how this relates to ideas of belonging. Following this, the participatory arts and story-based methodological approach is elaborated. I then present the empirical findings from the research which make visible young people's enactments of social navigation as caring for, caring about, and caring with others so as to build future pathways and wider social change.

Agency, care and belonging within young people's migration experiences

Young people's agency as social navigation

The idea of 'agency' for children and young people in the global South has been largely constructed in relation to the neo-liberal ideal of the autonomous subject; that agency is defined as rational choice and individual freedom (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottemoller & Chizororo 2006). In her critical analysis, Madhok (2013) argues that conceptions of agency as autonomous personhood reinforce colonial power relations, as they rely on stable contexts that assume actions are freely chosen and directed. The implication for agents in insecure, and 'coercive' contexts, Madhok argues, is that a failure to translate deeply-held desires into actions equates to a 'lack' of agency. Reinforcing this analysis, Wanjiku Kihato (2007) argues that migrant women are often positioned as lacking agency, in how they are labelled as 'victims'. She argues that this both objectifies and makes invisible a person's humanity, rendering them without power to change their circumstances.

In this article, I will explore how agency is understood within the ongoing negotiations in lives that are 'in motion' (Palmary, Hamber & Núñez 2015: 6). Informed by their research in Johannesburg, Palmary, Hamber & Núñez (2015)

conceptualise agency in relation to how people with migration experiences respond to, and cope with, precarity, and how they negotiate change, albeit within contexts of constraint. The precarity of everyday life involves understanding 'people's practices of help-seeking, care, support and healing in response to their everyday insecurity'.

Drawing on this idea of agency as negotiation, migration research globally has begun to engage with the concept of social navigation developed through research with young people in Africa (De-Boeck & Honwana 2005; Durham 2004; Honwana 2012; 2014; Vigh 2006), establishing, in particular, its utility in the lives of young people that move. Social navigation' emerged from research with young people in conflict affected contexts (Oosterom 2019). It refers to the way that young people actively respond to socially 'immediate' struggles for survival, whilst plotting courses towards 'imagined' horizons. The language of horizons suggests ways of looking ahead which are socially, historically and culturally constituted (Vigh 2009). By emphasising the complexity of power relations within social environments Vigh (2010) highlights the importance of negotiations of power, going beyond defining certain groups as either powerful or powerless.

The value of social navigation as a concept is placed in its recognition of young people's complex forms and expressions of agency as they move through dynamic contexts. Denov & Bryan (2012) argue that in the context of migration, 'social navigation' defies notions of victimhood, and reveals the decision-making power, networking, and survival strategies that young people employ to navigate flight. In Nunn *et al*.'s (2017) analysis of a young man's settlement in Australia, social navigation disrupts notions of linearity. The concept of navigation leaves openness to the continuous nature of navigating, and the skills and resources required.

Navigating care and belonging

Young people with migration experiences have moved for myriad reasons, including fleeing war, conflict, and persecution, to build lives for themselves outside of contexts of economic and political crisis, and to access opportunities so that they can better their lives. This experience of migration, whether dislocation or relocation, is a process of change that young people are navigating, and one that is deeply affected by shifts in relationships with people and places.

Research into the complex childhoods of young people in southern Africa, including independent child migrants, has incorporated an understanding of their caring practices, in particular their role in *caring for,* and *caring about,* others (Tronto 1989). The impact of the AIDS pandemic across sub-Saharan Africa has contributed to changes in household structure and the role of extended family relations, impacting young people as they have taken on roles as carers, household heads and migrants

(Nyambedha, Wandibba & Angaarg-Hansen 2003; Payne 2012; Robson *et al.* 2006). For children, this has often meant moving between extended familial households to provide support, and be supported (Ansell *et al.* 2012; Young & Ansell 2003; Hall & Posel 2018). In the South African context, young people have moved from neighbouring countries to join family members that have moved for labour, or to establish lives of their own (van Blerk 2012; Ansell *et al.* 2012).

Research conducted with young migrants in Italy and the UK by Chase & Allsopp (2021), found that caring, support and helping others were important capabilities identified by young people. Peer-to-peer support was seen as critical in the material, practical and emotional resources that young people could draw on. This emphasis on *caring about*, is that the emotional and affective dimensions of care can provide important insight into young people's aspirations and priorities. Caring for and caring about are deeply interconnected, in particular within the notion of a feminist 'caring ethics' (Tronto 1993) which establishes the role of care in ways of being in the world. Within the South African context, it is pertinent to relate the idea of caring ethics to the relational notion of *Ubuntu,* an ethics of communality, mutuality and reciprocity in decision-making (Chisale 2018).

Drawing on the framework of 'landscapes of care', as articulated by Milligan & Wiles (2010: 736), to unpack the complex interconnections between people, places and care, young people can be understood as navigating 'caringscapes' (Mckie & Gregory 2004: 2). This notion relates to the dynamic terrain that comprises a person's aspirations for, and obligations toward care. In their research with unaccompanied minors in Sweden, De Graeve & Bex (2017: 81) use the framing to take into account the factors that enable and constrain young people's access to significant care relationships. In this article, the notion is used to understand young people's articulation, construction and navigation of their own 'caringscapes', as a way of understanding and recognising their agency and power within their environments.

Within the diverse realities of young people with migration experiences, the intersections of care and belonging are pertinent, as they build their lives in new locations, both with, and without, family members. Home portrays the emotional attachment people hold to subjective experiences of familiarity and safety (Yuval-Davis 2006) and relational, cultural, economic, and legal influences contribute to feelings of home rooted in place (Antonsich 2010). Experiences of care from peers, and within communities, have been shown to enhance the quality of belonging for young people as caring relationships give value to who they are and their personhood (Bourdillon 2004; De-Graeve & Bex 2017; Robson *et al.* 2006; van-Blerk 2012; Rosen, Crafter & Meetoo 2019; Chase & Allsopp 2021). It is argued that places, are in turn, made meaningful by the social relations that include or alienate, provide care or drive loneliness (Massey 1994).

As articulated by Tronto (1993), the distribution of care and caring relationships within a landscape can make visible power relations and inequalities; what Yuval-Davis

(2006) refers to as the politics of belonging. Within analysis of the 'moral economy of care' the idea of deservingness 'of care' maps onto the politics of belonging (Watters 2007); who is and who is not deserving of care, friendship and peer support in a society. In exploring how and why young people navigate these politics of belonging, within caringscapes, I build on Kirby's (1996) argument, (drawing from Probyn, 1996), and theorisations within research on youth and place (Habib & Ward 2019), that belonging should be seen as in-process, and a personal dialectic in negotiation with one's surroundings. This conceptualisation provides an opportunity to better understand how young people with migration experiences creatively construct and resist power, in their navigation of care and belonging.

Methodology as participation, creativity and care

This article draws from youth-centred research with young people with migration experiences living in Cape Town, South Africa. Participatory dialogue between the young participants and myself, as the researcher, led to the development of a participatory arts and story-based research methodology grounded in the contextual realities, aspirations and cultural histories of those involved. The participatory approach was a decolonising commitment underpinned by an understanding that people 'hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions, [and] frame the interpretations' (Torre & Fine 2006: 458). The role of storytelling was important within this, re-positioning the power to conceptualise and narrate agency, identities and belonging with young people themselves (Bradbury & Clark 2012; de-Leeuw & Rydin 2007). This moved away from extractive experiences of personal storytelling, for example within the asylum system, towards what Lenette (2019: 43) refers to as 'alternative storytelling'. Creative expression further provided space for self-exploration, whilst recognising young people's agency as artists and creators (Ncube 2006; Ndlovu 2017). The resulting process was both personal and relational and brought the individual and collective into a learning dynamic enabling co-creation through critical reflection (Willox, Harper & Edge 2012: 132).

Identifying and engaging young participants

This research aimed to engage with realities of migration experiences across diverse histories, contexts and experiences. By going beyond binaries of migrant/non-migrant or citizen/other, the research complicated the experience of migration, dislocation, and relocation, and how this intersects with other markers of identity and belonging in young people's lives. The young people involved held diverse backgrounds and had moved to Cape Town from war-affected countries such as Democratic Republic of

Congo, Burundi and Angola but also from complex crisis contexts such as Malawi, Zimbabwe as well as from within South Africa, and Cape Town itself. The use of the term 'young people with migration experiences' is in line with arguments emphasising the harmful nature of politicised labelling and categorisations. Seeing a more fluid and dynamic relationship between young people's different positionalities holds the potential to counter divisive labels, and instead recognise shared claims for inclusion and rights (Landau 2012a).

The study took place with 51 participants who made up four participatory research groups of young people aged 14–25. Of those that participated in the research, 28 identified as male, and 23 as female. The four groups of participants reflected a sub-set of the diverse housing and residential environments of young people with migration-experiences in Cape Town. Two participant groups were with young people within residential care settings, one with young women, and the other with young men. A further mixed gender group was developed in partnership with a community-based organisation and a final mixed gender group was established more informally with young people within their own local area. The latter groups were located within two of Cape Town's structurally marginalised townships.

Relationships and trust-building as ethical practice

Organised in partnership with youth organisations working to enhance the lives of diverse youth facing marginalisation, a set of engagement activities including cooking sessions, youth workshops at museums and galleries, and organised hikes, aimed to build relationships and trust with young people living in Cape Town. From here, young people started to engage with the issue of migration experience in their lives, and made choices about whether and how they would like to participate in a project that brought this experience into view. As a female international researcher originally from the UK, with dual Iranian and Scottish heritage, I was also situated in this exploration, around issues of migration, power and privilege, including along lines of race, gender, migratory and socioeconomic status.

Cultivating relationships needed space and time, prior to, during and within the research process, and those established within this project built on five years of collaborative research partnerships with civil society organisations in Cape Town. These collaborations shaped an ethics application to Coventry University (UK), the researcher's host institution, which supported a contextually grounded approach, including towards safeguarding and child protection. Relatedly, and in agreement with the young participants involved, all names in this article have been pseudonymised.

For the young participants informed consent was a continuous process. Following an initial agreement, continuous consent encouraged young participants to actively

grapple with decisions around what they wanted to include in the project and why. I also produced ethical practice agreements with each participant group. These were reviewed regularly, and provided direct accountability between myself as the researcher and the young participants. Deeper trust was also built through the research approach, over time, as young people saw the commitment in the project to centring their knowledge and agency play out in practice (Cahill 2007; Torre & Fine 2006). These approaches brought myself as the researcher and the participants into shared, contextualised ethical commitments grounded in care (Edwards & Mauthner 2012; Tronto 1993; Gouws & Zyl 2015).

Participatory arts and story-based methods in practice

The central research processes took place over a period of between seven and ten months, through weekly workshops. Further cycles of action and reflection took place through unfolding opportunities for reflection and action over a further two years. Each of the four participatory research processes started at the personal level through sharing stories of lived experiences using creative and reflective techniques. From here, young people moved into cycles of personal, collective and relational learning through different creative modes (Wheeler *et al.* 2018). Depending on the participant group, young people's stories were developed as films, songs, poetry, theatre, visual storybooks, and body maps. The creative approaches connected to different young people's ways of feeling comfortable and confident in expressing themselves (Leavy 2018; Denov & Shevell 2019), and the process of art-making supported a sense of control and containment (Shahrokh & Treves 2020).

Grounded in a commitment to social justice, the research was also action oriented and questioned how spaces of inclusion could be created (Nunn 2020). The research moved through dialogic consciousness raising for both researchers and participants (Torre & Fine 2006; Cahill 2010). This learning process was also extended outwards towards social actors in the systems that surround young people's lives through influencing workshops and symposia with youth-workers, social workers, and government officials. Building on young people's research findings, the youth participants grew further initiatives—supported by grassroots organisations—including a youth-led peer support programme for young people newly arrived in Cape Town and a youth-led storytelling process with young men with complex vulnerabilities.

Participatory analysis and researcher synthesis

Drawing from ideas of emergence, collaboration and dialogue in participatory research, the process of analysis and sense-making was iterative throughout (Blakey,

Milne & Kilburn 2012). I undertook reflective analysis workshops with the young people involved to highlight key themes emerging in their storytelling and arts processes. The analysis incorporated the multiple data that had been generated, including the transcripts of workshop discussions, the narrations of meaning connected to artistic outputs, the artefacts and stories produced. Further, through reflective diaries and conversations we captured the changes young people went through as they (re) defined and (re)presented their realities (Jackson & Mazzei 2011). As I worked across the four groups, I undertook a further layer of thematic analysis, to learn across and between their diverse experiences. I recognise this knowledge, alongside my ways of telling, are still only 'traces' of young people's lives, and remain deeply entangled in my interpretation (Denzin 1989: 26).

Understanding care and belonging in young people's everyday lives

Within the presentation of empirical findings that follows I enter into the caringscapes of young people with migration experiences in South Africa. It is important however to note that, whilst wanting to explore themes of care and belonging in the analysis of their research, the young participants highlighted that audiences should remain aware of the webs of pain, loss and violence in their pasts and experiences of exclusion, xenophobia and violence in their present lives. The emphasis on care presented here is not to undermine these experiences, but it is to show how caring relationships, in particular those amongst peers and siblings, both facilitated practical assistance and emotional support, providing sustenance to young people navigating the complex reality of being young and a migrant in a structurally unequal and socially divided South Africa (Bradbury & Clark 2012; Newman & De-Lannoy 2014).

In the findings that follow the first theme presented focuses on young people's work to care for peers and siblings whilst preparing for migration, within the migration journey and in building their lives in a new context. This care-work was both about navigating daily challenges, and providing the space for strategic future planning. The second theme highlights how caring for others brought a sense of personal value in young people's self-definition. Young people's expressions of care were interventions in creating the identities and belonging that they imagined, however within wider societal constraints. The final theme surfaces young people's inclusive enactments of care, and how youth-led initiatives to build spaces and places of belonging are direct interventions into their caringscapes. The complexities of navigating unequal power relations whilst building care and belonging are also discussed, and signalled as an area of further research.

Caring for and about the future for self and others

The caring relationships expressed between young people provided both everyday, and strategic support within their social navigation that created a foundation for future-building. Young people who migrated on their own highlighted how relationships with other children and young people became significant as an integrated part of their survival. In Peter's (aged 18) journey from Zimbabwe to South Africa, he spoke of the importance of other children and young people in passing on information about routes and strategies for moving without being arrested, sharing access to clothes and food, providing support and sharing ideas and strategies for migration:

> I ran away to Harare where I stayed in the streets. I don't remember how long, but it was very long, maybe a year. I got clothes from my friends I made on the streets; my friend robbed a drunken man. I had a lot of friends on the street. My friends then told me we should go to South Africa. We took a train but when we got to the border, we got too scared to cross the border and went back to Harare. I then made two other friends who also said we should go to South Africa.

It was in these acts that we learn 'not only about violence but also aspects of the everyday that negotiate through and outside of violence' (Walker 2010: 9). These experiences of friends working together to strategise, and provide practical support were shared by many young men and women in this research. Takudzwa (aged 19), a young man originally from Zimbabwe, also explained how at 18, he experienced further dislocation, as he was asked to leave the family that was caring for him in South Africa. He said that this was because he 'was now a man' and was no longer perceived as a young person in need of care. At that time, he was writing his end of school exams, and his peers living in a shack in an informal settlement supported him to live with them without paying rent whilst he finished his education. In these examples caring relationships can be seen as a part of, and in support of, young people's strategic negotiations to build their futures.

Young people in this study linked their present caring acts to these earlier experiences. The group of young men that were living in the residential care setting, for example, explained how they showed care towards younger children, who would come in from 'the street' in a drop-in capacity. They would play games, do art and make them food. Reflecting on these expressions of care, Peter said: 'this is about providing hope, like others did for us, and giving these young children a way of seeing that a different kind of life is possible'. These caring relationships were reproduced again by older young people who had moved out of residential care settings into the community. Three young men in their early twenties who were extended kin from the Democratic Republic of Congo, opened up their home to other younger men preparing to leave care, or having recently left. Bassam (aged 21) said this was because, 'I knew how important our relationships with each other were in building up our lives in the community, and most young people don't have this, they don't have anyone'.

Seeing these caring acts as recreating kin or sibling relationships (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020) also helps to make sense of the flow of care from those older to younger, or across different positions of stability and security.

Young men in particular also shared their experiences of their commitment to caring for siblings, and how their experiences of social and economic marginalisation intersected with their aspirations for safe and just care. Joseph (aged 23), a young man from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was residing in a supported living environment for young men. He fought to have his 15-year-old brother stay with him after he learned that he had experienced abuse in a residential care setting. Joseph felt responsible for this happening, 'because I was not there to protect him, a brother should be with his brother, so he is safe'. Although Joseph managed to take on the role of care and protection of his brother, he also felt conflicted in bringing his brother into a hostile environment with older youth. This experience shows how the enactments of care that young people aspired for were not always within reach, and their care work was both an effort towards building belonging, and highlighting feelings of '(un)belonging' (Ward 2019) simultaneously.

This simultaneous experience of (un)belonging resonated for Jean (aged 22), a young man from DR-Congo, whose caring relationship with his brothers was complicated by fracturing within his family network. Jean had to move out of the home of an uncle that he was staying in with his two brothers because of tensions in the household, in particular because Jean stood up to a situation of domestic violence. However, he explained that this made his care a deeply significant intervention for him personally:

> [I]t is hard for me to see my brothers because I don't have a good relationship with [my uncle]. But I am trying to make sure that I stay connected with them ... it is my responsibility to ensure that they stay positive and that they receive positivity and love so that they do not turn to into people that don't know how to love in their lives.

In recognising the significance of love and care in young people's development, Jean is potentially intervening in the effects of trauma in his brothers' lives. Although he was able to look towards the future, the sense of not being able to care for his brothers in the present, and ensure their safety, was quite overwhelming. As Jean explained in one of our group sessions:

> I don't know how to find a, a way to make sure they are okay. My uncle [pauses] just treats them however he likes. It is more than just everyday stuff too, I also need to find a way for them to get their documents, but I don't have money, I also want to be in school, and this is really stressing me, agh, [shakes his head] ... you know it is too much stress.

Jean's experiences establish how young people's commitment to care is a significant responsibility, and highlights the emotional labour involved in building meaningful caring relationships in support of others' wellbeing and longer-term sense of belonging.

Young women spoke more negatively about feelings of being restricted, controlled and policed in their behaviour, and they felt that being 'cared for' enabled a position of power over them by adults, and legal caregivers, that was not always in their interest. A young woman with Angolan heritage called Esther (aged 17) also highlighted the complexities of sibling care for children and young people. She explained that the abuse she experienced from her mother led to her becoming 'a mother to my sister', and this made her 'very sad' as she was taken out of school. She felt that this 'took away my childhood'. For Esther, her care-work undermined her access to education, constraining her sense of power, and her rights within her childhood. Her experiences also speak to the gendering of care-work which the burden has been shown to predominantly fall upon girls in sub-Saharan Africa (Robson *et al.* 2006).

Caring with others and building place-based belonging

Young people yearned for close peer relationships, and friendships that they felt would give them value and enable them to bring value to others. Kabelo (aged 18), a young man from Lesotho, said that he wanted other people to see him: 'as a guardian that can be there for other people that will always be there for others'. As Aviwe (aged 16), from the Eastern Cape, described, he wanted his identity to be seen as 'kind, caring, positive and helpful'. The active construction of identity narratives of 'being caring' largely took place for young men, who related them to wider, racialised criminalisation and individualisation experienced in society. By focusing on others, they were establishing themselves as agents with positive contributions and conceptualising their belonging as being in constructive, reciprocal and caring relationships.

The young people shared how they were building care with others through spaces of peer support. Although these remained spaces of intimacy, they reflected the interaction of their caring values within the private sphere, with their connection to a public realm, albeit an intimate public (Poletti 2011). The spaces of peer support were built on shared foundations, whether of experiences of loss, dislocation and being placed in care, or of sociocultural intimacy and safety in self-expression. As Takudzwa (aged 18), originally from Zimbabwe, mentioned, this was particularly pertinent as he felt that he had to 'work to make myself less visible in South African society because I don't have [legal] status here'. The peer support groups were creating 'alternate spheres for articulating and recounting experiences silenced' (Das & Kleinman 2001: 3). This was an enactment of care produced with and for other young people with migration experiences.

This opportunity to learn from others and understand their experiences, helped young people to feel less alone and in turn build their sense of personal, or inner, strength. As Ramiro (aged 21), a young man from Angola, explained, 'for young

people that came here, we all think our story is the worst story, and then you come here, and you find people who are stronger than you so I feel that young people are resilient because they don't feel alone'. Young people also explained how the isolation they experienced was disrupted by having a consistent place where relationships and friendships could grow. Sylvia (aged 18), a young woman born in South Africa to parents from the Democratic Republic of Congo, explained that, 'being in my area you don't really have that kind of environment, where they encourage you and things [like that]. You come here, and you meet new people, and you find yourself'. In these reflections the relationship between care and belonging is reflected, not only in the personal sense of strength being built through the caring acts of others, but also in the affective relationship with place, an environment within which positive caring relationships manifested.

This enactment of care and belonging with and for other young people, intersected with young people creating safe and supportive spaces to share their stories. Young people were creating witnessing spaces that upheld their sense of value and worth and reinstated their sense of power. Within this, I learnt from Natasha (aged 18), a young woman born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and who grew up in Angola, about the role of listening in caring for, and with, others.

> I have learnt that through listening truly transformative things can happen, it is through listening that people can find their voice and then find a way to build a voice with others. It is so important that I give recognition to you and what you have taught me, to be relaxed in who you are and find your voice and your story and share that. ... As I move forward and grow, I now see all of you as a part of who I am, you have nurtured me and helped me to grow and I am the better and richer for it.

Through these listening relationships young people were supported to see themselves as someone with worth and value, not only to recognise their own contributions, but also that they were worthy of care themselves. The work these young people were doing to construct and enact care reflects Rogoff's (2003) articulation of human development, and how new generations adapt their heritage, and past influences, in the face of new circumstances.

Young people's aspirations for an enactment of care were taking place within relations of power, and distributions of caring relationships were constructing the boundaries of caring and belonging, and how far these could be extended to others (Tronto 1993). Aisha (aged 18), a young woman from Somalia, related this to her experiences at school.

> It is important to me because I have experienced a feeling of not belonging ... when I was at my last school I felt like I didn't belong and I was rejected by the people around me. I felt lost and I didn't know what to do, I couldn't study. Now I have a friendship group.

Young people felt constrained by boundaries of belonging, or (un)belonging, as they considered how to mobilise the ethics of care they had generated within their peer support groups into their wider public lives. For example, Priscilla (aged 16), from Angola, who within this research process had set up peer support groups for young people with migration experiences, felt afraid to try to implement something similar within her school where she felt many people positioned her as an outsider. She felt that an encroachment on 'their space' at school could lead to violent push-back by other young people. Instead, she decided to continue to 'act quietly'. Her strategy was to 'try and understand why people behave the way they do to exclude others', and 'show other students that foreigners are kind and caring'. Priscilla thus developed a strategy to perform acts of everyday care as a form of quiet resistance (Weitz 2001).

Caring together for wider social change

The participatory research process led by the group of young men living in a residential care setting led to the creation of a programme supporting creative expression with younger men and boys living in an early intervention setting within an informal settlement. They used the short films that they had made about their life story within their research process to create a space for sharing and dialogue with young men affected by issues including violence and neglect. They wanted to create a space to promote the idea that strength can come from sharing your story and counter harmful ideas of strength as exerting power over others. After watching Luke's film, the following discussion took place between Luke (aged 15), originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Themba (aged 15), a young Xhosa South African:

> Themba: In your story you said that you said that when your mum didn't come, that you stopped crying, how did this happen, how can others find this ... peace?
> Luke: Ya, you know, I don't know, it isn't that I stopped crying completely, it's just that I wasn't waiting for her to come anymore, I knew that she wasn't coming. I tried to focus on who was here and that was my brother, I was lucky that he was here.
> Themba: Ya I see, it is not easy and you're not the only one.

This interaction was significant as it indicates how hearing someone else's story can catalyse the possibility of an open conversation around healing and change. As Luke explains, the feelings of loss he was carrying stayed with him, but at the same time he explained how he was trying to build strength from his present relationships.

Within the youth-led peer support groups introduced above, young people were also actively constructing spaces of change in their lives. Within these groups were both young people with migration experiences living in community settings, and those living in residential care settings, from diverse genders, nationalities, ages and

racialised social positions, which shaped different relational, cultural and institutionally informed experiences. The young people emphasised that within these peer support groups, they were, seeking a kind of 'togetherness in difference', and to go beyond a 'totalising "we"' (O'Neill *et al.* 2019: 133) in order to move towards spaces that practise the kind of inclusivity they were looking for in wider society.

A further example of this inclusive enactment of care was within a dance-based social movement set up by Nimi (aged 21), a young man originally from Angola, who grew up in a residential care setting with his older sister. Nimi found dancing freestyle and drawing enabled him to express himself when he was growing up, which helped him to 'work through my worries'. Through meeting other dancers, it became clear to him that he wanted to initiate a movement across diverse backgrounds. He created this movement with his friend Antonio (aged 21), who was born in South Africa with Mozambican heritage, and around 15 other young people participated. Nimi explained that, 'I wanted to create a platform for other young people in Cape Town from difficult backgrounds to be able to express themselves and find ways to discover who they are'. Kaye, (aged 16), a mixed heritage South African young woman, explained how the idea behind the 'movement' spoke to her when she said, 'dancing is a way of expressing my feelings... I decided to join the crew as I thought it was a really good way to like, learn different styles and meet different people and have a place to share this stuff with them'. Although Nimi and Antonio's use of language of 'movement' was not explicitly constructing a political narrative, they were conscious that their efforts were happening in an overtly political space and built upon young people's desires for expressing their feelings and stories. Their actions reflect findings in Staeheli's (2003) work on community activism, which trace how an ethic of care has been used to build towards ideas of social justice and inclusion.

Whilst recognising their shared realities of migration and aspirations for belonging, the young people involved in setting up and leading these groups emphasised the importance of diversity in these spaces. As Sylvia explained, '[S]o I feel like it is the environment and the people you are with, meeting new people from different places and seeing their point of view, not always yours. That's what helps you to grow'. The young people were becoming 'accountable for the processes which produce us' by enacting their conceptualisations of belonging (Carrillo-Rowe 2009: 28). At the same time, the power relations that intersect within the young people's experiences and enactments created important differences. For example, gendered differences existed between the young women and men taking on leadership positions. Young men were translating their engagement into public and political life, whereas young women felt constrained or limited in doing this. This highlights the need for further exploration of the extent to which these spaces are addressing wider intersectional inequalities, how and why.

Conclusion

By exploring young people's aspirations for, and enactments of caring relationships, this study has made visible young people's expressions of agency whilst navigating precarity. Through their experiences and enactments of caring relationships the young participants were constructing new imaginaries of self, and established the power of positive connection with others to affect change. In doing so, they are challenging individualised approaches to agency and the achievement of aspirations, reductive narratives of lack and victimhood. Rather, they are cultivating agency through their caring relationships.

Young people have shown that building care in their lives is a collective and relational effort, countering the often atomising approaches of institutional care and protection. The recognition of significant caring relationships that young people hold with peers and siblings, should be facilitated and nurtured within their pathway planning. Within this, supporting opportunities to listen to others and to be listened to can build strength and promote wellbeing. Young people, in particular those caring for siblings, felt a huge sense of responsibility, and sometimes overwhelming emotional labour. It is important that these findings do not place the burden of care onto young people, but rather provide a way of understanding what socially 'just' care could look like from their perspective.

The findings from this research have shown that where young people organise to come together to express themselves, and to witness life stories, a deep kind of empathic listening was possible. Further exploration of how and why young people navigate across boundaries of difference in their everyday lives to build understanding and be able to heal is important. Committing to learning how diverse lives touch and interweave, across social divides can become a catalyst for change towards inclusive, non-oppressive identities (Swartz & Soudien 2015).

Ultimately, young people's diverse experiences with and expressions of care help build an understanding of their aspirations for belonging. We have learnt that young people's expressions and enactments of care exist in relation to the exclusions that they have experienced. However, young people are responding to these exclusions with actions that aim to build close relationships made up of inclusivity and tolerance. This desire to hold significant friendships and experience trust and care with their peers from diverse backgrounds counters the exclusionary narratives that exist within the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006) in the South African context (Landau 2012b). As a result, the caringscapes that young people with migration experiences are building through their social navigation have a transformative potential. A potential that that deserves further exploration both within South Africa, and globally.

Acknowledgements

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'When I play football with my friends … there is no time that I feel sad': an exploration of adolescents' friendship networks in Ethiopia

Nicola Jones, Kate Pincock, Kassahun Tilahun and Workneh Yadete

Abstract: The patterning and role of adolescent peer networks in low- and middle-income countries is under-researched and dominated by a 'crisis childhoods' framing. Using qualitative research in Ethiopia, this paper seeks to counter this framing, exploring how gender, marital status, location and disability shape adolescent friendships, in-person and online.

Our findings show that trusted friends provide emotional support and information, including about academic studies, work, puberty and marriage, but the peer networks available largely depend on gender and location. Urban adolescents, especially boys, are more likely to have friendships and older peer mentors linked to in-school and community-based adolescent clubs, and online peer networks, while their rural counterparts are more likely to participate in adolescent-only cultural traditions. Married girls and adolescents with disabilities appear to have fewer opportunities to establish peer networks, due to restrictive social norms and discrimination. The paper concludes by highlighting the context-specific and gendered dynamics of peer networks and children's cultures in shaping adolescent development and wellbeing.

Keywords: Adolescents, peer networks, friendship, gender, urban, rural, disability, married girls, digital environment, Ethiopia.

Note on the authors: see end of article.

Introduction

The second decade of life, from 10–19 years, is a key juncture in the life course, when the importance of peers is accentuated (Ross *et al.* 2020). The rewiring of the brain that happens during adolescence means that the threats and rewards that adolescents consider most salient are social, and that adolescents who have strong friendships are less sensitive to later experiences of social rejection (Blakemore 2018). However, evidence on the role of peer relationships in adolescents' experiences of wellbeing and agency in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including sub-Saharan Africa, remains thin. In exploring the nuances of these relationships and their role in adolescents' trajectories, from young people's own perspectives, this paper aims to counter the negative 'crisis childhoods' framing that continues to dominate research in Africa (Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi 2016).

We draw on qualitative research from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal study involving in-depth interviews with adolescents and their peers (n=209) to explore the patterning and role of friendship networks. Drawing on a relational understanding of participation and agency to foreground adolescents' peer networks, we highlight how gender (including marital status), location and disability status shape friendships in a range of social domains, including neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, online networks, organised clubs and adolescent-only cultural traditions.

We begin with an overview of the literature on adolescent peer networks and 'children's cultures', which informs our conceptual framing. We then present the methods and key findings, reflecting the varied perspectives of young people from four distinct cultural-linguistic zones of Ethiopia. The paper concludes by highlighting the context-specific and gendered dynamics of peer networks and children's cultures in shaping adolescent development trajectories and psychosocial wellbeing.

Literature review

Peer relationships and adolescence in sub-Saharan Africa

Accounts of the everyday lives of children and adolescents in Africa are often limited, problematic, and lack nuance. Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016) describe portrayals of African childhood being framed either as 'crisis childhoods', in which children are presented as passive victims of violence, corruption and disease, or exoticised as growing up removed from technology, infrastructure and other 'modernities'. The plurality of childhoods is obscured by narratives that focus on poverty, conflict and other major challenges, characterising African children's lives in terms of 'lack'

(Twum-Danso Imoh 2016). Yet evidence from other contexts shows that peer relationships provide support and protection, especially during crises (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn 2000), and can expose individuals to a more diverse range of information, ideas and behaviours (Cochran *et al.* 1990). Peers can provide critical support during transitions and life events, and promote positive outcomes in various domains, including health behaviours (Bernat & Resnick 2009).

In Ethiopia, Camfield (2012) draws on longitudinal work with adolescents to suggest that while young people's extended social networks can provide support, they can also expose them to influences and obligations that diminish their wellbeing. Most research in this context has focused on friendships as a space in which cultural norms are reinscribed and behavioural risks such as drinking alcohol (Reda *et al.* 2012) or engaging in unprotected sex (Cherie & Berhane 2012a) are encouraged. However, other literature highlights the role of peers in the lives of vulnerable adolescents, including orphans and sex workers, in providing both camaraderie and practical support (Evans 2012; Lee 2012; Ruiz-Casares 2010; Thurman *et al.* 2006; Erulkar & Ferede 2009; Sewasew *et al.* 2017). These stark differences underline the need for more nuanced approaches to adolescents' peer networks and their role in wellbeing, reflecting young people's own perspectives.

Peer networks and children's cultures

Children's everyday lives and relationships are central to the study of childhood and youth, with adolescence increasingly recognised as a time when peer relationships become very important (Crone & Dahl 2012). Changes that happen during adolescence affect the type and quality of friendships that adolescents develop. Peer relationships are shaped by gender norms (Mayall 2002; Morrow 2006), disability (Maxey & Beckert 2017), and socioeconomic inequalities (Hjalmarsson & Mood 2015). The role played by peers in adolescents' lives cannot therefore be understood without reference to the wider context in which adolescents are growing up—and within which they are active agents. Alongside studies positioning young people as political, economic and social actors, African scholars such as Abebe (2019) emphasise the interdependence at the heart of children's agency in contexts such as Ethiopia, where reciprocity between people and households is a cultural norm. This does not mean that children are not agents or individuals, but that their agency is shaped through interactions between their own personal goals and their social relationships with other actors at all levels (Abebe 2019; Abebe & Kjørholt 2009).

The *everyday* lives and social relations of children and youth are thus key to understanding social reproduction in relation to global, socioeconomic processes that shift over time (Katz 2004). 'Children's culture' refers to cultural production by children

as agents and actors in their own right, rather than adults-in-waiting. Researchers within the new sociology of childhood have called for children's culture to be treated as something that unfolds not only in relation to other young people in child-friendly, separate spaces, but also in relation to adults at home, at school and in other settings (James *et al.* 1998). Yet despite growing interest in 'children's culture' since the 1970s, there has been limited research on children's agency in cultural production in non-Western settings.

Important exceptions include Jirata's ethnographic research (2011; 2012; 2017; 2019) with Guji-Oromo agro-pastoralists in Ethiopia, which engages directly with children's games, folklore, riddles, and music as cultural production. Examples include the social nature of cattle tending, during which children play and sing songs that reinforce their understanding of cultural values and beliefs. These songs are recognised by adults and children alike as both a childhood tradition and a product of children's own culture in the context of wider socioeconomic relations (Jirata 2017).

Work by Twum-Danso Imoh & Okyere (2020) on young people's participation in Ghana and Nigeria underlines the importance of attending to adolescents' own understandings of their role in society. The authors challenge dominant conceptualisations of participation as being about expressing views or making decisions; instead, they assert that young people 'live' the concept of participation within their own cultural, economic, and social contexts, which shape the value they attach to different relationships such as those with peers.

Support for the idea of children's participation in cultural reproduction may, however, draw the line at practices relating to sex and relationships, where low parental involvement or lack of supervision is often implicitly problematised. An example of this in Ethiopia is '*shegoye*' cultural dancing, which occurs at night, away from adult supervision. Research usually highlights the connection between *shegoye* and early marriage (e.g. Abdumalik *et al.* 2018). Yet there has been scant attention to adolescents' own experiences and perceptions of cultural practices such as *shegoye*, and what they mean in the context of their relationships to their community and culture.

Gender, disability, and friendship

Despite attention to context within the social studies of childhood, there has also been little research on how friendship, leisure time and connections are shaped by gender, disability, and other social factors. Evidence from Africa and beyond indicates that gender norms affect susceptibility to peer influence when it comes to risky sexual behaviour (Cherie & Berhane 2012a; Muche *et al.* 2017; Widman *et al.* 2016). Gender norms also shape quality and type of friendships. Rock *et al.* (2016) found that in Malawi, very poor adolescent girls were much more likely to have few ties

outside their household than boys, who were more likely to report spending leisure time with peers. This echoes other research in Ethiopia identifying how norms about girls staying at home reduce their opportunities for social interaction (Poluha 2004).

In contrast, Sewasew *et al.* (2017) found that urban adolescent orphaned girls in Ethiopia draw on peer support *more* than their male peers, suggesting that strict gender norms may prevent them turning to family if they face problems beyond their control (although 'family members' were defined as guardians, such as grandparents, rather than parents or siblings). However, friendships may also have ambiguous effects on young people's wellbeing and agency. Various authors focusing on a range of LMIC contexts (including India and Zambia) document that friendships between girls can help them feel less alone, but can also be relationships through which gender norms are reinforced and policed (Dyson 2010; Heslop & Banda 2013).

Gender norms also intersect with broader aspects, including what sources of support are actually available, to shape the role of young people's friendships. Research by Hunter *et al.* (2020) with street-connected youth in Ghana, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) finds that restrictive gender norms shape opposite-sex sexual and romantic relationships among youth, but that same-sex relationships have primacy when it comes to trust and mutual assistance. A lack of trust in healthcare providers, who fail to build relationships with street-connected youth, makes these peer connections even more significant (*ibid.*). Mains (2014) suggests that acts of helping, and reciprocity are key to friendships among unemployed and underemployed youth in Jimma, Ethiopia, though these are strained by high unemployment and rising food prices.

Little is known about the quality and dynamics of peer relationships among adolescents with disabilities in contexts such as Ethiopia, where disability is stigmatised, and adolescents report experiencing teasing and bullying (Erulkar *et al.* 2010). In Ethiopia, as in other LMICs, the few adaptations to schools and other spaces are directed at promoting learning rather than enabling disabled children to expand their social networks (Franck & Joshi 2017). Research on friendships among adolescents with disabilities in high-income countries identifies the importance of accessible spaces in which to interact with non-disabled adolescents (Asbjørnslett *et al.* 2012; Kalymon *et al.* 2010; Orsmond *et al.* 2004), but analogous research in LMICs remains a significant gap in the literature.

Methods

This article draws on data collected by GAGE, a longitudinal study exploring gendered experiences of adolescence and the support and services that can most

effectively expand adolescent capabilities in LMICs. GAGE has been conducting research in Ethiopia since 2016. GAGE's social-ecological conceptual framework is based on the interconnectedness of the 'three Cs': capabilities, change strategies and contexts. 'Capabilities' refers to the ability to pursue lives that adolescents value; 'contexts' calls for recognition of the interplay between socio-cultural, economic and political factors at all levels that can enable or constrain adolescents' opportunities to leverage various 'change strategies'. With regard to peer networks, change strategies may include interventions to enrol adolescents in formal education (which can help foster peer networks), investments in non-formal education and safe spaces, and efforts to promote equitable and safe access to online peer networks.

Our analysis draws on qualitative data to address how social characteristics (gender, marital status, age, disability, location) shape the patterning and role of adolescents' peer networks. Data was collected in late 2018 and early 2019, and included in-depth individual and group interviews with 209 adolescent girls and boys and their peers from two age cohorts—younger adolescents (10–14 years) and older adolescents (15–19 years) (see Table 1). Research participants were from three diverse rural regions: South Gondar (Amhara); East Hararghe (Oromia); and Hari Rusa/Zone 5 (Afar); and an urban area, Dire Dawa City Administration. Participants were purposefully selected from a larger quantitative sample[1] to ensure diversity in terms of educational status (in-school and out-of-school), household composition (female- and male-headed households), marital status (unmarried, married or divorced) and disability status (including adolescents with physical, hearing or visual impairments). The interviews (between 1- and 2-hours' duration) put adolescents' perspectives and experiences centre stage, allowing in-depth exploration of their support networks in-person and online.

The interviews followed a methodological toolkit (see Jones *et al.* 2018b and 2019a) that was adapted to each of the focal regional contexts, and included three key tools: social network hexagons, friendship circles, and physical and virtual community mapping. The social network hexagon explores the range of people (family, peers, romantic/intimate partners, online interactions, community members and neighbours) with whom an adolescent interacts and the quality of those interactions (see Figures 1 and 2). The friendship circle tool involves an adolescent bringing two friends to an interview to discuss the history of their friendship, how they support and interact with each other, and any changes in friendship over time. The mapping exercises allow for group

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[1] The GAGE quantitative sample of 7000 adolescents involved a two-tiered sampling approach. We sampled communities based on two proxies of vulnerability: food-insecure district status, and high prevalence of child marriage (based on the 2007 census data), then randomly sampled adolescents of the requisite age groups based on a community listing process (see Jones *et al*. 2018a).

Table 1. Number of adolescent participants involved in social network hexagon and friendship circle in-depth interviews.

No.	Research Sites		Younger Cohort						Older Cohort				Total Number of Participants
			Social Network Hexagon (Individual interviews)		Friendship Circle (Group interviews comprised of 3 individuals)				Community mapping – physical and virtual (Group interviews comprised of 4-6 individuals)				
	Zone / Region	Kebele	Girls	Boys	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys		
					Group Interviews	Individual Participants	Group Interviews	Individual Participants	Group Interviews	Individual Participants	Group Interviews	Individual Participants	
1	South Gondar / Amhara	Jeman	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(1)	6	(1)	6	22
		Aquashmoch	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(2)	9	(1)	6	25
		Ebenat	-	-	-	-	-	-	(2)	10	(2)	10	20
2		Dire Dawa	4	4	(4)	12	(4)	12	(2)	10	(2)	10	52
3	East Hararghe / Oromiya	Bidibora	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(2)	9	(2)	10	29
		NUK	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(1)	6	(1)	6	22
4	Zone 5 / Afar	Daleti	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(1)	5	(1)	5	20
		Melkajeba	2	2	(2)	3	(2)	3	(1)	4	(1)	5	19
	Total		16	16	(16)	30	16	30	(12)	59	(11)	58	209

discussions around peer interactions in different online and offline spaces and their relative importance compared to interactions with others. Together, these tools allow for a rich exploration of adolescents' relationships and how these develop during the transition to adulthood.

Data collection was undertaken in local languages (Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Afar Af and Somali) by researchers of the same sex and from the same region as their interviewee. Informed consent was sought from those aged over 18, and assent obtained from those aged 10–17; consent was obtained from parents or caregivers, except where an adolescent was the household head. Ethical clearance for the research was granted by the Overseas Development Institute Ethics Review Board, the Addis Ababa University Institutional Review Board, and the relevant Ethiopian regional government committees.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by bilingual transcribers. Data was analysed thematically and coded in MAXQDA, a qualitative software package, using a detailed codebook developed in line with GAGE's conceptual framework and specifically the psychosocial capability domain indicators. These encompass factors that promote and undermine emotional resilience, access to support networks within and outside the family, the patterning and quality of peer interactions with age mates and older peer mentors, and adolescents' sense of social connectedness in the community, including opportunities for participation and agency (GAGE consortium 2019). To ensure trustworthiness of the deductive coding process, a sub-sample of transcripts was double coded and weekly debriefings were held with the coding team (research assistants with a qualitative social science background and East African experience) to discuss how to apply the codes in particular regional contexts.
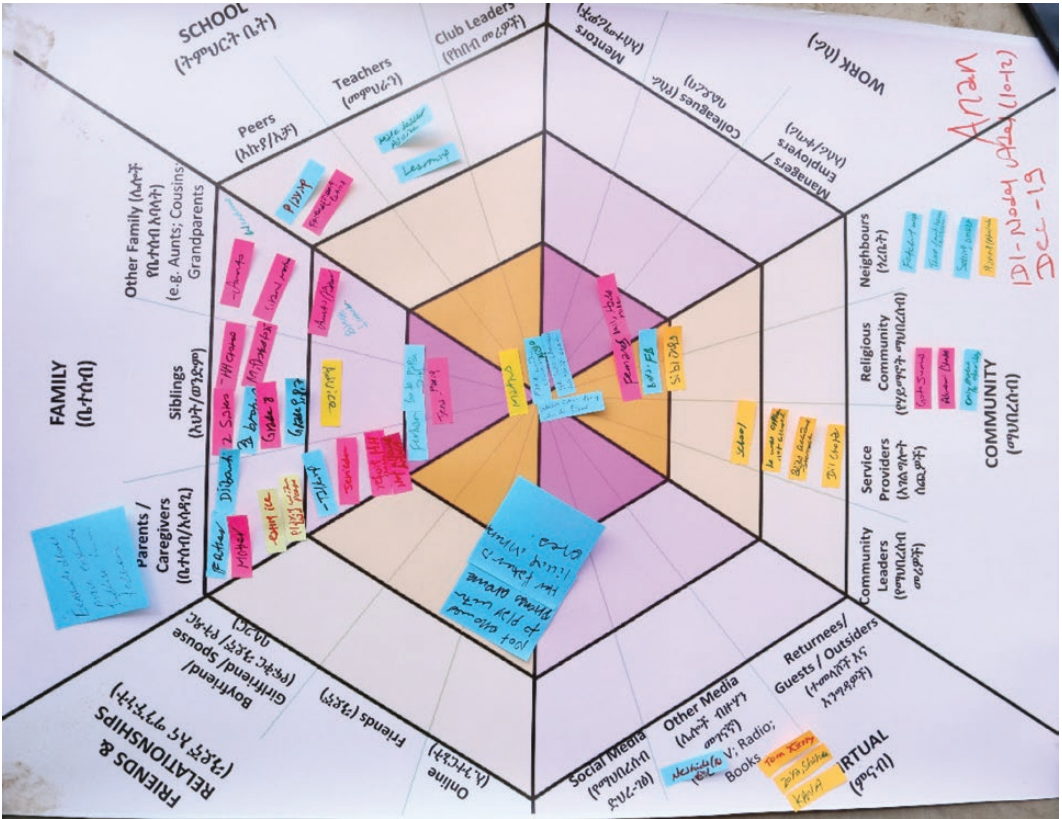
Figure 1. Social network hexagon with 12-year-old out-of-school girl, Dire Dawa City Administration.

Findings

Friendship networks and social connectedness

Our findings show that most adolescents have a friend whom they trust, and that friends play a key role in offering emotional support and sharing information about school, work, puberty, and sexual and reproductive health. Friendship networks span various domains, including neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, organised clubs and online.

Neighbourhood friendships

Many young people underscored the importance of friendships with neighbours, explaining that shared recreational time helps foster strong emotional bonds. A 14-year-old out-of-school divorced girl from rural Amhara described her neighbour as a key part of her daily life: '*We are best friends and we have never been in disagreement. … We just eat, be together and play together. … We share everything. … We*

Figure 2. Social network hexagon with 14-year-old married girl, East Hararghe, Oromia region.

go together if we have to fetch water.' Some interviewees emphasised that neighbourhood friends were more likely to endure than school friends, as a 13-year-old girl from Dire Dawa explained: '*We spend lots more time with neighbourhood friends than school friends … I cannot rely on my school friends. They might transfer to another school and that will be the end of our friendship. You do not meet with school friends when school is closed for the summer.'*
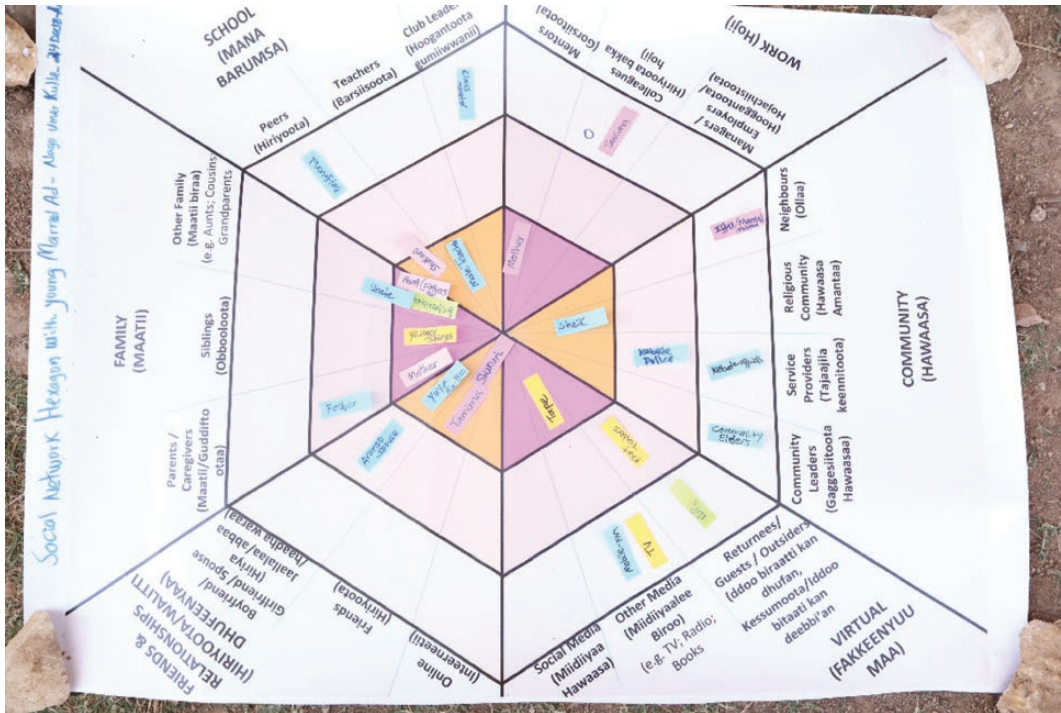
Adolescents also placed considerable value on the quality of friendships and certain character traits among peers. A 12-year-old in-school girl from Dire Dawa noted: '*One of my friends makes jokes and makes us laugh … I love her behaviour. Another friend does not respond violently when other kids try to pick a fight. She is quiet and reserved. … And a friend helps you if you fall while you play. We are so different and that makes us good friends.'* Similarly, an 11-year-old in-school boy from rural Amhara noted: '*I like the children in the neighbours' homes. They do not make gossip. They do not falsely tell other people what we do not say.'*

For girls in particular, neighbourhood friendships can offer vital support in navigating social norms, especially pressures to marry. As a 12-year-old boy from rural Afar commented, reflecting on friendship circles among girls his age, '*Girls talk to each other about their marriage … about their 'absuma' [the cousin they are mandated to marry] and their aspirations for the future. They also consult each other about what*

to do if they face a problem and how to solve it … especially if she is unsure about marriage.' However, some girls noted that it is difficult to maintain friendships after marriage, due to time poverty, mobility restrictions and conservative gender norms around the intra-household gender division of labour. A 15-year-old married girl from rural Amhara explained these intersecting barriers to peer interactions after marriage:

> *After we marry, we have a husband and a home to take care of. If we leave the house whenever we want to, our husbands will ask where we are going without preparing food. It is tiresome. We get to have a break when it is the Assumption of Virgin Mary [Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebration]. … That is when we have a blast! We get to meet each other without any worries. Otherwise we do not get to meet often. … After we got married there is no more spending nights chatting with each other. You are all alone after you get married. … Our husbands don't forbid us to meet but we do not want to go out when we have chores to do at home. … They are also not happy if there is no food in the house when they come back. … We do not get to meet people, let alone our friends.*

However, in some contexts, adolescents explained that their ability to forge friendships beyond their immediate neighbourhood was circumscribed by language barriers and ethnic tensions, with some consciously restricting their friendship circles to avoid emotional hurt. As an 11-year-old out-of-school Oromo boy from Dire Dawa explained, '*My friends are just from my neighbourhood. My mother does not allow me to go to other villages. They insult me in Amharic words that I may not understand … I avoid them for this reason. … The Somalis live in the other sections of the city and I do not have the chance to meet their children. I cannot understand their language. …*'

Similarly, adolescents from a pastoralist community in Afar (which has seen recurrent conflicts with neighbouring clans as well as communities of different ethnic backgrounds in recent years) emphasised that friendships with neighbours from the same clans were key to ensuring their safety. As a 12-year-old in-school girl explained: '*We discuss where to keep our goats, where they can drink. If I saw people fighting, I can share the information with them [friends]. We share this sort of information with each other. … We discuss and fight them together.*'

School peer relationships

Adolescent reflections on friendships with school peers focused on shared educational interests and aspirations, with some emphasising information sharing and support with school life. A 12-year-old boy from Dire Dawa noted that, '*If I lose my book, I ask my friends to lend their book to me. We lend books to one another. … We also study together. When there are topics that I could not understand, I will ask them to explain it. … We go to one of our friend's houses—his father encourages us to come over and study together.*' Similarly, an 11-year-old boy from rural Amhara recalled sharing concerns

about teacher absenteeism and safety travelling to school: '*We talk about reporting a teacher who was absent. … We talk about whether we should report to the principal's office if the teacher does not come to class. … We talk about the places where a snake might be on the way to school … that we do not have to move in grasslands in case a python may inhabit it*.' Others discussed school friendships as important for sharing career aspirations they could not necessarily share with family. As a 12-year-old boy from rural Oromia explained: '*We tell each other we want to be a pilot or … teacher or government employee, depending on our interests. … We talk about being prime minister, like Abiy [the current prime minister], Lemma or Jawar [prominent political leaders from Oromia region]. …*'

For adolescents with disabilities, peer interactions at school appeared to be especially valued. Those attending special needs classes emphasised how important these were in enabling them to develop friendships that community-level discrimination and stigma too often preclude. As a 16-year-old girl with a hearing impairment from urban Amhara noted: '*I used to imagine I am the only person with a problem hearing. Now that I've been able to enrol in school with other deaf students, I do not stress like before.*' An 18-year-old girl with a visual impairment (also from Amhara) explained that forging friendship networks at school had transformed her situation: '*I thought I was dead, but not anymore. After I started school here, I now believe I can be just like any other person. I am looking for the future than the past. After I saw how blind people manage their lives, I started having hope again. My friends became the source of my hope.*'

Workplace peer relations

Adolescents in our sample who were working tended to be engaged in urban informal sector work or paid and/or unpaid agricultural activities. Because of these challenging work environments, relationships with workplace peers emerged as important sources of support. As a 17-year-old out-of-school boy from urban Amhara, who has a hearing impairment, explained: '*My best friends are other youth who have hearing impairments. We discuss our work [as porters]. We discuss being hardworking. … If there is someone who stays idle, we encourage him to wake up and get involved in some sort of job*.' Although in a very different setting (livestock herding), a 13-year-old out-of-school boy from Afar emphasised that his relationships with (work) peers are pivotal, now, and to how he imagines his future.

> *I aspire for our future to live and tend our animals together in the same place and not to separate from each other. I also aspire that we will share what we have with one another. For example, if one of us doesn't have a weapon and the others do, then we will loan it to help the one who has to search far away for disappeared cattle, and we will give him wholeheartedly.*

Although married girls (as already discussed) generally have limited friendship networks, those they do have tend to centre around work—both unpaid domestic and paid activities, given their multiple and overlapping household responsibilities. As a 14-year-old married girl from rural Oromia explained: '*She [her friend] is like my sister. We do everything together. We dine and wash clothes together whether it is in the river or at home. … We go to the khat [a stimulant grown in the Horn of Africa and consumed via chewing] plantation to work together. We discuss everything with each other. … She tells me to accept my marriage and [to carry on] living with my husband.'*

Organised adolescent clubs

In urban areas, youth groups organised by sports clubs, youth centres, churches and mosques provide valuable opportunities to connect with peers, although predominantly for adolescent boys. In larger urban centres, like Dire Dawa city, sports clubs are especially important spaces, as a 12-year-old in-school boy noted: '*I feel happy when I play football. We relax … when we go to the field to play together. … We have bought a ball, and a team uniform by collecting donations from people door-to-door. … We have a young but clever coach. … He is a role model to us.'* Other boys reported that they valued community youth centres, which show sports matches on TV and/or provide opportunities for peers to play pool or darts together. However, such spaces tend to be male-dominated and oriented towards older adolescents, with few organised activities and inclusive recreational spaces for younger adolescents, especially girls. Although small in scale, school-based girls' clubs, offering empowerment and life skills training, emerged as valued and powerful spaces for peer interaction and mentorship for girls fortunate enough to have access to such clubs. As a 13-year-old girl from Dire Dawa explained: '*The girls' club is popular with many girls joining. … The teacher is good and treats us all equally. She is almost like our sister. She advises us about how to protect ourselves from rape. She also gives sanitary pads to those who can't afford to buy*.'

Online peer networks

Online friendships also emerged as an important part of adolescents' peer networks. As of 2019, 19 per cent of Ethiopians had some internet access, with young people more likely to be online than older people (ITU 2019). In urban Ethiopia in particular, Facebook is popular and used as an extension of in-person friendship groups, especially among boys, who are much more likely than girls to own a mobile device and have internet access (Jones *et al.* 2019b). A 17-year-old in-school boy from Dire

Dawa city explained how he and his friends use social media to engage with peers, highlighting both its advantages and downsides:

> *These days most adolescents of our age are social media users, especially Facebook … I upload sporting videos to upset my friends who support rival teams. … Our friends also boast by showing the number of likes they receive from Facebook friends. … I often use Facebook to chat with my friends. … But I see that it can change one's personality or behaviour and may lead to depression—for example, if someone doesn't feel they get enough likes from friends.*

While rural adolescents have significantly less access to online networks, our findings suggest that this is changing quickly, with boys in pastoralist communities gaining increased access to mobile phones given their migratory lifestyles. As a 13-year-old boy from a remote rural community in Afar explained, mobile phones are being used to recreate oral traditions of information sharing among his peers, including about conflict-related risks:

> *I use the mobile phone to make Dagu [traditional way of passing on information orally in Afar culture] with my friends. I can tell them to bring something I need. I can also dig up information about my community using the mobile phone. They can also call me and share ideas. … This time, there is conflict among the Afar and Amhara people; I need to update myself about the extent of conflict.*

Children's cultures and their role in facilitating mixed-sex and romantic relationships

In rural communities of Afar and Oromia, amidst hierarchical social structures, many young people reported participating in cultural dances (known as *shegoye* in East Hararghe, Oromia, and *saddah* in Afar). In Oromia, these dances are an important venue for young people to interact in a culturally sanctioned way (without adult supervision) with members of the opposite sex and to seek a potential marriage partner. Adolescents begin attending from age 11 or 12, and because the dances take place at night and often go on very late, regular participation can lead to school drop-out. While religious leaders are increasingly keen to ban *shegoye* due to concerns they contravene religious norms, and youth activists increasingly support a ban due to the detrimental effects on adolescent schooling, *shegoye* remain popular as a rite of passage. As a 16-year-old out-of-school boy from rural Oromia explained:

> *We play shegoye together. … We play in the evenings—usually daily. We hear the music on the tape and dance. I've been doing this for five years. We meet our girlfriends there. We call the girls by name by going near to their home. … They come out with us after they serve dinner. … Our 'girlfriends' bring us nuts, sugar and khat and we chew khat together. They lay down with us somewhere, feeding us khat and sugar. … There is no adult; our parents are not present.*

In Afar, the *saddah* cultural dance has one major difference to *shegoye*: participation is not a means to meet potential marriage partners but rather to interact with peers and enjoy culturally sanctioned recreational time in an adolescent-only space in what is otherwise a very rule-bound cultural milieu. For many adolescents, when asked about positive memories with friends, playing together during *saddah* was the main response. The tradition accommodates both younger and older adolescents, although adolescents emphasised that their interactions were solely with age-mates as skill, practice and physical maturity is required to perform in the main dance group. As an 11-year-old out-of-school girl noted:

> *We play saddah when the moon rises around 3 o'clock (9pm) and we finish playing at midnight. We don't play with the older adolescents. … They are much taller and bigger and may accidentally hurt us when jumping and dancing. Older girls play with older boys. We don't stay in the saddah playground when they are playing saddah—they often play through the night. We watch them for a while or we play with the younger adolescents in a separate place and then go home.*

In some cases—and reportedly increasingly so, due to growing access to modern contraception—adolescents also conduct sexual relationships with *saddah* participants. Some adolescents suggested that these spaces provide an opportunity for young people to explore their sexuality before conforming to the dominant cultural norm of *absuma* (arranged cousin) marriage. As a 14-year-old out-of-school boy explained: '*Mostly we talk to each other and we discuss the girls' beauty. We choose beautiful girls for one another, and we will talk about the beauty of girls we see at the 'saddah' playground. … After discussing these beautiful girls we will ask them and if they agree, we will take them somewhere.*' However, further exploration reveals some ambiguity as to whether these relationships are consensual or forced, as this account from a 13-year-old out-of-school boy highlights:

> *Boys and girls will line up in opposite rows, and move in and out towards and away from each other, singing and dancing. … Saddah brings us happiness. … They don't take girls at the saddah place, they only play and dance. But if they want to be with their girlfriends, they will take them to a dark place or to their home in the village. … We can't catch a girl if her family is found there. We will catch them secretly, and we can take them to another place. … And then we take girls to such homes if boys wanted to be with these girls and if they ordered us to bring girls for them somewhere. And then the boys will come and we leave them alone.*

As this account underscores agency and power in these encounters appears to rest with adolescent boys not girls. *Saddah* may therefore act as a space in which dominant cultural norms related to male sexual dominance are enacted and perpetuated.

Discussion

In contrast to a 'crisis childhoods' framing, our findings show that adolescent friendships in diverse urban and rural communities in Ethiopia are pivotal for cultural

production. Not only do adolescent peer networks provide emotional support, but they are spaces to share information about school, work, puberty and marriage, and to forge a sense of social connectedness, including with older mentors. Across all four study locations, adolescents emphasised the importance of carving out spaces within their everyday lives for interaction with peers. Neighbourhood, school and workplace-based friendships were most frequently cited as important; for young people with disabilities, special needs education classes were highly valued as opportunities to develop friendships that community-level discrimination and stigma too often preclude. This echoes findings from research in high-income country contexts—that tailored spaces for adolescents with disabilities are vital to enable them to connect with their peers (Asbjørnslett *et al.* 2012; Maxey & Beckert 2017).

Our findings offer a nuanced understanding of adolescent internet use, though previous research has largely explored only the negative effects and risks, such as high levels of engagement with and sharing of sexually explicit media (including violent and abusive imagery) (Cheney *et al.* 2017; Le Mat *et al.* 2019). Although we do not deny these possibilities, our findings suggest that online spaces are important for adolescents to connect with other young people, especially for sharing news and information. As with other leisure activities, our research reiterates findings from other studies that young people's internet use in Ethiopia is shaped by gender, urban/rural and socioeconomic inequalities in access to technology (Araya *et al.* 2018), with working adolescent boys and young men more likely to be able to afford phones and internet access (Banati *et al.* 2020).

One difference between locations was the extent to which opportunities for adolescent interaction are facilitated—or whether adolescents have to create these for themselves. In urban settings, adolescent boys and girls spoke positively about youth groups organised by sports clubs, religious institutions and community organisations. These not only provide opportunities to make friends but often enable positive interactions with trusted older peer mentors and adults. Yet while social groups were positively appraised by young people, we also find that some adolescent interactions and activities are deliberately organised to take place away from the direct supervision, pressure and behavioural expectations of parents and other adults. In rural areas, in the context of hierarchical social structures, many young people emphasised the important role of culturally sanctioned dances such as *shegoye* and *saddah* in providing access to mixed-sex peer networks and relationships. However, it is important to emphasise that this does not mean they are free from wider societal influences and norms, and especially for girls, who face considerable risks in terms of their bodily integrity and agency within mixed-sex relationships. Though adolescent girls themselves report embracing the opportunities that the dances give them to find possible marriage partners away from parental intervention, it is important to remain cautious about uncritically celebrating these socialising ventures as a safe space for adolescents' sexual agency and

cultural production. As the accounts of young married girls show, both in this data and in the extant literature (Gage 2013; Emirie *et al.* 2021), the freedoms with which these ventures are initially associated may be short-lived. Rather, their importance to young people as a space for social interaction should inform efforts to provide safer opportunities for adolescents to build relationships in ways that are genuinely supportive of the positive aspects of socialisation, rather than structured around possibilities for marriage and the more negative trajectory that adolescent marriage steers girls towards.

Conclusions

Overall our findings on adolescent friendships in urban and rural communities in Ethiopia underscore the importance of paying more attention to the critical role of adolescent peer networks and children's cultures in shaping young people's development and wellbeing during the second decade of life. Drawing on a relational understanding of participation and agency to foreground adolescents' peer networks, our research highlights that the peer networks available to young people are highly context-specific and shaped by location, gender and other social characteristics—not least education, marital status and disability status. Access to inclusive safe spaces and recreational opportunities—especially for adolescents who are out of school (temporarily or permanently) and for girls and adolescents with disabilities—can play a critical role in fostering adolescents' emotional resilience and social connectedness. However, a nuanced understanding of peer networks and children's cultures necessitates a recognition that such spaces are also venues of cultural production and may serve to enforce dominant social norms that perpetuate existing inequalities.

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Children's recreation as an everyday activity

Time use and time use satisfaction: an examination of children's out of school activities in Namibia

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Abstract: Population-based information on how school-going children spend their daily lives outside of school from their own perspective in African contexts is limited. Using representative data from 2124 four- and six-graders who completed the 2018 International Survey of Children's Wellbeing in Khomas region, Namibia, this article describes children's out-of-school activities, the contextual factors that influence patterns of time use and how these patterns of time use affect subjective wellbeing. Results indicate that children in Namibia spend time on diverse activities related to school, family, and leisure. Furthermore, children's participation in chores contributed positively to their life satisfaction and both play and spending time with family had a valuable impact on their wellbeing. By describing at a population level children's out-of-school time use and satisfaction, this study contributes to understanding the richness of children's lives in Khomas region and the valuable contributions they make to their families and communities.

Keywords: Time use, time use satisfaction, children, subjective wellbeing, Namibia.

Note on the authors: see end of article.

Introduction

At a global level, and particularly across the African continent, children contribute to their families through household chores and outside work. Notwithstanding the risks of housework [and child labour], through these contributions not only do children free other family members to engage in employment and other activities and provide concrete benefits to their households (e.g. by supplying water or providing childcare) but children may learn useful skills, strengthen sibling ties, and enhance their psychosocial well-being (Putnick & Bornstein 2016). Having leisure time for play and exploration is also crucial for the promotion of children's development, and influences their levels of satisfaction and well-being (Tonon, Laurito & Benatuil 2019). However, population-based information on how school-going children spend their daily lives outside of school from their own perspective in African contexts is limited (Sauerwein & Rees 2020), with most studies being smaller scale qualitative studies. Understanding how children in Africa spend their time from their own perspective, can provide a rich snapshot into their daily lives and help understand the diverse influences on childhoods in Africa.

Previous research on children's time use

While most research on children's time use has been conducted in the Global North (Sauerwein & Rees 2020), a few studies have looked at this issue in Africa. In a multi-country study, which included three African countries (Algeria, Ethiopia and South Africa), Rees (2017) found that children in Africa spend the majority of their out of school time on school work, household tasks/chores, caring for siblings/ other family members and watching television (South Africa only). Qualitative studies have supported this, reporting that children in Africa spend time on leisure activities, such as watching television (De Lange *et al.* 2012) as well as chores. In South Africa, for example, a study using drawings from 16 children, aged 6 to 10 years old, depict them collecting water from the river or the dam, fetching wood, and running errands (De Lange *et al.* 2012). Similarly, in Zambia, drawings from 38 children between the ages 8 and 12 show them cleaning, washing, cooking, caring for young children, and running errands as part of their everyday lives (Hunleth 2019). Since these latter studies were qualitative in nature, they do not show how frequently children engage in such activities and whether they may interfere with other parts of their lives such as schooling and play.

Studies have also shown that children's characteristics and social circumstances influence their patterns of time use. For example, research has shown that female children generally have less time for leisure activities (Fonta *et al.* 2020). In Egypt, Assaad, Levinson & Zibani (2010), for example, found that many girls who participate in 14 or more hours of domestic work per week do not go to school and would have been in

school had they not been expected to work. There are also apparent differences according to income level and whether children reside in rural and urban areas. Kazeem (2013) reports that, in Nigeria, children in rural areas and poor children spend more time on unpaid work than urban children and children classified as non-poor. Indeed, research in Burkina Faso considered leisure deprivation as an important dimension of child poverty, a deprivation felt by girls more than boys. With poverty depriving children of both leisure and studying time (Fonta *et al.* 2020), other research suggests that this may even increase rates of child labour (Kazeem 2013; De Wet & Ewemade 2018). Rees (2017), examining the effects of income on time use, reports a negative relationship between time spent on household chores and the countries' relative income level, suggesting that children residing in poorer countries tend to spend more time on household tasks. However, no clear relationship was found between income level and time spent on educational activities. In terms of leisure, findings from other studies suggest differences between rural in urban children; for example, free-time tends to be more spontaneous and creative in rural children as they tend to use their surrounding environment to entertain themselves. In Northern Malawi, playing with soil dolls and wire cars is more popular than watching television (Nelson *et al.* 2017), and rural children in South Africa have been found to use their imaginations and items from their milieu to create toys (Bartie *et al.* 2016). Rural children also seem to use different play spaces, like the streets, the forests and the rivers, given their close proximity to nature (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). However, several studies have suggested that children in rural areas may spend less time on leisure and educational activities (Fonta *et al.* 2020; Tötemeyer *et al.* 2015) and more time on labour (Kazeem 2013). Indeed, socio-economic factors may impact how children spend time and influence whether or not children in different geographical or socio-economic contexts have access to safe spaces for leisure and other out of school activities (Savahl *et al.* 2020).

Findings on children's use of technology, another form of leisure, shows a substantial increase in recent times. This research has been conducted prior to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic where children may spend more time at home during lockdowns. In such cases access to internet and electronic equipment may mean better access to resources for some children and this differential access to technology may widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. On the other hand, there is also a concern that excessive media use may have a negative effect on children's development (Sauerwein & Rees 2020). Looking at cross-country comparisons, Rees (2017), found that children in higher-income countries spent more time on the three leisure activities asked about in the survey—including using a computer (other activities include playing sports or doing exercise, watching television or listening to music) more frequently than children in lower-income countries. However, this study did not include data on children's time spent on free play. Understanding patterns of access to technology and the factors that may hamper them are important to understand.

Research has also explored whether time use patterns can influence children's overall levels of wellbeing. Sauerwein & Rees (2020), for example, looking at data from over 14 diverse countries across different continents found that children who engage infrequently in educational activities tend to be from more disadvantaged backgrounds and show lower life satisfaction whereas children who engage in more structured activities, such as extra classes, tend to have higher levels of satisfaction. The latter group of children also tend to be from more economically advantaged backgrounds. Research further examining the link between patterns of time use and children's satisfaction is thus needed to better understand the differential effects of play and other out-of-school activities on children's wellbeing.

The current article uses information from the Namibia component of the *International Survey of Children's Well-being (ISCWeB)*. This survey is a multi-country assessment of children's subjective well-being and various other facets of their life, including living conditions, material possessions, school and family, and experiences of daily life (Rees *et al.* 2020). Through the survey, children were able to share about many different contexts of their lives and provide insight of their perceived well-being within these contexts. The survey began in 2009 with 11 countries participating in the first wave (Dinsman & Reese 2014). Currently is in its third wave 35 countries from five continents have participated of which three are African countries (Algeria, Namibia, South Africa). Using data from Wave 3 of *ISCWeB*, this article describes (1) children's out-of-school activities in Khomas, Namibia; (2) contextual factors that influence children's patterns of time use; (3) children's satisfaction with how they spend their free time; and (4) whether these patterns of time use are related to children's subjective wellbeing. By exploring these sections of the survey, we hope to provide a snapshot into how children in one African country spend their time from their own perspectives.

Method

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design in line with the *ISCWeB* (Rees *et al.* 2020). The international study targets three age groups (8-, 10-, and 12-year-olds), however in Namibia, the study was limited to the two older age groups.

Research setting

In Namibia the survey took place in Khomas region, a predominantly urban region which contains the capital city, Windhoek. Khomas region has a population of 342 141, accounting for about 16 per cent of the total population of Namibia, and is divided into ten constituencies (Namibian Statistics Agency 2017). There exist wide variations between the ten constituencies of the region, with those characterised by

informal settlements recording higher levels of poverty and often lacking basic facilities, such as adequate water, sanitation, and electricity (RAISON 2014).

Participants

We used data from a representative sample of 2124 students (1025 in Grade 4 and 1099 in Grade 6) in Khomas region, Namibia (Ruiz-Casares, Gentz & Gouin 2021). A stratified random sample with replacement of primary and combined schools in the region was selected, with location (rural/urban) and whether the schools were private or public used as strata. In total, 31 schools were selected across the region. Within each school, a maximum of two classes or 50 students were selected per grade.

The final sample was 58.1 per cent female with a mean age of 11.1 years (Table 1). About half of participants were in Grade 6 and just over one tenth (11.9 per cent) of children were orphaned. Most children spoke English at home (48.6 per cent), followed by Oshiwambo (37.6 per cent), and Afrikaans (30.4 per cent). The sample was predominantly urban (88.6 per cent) and most children attended public/state schools (86.5 per cent). While most children owned clothes in a good condition and had access to electricity sometimes or always at home (83.9 per cent), less than two-thirds lived in a house with running water (64.3 per cent), and fewer had internet at home (58.3 per cent) or a mobile phone (52.4 per cent).

Materials and procedures

The questionnaire included close-ended questions on socio-demographics, family and school factors, different dimensions of wellbeing, and children's satisfaction with various aspects of their life, including time use. The questionnaires were pilot-tested in English with Grade 4 students prior to administration and refined to make the language more understandable to children. The final version of the questionnaire was back-translated and pilot tested in the four other local languages (i.e. Afrikaans, Oshikwanyama, Nama/Damara, and Otjiherero) and administered in July-November 2018 to groups in their usual classroom by multilingual researchers who had been previously trained in the survey and the ethical conduct of research with children.

This article uses data from the items in the survey pertaining to participant socio-demographics, time use, and one indicator of subjective wellbeing. Children's time use was measured with the item '*How often do you usually spend time doing the following things when you are not at school?*'; weekly frequency of participation in fourteen activities was measured with a 6-point scale ranging from *Never* to *Every day*. Satisfaction with *time use* and *free time to do what you want* was measured with two items and assessed using an 11-point Likert scale where 0 means *Not at all satisfied*

Table 1. Characteristics of study participants and their households (n = 2124).

	N/Mean	%/SD
Children		
Age, mean		
Grade 4 (n = 1025)	10.1	0.8
Grade 6 (n = 1096)	12.2	0.8
Total (n = 2121)	11.2	1.3
Sex		
Female	1233	41.9
Male	891	58.1
Born outside of Namibia (n = 2116)		
Yes	183	8.6
Unsure	53	2.5
Orphanhood (n = 2097)		
Maternal	47	2.2
Paternal	164	7.8
Double	39	1.9
Language spoken at home[a]		
English	1033	48.6
Oshiwambo	804	37.9
Afrikaans	645	30.4
Nama/Damara	439	20.7
Otjiherero	282	13.3
Other	294	13.8
Grade/ Age		
Four/ 10-year old	1025	48.3
Six/ 12-year old	1099	51.7
School type		
Public	1838	86.5
Private	286	13.5
Area		
Rural	242	11.4
Urban	1882	88.6

Table 1. Continued

	N/Mean	%/SD
Personal assets		
Clothes in good condition (n = 2102)	1884	89.6
Two pairs of shoes in good condition (n = 2102)	1719	81.8
Enough money for school trips and activities (n = 2095)	1338	63.9
Equipment/things for school (n = 2107)	1581	75.0
Equipment/things for sports and hobbies (n = 2107)	1349	64.0
Pocket money (n = 2100)	1230	58.6
Internet at home (n = 2102)	1226	58.3
Mobile phone (n = 2101)	1100	52.4
Households		
Type of household (n = 2116)		
Child's family	1928	91.1
Hostel or boarding school	120	5.7
Children's home/orphanage	9	0.4
Other[b]	59	2.8
Household composition		
Mother	1767	83.2
Father	1301	61.3
Stepparent	318	15.0
Grandparent	515	24.2
Brothers and sisters	1702	80.1
Other children	521	24.5
Other adults	688	32.4
Number of siblings (n = 2109)		
0	48	2.3
1–3	988	46.9
4–6	725	34.3
7+	348	16.4

Table 1. Continued

	N/Mean	%/SD
Housing conditions and assets		
Electricity (always, sometimes) (n = 2117)	1776	83.9
Running water[c] (n = 2001)	1287	64.3
Toilet that flushes[d] (n = 1979)	1433	72.4
House made of brick or concrete (n = 2091)	1382	66.1
Lives in a shack (n = 2091)	706	33.8
Has computer (n = 2099)	1352	64.4
Has television (n = 2097)	1810	86.3
Has place for study (n = 2120)	1444	68.1
Has separate bed for child (n = 2114)	1183	56.0

Notes: [a] Children could select more than one language; [b] Includes friends and neighbours
Missing values (only more than 5% shown): [c] Missing=5.8%; [d] Missing=6.8%;

and 10 *Completely satisfied*. A single-item scale was used to measure Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS) (Campbell, Converse & Rogers 1976). This item was measured using an 11-point scale from *Completely dissatisfied* (0) to *Completely satisfied* (10).

Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to examine relationships between contextual indicators, children's activities, and satisfaction with time use. Socio-demographic differences (for example, gender, orphan status, rural/urban location) were assessed with t-tests/Mann Whitney U test and Pearson's/Spearman's correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between time use, time use satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, and time use variables activities. To compare weekly participation in different activities by distinct groups of children, the scale assessing time use was converted to a 7-point scale. All analyses were conducted with unweighted data using SPSS 24.0. For participant demographics, missing values above 5 per cent are indicated in the table.

Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Namibia and McGill University and permits granted by the national and regional offices of the Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture. In addition, permission was obtained from school management and informed consent was obtained from

parents/guardians and children. The study followed the *Ethical Research Involving Children* (ERIC) guidelines (2013), with an emphasis on considering both children's rights to *participation* without discrimination and to *protection* from harm, and the implications of differential power relationship between adult researchers and child participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating children and their parents/legal guardians.

Results

Children's out-of-school activities

Children were asked how much time they spend on different activities when not in school (Table 2). The most common out-of-school daily activities are doing homework/studying (64.7 per cent of children), watching television (54.9 per cent), helping around the house (53.7 per cent) and relaxing/having fun with the family (50.7 per cent). The least common daily activities are working with non-family for money (13.8 per cent) and taking classes after school (18 per cent). Children were also asked about time spent on leisure activities. Just under half the children play outdoors (47.1 per cent) or practise sports/exercise every day (41.1 per cent). Many children never or less than once a week use social media (43.1 per cent) and never or rarely play electronic games (34.6 per cent).

Contextual factors that influence children's patterns of time use

Differences in children's patterns of time use (mean number of days participating in an activity in the week) according to child traits are shown in Table 3.
Age/grade group: Compared to children in Grade 6 (around 12 years-old), Grade 4 children (around 10 years-old) engage more in leisure activities including relaxing/having fun with the family ($p<.05$), going to religious activities ($p<.001$), playing sports/exercise ($p<.01$) and playing electronic games ($p<.001$). Grade 4 children also report spending more time taking classes after school ($p<.001$), working for money/food (not with family members) ($p<.001$) and caring for siblings or other family members ($p<.001$) than Grade 6 children.
Gender: Male children more frequently work with the family on a business or farm ($p<.01$) and work with non-family members for money/food ($p<.001$) than female children. They also spend more time on leisure activities, such as watching TV ($p<.05$), playing sports ($p<.001$) and using social media ($p<.001$). In contrast, female children spend more time helping around the house ($p<.001$) and doing homework/studying ($p<.001$).

Table 2. Time spent in different activities outside of school.

Activity	Mean[a]	SD	Frequency of children reporting each level						
			Never (%)	< once/week (%)	Once or twice/ week (%)	3–4 days/ week (%)	5–6 days/ week (%)	Every day (%)	DK /NR (%)
Work & home care									
Help around the house	4.9	2.6	6.3	8.8	10.6	8.7	11.9	53.7	0.4
Work with family (business/farm)	2.9	3	31.5	14.3	9.7	7.3	10.7	26.6	0.7
Take care of siblings/other family	4	3	20.5	10.9	8.2	6.3	11.9	42.2	0.7
Work (not family) for money	1.6	2.6	59.5	9.2	6.2	5.2	6.2	13.8	1.4
Academic									
Have classes after school	2.1	2.8	49	9.8	9.5	7.3	6.3	18	1.3
Do homework/study	5.6	2.3	3.2	5.3	6.6	7.3	12.9	64.7	1.2
Leisure									
Go to religious places/ services	2.7	2.6	10.5	19.3	34	7.2	9.4	19.5	0.9
Watch TV	4.6	2.9	12.8	10.4	8	6.7	7.2	54.9	0.5
Do sports/exercise	4.2	2.9	13.1	10.8	12.3	9	13.7	41.1	1.1
Relax, talk, have fun with family	4.8	2.7	8.4	9.7	8.5	8.7	14	50.7	1.1
Play outside	4.5	2.8	10.4	10.7	10.3	9.9	11.6	47.1	0.7
Use social media	3.1	3	34.1	9	9.4	7.9	10.6	29.1	1.1
Play electronic games	3.6	3	24.1	10.5	11.2	8.1	11.9	34.2	0.8
Do nothing/rest	3	2.9	27.5	15.1	12.3	8.3	9.5	27.3	0.7

[a] Mean number of days in the week spent on each activity.

Orphan status: Compared to orphaned children, non-orphans spend more time doing homework/studying (p<.01) and on leisure activities, such as exercising (p<.018), relaxing and having fun with their family (p<.001) and using social media (p<.05). In contrast, orphans spend more time working for money/food for people outside of their family (p<.01) and going to religious places/services (p<.01).

Table 4 shows children's patterns of time use according to some social and geographical characteristics.

Location: Children who live in urban locations spend more time on certain leisure activities, including watching television (p<.001), doing sports/exercise (p<.05), relaxing/talking and having fun with family (p<.001), playing outside (p<.05) and using social media (p<.001). They also spend more time on work activities such as helping around the house (p<.001), working with family in a business/farm (p<.05) and taking care of siblings (p<.05). Whereas urban children spend more time doing homework or studying (p<.001), rural children spend more time taking classes after school (p<.001).

School type: Children in private schools spend more time doing homework/studying (p<.001) and significantly more time on certain leisure activities (p<.001), such as watching television (p<.05), using social media (p<.001), and playing electronic games (p<.01). Children in public/ state schools spend more time engaging in work activities, such as helping around the house (p<.001) and taking care of siblings/other family members (p<.001). They also report spending more time in classes after school (p<.001) and going to religious places/services (p<. 001).

Dwelling type: Children who live in a shack spend more time engaging in some work activities, including working with family on a business/farm (p<.001), taking care of siblings or other family members (p<.05), and working for money or food for people outside of their family (p<.01) than children who live in a brick/concrete house. They also spend more time taking classes after school (p<.05), but significantly less time doing homework/studying (p<.05). Children living in shacks also spend less time on leisure activities, such as watching television (p<.001), playing sports/exercise (p<.001), relaxing and having fun with family (p<.001), using social media (p<.001), and playing electronic games (p<.001).

Ownership of Personal Assets: Children who own more personal assets report spending more time doing homework/studying (p<.001), watching television (p<.001), doing sports/exercise (p<.001), relaxing and having fun with family (p<.001), playing outside (p<.001), using social media (p<.001), playing electronic games (p<.001), and doing nothing/resting (p<.001) than children who own fewer assets. Children who own fewer assets, spend more time taking care of siblings (p<.05) and other family members than children who own more assets.

Table 3. Children's patterns of time use by child traits.

Activity	Total	Age groups			Gender			Orphanhood		
		10 years	12 years	p-value	Male	Female	p-value	Orphan	Non-orphan	p-value
	n	M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)	
Work and home care										
Help around the house	2116	4.8 (2.7)	5.0 (2.6)	.065	4.6 (2.7)	5.1 (2.6)	.000	5.1 (2.6)	4.9 (2.7)	.256
Work with family	2109	3.4 (3.0)	2.4 (2.9)	.000	3.1 (3.0)	2.7 (3.0)	.002	3.0 (3.0)	2.9 (3.0)	.704
Take care of siblings/other family	2109	4.2 (3.0)	3.8 (3.1)	.001	3.9 (3.0)	4.1 (3.0)	.319	3.7 (3.1)	4.1 (3.0)	.097
Work (not family) for money	2095	2.0 (2.7)	1.3 (2.4)	.000	2.0 (2.8)	1.4 (2.4)	.000	2.2 (2.9)	1.5 (2.5)	.002
Academic										
Have classes after school	2097	2.4 (2.9)	1.7 (2.6)	.000	2.1 (2.8)	2.0 (2.)	.181	2.3 (2.8)	2.0 (2.7)	.076
Do homework/study	2098	5.7 (2.3)	5.6 (2.2)	.347	5.4 (2.4)	5.8 (2.1)	.000	5.2 (2.5)	5.7 (2.2)	.005
Leisure										
Go to religious places/ services	2105	3.1 (2.7)	2.4 (2.4)	.000	2.9 (2.6)	2.6 (2.5)	.015	3.2 (2.7)	2.7 (2.5)	.007
Watch TV	2114	4.6 (2.9)	4.7 (2.9)	.626	4.8 (2.8)	4.5 (3.0)	.015	4.4 (2.9)	4.7 (2.9)	.071
Do sports/exercise	2100	4.4 (2.8)	4.0 (2.9)	.002	4.9 (2.7)	3.7 (2.9)	.000	3.8 (2.9)	4.3 (2.8)	.018
Relax, talk, have fun with family	2101	4.9 (2.6)	4.7 (2.7)	.018	4.7 (2.7)	4.9 (2.7)	.095	4.1 (2.9)	4.9 (2.6)	.000
Play outside	2109	4.5 (2.8)	4.4 (2.8)	.350	4.7 (2.7)	4.3 (2.9)	.000	4.2 (2.8)	4.6 (2.8)	.093
Use social media	2101	3.1 (3.0)	3.0 (3.0)	.634	3.4 (3.0)	2.9 (3.0)	.000	2.7 (3.0)	3.2 (3.0)	.015
Play electronic games	2106	3.9 (3.0)	3.2 (3.0)	.000	4.2 (2.9)	3.1 (3.0)	.000	3.4 (3.0)	3.6 (3.0)	.235
Do nothing/rest	2109	3.1 (3.0)	2.8 (2.9)	.005	3.1 (3.0)	2.9 (2.9)	.153	2.9 (2.9)	3.0 (2.9)	.284

Table 4. Children's patterns of time use by social characteristics.

Activity	Total	Location			Type of school			Dwelling type			Ownership of Assets	
		Rural	Urban	p-value	Public	Private	p-value	Concrete	Shack	p-value	Pearson r	p-value
	n	M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)			
Work and home care												
Help around the house	2116	4.3 (2.8)	5.0 (2.6)	.000	5.0 (2.6)	4.1 (2.7)	.000	4.9 (2.6)	5.0 (2.7)	.274	-.027	.230
Work with family	2109	2.5 (2.7)	3.0 (3.0)	.017	3.1 (3.0)	1.5 (2.3)	.000	2.7 (2.9)	3.2 (3.0)	.000	.016	.476
Take care of siblings/other family	2109	3.5 (3.0)	4.1 (3.0)	.012	4.1 (3.0)	3.3 (3.0)	.000	3.9 (3.1)	4.2 (3.0)	.012	-.049	.027
Work (not family) for money	2095	2.4 (2.8)	1.5 (2.6)	.000	1.7 (2.7)	0.9 (2.0)	.000	1.5 (2.5)	1.9 (2.7)	.001	-.037	.099
Academic												
Have classes after school	2097	2.6 (2.7)	2.0 (2.8)	.002	2.1 (2.8)	1.5 (2.2)	.000	1.9 (2.7)	2.2 (2.8)	.014	-.009	.693
Do homework/study	2098	4.8 (2.7)	5.7 (2.2)	.000	5.6 (2.3)	6.0 (1.8)	.000	5.7 (2.7)	5.4 (2.4)	.011	.137	.000
Leisure												
Go to religious places/ services	2105	3.4 (2.7)	2.7 (2.5)	.000	2.9 (2.6)	1.9 (1.9)	.000	2.6 (2.5)	2.9 (2.7)	.015	.037	.093
Watch TV	2114	3.5 (3.2)	4.8 (2.9)	.000	4.6 (3.0)	5.0 (2.5)	.023	5.1 (2.7)	3.7 (3.2)	.000	.309	.000
Do sports/exercise	2100	3.8 (2.9)	4.2 (2.8)	.017	4.1 (2.9)	4.4 (2.6)	.066	4.4 (2.8)	3.8 (3.0)	.000	.234	.000
Relax, talk, have fun with family	2101	3.8 (2.9)	4.9 (2.6)	.000	4.8 (2.7)	5.0 (2.5)	.144	5.1 (2.5)	4.3 (2.9)	.000	.287	.000
Play outside	2109	4.1 (2.8)	4.5 (2.8)	.020	4.5 (2.8)	4.3 (2.8)	.178	4.6 (2.8)	4.3 (2.9)	.072	.170	.000
Use social media	2101	2.2 (2.8)	3.2 (3.0)	.000	3.0 (3.0)	3.7 (3.0)	.000	3.6 (3.0)	2.0 (2.8)	.000	.414	.000
Play electronic games	2106	3.2 (3.0)	3.6 (3.0)	.073	3.5 (3.0)	4.0 (2.7)	.002	3.9 (2.9)	2.9 (3.0)	.000	.334	.000
Do nothing/rest	2109	3.1 (2.9)	3.0 (2.9)	.540	3.0 (3.0)	3.0 (2.8)	.940	3.0 (2.9)	2.9 (3.0)	.498	.104	.000

Contextual factors that influence children's life satisfaction and satisfaction with time use

More than half the children report high levels of satisfaction (scores above 7 on the 11-point scale) with how they use their time (67.1 per cent) and also how much free time they have (65.5 per cent), with very few children indicating low satisfaction (scores below 3) for time use (5.5 per cent) and free time (8.2 per cent).

Table 5 and Table 6 shows how different groups of children rate their wellbeing and their time use satisfaction. Grade 4 children score higher in all three indicators: they report higher levels of life satisfaction (p<.001), time use satisfaction (p≤.001), and satisfaction with the amount of free time (p≤.001) than Grade 6 children. No gender differences are noted. Non-orphans report higher levels of life satisfaction (p≤.05) and time use satisfaction (p≤.05) than orphaned children. Children who school in urban locations also report higher satisfaction with life (p≤.05), time use (p≤.001) and free time (p≤.001), when compared to children from rural areas. Children in public schools report higher satisfaction with the amount of free time they had (p≤.0) than children in private schools, but no differences are apparent with life satisfaction or time use. Finally, socio-economic indicators also have an effect on children's satisfaction with the different indicators; children living in informal dwellings (shacks) report lower life satisfaction (p≤.05), satisfaction with time use (p≤.001) and with the amount of free time (p≤.0). Finally, owning more personal assets is positively associated with life satisfaction ($r=0.229$, p<.001)), time use satisfaction ($r=0.302$, p<.001), and satisfaction with free time ($r=.282$, p<.001).

Life satisfaction and time use patterns

Involvement in certain activities has a positive impact on wellbeing scores (Table 7). The strongest relationships are with relaxing with family ($r=.279$, p<.001), doing homework/studying ($r= .141$, p<.001), and playing sports/exercise ($r=.136$, p<.05). Furthermore, children who indicate higher levels of satisfaction with their time use as well as with their free time are those who spend more time relaxing and having fun with family (p<.001), playing outside (p<.001) and playing sports/exercise (p<.001).

Discussion

In this article, we explored children's patterns of out-of-school time use in a sample of Grade 4 and 6 students from the Khomas region of Namibia. We were interested in children's own perspectives on how they spend their everyday lives as well as advancing the literature on how child traits and socio-demographic characteristics affect the activities that

Table 5. Children's levels of wellbeing and satisfaction by child traits.

	Age/grade groups			Gender			Orphanhood		
	10 years/ Grade 4	12 years/ Grade 6	p-value	Male	Female	p-value	Orphan	Non-orphan	p-value
	M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)	
Satisfaction with life as a whole (OLS)	9.0 (2.1)	8.4 (2.4)	.000	8.9 (2.2)	8.7 (2.3)	.135	8.4 (2.6)	8.8 (2.2)	.039
Satisfaction with time use	8.4 (2.5)	7.5 (2.7)	.000	8.0 (2.6)	7.8 (2.7)	.111	7.6 (3.0)	8.0 (2.6)	.028
Satisfaction with free time	8.3 (2.6)	7.1 (3.1)	.000	7.8 (2.9)	7.6 (3.0)	.170	7.5 (3.2)	7.7 (2.9)	.307

Table 6. Children's levels of wellbeing and satisfaction by socio-economic characteristics.

Activity	Location			Type of school			Dwelling type			Ownership of Assets	
	Rural	Urban	p-value	Public	Private	p-value	Concrete	Shack	p-value	Pearson r	p-value
	M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)		M (SD)	M (SD)			
Satisfaction with life as a whole (OLS)	8.4 (2.8)	8.8 (2.2)	.029	8.7 (2.3)	8.8 (1.9)	.636	8.8 (2.1)	8.6 (2.5)	.018	.229	.000
Satisfaction with time use	7.3 (3.1)	8.0 (2.6)	.001	7.9 (2.7)	8.0 (2.1)	.388	8.1 (2.4)	7.5 (3.0)	.000	.302	.000
Satisfaction with free time	7.0 (3.3)	7.8 (2.9)	.001	7.7 (2.9)	7.3 (3.0)	.012	7.8 (2.8)	7.4 (3.1)	.002	.282	.000

Table 7. Associations between wellbeing, time use satisfaction, and selected activities children engage on.

	Wellbeing (OLS)	Time use satisfaction	Free time satisfaction	Household chores	Taking care of siblings	Homework/ studying	Play outside	Play sports	Social media	Watching T.V.	Relaxing with family
Wellbeing (OLS)	1	.355**	.356**	.083**	.034	.122**	.141**	.136**	.097**	.087**	.279**
Time use Satisfaction		1	.434**	.057**	.051*	.142**	.197**	.179**	.124**	.127**	.293**
Free time Satisfaction			1	.092**	.071**	.095**	.209**	.176**	.160**	.130**	.318**
Household chores				1	.227**	.167**	.106**	.109**	-.010	.041	.174**
Taking care of siblings					1	.122**	.090**	.164**	-.004	.010	.150**
Homework/ studying						1	.138**	.144**	.068**	.099**	.225**
Play outside							1	.279**	.167**	.219**	.313**
Play sports								1	.206**	.187**	.271**
Social media									1	.278**	.211**
Watching TV										1	.236**
Relaxing with family											1

*p≤ .05, **p≤ .01, *** p≤ .001

children engage in and how these may affect their life satisfaction levels. Out-of-school time is under-studied in Namibia and although there is more research on the topic in the rest of Africa, the studies tend to be ethnographic in nature or have smaller samples.

Our research shows that children in Namibia spend time on various activities related to school, family, and leisure. The most common out-of-school activity conducted daily by almost one-third of our sample was homework or studying, similar to what Tötemeyer *et al.* (2015) found in their study of 1402 Grade 6 students in seven regions in Namibia. Like our study, Rees (2017) found that allocating one's time to homework was highly influenced by gender, with girls dedicating more time to it than boys in 11 different countries, including some on the African continent (i.e. Algeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia).

Watching television was the second most common out-of-school activity in our sample, also found to be a popular activity in other parts of Africa. For example, watching television and listening to the radio is a common activity in rural South Africa (De Lange *et al.* 2012) and Malawi (Nelson *et al.* 2017). A previous study of 12- to 15-year-olds from average to below-average income groups in the Khomas region of Namibia found that adolescents would rather spend their out-of-school time watching television or on social media than reading (Kirchner & Mostert 2017). This resonates with children's experiences in other income groups and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Diary entries of a 15-year-old boy from a high-income suburb of Accra in Ghana showed that he enjoys watching television in his free-time and going to the cinema with his family (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016).

In the current study, time spent helping around the house was reported as being the third most common out-of-school activity, similar to qualitative research in other African contexts which document activities like fetching wood, (De Lange *et al.* 2012), preparing food and washing clothes (Hunleth 2019), sweeping, helping in the garden, herding goats, grazing cattle, collecting groceries (Nelson *et al.* 2017), preparing food and caring for young children (Njelesani *et al.* 2011). While the above studies predominantly document children's chores in rural areas, our research shows that this is a common activity in both rural and urban children. Indeed, helping around the house is an important part of children's lives in sub-Saharan Africa.

Spending time with family on a daily basis, another common activity in our sample has been reported in both urban and rural children. In rural South Africa, children sometimes spend time listening to music, reading, and enjoying meals as a family (Samuels *et al.* 2020). Mealtimes, leisure time (radio, music, television), watching football matches within the community, and telling stories by the fire are all popular family activities in rural Malawi (Nelson *et al.* 2017).

Grade 4 children in our study spent more time on leisure activities, including relaxing with the family, playing sports and electronic games, than Grade 6 children. Grade 4 children also spent more time on educational activities and caring for other family

members. Results from previous research have also indicated that younger children are able to allocate more time to leisure than their older siblings, and the latter will only spend more time on homework if they don't have many younger siblings to care for (Jordan *et al.* 2018). In regions where children are expected to work at a certain age, studies have shown that younger children will participate in work-themed play to practice their skills. This type of play disappears as soon as the children are of age to work (Fouts, Neitzel & Bader 2016).

Our results show marked gender differences in children's patterns of time use. Boys spent more time than girls on work with family members on a business/farm and work for money for non-family members and on most leisure activities. Similarly, Posel & Graspa (2017) found that, on average, boys have been found to spend more time than girls on leisure and production work during the day, while girls spend substantially more time on household work. Furthermore, boys are often recorded playing sports outdoors, like soccer and cricket (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). In this line, in a large sample of 13- to 15-year-olds from eight African countries (Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Senegal, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), 16.6 per cent of boys reported being frequently physically active (i.e. running, fast walking, biking, dancing, and playing football; it excluded gym class), compared to 12 per cent of girls (Peltzer 2010).

Our results showed that girls in Khomas spent more time helping around the house and doing homework/studying. Data from 16 countries from a previous *ISCWeB* Wave, also shows that girls are more likely to help with housework (Rees 2017). This often starts at an early age. In Egyptian communities where basic public services are limited, young girls are asked to fetch water and fuel, dispose of garbage, do laundry, and care for younger siblings (Assaad, Levison & Zibani 2010). Although our study did not find that girls' participation in household chores impacted their time spent on school work, research in other contexts has suggested this (Kazeem 2013) and it will be important to monitor this. Other studies have found no significant gender difference in the average time allocated to learning activities both at school and at home (Posel & Grapsa 2017), in fact, our findings confirm Rees (2017): that children who do more housework also tend to spend more time on homework, with girls being more involved in both activities.

Our results uncover the impact of socio-economic circumstances on children's time allocations. Indeed, children who owned more personal assets reported spending more time doing homework, watching television, doing exercise, relaxing with the family, playing outdoors, and on social media and electronic games. Children who lived in informal dwellings in our sample tended to spend more time contributing to family, such as taking care of siblings, and less time on homework/studying and leisure activities. Results from previous studies have also shown that children from a higher socio-economic status participate more in sports (Rees 2017; Peltzer 2010) and leisure in general (Jordan *et al*. 2018). Rees (2017) in particular found that children from higher-income countries spend more time on leisure activities, such as watching

television, listening to music, and using the computer than children from lower-income countries. Other research has also shown that children in poorer living conditions may have less time available for leisure and study (Fonta *et al.* 2020) as they may be required to contribute more to family life, including participation in domestic chores, such as fetching water and disposing of waste (Assaad *et al*. 2010).

Our findings show that children living in urban locations spent more time watching television, doing sports, relaxing with family, outdoors, and/or on social media. They also spent more time on chores, working with family, and studying. Previous studies found similar results. Rural children in Burkina Faso were found to have less access to information and leisure than urban children (Fonta *et al.* 2020). Totemeyer *et al.* (2015) pointed out that while rural Grade 6 children spend less time on educational activities, like reading (with 17.3 per cent of rural students being readers,[1] compared to 36.5 per cent in urban schools), they spent more time on oral storytelling, story reading and listening to stories on the radio, which also resulted in rural children spending quality time with their family. This is supported by other research that shows more creative use of play for children in rural areas (Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015; Bartie *et al.* 2016; Nelson *et al.* 2017). Indeed, while our findings showed that urban children spend more time playing outdoors, it should be noted that play was not defined for children and it may be that rural children did not consider these types of activities as play. Finally, while our findings suggested that urban children spend more time on chores and working with family, previous studies have come to different conclusions with regards to labour. Kazeem (2013), for example, found that rural Nigerian children's involvement in agricultural activities and labour was very high compared to urban children. Finally, other findings suggested that South African children living in rural areas have higher mean time allocations to household and production work and lower mean time allocations to learning, compared to urban children (Posel & Grapsa 2017). These differences may be attributed to differing definitions of household work, and teasing out what household activities children in different circumstances engage in, may be valuable for future research.

Grade 4 children, non-orphans, children schooling in urban locations and children in better socio-economic conditions tended to report higher levels of satisfaction with life and/or time use. Children who attended public schools reported being satisfied with the amount of free time they had but no differences were found with life satisfaction or time use. While our study did not find gender differences, in Posel & Grapsa (2017) girls reported being more comfortable with their time use than boys and rural children being less likely than urban children to report being uncomfortable with their time use during

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[1] In this study, readers are defined as 'a person who had some knowledge of the basic types of reading material available, who either spontaneously mentioned reading for pleasure as an activity, or gave reading a priority among various options on which a substantial amount of time was spent after school'.

the day. Using *ISCWeB* data from 14 countries, Sauerwein & Rees (2020) showed that children who report allocating very little time to homework, reading, and media, such as television, music and computers, tend to have high levels of material deprivation[2] and low levels of life satisfaction. These children also tend to be predominantly male. Children who are low media users but are engaged in structured leisure activities (youth movements, scouts, etc.) were found to have an average level of life satisfaction. Those who report having an organized schedule and being engaged in extra lessons and reading for pleasure tended to have higher-than-average levels of life satisfaction.

Our study revealed that relaxing with family, doing homework/studying, and playing outdoors have a strong impact on children's wellbeing scores. Furthermore, children who reported higher levels of satisfaction with their time use and free time patterns were those who spent more time relaxing and having fun with family, playing outdoors, and exercising. This points to higher self-reported satisfaction for children who are involved with active leisure activities as well as leisure with family. These results are in line with other studies on the African continent that examine the impact of certain activities on children's overall satisfaction. In Central Africa, Fouts *et al* (2016) observed play behaviours and found that social play (i.e. object play, games, roleplaying, imagined scenarios, wrestling and tickling between a child and at least one other person) had a positive and relaxed effect on children. To represent when they most have fun, children in several studies in South Africa have identified playing outdoors (De Lange *et al.* 2012; Alexander, Cocks & Shackleton 2015). Finally, a 9-year-old boy from Ethiopia in Jirata's (2012) study put a lot of emphasis on the happiness that playing riddles and folktales with his siblings and friend brought him. While all these studies used different conceptualisations of satisfaction, they are consistent with our findings that children are satisfied with their time use when this time is spent having fun with family.

This study has some limitations. The sample was limited to Khomas region and Grade 4 and Grade 6 children. Results cannot be generalized to a broader population of children since no weights were used for analysis. Causality cannot be inferred as we used a cross-sectional design. Comparisons across grades need to be done with caution since different answering styles have been documented across groups (Casas & González-Carrasco 2019).

Despite these limitations this study broadens our understanding of children's lives in Namibia, the valuable contributions they make to their families and communities, and the activities that contribute most to their life satisfaction and wellbeing. Children in this context regularly engage in a wide range of activities during their out of school time. This study also illustrates the potential of population-based research to capture the perspectives of a large and diverse group of children in different ecological contexts. Solid evidence that children's participation in household chores contributes positively to their life satisfaction broadens our understanding

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[2] Clothes in good condition, a computer, the internet, a mobile phone, one's own room, books, a family car, and equipment to play music.

of children's work and should be further studied across different sub-groups of children, particularly those who are economically and otherwise disadvantaged. A closer look at the tasks different children perform and the conditions under which they carry them out will be crucial to facilitating positive child development and integration into their families and communities. Our study also adds to the scarce literature on child play in Africa by showing the valuable impact of play and leisure on children's wellbeing as well as the importance of spending time with family. Indeed, the dimension of play has been chronically overlooked in the literature and this study offers a significant route to rethinking the role of play and creativity in African childhoods. Finally, our study suggests avenues for initiatives to ensure that children from diverse contexts have the opportunity to participate in activities that can promote their well-being.

Acknowledgements

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Childhood at latitude zero: revealing Sao Tome and Principe children's play culture

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Abstract: In the scope of the sociology of childhood, the aim is to present one of the diverse socio-cultural worlds of African children, specifically their play culture, with the intention to reveal Sao Tome and Principe childhood's daily life dimensions by considering those in which children are specialised and thrilled to talk about: games, play and toys. With the support of postcolonial studies, the present research points out that Santomean children from this African country, which lies at latitude zero on the equator, are literally living in between two worlds: simultaneously handling the challenge of being a child in their own society (adult-centrism) as well as defying the standardised Western childhood imposed by occidental hegemonic institutions (Eurocentrism). Nevertheless, it seems that African children's actions, resilience, creativity, and intelligence, can be linked to cultures of subversion and resistance, in challenging social inequalities and fighting for social justice—like counter-hegemonic struggles.

Keywords: Sociology of childhood, postcolonial studies, Sao Tome and Principe, play culture.

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Introduction

In childhood studies, especially the sociology of childhood, it is essential to search for, and foreground, the voices of the African children in order to fill a gap in research and theoretical productions about the processes of constructing childhood in peripheral countries (Prout 2010). In this regard, the intention is to move beyond the 'narrative of "lacks" about African children' (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016: 455) and instead, explore in this paper, the cultures of children and the ways that they reveal themselves to be creative '(re)productors of the culture' (Corsaro 1990; Pinto & Sarmento 1997; Delalande 2001; Sarmento 2003). This paper aims to shed light on ethnographic research carried out for the purpose of capturing children's games, play and toys, with a focus on Portuguese-speaking children from Sao Tome and Principe who are recognised as social actors 'in their own right, assuming the analytical autonomy of children's social action' (Qvortrup 1991: 192; Qvortrup *et al.* 2009). However, it is important to note that, as Abebe (2019: 1) argues, we should aim to go 'beyond the recognition that children are social actors' and instead, reveal not only their sociocultural and material contexts, but also the 'relational processes within which their everyday agency unfolds'.

The research presented here seeks to distance itself from the hegemonic academic discourses as well as from the colonial view of history by listening to the voices of children whose lives have not only been made invisible by the Eurocentrism which dominates the social sciences, but also marginalised by the adult-centrism that remains identifiable in childhood studies. Therefore, the proposal is dialoguing with postcolonial authors (e.g. Mudimbe 1994; Spivak 2010; Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2003; Santos & Meneses 2010; Sanches 2005, among others) in order to fulfil one of the main goals of the research study on which this paper is based, that is, 'giving voice to the marginalised' African children. In other words, this paper seeks to listen to the frequently 'double excluded subjects' in social research (Colonna 2012)—so called because they are both children and African. The very topic of the present research study, with its focus on children's play cultures, is itself a discriminated subject within the broader academy as it is not taken as a serious subject.

Childhood cultures (Delalande 2001; Corsaro 2002; Sarmento 2004) are characterised by the fundamental feature of playfulness (Sarmento 2004), constituting children's play as a set of distinct cultural practices, carried out by social actors, belonging to a specific generational group (James *et al.* 1998). Here, these playful cultural practices will be analysed in the interactive and living context of children's reality, where they produce a specific culture which is, in turn, (re)produced within a broader culture (Brougère 1998). That is to say, that children's playful cultural practices occur amidst local and global sets of rules as well as legal and symbolic

dispositions that regulate children's position and actions in the society and inform their relations with others.

Even when the realities of African children are highlighted by international media, policymakers or researchers, the narratives these actors have hitherto tended to foreground have 'eclipsed the mundanities of everyday life for many children whose lives are not characterised by "lacks" and difficulties' (Twum-Danso 2016: 456). In contrast, in this paper it is assumed that the alterity of being an African child can be revealed through a subject in which children are specialists, most notably, their engagement in everyday play, games, toys and the varied ways they do this by focusing on their expected postures and gestures, their choices and ways of interaction, their humour, telling of stories (or secrets), as their silences.

After presenting the visual ethnography approach adopted as part of a qualitative approach for the collection of data, the article will illuminate the games, play and toys of the children from Sao Tome and Principe as well as the critical appreciation of the spaces and times they choose to play and the people with whom they elect to play. By acknowledging children's own conceptions, some dimensions of childhood cultures will be revealed. This will specifically be achieved through listening and reflecting on this group of children's daily playful practices and knowledge. Therefore, the aim is not so much to enumerate, measure or weigh the so-called 'disadvantaged' African children (Punch 2003), but instead, to develop an insight into their 'agency' and explore its 'contradictory aspects and effects in their lives' (Abebe 2019: 8; Liebel 2020). In other words, this paper will seek to develop a deeper insight into the lives of these children as well as those of their families and friends: what do they do in their societies? What are their dreams and fantasies? And how these dreams and fantasies help to establish their imaginary worlds.

Pointing to the research study's conclusions, it will be highlighted here that children from Sao Tome and Principe's latitude zero are literally living in between two worlds in addition to being on the line of equator—that is, at latitude zero: simultaneously handling the challenge of being a child in their own society (adult-centrism) as well as defying the standardised Western childhood imposed by occidental hegemonic institutions (Eurocentrism).

Theoretical framework

Child studies and post-colonial studies

Within the field of childhood studies, there is a growing community of scholars who are *underlining* the importance of deepening knowledge about childhoods within the context of occidental societies or the Global South. Confronting itself with the concept

of 'normativity', the sociology of childhood, for instance, opens up to the construction of new and diverse perspectives about childhood (Nieuwenhuys 2009; Qvortrup *et al.* 2009; Punch & Tisdall 2012: Spyrou *et al.* 2018). Normativity is here understood as the set of rules, legal and symbolic dispositions, that regulate children's position and actions in society, guiding their relationship with adults, peers, and institutions.

The hegemonic claim of childhood normativity was established in Western modernity (Sarmento *et al.* 2018: 135–6), based specifically on the 'feelings of childhood' documented by Philippe Ariès (1988). Coming from Western European contexts, the 'hegemonic ideal' (Crewe 2010; Nieuwenhuys 2013; Balagopalan 2002, 2014) or the idea of a normal childhood could be described as the life of that child who: is aware and enjoys their rights of provision, protection, and participation; was born into a family with a mother and father; is under medical supervision from birth which leads to a monitoring of their growth and development from the first day of life; has access to a range of institutions and professionals responsible for their education, extracurricular and sport activities. Often occurring in gyms, parks or other fun spaces, normalised children's playful activities are also monitored by adults, previously dividing children in homogeneous age groups, where they can watch children's programmes, play online or with the PlayStation Portable, often referring to superhero brands, within the so called 'global material culture' (Aitken 2001; Buckingham 2011; Wyness 2015).

Working on the assumption that it's crucial to search for children's voices in diverse parts of the world to ensure that pluralised knowledge about childhood and children's lives exist, the point of departure here is to foreground the voices of those who historically have not had a voice in its generational and geographical alterity: African children. Put another way, this paper will reaffirm a central tenet at the heart of discourses within the sociology of childhood—most notably its defence of the view that children are social actors as well as its defence of foregrounding hitherto excluded voices. On this latter point the sociology of childhood adopts a similar standpoint as post-colonial studies.

Postcolonialism is here understood as the set of theoretical and analytical currents which illuminate theoretical and political primacy in analysing the unequal relations between the Global South and Global North. It also considers that both the Western and the non-Western worlds were victims of colonialism, but 'from the edges or peripheries, structures of power and knowledge are more visible'. Thus, to reveal the underlying structure of power and knowledge, it is best to do so with those who have been marginalised by ensuring that they are given a voice to clearly express the consequences of the inequalities that exist between the 'north and south of the world' (Santos 2004: 8). Postcolonial theories challenge the question of the Eurocentric vision of the world, as a markedly colonialist assumption, allowing space for the voices and visions of the 'subalterns'—that is, those who, during the European colonial domination, were systematically represented as not having agency or voice (Mignolo 2003; Sanches 2005; Santos & Meneses 2010; Nieuwenhuys 2013).

Postcolonial perspectives also help to reflect upon the notion of how childhood normativity is rendering some children invisible, or pushing some childhoods to 'the margins', because they do not fit into a normative view of childhood. For instance, without considering the economic, social, and cultural context in which children live, they can be often 'considered as being in transition ("becoming") and not as autonomous and complete social beings ("being")' (Sarmento 2013: 32). As Olga Nieuwenhuys (2013: 5–6) puts it:

> Postcolonialism's invitation to look at the other side of the picture or even turn the world upside down, cannot be followed up without challenging current disciplinary boundaries that privilege normative representations of Northern, white, bourgeois childhood (in the singular) and produces by the same token 'other' childhoods (in the plural)—both in the North and the South...

Analysing childhood 'from the margins' (Mudimbe 1994; Spivak 2010; Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2003; Santos & Meneses 2010; Sanches 2005) constitutes both an epistemological and a theoretical challenge. This, therefore, implies looking away from normative conceptions of childhood in order to problematise it and producing a new perspective that illuminates what Aries (1988) calls the 'feeling of childhood' (Sarmento, Marchi & Trevisan 2018). In this view, researching children's daily actions in postcolonial contexts, such as those that exist in most of Africa, helps us to problematise Western concepts and prejudices about childhood (Baraldi & Cockburn 2018). Additionally, it also makes possible our ability to further understand the heterogeneous realities of 'children at the margins' (Marchi 2007; Sarmento & Marchi 2008; Sarmento, Marchi & Trevisan 2018) and defying current concepts of childhood normativity.

Through the analysis of the playful practices of African children who are located at latitude zero of the equator and listening to children as the 'experts' of play (Barra & Sampaio 2020), it was possible to document and question the normalisation of children's play.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology: visual ethnography approach

The study was conducted between June 2011 and June 2012 in all districts of São Tomé and Príncipe—in several places within the twelve communities on the island of Sao Tome (urban, peripheral, and rural), and seven communities of the Autonomous Region of Príncipe. The research study adopted a qualitative approach (Lüdke & André 1986; Lessard-Hébert *et al.* 1990), drawing specifically on ethnography as the method for the collection of data.

The research presents the playful practices of more than 1300 children, within 35 agreed observation sessions with children and more than 50 moments of spontaneous

play. In both of these participant observation modalities, an attempt was made to decentralise the role of the adult as the research manager in order to conceive the study as a process which was co-managed with children (Soares 2006). Specifically, the designated agreed observation sessions were carried out in hours and places previously chosen by children themselves once children and caregivers gave their informed consent to take part of the study. Consent was also negotiated with key people and institutions were consulted beforehand in order to enable the researcher to enter the community to participate in, and document, children's playful activities. Frequently, these playful sessions took place in their own communities, at an agreed time, where the researcher met the invited group of children to engage in playful activities. However, it was not surprising that many children from the neighbourhood also came to see what was going on and were welcome to take part in the playful sessions. The designated spontaneous play moments are so called because they were captured by the researcher without any planning for them to occur. That is, those numerous flashed moments in which the researcher could witness children freely playing all around, performing some game, using or manufacturing toys, and so on. However, the inclusion of these spontaneous moments of play in data analysis was equally consented (or not) by the participating children and caregivers.

Through direct, close, and privileged contact with children, the researcher was allowed to reconstruct the processes and relationships (Lüdke & André 1986) that configure the daily experience of children's play. That is to say, carrying out participant observation enabled the understanding of the mechanisms of domination and resistance, oppression, and contestation, at the same time that they are conveyed. In addition, visual data collection and its analysis allowed the re-elaboration of knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, ways of seeing and feeling reality and the world by children and by the researcher, decontextualising and (re)contextualise collected data.

The analysis of thousands of photographs, hundreds of pages of field notes, and dozens of videos collected during the field work brought many answers about where, when, with whom and how children play. In both observation modalities the following details were systematically registered: community, date and hour that playful activities took place; the identification of the participating children (boys and girls, minimum and maximum age); the space(s) for holding the playful session, or even some games; the chronology of activities and their duration (both those announced or declared by the child and those actually performed by them); materials, toys or artifacts used in each activity; peer groups involved in each activity; the initiation or announcement of each playful activity; the identification of the supervisor or advisors for each activity; parallel activities happening close to the children's play session and sometimes far away from the main playgroup—or from the 'epicentre of play' (Barra 2016).

The rebuilding of the processes and relations that shape the daily experience of play, games, and the use of toys by children from Sao Tome and Principe was

mirrored and fixed with the support of visual methodologies. That is, by enabling the use of photography and digital video as research tools, carrying out a 'visual ethnography' (Pink 2007) contributed to the collection of descriptive data reflecting on children '... in specific contexts, with specific experiences and in real life situations' (Graue & Walsh 2003: 22). This 'micro-sociological and ethnographic study' (Hengst & Zeiher 2004) is here characterised by children's autonomous and competent actions as a key aspect of the sociological investigation on childhood (James & Prout 1990a; 1990b; Segalen 2010). Hence, it is important to reinforce the voice, participation, and 'agency' of children (Abebe 2019; Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi 2016) in the production of sociological data.

Context

Sao Tome and Principe is an African archipelago, composed of two volcanic islands located at the gulf of Equatorial Guinea, about 300 km from the West African coast, being crossed by the imaginary line of the equator: latitude zero. Portuguese explorers first encountered the island of São Tomé in 1470 and colonised the country for 500 years, until 1975. Being the second smallest African country, with about 215 000 inhabitants (INE-STP 2021), one-third lives on less than US$ 1.9 per day, and more than two-thirds are poor, based on a poverty line of US$ 3.2 per day of the World Bank. Very dependent on foreign aid, Sao Tome and Principe has an economy based on the production of cocoa which is responsible for many exports. Fishing is also a key element of the economy, while in recent years tourism has started to become seen as a strategic sector to be developed.

Sao Tome and Principe's climate is equatorial, hot, and humid, with two seasons: the warm and rainy season roughly from October to May, and the other dry and mild season from May to August (known as *gravana*). The cultural wealth (language, cuisine, culture, worship, religion, etc.) comes from the miscegenation between Portuguese and indigenous people associated with the coast of Guinea as well as Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique. The official language is Portuguese but the Creole languages (as *Forro*, *N'gola* and *Lung'ye*) are also spoken within the two islands.

The population is very young, with children aged zero to fourteen years representing more than 40 per cent of the population (INE-STP 2021), and this may be the reason underpinning the Santomean saying which states '*mina ça likêza póbli'*, that is, 'children are the wealth of the poor'. Due to the demographic significance of children within the population a number of studies have been produced which provide information that indicate that children are a priority target for attention and protection in the country. In general, it's conveyed an image of the 'victim child' and, above all, the situation of children as 'a subject and not like subjects' in their societies (Sarmento 2003). Then, it's substantially important to reflect on

how local and global constructions of children can interact and relate to each other and contribute to the deconstruction of the idea of a unique, homogeneous, or normalised childhood.

Findings

In the next pages, the analysis of the games, play and toys of the children from Sao Tome and Principe illuminate the 'cultures of childhood' (Delalande 2001; Corsaro 2002; Sarmento 2004), especially in the critical appreciation of the space in which they play, the chosen time, peer group formation, as well as about who is playing or watching play. The 'peer group' (Corsaro 1990) highlighted here represents the collective of children who are immersed in the same playful culture. That is, a particular generation in a particular historical period, recognising a complex and hierarchical structure of material elements (such as games and playful activities), rites, artefacts (such as toys), ceremonial dispositions, norms, and values (Brougère 1998).

Children's games

The frequent use of verbs such as walking, jumping, climbing, descending, climbing, sliding, running, pushing, hanging, whirling, etc. in the field notes, sheds light on the nature of the playful activities that I noted in most of the observation sessions. However, children's predilection in playing games using all kinds of balls is evident in the data analysis, even when the ball did not exist and, in some cases, was spontaneously handcrafted using different waste materials.

The performance of games is dominant in the activities carried out in the observation sessions, constituting an important category of analysis, both due to its frequency and its diversity in the observation sessions. The popularity of many games in this study is a testimony to how being outdoors in nature is associated with the ability of children to use up a lot of energy, with no adults having to tell them to get off screens or the couch.

It's also important to point out that some games were never observed by the researcher. Instead, they were addressed by some children as other ways of playing, some of which were prohibited by adults. For example, hide and seek, *beijinho beijoca* (kiss, kiss), or *mamãcupapá* (mothers and fathers) are games which manifest intimacy between boys and girls and hence, were played out of the sight of strangers. This finding makes me wonder why children talked about these forbidden games to me even though they knew that they wouldn't perform them anyway while I was around. It seems that between children's wishes and adults' impositions there is an uneasy

generational understanding: children know they shouldn't play these games, but they still play them; adults know that it is useless to prohibit these games, but they still forbid them.

Children's play

In the scope of the playful activities, it's important to note the frequency of activities like dancing, singing, acting or make-believe play. The meteorological conditions of this tropical country are the background stage for children's creativity and playful activities either constraining it or enhancing it. Examples include children pretending to 'fish' in large pools of water left by the floods, or flying kites, spinning a fan, or imitating the fluttering *Superman* cape when enjoying the blowing winds in the *gravana* season. Children also showed that most of these make-believe activities can be played only with their own bodies, with a playmate or with a small group of children, rolling or spinning with each other, riding piggyback or *bligá* (simulating fighting), for example. In general, the ways in which children showed that they like, and want to, play seem to be totally opposed to the ways in which play is organised and regulated in Western societies nowadays, according to a 'hegemonic ideal' (Crewe 2010; Nieuwenhuys 2013; Balagopalan 2002, 2014). In particular, the games that seem to cause more pleasure and fun do not need to have elaborate toys (sometimes they need nothing at all) or to be held in special appropriate places. The intensity and enjoyment of children's play seems to lie in the ability to create, despite the challenging circumstances children face within this context.

It is also common to observe Santomean children playing by using natural materials or elements of nature, as in *brincadera di barro* (modelling the clay) or *trepá na madera* (climbing trees), respectively. However, these activities are not done as often as children would want. This is due to the fact that climbing a neighbour's tree without their permission means breaking social rules; and playing with clay can become too expensive for certain households who may not be able to pay for the needed soap to wash children's clothes after play, for example.

Children's toys

During the observation sessions, the use of toys by children was not significant. However, everything seemed to appear as toys in the hands of children. Thus, it was reported that the chocolate cake made with clay became an icing cake when it was covered with ashes or ornamented with flowers, chopsticks, or dry seeds; children pretended to cook by using *blagá* (crush red seeds) to obtain *piri-piri (chilli powder)*. Children also explained that they were 'sewing' when I observed that they were sticking

thin sticks green leaves together to make soldiers' hats or bands, shredding banana leaf to make skirts or wigs, or using dry banana leaves to make *boneca da folha di bananera* (banana leaf dolls). Additionally, amongst the toys manufactured by children, often produced by combining natural and waste materials (including all types of caps, boxes, cartons, cans, plastics, packaging, wires, and so on), were also found toys like *finá-finá* (smashed rolling taps), *gualala* (stroller), *mira* (hook), or *ventoinha* (fan made with leaves), for example. In line with the make-believe play described above, it seems that the great joy in playing with toys is not so much in the objects themselves but in the creative production process, with some children even transforming garbage into something to play with (Figure 1).

In the category of commercial toys a few standardised toys were found such as a basketball, a bicycle, a *Barbie* doll, or the *Spiderman* figure. Those commercial toys were rarely seen according to study's general data. Although, in contrast to this scarcity, numerous branded toys were observed in one specific session. These toys were

Figure 1. One of the self-made children's toys.

brought to the agreed observation session by an adult (mother) but were not age-appropriate for the participating children, as they were mostly sensorimotor stimulation baby toys. Hence, during this session two siblings (nine and six years old) often demonstrated a willingness to subvert suggestions by adults about how to play these toys by finding different ways to use those toys from their original function; for example, pretending to be on the phone with a remote control or using *Ruca*'s piano as a Disc-Jockey mix table. Also, instead of playing with the toys, the siblings asked many times to go cycling or to go and play catch with their friends who lived next door, preferably barefoot like them, instead of watching cable TV, a DVD or singing to the researcher, as their mother had suggested.

Play spaces

The spaces chosen by children for carrying out agreed observation sessions and those that they actually used to play were frequently open and multifunctional public spaces, such as the community yard, the soccer field, the atriums or community halls, the court-yard of religious or non-governmental organisations, the community ballroom, as well as laundry spaces, street vending spots, or community television spaces, for example. It is important to remember that the preference for children to play in community yards may be anchored in the most traditional way of organising the social space in Sao Tome and Principe. That is, the community yard (Figure 2) represents the space where everything happens and everyone passes by, also the place where 'solidarity or conflict resolution is operated and carried out in a public and consensual way', functioning as a 'metaphor for this tiny country' (Mata 2004: 26). Therefore, children choosing such spaces to play also reveals the way they are reading their social and cultural surroundings at the same time as making changes they desire. In other words, children are doing the (re)production of their own playful culture, within a broader adult culture (Brougère 1998).

Choosing large open spaces to play, such as community yards, squares, or football fields, can also be explained by the fact that they made possible the ability to host a large number of participants and presented ideal conditions for large groups of players. However, among the variety of spaces chosen by children to play there were also included spaces under the children's houses, the balconies and porches attached to their homes or those of their neighbours, whether they were under construction or were abandoned buildings. Although these spaces can be considered as private territories, children often played there while interacting with passers-by who also did not question the presence of the children in that space. That can also be

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[1] This is a space in the community where there is a TV for all members to watch. This is seen as a solution within a context whereby not all families have a TV, or even electricity.

Figure 2. Performance of games at a Santomean community yard.

highlighted in the case of two older boys playing with their private Playstation on the community television space,[1] that is, they are privately playing in a public space.

Many of the spaces chosen by the children to play are, at first glance, unsuitable for playing according to an (Western) adult eye, however later they are revealed as being fundamental in the very configuration of the children's games, that is, it's often the space itself that dictates and explains the nature of playing. An example is when children collect coconut leaves in a torrential rainstorm just to slide down the mud slopes as part of an adapted skiing competition. Another situation that helped to undermine the appropriateness' conception of playing spaces was the researcher's confrontation with children's make-believe grave as part of a game just in the cemetery's main entrance (Figure 3). Additionally, I observed children jumping all around the cemetery—both inside and outside of its walls (Figure 4). Maybe in this case, by choosing the cemetery to play in, children are just finding their own way to deal with death since in Sao Tome and Principe children are not allowed to participate in the rituals associated with any funeral.

In these examples, it was essential to assume a position of discovering perspectives and meanings attributed by the children themselves to the play experience; that is, by conceiving the space in which children play 'as an unfinished product and, by the social uses that children invest in it, to show them as social actors involved in a dual social integration, both in the adult as in children's world' (Ferreira 2012: 237). Also, the spaces where children are playing are different both for boys and girls, as most of the collected data reveal that girls play closer to their homes or under them, as well as on its stairs, balconies or porches linked to their home. This fact

Figure 3. Playing at the cemetery.

can be directly related to the social roles' perception by each gender, corroborating the findings of other studies carried out in communities in other African countries (e.g. Guerreiro 1966; Rossie 2005; Koppele 2012; Colonna 2012). Specifically, the fact that girls play nearer home is not only about the fact that that enables them to be supervised by their family members; also, it is because girls are responsible for carrying out many household chores and simultaneously taking care of younger siblings. Boys, on the other hand, are often responsible for carrying out tasks that involve taking more distant routes, such as running errands, buying something at the market, fetching firewood from the bush or collecting water from the river, for example. This makes it possible for this group to play further away from their homes, plan outings and go on walks with their favourite companions and toys (bicycles, footballs or *gualalas* (wheelbarrows)).

Figure 4. Playing at the cemetery.

Play time

The observation sessions were always negotiated with children as well as with their responsible adults, who clearly place children's housework as a priority, allowing them to come and play only after they had completed their chores. Nevertheless, the observation showed that children can also play during the performance of their household chores, that is, they play while washing clothes (Figure 5), bathing in the river (Figure 6) or while selling homemade biscuits, for example. An episode illustrating this was related to the task of fetching water. The mother of one of the girls attending the observed session requested that her daughter should go and fetch water before
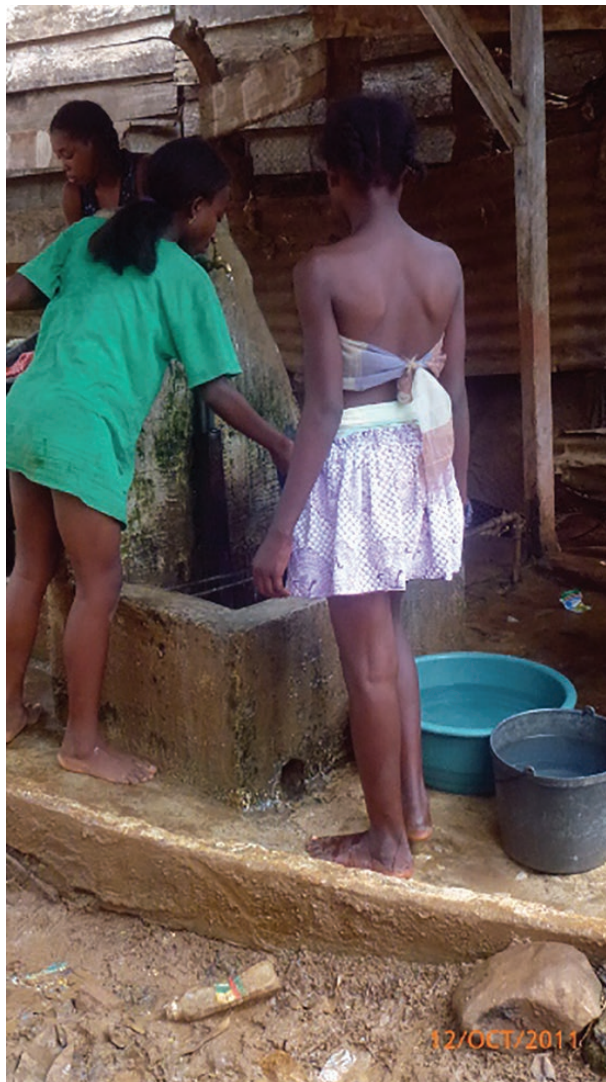
Figure 5. Playing games while doing housework.

Figure 6. Children playing in the river.

starting any game. As a result, this girl called her friends and headed for the communal tap, sadly verifying that the tap was pouring little water at a time. This meant that the process of fetching water was going to take a long time. Understanding the extended time needed to fill the containers, the girls placed the containers in order to fill them one by one while they animatedly performed numerous games of skipping rope (Figure 7). Another example came from boys who would take longer routes to carry out tasks such as running errands for adults, finding herbs for rabbits, or carrying bottles of water for home, for example, in order to play with their friends who they would often ask to accompany them on an errand.

Children often informed the researcher that the most suitable periods to play would be only in school holidays, on Saturdays or Sundays, as long as the catechesis and mass times are safeguarded as well as the traditional Sunday lunch, held on the beach

Figure 7. Playing games while doing housework.

with extended family. Hence, as long as these social, religious, and family commit-
ments were respected children would then be available to play. Nevertheless, observing
children for one year on the islands showed that children found time to play all year
round, at all hours, and on all days. Thus, they played on holidays or school breaks,
but also during the school period: before going to school, in the school playground,
or at the time of *desmanchada* (the end of school period). They also played during the
trip to, or from, school since in most communities these trips were carried out on foot,
by groups of numerous boys and girls (Figure 8).

   In this way, reflecting on the disparity between children's words and actions it's
important to consider that maybe children are saying just what they think adults want
to hear (Alderson 1995; Mahon *et al.* 1996), especially when it comes to a Western
white adult who wants to know about their games. In short, by choosing and present-
ing the appropriate time to play, children from Sao Tome and Principe creatively weave
their play culture between what is inscribed in children's cultures built locally within
the scope of their peers, family, and friends and what is being dictating by actors and
hegemonic institutions. In other words, the actions of these African children seem to
be situated in the convergence between local (family, friends) and hegemonic (school,
church) rules and constraints.

Who plays?

It was essential to listen to what children told us in their natural play contexts, in dif-
ferent ways, about who was participating, initiating, directing, guiding, or ending play
activities. Likewise, an analysis that considered gender and age was essential in realis-
ing who plays alone, who plays in the company of a friend or in small groups of chil-
dren, and how small or large girls' and boys' play groups were. It was also possible to

Figure 8. Children's playing while going to school.

account for the hierarchical interaction's rules of children among themselves, as well as the way they respect rules and orders from the adult social worlds in which they operate (Ferreira 2004). In this way I was able to note both intra and intergenerational dynamics in the playful context through the way children interacted with peers and adults in a playful context.

In most of the arranged observation sessions there was a large age range in the composition of the numerous groups of participant children (from months to more than 18 years of age). Most of the observation sessions were held in open spaces within the communities allowing to note that the positioning and action of children during the session were not indifferent to their age and gender. That means, by reviewing visual data it was possible to define the image (both literally and conceptually) of three concentric circles towards an epicentre of play, where most of the participating children perform playful activities. As will be further explained, in most of the carried-out observation sessions, each one of these circles were occupied by different protagonists doing different activities.

The first circle, larger and further away from the epicentre of play, was occupied mostly by adult, men who observed the play (Figure 9). Alongside this group, who more often than not seemed to ignore what was happening, there were often found groups of primarily older boys, but which could also include younger boys aged 11 or 12 years old. Therefore, in the place where the apparently uninterested men were, were also boys

Figure 9. The first concentric circle of the combined observation's sessions.

who frequently appeared during the observation sessions carrying various toys, wheelbarrows, strollers of all kinds or balancing tyres, pulleys, and hoops. Frequently, these boys simply stopped to watch the ongoing play session or went on to play their own games a little further away. In a brief analysis of the games, they were playing away from the main group, these included activities such as: *trepá na madera* (climbing trees); *bligá* (engaging in pretending fights); playing soccer; or riding a bicycle (Figure 10). It seemed that these boys were demonstrating their maturity and virility by keeping away from the ongoing games of younger children and observing them like the adults or distancing themselves away to perform other types of games. There were several episodes in which I found myself as an object of romantic interest of these boys, further indicating the idea that they did not want to be seen as children and sought to highlight their maturity by asking me out. The fact that they are accompanied by toys did not invalidate this argument, because, as already explained above, strollers and wheelbarrow were often used by boys to work and not to play. Carrying a soccer ball, on the other hand, seemed to be a distinctive sign of maturity, because in this case we were dealing with 'the reminiscence of an institutionally supported culture, related to the seriousness that is attributed to soccer clashes, which is not credited to other performances and to other

Figure 10. The first concentric circle of the combined observation's sessions.

local interactions' (Nascimento 2013: 193). Also, in the case of climbing up trees in the surrounding space, this activity would only be considered a game if its purpose was not to collect fruits and offer, or sell, them to the same children who were participating in the play sessions—a point which they often emphasised.

In the second circle I found women and older girls who, being closer to the epi-centre of play, were helping in the organisation of the play group but not only that (Figures 11, 12). The activities of this second identified circle were carried out by older girls (over 14 years old) and it's very similar to the real-life multitasking nature of a Santomean adult woman. That is, simultaneously playing, working, and taking care of the youngest children, (Figure 13) offering their lap, providing food, or giving them some attention, for example. Furthermore, these older girls were guiding children in the ongoing games, giving new ideas to older games, behaving like a referee, giving tips and hints for the best performance, or providing materials for carrying out new play-ful activities, for example. However, these girls were not only attentive to the ongoing

Figure 11. The second concentric circle of the combined observation's sessions.

Figure 12. The second concentric circle of the combined observation's sessions.

play of young children in their charge because they often had to withdraw to carry out other activities like selling candies, as can be illustrated by my field notes from one of the agreed observation sessions (Figure 14):

> ... I captured the moment when one of the older girls—the one with the baby asleep on her back, having abandoned the can game, goes to the vending stand that she has set up to attend

Figure 13. One of the multitasking girls in the combined observation's session.

Figure 14. One of the multitasking girls in the combined observation's session.

> to an incoming customer: one of the older boys who also participates in the session 'becomes' a client. She is selling a sugar and coconut candy that is much appreciated by children.
>
> <div align="right">(CS field notes: R. P. G.—São Tomé Island, 31 August 2011)</div>

Analysing the nature of many activities in which younger children were involved—often in the arms of a girl, *a bombor* (strapped to their back with a fabric) or simply standing by their side, it's clear that they were mimicking what was taking place in the observation session. For example, they used the same space for the repetition of the same game; or played with a wide range of materials abandoned by play groups, such as a banana tree rope, plastic bags, basins, bottles, and ropes. It's also often verified that these young children do not cross the imaginary border that separates them from the epicentre of play. The following field note is enlightening:

> Reflecting on this chronology of events is familiar to me, that is: when the play space is vacant or when the utensils or toys are left by the older children, the young children regain it to play; now without the confusion of the older ones, quietly or without spectators. It's visible today that the 'football table' cardboard box is used to play only when no one is using it anymore. ... I observe younger children playing in the places formerly 'spectacle stages' for the older ones and then I capture them immersed, playing in their own way.

At the very epicentre of play, in turn, there are numerous boys and girls who are effectively participating in the games during the observation session, most of the time with playful activities being decided and guided by older girls. There were find a huge part of the reported games in this study, like jumping, catching, running, searching, stopping, dancing, or sitting games.

Frequently formed and visualised at the agreed observation sessions, the scrutiny of these imaginary concentric circles mainly through visual data retains the idea that men, women, girls, and boys' geographical situation in the play stage at the same time makes a clear demarcation between the traditional social roles attributed to men and women in Sao Tome and Principe.

Discussion

Through broadening the lenses through which we analyse children's play, games, and toys, as well as their spaces, times and joint protagonists of play, this article has revealed the choices and actual use of spaces to play, the circumvention of rules about play time, as well as the roles played by the youngest and eldest actors in the daily playful life of children from Sao Tome and Principe. Hence, we are now able to recognise the play as another way children use to give meaning, as well as to interact, transform, and defy, their sociocultural and material worlds. Through the voice of the most qualified informants to do so, we realise that children's play culture is indelibly marked by their geographical, economic, and sociocultural contexts.

As explained, the simple positioning and (re)actions of the different actors during playful sessions helped to reveal the distribution of knowledge and power within the group of children, and between them and adults in Sao Tome and Principe's society—respecting or defying a deeper cultural identity, social and power relations, as well as reflecting generational and gender belonging. That is, children's processes of comprehension, experience and reproduction of the culture are clearly marked by child's gender and generation of belonging. In this way, playful activities constitute a 'total social phenomenon' (Huizinga 1980; Callois 1990) as they are actions that incorporate the historical and cultural dimension of human behaviours and are anchored in a multiplicity of elements of a given situation (spatial, temporal, social and relational).

Children's play culture from Sao Tome and Principe, a country located at latitude zero of the equator, helps to interrogate childhood 'normativity' and to reconceptualise African childhoods and children's agency. Specifically, it enables us to reflect on how local concepts of children and childhood contribute to the deconstruction of the idea of a unique, homogeneous or 'normalised' childhood.

As stated at the beginning of the article, my intent was to reveal how children located at latitude zero of the equator are not only living between two worlds geographically, but are also living between two worlds culturally and socially which is reflected through an analysis of their playful interactions and activities. In particular, children's activities and interactions showed how they are simultaneously handling the challenge of being a child in their own society (adult-centrism) as well as defying the standardised Western childhood imposed by occidental hegemonic institutions (Eurocentrism) through revealing tensions that existed and ways to overcome them, as well as circumventing social rules and (re)producing their own childhood culture.

In relation to challenging adultcentrism in their own societies, Santomean children are defying adult rules and authority when they engage in games, play, or use toys in very specific ways. Otherwise, how come children told me (a strange European occidental adult) about forbidden games, often right in front of the adult who prohibits them? Also, how come children keep doing really rewarding playful activities despite the fact that adult rules restrict them from climbing trees and economic constraints prevent some from modelling clay? Similarly, how come children from a privileged socio-economic status ignored their material possessions and bypassed their caregiver's suggestions just to play outdoors with their next-door neighbours (preferably barefoot)?

With regards to defying Eurocentrism or the rules of a normalised childhood, in the performed games, play and also in toys children's use, there is a clear confrontation between the experiences of children I talked to and the 'hegemonic ideal' (Crewe 2010; Nieuwenhuys 2013; Balagopalan 2002, 2014) which centres around the need for adequate space, regulated time, organise play, and the supposed necessary acquisition of high quality (branded) toys, regulated by western institutions (school, church or global market). It seems that when children play in Sao Tome and Principe there is no lack of time for them to engage in nature and fresh air, nor a lack of physical exercise. Also, while children play games, they often only need their body to perform interesting make-believe play, and sometimes branded new toys drive away their play mates.

In short, elaborating on the data we can say that Santomean children are showing a deep understanding of the complexity of their social position in an extremely poor country, so in the context of play culture children's interests are focused on negotiating time, sharing spaces, and guarantying the company of their peers, experiencing the 'common culture of childhood' (Buckingham 2011: 162). Data analysis also showed that peer groups' dynamics are fundamental so the playful culture can be transmitted, developed, and reinvented in each generation of children, both diachronically and synchronically (Corsaro 1985; James *et al.* 1998; Delalande 2001; Sarmento 2004). That happens, for example, when older children teach the rules of a game to the play group while at the same time accepting the newest reinvention or modification to the games they are playing. However, those dynamics also reveal meanings, constrains and possibilities of being

a student, a son or a daughter, a male or female, a child or an adult, moreover, of being an almost child or an almost adult within Sao Tome and Principe's society.

Generally, the reflections that have been exposed here allow us to verify the complexity inherent to the study of children's playful cultures at the same time reaffirming the importance of studying children within their dynamics and interactions, culturally, socially, historically, and economically contextualised.

Given the importance of these African children's playful testimony, it's now our major duty to seriously reflect about the pluralities of meanings in each child's action, modes of experience and resilience, and about the ways they are willing to (re)create reality. Maybe they are communicating, in the best way they know, which are their joy and their struggles in challenging social inequalities and pursuing social justice.

Acknowledgements

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Play, create, transform: a pluriverse of children and childhoods from southern Mozambique

Marina Di Napoli Pastore

Abstract: This article discusses the understanding of children as sociocultural beings and active agents in three communities in southern Mozambique as part of doctoral research from 2014–2018. This research study aimed to understand play as comprising meaningful activities for children and examine the possibilities for transformation and reinterpretation of possible worlds. An ethnographic framework was used drawing on methods such as participant observation, photographs, videos, informal conversations, and open interviews. Through the scenes observed, all of which foreground play, this paper addresses the relationship between children and waste materials and production of toys, their involvement with landscapes and the environment, and their role in the production of knowledge and data through the use of photography. As final considerations, the article reflects on the future of childhood studies and new decolonialised perspectives that consider children and their contexts, classes, ethnicities, and gender.

Keywords: Children, Mozambique, childhood studies, play, ethnography, social occupational therapy.

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Introduction

Adults do not always listen to children attentively and with interest, and this is often true in academia with a few exceptions in primarily sociological and anthropological literature. In studies addressing childhoods, children are considered as participatory individuals with rights. However, this acknowledgment is still expressed within the Eurocentric and normative framework, with most references about children's lives based on theories produced by adults.

In this sense, the term pluriverse appears as a reference to the plurality of childhoods, pointing to the coexistence of different worlds, or universes. The concept of pluriverse, developed by Canevacci (2005, 2013), argues that there is not a single and global view of (children's) cultures that can be summed up to a number, a code, or a recipe. In the Mozambican experience, there are different constructions of childhoods and possibilities of being a child and playing is one of the activities that enables this dynamic.

This paper, therefore, discusses the production of children from, and through, shared experiences in which play is presented as a creative activity and as child creation, expression and knowledge that coexist in everyday life, producing diverse poetic senses and thoughts about being a child in Mozambique. This manuscript is based on my doctoral research (Pastore 2020). Based on the understanding of children as sociocultural beings and active agents in productions of the world around them and in dialogue with childhood studies, this paper aims to understand play and the relationships that precede, mediate, and follow these productions, as meaningful activities of children and possibilities of transformations and rereading of worlds and imaginative horizons (Crapanzano 2005).

To understand the complexity with which cultures and societies approach and deal with children, as well as with their childhoods, it is necessary to look beyond the obvious. The obvious, in contexts of studies addressing African children, occurs through the bias of lack, negativities, diseases, poverty and conflicts. In short, they demonstrate a bias on extremely socially vulnerable and/or marginalised children (USAID 2002; Unicef 2006). The denial of differences and diversities, both in contexts and relations conducted and marked by colonialism and wars, seems to remain today, whether in politics or in the ways of thinking about and dealing with children in Mozambique. This is evidenced by the approaches adopted by NGOs that work with children, or even by UNICEF, in which a single reference and childhood is used, emphatically that of a white, European, or North American child (Abebe & Ofuso-Kusi 2016; Twum-Danso Imoh 2016; Alanamu *et al.* 2018), as the standard to judge all childhoods.

In specific fields of study, such as anthropology, sociology, education and the arts, children have been addressed as social actors and agents of their own

processes. In this context it seems inoperative and, somehow, inhumane not to listen to them.

By observing the Mozambican children, their creations and the way in which they develop relationships with others and construct their own identity, it becomes impossible not to consider their socio-historical-cultural existence (Fanon 1980; Cabral 2007).

In this context, it seems pertinent to refer to a plurality of childhoods, pointing to the coexistence of different worlds or universes. This was done from a long-standing, multi-sided ethnographic study, conducted between 2014 and 2018, based on references from the literature that involve dialogically learned experiences and understandings. By understanding that there are multiple dimensions to the lives of Mozambican children and that playing is one of their main activities, this study narrates, discusses, and illustrates the experiences of children who are connected in, and through, play in southern Mozambique. This study was not developed from the perspective of nurturing care or a global development plan, but from that of social occupational therapy and child anthropology, which understands this multiplicity of children from sociocultural contexts.

By taking children as producers of culture and active collaborators, the dialogic dynamic was considered not only with them, but also with their family and community. Thus, the relationship established in the study sought horizontality of power, anchored in Paulo Freire's theory (Freire 1987; 1989) which underscores the importance of dialoguing with others to understand the world.

This framework of knowledge construction within horizontal relations between the people involved in it (Freire 1987) favours an environment for fundamental propositions arising from concerns of 'existing in the world'. Put it another way, this framework encourages researchers to focus on 'making history with the child' (Freire 1989: 13). Adopting such an approach requires researchers to view children as agents of transforming processes and as constructors of historical processes that underpin the society in which they live.

Recent studies have argued that the ways of understanding and portraying childhood have never been static (Abebe & Ofuso-Kusi 2016; Twum-Danso Imoh 2016); the research on which this article was based also sought a dynamic set of practices, beliefs and times on which play, as a meaningful activity for children, was the motive of multiple senses and pluriverses. The focus was on children aged 5 to 17 years from three communities in southern Mozambique—Matola A, Mabotine, and Nhandlovo. The definition of a child used in the study was based on the participants' self-declarations in informal conversations or interviews—that they considered themselves to be children according to the relevant legislation enforced in that country.

Literature review

In a simplified way, studies conducted with children in Africa are still restricted, focused on standardising and characterising childhood through a logic of inclusion or exclusion. As these studies use, as a reference point, European and northern childhoods, they demonstrate the extent to which African childhoods do not fit into this mould. As a result, such children end up being treated, studied, and seen according to the logic of 'lack' or as victims of problems such as wars, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, and child labour (Abebe & Ofuso-Kusi 2016; Twum-Danso Imoh 2016; Alanamu *et al.* 2018).

It is noteworthy that a literature review on the issue of childhood in Mozambique, especially in Portuguese-language literature, showed that there is still little specific production of research and documents that place the child as the central focus of the study. Exceptions are some official Mozambican documents, such as reports from UNICEF-Mozambique, the National Institute of Statistics of Mozambique, or even, the National Action Plan for Children 2006–2010 (Governo de Moçambique 2006) and the National Action Plan for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (Cardoso 2010). The predominant concern is linked to social problems such as illness, shelter, social vulnerability, adoption, street situation, among others (Schutte 1980; Jonker & Swanzen 2007; Sarkym 2008; Mezmur 2009; van As & Millar 2012; Wittenberg 2013; Hendricks 2014). None of these studies were, however, concerned about understanding childhood in its multiple dimensions in the country and did not dialogue directly with the children.

Another issue raised is the difficulty in accessing most texts at paid databases, which limits access to studies that involve the aforementioned themes, either because of the difficulty in the quality of online access, the amounts charged to access some articles, or even the processes imposed to access them in public libraries, involving time-consuming bureaucracy. The grouping of studies into a category called 'African studies' restricts and reduces the diversity in research, in the disciplines and in the references used, in a relationship that is also unequal to other studies, which are not grouped into 'European studies' or 'North American studies', but are separated by disciplines such as 'literature' or 'anthropology'. In addition, there is confusion when searching for African children in search filters, where most studies show Black, Afro-descendant or Latin American children in 'one single topic'.

In relation to play and children, this theme is still a challenge in existing studies about childhoods in Mozambique. A book entitled *Play, Toys and Games: Ways of Being Children in Portuguese-speaking Countries*, by Catarina Tomás and Natália Fernandes (2014), has a chapter on the play of children in the outskirts of Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique, by Elena Colonna and Rui António. Added to this is a doctoral research study by Carlota Tembe, which is currently ongoing, on playing from an intergenerational perspective. Understanding that play is not yet one of the

central themes of studies produced about Mozambican childhoods, this research also sought to explore this aspect of children's lives.

In the case of research with children in Mozambique (Colonna & António 2014), the pluralities that exist in childhood experiences are overlooked in two ways: both by the posture of non-dialogue with subjects (but with objects of study) and by disqualifications derived from the fact that they are children from non-hegemonic countries (Marchi 2007). This one-dimensional focus on Mozambican childhoods also persists, within the scope of the research, guidelines of coloniality with hierarchisation in the theoretical evaluation, disqualifying or ignoring the academic production of southern countries. Thus, the bulk of the interest on Mozambican childhoods is centred around exploitation and rights violations. It is difficult to turn the focus on to issues of power and, above all, on to trying to understand cultural logics and rationales that are foreign to Eurocentric cultures.

By understanding coloniality as 'a global logic of dehumanisation that is able to exist even in the absence of formal colonies' (Maldonado-Torres 2019: 36) that defines racial difference as a factor of exclusion and, thus, a propagator of racism, research is, even today, discriminatory and colonising, in the sense that some knowledge is valued and highlighted to the detriment of others. Walsh *et al.* (2018: 3) advocate that coloniality 'has been built as a political, epistemological and pedagogical force', establishing the possibilities or not of critical thinking from those who have become subordinated by European capitalist modernity.

In this study, the theoretical references found and selected try to encompass authors from Southern countries and themes that address the children who inhabit, transform, and produce cultures and knowledge also in these countries, in a logic different from the conventional, in an approach seeking to foster the decoloniality of research and challenge hegemonic thinking. Decoloniality is thought of in this work as a political and intellectual position that is inspired by a question of 'struggle against the exogenous structures of Western-modern domination/power, and also against the internal or Western structures that we carry within us and that constitute us' (Grosfoguel 2019: 67–9) by finding in, with, and for, children the ways of existing in the world through play.

Thinking about Mozambican children in their contexts based on their ways of playing and, thus, producing knowledge and culture is to decolonise thought, theories, and ways of acting with them, producing knowledge and practices in dialogue with authors from the South, mainly those from the African continent, of which ethnography and associated methods were fundamental in this research.

This study aims to illuminate plurality of children's lives in Mozambique and demonstrate that play, although not present in most research studies, is part of the everyday lives of children in the South region of the country, and is, in fact, one of their significant daily activities.

Methodology

An ethnographic study that allowed me to meet children and observe their productions and experiences around play was conducted between 2014 and 2018 with the aim of rethinking the ways children and their realities are integrated into different practices in diverse contexts, including in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. This research also allowed me to understand that these children's actions are fundamental in their singular, collective and community processes and that local knowledge, along with cultural and social knowledge, permeate their ways of life and creations. Through ethnography, it was possible to conceive play and the construction of knowledge as some of the means of perpetuation and cultural production in which children are not only active agents, but social, conscious individuals who create, through play, ways of being, transforming, transcribing, and translating the environment they inhabit.

The presence of the researcher, adult and foreign, is a point that also deserves to be highlighted. There is no possible way a study can be conducted free from power relations and interferences. However, there are ways of doing research that initiate dialogue with children in which the researcher's role is that of an atypical adult—albeit still an adult.

Although the objective here is not to expand on these questions, I feel it is important to emphasise that doing ethnographic research, with fieldwork and associated techniques, requires a reflexivity from those who conduct it. The researcher should be careful not to fall into a game of innocence and superiority or assume that the researcher and researched are equal. The place in the field and in relationships should always be negotiated, rethought, and based on reflections and relationships.

Study design

The ethnographic study was designed to occur in 2014, 2017 and 2018. In each of these years, the field research took about six months. The study was conducted in the children's homes, schools, churches, streets, and neighbourhoods as a whole in the communities of Matola A, Mabotine, and Nhandlovo. The community of Mabotine is located in Maputo, the country's capital; Matola A is located in the city of Matola, Maputo province, and Nhandlovo is a rural village located in the Inhambane province. These places were chosen because of the links that the researcher had with these children and their families from a previous study carried out in 2012. At the same time, participatory techniques, and methodologies, such as photography, videos, drawings, participant observation, informal conversations and open and semi-structured interviews, were used with the children.

Participants

Children aged 2 to 17 years participated in the research study; however, only those aged 5 to 17 years were included in this paper. In each community, the children chose to participate in the study, and they were investigators and assisted with the production and collection of data together with the researcher as peer researchers. The children's involvement was voluntary, and I chose to include those who asked to be part of the research. Others were referred by the children themselves or ended up participating indirectly, in moments of play observed as part of this study. All relationships were formed through bonding and previous contacts.

Ethical considerations

Ethical procedures were guided by the ethics code of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA). As there is no ethical committee for research in human sciences in Mozambique, it was necessary to search for other ways to be ethically aligned with the existing issues in the country. In 2017, the sociology department at the Eduardo Mondlane University, together with UNICEF-Mozambique, created a short course in 'Ethics in Social Research' whose main objective was 'to train academics and professionals working in the field of social research to ethically manage the entire process, from study design to publication and dissemination of results',[1] and this course is offered to the present day.

Informed Consent Forms (ICF) were obtained verbally, as most the children and their guardians did not read or write Portuguese. Although Mozambique is a country in which Portuguese is the official language, most of its population speaks various indigenous languages, such as *Changana* and *Matsua*. Because of this, when Portuguese could not be used as a common language between the researcher and participants, some of the children who spoke both Portuguese and the other languages adopted the role of translator.

Following a first conversation with the child participants, the researcher spoke to their parents or guardians and obtained their acceptance prior to the study being undertaken.

Likewise, the images included in this study were taken by the children themselves, and had their and their guardians' permission to be collected and used for academic purposes.

In each research space, consent to be there and then to carry out the study was given in a personal conversation. Local and regional authorities and hierarchies were consulted, and gave their approval for the study to be undertaken in their contexts.

[1] This can be better verified on the social media of UNICEF-Mozambique: https://twitter.com/UNICEF_Moz

The relationship of authorisation with the participating children, as well as with their families and other people involved, was based on dialogue: I informed them about the study, we discussed their opinions about it, and then I sensed whether they were willing to participate. This process was respected from beginning to end. At the end of the project, a photo album was given to each child. This photo album was built together with them, and they chose the images they wanted to print and keep. It was a way of using part of the data as an acknowledgment and validating the experience exchanges that occurred during the process.

Data collection and analysis

Ethnography integrates this work not only as a methodology, but also as a theoretical and fundamental part of data production, of its analysis, its constant reflexivity and theoretical production (Peirano, 2014). Along with ethnography, other methods were employed to seek a greater understanding of play: informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, photography, drawing, and video.

Informal conversations occurred along with participant observation, which involved the children's significant spaces, such as school, home, streets, neighbourhoods, and other environments, for instance the river in the rural case. The semi-structured interviews also occurred during moments of play as well as other occasions. Everything was recorded through field notes.

Photography was the most used technique, followed by participant observation and data recording in field notebooks (nine in total). From a total of 5298 photographs, most of them taken by the children themselves of the moments of play or what they considered important in their daily lives, 13 photos were included in this study. The children and their guardians authorised the use of this material. Data analysis was carried out by themes involving play on several fronts: with the use of disposable materials, in environmental spaces, and in photographs of play situations.

Results and discussion

During the collection and analysis of data, many children presented play as the main category used to maintain their position as children and defended this activity. In the search for the ways children played and their understandings, the researcher was presented with the scenes and narratives transcribed below.

It is important to take into account cultural aspects when analysing the results of a research study conducted with children and childhoods. To think about children and childhood in Mozambique is also to think about the meanings of the experiences that

permeate their day-to-day lives which includes beliefs, customs, values, symbols, and meanings (Borba 2007; Barros & Mariano 2019; Carvalho 2005).

Some narratives are presented to illustrate part of the study results and experiences with children, based on observations and experiences, as well as some photographs selected as part of the production of data and about play.

Play and its interfaces: intertwining imagination, freedom, and creativity

Sildolfe, 13 years old, liked drawing. One day he drew a picture of children and said he would paint them with the colours of the rainbow. When I asked him why, he said: 'ah, we are happy! When we play, we stay alive. Don't you feel joy in your body, Aunt Marina? We can be all the colours we want' (Field Notes no. 4, 2018). In the children's speech as well as in the understanding of adults, and even in the laws and programmes, play appears as the main aspect of children lives, both in terms of the right to exercise citizenship and the duty of the family and society (República de Moçambique, 1992). In this way it coexists with countless other aspects that constitute what it is to be a child in Mozambique, which encompasses multiple forms and plural possibilities.

When children play, in a mix of doing and creating, they colour and add sensations to their experiences, producing many forms of being, constructing, (re)inventing, and imagining. As there are different ways of understanding what children are in each of the contexts, there are different ways to understand and concretise play: in the construction of toys, relationships between material and immaterial beings, humans, and non-humans, in everyday images and scenes, etc.

There were several occasions when the children interacted with the environment, transformed the landscape into scenes, and created things by gathering and using discarded materials. One of these moments occurred on one of the field research days in Matola A in mid-2014. Some boys were talking while sitting in a backyard. In the shade of the only tree, Carlos (12 years old) moved his hands and the others followed them with their eyes. In his hands, black plastic bags were being joined and taking shape—'I'm making a *chingufu*',[2] he said.

The younger boys concentrated on what was being done but did not participate directly in the construction. One of the older boys decided that he would also take the spotlight and, in a quick movement, climbed the tree, drawing all the attention to him by using his body to create dancing shadows. Carlos did not take his eyes off the plastic bags, which were forming an increasing circle; the rest of the boys divided their attention between the two actors.

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[2] *Chingufu* is a ball made with plastic and fabric.

Figures 1 and 2. Making a *chingufu*. Source: researcher's personal archive (2014).[3]

1   'Pass me the string', said Carlos, while Délcio (14 years old), sitting in front, gave
     it to him.
2   'You have to tie it', said Carlos, reaffirming his movements out loud.

There, playing was a moment beyond what was happening in the present: it involved a
whole previous logic, of individual and collective construction, so that it could occur.

   The coloured strings collected from discarded material were taking shape in what
was being built. The torn plastic bags and their pieces collected from the ground,
wrapped with the worn strings from something that had previously been useful, took
the new form of a solid sphere. The created ball rolled on the ground while the boys
tried dribbling and passing it. Football with *chingufu*, a ball made in a few minutes,
was now being played there (Field Notes no. 2, 2014).

   The construction of the ball, from materials that had been discarded and recycled
was part of the everyday lives of children and their playful moments, both in urban
and rural areas. In Nhandlovo, for example, the children looked for discarded plastics
and tied them with strings they had made with tree fibres, transforming the available
raw materials into key pieces for the construction of toys, such as a ball, which in

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[3] It is worth mentioning that, although the photos are from the researcher's personal archive, it was the
children themselves who photographed the images of this text. The use was authorised by both the chil-
dren and their guardians.

[4] In *Matsua* (another Mozambican language) the word for ball is *puri*.

Figures 3 and 4. Remote control and toy car. Source: researcher's personal archive (2017).

that context, was known by another name: *puri*.[4] Making toys was part of the play moments.

When referring to a Mozambican childhood, or to African childhoods, in general, what we have is the image of a stolen childhood in which play does not permeate everyday life or, when it is part of it, it usually occurs through the lack of toys, opportunities, and places. The construction of the *chingufu* represents the possibility of transforming the world into something that can be played with.

Other materials were used in their creations: remains of rubber bands, coloured plastics, remains of fabric, pieces of glass found along the way, stones, *caniços*,[5] rice bags, old tyres, plastic bottles, broomsticks, etc. The children built strollers, kites and seesaws, invented clothing, made fashion shows and created scenarios. They also sang and produced instruments, performed, and played. Music and laughter were shared, allowing the children to form and express a collective identity.

[5] *Caniços* are one of the main house building materials in Mozambique. *Caniços* are the reeds of some plant species, such as bamboo (Carvalhor 2019).

Adults hardly interrupted their playing moments; rather, the children themselves initiated, directed, and decided on the form in which they played when they had some activity or went to school. They were the ones who decided what, and how, to play, the toys they would create, and the materials. The songs varied, but generally they were songs sung in their mother tongue, rap by Mozambican singers, or Brazilian songs.

In their ways of creating, children bring the experience in which improvisatory practice unfolds, according to Ingold (2012: 27), not as connections or relations between one thing and another, but rather along the lines on which 'things continually come into being'. The construction of toys and the relationship that the children were creating with those moments were intrinsically associated with playing. Further, the ways they were building and sharing notions of values, meanings, gestures, feelings, exchanges, knowledge, and social norms as they played were linked to the culture in which they were inserted and the contexts they inhabit.

There must be enthusiasm in every adventure children experience. As Pereira (2013: 32) states: 'without enthusiasm, there is no life'. Further it was evident that it was in these experiences that children developed strengths and ideas for their creations and productions. In 2017, on one of the field research days, Félix (16 years old), Manelito (11), Omilton (12), and Cris (10) were gathered in the backyard of Grandma Clemência's house, in Matola, Maputo. There were several materials spread on the ground: a bottom of an old speaker (cork), old wires, rotating parts, batteries, glass, a small screwdriver, bolt nuts, rubber bands, and threaded parts. Asked about what would come out of all those things, they replied: 'we're going to assemble a remote-control car'.

Using a notebook as a ruler, the boys made the necessary marks to fit the pieces on the cork part, through observation with the naked eye; the exchanges of information, articulated in *Xichangana* (a Bantu language), reinforced the ways in which they believed that each piece would work. Félix drilled and rotated the pieces while Manelito watched. Together, the four boys were conducting the construction process. Félix was the leader, while Manelito was more of an observer. They said they had learned to assemble the car at home, with the help of Daimo (13 years old). The boys drilled the cork, turned one of the pieces, threaded and unthreaded, finished and sanded the old, weathered, rusted rotating parts. Soon after, they dispersed, and each went to an activity: school, cooking, playing football, etc. The next day, they returned to the assembly. Divided between the construction of the remote-control car and the preparation of the tea they would drink, the boys took turns heating the water and tightening the pieces, sharing knowledge even in silence. Félix sanded and beat on the pieces. One of the main pieces was the dynamo, which they called '*dina*'.

1　'Can you see this? It's a *dina ...*', Félix said.
2　'*Dina*?'

3   '*Yah*. From the DVD player ...'. He stopped, scratched his head, and then added:—'It looks like I'm forgetting something ...'

Félix stood up, walked outside, and returned with two wheels from an old toy car and some caps from plastic bottles which would be used as the wheels of the remote-control car. He walked back to the yard, picked up a long, thin piece of iron and broke it. With a stone, he sanded the iron piece, making it as smooth as possible. He took the caps, pierced them in the middle and fitted in a piece of thin metal, enjoying their rotating movement.

4   'Now we have a wheel!' He exclaimed.

Manelito joined him and they started mounting the parts in the car.

5   'This will make the car wheels turn'—said Félix, while Manelito held a circular, jagged piece that would be placed at the car base. Félix spoke about the pieces to Manelito at the same time that he spoke to himself, reaffirming the specificities of each one of them and the ways of mounting them. The car construction process was long. The boys would come, sit, and talk. They would choose parts, positions, and ways of building. With the base mounted, they tested the wires, battery, and *dina*. This time, Manelito and Omilton were the protagonists. With one end of the wire touching the battery and the other the dynamo, the boys tested it until the *dina* spun, producing electrical current for its operation. With the *dina* working, the boys joined the battery on one side and the rubber band on the other, which was connected to a small white plastic gear that would make the wheels turn. The car base was then ready and functioning. Daimo arrived soon after and was surprised by the evolution of the car. The boys said 'the car is his', and started a dialogue of their ideas:

6   'I saw this remote control at secondary school; it's a science thing, I've learned how to make this remote control. I don't remember what is made of, but I made it using a bottle. But this one was made using a slipper'—said Daimo, thus bringing in a new element: he learnt how to make the remote control at school during a science class.

7   'Do you like building things?'

8   'I like to build toys', he said. 'Playing is child fun. Because when you are a child, you have a lot of fun, you know other games, so that you won't have any difficulties in education when you grow up and ... And ... That's it. Playing, you learn not to spoil the happiness of others. And learn to create other play'.

In his comments, Daimo brings reflections that go beyond building, and that go to a place of understanding play as formation of identity, values, knowledge, and exchanges that will also continue through adulthood. According to the researcher,

Figure 5. *Machamba*. Source: researcher's personal archive (2018).

Ghandhy Piorsky (2015), playing children also become playing adults who cooperate with children and with others (Ensinando 2015). Daimo gathers a notion of solidarity coexisting in the act of creating toys and the role of knowledge acquired also in school life as a source of inspiration for the construction of play.

The children stated that 'everything can become a toy', and it was in playing that the meetings occurred: between children, spaces, and materials. In places that lack many things, improvisation is a way of inhabiting the world and being connected to it.

This construction involves several aspects: skills in physics, even without knowledge of science as a subject and of its application; teaching-learning dynamics based on experiences and on horizontal relationships and knowledge sharing; intergenerational relationships, and sharing of experiences. There is also an empirical creativity along with the desire to transform and create in order to play, understanding that play goes beyond the logically and rationally established truths. To observe and understand the children's play and relationships beyond what is lacking is to enable a world of artefacts and experiences. An example can be taken from William Kamkwamba's 2009 book, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*. William was a 13-year-old boy who lived the village of Wimbe, Malawi, when he designed and built a windmill that activated a pump to collect water from the soil that was used to irrigate the plantations of that village, which had been suffering the consequences of a drought for five years. This true story provides the frame through which we can think about the application of children's knowledge and intelligence and, on our side, to think about how we mediate the possibility of this existence (Menino 2019).

These constructions—of the windmill by William and of the remote-control car by Daimo, Manelito, Omilton, and Félix—encompassed knowledge acquired from

a need, driven by specific demands, but which created life from observation and creativity. When children make, create, interpret, and translate acquired knowledge and desires, they begin to reach spheres of knowledge that go beyond school teachings and that permeate and transcend life experience (Ensinando 2015; Menino 2019). The moment of creation was also a moment of encounter and relationship—relationship between children, peers, intergenerational, and between the children, the objects, and the materials available. The construction of toys also allowed the relationship between children of different ages and the continuity of care. In addition to material exchanges, there were immaterial ones. For example, contact with the wind and knowledge about the coming winds were key factors in flying a kite. The exchanges and relationships that the children created, maintained, and reinvented were constantly there.

It was common to find children playing free in open spaces in communities and villages, between houses, in backyards, on the streets, in isolated places and in those where there were people. There were places that only children knew; adults either did not know how to get to them or it seemed that the access was not allowed. Knowing places, especially those where they could play, was one of the children's skills.

I realised that there were cultural movements in these interactions that surpassed the understanding of culture as something focused only on human behaviour, as stated by Pires (2010) citing Ingold (2000). Rather, there was a developmental relationship through the histories of relationships with other living and non-living beings, from the environment they inhabit and what surrounds them, against an idea of child socialisation in which knowledge is imposed on children, but of doing while being.

Lenna Bahule (2019, informal conversation) defends the relationship between natural environment and the formation of Mozambicans, including children. According to her, nature 'concerns everything that involves us: religion, the ways we are brought up, identity. And in the ways of play, and also how it occurs'. Play never happened in isolation from where it was inserted: it occurred in the spaces where it gained the stage. Play moved creativity, construction, and scenarios.

In their relations with landscapes, the children found references through play, such as relationships with historical, social, geographical, cultural and expression processes that were only possible based on their experiences. Clemência (Félix's grandmother, 63 years old), when recalling a memory from her childhood, related the children's play in Nhandlovo to cultivating the land: 'Children are excited to come to the *machamba*.[6] They begin to dig, and dig, dig. They learn to like the land, the corncobs, and the seeds. They see the plants growing and get excited. Their hearts become filled with good things. To be on the *machamba* you have to have a heart' (Field Notes no. 3, 2018). The children, although not responding directly, reported that 'being on the farm is taking care of what we are going to eat with affection'.

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[6] The term in Xichangana for plantation.

Figure 6. The stream and its waters. Source: researcher's personal archive (2018).

The reality of many children in the region was portrayed in that speech: from an early age, they went to the fields with their parents or grandparents; learning about nature/the land/planting was part of being involved in work in the fields with family and being recognised as participants in daily chores. For adults, it was through playing that children learned different rules and values; for the children, it was through playing that they had fun. As a researcher, I understand a completeness in both functions of play.

The relationship with the *machamba* involved issues of other orders as well: relations with non-living and spiritual beings. Before entering the fields, the children and adults asked for permission and protection from the landowners, ancestors, in a relationship of respect for the past and present. Nature and spirituality coexisting in the children's experiences, in communion and in a way of building values, mediated by play.

It was in nature, in spaces along streams and/or rivers, that much of the play children engaged in emerged: the children built boats and raced them, could move freely—come and go—in these spaces. Such freedom was not always allowed in other spaces. Their bodies would become other things, and they bathed, fought, performed tasks, and played. The contact with nature, especially in Nhandlovo, allowed these children to have experiences different from those of other children who lived in urban areas, where competitiveness and individualities seemed to gain more life than solidarity and conviviality.

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[7] *Landi* is a term that refers the word *mulandi*, which means 'black' in Xichangana. It refers to the tradition of the people of that territory.

Figures 7, 8 and 9. Various forms of play. Source: researcher's personal archive (2014–2018).

In addition to the *machambas*, all other places had streams and/or rivers. In Nhandlovo, many things happened in the river and its banks: people met and washed clothes, animals drank water, children played. Grandpa Bento (72 years old) said: 'the river is the meeting place, of waters and winds. It is in the river that life happens. Haven't you ever heard that?' (Field Notes no. 1, 2018).

The land was as respected as the water, which also led to respect for the spirits and people who had been there in past times: 'you must respect it', said the boys. This demonstration of care for the ancestors and the lands expressed by the children is also an understanding of harmony and of the relationships between diverse existing forces that transform everyday life, and play is permeated by them. Respect for ancestors, as a cultural tradition, was reinvented there by the children from what was available and accessible to them, while maintaining a present socio-historical process. Children demonstrated this in playing and respecting spaces and traditions.

In the book *Ombella* (2014), the Angolan writer Ondjaki brings this relationship between living and non-living beings and the ways in which, when upset, Ombella, the Goddess of rain, wept and became saddened. According to her degree of emotion, she could create mild rain or intense storms.

The children referred to the river in Matsua as *Iatxongwine*. Playing in the river was then more than the river itself: it was everything that involved coming and going, the paths, the relationships established by the children, the exchanges and relations with spaces and the environment, with ancestral beings, food, references, and language. Grandma Clemência said this was a '*Landi* tradition':[7]

1   *Landi* tradition means to respect the land and the spirits that live there and who cared and still care for it.
2   The spiritual question and the coexistence with a world of non-living beings are very present in these communities, and children understand and incorporate this spiritual coexistence in different ways (Honwana, 2002).

Understanding Grandma Clemencia's comments and the children's relationship with nature and its surroundings was to understand that the *Landi* tradition allows exchanges between children and adults in the same logic and with the same care and respect. It is a *Landi* tradition to follow beliefs and believe in tales, without losing the innocence and coherence that exist in adverse relationships and those with otherness and coexistence of worlds, in an understanding that universes and landscapes are more than what the rational, Eurocentric logic explains. It is a *Landi* tradition to respect nature, the animals, and the land and to teach children about all the responsibility, without taking away from them the richness and delicacy of being children, playing, and running. It is being human in this world that is gradually teaching us the opposite. (Field Notes no. 2, 2018).

Playing in, and with, the environment, the way the boys did in Nhandlovo, was a state of being in communion with different natural elements such as water, land, air, trees, and fruits, living and non-living beings, visible and not visible. What if, when playing, children were leaving their footprints in the world? A world permeated by the environment and the living and non-living beings with whom these children had relationships. Those children would build connections through skills and perceptions in the spaces where the experience and the referential were only possible through the

experience of a body in that space, through those sensations (Ondjaki 2008; Field Notes no. 1, 2017; Bahule 2019).

From the flows and counter flows, the children would transform what surrounded them. Twum-Danso Imoh (2016) discusses the notions of childhood within micro- and macro-social spaces. Play is what also allows us to enter and look at the universes and aspects that these children seek when they bring notions related to food, utensils, the roles assumed, and the materials used and processed into their play. For those children, playing and transforming, respecting the elements and beings, meant also being connected to the realities that permeated them on several fronts.

Many were the transformations that those children made, as were the elements and landscapes with which they played: water, earth, fire, animals, fruits, flowers, plants, wind... The environment presents its potency in the places where the research occurred, in a very close interaction with play and children, and when the environment encounters the imagination provided by the natural elements that surround the children, it enhances its potency and generates knowledge that, when shared, flourishes in the play and knowledge that children share in their everyday lives, care, and production of senses and meanings.

This might then be the moment to remake the images of these children from and in landscapes, contextualised in current temporalities and spaces in which their images can also add to their play, their relationships with nature and as forms of cultural production, perpetuation and transformation. To recreate new imaginaries and research data in which the images of children playing, in the 21st century, are part of Mozambican childhoods, of their activities and formation as people, in an attempt to create new stories, memories, and presently contextualised realities.

Final considerations

The greatest challenge of this research study was to understand, albeit indirectly, the distance and margins (borders, porous contact spaces) between normative notions of childhood and children's actual lives in Mozambique. We cannot universalise childhood or reduce it to a single way of being. There is need to meet the children in their real spaces, contextualise their experiences in their stories and ways of life, so that we can look at them and do research that is with, about, and for, them. This is because, in most studies, understandings and portrayals of an ideal childhood fail to consider the sociocultural contexts, colonisation and children's own lives.

These considerations thus constituted some of the main points of reflection in the construction and interpretation of data, as well as in the process of writing and rereading: A crucial reflection in the collection and interpretation of data and later analysis, was that the routine marginalisation of children from African countries, in which it is assumed

childhood is not experienced, is incorrect. Rather, childhood is an importance space between worlds of experience. Researchers must explore perceptions of how children play, transform, and are transformed, develop intelligence and create collective identities.

When children create actions and ways of doing, based on what they know or learn from their experiences, they exercise their participation and citizenship as social individuals and create ways to share their voices, points of view, and social and collective life not only through dialogue, but also through rhythms, steps, and gestures. When children create dynamics and take the researcher to the spaces where play occurs or can occur, they not only inform the studies, but become active and actively creative participants in their own narratives, integrating and building data, theories, and ways of thinking and conducting research that are aligned with their ways of life (Myers, 2010).

There is need to create spaces so that the theories that address childhood studies in Africa encompass the issues of playing, transforming, creating, weaving, and reliving. There is a need to make room for the imagination and creativity of children as well of researchers. There is need to build other ways of going beyond the margins and making crossings that focus mainly on play, on understanding children's capacities for both action and abstraction, on the making of their imagination and make-believe, and on their realisation. Ecology, recycling, different languages, rhythms, gestures, gender difference and how girls and boys play, ancestry, and many other aspects of play can be interesting themes for future childhood studies and paths. Perhaps research should be more like play, from southern Mozambique and beyond.

Acknowledgements

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Education, socialisation

Harambee approach: towards decolonising East African education through capturing social-cultural ethos

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Abstract: In Kenya, the cultural practices and experiences of both children and teachers are marginalised in the education system. The education system remains predominantly authoritarian with an underlying colonial framework. Often, in local and global spaces, there is an exclusion of the vital experiences and knowledge that East African students acquire from collaborative daily lives in their homes and communities. These crucial skills should be integrated into their classroom learning to decolonise education and liberate the engagement of East African students. This model of learning, which is based on the Harambee approach, is a proposal based on my ethnographic PhD study conducted in a rural community in Kenya. The study included interviews and a focus group with teachers, and observations of students. The proposed concept captures the need for all key stakeholders to participate actively in policymaking and practice review, to accommodate the needs of all students and their teachers. The Harambee approach includes the social-cultural experiences of children. Additionally, dialogic engagement would be an inclusive strategy to emancipate the autonomy of students.

Keywords: Dialogic pedagogies, Harambee concept, decolonising education, East Africa.

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Introduction

Previous studies by Corrado & Robertson (2019) and Twum-Danso Imoh (2016) have challenged the representation of African childhoods as marginalised. Most African childhood experiences are comfortable, diverse, and filled with rich social-cultural experiences which are often excluded in discussions about education, media, and politics (Corrado & Robertson 2019). To liberate the misrepresentation of African childhoods, there is a need to reconceptualise education practices in East Africa to alleviate children's participation in local and global forums. The proposed Harambee approach is a recommendation from my PhD research in a rural community in Kenya which is similar to many other parts of the country and East Africa more generally (Corrado 2020). The Harambee approach aims to decolonise the education system in Kenya (and other East African contexts) and liberate the voices of students.

The Harambee term is a Kiswahili word with a distinctive meaning in East Africa, especially in Kenya. It was officially used by Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya. Harambee's discourse aimed to unite all Kenyans as they embarked on the process of self-government and building their nation. The term 'Harambee', captures the African historical spirit of togetherness in social, political, and economic areas (Kenyatta 1965). As a result, the term resonates with Kenyan roots, making the concept understandable and acceptable, but also applicable and understood in other East African countries.

The Harambee spirit has been upheld in the education sector, where communities have built schools and collected money to educate disadvantaged students, as mentioned earlier. The aim is to help disadvantaged families and communities access school-based education in order to overcome social inequalities. In the 1980s, when the 8-4-4 system (8 years primary school, 4 years secondary, and, 4 years at university level) of education was introduced, Harambee secondary schools were established to provide access to education for those students who did not achieve a high enough grade in their KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) exam or who could not afford to pay the high costs of boarding schools. Generally, the system of Harambee penetrates through most aspects of the daily lives of Kenyans. Most have been part of Harambee, both as givers and as recipients of money or beneficiaries of facilities built through collective efforts (Corrado 2020). According to the global index on the most generous countries, Kenya is in twelfth place, globally (Charity Aid Foundation 2018; Telegraph 2017). This is due to the importance placed on generosity within the Harambee spirit.

The legacy of the Harambee spirit is not without limits. Occasionally, some individuals have taken advantage of the system to extort money from others. Others have mishandled the funds collected, which has had an impact on the spirit of Harambee (Corrado 2020). But here I argue that Harambee continues to weave through the

Kenyan social-cultural and political and even economic fabric. Additionally, it is alive in educational practice. It can be seen as one of the Kenyan values that should be upheld while working towards promoting the strengths of Kenyans, rather than falling into the trap of concentrating on the negatives (Cohen 1994; Diop 2014).

For Kenya to meet the learning needs of its students and reach the set-out policies for Vision 2030 concerning the provision of high-quality education (the Republic of Kenya 2015), there is a need to reconceptualise the educational approach. In this article, I reconceptualise a theoretical and practical approach that could use dialogic pedagogy in education spaces to progress learning experiences for students.

Dialogic engagement in this article refers to the use of exploratory talk in teaching and learning. Dialogic pedagogy is not seen as an end-state for learning, but an idea of developing practice towards goals where students can learn to develop agency through fostering a deeper level of interactions in their lessons (Mercer 2000; Alexander 2008). Furthermore, drawing on Freire's argument, I argue that silenced humans can use dialogue to liberate themselves from any kind of oppression when they develop critical consciousness (Freire & Macedo 1970). This kind of critical consciousness is needed in students' learning in East African contexts as it is key to helping students speak up in class and beyond.

Literature review

Nxumalo & Cedillo (2017) argued that the process of decolonisation acknowledges that there are existing colonial ideologies in education that need reviewing in order to provide a balanced and inclusive education. Scholars like Thiong'o (1986) and Oelofsen (2015) have called for the decolonisation of African minds and intellectual institutions. Decolonisation starts by identifying the colonial aspects that need to be critically reviewed (CHE 2017). This revision in education should be in areas such as the content of curriculum and syllabus, the language of instruction, and pedagogical practices. East African education systems today need to become more 'African-centric' than 'Eurocentric,' which I contend could be achieved through the implementation of my proposed Harambee framework. Indeed, the Harambee framework aims to make the content of the curriculum more culturally relevant through the inclusion of cultural tools and using pedagogies that empower students. The proposed Harambee approach should additionally challenge the use of imported pedagogies and policies. It should promote the voices of key players in East African education and meet the needs of their students. Tabulawa (2013) claimed that the use of foreign practices has not been successful in Africa. Hence, there is a need to contextualise education systems and practices, through the understanding of social cultural theory and dialogic pedagogy theory discussed in this section.

Historically, Africans passed on knowledge and skills from one generation to another informally. This system of informal education was through storytelling, riddles, songs, and participation. Mentoring of the younger generation was utilised to pass on different skills either by family members or older adults through active participation and collaboration (Kenyatta 1965; Adeyemi & Andenyika 2003; Rogoff 2003). Additionally, peer cooperation was also encouraged (Were & Wilson 1968). However, in the early 19th century, formal education was introduced to East Africa (similar to other African countries) by colonial governments for the purpose of providing basic skills such as literacy and mathematics. These basic skills enabled some Africans to take on subordinate roles such as cooks, office messengers and lower-primary teaching assistants within the labour market established by the colonial system (Rogoff 2003). Similarly, the Christian missionaries provided formal education to help converted Christians (Africans) read Bibles and evangelise their communities. The provision of formal education to Africans was limited up to the primary level, while the secondary and tertiary levels were only accessible by people from Asian and White ethnic groups within these contexts. This segregated system originated from colonial ideologies, that viewed Black people (especially Africans) as less intelligent compared to other races (Poncian 2015; Corrado 2020). Consequently, most Africans just acquired basic knowledge and skills and worked in subordinate roles such as domestic workers and guards.

In the early 1960s, most East African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania gained independence, and education was made free for all races at all levels. As a result, many more Africans could access secondary and tertiary education. Post-independence, the East African countries tried to incorporate their pan-African ideologies into their education. The pioneer of this movement was Tanzania's president, Julius Nyerere, who advocated for an education centred on self-reliance, which met the needs of the people (Kassam 1995; Sifuna 2007; Ibbott 2014). Most of these ideologies aimed at incorporating African cultures and values into education systems and sought to overcome the biased colonial system. Since the independence of Kenya in 1963, there have been several commissions seeking to ensure that education meets the needs of students (Wanjohi 2011). Some of the commissions are notably: the Ominde Commission (1964), the Mackay Commission (1981), UWEZO Assessments (2012), and more recently, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Republic of Kenya 2017). These commissions have aimed to make the education system in Kenya progressive. However, they have not fully included the collaborative daily lifestyles experienced by many students. According to Ackers & Hardman (2012), education in East Africa still widely uses old methods of teaching which are authoritarian and exclude the values linked to the local context. These practices could be traced to the colonial roots which undervalued African knowledges and experiences, and according to Njoya (2017) limited the intellectual participation of students.

In East Africa post-independence, only Tanzania successfully incorporated the use of a local language, Kiswahili, as a language of instruction in schools. Kenya only included Kiswahili as a subject. However, there has been more emphasis on using English for teaching instruction, whilst learning Western languages was favoured over local languages in Kenyan schools (Thiong'o 1986). Although in policy Kenya has recently advocated for the use of local languages in learning (Republic of Kenya 2017), this shift is not reflected in classroom practices (Corrado 2020). Subsequently, there is a need to decolonise the education system. The inclusion of local languages in education (Thiong'o 1986, cited by Ngugi 2018) is an important means of decolonising the minds. Said (1993; 1995) argues that the language of instruction in teaching disseminates specific cultural values. These values have an invisible power to reinforce ideologies and practices that influence people and societies (Bernstein 2003). The colonial education policies and practices are mostly Eurocentric. As a result, they promote the use of Western languages such as English and French even though most students in East Africa use local languages in their daily lives to communicate with others. Consequently, these local languages should be included in classroom learning to help decolonise the education system. Otherwise, the exclusion of cultural and socio-economical relevance in African education will continue to see school-based education alienate not only many students, but also the contexts from which they come (Ibbott 2014; UNESCO 2015; Njoya 2017).

In my PhD study, I further applied dialogic pedagogy as a theoretical perspective because it promotes students' participation in their learning. According to Mercer (2008) and Alexander (2008), students who use dialogic pedagogies can integrate their previous life experiences in learning. Furthermore, students who use dialogic learning gain confidence while participating actively in learning spaces and beyond. According to Freire & Macedo (2012), when there is a dialogue in learning and social contexts, the 'silenced' individuals voice their ideas, thus liberating themselves from disadvantaged positions. For many East African students, where the method of instruction remains authoritarian (Ackers & Hardman 2012), the incorporation of dialogic pedagogy might be empowering. Specifically, it will enable these students to start addressing their issues and illuminate their authenticity and creativity. Drawing on Corrado & Robertson's (2019) and Corrado's (2019) work, it is critical to have a balanced reflection of the African context. As noted earlier, the incorporation of cultural tools would make education more relevant to the worlds of students. In most instances, the African cultural relevance in education is usually omitted in 'Eurocentric' based systems (Schweisfurth 2014; Corrado 2019; Twum-Danso Imoh 2020).

The proposed Harambee approach builds on Kenyan children's experiences and contextual needs. It draws on multiple facets of East African people, which include their pre-colonial traditions, their experiences in colonial and post-colonial eras, and their future ambitions. In this recommendation, I propose an education that validates

the Harambee fundamentals of collectivism. Subsequently, the Harambee framework aims to decolonise education systems through incorporation of dialogic engagement with all key players in education and through a review of both curriculum and teaching practice practices.

Methodology

My PhD study was ethnographic research which was conducted in a rural community in Central Kenya, where I observed the engagement of teachers and students for the purpose of understanding daily classroom practices (Corrado 2020). I further observed students in their local church as they engaged with their parents in religious activities which is a common occurrence in the Kenyan community. For my observations, I utilised field notes, photos, short video clips- for five weeks. In addition to my observations, I conducted interviews with five male teachers, and a focus group to obtain information on the teachers' pedagogical practices. The interviews and a focus group were semi-structured and were audio-recorded.

In my study, thematic analysis was used to reveal recurring themes emerging through participants' perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and observed actions that were obtained from the collected data. Although thematic analysis can be messy and time-consuming (Flick 2007; 2014), it was very helpful for me since it facilitated a deeper understanding of the human experience and, in this study, a deeper and richer understanding of teachers' teaching experiences and professional pedagogic choices.

The schools selected for my research were typical rural, government-funded schools, similar to the majority of primary schools in Kenya. The main school in this study was Baraka School (pseudonym). I spent May 2016 in Baraka, where I undertook most of the observations and all the interviews with teachers, and where I conducted a focus group discussion. I also took photos of the school. The participants who took part in the study were all men, even though all teachers were invited to take part. The teachers' chosen pseudonyms were Kuria, Mike, Pius, Gathenya, and Kim. Participant observation was conducted in classrooms for students aged 10 to 12 years, who were predominantly taught by male staff. While in Kenya, I visited my former primary school Elimu (pseudonym) to undertake complementary observations. I was in Elimu school as a pupil as well as all my family. My mother, now retired, worked as a teacher for three decades in Elimu school. Despite Elimu School and Baraka School both being government-funded and in the same region, their resourcing is quite different. Elimu school was better resourced since most students came from middle-class backgrounds as opposed to children in Baraka who came from low-income backgrounds. I further observed children in their local church which I will call Maendeleo while they engaged in church activities. BERA (2011) guidelines on ethical

considerations were well-thought-out and ethics forms completed and approved by the University Board prior to data collection. Respecting the context was highly considered throughout the study including, the need to create rapport and seek verbal permission prior to collecting data.

My study revealed that the current education system has great strengths yet, it is faced with challenges that need to be addressed. One of the setbacks apparent in my study was the lack of relevance of classroom learning to the lives of the students. In addition, it was apparent that the education system still has colonial practices which are authoritarian and discourages the active participation of both students and teachers in their classroom learning. There is a lack of participation of students, parents, and teachers in major decisions in education, especially those from lower economic backgrounds, paving the way for inequality in the system. At the same time, the social-cultural and economic values and needs are not well reflected in the syllabus, which disadvantages the students in their learning and beyond their learning where they need to be equipped for lifelong success. As a result, the recommendations led to this Harambee approach proposal which is fully discussed in the following section.

Findings

Drawing on my observations in Maendeleo church, the children engaged collaboratively with their peers and adults in various activities. These activities required talent, skills, and self-determination. A good example is of a young child of about 10 years old, observed reading a Bible chapter in a local language (Gikuyu) to a congregation of about 1000 people. At the same time, two young children between 5–10 years were observed, leading the congregation in prayers, while their peers sang collaborative songs to the congregation alongside their parents. The efficacy and skills demonstrated by these young children were evident. This is unlike the recurring global representations of African children which foreground them as primarily victims who are in need, with little ability to solve problems, or with the minimal capability to participate or give back to humanity (Corrado & Robertson 2019). Another good example in my observations was at Baraka school, where students, alongside their teachers, planted trees as part of a conservation activity. These students were determined to be part of the local and global solutions to environmental conservation. Corrado & Robertson (2019) have argued that African childhoods have been marred by biased misrepresentations in global discourses, which ignore these aspects of children's lives. Hence, there is a need to show the diversity of experiences and skills in these children's realities such as the examples noted above. Moreover, it would be important to validate the rich social-cultural values, experiences, and support, that these children have, which should help to redefine their positioning. The resolution should be completed through education.

Regrettably, the old colonial practices still haunt education systems in East Africa which silences the participation of students in formal spaces. For example, in a school like Baraka the participation of students in their learning is restricted by authoritarian pedagogies. This leads students to adopt a position of silence in formal spaces in education, politics, and business. The Harambee approach aims to build on the social-cultural experiences of students and contextualises their learning needs, to liberate their involvement. The Harambee approach aims to shift power through using a bottom-up approach to help decolonise the education system and contextualise practice.

The application of the Harambee approach is discussed in the following sections. I demonstrate the need to contextualise the social experiences of students in their learning, as well as apply dialogic pedagogy. In addition, I discuss how the concept recommends the promotion of reflective practice for teachers and the need to involve key players in a collaborative way that upholds the Harambee strategy.

Contextualising students' social experiences

That students in Kenya have varied experiences acquired outside their classroom learning emerged clearly in my study. Indeed, some of the students in their time outside of school help their parents in home management and are involved in practical activities in the community. In my investigations, as noted earlier, I observed some students at Baraka School planting trees as a conservation exercise. Added to that, I saw these students engage in athletics training without their teachers' supervision as they prepared for a competition against neighbouring schools. These kinds of engagements demonstrated the efficacy and collaborative skills of students. Similar observations were made in the community church where I observed children get involved in Bible readings, conducting church services, and singing in collaboration with their peers and parents. This kind of participation outside of the classroom seems to develop valuable skills and knowledge that could be included in classroom learning. Students should be able to discuss and reflect on these activities. As proposed by Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere (cited in Kassam 1995; see also Ibbott 2014), students should relate their learning to their environment and be able to bring their outside skills and experiences into the classroom. When students relate their classroom learning to their lives, this can be considered 'good' education that can help meet the needs of these students within their context (Tabulawa 2013).

Through the Harambee approach, a collective contextualised learning would include the specific needs recognised by Kenyan teachers. For example, practical subjects such as home science, art and craft, music, and business education would be made available in the curriculum and taught in schools. At the moment, although some of these subjects are available, they are not a priority because they are not examined. This is significant because as the school system is exam-based, teachers and

pupils concentrate on passing exams. Still, my study recognised that students who are not academic may have other talents that could be supported by these subjects. However, these have, hitherto, been ignored. To overcome this issue, there should be a platform for these subjects to be included and promoted. Moreover, the learning of all subjects should be not only theory-based, but should also include practical learning. The Kenyan teachers who participated in the study noted that when practical work is involved in learning, the students are actively engaged and learn more. They are also able to bring their outside experiences into classroom learning, and vice versa (Nyerere 1968; Freire & Macedo 1993; Ibbott 2014). Most of the teachers interviewed in this study agreed that science subjects need experiments. They recognised that most other subjects could have practical exercises which teachers would have to plan purposefully. One of the English teachers noted that they can have debates, use their dictionaries, or do word searches, where students are more involved and also learn a great deal. Indeed, most of these practical uses involve plenty of dialogue and discussion. They can overcome the formal setting of the classrooms and break down any barriers.

The promotion of local languages in the curriculum would help students to learn positively in languages that they are confident to speak (Thiong'o 1986). From my observations, students actively used local languages in informal settings. In addition, at times, teachers used local languages in their classrooms to elaborate concepts for the purpose of promoting understanding. One of the participants, Pius, explained the situation as thus: '... because most of them are still using their mother tongue so when they come to school, English becomes like a foreign language to them.' That demonstrates that most children from rural areas were not confident in English. The consequence of this was that they were limited in their classroom engagement. Nonetheless, these children could converse with their teachers in local languages. Thus, it is important to use these languages in learning. The application of local languages also helps to create a cultural understanding and could promote classroom dialogue, since students are using a language in which they are confident. Moreover, the exclusion of African languages from the curriculum sustains the universal view that African cultures, values, and learning tools are backward and non-academic, an issue that has been previously raised by Thiong'o (1986). This may negatively affect the confidence and self-esteem of students. However, through inclusion, a reversal effect might be projected, most notably, boosting students' confidence to engage actively. When they learn in their local languages, they may be inspired to learn other languages. This inclusion of local languages may further help with the identity emancipation for students in Kenya. Since most students associate their use of local languages with informality and being uncivilised, ideologies drawn from the colonial period projected African languages and traditional practices as backward (Diop 2014; Ngugi 2018). To overcome such prejudices and promote balanced identities, it is imperative to include local languages in education (Corrado 2019). Moreover, currently, Kenyan local languages are useful in careers such as journalism,

which some students might choose for future careers. Therefore, the incorporation of local languages, even in upper-primary education, could challenge stereotypes, promote local languages, and pave the way for future engagement in the labour market.

Applying dialogic pedagogy

Some teachers were aware of the limitations of traditional teaching approaches. This was raised by a teacher called Gathenya who noted that teaching only on the blackboard does not help students to understand:

> I think when you involve the students, for example, I am also a mathematics teacher, I was thinking sometime back the reason I know so many things and I remember them it is because I went beyond that. For example, a certain concept is because I had seen it myself, that is why I can remember it even today. When you just teach on the blackboard and then go out and do not do something else the child will not remember it again, but the minute you involve that child to do something, maybe you have another lesson in the week and they do questions, questions, and answers maybe like a group competition, they will ask one another.

All the teachers interviewed in Baraka seemed to agree that by going into discussion or demonstrating with learning aids, students are involved in diverse ways in their space for interactions, and learning is advanced. They also stipulated that dialogue could be beneficial to their practice; for example, their students become more confident and have better comprehension. Wilkinson *et al*. (2016) assert that the use of dialogue helps students to make sense of their world and to solve problems intellectually, making a focus on dialogue in learning vital.

The proposed Harambee approach would help to perpetuate the trajectory needed in Kenyan classrooms by engaging both teachers and students in active dialogues in their classroom learning. These kinds of practices would encourage the use of both local and foreign languages in classroom learning. It would include practical exercises in lessons and the incorporation of outside experiences. Indeed, the use of a pedagogy that encapsulates these experiences would help to promote productive learning for students, since they are actively involved, and the learning captures their lives and prepares them for their future. By using dialogue in the classroom, some of the Basic Education Curriculum goals would be met (Republic of Kenya 2017). Indeed, when the students apply the Harambee concept in their classroom dialogue, they will have discussions and practical engagement, enabling them to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, reflection skills, collaboration skills, and self-expression. These skills would equip students cognitively, socially, and psychologically.

The use of the Harambee concept could help to break through students' socioeconomic barriers to participation. Overall, dialogue in the classroom should promote collaboration, both asymmetrical and symmetrical (Freire & Macedo 1993; Mercer

2000), breaking down the barriers between students and teachers and also between students. Consequently, the use of dialogue in classroom learning can help with emancipation (Freire & Macedo 1993). Indeed, through classroom discussion, as students start tackling issues, they will ask questions that relate to their lives in the classroom and beyond. They might start to discuss inequality issues in their settings and start to challenge local and global hegemonies. Furthermore, the current incorporation of information technology and the high use of mobile phones in Kenya make most students more aware of global issues. As a result, they have started to participate in social media discussions which are part of their daily life. Hence, they may continue to engage in dialogue further, even in their classroom interaction space. I observed some teachers using their mobile phones to download music and incorporate it into their teaching. IT education could make interaction space both contextualised and globally engaged. The students will be able to ask and answer questions at their local level and also be involved in global debates. They will be able to contest injustices (Freire & Macedo 1993; hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995). They could also illuminate their views, work, and contexts, using these platforms to voice their concerns and raise awareness.

Promoting reflective practice

The teachers at Baraka School identified a need for advanced pedagogies in their practice. They unanimously agreed that although they predominantly used monologic pedagogies, there was a need for new pedagogies. They noted that there was no communication between them and the training colleges and mostly there was little consultation by the Ministry of Education or education researchers. They noted a need for innovative pedagogy that involves the views of teachers being listened to, to help to capture their needs. Even so, one cannot ignore the conflicted mindset of teachers: since their background is authoritarian, some felt that their authority should not be compromised. Thus, there is a need to engage with teachers reflectively as they learn new pedagogies to deal with issues that might impair their progress. Other research has shown that mindset and previous experiences of teachers can limit changes in the space of interaction between this group and their students (Gillborn 2008; Alexander 2010; Wilkinson *et al*. 2016). In this Harambee approach, it would be vital for teachers to have a platform from which they can reflect on their practice and, also, plan for progressive teaching. Moreover, the teachers in Kenya appeared keen to work with other key groups to devise superior teaching and learning tools for their settings. Therefore, the entire approach should use spaces that facilitate interaction between all key players, including parents, the Ministry of Education, the government, training colleges, and education researchers.

From my study, there was an emerging consensus that professional development is needed in Kenyan schools, such as post-teacher training for the advancement of teaching and learning practices. Training should be continuous throughout a teacher's career, since new research and progressive classroom practices keep emerging. Hence, updating the skills of teachers is critical. The teachers in Baraka School appeared willing to be trained in pedagogies that relate to their context. Harambee pedagogical approach should promote a space for self-reflection in professional practice through discussions and reflections. After my interviews with the teachers, it was evident in my observations that teachers were engaging students more actively in their teaching. The teachers appeared to have used my interviews as a platform for dialogue, enabling them to reflect on their practice. They were also able to be creative within their setting with the resources available. Indeed, in one of the classes observed after the interviews, the teacher organised a group competition where students asked each other questions. The set-up was in two circles, and the students appeared to actively engage more than previously observed. This active involvement in their learning recurred in other classes that I observed after the interviews. Therefore, it was possible that the teachers had time to reflect during that time and modified their subsequent space for interaction.

When teachers feel supported by the government and society and are equipped with skills for engaging pedagogies, their autonomy can increase. One of the main issues identified was the low self-esteem of the participating teachers (Corrado 2020). They felt that their practices were not good enough for all their students and they felt unsupported. Teacher Mike stated that 'the curriculum should be improved and made to help this child because curriculum as it is now, it is only teaching the child only to pass an exam.' However, they were still able to teach, and the students learned what was expected. Such challenges of inequalities, marginalisation, and professional difficulties mentioned by teachers in the study (like Mike above) are not only experienced in Kenya, but are also discernible in other parts of the world, including the UK as revealed by Gillborn (2008). Therefore, these teachers in Kenya need to know that these challenges are not limited to their context. This notwithstanding, these teachers should be supported by their schools and the Ministry of Education to address their contextual challenges. Moreover, teachers should be equipped to practise autonomy in their classrooms to increase their creativity and activity.

Teachers should also be willing to unlearn counterproductive practices (Cochran-Smith 2009; McWilliam 2008). According to Mike, teachers in Kenya are aware of several methods of teaching. However, they only use the same familiar style. Although most teachers did not want to admit it, my observations supported this view. The teachers predominantly used teacher-centred methods. Teacher Mike admitted that *'they fall back on known territories.'* According to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009), teachers need to unlearn some practices to embrace new ones. Hence, in training

teachers on new pedagogies, it is important to identify how the unproductive methods can be dealt with, to avoid relapse.

Key players collaboration

From my study, it emerged that consultation at ground level seemed to be absent from some areas, as mentioned earlier. The teachers in my interviews felt left out of curriculum development and the allocation of funding for their school. Similarly, the needs of teachers were unmet, and they felt overlooked, which created tensions. The tensions appeared to recur across other groups as I have outlined elsewhere (Corrado 2020). For example, this happens at the society level between teachers and the parents, when parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are asked to give financial support to fund resources not provided by the government. Likewise, there were tensions between teachers, the Ministry of Education, and the government concerning remuneration, training needs, school funding, and curriculum development. Furthermore, when the government in Kenya appears to undertake directives from global organisations on policy issues and practice, their actions can generate social, economic, and historical tensions (Said 1995; Maathai 2009). As a result, there is a need for the liberation of all the 'silenced groups' to find solutions to these tensions and encourage better working relations. This requires communication within, and across, the groups, initially to challenge hegemonies and address tensions, and thereafter, to endorse positive plans. From my analysis, reflecting on improving communication was a major theme that recurred in the interviews.

Ideally, the communication across the groups should be dialogic, where all participatory bodies are heard promoting a Harambee spirit. Indeed, when groups have dialogue, they will be able to forge cohesive working relationships. They may produce a moral lens with a better understanding of circumstances and aid emancipation too (Steinberg & Kincheloe 2010). Together, these groups can identify areas of concern and identify solutions. Also, in unison, they can plan sustainable goals that are effective in Kenyan schools. For instance, parents would be able to understand how government funding works and identify if there are some teaching and learning resources that they need to provide resources for. The teachers and the Ministry of Education would be able to plan and promote good education practices, such as pedagogies to meet the needs of students. The government and Ministry of Education would be able to include teachers in matters of funding, curriculum development, and all other areas that relate to their profession. The move might boost the morale of teachers. Moreover, specific resource provision and support for advanced teaching practice could be offered, where open communication is fostered. Eventually, the practices of both teachers and students will improve interaction, since they will be funded adequately, and their teachers will be motivated and resourced for advanced practice.

Possibly, the inequalities in schools and society can be addressed, after effective use of pedagogical spaces.

Through the Harambee approach key players should be equally included in the process. The approach could help to bridge the social, economic, political, and global differences that impact Kenyan education and society. At the same time, the key groups would be able to identify their strengths and promote them through dialogue in spaces or interaction. Moreover, they could confront the negative perceptions and identities that unjustly impact their autonomy. This would encourage the use of creativity and independence by the key groups in education and their societies. As a result, the 'invisible' marginalised groups (such as teachers, poorer parents, and students) could use pedagogical spaces to explore their agency, creativity, and participation. Furthermore, Kenyan groups (students, teachers, and society) may utilise these spaces to challenge local and global domination through the use of dialogue for emancipation.

Application of Harambee Concept in East Africa

In East Africa (like other African countries), private schools have higher social status than public schools (Akyeampong 2009; Corrado 2019). Private schools are well funded and have resources that teachers and students can use in their classrooms. These disparities can be identified in Kenyan schools, as was evident in my study. Nonetheless, all students require a high-quality education where superior practices are upheld, regardless of social, economic, and political status. Each East African country needs a platform for dialogue in order to identify the needs of a particular context. This will contribute to addressing underlying inequality issues. Correspondingly, in countries that borrow policies from other countries with little consultation on the ground, the needs of students remain overlooked (Tabulawa 2013). Thus, similar to Kenya where dialogue could be applied, there may be opportunities in other East African countries to formulate practices that are advantageous at the local level and further compete globally. Moreover, education systems need to work and benefit the people, and they need to be culturally relevant. Therefore, addressing both micro-issues and macro-issues is essential, through engaging all key players from all levels of the education systems (Harber 2014). Moreover, education in East Africa should prepare students with skills to meet both short-term and long-term goals, from the personal to the local and global levels, starting with their classroom practice. Furthermore, their cultural and policy spaces should support relevant and advanced education practices that promote learning for all students.

On the other hand, the East African Community (EAC 2021) which includes countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi among others, has focused on finding local solutions to political and economic matters. The East African Community aims to uphold sovereignty and ensure formerly colonised countries move away from their

dependency on developed countries, which at times has disenabled them (Maathai 2009; Harber 2014; Corrado 2020). Maathai (2009) advocated for African countries to break the yoke of control from developed countries and global organisations and uphold autonomy. The global hegemonies have dominated Africans economically, culturally, and politically for many years, limiting their autonomy and progress (Said 1995; Maathai 2009; Schweisfurth 2014; Harber 2014; Corrado 2020). I argue that this need for East African community liberty may well include developing contextualised education systems that engage students actively, creatively, and autonomously.

East African countries can individually and/or collectively start by improving their teaching and learning practices. The aspects of Harambee can be incorporated through the use of pedagogical spaces by key groups (government, teachers, parents, society, and students) which could help them to address hegemonies and further draw up progressive resolutions. Discussing hegemonies and utilising pedagogical spaces through the inclusion of the 'silenced groups' is the way forward for many countries, especially in East Africa. Without effective and collaborative communication, such inequalities will persist, influencing classroom practice negatively. Thus, this proposed Harambee approach might be a solution not just for Kenya, but for other East African countries to decolonise their systems, as they uphold the autonomy of their students.

Conclusion

Drawing on my PhD ethnography study, it was evident that Kenyan childhoods have diverse and valued social-cultural experiences. These dynamic involvements are experienced by many African children but are often overlooked in the global representations. Therefore, the current systems of education in Kenya and other East African countries need to capture this valuable knowledge and skills. Hence, there is a need to decolonise practice. The Harambee approach has outlined strategies to support the autonomy of students and liberate their positioning both locally and globally.

The Harambee approach is an original decolonising framework that contextualises classroom practices in Kenya. Besides, Harambee addresses the local and global hegemonic issues that impact classroom practices. The approach stipulates the need for all key players to engage dialogically in their education system to uphold the students' autonomy. The Harambee approach empowers students through the inclusion of their cultural tools and further contests inequality and misrepresentation. Harambee concept could go beyond classroom engagement as it aims to equip students to participate actively in their world.

This was a small-scale study. Therefore, more context consultations are needed. The strength of my research was observing students in their classrooms, within their schools, and also in their community. Another advantage was engaging with teachers

in a rural community whose voices are often overlooked which was a strategic shift power by alleviating unheard voices. The Harambee approach could be a valuable emancipation tool of the Kenyan education system and other East African contexts.

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Children's everyday work in rural Muslim *Yorùbá* communities in North Central Nigeria

Bukola Oyinloye

Abstract: Proponents of children's freedom to work agree that work is socially, culturally, and relationally constructed. However, more remains to be known about these constructions, particularly in rural sub-Saharan Africa. This article explores the cultural childrearing beliefs or ethnotheories of *Yorùbá* parents in rural Northern Nigeria, and parents' role in organising children's everyday intra-familial and intra-communal work. Data were generated within a broader ethnographic study which explored parents' perspectives and practices around formal schooling. Participant observation, including after school observations of children, and partly structured interviews were employed. Findings reveal children's activities aligned with parents' ethnotheories about what and how children should learn towards becoming functional, communal adults or *Ọmọlúàbís*. Parent's ethnotheories also broadened to accommodate new realities, resulting in additional expectations of children. The article highlights the need to further examine the wider structures which underpin parents' ethnotheories and thereby determine children's capabilities to realise their everyday lives.

Keywords: Ethnotheories, *Yorùbá*, *Ọmọlúàbí*, children's agency.

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Introduction

Work, or participation in 'labour' or wage activities remains a contested notion in the literature on global childhoods. While opponents of work generally argue that children are to be cared for and made available for learning, proponents argue against what they perceive is a Western liberal conception of childhood and for plural conceptualisations situated within diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts (Bourdillon 2006). Moreover, some proponents highlight that work produces social benefits alongside other types of learning (Bourdillon & Spittler 2012; Liebel 2004) and generates necessary earnings and opportunities for vulnerable children (Bourdillon 2006; 2011). Despite these arguments, both groups broadly agree that there are different types of work, some exploitative and potentially harmful, others benign and even useful, particularly those contributing to the household economy and equipping children with workplace skills (Bass 2004).

Accordingly, Bourdillon (2006) proposes conceptualising work on a continuum between benefits and harm and including activities such as school and sport which can induce benefits *and* cause harm. More recently, however, scholars have suggested distinguishing work—activities embedded into family/community life which incorporate, either explicitly or implicitly, a learning or developmental aim—from 'labour'—activities designed for wages (or as a form of payment) which extract children from families and communities, expose them to hazards and may not incorporate a learning aim (Lancy 2016). Examples of such work, thus, include chores (e.g. fetching water, cleaning, farming, caring for livestock, etc.), care work (e.g. for younger siblings, or the elderly) and economic activities (e.g. farming, hawking, helping in a shop, etc.) (Bourdillon 2006; Lancy 2016). This distinction between work and labour is also spatial: work typically occurs around the home, and usually under the guidance of family/community members (particularly for younger children) (Rogoff 1995) while labour takes place away from home (though may remain within the wider community) and under the supervision of adults with whom the child has a weaker affiliation.

Notably, the guidance of a more knowledgeable other, whether actively or passively (Lancy 2016), in children's work suggests an intentionality which reflects the dominant dispositions and ideas in the environments in which such children grow up. For young children in particular, learning or developmental aims are embedded within their developmental niches or culturally constructed environments which comprise three mutually reinforcing components: children's everyday physical and social settings; the culturally regulated customs and practices of childrearing; and the cultural childrearing beliefs (or ethnotheories) of those who care for them (Harkness & Super 1996).

Ethnotheories, moreover, illuminate the social and cultural contexts as well as relationships within which children's work is embedded. While pluralists would accept that children's work is socially, culturally, and relationally constructed, more remains to be known about these constructions. To deepen insight about them, this article explores the ethnotheories of parents in rural Northern Nigeria and their role in the organisation of children's everyday work understood as children's intra-familial and intra-communal activities. The children whose activities are of interest in this article are aged 15 or below. The term 'children' follows conventional reference to children under the biological age of 18 in the literature, owing to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, this usage is for simplicity only and neither implies a homogeneity of all children below eighteen (Bourdillon 2006) nor a uniform construction of childhood across all cultures and contexts (see, e.g. Abebe 2019). As others have argued, a more heterogeneous, pluralist conception recognises the intersectionality of temporality—individual linear progression and change through time—and spatiality—relational process within the material and symbolic production of space or social life (Farrugia & Wood 2017).

The article begins by exploring the concept of ethnotheories and briefly reviewing the literature relevant to sub-Saharan Africa. It provides an overview of the research context and then discusses the methods used to generate data for the broader study upon which the article is based. It goes on to present the findings and concludes with a discussion of some implications of these findings.

Conceptual framework and literature review

Parental ethnotheories and role construction in rural sub-Saharan Africa

Parental ethnotheories are parents' perspectives or cultural beliefs which serve as the organising principles for children's everyday life (Harkness & Super 2006). They are the cultural models inherent in taken-for granted ideas about the 'right way[s] to think or act' (62), demonstrating that children's activities are not arbitrary but organised as part of a cultural system with its own system of meanings (Harkness & Super 1996). Though many studies of ethnotheories focus on parental beliefs around valued traits and aptitudes in children (e.g. Nsamenang & Lamb 1993; Harkness & Super 1992; Harkness *et al.* 2010), this article takes a slightly different focus towards parents' broader beliefs about the range of children's everyday activities and the purpose these activities fulfil. Nevertheless, among some of the existing studies are insights into children's activities in rural sub-Saharan Africa and parents' role within them.

The Six Cultures Study of Socialization (SCSS) of the late 1950s, by the Whitings and their colleagues, was among the earliest to narratively expand knowledge about parental ethnotheories in predominantly non-Western, subsistence-level agricultural communities, one of which was the Gusii of Kenya (LeVine 2010; Munroe & Gauvain 2010; LeVine 2003). Towards meaningful contribution to community, school-aged Gusii children (post-infancy and pre-marital) were expected to respect, obey, be responsible and do domestic work at home (LeVine *et al.* 1994). Parents perceived their roles not directly as teachers or instructors but as disciplinarians, managers, and protectors whose children would receive the necessary education along with other children within a prescribed, hierarchically structured environment. Likewise, Lancy (1996)'s 1970s study of Liberian Kpelle children between six and 13 revealed young children were not directly instructed but instead expected to play on the 'mother ground'—open spaces in villages nearby parents, adults or older siblings who were working—under the watchful eye of these adults which facilitated children's observation of, and learning from, them. These observations were reproduced in children's varied play-forms which mimicked observed practices and served an important means through which young children acquired their culture. Slightly older Kpelle children engaged in household economic activities while even older ones engaged in structured activities such as organised apprenticeships and 'bush schools' which transmitted core values necessary for adulthood, e.g. those required for relations with the opposite sex and authorities, and for participation in religious and mystical activities.

Among the Kipsigis of Kenya, domestic chores (e.g. sweeping, washing, foraging, etc.) and younger sibling childcare were expected of girls while boys were expected, among others, to care for livestock, and carry out minor domestic repairs without parents' direct instructions or supervision (Harkness & Super 1992). These duties, for parents, were purposeful in developing children's socially responsible intelligence, the absence of which was exemplified by children's neglect of such activities to play (Super *et al*. 2011). Gendered differentiation of children's chores and other work types have been identified in other parts of Africa including, among the Tchokwe (Angola), Touareg, Hadza (Tanzania), Igbo (Nigeria) (Lancy 2016; see also Robson 1996 in relation to the Hausa in Northern Nigeria). However, among other non-African, though indigenous, peoples such as the Tsimané (Bolivia), boys can be assigned to 'typical' girls' work such as sibling care when no girls are available (see Stieglitz *et al.* 2013, as cited in Lancy 2016). Lancy, moreover, suggests that girls spend more of their days working while boys appear to have more freedom to play.

Subsequent studies have corroborated the ethnotheories, expectations and daily organisational patterns of rural Africans such as the afore highlighted Gusii, Kpelle and Kipsigis. For instance, among the Nso of Cameroun, good 'prototypical' children (i.e. obedient, respectful, hardworking, helpful, honest and intelligent) are expected to dutifully undertake chores at home, including run errands, and attend and progress

in school, the latter's more recent emergence suggestive of parents' acceptance of the reality of their contemporary lives within which schooling is perceived inevitable (Nsamenang & Lamb 1993). Among the Yorùbás of Nigeria on whom this article focuses, children are given household duties and sent on errands, including fetching objects and making purchases, to train them to be responsible, helpful and to respectfully relate with others, particularly elders (Ogunaike & Houser 2002; Omobowale *et al.* 2019; Zeitlin 1996). Parent and adult involvement includes doling out instructions, i.e. for errands or chores, and monitoring and assessing children's itineraries or tasks. Historically, such tasks are gendered, with girls expected, and thus trained, to assume household chores within the kitchen and around the home (examples: cooking, cleaning, washing, sweeping, tidying, etc.) as well as care responsibilities, and boys expected to take on more external chores which involve physical strength (e.g. cutting grass, lifting heavy items, etc.) (Akanle & Omolara 2012). For both genders, such training contributes to the development of an Ọmọlúàbí,—a person of good character—a central concept in Yorùbá beliefs around child rearing and social cohesion (Busari *et al.* 2017) and a goal of Yorùbá traditional education alongside useful membership in community (Akinyemi 2003).

Notably, expectations of children's communality are not unique to the Yorùbás but common across various African societies and reflected in the widely used Southern African concept of Ubuntu (often interpreted as '*I am because we are*'), and its ethnocultural correlates (Mugumbate & Chereni 2019: 29). As others have suggested, African parents and communities employ children's work not only to develop cognition and inculcate specific knowledge and skills, but also to socialise values which contribute to social integration and cohesion (for example, Nsamenang 2006).

While some Yorùbá scholars have focused on how Ọmọlúàbí is achieved through rhetorical and physical child discipline (Busari *et al.* 2017), others have explored how it is transmitted through verbal art forms such as riddles, songs, folktales among others (Akinyemi 2003). Others still have outlined the range of values an Ọmọlúàbí-focused traditional education seeks to instil which includes tangible skills in domestic work, hunting and farming, alongside intangible values of spirituality, respect, communality, among others (Akinwale 2013). Though scholars such as Ogunaike & Houser (2002) have alluded to the connection between Ọmọlúàbí and children's chores and childcare, few scholars have shed light on the range of rural Yorùbá children's activities and how Yorùbá parents themselves construct these in relation to Ọmọlúàbí.

The research context

This article is drawn from a qualitative ethnographic study carried out amongst two rural Yorùbá communities (henceforth commA and commB) in a North Central Nigerian state, between November 2018 and December 2019. Nigeria is a West African country

subdivided into 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). These 37 areas are further divided into six administrative geopolitical zones—South South, South East, South West, North Central, North West and North East—groupings of states generally with similar ethnicities and socio-political histories. The country's largest ethnic groups are the Yorùbás, Igbos, and Hausas but scholars suggest there are hundreds of other ethnolinguistic groups of which estimates range between 250 and 400 (Brann 1991), including sub-groups of the three largest groups. The study's state is sometimes called a 'bridge' state given its Southwestern (Yorùbá) cultural origins and its North Western (Islam) religious alignment. Thus, the state is usually not considered part of the 'core' North, i.e. North West and North East, and is multi-religious, with adherents to Islam (Muslims), Christianity (Christians) and traditional religion (pre-Islamic and pre-Christianic theisms practised by different ethnic groups around the country). Major industries in the state include farming, traditional textile weaving and pottery.

Public pre-tertiary schooling in Nigeria comprises universal basic (one year of early childhood, six of primary, and three of junior secondary) and three years of senior secondary schooling, a 1-6-3-3 structure. Universal basic education (UBE) is free by Federal policy but in reality, states charge a variety of fees including entrance, term, end of term along with significant examination costs at the end of secondary. Unsurprisingly, UBE implementation is fraught with challenges such as gross underestimation of enrolment, shortage of certified teachers and significant underfunding (Bolaji *et al.* 2016). In the majority Muslim North West and North East, these challenges alongside those related to attendance and learning outcomes, are particularly severe. For instance, the majority of the estimated 10 million Nigerian children between ages five and 14 who are out of formal, public schools are in the North (UNICEF 2017), though this data includes children who are only attending Quranic/Arabic schools (not considered formal, public schools). The challenges with schooling in Northern Nigeria reflect, on one hand, the slower implementation of previous Federal universal schooling schemes, and on the other, tensions between religious (in this case, Islamic) and secular schooling (in this case, European style public schooling founded on Christian ideals and values). States in the North Central face similar educational challenges, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree. For instance, on indicators such as primary/junior secondary net attendance rate, schooling status, etc. the research state is usually grouped with those in the South West (see NPC 2015).

Methods

Multiple methods are best for understanding parental ethnotheories and a particularly useful starting point is observations of the organisation of children's everyday life (Harkness *et al.* 2006) which, complemented with parent interviews, may be

analysed to reveal the principles underpinning children's routines. The diversity of methods further serves to infer across data sources to determine those most likely to be valid (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007). Observations of children's everyday lives may be conducted not only within homes but in other spaces children inhabit such as schools, and religious and other institutions (Ntarangwi 2012).

Fieldwork for the broader ethnographic study occurred in two phases: first, through an initial intensive five-month period and thereafter through a month-long follow-up visit which enabled validation of the emerging ideas from the first. Two small communities, each with a public primary and junior secondary school, were selected for the study with the help of key contacts in the state (one, a former colleague) to explore parents' understandings of and practices in relation to children's schooling as well as relationships with schools. The communities were predominantly Muslim and practised polygyny. Men primarily engaged in commercial driving (commA) and farming (commB) while women across both communities engaged in farming and small-scale, off-farm micro-enterprises, including the sale of farm produce, cooked food or snacks and provisions. CommA is located alongside a busy interstate road and is nearer to the main town than commB which is not only farther from the main town, but also located along a quieter interstate road. Thus, more commA families than those in the more rural commB farm both for subsistence and small-scale commerce, the produce from the latter being sold at the five-day market in a nearby town. Given the challenges of the broader Nigerian economy, many commA fathers who also own farms near commA have begun to supplement their livelihoods with subsistence and small-scale farming.

Given generally higher levels of parental involvement at lower levels of schooling, the broader study focused on basic schooling which, as already noted, includes one year of pre-primary, six of primary and three of junior secondary schooling (JSS). The communities' public primary schools (schoolA and schoolB) anchored the study and facilitated access to parents. School heads initially helped select 16 parents (eight per community). Five more were added who self-volunteered, were spouses of already selected parents, or later recognised as information-rich community members (three in commA and two in commB). Thus, there were, in total, 21 parents including one grandmother (commA) and three grandparents (commB: two grandfathers and two grandmothers), three of whom were carers of primary school children.

The main methods were partially structured recorded qualitative interviews—gently guided discussions with a conversational partner (Rubin & Rubin 2012)—with parents and casual age-appropriate interactions with children, all in Yorùbá; and participant observation, the central method in ethnography (Delamont 2016). Participant observation requires balancing participation—being involved and subjective—and observation—being distant and objective, while capturing data on the interaction and

what is being observed (O'Reilly 2012). In the study, participant observation occurred alongside interviews with parents and children. Fieldnotes were typed on a mobile phone to document observations while interviews, aided by partly structured interview guides, sought parents' perspectives around schooling. The intensive fieldwork period also included a month of dedicated after school observation of children's activities which typically began by 1.30 p.m. until around 5 p.m. or whenever children had departed for their after-school activities. For this, a printed observation schedule was used to document children's activities and parent-child interactions during the period of observation.

Though the focus was on parents, the study positioned children as subjects and agents (Bourdillon 2006) who could also '[give] voice to their own experiences and understanding of their world' (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). This, moreover, helped triangulate parents' perspectives. Children's voices and experiences were provided by 15 children and grandchildren, three of whom were in JSS1. Apart from two adolescents, children were between the ages of nine and 13. Oral consent was obtained from parents and grandparents, while children provided their assent. The author, being of Yorùbá descent and fluent in the language, conducted interviews in Yorùbá with both parents and children. Ethical clearance was obtained from the author's institution in the United Kingdom as well as the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the parent and children participants.

Transcription (including translation to English) occurred primarily after fieldwork and was carried out by the author and checked with key contacts (some also occurred during fieldwork, and checks made with participants themselves). A thematic analytical approach was used for the primarily qualitative data to identify themes which 'represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke 2006: 82). A theme, moreover, consists of one or more group(s) of codes: terms or phrases which capture the essence of parts of the data (Braun & Clarke 2013). NVivo12 qualitative data analysis software was used to identify first level codes which were then aggregated to a second level and thereafter grouped as themes. Given parental ethnotheories were generally consistent across both communities, findings

Table 1. Parent sample

	commA				commB				Total
	Male	**Female***	**Boy**	**Girl**	**Male***	**Female***	**Boy**	**Girl**	
Individual	4	7	1	6	8	2	4	5	**37**
Group				7	19	10			**36**
Total	**4**	**7**	**1**	**13**	**27**	**12**	**4**	**5**	**70**

*Includes grandparents: one grandmother in commA; two grandfathers and one grandmother in commB

Table 2. Children'-0s sample

| #	Comm	ID	Selected parent	Age (fieldwork)	Level at fieldwork
1	A	Boy1	Mother1	9	P5
2	A	Boy2	Mother2	12	JSS1
3	A	Girl3	Mother3	10	P6
4	A	Girl3 stepsister*	Mother3	12	P6
5	A	Girl5	Father5	10	JSS1
6	A	Girl7	Mother7	13	P6
7	A	Girl9	Mother9	-	JSS1
8	B	Boy2	Father2	15	P6
9	B	Girl3	Father3	8	P4
10	B	Boy4	Father4	11	P6
11	B	Boy5	Father5	13	P6
12	B	Girl6	Father6	13	P4
13	B	Boy7	Mother7	11	P5
14	B	Girl7	Mother7	11~	P6
15	B	Girl8	Grandmother8	14	P6

Her mother, the Mother3's junior wife was not selected, but she participated in discussions with girl3 and girl7. The total number of parents in this table is less than 21 because not all parents had an upper level child at the public primary school.

are here represented together. For children, where necessary, findings are represented specific to the communities in which they emerged.

Findings

Parental ethnotheories

Ethnotheories were uncovered amongst Yorùbá parents when they were asked to elaborate upon the concept of 'ko eko' (to learn), a term they had used widely to convey their reason for sending children to school. They revealed a complex conceptualisation of *eko* as holistic and constitutive of multiple, mutually reinforcing elements, only one of which was *eko ile iwe* (school learning or schooling). The others were *eko ile* (home learning), *eko ile kewu* (elementary Islamic schooling), and *ise owo* (handiwork) where *eko ile iwe*, *eko ile kewu* and *ise owo* together constitute *eko ita* because they occur outside the home. The following diagram illustrates:
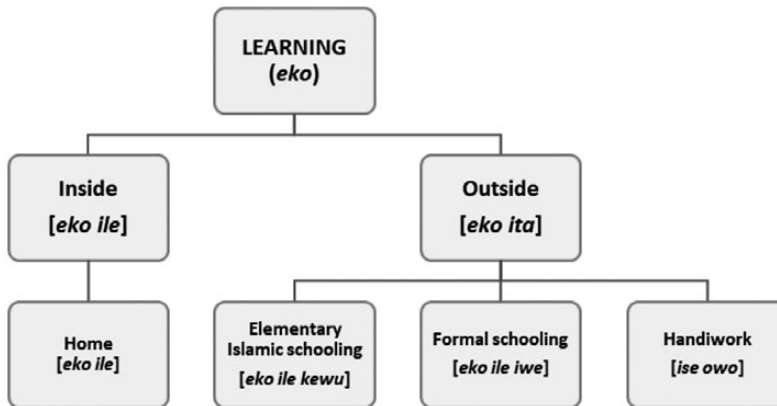
Figure 1. Yorùbá parents' ethnotheories.

With *eko ile*, parents positioned themselves as teachers who teach children how to take care of their bodies, the home and the natural environment (i.e. through work); how to run errands, including hawking which supported parents' economic activities and inculcated functional skills; how to behave (e.g. respect and discipline); and how to relate appropriately with others in the community, particularly those in age or titular/positional seniority. Though unstructured and informal, these elements represent *eko ile*'s 'core modules' and are intrinsic to fulfilling the outcomes of an Ọmọlúàbí 'curriculum' (see Lancy 2012's 'chore curriculum').

Eko ile kewu, according to parents, is elementary Islamic schooling taught by Islamic teachers (Aafaas) who teach recitation of the Quran in Arabic (*kewu*) so that children may pray effectively and, where desired, progress further in their Islamic studies. *Eko ile iwe* is taught by schoolteachers who teach children to *ka [i]we*, or *read book*, write in Yorùbá and English and learn other subjects to gain knowledge and skills which may lead to future [usually salaried] employment. While *eko ile iwe* is a structured, institutionalised (i.e. formal) system of learning offered by the public education system, *eko ile kewu* (typically, including that offered in both research communities) is less so, offering greater flexibility for learner attendance and holidays though like *eko ile iwe*, its content is structured by Aafaas.

Master craftspersons of *ise owo* across and outside both communities, according to parents, teach a skill, craft or trade which, once mastered by the child/youth, may then be used to generate income within the community, i.e. through self-employment. *Ise owo* is a process of informal apprenticeship, the latter defined by the International Labour Office (2009: x) as the system through which 'a young learner (apprentice) acquires the skills for a trade or craft in a micro- or small enterprise learning and working side by side with an experienced craftsperson.' *Ise owo* is not a new phenomenon among *Yorùbás* or other traditional African societies. Among *Yorùbás*, for example, traditional, non-formal apprenticeships have always existed where children acquired skills in trades, crafts and other professions from parents or other highly

skilled masters (Obidi 1995). Parents alluded to this historicity when they spoke about their own experiences of learning *ise owo* which sometimes required them to leave their communities to apprentice under a reputable Master in a bigger town.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, parents' conceptualisations of *eko* are also spatial. Unlike *eko ile* which occurs within the home environment and is, as parents view it, the responsibility of parents as teachers, the other forms take place outside the immediate home environment and are taught by relevant teachers within their physical domains. Despite their spatial separation, parents believe the various forms of learning reinforce and buttress each other. As one father explained:

> ... that monitoring by parents in the home is very important for the child before they'll[1] now be learning *eko ita* ... whatever they learns as *eko ile* even if a little bit, will help them because if they have respect for their teacher [in whichever domain], the teacher will also say, this child is a 'real' child, even if [the child] wants to say they don't want to do well, if [the teacher] has seen [the child's] behaviour, the teacher will say, ahh, this child is responsible ... [and] will also then keep an eye on them differently... (commA Father 2018/12/18)

Put differently by another father, 'if a child doesn't have home learning, s/he can't have that of outside, s/he can't find that of outside' (commB Father 10/12/2018). Thus, for parents, home learning is the basis of all other forms as it inculcates the foundational socio-cultural *Ọmọlúàbí* qualities which characterise a 'real' child or an *omo gidi*; and the environmental and physical (bodily) management capabilities required to thrive in the other domains. Schoolteachers and trainers further reinforce this home learning while imparting new knowledge and skills while Aafaas reinforce home learning as they equip children with the spiritual capabilities necessary to fulfil religious obligations and psychologically withstand life's challenges, i.e. through prayer and the hope it breeds.

For parents, each of the different spheres of learning plays its role in the formation of a faith-filled, functional adult who is financially self-sufficient (i.e. can sustain him/herself) and economically supports immediate and extended families; contributes to the development and harmony of his/her community; and generally lives a life of ease (e.g. of contentment, satisfaction and moderation). These broadened expectations imply an expansion of the notion of *Ọmọlúàbí* beyond the sphere of the immediate home environment and suggests, as earlier noted (e.g. by Nsamenang & Lamb 1993), that rural parents are coming to terms with the realities of their contemporary lives which require modern forms of learning and financial self-reliance.

Children's everyday activities

Parents in both communities described children's activities ethnotheoretically, namely, in terms of *eko ile*, *eko ile kewu*, *eko ile iwe*, and *ise owo*. *Eko ile* constituted work:

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[1] Here, 'they' is a gender neutral reference.

chores (e.g. fetching water, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, sweeping, and cleaning the home environment, running errands, farming, etc.); and economic activities for the household (e.g. farming and hawking) and for children themselves (i.e. to pay school fees) (e.g. micro poultry farming, making charcoal, etc.). No parent mentioned care work as part of children's *eko ile* activities though this is likely because parents did not categorise it as work but as expressions of care which fostered harmonious familial lives (see, e.g. Serpell & Adamson-Holley 2017).

In resonance with the literature, children's chores across both communities were gendered in different ways. First, parents reported that girls, more than boys, were generally assigned household chores such as fetching water, cleaning, cooking, and washing dishes and clothes (sometimes including parents' clothes). One commB father offered that a boy who does such chores does them just to go along with girls but they are not part of his duties. Corroborating this, a commA mother noted that some boys indeed do chores. However, for her and another commA father, this generally occurred if there was no girl child in the household. Though this mother also reported that boys farmed while girls did chores (e.g. on weekends), farming was not consistently gender-differentiated by parents. Particularly in the more rural commB, farming was the remit of both rural boys and girls as it was believed necessary for their subsistence and therefore, survival. As one commB grandfather noted:

> because we, we the rural people, we won't want to, we won't want to buy food [out] to eat, or you don't understand me? Hence, they [the children] will do three [types of] work daily: they'll go to *ile iwe*, they'll go to *ile kewu*, and they'll go to the farm. (2018/12/19)

However, it is possible that even in commB, gendered specialization vis-à-vis farming becomes more apparent as children move into adolescence. This relates to the second dimension of gender-differentiation: temporality. Gendered chore expectations appeared to change at different points over time (as children grow) and within time (within day-to-day activities). For instance, while parents acknowledged both girls and boys did chores, boys appeared to be able to get away with doing less in the morning prior to heading to school. A commA mother (Boy1) who reported her son washes dishes, noted that because he needs to quicky prepare for school, he only does them after returning from school. Other mothers of girls reported that girls, unlike boys, are *required* to do chores in the morning, except there is no girl in the household. This was alluded to by a commB father who was usually called upon by girls late for school to advocate on their behalf at school who, during a parent-teacher meeting, advised mothers (the ones 'who own the children') to limit girls' morning errands (2019/02/27). One morning, three upper primary school-aged girls were observed walking by his house on the way to school after lessons had begun. After querying them about their lateness—the girls reported they were doing chores—he advised them to tell their mothers that they can no longer do so many chores in the morning as they would be punished at school.

A third dimension of gender differentiation relates to the teacher of the chore (and by extension, economic activity), and has been alluded to by the commB father's adage of mothers as 'owners of the children'. Some fathers reported that mothers were generally responsible for teaching girls—boys if no girls available—household chores. A commA father who disclosed he had to learn to do chores reported he learned from the Aunt with whom he lived. Some fathers and mothers also noted that children's hawking was generally to support mothers' micro-enterprises, implying that mothers were the main teachers of this activity.

Children's *eko ile iwe* and *eko ile kewu* activities were evident from attendance to schoolA and schoolB and the *ile kewu* located in each community. Although a core part of their ethnotheories, parents did not mention *ise owo* as part of children's activities during fieldwork though this is likely because most children of interest were still young and had yet to begin. However, the follow-up visit revealed three children had begun it in commB, one in commA, and discussions had begun within the other households on children's desired *ise owo* and the identification of Master trainers.

Before and after school observations corroborated and supplemented parents' descriptions of children's activities. Except cooking which was usually done by girls (although boys helped or roasted yams on farms), the various chores described by parents were observed being undertaken by both girls and boys despite parents' gendered articulations. Two commA mothers had a boy as their last child, and while one (Boy2) was observed fetching water and washing dishes as well as his own clothes, the other slightly younger Boy1 was not though, as noted earlier, his mother reported part of his duties after school was to wash dishes before heading to *eko ile kewu* (this couldn't be corroborated as on the day of his observation, he disappeared through the back of the house). In commB, Boy5 was repeatedly observed fetching water even though he had a younger girl sibling (in lower primary). Other boys and girls in both communities were observed fetching water though in commA where there was more observation of this activity, more girls were observed than boys. However, similar differentiation is likely to have been observed in commB as this activity has been equally observed there.

In relation to household economic activities, as parents reported, children were observed hawking; tending to livestock; heading to or coming from the farm; and helping to peel cassava for market day or mothers' micro-enterprises. Hawking was widespread in both communities and children of selected and non-selected parents, both boys and girls, were observed hawking boiled eggs, cooked/fried tofu, cooked yams, local pap (fermented corn meal), dried fish, oranges, bananas, bread, drinks, condiments, tray goods (milk sachets, soap, sugar, etc.), etc. A particularly lucrative economic activity in February and March was cashew nut picking. Mothers (and a few fathers) and boy and girl children were frequently observed heading to farms to

pick cashew fruits whose shelled nuts were then removed, dried and sold to neighbours or cooperatives along the cashew value chain. As reported by children during a classroom observation, some children temporarily dropped out of school to go cashew nut picking in neighbouring towns. For self-regarding economic activities, Boy2 in commB was observed heading back and forth to the farm to make charcoal to sell to teachers and others.

In the mornings, children of various parents were observed getting ready and heading to school, and after school, children ate, rested and either departed to *ile kewu* or went hawking. Perhaps because children were young and most mothers' economic activities were home-based, observed instances of sibling-care were primarily in relation to helping feed, play with and keep an eye on younger siblings at home. As the literature suggests, this was typically done by girls (e.g. Robson 1996), although in this study, girls' sibling care usually occurred within sight of mothers who were occupied nearby in other activities. For children who went to *ile kewu* with younger siblings (some toddlers), care work consisted of their monitoring of these siblings to, from and during *ile kewu*. With other, non-selected children, care work was most evident in schools where older siblings kept watch over younger ones by checking on them during breaks and walking together to and from school. CommB Girl 6's cousin, who had a particularly fussy toddler sister, was permitted to bring the toddler into her own classroom and therefore combined care work with school learning. Given most children had not yet begun *ise owo* and that most *ise owo* took place outside children's immediate home environment, this was not observed amongst selected children.

Children's everyday activities (children's voices)

Children's voices corroborated the above observations as well as parents' perspectives. Notably, they provided greater detail on their own activities and schedules. Table 3 outlines a typical weekday for a girl in commA and a boy in commB, drawn from conversations with children. The table is not meant to be comparative but to give a sense of children's activities in each community.

With school out of the picture, weekend activities were only marginally simpler as hours of school (8 a.m. to 2 p.m.) were merely redistributed across children's existing work. For example, for commB's Boy4, weekends generally consisted of waking up and praying, fetching water, and going on to morning *ile kewu* between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. This was typically followed by going to the farm from which they (usually he and his siblings) returned by 1 p.m. They then ate and proceeded to afternoon *ile kewu* (same schedule as weekdays). After *ile kewu*, they returned to the farm until around 6.30 p.m. On return, they ate, played or hung out, and trickled to sleep. Like *ile iwe*, *ile kewu*'s schedule is constant Monday to Wednesday and Saturday to Sunday—there is a morning *kewu* and afternoon *kewu*—and there is no *ile kewu* on Thursday and Friday, the

Table 3. Typical day-00 for girls and boys

Children's typical school day activities		
Period	**Composite girl (commA)**	**Composite boy (commB)**
Before school	Wake up between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.	Wake up early
	[Pray]	Pray
	Sweep	Fetch water
	Fetch water (for siblings' bath)	Run errands for parents
	Wash dishes (previous night's)	Go to *ile kewu* (between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m.) (sometimes)
	Fetch water (own bath)	
	Help cook	Bathe
	Grind peppers (manually)	Eat
	Put bath water on fire	Prepare for school
	Bathe	
	Go to *ile kewu* around 7 a.m. (sometimes)	
	Hawk (sometimes)	
	Dress up for school	
	Eat	
	Head to school (around 8 a.m.)	
After school	Arrive shortly before 2 p.m. (school closes at 1:30 p.m. but children pray and hang out before heading home)	Change school clothes
		Fetch water
	Change clothes	Wash clothes (if Wednesday)
	Wash dishes	Eat
	Sweep	Go to market (on market day)
	Play a little	Go to *ile kewu* (2 p.m. to 5 p.m. except Thursday/Friday)
	Eat	
	Se faji (i.e. chill, hang out with friends, siblings, mothers)	If no *ile kewu*:
	Go to *ile kewu* (around 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. or 4 p.m. till 6 p.m.)	Go to farm (Thursday/Friday) or
	If no *ile kewu*:	Hawk or
	Go hawking (if so, misses afternoon kewu)	Peel cassava (on Thursday/ Friday) or
	Run errands (i.e. going to buy goods for mother)	Attend boys' association meeting (every eight days)
	Go to evening *ile kewu* (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.)* (some children)	Play ball
		Run parents' errands
		Go cashew nut picking
After afternoon ile kewu	Arrive between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. (the later they leave home, they later they return)	Arrive at 5 p.m. (if left home at 3 p.m., or later if left later)
	Sweep / clean up environment	Gather firewood and/or
	Help sell pap at home	Go to farm (until about 6:30 p.m.)
	Go hawking (if it is not too late)	
	Help elder siblings cook	Watch films (if electricity) (sometimes)
	Eat	
	Do assignment (if there is someone to help)	*Se faji* (i.e. play/hang out outside) (if no electricity)
	Se faji (chill, hang out with friends, siblings, mothers)	Eat
	Sleep when its time	Do assignment
		Sleep (around 8 p.m. or 9 p.m.)

second evening kewu was only mentioned by one girl, although it is likely this is a replacement for the missed morning kewu

Islamic weekend which mirrors the secular Saturday/Sunday weekend. In commB, there is no morning *ile kewu* on market day. Notably, the references to *se faji* suggests parental recognition of children's need for leisure and play though unlike Lancy (2016), the data here suggest this was more leisure and rest, rather than an exclusive learning aim.

Children struggled to indicate the timing of their activities and so specified approximate times which often mirrored the timings of the Islamic call to prayer which occurred at very specific times during the day, e.g. 4 p.m. Their struggles resonated with parents, suggesting to some extent, a timelessness of communal activities which is somewhat mitigated by the calls to prayer. Notably, the above activities are non-exhaustive, but a reflection of what children were able to recollect with assistance from siblings and friends who contributed, as compelled, to conversations with children. Similarly, activities have been presented in the order in which children reportedly carried them out. However, it is highly likely that these vary day to day according to the exigencies of the moment.

As observations revealed, children's narratives were not always consistent with their actions. Given the amount of morning work, few went to morning *ile kewu* even though nearly all mentioned it. Attendance to afternoon *ile kewu*, though higher, was irregular and those who went often departed closer to 4 p.m. For children who hawked, *ile kewu* was secondary. For example, commA Girl7 disclosed her *ile kewu* attendance was contingent upon her ability to sell all her goods before the afternoon *kewu* session elapsed:

> B: What time do you go to *ile kewu* if you come back quickly from hawking?
> Girl7: 4:00 p.m.
> B: How many times a week do you go to *ile kewu*?
> Girl7: Every day
> B: But you don't usually come back early from hawking ...
> Girl7: When it's, when it's ... it's how quickly the hawking takes
> B: Do you, do you have to sell all of what you're selling before you return?
> Girl7: Yes
> B: What if you don't sell all of it?
> Girl7: If I don't sell all of it, I'll [continue] hawking, I won't go to *ile kewu* anymore then
> *(2019/01/28)*

Likewise, on the day of her after school observation, commA Girl3 did not go to *ile kewu* but went hawking. In relation to schooling, children did not naturally mention assignment completion unless they were asked, to which some responded that they did it after school (i.e. before *ile kewu*) while others in the evening before bedtime. Though assignments were not always given, no child was observed doing assignment or reviewing their books after school. The observation period—after school until departure for *ile kewu*—turned out to be children's leisure time; thus, reported after *ile kewu* activities were based on children's and parents' reports. Notably, while some children readily prepared for *ile kewu*, many were repeatedly reminded and hurried off. Others did not

attend because of fees owed or Aafaa preferences. As parent teacher meetings revealed, not all children who left home to go to school arrived there. Likewise, not all children always liked hawking even if, like commA Girl7, they understood its importance to their families and felt pride in their capability to contribute to the household economy (see also Putnick & Bornstein 2016). CommA Girl7 who hawked nearly every day sometimes grumbled at the task while commB Boy2's sister had to be cajoled and incentivised before she agreed to a brief hawk. To the extent that parental and other opportunities afforded, children evidently exercised agency in the pursuit of their day-to-day activities.

In addition to the above activities, children also had social obligations, as alluded to in Table 3 with the boys' association meeting in commB. In both communities, girls' and boys' associations existed for children in various age bands starting from pre-pubescence. Though a means of socialisation, their main functions were to provide children's visible representation and (usually monetary) contribution at communal occasions such as naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, etc. and to teach children how to participate in occasions. Children who were not members of associations due to age or lack of parental permission attended occasions with parents or older siblings. Likewise, children accompanied parents to occasions outside communities or to visit relatives. Such functions and social obligations taught children how to exist socially, collectively, and harmoniously in the community towards achieving the relational element of *eko ile*.

Discussion

This article has provided insight into parental ethnotheories around children's everyday lives in rural Muslim Yorùbá communities in Nigeria, demonstrating a range of work activities around the home and community including chores, economic activities, schooling, and elementary Islamic schooling. It has demonstrated that these activities are indissoluble from learning as they are the expression of parents' ethnotheories or perspectives around how childhood should be organized—and the roles parents should play—to inculcate Ọmọlúàbís values and equip children with functional skills. While for parents, Ọmọlúàbíhood is expected of, and attainable by, both boys and girls, the journey to actualisation typically looks different for boys and girls as the functional skills through which Ọmọlúàbíhood is tacitly assessed differs for boys and girls where such difference is possible.

As a result of this gendered Ọmọlúàbíhood, socially reproductive household work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for younger siblings, etc. are gender-differentiated. However, as the evidence presented in this article has shown, this does not imply that boys are exempt from such work. Rather, and as others have demonstrated in the broader Nigerian context, girls do slightly more of it (Putnick & Bornstein 2016). Moreover, Putnick & Bornstein (2016)'s analysis also suggests

that boys do more work than girls overall, given they do more work outside the home (paid or unpaid work in agriculture, services, and industry) and in family work (usually unpaid work done for the family in e.g. agriculture or family enterprises), a phenomenon which renders boys' work outside the home sphere less visible. Though scholars have highlighted the constraints that the temporality of morning household chores poses for the achievement of SDG 4 (quality education), particularly for girls in contexts where their share of chores is significantly higher than those of boys (Rai *et al.* 2019), the evidence in this article suggests parents perceive children's household work as a form of learning which they must inculcate—given that it will not be taught at school—and whose absence challenges children's achievement of necessary, communally valued functional skills. While incorporating a gender perspective (Rai *et al.* 2019) into the concept of Ọmọlúàbí enables a deeper exploration of household work among the rural Yorùbá and potentially offers opportunities for increasing rural girls' and boys' participation in schooling, the extent to which formal schooling itself *should* contend with existing parental ethnotheories in the way it currently does merits greater attention in discourse about contemporary rural African childhoods.

Evidently, the findings highlight the importance of the concept of Ọmọlúàbí among the Yorùbá. This importance, and the ways in which parents and adult members of Yorùbá communities seek to instil the concept during childhood, have been underscored by various scholars (e.g. Akinwale 2013; Busari *et al.* 2017, etc.). However, while scholars have explored how *Ọmọlúàbí* values are transmitted through verbal and physical discipline (e.g. Busari *et al.* 2017) and traditional (Akinyemi 2003) and popular art forms (Omobowale *et al.* 2019), few have detailed, as this article does, the tangible activities that parents and adults use to develop *Ọmọlúàbí* children and equip them with the requisite functional skills for adulthood (Nsamenang 2006). Such tangible acts are arguably the primary means of *Ọmọlúàbí* transmission unlike discipline which is a response to children who challenge this transmission, and oral art, which supplements these tangible forms.

The findings presented in this article suggest a broadened notion of *Ọmọlúàbí* which incorporates religious and European education as well as economic self-sustenance. This aligns with scholars (for example, Nsamenang & Lamb 1993) who have suggested that rural parents' reconceptualised ethnotheories seek to meet the realities of contemporary lives while maintaining, to some extent, traditional ones. For example, the broader study within which this article is situated demonstrated that while apprenticeships are a traditional practice, their resurgence in the two research communities is a direct reaction to the extreme, protracted unemployment facing young, particularly rural, Nigerians post tertiary schooling.

Socio-cultural and contemporary ethnotheories and conceptions of childhood within rural contexts have, therefore, become interwoven with wider national and transnational socio-economic and political dynamics (Abebe 2007). One implication

of this is the imperative to consider traditional as well as rural lives as they are embedded within their contemporary contexts. Another is that broadened ethnotheories heighten the tensions manifest in children's varied capabilities to realise the range of desired activities and expectations. This is primarily because children's agency is interdependent upon and negotiated with parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, friends, and other community members; and exercised under certain conditions and in specific situations and spaces (Abebe 2019). Though the findings suggest some parents recognise the contentions which may arise from these intersections, resolving them requires strategies which incorporate the wider national and transnational socio-economic and political structures which underpin such contests. As various scholars have noted (e.g. Bourdillon 2006; Imoh *et al.* 2019, etc.), this ultimately requires eschewing binary categorisations of childhood and ethnotheories towards relational examinations of the intersection of diverse beliefs and structures; the afforded opportunities and inherent tensions; and the everyday, socio-spatial lives (Farrugia & Wood 2017) that children are able to live.

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Ordinary childhoods and everyday Islamic practices of protection and care in Zanzibar

Franziska Fay

Abstract: In Zanzibar, religiously framed practices impact children's socialisation. Many actions that frame Zanzibari children's everyday lives—from birth rituals, to poetry recitation, to formal education—are closely tied to Islam. With ninety-nine percent of Zanzibaris identifying as Muslim, this sense of identity is fostered and transmitted from when a child is born. This article explores how conceptions of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' reflect in early socialisation practices that address Muslim Zanzibari children's lives, centrally by drawing on knowledge published in three booklets on Islam and child rearing acquired in Zanzibar Town in 2014 and 2021. It thereby shows how religious practices co-construct childhoods and underlines the need to pay attention to less extraordinary aspects and meanings of how being young and pious in contemporary African settings are made.

Keywords: Childhood, Islam, socialisation, everyday, protection, care, Zanzibar.

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Introduction

In order to continue decolonising how we think about African children's lives—also within the academy and as scholars of childhood and youth—we need to deepen our understandings of children's realities beyond moments of marginalisation and hardship. While many children, without doubt, continue to live under extremely difficult circumstances in sub-Saharan African countries, they too live ordinary lives that are structured and shaped by everyday practices of socialisation. It is pressing to counter and balance the overwhelming focus on the challenges and the generalising discourses that are produced about childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa as they 'are closely associated with extreme or difficult circumstances,' for this kind of 'portrayal of African childhoods has eclipsed the mundanities of everyday life for many children whose lives are not characterised by "lacks" and difficulties' (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016: 456). This dimension of the everyday—of the ordinary as the extraordinary's twin—with a specific contextual focus on one Muslim-majority setting, is at the centre of this article. With the words of Stanley Cavell, it is the acknowledgement of the 'small things in response to tumultuous things' (cited in Das 2007: xiv) in children's lives, of 'the spectacular as nevertheless grounded in the routines of everyday life' (Das 2007: 163), that I focus on here.

In Zanzibar, some of those 'small' and less 'tumultuous' things include Muslim socialisation practices that frame and structure children's lives and their becoming as pious persons. In this article I explore how notions of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' (Das 2007) permeate early socialisation practices that address Muslim Zanzibari children's lives. I engage closely with Zanzibari knowledge productions to show how religious practices and processes productively co-construct childhoods in one specific African context and to contribute to a more multidimensional understanding of childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa. In Zanzibar children centrally partake in the worlds they live in through Islam. Many of the ordinary actions that co-constitute Zanzibari children's everyday lives are thus deeply infused by religious belief. With ninety-nine percent of Zanzibaris identifying as Muslim, this sense of identity is fostered from when a child is born.

In order to stray from the wide array of literature on, for example, working children, children living in the street, children affected by illness, and children's involvement in conflict, this article speaks to a less public and politicised domain of children's lives in Zanzibar: Islamic socialisation practices as they are theorised and invoked with meaning during children's early years of growing up. I engage the theoretical framework of the 'everyday' and the 'ordinary' and three booklets on Islam and child rearing that were distributed by religious book sellers[1] in Zanzibar Town between

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[1] All books were procured at either the book stalls outside Masjid Jibril on Tharia Street, the Duka la Vitabu na Dawa za Asili on Market Street, or another similar shop just off Market Street near Shamshu and Sons Pharmacy.

2014–21. During this period, I regularly visited Islamic bookstores in urban Zanzibar to enquire about new publications on child rearing in Islam. The three booklets I draw on in this article were those that were available upon my inquiries and that explicitly set out religious guidelines for rearing and socialising children. In 2021, when I procured the most recent booklet I will discuss, the other two booklets were still on sale and presented to me as the only other booklets available on the matter.

Islam, childhood and the 'everyday' in Zanzibar

In the Zanzibar context, both children and Islam[2] are ordinary and omnipresent categories to think with. Children below the age of 18 make for 48 per cent of Zanzibar's population.[3] The Swahili cultural context within which the majority of Zanzibari children grow up has often been described as deeply Islamic. In order to be considered 'truly Swahili,' being a Muslim is required (Knappert 2005: 182). In public discourse in Zanzibar religious leaders hold unchallenged moral authority and this too applies to discourses on children and childhood. While Islam is the dominant religion in the archipelago, it also presents an ever changing and non-static phenomenon with its 'discursive tradition' taking a unique shape in this context (Anjum 2007). The highly diverse interpretations and practices of Islam imply, for example, that being a 'good Muslim' means different things, 'based on locally grounded and morally imbued interpretations of the Islamic tradition' (Inhorn & Sargent 2006: 5).

In the archipelago most people know what a child is, what the category of child speaks to, through Islam. However, as much as children and Islam are consistent parts of everyday life in Zanzibar, little attention has been attributed to those realms in which the categories intersect and indeed induce each other with meaning. According to Veena Das (1989: 264), a child is 'not only an object of commands and manipulation,' but also a 'civilizational obsession' as 'every stage in childhood is marked by ritual that incorporates the child into the society.' I suggest that there is a need to engage more deeply with this civilisational obsession and with children's societal incorporation through everyday care practices in the context of Zanzibar by turning to Islam and its assigned practices as a lens on the everyday. Simultaneously we can

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[2] The form Islam takes in Zanzibar and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa 'is shaped by a history of constant debate and linked to power struggles in the region' (Kresse 2007: 81). Therefore, the variety of African countries' historical encounters with Islam makes it difficult to support a notion of 'a single, African Islam' (Loimeier 2013: 11). Islam in Zanzibar is thus best considered a multi-layered phenomenon that is defined by how people interpret and translate the respective ideas into their everyday lives. Even though some important markers reappear in various forms in this geographic region, the context here also shapes the form that religion takes (Asad [1986] (2009).

[3] National Bureau of Statistics (2018).

broaden our understanding of Islam through the lens of the child 'as a "stage" that could be reactivated at any point in one's lifetime' (Han 2021: 5).

However, in public discourse both childhood and Islam in Africa are frequently invoked with negative connotations and associations rather than multi-layered representations that reflect the complexity and varieties of reality. The '"African child" has become a rather static and one-dimensional symbol,' one that 'obscures the wide diversity in children and renders those that do not suffer "the African way" invisible' (Hengeveld 2012). In the collective Western imagination, and co-shaped by media portrayals, the child in an African context 'has turned into a 'type'; a type with a typical and singular story of despair and helplessness' (Hengeveld 2012). Maria Hengeveld's (2012) line of argument that critically attends to the category of 'child' can be adapted to the way in which the media attends to religion, specifically to Islam. Here too, shortcomings usually simplify the Muslim faith in accordance with that same collective Western imagination in which Islam has become a type frequently defined by a single story of radicalisation and disempowerment. In this context it is largely (male) youth and women who veil on whom such imaginaries are projected. 'Islam', like the 'African child', is commonly not imagined as a multi-dimensional symbol, but instead, reduced to a static, and problematic, category, that renders all Muslims worldwide into potential terrorists or people without voice or agency (Soares & Osella 2009; Mamdani 2002). The diversity of experiences that Muslims make in different parts of the world and within the same communities thereby become invisible and exclude everyday ordinary Islam and its associated practices from that mainstream imagination.

The notion of the everyday has proved to be particularly helpful in drawing out how children's experiences, such as those that are frequently conceptualised and condemned as violence or an interruption to the everyday, are a steady part of many children's ordinary everyday lives (Fay 2021; Scheper-Hughes 1992). It is certainly important to acknowledge that 'risk is pervasive in poor communities, a feature not simply of "extraordinary" childhoods, but an integral part of everyday, "ordinary" lives in which the young negotiate multiple challenges' (Crivello & Boyden 2014: 380). Nevertheless, a focus on the less spectacular or shocking aspects that structure children's realities can help to contextualise some practices viewed out of context. I thus focus on some mundane Islamic practices of care to disrupt the dominant focus on the everyday in suffering and understand it also through practices and spaces of specific non-suffering. To balance the existing excess of observations of the everyday and ordinary through children's pain and violence—that which to many observers remains extraordinary—I consider everyday acts of Islamic child rearing and socialisation in Zanzibar, to bring attention to some of the quotidian and ordinary 'questions, answers and judgements that prevail' (Parkin 2017: 549) in childcare discourse and practice.

In my understanding of the 'everyday,' I follow Samuli Schielke (2019: 3) who considers it 'an attribute, a qualifier that characterises the recurring, goes-without-saying, undramatic, pragmatic and regular livelihood-related qualities of actions, situations, experiences and ways of reasoning vis-à-vis their potential extraordinary, dramatic, liminal, systematically reflected qualities'; who argues that 'nearly all things and situations mediated by human interaction that can be everyday can also be exceptional and extraordinary.' Particularly Schielke's attention to the duality of the everyday—its possibility of both ordinary- and extraordinariness—underlines the need to keep our positionality in mind. When viewed from the position of their actors, or the respective setting, the everyday Islamic practices of care and socialisation directed at children by parents and guardians, teachers and religious leaders in Zanzibari communities that I look at in what follows are perfectly ordinary.

The everyday, is also connected to the concept of ethics. Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando (2015: 63) describe 'everyday life' as presenting 'a series of challenges that require ethical decision-making: should one meet a colleague in a café that serves alcohol? Should a woman alone ride in a taxi with a male driver? Should one go to a mosque study group if one's husband is firmly against it? These are all questions that pertain to piety as much as they do to the domain of the everyday.' Following their perspective, I draw on this interwovenness of the everyday with the ethical which is 'intrinsic to action' (Lambek 2010: 39), or habit 'as a mode of routine and repetition that makes everyday life appear as if given, a flywheel of society' (Das 2018: 538).

Thus, the fact that children are actors in and of everyday Islamic practice also means that through these practices children learn to differentiate what is locally considered ethical and what is not. And they are socialised into the ethical standards of the communities in which they live—into their own moral local lives. If we understand the ethical as 'the site of both repetition and newness' (Das *et al.* 2014: 3) this is located where Zanzibari children have been and will probably continue to undergo the same Islamic childcare practices, without being able to ever fully predict how external circumstances may contribute to add something unforeseen. The moral in the sphere of childhood and Islam in Zanzibar is thus expressed and best observed in the routines, habits and 'small events of everyday life' (Das 2015: 117; Das 2010: 376) such as the practices considered in the following section.

Methodology

The three booklets[4] I discuss in this article are called 'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' (*Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa*), 'The Teachings of Islam about

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[4] Other booklets generally contained more educational material such as Arabic learning manuals.

Child Rearing' (*Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto*) and 'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' (*Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara*). While 'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' engages with the immediate period after a child is born and the proper and considered to be necessary rituals of socialising the child into the world in accordance with Islam, 'The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing' mentions the same rituals but also speaks about the relationship and responsibility of the parents in the context of raising a child in accordance with Islamic beliefs. Both booklets emphasise the particular vulnerability of young children to spiritual interferences from, for example, bad spirits of the devil and underline the need to protect them from it. 'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' speaks directly to the need of decreasing hitting children as part of their upbringing and equally centres the role and responsibility of the parents in this matter.

All booklets speak to questions concerning children's protection and safety by drawing on everyday Islamic practices of guaranteeing those characteristics. I argue that these three booklets present a Zanzibari discourse on what in globalised policy terms is frequently referred to as 'child protection' but that remains insufficiently connected to, and integrative of, local conceptualisations of how to guarantee children's protection and safety. The booklets offer a selection of aspects that children are understood to be vulnerable to and thus in need of both physical and spiritual protection from in Zanzibar—they present critical insights into child socialisation as understood from within Zanzibari Muslim communities first.

I analysed the content of the booklets by translating[5] it into English in regard to respective themes that occur in English speaking discourses on childcare and protection. I then put the booklets' content in conversation with some research participants' commentary that I collected while undertaking long-term ethnographic fieldwork on child protection in 2014/2015. This sort of discourse analysis allows to unravel the multitude of angles that exist of concepts such as protection and care. In reference to 'children' I do not focus on a specific age group in this article following that the contour of the categories of adulthood and childhood is unstable and only 'comes to be formed in relation to the other' (Das 2015: 60), and that both childhood and adulthood are 'created in the context of actual interactions between adults and children' (Das 2015: 79). Instead, I turn my attention, more broadly, to 'children' as they are mentioned and addressed in the material and discussions I draw on.

At the time the data was collected I was undertaking 18 months of doctoral fieldwork on child protection in Zanzibar. This anthropological research on child protection and the many meanings of the concept allowed me to engage with a variety of existing discourses that co-constitute how children are understood to be safe and

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[5] All translations my own.

protected during their younger years and as they grow up to be adults. It was through this ethnographic approach and by working with religious leaders who were involved in internationally initiated child protection programmes that I learned about the booklets that I centre in this discussion. Due to my fluency in Swahili I was able to conduct all interviews and translations independently. As part of my research training at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) I had additionally completed a training on ethical conduct in the context of research with children. Informed consent for the participation in research activities and the publication of material was provided by all child and adult research participants at the onset of fieldwork and continuously renegotiated throughout.

I choose this approach to respond to some blind spots in the study of childhood and religion. In Zanzibar, Islamic practices give structure to children's lives. Thus, Islam—or rather the embodied experiences of it—for Zanzibari children is interwoven and inseparable from the fabric that is everyday life. And religiously grounded practices of care, such as those I will discuss in what follows, are part of the 'texture of the ordinary' (Das 2020) in Zanzibar. Nevertheless, within anthropology and beyond, childhood has rarely been considered in relation to the 'neglected areas of well-being sometimes referred to as "spiritual"' (Bourdillon 2014: 497), and within the anthropology of Islam only occasionally links have been made to children as agentive, and positive, producers of its realm. I ask: What does it do when we repeatedly speak in a certain way about childhood and Islam? And why are there so few accounts that consider the ordinary overlaps of what it means to be young and Muslim in Africa within each other's domains—Islam as a lens to understanding childhood, and children as agents through whom to better understand religion?

Understanding everyday childcare and protection practices through religious booklets

I came to be interested in Islamic religious booklets on child rearing and care by way of the references that the religious leaders who were among my research interlocutors on child protection frequently made use of. Such booklets were explained to me to generally be written by well-regarded religious teachers and scholars who are referred to by the honorific title of *ustadh*. Similar to other guidebooks on all areas and questions of life as regarded from an Islamic point of view, those that engage with questions of child rearing were available at Islamic book stores or stalls commonly located next to, or nearby, mosques across Zanzibar Town. These booklets—and in what follows I focus on those three that were available to me between 2014–21—outlined in detail Islamic rites of infancy. As accessible guiding sources they are intended to contribute to children's well-being in their communities. The

booklets explain in brief those practices regarded to serve 'to incorporate the child into the human society as a whole and particularly into the Muslim community' (Giladi 1992: 35). As some of children's earliest experiences, these theorisations of religious ritual practices emphasise the authority of Islam as a defining discourse to everyday life that co-determines the approach to assuring children's well-being from early on.

Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa—'Things to be Done to a Child at Birth' (Booklet 1)

The first booklet I acquired from a Stone Town religious bookshop, *Mambo ya Kufanyiwa Mtoto Anapozaliwa* ('Things to be Done to a Child at Birth'; Shabaan n.d.) (see Figure 1), written by J. Shaaban, summarises what according to Islam is considered necessary to be performed on children to assure their well-being, safety, and protection after birth. The booklet is structured in eleven sections on different themes that offer a combination of a short content in Swahili with sura from the Qur'an and Swahili translations thereof, including amongst other topics: Congratulations for giving birth (*bishara na pongezi kwa kupata mtoto*), reading a newborn the *Adhan* and *Ikama* upon birth (*kuadhiniwa mtoto akizaliwa*), to feed them something sweet (*kumlambisha kitu kitamu*), to shave their hair (*kumnyoa nywele*), to give them a name (*kumwita jina*), slaughter of sheep/goat as sacrifice (*akika kwa ajili yake*), circumcision (*khitani na hukumu yake*), and some others.

Upon a child's birth it is common practice to read the Adhan, the Islamic call to prayer, into the right ear and the Ikama, *the second call to prayer,* into the left ear (*kuadhiniwa mtoto akizaliwa*). This call to prayer is understood as the words of God which are intended as the first a child should hear (Shaaban n.d.: 6). They are considered to hold specific protective power over the child. The sura Yasini is said to protect both the child and mother (Ingrams 1931: 228). The purpose of the practice is explained so 'the child will not be affected (*hatohudhuriwa*) by Ummu Subyaani, a Jinni that follows and harms (*kuwadhuru*) children' (Shaaban n.d.: 5). The practice of feeding the child something sweet (*kumlambisha kitu kitamu*) like a pressed date or honey, also called tahnik, is said to have been done by the Prophet himself. Following this, on the first, third, or seventh day after birth, the child should be named (*kumwita jina*; Shaaban n.d.: 7).

On the seventh day after birth, a child's hair should be shaved (*kumnyoa nywele*); the weight of this hair (*uzani wa nywele za ujusi*) should be measured against money/silver, and the hair should be buried in the ground (*zifukiwe ardhini*) (Ingrams 1931: 197). One of my female long-term Swahili teachers and regular discussion partner in her forties explained this practice as follows: 'We believe this hair is not good. The
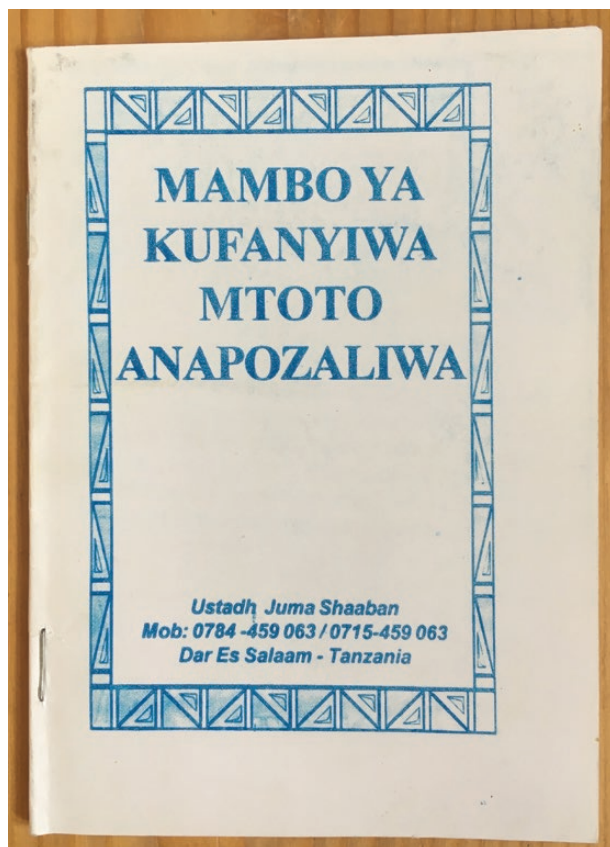
Figure 1. Booklet on the things to be done to a child at birth. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2014. 10 × 14 cm, 16 pages.

state/atmosphere (*hali ya hewa*[6]) is different outside the womb in the worldly life (*maisha ya dunia*) so it needs to go and grow anew.' The Akika—the slaughter of two goats for a male child and one goat for a female child (*akika kwa ajili yake*)—should also be done on the seventh day (8). 'If you don't have money,' another conversation partner noted on this practice, 'you can slaughter them later, but it must be done before the child reaches puberty (*kufika baleghe*). You do this as an offering and to give thanks to God for giving you a child. Men get two goats because they carry more responsibility than women.'[7]

All these customary practices recommended for Muslim Zanzibari children emphasise a newborn child's immediate need to be socially engaged, to be treated as, and made into, a member of her or his respective community. They reflect the value and status of children as inevitably entangled in Zanzibari everyday reality and

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[6] Lit. 'the weather'.

[7] For Muslim Zanzibari mothers, childbirth is followed by the *arobaini*, a period of forty days of seclusion of the mother and the newborn.

underline the personhood even of a newborn, for example, through acknowledging that they too may be prone to, and must thus be protected from, possession by evil.

In line with the above, many of my interlocutors in Zanzibar also considered the Qur'an itself to have medical and protective powers for children. 'The whole Qur'an is medicine (*dawa*),' one sheikh emphasised, as he explained its specific application. Qur'anic medicine (*kombe*) was explained to me as commonly practised by religious authorities and as consisting of writing sura from the Qur'an with saffron-coloured ink onto a plate, dissolving the script in rose water, and then either washing oneself with the liquid or drinking it (Nieber 2017). I was told that Qur'anic medicine also consisted, for example, of sura written on a piece of paper, wrapped in some cloth, and worn on the body as a talisman or protective charm (*hirizi*). In urban Zanzibar, but much more frequently in the villages away from Zanzibar Town, I frequently observed children wearing necklaces on which hung small packets that contained sura. Similar constructions could be observed suspended from ceilings on lengths of thread or hung on doors in several of my interlocutors' houses to, as commonly explained to me, ward off 'the evil' (Ingrams 1931: 462). Whether I noticed them on children or in houses, they were everyday rituals of protection.[8]

Even though the use of Qur'anic medicine seemed to be widely accepted, the preparation and use of hirizi were also sometimes contested. Despite their incorporation of Qur'anic sura, they were occasionally considered more 'cultural' than 'religious' and thus, for some people, even antireligious. A female neighbour in her thirties, for example, explained her opposition to the use of hirizi:

> Local healers *(waganga)* and not sheikhs make *hirizi* for children. Here in town there are only few. It doesn't agree with religion (*haiendi na dini*). If you want to protect (*kumlinda*) a child with spirits (*majini*), then what are you worshiping (*unaabudu nini*)? Allah? Or someone else? That's why it's inappropriate (*haifai*) and town people don't like it. In the villages (*shambani*) you find it a lot. Here in town there are no *waganga* who deal with those matters.

Her discomfort with mixing religious and cultural practice pointed to the tension around the compatibility of the Zanzibari Islamic religious and Swahili cultural spheres. As mentioned, even though *hirizi* contain Qur'anic sura that are believed to have protective and curative powers, their use through charms to protect children from evil spirits was occasionally considered blasphemy. However, as another sheikh

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[8] In practices that made use of *hirizi* the religious and the cultural spheres in Zanzibar overlapped. *Hirizi* (protective charms) draw on Qur'anic verses' protective power and are considered to lie between religion (*dini*) and 'tradition' (*mila*). The opposition of these two categories is problematic, because at the conceptual level 'it artificially isolates what occurs together or is intermingled in real life' (Middleton 1992: 162). In daily life in Zanzibar, religious and cultural practices commonly complemented each other and overlapped to the extent of being genuinely intertwined as to 'describe a continuum' (Loimeier & Seesemann 2006: 10).

made clear: 'The two most important things for the protection of children (*kinga*[9] *za watoto*) are safety (*usalama*) and health (*afya*). To protect children from diseases caused by spirits (*majini*) we use *hirizi*. Some people say using *hirizi* is against Islam and blasphemy, but this is a lack of knowledge and not true.' His emphasis on health and safety as central to understanding how children's well-being was best assured underline not only the fundamental consensus on children's need for protection but also the expectation to achieve it through religious practice, whether contested or not.

This resonates with David Parkin's description of the use of Qur'anic verses in therapy as causing tension between 'high-placed Muslims influenced by Wahhabism or Salafism' and 'ordinary Muslims.' According to him, 'the former denounce this particular use of the Qur'an as 'superstition' and disrespectful of the Holy Book, while also accepting that God is the source of all successful healing' while

> ordinary Muslims, including divinatory healers, do not normally argue among themselves over the pros and cons of the Wahhabi viewpoint, preferring to go about their everyday business of using Qur'anic verses for kombe and the Holy Book itself as an object in healing and in talking about healing. But, as in this account, they clearly do not condemn the therapeutic use of the Qur'an; in fact, they see it as essential. They say that it is using the benefits of God's work and is therefore both moral and professionally ethical (Parkin 2017: 542).

In Zanzibar my interlocutors' actions and narratives directed at children's care were seldom separable from Islam so that depictions of the boundaries between what was considered 'cultural' (*kitamaduni*) and what vernacular, or 'traditional' (*kienyeji*) practice varied greatly between people. The publicly contested compatibility of Zanzibari-Swahili culture and religion was often visibly undermined by my research participants' lived realities, which were shaped by close-knit combinations of both. Religious protection rituals aligned with 'cultural' rites of care, and both centred around children's health and safety in their everyday environments.

The owner of a small pharmacy of alternative medicine explained to me some of the protective health practices that he recommended when his customers asked for ingredients or cures to heal children's ailments. According to him 'anything can be prepared as protection/prevention (*kinga*) for children' and amongst those were *mvuje*, and *hirizi*:

> You can protect with *mvuje*,[10] which is like a tree, and garlic (*kitunguu thomu*) in a black cloth (*kitambaa cheusi*) tied to a child's arm. Children wear *mvuje* like a watch (*kama saa*) as a protection. Children are also clothed (*kuvishwa*) with *hirizi* to protect them (*kumlinda*) from bad spirits. *Hirizi* consist of a piece of paper with a sura from the Qur'an bound into a special tin (*kibati maalum*) or into a piece of cloth. The child wears it like a bracelet (*kidani*). All this is protection.

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[9] Lit. 'prevention'.

[10] The *mvuje* mix consists of wheat flour (*unga wa ngano*), *mvuje*, and gum arabicum.

This understanding of children's well-being and safety, grounded in Islamic belief and medical understandings of caring for children, was repeated by research participants of various ages and genders. Another interlocutor emphasised the importance of using medicinal herbs (*dawa za mitishamba*) to keep children safe and so guarantee their physical well-being and bodily integrity.

> As protection from the devil, you put kohl (*wanja*) on their eyes, both for boys and girls. It must be a special, soft *wanja* without sand in it. You use soot (*masinzi*) with ghee (*samli*) or fat (*mafuta*). This *wanja la kombe* (religious magical kohl) is also called *hasadi*. You can continue doing that even after the *arobaini*, to protect the child (*kumkinga*) from jealousy (*husda*).

Both conversation partners conceptualised care through notions of the body and health. Primarily, they understood children's well-being as a form of preventing disease, treating pain, and protecting them from supernatural harm: it was often believed that childhood illness is 'caused by the evil eye' (Boswell 2011: 105). Treatments with *mvuje, jimbo*, or *wanja* therefore serve as 'a protection from harm' (127). The many ways of protecting children in society according to Swahili-Zanzibari 'cultural' practices—whether tying *hirizi* to their body, applying kohl to their face, bathing or fumigating newborns in herbal concoctions—are all interwoven with Islamic belief to guarantee they are cared for, to assure their cure or well-being. People's differing perspectives on practices of care and healing thus emphasise the multiple viewpoints on Islamic care practices for Zanzibari children.

Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto—'The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing' (Booklet 2)

A second slightly longer booklet titled *Mafunzo ya Kiislam Kuhusu Malezi ya Watoto* ('The Teachings of Islam about Child Rearing') (see Figure 2), written by Baragashi Mswagala, was structured similarly to the first booklet with brief elaborations in Swahili, *sura* from the Qur'an, and passages from the *hadith* in Arabic with accompanying Swahili translations. Nevertheless, in this booklet the author describes Islamic child rearing to begin with the 'search for a suitor/ looking for a fiancé' (*kutafuta mchumba*), instead of with the birth of a child as outlined in the previous booklet, or pregnancy as the onset of parenting:

> Islamic child rearing begins from when you begin to look for a fiancé, if/for the fiancé is/ must be pious; for if a woman is pious even her children will be pious and obedient to a large degree, because the children do not only inherit their mother's features/look or other things, but they inherit also her character/manners/behaviour.[11] (Mswagala 2014: 6)

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[11] *Malezi ya Kiislamu kwa Watoto yanaanzia tokea katika kutafuta mchumba, kwani mchumba akiwa mchamungu; yaani mke akiwa mchamungu basi hata Watoto wake pia watakuwa wachamungu na watiifu kwa asilimia kubwa, kwa sababu Watoto hawarithi sura ya mama yao tu au vitu vingine bali wanarithi na tabia yake.*

Figure 2. Booklet on the teachings of Islam about child rearing. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2014. 15 × 20 cm, 40 pages.

Thus, the author sums up, raising children in Islam begins 'when parents start dating' (*wazazi wanavyo chumbiana*), 'get married' (*wanavyo oana*), and when they 'consume their marriage' (*tenda tendo la ndoa*). If Islamic procedures are followed regarding these matters, the child that will be born 'will be good through the grace of God' (*atakuwa mwema kwa uwezo wa Allah SW)* (Mswagala 2014: 11). This alternative perspective onto the actual beginning of Islamic child rearing puts not the child, but the parents at the centre of the practice and emphasises the responsibility of the adult to adhere to religious practice to assure a child's moral becoming. It also reflects the relationality of children as social beings who come to grow up in community with others, in which something considered as ordinary as dating a potential partner may be given more meaning for the actual child's life than for the adults involved. Further, the sole reflection on women's characteristics in the quotation also reflects the heavily gendered nature of the booklets and the views they present. Exclusively written by men and communicating a sole male perspective on matters of child rearing, this poses a curious fact keeping in mind that in everyday life in Zanzibar this domain usually remains assigned to women.

Only then does the booklet move on to consider what it is that parents should do in accordance with Islamic law (*nini wazazi wanatakiwa wafanye kwa mujibu wa she-ria za Kiislamu*). Baragashi Mswagala begins by describing three steps the previous booklet laid out as relevant: reading of the Adhan (*kumuadhinia*), a special prayer to protect/prevent the child from the devil (*dua maalum la kumkinga mtoto na shetani*), and the ritual slaughter of a goat (*kumfanyia akika*). Regarding the reading of the *Adhan* upon a child's birth the author offers the following explanation:

> ... [it serves] to protect the child from evil spirits or demons. Evil spirits usually possess and harm children to affect them badly until they reach adulthood, but when the *Adhana* has been read to them those evil spirits and demons run away and don't come again. So when the child is not read the *Adhan* on their day of birth, there is no surprise if that child will be bad and lacking goodness or being disobedient, for they have already taken on evil mannerism/ character/ behaviour due to being affected by that spirit/ demon/ devil since their childhood. It takes hard work to fix/ correct this.[12] (Mswagala 2014: 12–13)

This protection from evil—a part of ordinary everyday reality—is also described in connection to the mother saying a 'special prayer' (*dua maalum*) for the child in order to ask Allah 'to protect the child from evil' (*amkinge na shetani*) (Mswagala 2014: 13). And even in regard to the *Akika*, it is stated that a child for whom no *Akika* has been performed 'cannot be expected to be in a safe place in this earthly life' (*asitarajiwe kuwa katika hali salama katika maisha yake ya hapa duniani*) (Mswagala 2014: 15). The duality of good and bad as constituting of everyday life is here also considered in direct connection to its potential effects on children. This resonates with another female interlocutor's assessment of preventive child care against potential harm:

> The biggest harm for children is the devil/a demon[13] (*shetani*). Children must be protected (*alindwe*) so they won't be changed by it. When the mother goes to the bathroom, someone should look after the child so the devil cannot change it. That's also why at the *magharibi* prayer children must come inside, as during that time demons (*mashetani*) roam about (*wana-randa*). Staying inside is a good protection (*kinga*). In Islam we believe that children's bodies may be entered by demons who will make them do abnormal things (*siyo vya kawaida*) while the child is still healthy (*mzima*).

Children's vulnerability to supernatural harm and need for protection from it reflect the fragility of the state of childhood and the attention needed to assure children's

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[12] *... nayo ni kumlinda na pepo wabaya au mashetani wa kijini. Mapepo wabaya kwa kawaida huwaendea Watoto na kuwadhuru ili kuwapa athari mbaya mpaka ukubwani mwao, lakini wakiadhiniwa basi hayo mapepo mabaya mashetani yanakimbia na hayamjii tena. Hivyo mtoto asiyo adhinia katika ile siku aliyoza-liwa, hakuna ajabu kwa mtoto huyo akiwa muovu, na kukosa kuwa mwema kabisa au kukosa kuwa mtiifu, kwani ameshakuwa na tabia za kishetani kutokana na kuathiriwa na huyo shetani tokea utotoni mwakeo! Inahitajika kazi kubwa kumrekebisha.*

[13] Although demons/spirits may cause children harm, I was also occasionally told that they could also protect children if it was a good demon (*shetani mzuri*).

well-being. Even though Zanzibari children are considered 'pure,' they are also regarded as 'vulnerable to evil and pollution' (Boswell 2011: 105).

Alongside the practices of the *Adhan*, the special prayer and the *Akika*, Mswagala describes the child's socialisation process as a matter in need of particular attention:

> For when a child reaches an age of understanding (*umri wa kufahamu*), or put differently 'an age of knowing bad and good' (*umri wa kujua baya na jema*), it is explained that parents need to be particularly careful in regard 'to do evil deeds in front of them' (*kutenda matendo maovu mbele yake*) for those may have a bad effect on that child (Mswagala 2014: 15).

Finally, this booklet also draws out the importance of teaching a child about prayer (*kufundisha swala*). 'When a child turns seven years, they shall begin to be taught how to pray ... they shall be taught that prayer well so they will pray correctly and get used to it until they will come to consider it a great sin to miss/leave it'[14] (Mswagala 2014: 26). The hadith the author draws on to emphasise this claim is the following: 'Instruct your children to pray at the time when they reach seven years, and hit them if they neglect their prayers from when they are ten years old, and separate them for sleeping (between girls and boys)'[15] (Mswagala 2014: 26). Even though several of my conversation partners repeatedly pointed me to this hadith and cited it as the central source to contextualising physical discipline in the context of Islam, there were as many people I spoke to who disapproved of its literal translation, interpretation and application.

Overall it is the emphasis on the 'responsibility of parents, religious leaders and teachers' (*wajibu wa wazazi, maimamu na waalimu*) as important actors in the Islamic socialisation process of children in Zanzibar, that is repeatedly stressed throughout this booklet and the ways in which the respective care practices are explained, that unravel a Zanzibari understanding of care and protection as it is embedded in everyday community life. A final reference that speaks to this collaboration makes this clear:

> There needs to be great collaboration between parents at home, religious leaders in the mosques and teachers at the madrasas (Qur'anic schools) and schools, because it is the parents who build the child's body, the religious leaders who build their soul/ spirit and the teachers who build their mind/ intellect, therefore it is necessary they work together.[16] (Mswagala 2014: 31)

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[14] *... anapofika huyo mtoto na umri wa miaka saba, aanze kufundishwa swala ... afundishwe vizuri hiyo swala ili awe anaiswali kiusahihi, aizoee mpaka aone ni dhambi kubwa kuiacha.*

[15] *... waamrisheni Watoto wenu kuswali hali wao wana umri wa miaka 7, nawapigeni wakizembea hali wao wakiwa na umri wa miaka kumi, na watenganisheni kulala [kati ya Watoto wa kike na wa kiume].*

[16] *Unatakiwa uwepo ushirikiano mkubwa kati ya wazazi majumbani, maimamu misikitini na waalimu huko madrasani au mashuleni, kwani wazazi wanajenga mwili wa mtoto, maimamu wanajenga roho ya mtoto na waalimu wanajenga akili ya mtoto, kwahiyo lazima washirikiane.*

Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara— 'Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time' (Booklet 3)

A third booklet I was able to procure from a religious bookstore in Zanzibar Town in July 2021 is titled *Hatua 13 za Kuanza Kumlea Mtoto Bila Kumpiga Mara Kwa Mara* ('Thirteen Steps to Begin Raising a Child Without Hitting Them from Time to Time') (see Figure 3) and authored by Hassan Hassan J. from Tabora, Tanzania (n.d.). Inside the booklet the subtitle *Furahia Malezi ya Mtoto Wako* (Enjoy Raising Your Child) is included. In opposition to the previous booklet that drew on a hadith to suggest a child should be hit when she or he neglects her or his prayers from the age of ten, this booklet takes a decided stance against hitting and draws on a different selection of hadith to support a non-violent approach to child-rearing.

Hassan J. begins the introduction by setting out that children are the moral responsibility in order to fulfil one's obligations that are considered to be due to Allah and that the work of raising children is to be implemented in a heartfelt and cheerful way, for children are a gift[17] (Hassan n.d.: 2). He goes on to describe the goal of raising children as to prepare them to become of use (*kuwa wenye manufaa*) to parents/adults, to themselves, and to the community at large, for life on earth and the afterlife. In order to fulfil that, children are supposed to follow the orders of Allah[18] (Hassan n.d.: 2).

The booklet addresses specifically the goal of abstaining from hitting children from time to time and to speak badly to them as part of the child rearing process when they act in undesirable ways[19] (Hassan n.d.: 2). The continuation of this state is described by Hassan J. as a sign that the parent does not enjoy raising his or her child[20] (Hassan n.d.: 3). He then sets out that the Prophet Muhammad himself was well known for the way in which he empathised with and loved children, being said to have carried them, kissed them and cried for them when they died[21] (Hassan n.d.: 3). The booklet opens with referring to two hadith,[22] one about Aisha—the third wife of the

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[17] *Watoto ni Amanah tuliyopewa na Allah (s.w). Kuwalea ni kazi ambayo tunatakiwa kuitekeleza kwa moyo mkunjufu huku tukizingatia kwamba Watoto ni zawadi kwetu pia.*

[18] *Malengo ya kuwalea Watoto wetu yanapaswa kuwa ni kuwaandaa kuwa wenye manufaa kwa ajili yetu, kwa ajili yao na kwa ajili ya jamii, katika Maisha ya hapa duniani, na kesho akhera. Wawe ni Watoto wenye kufuata maamrisho ya Allah (s.w) katika Maisha yao ya kila siku.*

[19] *Watoto kupigwa mara kwa mara na kusemwa vibaya pale wanapofanya jambo lisilopendeza.*

[20] *ishara kwamba mzazi hafurahi malezi ya mtoto wake.*

[21] *Mtume Muhammad (s.a.w) anafahamika vema kwa namna alivyokuwa akiwahurumia na kuwapenda Watoto. Alikuwa akiwabeba, akiwabusu, na hata kulia machozi pale walipofariki.*

[22] *Aisha (r.a) ameeleza kuwa Mtume (s.a.w) amesema: 'Hakika Allah ni Mpole, Anapenda upole, na Hutoa ujira Asioutoa kwa jambo linguine lolote wala Hatoi juu ya ukali.' (Muslim) (p.4); Abu Hurairah (r.a) amesimulia: Mtume (s.a.w) amesema: 'Mwenye nguvu sio yule awashindae watu kwa mieleka, bali mwanye nguvu ni anaemiliki nafsi yake wakati wa hasira.' (Muttafaq).*

Figure 3. Booklet on child rearing without corporal punishment. Bought by the author in Zanzibar Town in 2021. 8 × 10 cm, 24 pages.

prophet Muhammad—and one about Abu Hurairah—one of Prophet Muhammad's companions—both pointing out the importance of gentleness (*upole*), and being gentle (*kuwa mpole*), as key characteristics when it comes to child rearing and especially in the context of Islam (Hassan n.d.: 4).

In the sections that follow, Hassan J. sets out what it means to enjoy raising your child, its benefits for parents, and practical examples for implementation. A parent that abstains from using violence or abuse in order to control his or her child and instead makes use of a good relationship and teachings is considered by Hassan J. as the goal[23] (Hassan n.d.: 10). Finally, the author spells out thirteen steps to abstaining from hitting your child at the time of raising them. Alongside being calm (*kuwa mtulivu*) and controlling your anger (*dhibiti hasira zako*), the importance of teaching your child about Islam and demonstrating its implementation (*mfundishe mtoto wako Uislamu na simamia utekelezaji wake*) (Hassan n.d.: 21), as well as studying Islam and

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[23] *Ni mzazi ambaye anajiepusha kutumia vurugu au udhalilishaji ili kumdhibiti mtoto wake, na badala yake hutumia mahusiano mazuri na ufundishaji ...*

implementing it every day (*soma Uislamu na kuutekeleza kila siku*) (Hassan n.d.: 22),
are emphasised as key.

Similar to the other two booklets this booklet on the aspect of child discipline
addresses explicitly the role and behaviour of the parents in child rearing and their
influence in shaping the child by raising them in a particular manner and always in
accordance with Islam. The particular emphasis on gentleness and non-violent child
rearing as Islamic and its derivation from the hadith and physical disciplining tech-
niques suggested in the previous booklet points to the many interpretations that exist
of Muslim religious sources such as hadith in Zanzibar in accordance with whom they
are utilised by and to what end.

Regardless of the different interpretations of religious perspectives on guidance
I encountered, in Zanzibar, Islam was always considered to structure children's devel-
opment and for their developmental stages to be defined by it. Various religious lead-
ers I spoke with referred to what they called the Triple Seven Hadith when I inquired
about Islamic frameworks to child rearing. This hadith was explained to me to indicate
three key stages in life that all Muslim children pass through as they become adults:
1) from birth to age seven, 2) from ages seven to 14, and 3) from 14 until age 21, each
stage lasting for a period of seven years. One well-known Zanzibari religious leader
explained that at each stage a child's particular needs of those years were responded
to through specific forms of child-rearing:[24]

> About child rearing (*malezi ya mtoto*) the Prophet (saw) said: 'Play with them (*chezeni nao*)
> in the first seven years, teach them (*waelimisheni*) from the age of seven, and befriend them
> (*wafanyeni marafiki*) during the third stage.' From birth until age seven, be close to them,
> listen to them and play with them.[25] From seven to 14, rear them (*kumlea*), teach them (*kum-
> somesha*), and give them education (*elimu*) and knowledge (*taaluma*). From 14 to 21 children
> start sitting with the elders (*kukaa na wazee*) and being taught lessons (*mafunzo*). Start treat-
> ing them as friends (*mfanye marafiki*) and do not hide anything from them (*humfichi kitu*).
> After passing through these stages, they are an adult (*mtu mzima*).

The retelling of this broader approach to child rearing and care orients itself towards
the everyday reality of the child at the respective particular age, and it asks the parent
to adjust their behaviour towards the child to the needs of those years. Similar to the
guidance set out in the third booklet it is the child's specific needs at certain moments
in their upbringing and the responsibility of parents to react and respond to them
adequately that are put at the centre here.

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[24] He referred to the Qur'an sura 26, verse 18, and *hadith* Musaffaab (kumsaba'an).
[25] Qur'an sura 12, verse 4 (1–7).

Reconfiguring discourses on African childhoods by centering the ordinary through religious booklets

The insights on childcare and protection that can be gained by engaging closely with alternative sources such as the booklets I discussed contribute to centering a sense of the ordinary that is constituting of children's everyday lives in this part of the world. In her work *Everyday Life*, philosopher Agnes Heller (1970: 3) argued that 'if individuals are to reproduce society, they must reproduce themselves as individuals' and that 'we may define "everyday life" as the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make social reproduction possible.' Such a reproduction of selves and of community—or the reproduction of everyday life, of life, at large—is partly what happens along the lines of the Islamic rules and rituals of caring for children that I have explored. Heller went on to claim:

> No society can exist without individual reproduction, and no individual can exist without self-reproduction. Everyday life exists, then, in every society; indeed, every human being, whatever his place in the social division of labour, has his own everyday life. But this is not to say that the content and structure of everyday life are the same for all individuals in all societies. Reproduction of the person is always of the concrete person: the concrete person occupying a given place in a given society. (Heller 1970: 3)

Following this, it may hold that Zanzibari children's everyday lives and their reproduction and constitution through the respective practices of care, are also a reproduction of the status of child in the social hierarchy of Zanzibari society. The Islamic rules required to reproduce moral Muslim children differ from those needed to make, for example, a moral adult, whether that be a market-seller or a member of parliament. In other words, the knowledge needed to bring the concept of a child in Zanzibar into being, to make it an epistemic reality, is religious at heart, and inseparable 'from the structural system of everyday thinking' (Heller 1970: 49). The knowledge presented in the booklets as well as the accounts of my interlocutors that reiterated or contested it present such a system of everyday thinking about children and their care and protection.

Some of the discourses on African childhoods that I became familiar with while conducting research on internationally initiated child protection programmes in Zanzibar were those of international children's rights organisations like Save the Children or UNICEF. The ways in which childcare and child protection were promoted by these actors were often insufficiently linked to and in conversation with the existing socio-religious discursive system that commonly frames child well-being in Zanzibar and as I have outlined it by means of the three religious booklets. Despite many overlaps in regard to questions of child health, protection and safety, child rearing and protection knowledge, such as that by child rights organisations, thus often remained to be considered as 'professional knowledge' by my research participants but not 'a necessary condition for the reproduction of a particular person born into a given

society' (Heller 1970: 49). This insufficient integration of existing Zanzibari knowledge production on and approaches to the child rearing process fostered a gap between circulating ways of knowing about children and how to care for them. Integrating secular, universalised policy discourses of childhood, protection and well-being with religious, Zanzibari narratives of knowing about these things would strengthen rather than divide the shared goal of keeping children safe as they grow. Due to this disregard, everyday Islamic childcare practices in Zanzibar may thus also be understood as some of the conditions imposed by that respective context that children 'must appropriate and make their own if they are to survive' (Heller 1970: 54).

Paying attention to the small acts of care in children's ordinary everyday lives in Zanzibar—such as those outlined in the booklets—may stand up to the louder events commonly in focus in larger discourses on both African childhoods and Islam. Such attention may aid our ability to transcend narratives that commonly foreground lacks and absences in African children's lives and allow to also see what *is* part of their every-day, already—such as religious ritual practices and ideas that structure their becoming of persons in society. If we shift from 'considerations of individual agency and inten-tionality to the place where we see the individual within the flux of collective life,' as Das (2012: 140) puts it, discourses engaged with African childhoods prove to be mean-ingful in respect to the power they have to speak to, and about, some conditions of all people's social lives in a place. In Zanzibar this flux of collective life is best observed through Islamic framings of growing up as presented in the booklets, that never only consider children's individual agency but also always regard them as connected within their community collective. Child protection and child health professionals could learn much from how the care for and protection of children is conceptualised through locally available sources such as religious booklets that centre ideas of prevention over those of protection and keep a health-approach at the heart of achieving children's well-be-ing. This might present an opportunity to integrate different approaches to improving child well-being in Zanzibar within each other and to align them more strongly with existing sources of knowledge that have insufficiently been paid attention to.

Conclusion

In this article I have turned to Islamic religious booklets on child rearing in order to show what alternative ordinary sources of knowledge can contribute to dis-courses of child care and protection. I have explored the topics that are outlined and discussed in these sources and have tried to show why the ordinary—as it can be traced in practices of childcare and protection—matters greatly in the study of children in sub-Saharan Africa. This has led me to suggest that an increased focus on these themes and sources may contribute to reconfiguring and potentially even

transforming existing discourses on African childhoods in which these matters continue to remain marginalised. Ordinary everyday practices of care and protection during childhood—a stage of life considered to require particular attention in Zanzibar—that often go unnoticed in academic discourses and media portrayals matter precisely because of their omnipresence and their identity and community building nature. This examination of how children's everyday lives in Zanzibar are structured by diverse Islamic discourses and practices of care, that allow them to fit into and understand to navigate their local communities, supports an understanding of childhood and children in sub-Saharan Africa that is willing to also see and work with what is ordinary in those children's worlds, and not only what is out-of-the-ordinary. Religiously infused practices, such as those of birth rituals during early childhood or health routines in later years, are not interruptions to children's everyday lives in Zanzibar, but rather a part of it, that tell us about some important building parts of children's worlds.

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Seen, heard and protected in their best interest: childhood construction within the worldview of the Fantse of Ghana

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Abstract: Children in Africa are generally construed to be marginalised due to their minimal involvement in family decision-making processes. This article, which provides a worldview of childhood construction among the Fantse of Ghana, draws on the PhD dissertation and other research studies by the author and uses the social constructivist theory by Vygotsky and Meyer Fortes' stages in the developmental cycle in domestic groups to explore children's social standing. The expectation in the academy is that many of the worldviews in African societies should be waning. However, they prevail in some rural and urban communities in Ghana today. Significantly, the larger context of Fantse social systems promotes peer-learning and acculturation among children. Therefore, even though some children may be marginalised, the emphasis placed on children's voices ensures their participation in decision-making in matters affecting them. This article recommends that Fantse social systems should be considered for ensuring compliance with child rights policies in Ghana.

Keywords: Childhood, children, community, domestic group, family, Fantse (Fante), Fortes, personhood, Ghana.

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Introduction

Childhood in Africa is often presented in ways that suggest that children are marginalised. They are represented as lacking the good things that enhance their development and are seen as victims of social injustice and exploitation. As a result, society advocates that, adults should act in the best interests of children (Bordonaro & Payne 2012; Botchway 2019; Ensor 2012; Twum-Danso Imoh 2016; Spyrou *et al.* 2018). Some international organisations frame childhood care and services within Western narratives which problematise African forms of childrearing and preclude African children from enjoying many of the rights spelt out in international human rights documents (Collins 2017). These narratives often contend that within African cultures children are only seen but not heard, and thus, they are not involved in family decision-making (Godwyll 2008: 21–28; Oduro-Sarpong 2003). Such arguments lead to a situation whereby tensions seem to arise between indigenous African cultures and dominant human rights discourses.

This article argues that the idea that 'children are seen but not heard' in African contexts is erroneously conceived within the global conception of childhood as when we look closely at various cultures in Africa, we can see evidence of children being seen, heard, and protected. To illustrate this point, this paper focuses on understanding the concept of personhood and the broader worldview of the Fantse people of Ghana within which there is a recognition that children should have opportunities and privileges within both social and cultural realms to participate in decision-making affecting their interests. It adopts the dimension of childhood which Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016) describe as 'indigenous' and unique but, it does not subscribe to their notion that this approach excludes children from the impact of the forces of modernity and technological development. The justification for the deviation is that their stance reinforces the concept of 'othering' by treating children of Africa as the 'other', ignoring their cultures and excluding concerns about them from the discourse on global childhood (Collins 2017).

Drawing on the conviction that the daily activities of children subsist on culture, this article identifies some values about children's lives within the Fantse social system and the diversities associated with childhood construction that provide the basis for modernity, and for illuminating the mundanities of childhood. The need to uphold aspects of customs in examining a phenomenon also stems from the roles of indigenous values in shaping modernity. For example, no society changes to its modern state without carrying aspects of its traditions to the modern era (Munoz 2007). Furthermore, after statutory laws have been enacted, the indigenous institutions that are not often considered in framing the laws rather become the agents for implementing those laws (Wilson 2016: 149). These call for a better understanding of the roles that indigenous institutions play in addressing issues of child protection and ensuring that children's rights are upheld in Ghana. Accordingly, this article foregrounds indigenous ideas that have, hitherto, been

left out of dominant discourses on childhood and children's rights because they are seen to be at odds with dominant rights discourses when they can provide some support for contemporary human rights discourses (de Castro 2020). It is also grounded in the view that indigenous knowledge is excluded from, and mitigates, the effects of the negative representation of childhoods that have resulted from coloniality. Limiting this article to the indigenous worldview of the Fantse of Ghana, a matrilineal people who practise the double unilineal descent system, is a call to other researchers to examine the extent to which other African cultures may similarly provide structures and ideas that can complement rights discourses. This will enable the adoption of a holistic cultural-based approach in strategies to implement children's rights within these contexts.

Methodology

The worldview produced in this article was developed from my previous studies, including my PhD dissertation and other research studies, the periodic fieldwork experiences that I organise for my third-year Research Methods class at the University of Cape Coast and my personal observations of children as they play and participate in house chores in many of the Fantse communities in which I have lived. The thesis was a phenomenological study on matrilineality and inheritance where aspects of the rights of women and children were studied in five Fantse communities: Dago, Kormantse No. 2, Mankesim, Apewosika and Baafikrom. The follow up was done after I had taken my research methods students to Kormantse No 1 and 2 over a period of five years, where I lived with the students, among host families for a period of two weeks in each instance and gathered data. Many of the reports written by the students confirmed the findings of the thesis. It is pertinent to note that I am a Fantse who has lived aspects of these childhood experiences and have as well been influenced by Western education and urbanisation. However, to avoid personal biases, I also asked more questions as I interacted with members of the communities in order to develop a deeper insight into the indigenous Fantse worldview. The information on the worldview gathered has also been grounded in the literature, especially the theoretical frameworks provided by Meyer Fortes and Lev Vygotsky, and others who have written on children and childhood. It must be emphasised that all these have contributed to the presentation of this discussion focusing on the Fantse worldview on childhood. It is pertinent to note that these worldviews are going through social change. However, this process of change is slow in many rural areas and some urban centres.

Children and childhood (re)defined

The standard definition of a child by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

(ACRWC) is that of a person below the age of 18 years. The notions of childhood, based on this definition, is often informed by perceptions of the media, international organisations, and local non-governmental organisations which aim at rescuing children from danger (Khan 2010). Realising that the universal definition is not in tandem with the perceptions of childhood in many African societies, Twum-Danso (2005) lambasts governments of Africa who ratified the international treaties on childhood for not consulting the populace for their views before accepting the definition. She argued that for the ACRWC to stipulate that children have responsibilities towards their families, communities and states, means that Africans uphold the contribution of children towards the welfare of society.

This article concurs with the stand taken by Twum-Danso (2005; 2019) that childhood in many African contexts is more of a position and not a chronological age which terminates along with a person's biological development. It also subscribes to arguments I have made elsewhere (Wilson 2016: 150) which articulate that for the Fantse, one is a child as long as he or she is either a son or daughter to a parent and/or an unmarried person. In this paper, I maintain that this makes one a child throughout his or her life and in need of direction from members of the community in which he or she lives. Within the same context, one's position as a child leads an individual to have responsibilities to his or her parents and other members of the community in their old age. Accordingly, the Fantse conception of childhood is not about biological development and chronological age or one which perceives children in the contexts of 'deficits', but one which helps children to redefine themselves at various stages of their lives. In this situation, children are socialised to accept the fact that they are a major part of the social system and are capable to do many things for the family and community, according to the developmental stage that they have attained in life (Wilson 2016; 2020). For example, during the period of adolescence, a child may contribute his or her quota to running the affairs of the domestic household by helping to sweep the compound, fetching firewood, hunting for snails and mushrooms, and running errands for his or her parents and members of the household. When he or she starts working and is not yet married, he or she is expected to contribute to the domestic budget of his or her natal family, and may foster a younger sibling (Wilson 2011). The performance of these activities supports children to have self-confidence, in order to fit into the society and discharge their roles effectively for their personal development and for those of their communities. Also, childhood in this context is not always about a situation where a child is considered as weak and in need of support from adults, but a situation where a child can also support others in the community. Related to this is the recognition that childhood is also a phase in which individuals have the opportunity to speak for themselves and other children on issues that aim to develop a community. Taken from this point, this paper examines the construction of childhood within the theoretical frameworks of Fortes (1969) and social constructivists

(Vygotsky 1978). These analytical frameworks, which I discuss below, suggest that culture is critical to the construction of community affairs. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this paper heavily draws on the two schools of thought to flesh out the cultural dimensions of childhood in Fantseland.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this paper draws on the social constructivist theory advanced by Lev Vygotsky (1978) and 'the developmental cycle of the domestic group' advanced by Meyer Fortes (1969). It focuses more on the ideas of Fortes but intersperses these ideas with the views of social constructivism to justify the cultural dimensions of childhood. Social constructivism suits this article because it seeks to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social realities and associated values.

Social constructivism is 'a theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which 'reality' is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through sets of discourses' (James & James 2008: 122). It foregrounds culture as a key source of knowledge in any community and examines the connections between a group of people and the sociocultural context in which its members act and interact in shared experiences (Vygotsky 1978). It upholds the principle that the society moulds individuals within the community in such a way that they behave according to the manners that the society has conditioned them. In reference to learning and childhood development, Vygotsky noted that children's learning abilities communicate the ways that they understand issues in the community in which they live.

To say that childhood is socially constructed means that the mode of construction differs from one society or context to another, and even within the same society, it depends on other social factors such as gender and social class (Norozi & Moen 2016). Also, the social construction of childhoods reflects variations in how cultures impute incompetence and 'completeness' or 'incompleteness' in the nature of the child. Therefore, various cultures assign different developmental tasks to children of the same biological ages (Nsamenang 2008; Prout & James 1990). In light of the foregoing, this paper explores the cultural dimension of the construction of childhood within the Fantse worldview, which upholds the way children perceive and understand their own realities within the society and its implications for child-based rights and responsibilities. Though, social constructivism has its own fair share of critiques, including that of Liu & Matthews (2005) who argue that Vygotsky's theory often arises from concepts taken literally with no appreciation for general philosophical orientation underpinning his works, these critiques are not the focus of this paper.

The structural functionalism school of thought, of which Fortes' developmental cycle falls within, coheres with the ideas of social constructivism, and that the cycle draws on the structures that condition childhood and adulthood. Fortes' (1969) developed an analytical framework for the debate about the 'domestic group' and its development. He explained that the domestic group is essentially a household which provides the cultural resources for maintaining and bringing up its members, and also splitting them through marriage. In other words, the pattern of residence provides the economic, affective, and jural bases for domestic groups and explains the mode by which society grows out of an individual child who is socialised to fit into a community.

First, Fortes (1969) identified two domains within which childhood is constructed in social systems—the private or domestic domain (formed through direct bonds of marriage, filiation and siblingship and viewed from within as an internal system), and the politico-jural domain (made up of all the people in a community and viewed from an external system other than the family). Out of these domains, Fortes identified four phases, the first three of which fall within the domestic domain. The first two phases, known together as the 'domestic infancy' are centred on the parents. The first phase is where a child is wholly contained within the matricentral cell. The child serves as an appendage to his or her mother in the social, affective, and physiological sense, and the mother serves as the link between him or her, and the society. Fortes (1969) noted that this phase begins from birth and may last for only a few days of post-partum seclusion. It may either be ritually terminated or merged subtly into the second phase where the child is accepted into the patricentral nuclear family unit. The father-husband assumes social and spiritual responsibility for his child and mother-wife.

After weaning, a child enters the third phase, which Fortes (1969) refers to as the jural infancy. At this stage, the child is no longer confined to his or her mother's quarters but has the freedom and is able to access the whole dwelling house and the surroundings. At this stage children come under the jural and ritual care of the head of the domestic group who may not even be their father but anyone within the domestic group who may be designated as the leader of the group. The child's rights to productive resources, such as housing, as well as ritual, political and/or jural institutions, are tied to those of the parents or designated leaders.

The domestic domain emphasises the stage of growth of a child and the associated capabilities. These capabilities are crafted in explicit gender roles, so each parent is influenced by his or her gender during the process of socialising their offspring. Fortes identified this as the phase of childhood proper and noted that this occurs over a relatively longer period. As domestic childhood draws to an end and jural childhood begins, the two phases merge and complement each other. However, jural infancy terminates when one develops one's own conjugal family or family of procreation. Jural childhood falls within both the family and community. Fortes (1969: 11–12) noted

that the third and fourth phases are complementary and interdependent: just when jural infancy draws to an end, jural childhood (also referred to as the politico-jural domain) begins.

Though there are clear distinctions between jural childhood and adulthood, every member of a society exists simultaneously in both. Fortes asserted that jural infancy is located in the domestic domain, but its attribute is defined by norms validated in the politico-jural domain. A major aim of socialisation of children is to shape them to replace their parents in their families and communities. Thus, children become agents of socialisation and they are conferred with the actual or potential autonomy to control some productive resources. They enjoy some level of jural independence and have access to ritual powers and institutions. It is common for the domestic domain to be legitimised through rites of passage. These rites, which also define the level of status attained, are communally owned, so members of the society accept the norms that define childhood. Thus, the author concurs with Fortes' ideas, noting that they resonate with the social constructivists' ideas and Fantse customs.

Contextual and theoretical analyses of Fantse worldview of childhood

Considering the above, and the fact that Fantse culture defines and appreciates the roles of children as a major social group who will, in future, replace the adults in society, this article triangulates the two theories to draw upon their implications for the determination of childhood roles and expectations. Again, in framing childhood among the Fantse, I consider the fact that the structural functionalism school of thought, of which Fortes' developmental cycle falls within, coheres with the ideas of social constructivism, and that the cycle draws on the structures that condition childhood and adulthood. Consequently, triangulation of the two viewpoints is convenient in articulating the arguments of this paper. Furthermore, structural functionalism indicates that individuals project miniature values of the culture of an entire community (Wilson 2020: 7). The call made by social constructivism adheres to culture in analysing a situation, while Fortes' ideas are also informed within the tenets of culture. Thus, both ideas support the view that culture matters in explaining every human institution, and this article follows this line of argument.

Childhood among the Fantse

Fortes' developmental cycle shows that childhood is defined in the cultural context, taking into consideration the biological growth and social formation within a household and community. Fortes' ideas do not wholly fit into what one might call the developmental cycle of the domestic group of the Fantse. For example, he stated

that the cycle begins after birth but for the Fantse, gestation is part of the period of childhood (Wilson 2016) because the child is endowed with the entities that makes it human—blood, spirit, and soul.[1] Moreover, Fortes couched the first two phases along a nuclear family system which is independent of a larger family group. However, a close observation of the Fantse family system is a composite one of which the nuclear family is an appendage. Despite these, Fortes' ideas are in line with Fantse culture and can best be used for explaining issues of childhood by taking cognisance of the concept of personhood and the rule of residence.

Personhood and childhood in Fantse social system

Among the Fantse, childhood is a bio-social construct that follows the concept of personhood (Gyekye 1996; Wilson 2016; Wiredu 2001). Personhood addresses the elements that constitutes a person and society's expectations of that person, while the rule of residence explains the relationships that exist among the people who live in a household and how a child grows in the household and community. Thus, the concept of personhood and Fortes' developmental cycle is sufficient for the recognition of children as major components of the society which ought to be protected, seen (recognised) and heard, and by so doing, respected. This article pinpoints some of the areas of digression, which call for reconstructing Fortes' ideas with regard to the culture of the Fantse.

Among the Fantse, personhood means that an individual is comprised of three major elements: blood, spirit, and soul. The blood is obtained from the mother, the spirit from the father and the Supreme Being gives the soul. Thus, a person's composition, or cultural anatomy, demonstrates two dimensions: the physical aspect (i.e. one obtaining blood from the mother) and a meta-physical dimension (i.e. obtaining spirit and soul from the father and the Supreme Being) (Gyekye 1996; Wilson 2016; Wiredu 2001). In the physical realm, children are deemed to be weak and vulnerable and need direction, protection, and proper socialisation in order to perpetuate the legacies of their families and culture (Botchway 2019). Fantse culture upholds this idea and assigns the community with the responsibility of a child's upbringing. However, the onus of socialising the child falls on the parents, siblings, and relatives who live with the child in the household as well as their neighbours, just as Fortes (1969) noted. The responsibilities of the community and the specific assignments given to close relatives allow the community to develop customs that ensure that children are protected and heard. Thus, in line with social constructivism, parents and their children play their respective roles to interpret the actions and events that occur in a community

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[1] Nsamenang (2008) also identifies gestation as part of the stages of the development of a person among the Nso of Cameroun.

and conceptualise indigenous knowledge as a set of beliefs or mental models that the Fantse use to interpret their worldviews and actions within the community.

The spiritual realm of personhood casts children as creatures with a soul obtained from the Supreme Being and spirit from their fathers. A child is considered a 'divine gift' (Wilson 2016).[2] It is also believed to have sprung from ancestry as its spirit is believed to flow through the patrilineage. The links with ancestry through the father's lineage means that children belong to the socio-religious groups known as the *egyabosom* and *asafo*. Therefore, children have to observe taboos associated with their father's patrilineage.[3] There is the belief that children might have been reincarnated to deliver messages from the ancestors, or to continue with some duties assigned to them from the world of the ancestors. Because of this belief, children are at times considered as adults within the social structure (Botchway 2019: vii-ix; Sarpong 1974: 39–45). Apart from the *kra din* (soul name), which a child derives from the day on which he or she was born, the child is given a name which is also derived from either deceased or older members of the clan or community in order to show the link to ancestry. For this reason, titles such as Nana (Ancestor, Chief or Grandparent), Maame (Mother) and Papa (Father) and others, which are attributable to ancestry and old age, are added to their names and also, they are accorded some respect. And once they exist to complete an unfinished business of an ancestor, society is expected to listen to them.

Personhood makes a person aware of his or her social and moral obligations to the family or community. This awareness makes an individual reflect on what the society expects of him or her, shapes his or her conduct, and makes him or her have self-control.[4] Through these, a person becomes self-conscious and establishes an identity (a sense of belonging to a particular society) for himself or herself. With these attributes, the members of the family and community are expected to pay close attention to children as they grow, treat them fairly and accord them some respect. Therefore, they are not just seen (recognised) but also listened to and heard.

The four phases that Fortes identified in the developmental cycle exist among the Fantse construction of childhood and follows the concept of personhood. However, contrary to Fortes' assertion that the patricentral phase occurs after the matricentral phase, the concept of personhood shows that the two phases run concurrently and are initiated after conception (Christensen 1954; Wilson 2020). The concept of personhood illustrates that though a woman carries her own father's spirit, the spirit of her husband helps to form the foetus which she carries during pregnancy, so she comes

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[2] Nsamenang (2008) also identified that with the Nso of Cameroun.

[3] Wilson (2007) noted that the *egyabosom* is weakly translated as father's deity. The Fantse believe that one's father is his or her spiritual guardian. The *asafo* is the social, political, and military organisation of the Fantse, and a child can belong only to his father's asafo and not that of his/her mother.

[4] Wilson (2016) provides details of Fortes ideas on personhood which he derived from many of Fortes' works.

under the bond of her husband's spirit and must observe the dietary taboos associated with her husband's spirit. Biological sciences acknowledge the natural attachment of a foetus to its mother's womb through the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord serves as a conduit for the foetus' nourishment. The Fantse uphold this tenet as well as the belief in the attachment of an imaginary substance known as *abadaa* in the extra sensory realm, connecting the foetus to the mother's womb (Wilson, 2016; 2020). Wilson (2020: 16–27) noted that a*badaa* is associated with women and is believed to be derived from the womb and breastmilk. *Abadaa* is weakly translated into English as mother's filial love or compassion, but the Fantse say that it is rather the substance that endows a mother with extreme filial love and compassion. Again, the Fantse state that usually, a mother's *abadaa* for a child exists throughout her life. After a wife informs her husband about the pregnancy, it is expected that a husband takes care of the physical and spiritual needs of both the mother and the child to ensure a safe delivery.

It is very difficult to understand why Fortes did not include the gestation period in the matricentral cell, especially when the child has no contact with the world. For the Fantse, the child exists in matricentral cell, and is dependent on its mother in the social, affective, and physiological sense. However, it also comes under the patricentral phase. The matricentral cell exists only because of the strong attachment of the child to his or her mother and the phase does not terminate into the patricentral phase. Whereas the period of matricentral cell exists during gestation, there cannot be a period in the child's development which is wholly centred on the father as a mother continues to play her roles, though society holds a father responsible for the upkeep of the child and its spiritual development. Thus, the matricentral cell which Fortes identifies, exists among the Fantse in the sense that the child really depends on the mother's umbilical cord and breast milk for nourishment, and her arms for physical protection. Also, one of the routines of child rearing is that a mother straps her baby to her back. There is also the belief that the toddler is able to determine the presence of his or her mother through smell. All these express the matrifilial bonds which the Fantse uphold and have to ensure that a child is accorded some respect and protection. However, the Fantse worldview is that, in spite of the strong matrifilial bonds, children depend on their father's spirit for spiritual protection. Hence, the matricentral and patricentral phases go together though each has its own threshold of operation.

Childbirth and child development have challenges including maternal and child mortality so successful delivery of a child is expected to bring joy signified by the presentation of gifts to mother and child from relatives. Before the out-dooring and naming ceremony of a child, which Fortes describes as the period of the matricentral cell, a father's responsibility to the child is mostly spiritual. The physical aspects are mostly performed through the mother, so they do not terminate the matricentral cell. The Fantse believe that the protection offered by the father's spirit is crucial because the child may die as those in the spirit world continue to lay claim to him or her within that period. In the early days after

birth, the child may be indoors, but he or she is also in contact with an elderly woman (normally, its maternal grandmother) who bathes him or her. The Fantse believe that this woman helps to mould the child's physique to what is culturally acceptable. Therefore, the matricentral and patricentral phases draw a link between the child and his or her lineage and community, and not only the mother as Fortes noted.

Also, before the child is out-doored, the father has to present some items to the mother and child, and affirm his paternal responsibilities to him or her, as well as the mother-wife (Ephirim-Donkor 1997; Wilson 2020). While the payment of bride-wealth establishes paternity, the gift items affirm paternity. After presenting the gifts, the father is expected to nurture and exhibit some level of compassion, similar to *abadaa* (an imaginary substance attached to the womb that impresses on the mother to be more compassionate to the child), though not in the same form as a woman will exhibit. All these reflect the conjugal bonds (between husband and wife) and filial bonds (between a parent and a child) as outlined by Fortes (1969), but not the delineation of matricentral cell from the patricentral unit.

The domestic domain is made up of domestic infancy and jural infancy (to use Fortes' own terminologies). However, for the sake of expediency, I use domestic childhood and jural childhood to emphasise the stage of growth of the child. Domestic childhood falls within the family while jural childhood falls within the family and community. This meets Fortes' claim that as domestic childhood draws to an end and jural adulthood begins, the two phases merge and complement each other. It is also so because the third phase fits more into only the family while the fourth phase fits into the family and community. However, beyond Fortes' claim is that in both phases, there are explicit gender roles for the parents as they help to socialise their sons and daughters. This supports James *et al.*'s (1998) assertion that childhood, as a variable of social analysis, can never be entirely separated from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Childhood is not about one's age but status and one's ability to reason and perform certain tasks within the family and community. The duties assigned are gender-based. In view of these, the next segment examines the rule of residence among the Fantse, specifically how the developmental cycle fits into the social systems.

Children and the Fantse residential system

The developmental cycle of the domestic group takes place in a household, so the process of socialisation depends on the rule of residence. Fantse residential systems are duolocal, neolocal and compound households (Wilson 2007).

The duolocal rule of residence, where married couples do not live together, offers another dimension of socialisation of children. Within this social system men live in the *prama* (male household) while women live in the *igyadze* (female household)

(Hagan 1983; Wilson 2007; 2020). The people in the *prama* often include agnates and their sons while those in the *igyadze* are sisters and their daughters and very young sons. Mothers and mothers' sisters are the main agents of socialisation for girls while the fathers and fathers' brothers are the primary agents of socialisation for boys. However, there is also a high rate of acculturation. In the *prama*, the boys perform their house chores and play around with their cousins.[5] When they join children from other households to play, the cousins are at first brothers before rivalry of any sort crops up. After play, they all troop home in one file. While at home, the boys observe their elder brothers, who are in the politico-jural domain, and their fathers receive visitors and perform customs.

As the boys move away from their mothers to the *prama*, the girls remain in the *igyadze* with their mothers but, they move away from private childhood to jural childhood. Within the jural domain the onus is on their mothers and mothers' sisters to socialise them within the female household (Wilson 2011). They connect to their fathers' lineages as they draw on the pieces of advice from their fathers' sisters. As the girls attain puberty, they are educated about the tasks of womanhood, their own sexuality and those of their would-be husbands, including the taboos and prohibitions associated with menstruation and reproduction, rules of marriage, dietary rules, and societal responsibilities and expectations (Ephirim-Donkor 1997; Oduro-Sarpong 2003). Whereas Europeans assign childcare solely to adults, Africans situate childcare training as a commitment for children to learn as part of their duties to their families (Nsamenang 2008). Amongst the Fantse, a girl is supposed to learn how to bathe herself from an early age and also to provide care to her siblings. By doing this, it is believed that she will learn new skills to build into what she already knew (Wadende *et al.* 2016). The age sets that develop after adolescence help to shape young men and women to perform tasks within their families and communities and thus make them participate effectively within the periods of domestic and jural infancy and the politico-jural domain.

At the jural childhood phase, both males and females are encouraged to take up domestic and community roles based on their individual strengths and capacities. Here, the boys are deemed to be of age (between the ages of 7–12) so they are expected to be segregated from women and girls and hence, they go to live with their fathers and their fathers' agnates in the *prama* (Hagan 1983; Wilson 2016). The period of segregation constitutes what Fortes refers to as the childhood proper. That is when the children are socialised to take up active roles in order to fulfil their family and community obligations. The roles within the domestic realms that children are expected to undertake are due to the need to prepare them for roles within the politico-jural

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[5] For the Fantse, the replica of kin term 'cousin' does not exist. The boys are brothers because they are sons of agnates.

domain. While the younger ones play around and undertake their house chores, they are also expected to observe their elder brothers and fathers receive visitors and perform customs and, in this way, learn about their cultures. Older sons should be socialised to lead communal lives and take up the roles of *mbambayin*.[6] They are expected to join their fathers in the deliberations that take place in the *prama*, help to socialise the younger ones as they supervise them to perform their daily chores and accompany their fathers to the latter's *ebusuafie* (household for lineages and/or clans) for the purpose of participating in the deliberations that take place. This is a clear case of positive participation—one which improves children's self-confidence, self-esteem and skills, and supports mutual learning among children (Collins 2017). Positive participation makes children visible outside the private spheres of the family and schools and supports meaningful social development. Thus, the children are seen and heard, not only in matters affecting them but also those that affect their fathers and fathers' clans.

Jural childhood positions young men and women as children of the community instead of children of their parents as they participate actively in communal activities. For example, the young women perform *mpeewa* in order to exercise their bodies, educate the public and at times expose some of the wrongs in the community.[7] By performing *mpeewa*, members of the community get to know some of the evil deeds of the society. This makes the young men active as they take such matters up within the *asafo* and take action to correct those deeds.[8] The elders of the community get such information and act upon them to bring sanity into the society by punishing or rewarding people for their deeds. As the young men and women participate in the social and political activities, they develop certain morally desirable properties such as a sense of responsibility for themselves and for others (Wadende *et al.* 2016: 3). Taking up these moral responsibilities make their voices heard within their families and communities. Thus, adolescents and young men and women participate in decision-making affecting them as well as other members of their families and the entire community as they grow. It is worthy of note that *mpeewa* is gradually dying out as a result of social change associated with Western education and contemporary local government systems.

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[6] See Wilson (2020: 21–30) for roles of *mbambayin* (sons of agnates). They serve their fathers and the fathers' matrilineages in various capacities, including social, political, and religious, and participate in the meetings of their fathers' agnates and matrilineages without any form of inhibition.

[7] *Mpeewa* is indigenous music and dance performance by young women. They gather at open spaces and sing songs most of which are love songs to express their love for their suitors, praise young men for their good deeds and also castigate those who have done evil in the society, especially those who abuse women.

[8] The *asafo* provides avenues for members of a community to present their views on issues. The socialisation of children in the *asafo*, makes them develop the art of speaking and activism for political participation.

The age sets that develop after adolescence help to shape young men and women to perform tasks within their families and communities and thus make them participate effectively within the periods of domestic and jural infancy and the politico-jural domain. Also, the unity and solidarity among the *mbambayin* (sons of agnates) make them feel protected as they can act in unison to claim their rights from their fathers' clans under the rules of the double unilineal descent. The physical and spiritual attachment of *mbambayin* to their fathers and father's brothers and sisters and the *prama* (household occupied by agnates) makes them feel that they are protected physically and spiritually (Wilson 2020: 27–31).

In addition to role and tasks in the community in the domestic domain, irrespective of the rule of residence, children are expected to play among themselves and show their capabilities of taking decisions for themselves and helping adults. This is seen as part of the socialisation process as it enables them to learn how to cooperate with others as they make their own handiworks and share them with others. It is envisaged that through this process children will set roles and rules for themselves for the contribution of resources for making and using the handicrafts. Through developing their toys, it is believed that they will develop their abilities and their personalities, express their points of view, plan and organise their own activities. Developing these behaviours and skills is seen as important as it can help to reduce conflicts and provide non-standard solutions to problems (Doyla 2010; Nsamenang 2006).

If conflicts do arise, children are expected to apply the rules that they have set for themselves to resolve them. If they cannot resolve the conflicts by themselves, there is an understanding that they should solicit the help of peers or adults, who are not part of the playing activity, to enforce them. In mediating the conflict, these new actors are supposed to find a resolution that draws on the rules that the children involved in the activity have set for themselves. Additionally, the mediators are encouraged to demonstrate an adherence to the principles of fair play, natural justice, and the tenets of culture as they ensure that their judgement inures to the best interest of the children. The children's ability to sharpen their reasoning power and make rules for themselves is meant to equip them with the cultural tools to analyse the realities of life and to recognise their self-worth. All these factors have the potential to make the children believe in themselves and their own capabilities. They develop a form self-identity based on what they can do and associate themselves with others in similar capacities. This self-identity gives them the confidence and motivates them to share their views with others. Through this, they make their views about themselves and others in the community heard.

The socialisation process emphasises the need to teach children to perform tasks based on their ages and ability as well as protect the weak and vulnerable in society. In sibling relationships, older children are expected to have responsibilities to protect the younger ones. Additionally, parents are supposed to equip their children with the tools to avoid abuse. For instance, onus is placed on parents and caregivers to teach

children that they should avoid abusers in the community and outright strangers. When parents see that their children are morose, dejected or stressed out or have dried tears on their faces, they are charged with the responsibility to first find out what had happened. If a case of abuse or mistreatment is reported by the child, depending on the circumstances, mothers and caregivers in particular, are called upon to investigate thoroughly and fight the parents of the abusive child. These encourage children to resist abuse and help to protect him or her from abuse.

Children and the care of the aged

The indigenous duolocal system offers support to members of the kin group, and ensures that care is provided to the aged, in particular. However, the joint neolocal residential system does not give such support in the same quantum as that of the duolocal system. As a result, many migrants send their children to their aged parents who also live in neolocal households to be socialised. This ensures that grandchildren provide care and support to their grandparents in the absence of the adult generation. Many children have embraced caregiving for their grandparents as a commitment (Frahauf & Orel 2008: 210–1); hence, such services cannot be underestimated.

An ethnographic research study conducted by Douglas Frimpong-Nnuroh,[9] identified a number of ways by which grandchildren use their ingenuity to provide care for their grandparents. For example, the grandparents in the study indicated that their grandchildren serve as companions and confidants and relieve them of emotions. Moreover, the grandchildren perform their house chores without much supervision from their grandparents as they set rules among themselves to ensure that everyone does his or her chores. In case of violation, the grandparents judge them based on the rules that the grandchildren have set for themselves. Thus, the grandparents are rather dependent on their grandchildren for care. Here, as the grandchildren are seen, and as they actively and positively participate in these activities in the household, they are also heard because they make the rules. Above all, the grandparents respect their grandchildren as the grandchildren serve as their confidants and their activities heal them emotionally.

[9] Douglas Frimpong-Nnuroh's research (under development) was conducted among the Ellembelle Nzema, an ethnic group in the Western Region of Ghana. He has given me the permission to use the information. Though, the result may be different from those of the Fantse, it is worthy of note that the Nzema are also Akan and live close to the Fantse, so they have cultural practices that are similar to those of the Fantse.

Childhood among the Fantse as rights-based phenomenon

Indigenous Fantse culture is not at odds with human rights discourses. Instead, there are elements of the culture that can work together with principles of human rights to ensure children's wellbeing. Some aspects of the Fantse worldview about childhood and children such as the moral expectations associated with personhood ensure that Fantse children enjoy their rights and perform their duties as well. The fact that a person derives his or her soul from God, noted earlier in this article, means that the Fantse believe that every human being has an equal measure of the God-given soul, and hence, everyone has an aspect of God within him or her. The soul endows every child with equal measure of human rights (Wilson 2016; Wiredu 2001). But these rights are not in abstract. Someone must provide them as a responsibility.

Because the family is the major social and political organisation, it is accorded the responsibility to see to the fulfilment of rights. In order that families do not trample upon these rights, the indigenous state has the onus, to ensure that every clan accords its members and those connected to it by marriage to be accorded their rights. Since the governments of the indigenous states are composed of representatives of the various clans, the representatives ensure that the state does not also trample upon the rights of the individuals in the clan. This is one of the checks and balances in indigenous politics. With the rights accorded children, coupled with their roles and capabilities to make rules for themselves, Fantse children are not children of deficits, but those that are seen, heard and protected in Fantse social systems.

Conclusion

In addressing the mundanities of childhood in Africa, this article concurs that childhood is a bio-social construct. The article has supported the views of authors such as Twum-Danso (2005); (2019) that the Western conception of childhood as a state or phase characterised by innocence, dependence, vulnerability, and lack of participation in the larger social fabric, is incongruous with Fantse customs. Additionally, it has taken exception to the widely held idea by many non-governmental and international organisations that children of Africa are often abused and marginalised because they do not participate in decisions affecting their well-being as noted by Oduro-Sarpong (2003).

As a right-based phenomenon, Fantse children are taught to uphold their duties to work for the cohesion of their families and, respect their parents, superiors and elders at all times. They are also enjoined to assist the elderly when the latter are in need. In effect, they participate in activities reserved for them and they set their own rules for participation. As they do these, they talk about their own needs and interests as well

as those of the community. Thus, indigenous structures that allow children to express their views on matters that affect them exist. These mean that, against the backdrop that children of Africa are only seen but not heard, the Fantse worldview seeks to ensure that children are seen, heard, and protected in the course of their socialisation.

The article calls for a greater understanding of Fantse customs to help to examine the myriad complex issues relating to children as the customs and laws enjoin parents and communities to ensure the well-being of their children. Both customs and laws recognise the strengths and weaknesses of every individual child and entreat society to accord children some respect and protect them from abuses. They perceive children as part of the structures of the society and childhood as a process. This process is expected to end with the marriage of a person. However, since childhood is also connected with being the son or daughter of another person, it does not end till a person dies. Furthermore, these indigenous customs see children as capable of participating in family and community activities. Thus, the Fantse use motivation to construct acceptable behaviour as adults engage children in goal-directed values.

Though, some Fantse children may be marginalised, the way adults use the rules that the children have set for themselves to encourage them to participate in decision-making about matters that affect them is the thrust of this article. With the diversity of childhood outlined in this article, one can apply the Fantse model to examine the concept of childhood in other indigenous cultures in Ghana. Stakeholders should encourage children to uphold the duty of assisting their families and communities as this averts the perception of childhood as a period associated with innocence and weakness, but also one in which children are incapable of providing care. The larger context of the social systems should be considered for ensuring compliance with child rights documents, while society teaches children the customs and laws that uphold children's rights and duties in contemporary contexts.

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Children as peacemakers in transforming everyday conflicts in Ghana

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Abstract: African children are often reported in news and publications as child soldiers, dabbling in drug use, indoctrinated to commit violent assaults, and living in poverty. While these occurrences have been recorded in conflicts around the continent, the dominance of such narratives erases both the active and silent roles children play in advancing peace through everyday childhood practices. The generalisation creates a single and narrow description of the African child. This article explores the peace-making practices of Ghanaian children in their homes, communities, schools, and other spaces and seeks to understand why and how these roles are downplayed. The article proposes ways of shoring up this powerful image of African children through their socio-cultural environments and indigenous knowledge. It is important that the narrative of Ghanaian childhood is re-told to reflect these potential peace-making perspectives because they have implications for citizens' participation, and stability in Ghana.

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Introduction: unpacking the narrative on the African child, peace, and conflict

Blaise, a former child combatant, who led a battalion of 800 men to fight other militias at the young age of 13 years, has remarkably transitioned into a new life as a peace worker. He has innovatively rescued over 1500 child soldiers from militia and rebel camps (Peace Direct 2016). The African continent, like many other regions of the world, abounds in volatile and latent conflicts. Often, in reports about Africa, conflicts and particularly their adverse impact on children predominate. Global reports and publications often cite children and women as the victims of conflicts (Sideris 2003; Save the Children 2020; 2019; 2018; UNICEF 2021). There are chilling accounts of children rescued from the camps of rebel soldiers as in the story of Blaise above. These accounts have attracted humanitarian aid and changed national and international policies. The challenge is when these become the only way in which the life of African children is perceived or understood. If such narratives are not balanced with other aspects of African childhoods, they could provide a skewed account of the child in conflict, and even in everyday life, and contribute to the generalisation of childhoods in Africa. Rather than *peace journalism* (Lynch 2007; Galtung 2003), *war journalism* becomes prevalent, and the African child is placed in the 'victim of war' narrative. Multiple narratives are useful in creating a complete picture of both the everyday lives and the dire circumstances African children encounter in life.

Like the story of Blaise above, some of the skewed narrative is shifting. A number of authors have highlighted the transition of child soldiers to peace actors (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 126–35; Machakanja 2014: 85–108). These are important narratives. They cause a shift from a societal condemnation as 'child soldier', to demonstrating the resilience of African children, their ability to transition from conflicts, and be reintegrated into society. However, the dominant narrative is still one in which the African child is perceived as a victim of conflict and violence, wallowing in economic deprivation, and facing a bleak future. In their introductory chapter, Deluca *et al.* (2014: 109) observe, 'we begin [Matadi's] story as a vulnerable child bereft of parents caught in the maelstrom of Liberia's civil war.' The authors capture the predominant narrative, but go on to demonstrate the emerging shift in peace and conflict narratives. There are still not enough stories that show how the African child prevents conflict, and builds peace in their everyday lives, within or without violent conflicts.

Ghana has not experienced a protracted, nationwide armed conflict in recent history. However, conflict, defined as a pervasive characteristic of human life (Tillett 1999), including everyday disagreements or altercations is relevant to the Ghanaian context. It may or may not be violent, but it can provide the opportunity for transformation (Fisher *et al.* 2020), and, therefore, has the potential to facilitate peace-making. It is in these everyday conflicts that this article highlights the peace-making roles

of Ghanaian children, occurring in their homes, communities, schools, and other socio-cultural spaces. The emphasis of this article is, therefore, more on the everyday peace-making efforts rather than interventions in armed or violent conflicts.

Geopolitically, Ghana is situated in a sub-region that has experienced several protracted conflicts and other forms of political instability in neighbouring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Nigeria. Ghana has also accepted refugees globally, sometimes based on ethnocultural and historical ties as well as commitments to international protocols. According to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, Ghana hosts refugees and asylum seekers from over thirty countries with women and children being the majority in the demography of refugees in Ghana, fleeing from fear of persecution or aggression in their countries of origin.[1] So, although Ghanaian children are not caught up in violent conflicts, as Suleiman (2017) argues, what may be external affects the local and has the potential to change internal stability, suggesting that global conflicts can 'complicate local conflict ecologies' (p. 316), in relatively peaceful places like Ghana. Ghana is, therefore, in the position to experience some of the spill-over of conflicts in other countries. Internally, Ghana has experienced sporadic conflicts such as the Alavanyo–Nkonya incidences, chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana (see Bukari *et al.* 2021), the farmers–Fulani herdsmen unrests (see Olaniyan *et al.* 2015) and other ethnic clashes, as well as occasional religion-based disagreements such as, between Christian denominations and traditional leaders or between small sections of Muslims and Christians in specific localities (see Suleiman 2017). These are all forms of conflicts, but none have escalated into a nationwide protracted conflict. They mostly become 'hot spots' during key national events such as elections. To this extent, Ghana is overall considered a stable country that fosters a relatively peaceful co-existence within multiple ethnic groups and religious persuasions (Suleiman 2017) and demonstrates greater cultural integration than other African countries.

What is it in the fabric of Ghanaian society that mitigates violent conflicts and maintains relative peace in spite of all the socio-economic and political challenges? This article cannot address all of the possible factors that could address this question. However, it posits that the upbringing of Ghanaian children and their socio-cultural environment could be a contributory factor to the low intensity of conflicts in Ghana and this can potentially characterise Ghanaian children as peacemakers. While this is not intended to suggest that every single child is a peacemaker, this perspective points to the gaps in the narrative on African childhoods and particularly suggests that the peacemaker qualities in Ghanaian children is missing, in discourses on conflicts.

The article does not only seek to understand why and how these peace roles are downplayed, but particularly proposes ways of shoring up this powerful image of the

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[1] https://www.unhcr.org/gh/who-we-help-2/refugees/

Ghanaian child. While acknowledging children as one of the marginalised groups across the world, including in Africa, this article challenges an over generalisation of such assertions that supresses the civic capacity in children and proposes a deepening of peace education that is anchored in African, and for that matter Ghanaian, socio-cultural practices. Without being oblivious to cultural practices that stifle children's voices, and undermine participation, the article offers ways of upholding the positive values undergirding such practices, while empowering children to realise their full potentials as active citizens and peacemakers in both places of conflict and apparent peace. Like Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016), this article does not seek to romanticise Africa, and for that matter Ghana, as a special childhood arena. That will be 'othering' Africa and reproducing a form of the dominant global narrative, even if positive. Unlike Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016), however, this article will indigenise some of the traits in Ghanaian children, that qualify them for peace-making, by demonstrating how those features could be traced to factors in the upbringing and socialisation of African children. This is important because part of the war narrative about Africa is drawn from historical descriptions of Africans as 'warriors' living in a terrain prone to conflict. A different narrative from an Afrocentric perspective (Owusu-Ansah & Miji 2013; Asante 2007; 2020) and particularly from the framework of indigenous practices and local epistemologies, is important. This article, therefore, advocates more indigenous peace efforts, situated in positive Ghanaian cultures and traditions.

Methodology

This article utilises secondary research to a) demonstrate the dominant narrative that presents African children as victims of conflict, actors of, and in, violence; and b) explore alternative narratives of Ghanaian children as peacemakers anchored in Ghanaian and African practices and environments. The article addresses these through a systematic literature review.

Literature search

Based on the problem discussed above, the literature search was guided by two research questions: What are the dominant narratives on African children during conflict? Are there other narratives to demonstrate the multiplicity of experiences of Ghanaian children as peacemakers? The main search engines utilised were iDiscover (Cambridge LibGuides/Cambridge Libraries) and ProQuest, supplemented by Google Scholar, which provided grey literature and listed current peacebuilding literature. The key search engine concepts were 'children as peacemakers', 'peacebuilding', 'children and conflict in Africa', 'childhoods in Africa', and 'African relationality'.

Although there was no limit in terms of the publication date, most of the reviewed literature fell within the last three decades when intra-state conflicts increased across the African continent with dire effects on children. It is also the period within which key protocols on children were developed by agencies such as the United Nations, the African Union, and governments at the country level.

Screening for inclusion and eligibility

Relevance of identified literature was assessed first from the title, and then the abstract, to determine the extent to which it advances the research questions, following which the full reference was sourced and documented. The search prioritised journal articles and books by authors from the African region and those who have studied and worked in Africa extensively. This was to provide an 'insider perspective' on the narrative of African children and highlight overlooked perspectives. Authors outside of the African region, were mainly included to provide psychoanalytic perspectives about children and dominant peace theories. The sampling strategy was selective and purposive, intended to highlight the deficiencies in the existing body of work, and surface alternative narratives. Following a coarse sieve screening, the article identified about 40 core bibliography based on the criteria established, and highlighting children's roles in families and the community, children and conflicts in Africa, and African epistemologies. This is supplemented by anecdotal insights, gathered at the start of this research through informal telephone conversations with a few Ghanaian parents to explore the relevancy of the argument in the Ghanaian context. This was not an intentional data collection method and, therefore, was not structured around any specific data sampling. The insight is used here only anecdotally, supported by evidence found in the literature The search also included data from non-governmental organisations that focus on children's welfare, as well as other 'grey literature'.

Data extraction, analysis and usage

This article employed a hybrid of descriptive reviews—a critical review to support the argument that narratives on African children are skewed to depict them as victims and actors in conflict, and a narrative review, to demonstrate the potential for alternative perspectives. Some of the systematic review is used as background information to illustrate the problem and substantiate anecdotal information. Overall, this article interrogates the constructivist and single-focus notions around African children, by broadening perspectives around the peace-making roles in Ghanaian childhoods.

The legal framework and children's agency

The article applies the definition of a child, as stipulated in article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, (ACRWC) (African Union 1990), adopted by the then Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU), and Ghana's Children's Act (Act 560 of 1998), which is, every human being below the age of 18 years. The discussions are also anchored within Ghana's commitment to regulatory and legal frameworks on children's rights, being the first country in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations 1989). The rights of children are well articulated in Ghana's 1992 constitution, finding expression in the Children's Act of 1998. These legal frameworks highlight the recognition and role of children in society and in relation to peace. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states '... in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, that suggests that, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.' It further adds that '... the child should be ... brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity ...' (United Nations 1989: 1). This was at the time, the most widely ratified treaty in history and it makes significant promises to accord children respect and voice, and recognises them, not as objects, but human beings with rights.[2] The ACRWC also reaffirms the status of the child. It embraces civil, political, economic and cultural rights of the child. It is instructive that the Charter's preamble highlights, in relation to the African child, consideration for 'the virtues of their cultural heritage, historical background and the values of the African civilization.' While the language of the Charter also contributes to the narrative of 'vulnerability', it grants and recognises the agency of the child—article 32, (responsibilities of the child to family, community, and nation), and articles 7, 8, and 9 (freedoms of the child). Ghana's Children's Act on the other hand leans heavily towards child protection, state responsibility and addressing offences against children. It is worth noting that exploring responses to the vulnerability of children is of utmost importance. These are critical in safeguarding children. However, without the express recognition of the roles children can, and indeed, do already play in Ghanaian culture, the child is again presented as only vulnerable and their contributions, including the ability to contribute to peace and stability, obscured. A balance in addressing vulnerability while exploring appropriate levels of agency in children is useful.

In spite of the legal provisions that create space for children to express their potentials, narratives about African childhoods barely capture such agency. The narrative on Africa is one of conflict, famine, hunger, mortality—mainly what may be termed

[2] https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention

'afro-pessimism' (Wilderson 2020; Wekker 2020; Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi 2016). Conflict reporting is prevalent, and focuses on instability, to the neglect of peace journalism which highlights everyday efforts by citizens towards restoring harmony. Even in places of relative peace such as Ghana, the general reportage still presents children and the youth as the obvious group exploited by politicians in election seasons,[3] while in places of armed conflicts, children are perceived as recruits for war lords and rebels. These perspectives are influenced by the interface of the history of the African continent as an enslaved territory, and global narratives around the need to redeem and develop the continent (see Twum-Danso Imoh 2016; Twum-Danso & Ame 2012)—a narrative shaped by both Western development perspectives and Africa's own persistent narratives of lack. Such narratives do not capture the entirety of the life of the Ghanaian child as it evolves from infancy to adulthood, in a process that is not linear but one that is cyclical and relational (see Smørholm 2016). Children's everyday lives are impacted by social transformations in what Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016: 309) call a 'constant becoming'. There is need for a narrative that presents a comprehensive account of what African children embody. Such narrative must accord the child their dignity as observed in the preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the story ought to be balanced by African epistemologies. For the Ghanaian child, their means of knowing and ability to act as responsible citizens is shaped by their family, social interactions and relationships in their communities informed by their history and cultural heritage. Gyekye (1997: 9), suggests that such a cultural context is shaped by long-preserved traditions and practices. Participation in community life, therefore, informs one's wellbeing, identity and potential (p. 10) and the common good (p. 11).

Peace making and the Ghanaian socio-cultural environment

Relationships and interconnectedness are important concepts in African cultures, and they impact wellbeing and societal harmony (see Wissing *et al.* 2020; Gyekye 1997). Owusu-Ansah & Miji (2013) suggests that wholeness, community, and harmony are deeply embedded in African cultures and are the hallmark of African relationality. African relationships embody that which exists between a person and other people, between people and their environment as well as between people and their spirituality. To maintain harmony is to keep these relationships afloat and sustained. Such harmony is the intent of peace-making. As Gyekye (1997: 12) observes, 'there is no human being who does not desire peace'. The communitarian society, as exists in Africa, cherishes harmony and mutual sympathies (1997: 37) because of the notion

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[3] https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-ghana

that what happens to one affects the whole. In African cultures, there is a shared goal to pursue and uphold these values (1997: 8).

Peace-making is simply an effort to restore relationships. It requires a willingness to relate to another, to dialogue, and to seek harmonious solutions. It is both a preventative measure and a conflict transformation tool, best integrated in everyday lives (see Verbeek 2008). The United Nations describes peace-making both as a process involving diplomatic actions from States or envoys to address conflicts,[4] and efforts by non-state actors to promote peace. Peace-making in this article alludes more to the role of non-state actors and the citizenry (including children) in ensuring peace. Compared to other peace operations (such as peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and conflict prevention) peace-making offers opportunities to address everyday conflicts. This is particularly relevant in the Ghanaian contexts where there have not been protracted armed conflicts requiring other forms of peace support operations. It is useful to perceive peace in Ghana as a state of total wellbeing that embodies socio-cultural political and economic circumstances. The need for peace making is intrinsically linked to the core African cultural value of relationship building and the concept of *Ubuntu* which Ramphele (2017: 108) suggests 'imposes an inescapable ethical and moral code on our relationships.' There is a sense of collective responsibility in upholding these values through everyday practices that foster respect, suggesting that survival depends on interconnectedness and harmony with the other and collective responsibility, as a 'collective ethic' (Owusu-Ansah & Miji 2013: 2), is central to this world view and, hence, central to raising children in Africa. Gyekye (1997: 35) describes these as 'principles of communitarian morality' exemplified by compassion, interdependence, solidarity, cooperation, reciprocity and social wellbeing. The emotional wellbeing of children also tends to be enhanced through support from peers and relationships with adults (Salifu Yendork & Somhlaba 2017, cited in Wissing *et al.* 2020).

This article proposes that notions of peace-making can particularly be found in Ghanaian proverbs, norms, and practices and in environments that can shape children into potential peacemakers. Historically, these have served as avenues to transmit societal values. The following proverbs illustrate this perspective. The Akan[5] proverb, *ti koro nko agyina,* often explained as two heads are better than one, or that one person does not hold counsel, suggests the need to dialogue with others in decision-making. Dialogue is a useful tool in resolving disagreements and finding a common ground for action. It reduces individualism and promotes the collective—a key element in many African cultures, as discussed above, and a key approach to peace-making, a process that requires parties working together to find mutually beneficial solutions.

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[4] https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology

[5] Akan is the largest ethnic group in Ghana, and the Akan language is the most widely spoken language in Ghana with several mutually intelligible dialects.

The collective is further illustrated by the Ga[6] proverb *loo pii fitee wonu*, which literally translates as, the soup is not ruined by a lot of meat/fish. This expresses the need for pluralism, a notion that encourages multiple voices, and narratives that enrich society and encourage peaceful co-existence. Similarly, *mokome efee man* in Ga, suggesting one (person) makes not a people or town implies that it is the collective that forms a community or nation. Such community and civic awareness are useful in peace-making. It highlights the connectivity in African cultures, and the quest to preserve these, which involves peace-making.

A key source of knowledge and wisdom on peace-making can be revealed within everyday interactions between Ghanaian children and adults. Parents, uncles and aunties, close and distant relatives and friends impart knowledge to children, as they recount daily events. Nana Clemensen (2016) suggests that children acquire language, cultural skills, and competencies as they interact with adults and with their environment through actions such as observation, eavesdropping on the conversations of adults and learning from peers (see also Nsamenang 2008). In her ethnographic field-work among families in Zambia, Clemensen (2016) reflects on how children contribute to their community and family lives through farming, access to the stories, work and ambiguities of daily lives, sibling care and household chores. Children are not passive in these socio-cultural interactions. Through these, they contribute to the socio-cultural, economic, and political lives of their communities. They shape the environment as the social structures impact them and shape children's agency (see Smørholm 2016). Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi (2016) explain that children engage in work (see also Tetteh 2011), head households, advise their peers and make life decisions that impact them and others, in a constant growth and interdependence. It is within these everyday activities that other human characteristics such as disagreements and sometimes violence occurs and require mediating efforts, including peace-making. Children do not detach at this stage. They engage in such occurrences, as a natural continuum of the lives both they and adult members of the community live.

In their article, 'Some Roles Children Play in their Families,' Rollins *et al.* (1973) observed the relationship between a child's intrapsychic development and the family as a social system. The authors identified four roles of children namely, the scapegoat, the baby, the pet, and the peacemakers. They further observed that there are elements of peace-making in the three other roles. The study, affirms the fact that children pick up roles in their family contexts. Sometimes they extend this to school and other social settings. Referring to Ackerman's (1958) discussion of social role and its relationship to individual personality, Rollins *et al*. described a child's social role as their social identity within the context of a particular life situation—a link between society and the individual (in Rollins *et al.* 1973). Referencing Spiegel (1968: 393),[7] Rollins *et al.*

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[6] Language of the Ga ethnic group in Ghana.

[7] Cited in Rollins *et al.* (1973).

describe role as a sequence of acts 'tailored by the cultural process', including the environments children grow in (in Rollins *et al.* 1973: 512).

Exploring narratives on the peace-making qualities in Ghanaian children[8]

Hosny *et al.* (2020), using a story-stem method, qualitatively explored various aspects of everyday lives of Ghanaian primary school children. Among these were the empathetic understanding of children and culturally embedded values, such as care-giving and family duties. It is not unusual to hear Ghanaian parents describe a child as 'being supportive of parents', 'the considerate one', 'not self-centred' or 'she/he calms me down'. These expressions of empathy, as Hosny explains, is critical to peace-making skills, and help to prevent, resolve, and transform conflict. In informal telephone conversations with some Ghanaian parents at the start of this research to help explore alternative narratives of Ghanaian childhoods, some of these peace-making skills energed. A parent talked about her child's reluctance to have her parents query school authorities about the school's failure to implement the child's dietary programme, which had been mutually agreed between the parents and the school. It appeared that the daughter understood the dynamics of the school better, and was, hence, better placed to determine the best approach to address the issue. In peace-making, one may say she assessed and understood the context of the conflict, which then informed the best approaches towards resolution. She offered to speak to the teachers herself. This diffused any potential conflict. Is the child's refusal to have her parents confront the school authorities borne out of fear of being victimised by her teachers for 'reporting them to parents' or perhaps anxiety over the fact that the confrontation will lead to a focus on her weight issues and possibly generate teasing and mocking from peers? Are there gender undertones, worth exploring?[9] Will a boy child respond differently? There is enough evidence around the depressing silence and trauma children experience when they have been threatened through bullying, sexual assault, and other traumatic experiences in Ghana and across Africa (see Oduro *et al.* 2012; Arhin *et al.* 2019). Such traumatic silence ought to be differentiated from peace-making which is not silence but an active effort to find non-violent solutions.

[8] This section draws on a few anecdotal insights based on informal conversations with some Ghanaian parents (May 2021). It is not a generalisation, but rather, indicative of the potential in Ghanaian children, substantiated by the systematic literature review and underscoring the need to explore multiple narratives of the Ghanaian child.

[9] As indicated in the methodology, these were casual exploratory conversations at the start of the research; incidentally the participants (colleagues) happen to be parents of girls. As this was not conscious data sampling with the necessary ethical clearance, I cannot make claims on the gender dimensions of the responses. That will require further gender disaggregated work.

In another instance, a parent observed:

> In school children pick on her, for her size. She would come and report to me. I told her to fight back but she actually didn't. Rather she ... was generous to the bullies ... she is friends with the bullies.

This child employed non-violent tactics to restore peace between her and her school mates. According to the parent she (the child) presents her opinion and listens to others; 'she always hugs when she fights with her brother and the issue is resolved', the parent added. Listening is a critical skill in peace dialogues. It demonstrates respect and recognition of the other. These are also the core elements of the African interconnectedness discussed above. Peace-making is also often marked by a symbolic gesture, such as a handshake or a hug as this child demonstrated. Asked how the child came by such peace-making techniques, the mother responded, it is a trait she observed from the father's behaviour at home. The father talked through issues amicably to find solutions. Another parent suggested her daughter picked up such peace-making skill from her grandmother. There was hardly any reference to the school system imparting such skills except a reference to the application of these skills in school. A parent recounted a case in which her daughter, as school prefect, had reported a bullying incident to her teacher, but did not think the punishment the teacher prescribed—having the perpetrators kneel, was enough. The daughter insisted that more ought to be done to address the abusive language employed by one of the boys involved. Consequently, the teacher invited the parents of the boy to talk over the problem. The parent of the offended girl observed, 'I teach my children to set standards, and to know when to speak up.'

While not representative of every Ghanaian child, the above examples highlights Cribari-Assali's (2019) explanation of how children are able to resolve their own conflicts given the chance, and overtime, master these skills. The children described in these Ghanaian contexts were skilful in picking up the 'early warning signs' of potential conflicts and responded with non-aggressive methods. They took a step towards talking through the problem and finding collective solutions, as peace making requires, and consistent with African relationality. According to Rollins *et al.* (1973: 512) such reconciliatory behaviour of children helps to provide equilibrium in the home, minimising conflict and making co-existence possible.

While the examples above highlight individual experiences, and provide insights that may not be extensively documented and systematically analysed among various groups of children in Ghana, they provide anecdotal evidence which suggests children experience various forms of conflicts, often quickly resolved, and remarkably, mediated by their peers. They often apply peace-making skills acquired from their socio-cultural environment, however these are often lost in conflict narratives. These provide a basis to explore alternative narratives on the peace-making role and capacities of Ghanaian children, that may not align with the dominant perspectives.

A new peace and conflict narrative on African children is possible

Humanitarian organisations are beginning to document stories of African children beyond conflicts. The stories of Matadi in Liberia (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 109–18) and Luca, in Congo (Autesserre 2021: 12) are instructive. Abducted into armed groups during the wars in these countries, both Matadi and Luca (pseudonym) struggled to be reintegrated, because they did not return to peaceful homes. Luca was abducted when he was just five years of age, and released at eight years. With poverty and war still waging in Congo, little Luca kept running back to the militia group, influenced by the indoctrination, that, he can get what he wants, when backed by gun violence. It was not until a social enterprise model of local peacebuilding, that provided his mother a means of livelihood, was introduced in his village in South Kivu, that Luca began to live a peaceful life, and contribute to building his community (Autesserre 2021). Matadi, also kept returning to the bushes of rebels in Liberia, until he decided to relocate to Ghana, in order to be in a flourishing environment. Matadi later founded the Initiative for the Development of Former Child Soldiers (IDEFCOS), an organisation to integrate former child soldiers back into society. So, even in places of violent conflicts, there are narratives beyond children as victims and actors of war. Matadi's story is particularly interesting given his immersion in Ghanaian culture, when he settled in the Buduburam camp for Liberian refugees and sought to change his life. He was inevitably impacted by Ghanaian children and the communal environment. Referring to his stay in Ghana, the authors observed '[t]his was an important transition because Matadi moved beyond thinking exclusively about himself to thinking about other child groups as a community' (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 112).

When asked about becoming a peacemaker, Matadi talked about the family. In his explanation, his journey of becoming a peacemaker crystallised when he was reunited with his extended family following the internationally-led 1995 Liberia peace process. During this period in Monrovia, he experienced the love of family and community, recognising that life in a rebel group was not 'normal' (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 111). During his re-integration process, Matadi felt that he belonged to his traditional family (Deluca *et al.* 2014). These stories demonstrate that, given the right environment, the peace-making abilities of African children do emerge. These abilities are not restricted to poor settings. Even in affluent homes, many African children have an early conceptualisation of what is peaceful and what is hardship. At the Buduburam camp in Ghana, 'Matadi moved beyond thinking exclusively about himself to thinking about other child groups as a community' (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 112). The option to be cooperative and considerate of others is potentially a capability of the African child and also a trait that children learn from the extended

family system, regardless of their socio-economic conditions (see Forster 2010). While this may be true of children everywhere, in situations of conflict and particularly in the lives of former child soldiers, competition and revenge is rife, as Matadi observes about his struggles to stay alive and safe during his re-integration process and in the refugee camp (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 113). The authors report that throughout his ordeal, Matadi strived to maintain the values that his parents had inculcated in him over the 11 years he spent with them. The authors suggest that he did this by 'displaying *Ubuntu* qualities ... through sharing his transformation process and knowledge' (p. 115) with his fellow former child soldiers. His journey as a peacemaker began incorporating others, moving from himself to intercommunal peacebuilding (Deluca *et al.* 2014: 115). Here, we see an example of peace-making qualities that were inculcated in childhood through parenting, the extended family and the community. The severe disruption in childhood caused by war and the loss of parents did not curtail the childhood peace-making traits. Rather, upon reunification with family, these traits were revived, and to the betterment of the community, particularly former child soldiers.

However, how these peace-making traits are observed, analysed, interpreted, and reported is critical to understanding the peace-making skills of African and Ghanaian children. If these are observed only through the lens of Western methodologies, peace-making skills could be limited to intentionally imparted skills and knowledge. A key reason why narrative on the African child and particularly conflict in Africa is skewed is that stories, data, and analysis are often subjected to methods that are not sensitive to African realities and do not elevate what is valuable in African culture. Methodologies that appreciate the richness of African practices are spiral (Owusu-Ansah & Miji 2013), not linear; they are participatory and collaborative in line with African collectivity and should involve those most affected by the issues—Africans. The ways of knowing and doing peace may not conform entirely to dominant approaches to evidence-building. Therefore, some level of 'Afrocentricity' (Asante 1988) is important in capturing multiple or alternative narratives. There is the need to perceive peace-making and the lives of children, in a region that is deemed conflict-prone—Africa, from the African experience, and narratives should be culturally affirming. Such centralisation demands recognition and respect, not othering, but centering indigenous knowledge (Mkabela 2005). Owusu-Ansah & Miji (2013) posit that to create empowerment, African indigenous knowledge ought to be integral to research and policy making (see also Oduro 2018). Therefore conversations, strategies, research and policies on peace and conflict ought to be driven by African voices and indigenisation of tools and methods that help to surface local interpretation in the analysis of everyday social events in African childhoods.

Misconceptions and challenges to the peace maker role in Ghanaian Children

The peacemaker role of children is not always interpreted positively. In their discussion of children's roles in the family, Rollins *et al.* (1973) allude to the fact that sometimes when children are named the 'peaceful one', they may act to please and become the 'solace of parents'. They may not learn to voice their own frustrations. Ghanaian children are not exempt from these potential challenges. However, within African interconnectedness, peace-making skills empower children to strengthen relationships and so rather than remain 'passive peace-keepers' they engage in *active peace-making,* by taking the initiative to resolve issues directly with peers and siblings or through their guardians such as teachers and parents as seen in the informal conversations with parents.

For some, peace-making is an adult role and children may lose their childhoods if encouraged to play and lead such processes. In Ghana and for that matter Africa, what may be described as a suppression of childhood could well be the child playing their community roles as previously discussed. The separation of childhood and adulthood based on age, then appears artificial and devoid of the African world view (see Clemensen 2016; Abebe & Ofosu-Kusi 2016). These narratives are culture specific and require indigenous lenses. When children understand their socio-cultural context and African values, they understand why they act peacefully for the sustenance of the community they are part of.

Peace-making is sometimes misconceived as a passive endeavour. Drawing the line between being peaceful in everyday life, and not being seen as weak, is important for most parents and their children. Any effort at promoting the child as a peace-maker must ensure that the child maintains self-dignity and respect in accordance with the charters on the rights of children. These elements of respect as previously discussed are well situated in the upbringing of Ghanaian children and are the pillars and outcomes of well-thought out peace-making.

The peace-making roles of Ghanaian children can diminish if the skills and knowledge are not continuously honed. Children need opportunities to practise peace-making. In the anecdotal insights earlier discussed, children resolved conflicts in school spaces with, and without, teachers or parents, and they peer-resolved issues. With the appropriate socio-cultural guidance, teachers and parents can responsibly share the peace-making roles with children and shift from 'teacher-as-judge-and-jury models', where conflict resolution and punishment all reside in the teacher. Experiments in Downtown Alternative School (DAS) in Toronto, Canada, used stories and words to change how children respond to conflict (Fine *et al.* 1995). Based on ground rules developed by children, and with the guidance of teachers, children peace-makers, aged between five and seven, will show up, when other children fight, and ask to

mediate. When both sides accept the offer, the peace-makers will ask each side to tell their side of the issue, while the other side listens. When they have had their turn, the peace-makers will ask both sides for a possible solution. They often found a common ground. The children preferred to resolve the issues with their peers as mediators, rather than with teachers. The teachers reported that children developed language that impacted every aspect of their school lives (See also Morris, Taylor & Wilson 2000). This practice is not alien to Ghanaian children as discussed above. What may be lacking is incorporating such experience into our formalised learning spaces to provide continued learning and practice for children.

This article does not seek to romanticise Ghanaian culture and create an infallible image. Sometimes it is the socio-cultural and political practices that inhibit the peace-making expressions of children. It is common to hear the Akan expression *wo y3 mpanyin s3m* said to a child who tries to mediate or resolve an issue. The expression means the child is acting like an adult or usurping the role of an adult. Some of this name-calling, victimises and disempowers children (see Tetteh & Markwei 2018). Similarly, the saying that 'a child should be seen, not heard', can curtail the peace-making abilities of children. While these practices are often intended to curb excesses in children's behaviours and ensure they act responsibly, without the balance of developing their civic voices, their potential contribution to society is limited.

Sustaining the peace-making traits in Ghanaian children

As Suleiman (2017: 319) emphasises, Ghana's relative peace should not translate into 'social and political complacency.' Ghana's location in a sub-region of political instability, necessitates a deepening of her own internal peace efforts, particularly among young people, building on the soft peace skills found in her socio-cultural context. Aning & Atta-Asamoah (2011: 4–5) have argued that demography and environmental factors critically impact conflicts in West Africa. Citing particularly the 'youth bulge' and economic hardships in the region, they suggest that countries with high populations in the ages of 15–29 are deemed prone to violent conflict. When young people feel left out the decision-making and the distribution of national resources, the proclivity to violent conflict tends to be higher (Aning & Atta-Asamoah 2011: 12–13). This argument is however nuanced when the authors compared the situation to Ghana. They suggest that Ghana's response to its youth bulge has been different; young people have had the opportunity to challenge the status quo (p. 15) in Ghana's development and political processes. These gains potentially achieved through Ghana's socio-cultural and political practices, ought to be sustained strategically given Ghana's geopolitical situation. The early ages of 5–10 years is a good stage to incorporate peace lessons into the development of children. Crawford (2005) explores the importance of peace

studies in the classroom for children in the lower grades using an ecological approach. She suggests a peaceful learning environment and a diversified curriculum (see also Stomfay-Stitz & Wheeler 2003). Although Ghana may not have a standardised programme in the school curriculum that focuses on peace-making skills, cultural studies in the classroom, that intentionally highlight the peace-making elements in Ghanaian culture is a good entry point for training both teachers and pupils. It will help to institutionalise the good practices taken for granted in everyday socialisation. These models[10] could be extended to children and youth in both formal and informal education. More critically, these efforts should be informed by Ghanaian socio-cultural narratives, an approach that will value and incorporate rural schools and communities, and indigenous knowledge. Over time, there could be a large number of people who apply peace-promoting methods in resolving issues.

Organisations that advocate for children's wellbeing in Ghana can shore up the peace-making abilities of children by capturing the socio-cultural contexts. These include international agencies such as UNICEF,[11] UNESCO, international and local NGOs. As the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDG, 2015) suggests, sustainable programmes are guaranteed by the environments in which they are implemented. A peaceful and just environment (SDG 16), supported by children, and based on core cultural values will help prevent some circumstances that place children in situations of insecurity. Such roles, accorded children, will not only change the narrative of vulnerability, but will empower children to create an intersection between their cultural values gleaned from their upbringing, and the development issues around them. In her recent book, *Frontlines of Peace* (2021), Severine Autesserre highlights the need for local peace processes. This is because locals know the practices that work. Children form part of the 'local eco-system' of peace-making and youth, peace and security policies (United Nations Resolution 2250) underscore the need to include young people in peace work. Implementing these peace protocols through African and Ghanaian socio-cultural lenses can shift narratives about Ghanaian childhoods.

Finally, to change the narrative and advance the peace-making skills of children requires a change in the nature of the politics children see and the governance systems they engage. Hostile partisan politics could diminish their socio-cultural skills for peace-making.

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[10] See also West African Centre for Peace Foundation (https://wacpfgh.org/) in Ghana; Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE) https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org; Kettering Foundation, Higher Education Exchanges, (https://www.kettering.org/library/periodicals/higher-education-exchange; KROC Institute for International Peace Studies https://kroc.nd.edu/about-us/what-is-peace-studies/what-is-strategic-peacebuilding/

[11] Such as UNICEF childhood development in Ghana, https://www.unicef.org/ghana/early-childhood-development

Conclusion: towards a new narrative

This article proposes a reach into Ghanaian culture as a way to shore up peace-making roles of children and change the skewed narratives on Ghanaian childhoods. Ghanaian children experience several useful practices that promote peace. These include empathy, dialogue, reconciliatory, and problem-solving skills. These practices are embedded in cultures, metaphors, proverbs, and various traditional practices which children encounter in their upbringing. These traits are however inadequately observed, analysed, and documented, resulting in skewed narratives about African children, often characterised by wars and conflict. These dominant narratives fail to demonstrate the many ways in which Ghanaian children can contribute to peace-making. Unless such potential is studied, nurtured, and utilised in community and nation-building, such valuable skills could be lost. This will further perpetuate the narrow narratives on the Ghanaian child. This article highlights the peace-making potential in Ghanaian children, anchored in their traditions and advocates a strategic national plan to change the parochial narratives on the Ghanaian child. When the multiple dimensions of the experiences of the Ghanaian child is understood, a tapestry of children and their childhood emerges that is as varied as the often-lofty ideas in the global north. This reduces the binaries and notions of 'they and us' (Twum-Danso Imoh, Bourdillon & Meichsner 2019: 2), that mainstream media, academics and Africa's own narratives may have created about children. Given that the peace-making capabilities of children do not feature in the narratives, a thorough study is important not only as an academic exercise but one that can inform peace efforts, an area of priority in Africa.

Although Ghana has not experienced a nationwide protracted conflict, in times of tensions, as often experienced during elections, Ghana, like many African countries comes to the brink of destabilisation. Additionally, as this article has described, Ghana experiences various forms of conflicts, not necessarily violent ones, in everyday lives. Ghanaian children experience everyday disagreements that place them in positions to seek peace. Having been a pace setter in sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana's efforts at changing the narrative around children can significantly influence regional policies and change global narratives on peace and security.

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It takes a village to raise a child: everyday experiences of living with extended family in Namibia

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Abstract: The family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. The Namibian Constitution protects the family, without specifying what 'family' means—which allows for legal concepts of family to evolve to fit social realities. The caring for children, most commonly by extended family or kinship carers is widespread and a practice acceptable in most Namibian cultures in the spirit of *Ubuntu*. This article foregrounds the importance of carer-child relationships in the care provided by extended family for children who do not live with their birth parents. It further investigates children's everyday understandings of what family means to offer a multiplicity of experiences of child fosterage practice. These are presented from a range of carers and children within the fosterage context and considered within children's unique and positive relationships within their families.

Keywords: Extended family, family, fosterage, kinship care, Ubuntu, Namibia.

Note on the authors: see end of article

Introduction

Families are the basic and essential building blocks of society (International Federation for Family Development 2017) and as such are regarded as very important through-out Africa (Assim 2013), and indeed, elsewhere. Similarly, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989) in its preamble posits that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Similarly, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union 1990: 17) under Article 18 acknowledges the family as 'the natural unit and basis of society.' The Namibian Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA) 3 of 2015 does not define a family, but it describes a family member in relation to a child, as a:

> (i) Parent of the child; (ii) any other person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child; (iii) a grandparent, step-parent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or cousin of the child; or (iv) any other person with whom the child has developed a significant relation-ship, based on psychological or emotional attachment, which resembles a family relationship (CCPA 2015: 14).

Besides the significant role ascribed to the family globally and specifically in Namibia, there is no clear definition of family attributed mostly due to the diversity of family forms and living arrangements (Assim 2013; Okon 2012; Sharma 2013). This article does not aim to craft a definition of the term 'family,' but it considers it as an inte-grated and functional unit of society tasked with the primary responsibility of the upbringing, protection and development of children (Sharma 2013).

In modern Western societies, children are typically raised by their biological parents in a central nuclear family unit (Brown *et al.* 2020). The nuclear family is often associated with the idea of being the 'ideal' or 'proper' family or family form and as such, is assumed to be the benchmark from which all other family forms differ or deviate (Assim 2013). In most African contexts, the responsibility for the care of children is not only on the biological parents within the nuclear family set-up, but is shared by all in the extended family network (Amos 2013; Assim 2013; Madhavan & Gross 2013). Extended household organisation refers to the presence of adults other than parents and their partners, such as grandparents, other kin, and housemates sharing in the fosterage of children (Mollborn, Fomby & Dennis 2012).

The practice of fosterage is widespread in societies on the African continent (Beck *et al.* 2014). It is based on the social philosophy of *Ubuntu* which is centred around the capacity of individuals to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013; Nussbaum, 2003). The value of

Ubuntu is illustrated in Nelson Mandela's autobiography 'Long Walk to Freedom' (Makiwane & Kaunda 2018: 2) in which he states:

> My mother presided over three huts at Qunu, which as I remember, were always filled with babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts and uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins.

Childcare has historically been thought of, in Africa, as a social task performed by an entire extended family (Brown 2009). This collective sense of responsibility for the 'proper' upbringing of children is the background to the African proverb which states, 'it takes a village to raise a child', with the 'village' referring to the extended family and kinship community at large (Assim 2013: 27). This socially distributed care reflects strong kinship that serves as a social welfare system in times of need as well as the glue of teaching tradition (Brown *et al.* 2020). Social connectedness and support are widely recognised as protective factors for children (Ruiz-Casares 2010). In assessing the capacity of families in sub-Saharan African countries to care for orphan children, research has shown that it is not only about the provision of material resources, but advice, companionship and emotional support oftentimes are the only resources available in widespread poverty (Ruiz-Casares 2010). Children need a sense of belonging to their family and communities, with different types of relationships providing different kinds of support.

The informal practice of child fosterage is a kinship-based practice which entails 'the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of a child by someone other than a parent who is related to the child biologically, by legal family ties, or by a significant prior relationship' (Leinaweaver 2014: 131). Commonly, the arrangement is a non-regulated, traditional practice (Assim 2013), negotiated informally by elders within the family (Ariyo *et al.* 2019). Child fosterage is a culturally appropriate form of family life in Africa, where, for example, in Ethiopia, historically, children were purposefully sent to live with relatives in 'normal' times for reasons that are different from resolving the problems of orphanhood and child destitution (Abebe & Aase 2007). Extended family systems thus allow childcare to be a collective social responsibility shared across wider kin, providing important mechanisms for accessing education, medical treatment, and economic opportunities (McQuaid *et al.* 2019).

Namibia is situated in the southwest of Africa with a population of about 2.5 million people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020) of which 1 043 323 are persons under the age of 18 (Namibia Statistics Agency 2019). Thirty years of German settler colonialism in South West Africa (1884–1915) paved the way for continued white minority rule under South African control (Kössler 2015; Melber 2019) with its notorious apartheid rule along racial and ethnic lines. Namibia gained its independence from South Africa in 1990 and has fourteen political regions with

around 11 ethnic groups, with a predominant presence of a particular ethnic group in a region (Sharley, Ananias, Rees & Leonard 2019). During the era of colonisation and the Namibian War of Liberation (1966–88), forced separation of families resulted from labour migration, exile, and relocation by military forces (Ruiz-Casares 2010). The contract labour system that prevailed during the colonial period has been associated with the increase of female-headed households and the strengthening of the extended family as a safety net (Kamminga 2000). Contract labour was a system in which labourers, mostly men above the age of 16 years and mature enough to work and without any disabilities, were recruited to work in the central and southern part of Namibia (Likuwa & Shiwedha 2017). The contract labour system prevented Black African men from fulfilling their roles as fathers and husbands as they were away for 12 to 30 months of labour and were not allowed to take their families with them to their workplaces (Hishongwa 1992). Subsequently,

> Namibia's arduous fight for liberation posed a threat to the security of family structures and, consequently, reconfigured family ties. The impact that reconfiguration of kinship networks has had since colonial occupation suggests that present day Namibian families are socially interdependent, meaning that common goals are established with others and peoples' lives are more intimately affected by the actions of others (Brown *et al.* 2020: 174).

Kinship care, customary especially among Black Namibian families, has become the norm with the extended family caring for children whose parents were unable to do so for varied reasons (Ruiz-Casares 2010). The effects of labour migration on the family, for example, were mitigated by the extended family fulfilling the functions of the absent father (Hishongwa 1992). The practice of child migration in and out of kin networks in Namibia has, therefore, been historically prevalent with as high as 40 per cent of children not living with biological parents (Brown *et al.* 2020; Brown 2009).

With a prevalence of 12 percent in 2019, HIV/AIDS remains the main cause of death in Namibia (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). Consequently, orphanhood which refers to the state of being 18 years of age and below, and being without one or both parents due to death, is rife. In 2016, 11.1 percent of all children aged 18 years and below had lost at least one parent, with 1.4 percent having lost both parents (Namibia Statistics Agency 2017). Orphanhood is exacerbated by the high levels of poverty which also contributes largely to the vulnerability of children (Namibia Statistics Agency 2012). Grandparents and, to a lesser extent, other relatives are the most frequent caretakers of children who have either lost both parents or one parent (but are not residing with their surviving parent) (Ruiz-Casares 2010). A study by Brown (2019) describes a typical household in northern Namibia as one with many children of different ages living in one house or homestead, some of whom are the biological offspring of the mother and father, some relatives (e.g. nieces or nephews) of the mother or father, whilst others still are not biologically related to

either the mother or the father. Similarly, Hishongwa (1992: 90) noted that the family in northern Namibia is 'often large, typically with six to ten children. In most families, children of relatives also live in the family house.' A large family can, however, be highly adaptive, particularly for low-income and marginalised children, because it comprises a larger pool of people who are culturally obligated to assist the transferred child (Leinaweaver 2014).

With the onset of HIV and AIDS the narrative around orphanhood in Africa has raised significant concern that orphans pose a threat and a crisis to society (Abebe & Aase 2007). The burden of orphans on the extended family and the extended family system's inability to cope with caring for the rising number of orphans has been highlighted in many studies (Assim 2013; Young & Ansell 2003). Studies have also drawn attention to how the 'fabric of the extended African family/society' faces multiple increasing stressors (McQuaid *et al.* 2019). While high levels of HIV and the rising number of orphans inadvertently place enormous stress on a society and particularly the family, this may be less true of Africa than on any other continent of the world, due to the dominance of the extended family over the nuclear and the African cultural framework which places an emphasis on socially distributed childcare (Brown 2009).

Based on the findings of a study on orphan care in Ethiopia, Abebe and Aase (2007) assert that the capacities and strengths of the informal, traditional childcare system can still support a larger number of orphans, despite the huge threat posed by the AIDS epidemic. Young and Ansell (2003) further noted how inter-household family re-allocation alleviates loss of household labour and reduces any increased caring burden in southern Africa and alternatively, members relocate to other households in the extended family for support, typically meeting basic needs. Informal kinship-based fostering in the African context is a prevalent and integral component of many children's lives expanding the number of people a child considers to be family members (Leinaweaver 2014). The study by Abebe and Aase (2007) further suggests that economic hardship due to erosion of material resources does not necessarily diminish the social capacity of families for sharing the non-material resources of care and solace, nor does it damage deeply embedded emotional exchanges with which poor people cope through crises. Even though care work is highly gendered in many African societies, with women and girls usually considered to be the primary carers, care is often conceptualised as a moral duty, founded on love, emotional attachments and reciprocal kinship responsibilities, rather than monetary exchange (Evans 2010). Kinship care as a cultural value in extended families is associated with positive child outcomes such as strong kinship bonds, flexible in its roles, and relying on cultural values to sustain the family (Bester & Malan-Van Rooyen 2015).

Without necessarily romanticising the extended family system this article aims to explore the meaning of extended family caregiving from the perspective

the children, caregivers and child-care practitioners involved in extended care arrangements in Namibia. The discussion foregrounds the importance of parent/carer-child relationships in the routine care provided by extended family members to children who have faced challenging circumstances. The article investigates everyday understandings of what family means, and in doing so seeks to challenge deficit narratives about the rationale for fosterage practice. These findings are presented and considered within children's unique and positive relationships within their carers emphasising the multidimensional nature of childhood across three regions in Namibia.

Methods

This article uses secondary analysis to examine an existing qualitative data set which explored child fosterage practice in Namibia. The primary study was undertaken in 2019 which investigated the impact of informal care arrangements on children's health and welfare (Sharley *et al.* 2020). Secondary analysis was undertaken on a sample of the data set with the purpose of investigating additional research questions to those explored in the primary study (Long-Sutehall *et al.* 2010; Heaton 2008):

1   What are children's understandings of families in Namibia?
2   What are parents' and carers' understandings of families in Namibia?

The primary study

The data set

'Child Fosterage in Namibia: the impact of informal care arrangements on children's health and welfare', provided the sample from which transcripts were sorted for inclusion in the secondary analysis. In total, 36 participants took part in five workshops with:

1   key stakeholders from various child welfare agencies (n = 6)
2   childcare practitioners (n = 5)
3   carers who were caring for children through informal arrangements (n = 12)
4   children who were being cared for within informal arrangements (aged 9–15 years old) (n = 9)
5   child protection social workers from the State welfare agency (n = 4).

The aim of the primary study was to gather knowledge about the nature, shape and perceived prevalence of child fosterage in Namibia. The workshops aimed to engage communities in the construction of knowledge from their personal and professional experiences of child fosterage (Sharley *et al.* 2020).

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative data was collected over a two-week period in Windhoek, Namibia's capital city. On average, each workshop lasted approximately two hours. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants for each workshop: stakeholders and child-care practitioners were accessed through the Namibia Children's Rights Network (NCRN), whilst parents, carers, and children, were recruited with the support and assistance of staff from a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Windhoek which supports children and their family members in the locality. Data was collected using a schedule which included a number of themes for discussion. The workshop with children was structured around a creative activity which invited children to draw a representation of their family life through composition of a 'tree of life': a common term for the baobab tree on the African continent, widely recognised as a symbol of positivity and life (Sharley *et al.* 2020: 3).

Ethical considerations

For the primary study, ethical approval was obtained from Research Ethics Committees at both academic institutions (University of Namibia and University of Bristol). The research was undertaken with the understanding and written consent of each participant. Prior to the workshops, each participant signed an informed consent form and gave their permission for the discussion to be audio-recorded. Children who participated and were under 16 years of age, gave assent to their participation, and informed consent was gained from the adult with caring responsibility (Sharley *et al.* 2020: 3).

With regards to the secondary analysis presented in this paper, the secondary research questions were directly related to the aim and purpose of the original study. On this basis, the consent gained from participants was felt sufficient to undertake the secondary analysis. However, to gain an independent view that this consent was sufficient, the Research Ethics Committees at the University of Namibia and the University of Bristol (who approved the primary study) were both approached for agreement that the data could undergo a secondary analysis, and approval was granted.

Secondary analysis

Research questions

The methodology of supplementary analysis was chosen with the purpose of offering a more in-depth investigation of the data which had not been fully explored in the primary study (Heaton 2004). The supplementary research questions were:

1   What are children's understandings of families?
2   What are parents' and carers' understandings of families?

Each author was a member of the research team for the primary study into child fosterage, during which time the ideas explored in this secondary analysis were generated.

Assessing and sorting the primary data

Data from the primary study was reviewed for inclusion in the analysis. Transcripts were selected dependent upon whether they responded to the research questions posed. Three of the five transcripts were identified from the primary dataset for inclusion in the secondary analysis. These consisted of those from the workshops with childcare practitioners (n = 5), carers who were caring for children through informal arrangements (n = 12), and children who were being cared for within informal arrangements (aged 9–15 years old) (n = 9). All workshops included questions about participants' understandings of child fosterage, including the purpose of the arrangements, how decisions are made to foster children in and foster children out of families, and the perceived challenges and benefits of the practice for children's health and welfare within the diverse communities within Namibia.

Aside from the children's workshop which asked, '*What does family mean to you?*' and '*What type of families do you know?*', there were no direct questions which related to the broader topic of family in the other two workshops. However, participants were guided to share their experiences of how they were '*providing care and joy to children*', '*any challenges they had experienced in caring for their non-biological children*', and '*what is important to know when caring for a child under a fosterage arrangement?*' and to '*share their experiences of supporting or working with a child who is in a fosterage placement.*'

Analysis

The three transcripts were thematically analysed in accordance with the supplementary research questions posed. Authors were all members of the original research team, possessing a comprehensive understanding of the context and relationships in which the data was produced and analysed. As with the primary study, analytical

memorandums were compiled and shared by the three authors, then refined through discussion and reanalysed. This cyclical process was undertaken via videoconferencing over a two-month period in early 2021.

Limitations

It is important that the limitations of this article be elucidated, some of which might relate to the data collection and analysis employed. The use of secondary data analysis as a methodology indeed yielded interesting findings. However, the use of primary data collection and analysis may also strengthen the findings. Another limitation is that data, although drawn from different ethnic groups in Namibia, was only collected in an urban setting in the capital city, Windhoek. It should however be noted that everyday life experiences of children in extended family settings in rural areas may be vastly different due to the socio-economic diversities.

Findings and discussion

The findings presented in this paper offer an understanding about everyday experiences of fosterage within families across a range of different household contexts in Namibia. Four themes emerged which draw upon the lived experiences of participants and contribute knowledge about the role of informal childcare within families and communities. These themes sit within the Afrocentric world view of *Ubuntu* (Bradbury-Jones *et al.* 2018; Mkabela 2005), emphasising the philosophy of reciprocity in children's everyday care, drawing specific attention to four key areas:

1   ancestry and identity
2   love and compassion
3   the nature of care
4   sharing and generosity.

Theme 1: ancestry and identity

One of the key themes that emerged was ancestry and identity. The term 'ancestry' refers to connection to people or things from the past (Mathieson & Scally 2020). Participants indicated that children may not be raised by their birth parents but are fostered within extended family settings, residing with grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles with whom they share the same ancestors and roots. Similarly, when the child participants

were requested to draw their family tree and explained what it meant, all drawings included a family which consisted of their birth parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents. The ability of children to recall their birth family members is a way to remain connected with their family of origin, as stated by one of the participants below:

> I drew my mother, my father, sister, grandmother, grandfather, auntie, cousin, baby brother or sister and me. Although I do not stay with one of them, I still remember about them. [*Child*]

Findings also indicated that it may be difficult to distinguish between the care given by birth parents and the care given by foster parents, especially where there is a family connection between the birth parent and the foster parent. In cases where the birth mother is still alive, participants stated that the foster caregiver may still be regarded as the mother by children as exemplified below:

> When I left the country, my sister was staying with my two kids and she treated them ... I don't know in which ways she treated them. When I came back [returned] I got my kids back. The treatment that I was giving them, they were not even believing that I am their mother, they just give me examples that my mum [foster mother] treated us like this and ... I am saying, but I am your biological mother. ... [*Carer*]

Leinaweaver (2014) argues that instances where children are maintaining relationships with their family of origin results in positive outcomes and it is good for the children's development. This view was also maintained by some participants who valued the importance of foster children maintaining contact with their biological children:

> They know who their [biological] mother was because they know although she wasn't really involved in their lives, and I never chased her [biological mother] away, she was coming [to visit her children]. [*Childcare practitioner*]

Skoglund *et. al.* (2019) relayed how adult children raised in kinship relationships portrayed their childhood experiences growing up in different family relationships such as with birth parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. What was evident is the degree of continuity of family relationships that is based on already existing social and emotional bonds for children who are living with extended family members. Children who are placed in kinship or extended family care also experience a greater sense of stability as family relationships that have already been established are not disrupted (O'Brien 2012).

Experiencing caregiving as a recipient or an observer from a family member providing care was noted as contributing towards developing an *Ubuntu* culture of a caring attitude towards other family members in need of care. Most of the carer participants shared how their positive experiences as recipients of kinship care in childhood encouraged them to, in their adulthood, also show solidarity and support towards a child in need of care, as exemplified in the extract below:

> I want to care because I know I grew up as an orphan and I know [how it feels to be] an orphan. [*Carer*]

In contemporary Namibia, just like in other contexts in Africa, children often have to assume responsibilities of caring for younger siblings (Assim 2013). Contrary to the belief that the *Ubuntu* values are increasingly being eroded in urban areas (Nussbaum 2003), participants pointed out that they commenced their caregiving role at a very tender age and would, in most instances, continue with their caregiving role throughout adulthood, caring for family members who might need some form of assistance:

> At that time we were also very small [young] but after school we used to come back and help my mother. [*Carer*]

Care of children in extended family settings by older caregivers is also highly valued:

> Even my own grandchild. I can raise my grandchild and the mother is in America or in whatever it is. [*Carer*]

Remaining connected with grandparents ensures that there is less disruption in the lives of children. Several studies confirm the significant role that older caregivers such as grandparents fulfil in the lives of their grandchildren who are deprived of parental care (Booys *et al.* 2015; Kiraly *et al.* 2020; Louw 2013).

Living within an extended family setting was preferred by child participants rather than institutional care. A participant who had experienced living in an institution and in a family setting stated that:

> When we stayed in a children's home ... the situation there is not that quite good. [*Child*]

This finding is consistent with existing literature that maintains that children who are placed in the care of extended family members do not necessarily feel a loss of a sense of identity since they are usually placed with relatives with whom they share a common history and culture (Assim 2013). Furthermore, queries by children to establish their family of origin can be obtained from everyday life within family and community relationships and context. Thus, the sense of identity of children is assured if the child transitions from care by birth parents to care by extended family members (O'Brien 2012) which, in turn, provides a sense of belonging.

Theme 2: love and compassion

The second theme relates to the family as the source of the basic necessities of life and health, and the love and tenderness (Amos 2013) as expressed by the participants. As would be evident from the participants' descriptions 'family in the African context often

refers to what in Western terms would be the extended family' (Makiwane & Kaunda 2018: 2). In the context of family, the term love refers to bonds characterised by deep affection, respect, loyalty and healthy attachment (Dean 2021). A number of participants indicated love as the overarching factor in the care of children, as exemplified below:

> It's a bit difficult but children are children and what they need is to be loved. If you love then them I think everything just goes well. [*Carer*]
> You raise the children with the whole heart and love and everything. [*Carer*]

Even though the children did not explicitly state the love for their family, their expression of sense of belonging to a family could be an indication of their compassion and appreciation towards their extended family. When explaining the drawings about their family, some children indicated:

> My family ... I drawed [drew] my mum, my dad, my grandparents and my sister and I just forget to tell [include] my uncles and my aunt. [*Child*]

The drawings by the child participants also underscores the understanding of a family from an African perspective which is 'typically extended to aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and other relatives that form a family that functions in unison' (Makiwane & Kaunda 2018: 2).

Expressions of love and affection in the extended family set-up was prioritised by the participants irrespective of the type of relation between the child and the carer as illustrated in the extract below:

> We raise those six children [who are not related by blood] like family [and with] love ... so they have only one mother and one father. [*Carer*]

These sentiments by the participants illuminates the view that 'children are highly desired in many African communities and loved' (Makiwane & Kaunda 2018: 2).

The family is recognised as the most influential agent in the socialisation of the individual. Family provides initial human behaviour patterns in an orientation and initial interpersonal relationships (Banovcinova *et al.* 2014). This sentiment is echoed by a carer participant who stated that her caring behaviour and the consequent love expressed to children in her care, was modelled by her parents:

> So this love started from our parents. We have copied our parents and we have seen that this love will transform in us and we will love these children. [*Carer*]

An important area of socialization in the family is also the acquisition of basic rules and standards of functioning in society (Banovcinova *et al.* 2014). Kinship care in African families, among others, is a tool for the socialisation of children and a means of reducing family vulnerabilities (Assim 2013). Participants expressed how a family's love could shield a child from negative societal influences and map their future trajectories:

> ... if you don't have the love of your mother, what could you do? You could easily be in a crowd smoking and that would possibly lead to prostitution. I just want to help. You know, I want to do. [*Carer*]
>
> I think we just need to raise these kids with love and let them grow up in whatever they are going to do. After 18 years it's up to them. [*Childcare practitioner*]

This theme of love and compassion emphasises many African family values, signalled by the existence of strong kinship networks which serve as a safety net, especially for children. Kinship-based fostering expands the pool of relatives rather than replacing one parent with another (Leinaweaver 2014). Kinship carers usually include aunts, uncles and older siblings, but grandparents (especially grandmothers) form the majority (Assim 2013). The kinship family through its connections and expression of care and affection provides the child with a sense of belonging, consistency, continuity in family identity, emotional ties, and familiarity (Bester & Malan-Van Rooyen 2015). Similarly, Leinaweaver (2014) posits that 'having many caregivers is not only not harmful, but also can result in many meaningful affective relationships supporting a child's development.'

Theme 3: the nature of care

A strong theme that emerged in the data was the caregiving role of women in families and communities. Specifically, how they in charge of the care and protection of children that are considered vulnerable or in need of support. As previously indicated in many African countries, care work is highly gendered, with women and girls assuming the most significant caring roles for their families and communities (Evans 2021). Many participants in the workshops stated that the care of a child was transferred from woman to woman in the family, and that it was predominantly women who were responsible for the day-to-day management of caring for children from within or outside of their own family networks. This was highlighted by many of the children who talked about the role of women as their primary carer, referring to them as their 'mother' or 'mamma' in addition to, or often privileged over their biological parent. In the following extract a child talks about the role of her foster mother in this way:

> I am so glad that I have Mama that take[s] care of me and I take her as my real mum. [*Child*]

Another child shares how she was raised by her aunty following the death of her parents, calling her 'mum' because of the important role she has played in her care and the support she has provided to her:

> My mum's name is [xxxx]. I just call her mum because she took care of me when I was in a difficult state, so I appreciate what she has done for me. She has brought me to this chair today. If it was not for her, I couldn't be standing here or sitting here. [*Child*]

One carer talked about the challenges of caring for her non-biological siblings whilst she was still at school, when as a result of sudden unemployment, her parents migrated to the city for work, leaving her heading the household which comprised of ten children:

> I was the eldest ... I was around 13 years, and they were all behind me. My mum and my dad they went to the office for a living which was sudden ... I had to make sure that these kids must have something to eat. [Parent/carer]

In Namibia internal migrants tend to follow employment opportunities moving from regions where there are few employment opportunities, to urban areas which offer increased financial prospects (Namibia Statistics Agency 2015).

Some children also talked about specific elements of care and support that their 'mammas' provided. In the following extracts children emphasise how challenging they found growing up without the support of their mother:

> Sometimes you just cry and say 'what should I do? My mum is not here' so many bad feelings. [*Child*]
>
> Staying [living] without your mother, life is really hard because your mother is really important. She's the one that's really important. [*Child*]

Another child goes on to emphasise the presence of mothers in day-to-day child rearing responsibilities and the particular significance of this female role during adolescence and menstruation:

> You always think of your mum mostly not your father because he's not next to you mostly ... but when it's a girl's time your mother's always there for you ... you really, really, need a mother. [*Child*]

Most participants emphasised the role of women in the everyday care of children in Namibia and the lack of involvement of the father in child-rearing practice. The death of a mother was cited as a common reason for child to be cared for in extended family networks:

> If my sister passed away immediately I will be the one who would take care of her child. [*Childcare practitioner*]

There was very little discussion amongst the participants on the day-to-day role of fathers within their families or households which could be understood in the context of internal migration, acknowledged as being traditionally undertaken by men in the family who leave their homes in search of paid employment (Murray 1981 cited in Young & Ansell 2003). Fathers, when mentioned, were discussed in relation to situations whereby they made attempts to 'take children back' when a child had reached adolescence. Participants believed that these instances, although culturally recognised, were uncommon. This is demonstrated in the following extract from a participant:

> If the mum passed on then the father has the right to take the child, but in our communities ... the father will never take care of that child. [*Childcare practitioner*]

Many children expressed how precious elders were to them in their families. They offered protection, comfort, support on every-day worries. In the following extracts children say that they would approach elderly family members for guidance and protection:

> That's why it's very important to have someone, an elder ... to talk with a child that has not got a parent. [*Child*]
>
> You should go to an elder person and say, 'Auntie,' or 'Granny,' my friend says this to me [about] my mum and she keep on commenting [about] my parents ... because elder people know how to handle us. [*Child*]

Carers also spoke about their desire to protect children and to provide 'a better life' for those who had suffered harm or adversity within the community. In the following extracts participants explain their motivation to care for children who were in need of support and protection, and refer to the difficulties some of the children they were caring for had experienced at a young age:

> So, I took that child to raise the child... It's just to give a better life for the child. [*Carer*]
>
> Their mum was still alive, but she's passed on now. She used to take the kids from the school around 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock and she goes and sits in front of a bottle store [liquor outlet] or shop begging for money. [*Childcare practitioner*]
>
> The mum was having sex in front of those girls while they were so small, and they were sitting there and waiting until this thing finishes ... luckily I had a conversation with them about when somebody is touching you and why they mustn't do anything, and you are so young. [*Carer*]

The role of women in families in providing practical and emotional support to meet children's basic needs was a key discussion within the workshops, identifying significant challenges in accessing appropriate resources and services in the context of financial hardship for most families. Some participants talked about the added vulnerabilities of young girls and how having no parent to care for them could leave them at risk of prostitution or sexual violence within the community and in need of protection. In the following extract a woman describes the consequences for children who were not being cared for and supervised appropriately. She talks about the child she is now caring for and how she watched the child's mother 'sneak out' at night to go to the bar to drink, leaving her baby unattended:

> [I] hear the babies crying for hunger—but [she has] gone away for three or four hours ... I stay with her kids, and I struggle for milk and everything now. [*Carer*]

Another participant reflects on her role as a carer, and describes feeling obliged to provide food or clothing for children she sees within the community:

> How many street kids do you see? At every stop they are running. There are kids here and there. They are asking for money. They are not going to school, they don't have clothes, they don't have shoes. I think for us people who look after the children, if I see something ... I may need to pay for them. [*Carer*]
>
> When they're not taking care of the child this child would end up in the street—it's a girl and everyone knows about girls. [*Carer*]

This theme draws attention to the role and responsibility of women in children's care and protection within fosterage practice (Brown 2009). Carers have described their experiences and motivations for caring for a child from within or outside of their extended family networks, emphasising a desire to support children who had suffered adversity, poor-parenting, or experienced the death of a parent (Goody 1982; Madhavan & Gross 2013). The absence of men in the caring role is conspicuous. Participants describe the value that female elders bring to child-rearing in a diverse range of household contexts, and the role of teachers and neighbours in providing support during times of crisis or adversity (Branje *et al.* 2004). Specifically, young girls were acknowledged as being particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and prostitution amongst communities in Namibia, within the everyday realities and challenges of poverty and forced internal migration for paid employment (UNAIDS 2013; WHO 2005).

Theme 4: sharing and generosity

The fourth theme that emerged is sharing and generosity. Participants stated that members in extended family systems share food, clothing and shelter with one another and with the broader community despite the hardships in the wider context of poverty and having limited resources. Despite the challenges, the participants indicated treating non-biological children in their care as their own and sharing whatever they have equally amongst the children as outlined below:

> We are all in it together. If there is food, then they have the same as others. [*Carer*]
>
> But she [carer] feels if you have something for them she feels better that she shares it with somebody and not for her alone. [*Carer*]
>
> Sometimes whatever I'm having we have to share. So if there's nothing, there's nothing. [*Carer*]

In support of the views expressed by the participants, Ringson and Chereni (2020) stress that the extended family remains the strongest safety net for children in vulnerable circumstances whether or not resources are available. This, besides the strong evidence that suggests that extended families where a kin member is providing childcare for non-biological children are amongst the poorest in the community (O'Brien 2012).

In households of extended families, people seem to practise generosity by sharing food, living spaces and other means with people and also strangers who are passing by. In the spirit of *Ubuntu,* generosity can be understood as an act of doing good to other people or to make a contribution towards the common good in society (Komter 2010). One participant shares her experience of generosity in the home where she was raised:

> All people passing there say 'Mummy, we're hungry. Can you give us something to eat here?' What she [mother/carer] has in this house she likes to share with those people. Sharing is good. Every time when they are passing there people know this house they used to eat here so every time they came back they said 'Please, do you have something to give us?' What she has in the house she just shares with those people. [*Carer*]

Previous studies confirm that sharing of resources by family, friends and neighbours have contributed to the socio-economic and educational development in many communities in countries across the continent, as people are willing to share the little they have for the sake of another person in need (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley 2019). However, sometimes being generous may lead to exploitation and being taken advantage of (Munene 2001).

Values of generosity and sharing with those in need are also instilled in children. Children who are not living with birth parents may not be amongst the most fortunate in the community. However, they seem to have compassion towards other children in society who are also going through hardship, and are willing to extend a helping hand by sharing what they have with others:

> Last week we collected all our clothes like one pair of our winter clothes and one pair of summer clothes and some clothes that you don't like and we gave to the kids. [*Child*]

Another child participant added that:

> ... sometimes they [other children] don't have food to [take to] school [for lunch] and imagine ... [spending] even the whole school day ... without food ... we also just donated oranges and small toys, toothpaste. [*Child*]

Some of the participants stated that fairness and equal treatment is the norm in households of extended families. Participants further added that no distinction is made between the biological children and the children brought into the extended family, as expressed below:

> I want the child to feel that I am the mother although I was not even one. I just commit myself that this is what I'm going to do and I'm going to take good care of these children. [*Carer*]
> We raise those six children with that family love because when we treat our brother's children we treat them the same as those [foster] children; so they have only one mother and one father. [*Carer*]

Contrary to the findings by Brown *et al.* (2020) who pointed out inequalities in treatment experienced by children fostered into kinship family environments, the above

findings are consistent with scholars such as Ringson & Chereni (2020) who indicated carers in extended family systems in communities in countries across Africa were treating children in fosterage equitably to their own biological children.

Discussion

Child-rearing in Namibia, as it is in most African communities, is based upon the *Ubuntu* philosophy of caring and sharing. The extended family provides the child with a sense of belonging and identity because members of the extended family system share common roots and ancestry. Findings suggest that children who are living in extended, or kinship families maintain strong ancestral ties with a wide range of family members, as well as cultural identity with carers who are not biologically related to them. The article further established that positive experiences as recipients of kinship care in childhood places one in a better position to appreciate and to be willing to also provide kinship care to a child during adulthood. This in a way advances the philosophy of *Ubuntu* that comes from the realisation that each and everyone's life is deeply tied to the other and the choice to use personal power to commit to the common good as opposed to creating isolated individual good (Onyejiuwa 2017).

According to African socio-cultural concepts of childhood and care, children, families and communities have reciprocal rights and responsibilities as part of an 'intergenerational contract' to provide care and support when needed (Evans 2010). Children in communities across the region may also take up caregiving responsibility at a very young age which challenges the 'Western ideological constructions of childhood as a carefree phase of innocence, in which children are free from "adult responsibilities and work" as well as norms of parenting that define children as being dependent on their mothers (and fathers) for nurturing, care and socialisation' (Evans 2010: 6). The children's contribution to the family under the *Ubuntu* philosophy implies that 'what they are doing will enable or empower the community around them and help it improve' (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya 2013: 673). The communal value of a person is strongly based on what he/she does for the family and for the community, and this is a very vital and important part of daily life and family bonds in Africa (Nussbaum 2003; Schoeman 2012). Caregiving of children in kinship care being provided by the elderly, especially grandmothers, seem also very common contributing positively to the care and wellbeing of children. *Ubuntu* thus embodies the idea of interconnectedness of people to each other with every member in the community expected to visibly participate in society (Schoeman 2012).

Generosity and sharing with others in need are some of the common practices for children who are living in kinship or extended family systems. This compassion and sense of care for others in need seems to be developed from observations in the community, but also personal experiences, which results into being kind and serving

others. Having limited means or meagre resources does not prevent people from sharing food, clothing, shelter and other material means. The findings confirmed that generosity and sharing goes beyond biological family relationships and include extended family, friends and neighbours. This could be based on the premise that no one can be self-sufficient and that interdependence is a reality for all (Nussbaum 2003) which is true to the isiZulu saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* translated as 'a person is a person because of or through others' (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya 2013: 673). The value of generosity and sharing seem to contribute towards socio-economic development in African communities. It is only through such community solidarity that hunger, isolation, deprivation, poverty and any emerging challenges can be survived, because of the community's brotherly and sisterly concern, cooperation, care, and sharing (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya 2013).

Contrary to the findings by Leinaweaver (2014: 4) that 'informal kinship-based fostering can lead to foster children being treated differently than birth children', the children in the study upon which this article is based indicated that they were being treated equally to the biological children of the kinship caregiver and also expressed their happiness in living in an extended family network. The extended family is thus a critical safety net for orphans and children in need of care because it presents an opportunity for children to be nurtured collectively within familiar family context and community environment.

Acknowledgements

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Literary depictions of everyday African childhoods

Memory, innocence and nostalgia: other versions of African childhood in two African texts

Theresah Patrine Ennin

Abstract: There are a number of memoirs/autobiographies and biographies by African writers on their childhoods in Africa. However, many of these texts tend to focus mostly on the child protagonist's experiences of colonialism, slavery, war, death and deprivation. This article moves away from these narratives of deprivation and trauma, focusing on other versions of African childhoods where the child lives a carefree life devoid of danger and scarcity of resources. Using Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and doing a textual analysis of the content, themes and characters, this article argues that these texts can be read as recollections of nostalgia and memories of a carefree time in the life of two African children, a time that the narrators reminisce upon through the act of retelling in order to revisit the joys and innocence of those days.

Keywords: Memory, nostalgia, African childhood, innocence, *The Dark Child*, *Aké: The Years of Childhood*.

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Introduction

Autobiographies of childhood most commonly take the form of an adult author writing about events from his or her childhood (Douglas 2010). The autobiography of childhood has been seen as a diverse subgenre of autobiography. Examples of this subgenre include *Becoming* (2018) by Michelle Obama, *Dreams in a time of War* (2010) by Ngugi wa' Thiong'o, *Dreams from my Father* (1995) by Barack Obama and *Taking Flight* (2014) by Michaela DePrince. Autobiographies of childhood are widely read and have gained popularity and, sometimes notoriety primarily through their representations of traumatic childhoods, particularly autobiographical depictions of child abuse as pertains in *The Abandoned Baobab* (1983) by Ken Bugul, *Reflections of Mamie—A Story of Survival* (2013) by Rosemary Mamie Adkins, *Dear Teddy* (2012) by J.D. Stockholm, and *I know why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) by Maya Angelou. As Douglas (2010: 3) notes, at best, autobiographies of childhood have been praised for bringing 'child abuse to public attention' and becoming tools for advocacy; 'at worst, these books have been criticised for being exploitative, unethical, and even voyeuristic in their representation of child subjects.' Such responses are perhaps not surprising when we consider that in the cultural contexts within which these texts appear, there is now an intense socio-cultural interest in the child.

There are African autobiographies that detail the trauma that children go through as a result of war, abandonment, poverty and racial and tribal disturbances. Texts such as the *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom fighter* (1990) by Albie Sachs, *The House at Sugar Beach* (2008) by Helene Cooper, *The Devil that danced on Water* (2002) by Aminatta Forna, and *The Abandoned Baobab: The Autobiography of a Senegalese woman* (1983) by Ken Bugul fall under this category. This article, however, moves away from the stark and painful representation of a deprived African childhood, and rather focuses on the autobiographies of African childhood that depict happier times for the author who looks back with nostalgia. In the selection of texts for this article, it is argued that by recalling childhood stories, writers identify with their child self and express nostalgia for a lost world. The texts used are referred to as 'autobiographical' because they are published self-narratives in which the author and the protagonist are the same person.

The thrust of this article is to discuss Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* as recollections of a carefree time in the life of two African children; a time that the narrators go back to in the retelling to revisit the joys and innocence of those days. The selection of Laye's *The Dark Child* and Soyinka's *Aké* for this discussion is premised on the fact that they are reflections of African childhoods that are bereft of the usual deprivation and trauma seen in many African autobiographies of childhood, and thus would better afford the author the opportunity to look at other versions of African childhood in African literary texts.

Secondly, they are true narratives of childhood as the stories end with the child narrator on the cusp of adulthood; the narratives do not go beyond the childhood years. This article reflects on these texts as commentaries of the lives of the narrators on their childhood that were positive and enabling for their development as adults, working on the claim that these texts are celebrations of the innocence of an idyllic childhood that the narrators describe with nostalgia. The question of why these two texts is answered in Sow (2010), who sees a significant similarity between the two autobiographies. He argues that both texts have a similar narrative configuration, a shared ideological and historical coherence as well as a shared experience of the final periods of colonial rule, and beginning of political instabilities. Sow argues that in African literature,

> Childhood autobiographical narratives are regularly seen as responsive to historical junctures, and as exploring a repressive situation, or racial, gender, and/or class prejudice, recalling the drama of early life and character formation. It is a genre perceived as emblematic, a symbolic literary form, which has called for narrative codifications, ideological expectations and determinations, categorisation, and often exclusion. At the same time, several important texts—including L 'enfant noir and Aké—are not constructed around these dominant patterns. By their difference, they remind us of the diversity and plurality of African childhood experiences according to societies, places, political contexts, and historical moments (499).

Authors and texts

Aké: The Years of Childhood (1981), described as Wole Soyinka's childhood memoir, details the author's life from his infancy until he leaves home for further schooling at around 12 years of age. The memoir focuses on his growing intelligence, curiosity, and impetuous nature. Soyinka describes his relationships with his parents, siblings, and the other members of his extended family. Soyinka comes from a Christian home. His father is the headmaster of St. Peter's Primary school at Aké and his great grandfather was the Most Rev. J.J. Ransome-Kuti who was a teacher, and a Christian leader who converted people to the Christian faith through his versatility in rendering English gospel hymns into indigenous gospel songs. Ransome-Kuti became a deacon in 1895, was ordained a priest in 1897 and appointed district judge from 1902 to 1906. In 1911, he was appointed pastor of St Peter's Cathedral Church, Aké, after previously serving as superintendent of the Abeokuta Church Mission. In 1922, he was made canon of the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos and in 1925, he became the first Nigerian to release a record album after he recorded several Yoruba language hymns in gramophone through Zonophone Records. The nature of the family is reflected in the narrative through their mother, who is nicknamed 'Wild Christian' because of her faith and desire to convert everyone to Christianity. In addition to their Christian values, their home is very strict with rules to live by. Any infraction has a punishment, and Soyinka's

parents do not spare the rod. With parents who are engaged in economic activities, he and his siblings are financially comfortable and can afford to take tea, bread, butter and eggs for breakfast, delicacies only a few could afford then.

Soyinka indicates his fascination with Yoruba culture and practices right from the beginning of the narrative. As a young boy he is interested in the stories of the wood spirits, *òrò* and ghosts that are said to inhabit the woods around their house. He also expresses his love for the Yoruba foods eaten at home and his interest in the traditional leadership of his people exemplified in the *Odemo* of Isara and the Alake's palace and the *ogboni*. This blend of Yoruba heritage and his Christian background is what Olakunle George (2008) refers to as a complex hybridisation of traditional Yoruba norms and Western, Christian modernity leading to Soyinka emerging as a nationalist instead of a more ethnic or religiously inclined individual. Maduakor (1986) thus examines all these experiences recounted by Soyinka as contributing factors of his personal development which confirm the present view of Soyinka as a non-conformist. To Maduakor, the influence of the family on the development of the child is very significant. He gives an instance that Soyinka's present distrust for government and justice can be traced to his distrust for his parents' perception of justice and discipline at home. Inasmuch as it is accepted that the sum total of Soyinka's childhood experiences invariably affects his adult personality, I would like to reiterate that this narrative should not only be read as a way of finding the nuances in the works of the older Soyinka but also read as a yearning on the narrator's part for his lost childhood. As indicated by Iva Gilbertova (1993: 78–79):

> *Aké* is then a book about childhood, powerful and understandable anywhere in the world. It is about the great and admired, beloved and frightening, ridiculous and bizarre figures that a child meets on the way. It speaks about houses and rocks, about a thousand smells and tastes, about adventure, about lies and sincerity, about pain, hope and disappointment, about friendship. It is also a book about the world of adults perceived through a child's eyes.

This article discusses *Aké* as a bildungsroman of a young boy making his way through life in his community and learning to navigate that space for himself. It is in that same context of bildung that Jeyifo (2014) agrees that *Aké* is not one of the regular bildungsroman by African writers. Jeyifo asserts that this peculiarity warrants that Soyinka's *Aké* be perceived as an account of a process of unique individual development, where the autobiography is seen as the narration of Soyinka's awareness of a remarkable sense of his own peculiarity against the values and expectations of his family, hometown, nation and the world.

The autobiography is not a chronological narration of the events in Soyinka's childhood; rather, the narrative is made up of significant memorable events that the author shares with his audience. Of these, Moolla (2012) posits that the most abstrusely symbolic event in Soyinka's *Aké* is the occasion when the young protagonist receives

arc-shaped slashes on his ankles and wrists from his paternal grandfather which ritually and physically mark his transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Moolla, the scarification of the protagonist holds great spiritual, physical and emotional significance to his development. She explains that scarification among the protagonists' ethnic group, the Yoruba, literally and metaphorically embodies the road in an individual's life journey. Moolla further states that the Yoruba believe that scarification is a puberty rite initiated by its tutelary deity, Ògún who is the revered god of iron, the patron deity of metalworkers and body artists. Ritual scarification thus acts as a catalyst to the individual's self-realisation through artistic creativity. Moolla then suggests that the creative artistry of Soyinka can be traced to the inspiration he receives in his childhood ritual scarification.

Camara Laye narrates his childhood in *The Dark Child* (1954); the autobiography was recognised as one of the most important pieces of contemporary prose from French-speaking Africa. Laye's family were of the Malinké people, who retained their ancestral animist religion, despite the region's overall conversion to Islam several centuries ago. His father, Camara Komady, was a blacksmith and goldsmith and a descendent of the Camara clan, which traced its genealogy back to the thirteenth century. His mother, Dâman Sadan, also came from a family of blacksmiths.

Although sometimes criticised for not engaging with the French experience of colonialism, *The Dark Child* has been exonerated by critics who have found this to be far from the truth. Belcher (2007) shows that Laye's *The Dark Child* contains subtle strategies of resistance against French colonialism. She says that even though the novel does not directly oppose French rule like other anti-colonial texts, it uses the device of rhetorical indirection to express resistance. According to Belcher, African characters performing ignorance or stupidity, lying convincingly, deploying flattery, mistranslating, coding speech with subtext, and remaining silent are some forms of rhetorical indirection. Belcher claims:

> *L'Enfant noir* ... is an autobiography of the author's childhood in Koroussa, French Guinea, a traditional village little touched by Westernization. The book presents a largely positive memory of the joys of village life, with participation rather than resistance as its focus. In fact, the novel has been critiqued for exhibiting too little resistance to French colonialism, either direct or indirect. While the text clearly lacks any direct resistance (there are no revolutions, no rabble-rousing journalists, no showdowns with colonial officers), there are several elucidating cases of indirect resistance (70).

In spite of the 'elucidating cases of indirect resistance' found in the text as indicated above by Belcher, this article sees that as a different engagement from its primary concern, which is not on finding ways to read *The Dark Child* as form of resistance against French colonisation; but rather, to to read and discuss this text as a portrait of an African childhood.

Another prominent concern as far as critical reception to this book has been, is the important place of education in Laye's novel. Toko (2007) sees the traditional values of the African as the foundation of education and the mastery of Western technology and science. He observes that Laye's novel outlines the clash between African traditions and Western culture imposed by colonisation. He asserts that Laye portrays himself as a specimen of the contemporary African who constantly glides between black tradition and white civilisation. According to Toko, the introduction of the protagonist to his family totem in Kouroussa by his father begins the clash between traditional education and colonial school. He reveals that the fear of Laye's father concerning the difficulty in transferring all his totemic traditions and profession of his caste to his son is legitimate. Again, Toko recounts that all the other participants of the initiation are presented with symbols of their father's caste except the protagonist whose father presents him with a book and a pen: symbols of White civilisation.

Like *Aké*, *The Dark Child* is also read as a bildungsroman of a young man growing from childhood to adulthood. Hayes (2008) examines the idea of male identity in Laye's work and places the novel in the category of a male colonial bildungsroman where the subject matter or central idea of the novel is Laye's journey to becoming a man; his apprenticeship to masculinity. Hayes focuses more on the process of development that the protagonist goes through from his childhood through his initiation/ puberty and later his manhood or adulthood.

This transition is also addressed in Philipson's (1989) work where he critically studies Laye's transition from childhood to adulthood and argues that this occurs when Laye realises the important role that the world outside his community plays in his development. According to Philipson, the parents of the protagonist and his community are active agents of development. However, growth is not a prerogative of the family space alone, real growth of the protagonist occurs when he leaves his comfort zone to experience the Western world all on his own. Philipson is of the view that the childhood of the African and the state of colonisation are both stages that need to be outgrown.

In the light of the pre-existing critical writings on virtually all imaginable aspects of these two most influential texts on childhood, one may wonder why we need to go back to these texts in the year 2022 when there are more recent and yet to be exhausted texts on childhood in other parts of Africa. This revisiting has become essential primarily because African childhoods as expressed in the literature appear monolithic. According to Ainehi Edoro (2016), childhood in African fiction is, 'a brutal affair. It has often been represented as a nightmare of violence, rape, war, and everything in-between.' It appears then as if there are no other depictions of African childhoods in African literature. Uwem Akpan's *Say You Are One of Them* (2008) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* (2005) are examples of novels that showcase image after image of African children being hurt and brutalised. Stories like these

have their value, Edoro claims, however, the important thing to remember is that these novels do not have to define how we imagine the world of childhood in an African context. And it is on this premise that this article reads *Aké* and *The Dark Child* as other versions of African childhoods.

Aké: incessant curiosity and the making of an intellectual

Right from the beginning of the text, the reader is introduced to Soyinka's curious nature. He questions everything around him and wants to investigate everything. His incessant questioning is perceived by his mother as a sign of disobedience; however, Soyinka's rational mind wants to find meaning in the many contradictions in the adult world. When told the story of how his mother and her brother had been punished for disobeying their uncle and venturing into the woods behind the parsonage, where a wood sprite had chased them, Soyinka felt that, 'the fright should have sufficed as punishment' (Soyinka 1981: 7)

In considering punishment in his own household and the Aké community, Soyinka thinks that most of the punishment consists of humiliation. In pondering the case of a thief or a bed wetter who is paraded through town for everyone to see their shame, he wonders why people would turn out to see such punishment. This was what he was afraid of when his mother, Wild Christian, catches him eating the abandoned tin of powdered milk in the pantry. In his bid to escape such humiliation, should it come to that, he prepares to run away from home. His lack of understanding of the adult world, which clearly indicates his state as a child is also seen when he fights Dipo, his younger brother, on the urging of his family and then he is chastised for trying to kill his brother, 'I was overwhelmed by only one fact—that there was neither justice nor logic in the world of grown-ups' (Soyinka 1981: 104).

As indicated by Jeyifo (2014), there is a peculiarity to Soyinka that sets him apart from many other children. His curiosity is quite exceptional that at age four, he follows a police band for miles away from his home to several towns over. He opens the gate of their compound and goes to the church grounds to see what was making all the noise he was hearing. And being curious, he follows a procession of the police band as it marches along the road followed by a motley crowd made up of children and adults. As he follows the band that moves further and further from his home, he pays attention to what is going on around him, the various people and places he sees, 'there were shops and storey-buildings. And there were inscriptions everywhere: AKINS PHOTO STUDIO: LONDON TRAINED PORTRAITIST, then in smaller letters: A Trial will Convince You' (Soyinka 1981: 38). He says that he can no longer see the parsonage wall but he is not worried as he is too enraptured by the emergence of the proper shape and sizes; of 'those token bits and pieces of Aké which had entered our

home on occasions' (Soyinka 1981: 38), as exemplified by his sighting of the corn-mill, Miss McCutter's Maternity clinic, where he sees for the first time, the name McCutter which he knew as Makota.

Evidence of his innocence and naivety is seen when he feels reassured by the fact that the houses along the road he is traversing are all linked together by either a roof or fence. The band goes through the market just before Ibara where he is introduced to a variety of food stuffs and products. Later, he finds himself abandoned and all alone with the police band when it enters a compound. The officers are amazed to learn that he has come all the way from Aké. They send him home and the family is very astonished at what he has done. But being the little boy that he is, he does not grasp the enormity of the situation: that he could have gotten lost easily.

Soyinka's curiosity makes him follow his sister as she goes off to school. Although he can see and hear the older pupils as they have their morning assembly, as he lives on the school compound being the child of the headmaster, he cannot see his sister Tinu amongst them, and this is what fuels his curiosity all the more. Thus, he decides that he is going to school. He plans and discreetly follows Tinu and Lawanle, Tinu's escort, to school. When he is discovered, his infectious joy at being in school causes the teacher to let him stay. All children are born with an innate curiosity to explore their world (Perry 2001); however, this curiosity must be nurtured or developed in young children, otherwise it will be lost. Soyinka's curious nature is nurtured by some members of his family such as his father, grandfather, his father's friends, who generally do not suppress his natural precociousness, and also by his environment that contains many elements to fuel a child's imagination. Although as already indicated every child is curious, Soyinka's curiosity is not curtailed, thus allowing him to become more questioning and contemplative.

These qualities of the young Soyinka—his questioning and curious spirit and contemplative mood—contribute to his intelligence by making him perceptive. This becomes evident when he finds it strange that the adults discuss the children as if the children are not present. One day when he fights with the maid bathing him, he claims he wants to bath himself. When accused of being afraid of water by his family, Soyinka retorts that he is not afraid of water; how could he be when he likes to go bath in the rain? He then engages in a lively discussion on whether rain is not water, with his father. His argumentative nature is a form of exasperation for his mother, but his father actually encourages it, perhaps finding in it signs of a budding intellectual. Another instance is when his father, popularly known as Essay, is informed that Soyinka had questioned how the Sexton at church could prove that out of all the people in church, he had been the one talking. Finding the logic in the little boy's argument, Essay had barely managed to hold onto his laughter, conceding that indeed, that would be a difficult thing to prove.

Soyinka's childhood in an environment where his curiosity and questioning nature is encouraged (although his mother tries to subdue this nature) affords him the opportunity to grow into an intelligent person. This enabling environment is not reflective of many childhood experiences in Africa at the time. He was lucky to have found himself in the home of an educated man who allowed children to be seen and heard.

The young narrator makes references to his absent-mindedness as a child. These absent-minded episodes are lamented by his mother who persistently informs his father of the need to cure him of it before it is too late. Once, lost in his own world, he flogs his father's beautiful new rosebushes to shreds without being aware of what he is doing. This particularly scares him because he is his father's number one gardener who jealously tends his father's rose bushes (Soyinka 1981: 75). The second incidence occurs when, lost in his own world again, he accidentally causes his father's hunting gun to go off and make a hole in the ceiling of the sitting room.

In spite of these escapades, Soyinka is portrayed as a sensitive child. When his baby sister, Folasode, dies on her first birthday, his parents think the children too young to understand death and so they try to make light of the whole situation, but young Soyinka would have none of it:

> Suddenly, it all broke up within me. A force from nowhere pressed me against the bed and I howled. As I was picked up, I struggled against my father's soothing voice, tears all over me. I was sucked into a place of loss whose cause or definition remained elusive. I did not comprehend it yet, and even through those tears I saw the astonished face of Wild Christian, and heard her voice saying, 'But what does he understand of it? What does he understand?' (Soyinka 1981: 98).

In this passage, contrary to the mother's question, the young boy understands that his sister is gone forever, and it surprises him that the family does not want to acknowledge that change. This marks a phase in the young boy's life as we see him growing from a place of innocence to awareness. This growing maturity is demonstrated in his constant questioning of his parents 'ever-ready recourse to the cane for every infraction' (Soyinka 1981: 124), and his interrogation of the act of prostrating before men as pertains in Isara, his father's hometown (Soyinka 1981: 127). It finally culminates in the cutting of feet ceremony his grandfather subjects him to as a way of inoculating him against dangers in secondary school.

In his recollection of these memories, what is exhibited is Soyinka's childhood's environment which provides him with the opportunity to grow into the intellectual he becomes, the man who questioned and still questions every why and wherefore; the man who does not take things at face value but must investigate to find why they are so.

The Dark Child: memory and nascent manhood

Just as Soyinka's recollection of childhood memories in his autobiography highlights his contented childhood days, so does Laye's autobiography reflects the happiness he experiences in his childhood days. Whereas critics have indicated that Laye is reluctant to engage in a racial discourse in his work, Avono (2018) actually says that Laye's refusal to engage with the politics of race in his work, 'erases France, and thus distorts race for its francophone African audience' (Avono 2018: 93). Avono goes on to argue that Laye prefers to be European than African. It can be deduced from Avono's statements that he misinterprets Laye's nostalgia for his hometown and family. It is pertinent to say that this article focuses on a re-reading of the autobiography from a different perspective to throw more light on the other facets of this autobiography that have hitherto been relegated to the fringes of scholarly discussions on the text. Consequently, this article moves away consciously from debates on colonialism and race and fixes its attention solely on the adult narrator who looks back with nostalgia at his childhood home and life.

Nostalgia is closely related to memory. The recollection of memories propels nostalgic feelings in a person. Researchers indicate that memory is the process of taking in information from the world around us, processing it, storing it and later recalling that information, sometimes many years later. A complex type of memory that allows us to recall and even re-live personal events or episodes from our past is referred to as autobiographical memory. This type of memory forms our personal history or autobiography and is closely linked to another type of memory—spatial memory and navigation, which allows us to learn and remember how to find our way around the world. Thus, the recall of his childhood experiences invokes in Laye, nostalgia for his childhood days. Hepper *et al.* (2012: 114) define nostalgia as,

> ... a complex emotion that involves past-oriented cognition and a mixed-affective signature, and is often triggered by encountering a familiar smell, sound, or keepsake, by engaging in conversations, or by feeling lonely. When waxing nostalgic, one remembers, thinks about, reminisces about, or dwells on a memory from one's past—typically a fond, personally meaningful memory such as one's childhood or a close relationship.One often views the memory through rose-tinted glasses, misses that time or person, longs for it, and may even wish to return to the past. As a result, one typically feels emotional, most often happy but with a sense of loss and longing; other less common feelings include comfort, calm, regret, sadness, pain, or an overall sense of bittersweetness.

Thus, nostalgia is seen in terms of loss, mourning and the impossibility of return. This is the emotion most pervasive in Laye's autobiography. In his recollections of memories of the past, he evinces this nostalgia. One of Laye's earliest memories is of him playing around his father's hut as a young child of perhaps five years. This memorable experience is so vivid in his mind that it opens the narrative. He also describes

an incident with a snake one day around the hut. He sees a snake creeping around his father's hut, and to emphasise his innocence and naivety, he goes round to play with it, putting a reed into the snake's mouth. As the snake swallows the reed, Laye laughs (Laye 1954: 18); completely oblivious to the danger he is in. This institutes the age of innocence in the young child. In the midst of the commotion that ensues when the adults find out what he is doing and carry him away from danger, young Laye cries and promises his mother that he would not play that game again, 'although the game still didn't seem dangerous to me' (Laye 1954: 18).

Another childhood memory that resurfaces in the narration is his fascination with the railroad that passes by their hut. He would spend a lot of time there watching the iron rails. His fascination with snakes is also seen here at the rail roads where he is intrigued by the snakes that would be found crawling in the hot road bed. He often wonders what attracts these snakes to the hot rail roads. These incidents are evidence of his innocence and naivety as he fails to comprehend the danger all around him. This innocence is what makes childhood accounts most attractive. Although there is a wealth of research and debate on what constitutes childhood innocence,[1] I limit my definition of innocence in this article to children's simplicity, their lack of knowledge, and their purity of intentions not yet spoiled by mundane affairs. Laye's lack of fear of the dangers of playing on the railroads with the snakes is interpreted as a time in his life when danger and fear have not been instilled in him yet. Recalling these events, therefore, indicate the author's longing for this lost innocence.

In his description of his father's craft and work in precious minerals, Laye shows the beginning of his training in blacksmithing. The first rule of apprenticeship is to watch, before the apprentice is allowed to help with the actual work. Unfortunately for Laye, western education separated him from his father's craft and denied him the opportunity to be a goldsmith. It can be suggested that dedicating an entire chapter describing his father working with gold to create a trinket for a woman is indicative of a deep longing for what could have been. Laye describes in greater detail the ceremony surrounding the forging of the gold, a job that required manual adroitness, mastery of spiritual cleansing, and a knowledge

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[1] See the following for more in-depth discussion of the different manifestations of childhood innocence.

Baader, Meike Sophia. *Die romantische Idee des Kindes und der Kindheit: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Unschuld. Neuwied*, Germany: Luchterhand, 1996.

Fass, Paula S., ed. *The Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*. 3 vols. London and New York: Macmillan, 2004.

Richter, Dieter. *Das fremde Kind: Zur Entstehung der Kindheitsbilder des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*. Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1987.

Sommerville, C. John. *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*. Reissue ed. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Jenkins, Henry, ed. *The Children's Culture Reader*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1998.

of ritual. He shows how the woman, anticipating the resistance she might meet in getting the goldsmith to work on her gold in a timely manner, comes with a griot to act as a go-between. The description Laye provides of this service portrays his pride in his father's craft.

The impossibility of return to such a time is implicit in Laye's recollection of the days he spends at his mother's hometown of Tindican, a tiny village west of Kouroussa. During these visits, he explains how he is loved and pampered by his relatives, especially his grandmother. During the rice festival celebrated at the village, he describes the fun that he engages in with his friends. He tells of watching the fields for birds with his friends and how they would play around and sometimes forget to mind the birds and monkeys; how they would use their slingshots to kill the lizards and field mice. He narrates with a lot of nostalgia the time of the rice harvest and what fun they had, concluding that, 'Ah! How happy we were in those days!' (Laye 1954: 64).

The autobiographical narrative of Laye moves from childhood to his pre pre-pubescent years when he says that 'I am growing up.' He tells of his coming-of-age initiation ceremony of circumcision. The celebration includes a public festival that lasts several days. The entire community is interested in the ceremony and wishes the best for the candidates. Before the circumcision itself, the boys have to deal with a mystical bogeyman lion, Kondén Diara, that 'eats up little boys' (Laye 1954: 94). Filled with apprehension at the fear of the unknown, Laye is encouraged by his father not to show fear. When his father says he had also gone through the same rite, Laye asks, 'What happens to you?' (Laye 1954: 96) and his father responds:

> Nothing you need really be afraid of, nothing you cannot overcome by your own willpower. Remember: you have to control your fear; you have to control yourself. Kondén Diara will not take you away. He will roar. But he won't do more than roar.

These words give him the courage to join the other boys for a night in the forest with the lions. But when he compares this rite of passage to the circumcision that comes after, he declares that it was an ordeal. The circumcision is preceded by singing and dancing the *soli*, for a whole week. The initiates are celebrated, encouraged and showered with gifts. After the circumcision, they are kept away from their families to heal for a number of weeks, during which time the boys get to know each other better and bond. After the healing time, he joins his family again, this time as a man who deserves his own hut apart from his mother's and men's clothes. The gifting of the men's clothes and his own hut symbolises a movement away from his childhood to adulthood. It ends what the circumcision ceremony had begun; Laye is no more a child, and he expresses his sadness in leaving his childhood behind.

A trajectory of emancipated childhoods

Unlike Soyinka's *Aké* which ends before Soyinka leaves home for the secondary school, *The Dark Child* chronicles Laye's departure for the technical college in Conakry. The novel details his life at the school as well as his relationships with his father's brother and Marie, his school mate who later became his girlfriend. In spite of this difference, these two texts share some similarities in that they were both written by men who were born and lived relatively around the same time periods; and both texts celebrate a carefree childhood that contributed to making these men who they eventually became such that they can look back with nostalgia at a time long gone.

Both texts showcase caring and supportive families. Laye's father and Soyinka's manifest support, and a love, for their children through their desire to make sure that their children have the best that is available. When it is time for Laye to leave for Conakry, he goes looking for his father, and he breaks down in tears at the reality of leaving home; to reassure him, his father tells him: 'You be brave my son. My brothers will look after you. Work hard. Work as you worked here. We have made many sacrifices for you. They must not go for nothing' Laye 1954: 141). Although he wishes his son to be with him, Laye's father has long since known that his son would leave him and his traditions. He could have prevented his son from leaving, with the support of Laye's mother, but he never does, allowing the young boy to make his own path in life, 'I fear, very much, little one, that you are not often enough in my company. You are all day at school, and one day you will depart from that school for a greater one. You will leave me, little one ...' (Laye 1954: 27). This is not surprising because the narrator has been giving us hints of a future away from his father's forge. From an early age, Laye demonstrates the traits of a natural scholar, and though this is restrictive (for instance, at his grandmother's village, he must refrain from the roughest play to avoid ruining his expensive school clothes), his path appears already laid, and his family pushes him to excel; with every success taking him farther from Kouroussa. Likewise, Soyinka's father always encourages his questioning spirit, engaging him in debates that his mother even feel are beyond his years; a view his father does not share as he does not stop urging the little boy to think through things for himself.

Both fathers are also temperate eaters and generous, allowing many guests to eat at their table without sending them away. This, coupled with the fact that both children live with their parents and siblings and other non-blood relations inculcates in them the joy of community, whilst stressing that family is more than blood. Soyinka describes their household as full of a 'constantly varying assortment of children.' He claims that his mother could never say no to any of those parents or guardians who brought their wards for training or simply to be cared for by her. Wild Christian's bedroom where all these children slept, help to make them children of the house

(Soyinka 1981:79). Likewise, the Camara household is full of Laye's siblings and his father's many apprentices who live with them.

Laye and Soyinka have a healthy relationship with their parents and the other adults in their lives. They both have strong mothers who love them and try to bring them up as proper young men in the communities they live in. Notwithstanding Wild Christian's strict manner with the children in her house, there is no instance that Soyinka sensed that he is unloved and unwanted; rather, through the narrative, with the distance of time, he intimates an understanding of his mother's behaviour. One incident worth mentioning occurred when Soyinka, day-dreaming, destroyed his father's rosebushes and is saved from his father's wrath by his mother:

> I had never loved Wild Christian as I did at that moment. Responding to her husband's bellow of pain, she looked up and took in the situation. She breathed a soft 'A-ah' and her eyes filled with pity. The next moment, Essay charged across the intervening space and his fingers affixed themselves to his favourite spot, the lope of my ear, only this time, he was not only pinching it to hurt, but was trying to lift me up with it. Wild Christian moved very swiftly ... detaching my ear from his fingers and pleading with him. 'Dear, you must know. He must have been dreaming. Ah-Ah, isn't he the one who spends all his time looking after the garden? His mind wasn't there' (Soyinka 1981: 76).

Similarly, Laye narrates the love his mother has for him and he for her by dedicating the autobiography to her just as Soyinka does. In many instances in the novel, Laye describes his mother's unhappiness that her little boy is growing up and away from her; for instance, when he is given his own clothes and hut after the circumcision ceremony, his mother's sadness that he will no longer be sleeping in her hut is apparent, 'I turned toward my mother. She was smiling at me sadly' (Laye 1954: 135). Furthermore, when it was time for Laye to leave for France, her anguish knew no bounds.

Both children enjoy school and are intelligent in their studies. Laye passes his scholarship examinations, and later enrols in the Technical College in Conakry. His initial worries that the school was not grooming him for a better life are dispelled when the school is reorganised and the instruction in technical and general subjects upgraded. He passes his proficiency examinations and wins a scholarship to go for further studies in France. Soyinka is impressed by the idea of going to school as he watches his sister Tinu go everyday and so he follows her to school when he is three. He enjoys school and is often times the youngest student in his class. He too eventually wins a scholarship to the Government college.

It is interesting that although set in different geographical places in Africa, both texts indicate the importance of the rural environment in the lived experience of the narrators. Soyinka spends time in his father's village of Isara during vacations where he experiences village life. In Isara, he visits a farm, helps to kill a snake and eat it, and is given a lesson in avoiding bee stings. He also joins a hunting party of his age-group, which unfortunately is curtailed when he upsets a hornets' nest.

Laye routinely visits his mother's mother and brothers in the village of Tindican. There, he plays with his age mates, chasing birds and killing lizards. He takes part in watching the rice farm from monkeys and birds and participates in the rice harvest. Laye focuses predominantly on the joy of harvesting the rice and all the rituals that accompany this harvest.

Finally, another area of convergence is the ritual initiation into adulthood they both undergo. Whilst Laye goes through circumcision and the Kondén Diara ordeal to emerge an adult, Soyinka goes through scarification. Moolla (2012) indicates that the arc-shaped slashes on Soyinka's ankles and wrists from his paternal grandfather ritually and physically mark his transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Moolla, the scarification of the protagonist holds great spiritual, physical and emotional significance to his development.

Discussion

Laye and Soyinka, and to a large extent, their siblings enjoy a childhood that is filled with the mundane things of life; playing, going to school, being mischievous, going on adventure, having fun, learning new things and growing up. Their autobiographies serve as refreshingly different perspectives on childhoods in Africa that are mostly foregrounded in pain and despair. A cursory overview of autobiographies such as Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* (2008), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Ismael Beah's *A long Way Gone* (2008) and Aminatta Forna's *The Devil That Danced on the Water* (2003) showcase African childhoods steeped in misery and desolation, contributing inadvertently to a one-story narrative of African childhoods. Consequently, what this article has done is to bring to the fore other versions of African childhoods of children in Africa.

Portrayals of African childhood in African literature frequently present the child as a victim of the adult world. In reviewing Christopher Ouma's book, *Childhood in contemporary diasporic African literature: memories and futures past* (2020), Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba (2021: 601) observes that, 'Ouma's theory of childhood appears to validate a ubiquitous idea of Africa as a site of precarious childhood, a place of traumatic horror where the contemporary diasporic African writer returns for morbid inspiration.' In concluding the review, Anyaduba questions the political and ethical value readers are supposed to gain from an understanding of contemporary African literature as a literature of traumatic childhoods (602). Although the portrayal of African childhood as traumatic may not necessarily be false, what is at stake is the representation of a one-dimensional image of African childhood that obscures other realities. The questions most readers may ponder are whether all African childhoods are like these presented? Are there no other versions of African childhood? What is

the reasoning behind this one-dimensional portraiture? Chimamanda Adichie's TED on *The Danger of a Single Story* (TED Global 2009) is relevant for this discussion. In her presentation, she indicates that literature has been one of the tools that are used to present a singular story of Africa—a story of—catastrophe. Although not denying that Africa battles with corrupt governments, unemployment and poverty, she would like that the full picture is given of a continent full of positive things as well as negative things, like everywhere else in the world. The danger of the single story, she concludes, is that it creates stereotypes that tell an incomplete story. Likewise, African childhoods are as varied as there are different people and places on the continent. Literature, therefore, must help unseat stereotypes, and present a complete story of the entire picture. Consequently, this article initiates this discussion in its depiction of childhoods in *Aké* and *The Dark Child* that depart from this pervasive image of childhood as trauma in Africa by presenting African childhoods of happiness and wellbeing through the eyes of two rambunctious boys who lived, were loved and thrived in a space that was carefree and enabling for their development.

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Everyday childhoods in contemporary African fiction

Veronica Barnsley

Abstract: This article contends that humanitarian imagery and sociopolitical discourses that present African childhoods as 'lacking' are being rigorously challenged by African fiction that illuminates the diversity of childhood experiences that make up the everyday. The article aims to show that neither the trope of the African child as silent victim nor the globalised African child whose trajectory is characterised by escape from local and national ties is able to capture the complexity and plurality of 'parochial' (Jaji 2021) childhoods and suggests that new versions of childhood are emerging in African writing. By analysing the role of the everyday and the ambiguity of play in fiction by Tsitsi Dangarembga, NoViolet Bulawayo, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi and Khadija Abdalla Bajaber, alongside stories from the 2021 Caine Prize shortlist, the article showcases the fresh and adventurous narratives of childhood to be found in contemporary African fiction.

Keywords: African childhoods, Caine Prize, Tsitsi Dangarembga, NoViolet Bulawayo Jennifer Makumbi, Khadija Abdalla Bajaber.

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Introduction

The danger of the single story about Africa that Chimamanda Adichie highlighted in her 2009 TED Talk is arguably most persistent in representations of childhood. Adichie's own example rests on a distinction between her own middle-class childhood and that of the houseboy, Fide; 'All my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor.' This links Fide with the African child of Band Aid and Hollywood humanitarianism, demonstrating that the 'absence of sustained and well-informed reporting about Africa in the mainstream [western] media' (Franks 2010: 71) has implications both within Africa and globally.

Conforming to Binyavanga Wainaina's (2005: 92) wry assertion that Africa is 'to be pitied, worshipped or dominated', this humanitarian depiction of the African child also impacts how African women are seen, and see themselves. As Everjoice J. Winn (2007: 79) points out, in the context of humanitarianism 'the bare-foot African woman *sells*' while the gaze of 'the emaciated black child' rewards the viewer with imagined gratitude before the gift of aid is even given. Such images of both child and mother treat Africa 'diagnostically' (Harrison 2013: 528), meaning that the arresting eyes of the child in aid campaigns have become so familiar as to obscure the 'I' of personhood—the agency and creativity that Adichie is surprised by when she visits Fide's village and discovers the rich community life there.

Postcolonial and decolonial counternarratives about Africa are becoming more prominent across disciplines (Thondhlana & Garwe 2021) and the cultural resources of the continent are being showcased globally, not least via the appearance of two African writers (Damon Galgut and Nadifa Mohamed) on the 2021 Booker Prize shortlist. However, despite this enriched visibility of African stories, the same neocolonial images of African childhoods remain in circulation. In the 'global imaginary', to use Bwesigye Bwa Mwesigire and Madhu Krishnan's (2021: 97) preferred term, African childhoods easily get caught in the binary of the victim in need of rescue or escape, on the one hand, and the prematurely 'grown-up' child—worker/ soldier/ wife/ parent/ carer—on the other. There tends to be 'a preoccupation with children's social problems' (Wells 2015: 30) while the actualities and variety of day-to-day childhoods—even if they do come with some problems—are often absent.

This tunnel vision that frustrates Adichie and her contemporaries has repeatedly been diagnosed by scholars of childhood who argue, in sympathy with this supplementary issue, that the universalised Northern ideal of the child produces Southern childhoods characterised by 'lacks' (Twum-Danso Imoh 2016). As Olga Nieuwenhuys (2013: 4) declares, postcolonial perspectives are crucial in Childhood Studies because 'the dominance of the North over the South is inextricably linked to Northern childhood(s) representations against which Southern childhood(s) are measured and found wanting.' Referring to the US context, Julie C. Garlen (2019: 54) argues that

the modern obsession with childhood innocence is a foil for white supremacy; black children cannot qualify as 'innocent', 'pure' and in need of protection in the way that white children do. Instead they are judged as 'ignorant' while white children are only 'ignorant' in the context of childhood as an immature phase, which is deliberately prolonged because adults wish to protect children from what they perceive as the harmful knowledge of adulthood.

Garlen's argument has relevance for thinking about African fiction, particularly diasporic writing which, as Christopher Ouma (2020: 2) argues with reference to writers including Adichie and Wainaina, seeks to represent 'a life elsewhere' beyond 'the crisis of nationhood'. Despite the success of Adichie and others in challenging worn-out and damaging tropes about Africa, the global publishing and study of African texts often ensures palatable (and portable) alternatives to the Northern scripting of African childhoods, rather than supporting radical reassessments of the very concept of childhood. This is something an increasing number of African writers are taking issue with. For instance, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi (2020), whose novel *The First Woman* I discuss below, left her American Editor in favour of a Shona one who 'understood the text better' (Obi-Young 2019). This suggests that confronting the 'lacking' African child via the global marketing and scholarly discussion of African literature is not enough— the specificity and diversity of childhoods in African writing may still be ignored. To return to Adichie's single story, there is a risk that the transnational (mobile and global) African child that Ouma (2020) brings into focus succeeds not only in resisting the story of deprivation but in overlaying it with one of predominantly middle-class escape and self-betterment that still does not account for the majority of African childhoods.

This is not to discount innovative transnational narratives of childhood by diasporic writers, but to recognise that they are not the only stories being told about childhood in Africa. As I will discuss with reference to recent novels and short fiction, an ongoing reappraisal of African childhoods is required 'for thinking the social in all of its fullness' (Mwesigire & Krishnan 2021: 98) and to engage with the concerns that animate a new generation of African writers, some of whom are returning to Africa from the diaspora as Adichie's protagonist, Ifemelu, does in her novel of transnational migration, *Americanah* (2013). Mwesigire & Krishnan's (2021: 98) suggestion that the emergence of new African voices can happen 'outside of the dynamics of (post)coloniality and topographies of world literary space which so often dominate discussion on African literary production' can apply to fresh readings of childhood in African texts.

The African bildungsroman

The necessity of this reappraisal is particularly noticeable if we look at the trajectory of Tambu, the headstrong heroine of Tsitsi Dangarembga's 1988 novel *Nervous*

Conditions, which is a staple of African literature in the global classroom. At the end of this ground-breaking bildungsroman of gendered struggle (see Slaughter 2007: 230–231), Tambu's future seems at least well-lit if not bright as she arrives at the Sacred Heart convent to continue her hard-won education. However, when we meet her in the final part of Dangarembga's trilogy, *This Mournable Body* (2018), Tambu is a broken woman, unemployed and suffering mental distress. The later novel's second person address has an accusatory edge to it; 'when you were young and in fighting spirit, growing mealie cobs in the family field and selling them to raise money for your school fees, you were not this person that you have become. When and how did that happen?' (Dangarembga 2020a: 103). The narrator, focalising Tambu's fractured self, concludes that her metamorphosis took place (Dangarembga 2020a: 103) not at her uncle's mission, where 'you remained focused on a better life', but at the convent school where she experienced racism despite a veneer of equality. The horrible irony of Tambu becoming 'substitutable' (Coetzee 2020: 443)—going from being one of the brightest and one of the few black girls to be educated in her region to being cast adrift as not good enough—turns away from the re-creation of the self so prominent in post-colonial fiction towards the collective destruction brought on by Zimbabwe's political and economic collapse. Tambu struggles to confront her situation; 'how awful it is to admit that closeness to white people at the convent had ruined your heart, had caused your womb, from which you reproduced yourself before you gave birth to anything else, to shrink between your hip bones' (Dangarembga 2020a: 104). Having tried and failed to set up a white-led tourism enterprise in her home village, Tambu reluctantly leaves home again—'Your umbilical cord is buried on the homestead; in the empty space that widens at every step, you feel it tugging' (Dangarembga 2020a: 361)—but this time in order to reconcile with herself. Ultimately, she moves from defeat to fragile empowerment working alongside ex-freedom fighters, Lucia and Christine.

Tambu's determination to engage the strength she has as a Zimbabwean woman has its roots in her childhood optimism before her convent education and treads a careful line between her family's rural poverty and her cousin Nyasha's ill-fitting cosmopolitanism; 'there is no affluence even for the anglicised like Nyasha' (Chikafa-Chipiro 2020: 447). This clash of worlds that Tambu is caught in has childhood (past and present) at its centre.[1] When Nyasha's young son is beaten at school her German husband asks 'What kind of country do you build when children are raised in fear?' and Tambu retorts 'What we are is disciplined' (Dangarembga 2020a: 216). She views

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[1] In *Nervous Conditions* Nyasha struggles to combine the education she received in Britain with her commitment to the Chimurenga (war of independence) and suffers a mental and physical breakdown. Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro speaks for many readers invested in Dangarembga's trilogy when she says 'I felt very apprehensive about reading the sequel' (Chikafa-Chipiro 2020: 446) and spells out her own visceral response to Tambu's negative trajectory as a Zimbabwean woman; 'I am Tambu. I walk the streets of Harare and meet many other Tambus' (2020: 447).

Nyasha's position as 'too emotional about everything, [she] takes Western values about many matters too seriously, and this is—well, somewhat primitive' (Dangarembga 2020a: 217). Tambu turns the tables, suggesting that what Nyasha calls 'that damn English upbringing' (Dangarembga 2020a: 175) has not only made her forget how to read Shona but also given her an affinity for Western feminism that she fails to instil in her Zimbabwean students, for whom the lexicon of gender-mainstreaming has little relevance as they wrestle with 'the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations, of futures derailed and lives caught in downward personal trajectories' (Chikafa-Chipiro 2020: 1).

Dangarembga herself writes that she tried to satisfy her readers' wishes for Tambu and her peers to succeed by 'depicting small victories' rather than big ideals (2020b: 468). Her re-examination of what Carli Coetzee (2020: 444) calls 'the hidden curriculum of Black girlhood' chimes with a renewed critical and political focus on African feminisms and makes now a good time to reconsider how contemporary African writing might be freeing childhood (and particularly girlhood) from the humanitarian imaginary in which it is often referred to as having been 'cut short' or saved by migration to the global North. The transnational ideal of a childhood geared towards escape that defines Tambu's early life certainly feels less plausible as writers like Dangarembga reflect on postcolonial 'regression' (Dangarembga 2020b: 467) while others tell stories of migrants returning to African locations full of promise.[2] Tsitsi Jaji (2021: 293) emphasises that, contrary to the Afropolitan desire for global presence, much current African fiction is driven by a fascination with the local, the everyday, as 'the center of the world.' The single story—like all stories with staying power—has not disappeared but its counterweights have become more varied and more challenging for global readers who are better prepared to encounter African complexities and local ones who demand that their realities be represented. As Jaji (2021: 293) argues, whether or not writers have a global readership, 'reading parochially can recover the horizons of liberation in the wake of the disappointments of politics committed to freedom for oppressed people.'

Childhood and the Caine Prize

Testament to this variegated terrain of African writing is the Caine Prize, which has been awarded annually to an African short story since the year 2000.[3] Though increasingly joined by new competitions and publishing opportunities, the prize remains one of the foremost avenues for African writers to enter the global fiction scene

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[2] For instance, Adichie's *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013).

[3] www.caineprize.com

(*Wasafiri* 2010: 4).[4] Looking at the shortlist provides a good indication of the priorities and values of writers and readers, most of which are relevant to thinking about childhood. The 2021 shortlist of five contained two stories directly about childhood, one in which recollections of childhood are central ('A Separation' by Iryn Tushabe), and another focused on an 18-year-old protagonist (the winner, 'The Street Sweep' by Meron Hadero). Of course, assumptions about Africa as a whole cannot be made from such small samples. Indeed, this year's selection stands out partly because it includes writers from countries that have been underrepresented (Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Namibia) and sometimes suffer from 'a reductive portrait in the global imaginary' (Mwesigire & Krishnan 2021: 97) and not from those that tend to appear more frequently (Nigeria and South Africa, for instance). However, it's also notable that while three of the five stories feature child or young adult characters whose situation is poor or in some way precarious, in two of those three children do attend school and perceive themselves as relatively privileged; in only one ('The Street Sweep') does the teenage protagonist view himself as living in poverty.

'A Separation' by Iryn Tushabe features recollections of a middle-class childhood: the protagonist is a primatologist whose family does well from eco-tourism and who goes to university in Canada. The story's recollection of childhood is feminist in outlook as the 90-year-old Kaaka gifts her granddaughter the cowrie shells meant for her wedding night even though at thirty and she 'hasn't brought a suitor home' (Tushabe 2021: 5). For the grandmother 'this is just my way of telling you that your worth isn't tied to marriage and procreation' (Tushabe 2021: 5). By amalgamating Ugandan traditional practices with the granddaughter's scientific perspective, Tushabe finds a way, as she puts it in an interview, 'to 'allow the unknowable to seep through, creating room for the unexplainable' (2021: n.p.). Reframing both childhood and old age through dialogue, the story moves beyond what Grace Musila calls 'the family-nation metaphor' (2013: 350), which often traps African child characters in a gendered straightjacket in which home and family operate *as* nation in 'the allegorical mode' (2013: 349). Musila contends that East African short fiction has shifted towards 'possible counter-narratives that propose alternative scriptings of ... familial spaces' (2013: 351). Certainly, 'A Separation' proposes new forms of intergenerational solidarity and cross-cultural conversations that stretch—even if they don't break—the association of women with mothering and the assumption that children will carry the weight of fraught national aspirations (Ouma 2020).

The driving concerns of the Caine prize stories stray far from the tropes of African childhood as defined either by lack or transnational escape; they include education (which has always been a focus of Anglophone African writing, as it is in *Nervous*

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[4] Other examples of literary activism that constitute 'creative pipelines' (Mwesigire & Krishnan 2021: 101) include Writivism, Kwani Trust, Brittle Paper and Ibua.

Conditions), racism and colourism, neocolonialism, capitalism, feminism, sexual violence, and disability. There are sharp and often satirical views on white privilege, but this is not the main take-away of these stories; rather it is African-driven social justice. In Rémy Ngamije's 'The Giver of Nicknames,' a 16-year-old black boy reports a white boy for raping a black girl in school. As the accused's parents are rich patrons of the school who employ most of the other students' parents, they buy him out of trouble. However, at the heart of the story is the whistle-blower's ability to empathise both with the rape-victim—he repeatedly asserts that '*she said no*' (Ngamije 2021: 11)—and with his own mother who, he subsequently realises, was raped by his father. He presents himself as an enterprising advocate who challenges both the passive and silent acceptance that his mother expects of children and the culture of cover-up that the school promotes.

Many of the situations in these stories are uncomfortable, but they are also instrumental in constructing child characters that turn adult expectations—familial, communal, national, or global—upside down. Doreen Baingana 'Lucky,' set in a school in Northern Uganda during civil unrest, is a prime example of a child's perspective that invites complexity and ambiguity. As Karen Lauterbach (2021) puts it, 'this is a story about the cruelty of civil war but we are not left crying or sentimentalised.' Instead, the bored and hungry narrator, trapped with a group of peers and their eccentric Maths teacher, is forced to focus on the tedious limbo of the everyday in which 'neither the carefree past or a fantastic future' is available, prompting the children search for what is diverting or unusual in their new normal.[5]

Politics through child's play

Many of the arresting literary moments when the everyday is reimagined occur through children's play or within the playful modes of childhood that defy immiseration. The notion that play can in itself be redemptive comes dangerously close to the humanitarian image-management of African childhoods. However, in the most subtle writing at least, play offers something more substantial in its place. In Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* play and playfulness bring relief from familial and social tensions within Nyasha's household (and shield the children from the actual violence that skirts their lives as the housekeeper Mai Taka is beaten by her husband and political unrest simmers). A trip to the cinema offers fleeting enjoyment while also

[5] This diversity of African stories and emphasis on empowerment and social justice is also present in children's literature. There isn't space in this article to explore this, but a recent showcase in *Brittle Paper* includes works by well-known speculative fiction writer Nnedi Okorafor, Booker Prize winner Ben Okri and actress Lupita Ny'ongo and attests to the 'imaginative nourishment' provided by African writing for children. https://brittlepaper.com/2021/11/insert-final-number-childrens-books-by-african-writers/

foreshadowing the later debates on corporal punishment and the role of fear in controlling children mentioned above. Panashe, the youngest child, doesn't want to see a film featuring Ananse the spider; '"I don't like spiders," quivers your nephew "I don't want to see the spider!"' (Dangarembga 2020a: 205). Panashe is persuaded not by his mother's promises of popcorn and chocolate, made 'as though her son were a little experiment' (2020a: 205) but by the housekeeper's rendition of Incy Wincy Spider. It is Mai Taka, the working-class servant, who reassures the child through cross-cultural nursery talk. By the end of the film, she 'bubbles with enjoyment' (Panashe's and her own), exclaiming 'Oh, those Ghanaians ... when will we be able to do things like that? Like those from West Africa?' , at which 'Nyasha winces and Leon changes the conversation' (2020a: 206). Decoding their response, both Tambu and the reader can see that the consummate storytelling of the Anansi film has thrown into bleak relief the dire situation of Zimbabwe that is eating away at the couple's marriage. In this sense, Panashe can indeed be understood as a next-generation 'experiment' into the sustainability of the transnational opportunities that Tambu once sought. Both his parents are educated and want the same for their offspring. However, Panashe and his sister Anesu's futures are bound up with their country of birth in ambivalent ways. Nyasha describes Zimbabwe as 'peace-loving' while Leon warns about state violence and Tambu functions as their witness and go-between. As Panashe bawls in the cinema 'people turn to see what the tall white man is doing to the little brown person' (Dangarembga 2020a: 206), prompting the question of whether Leon's uncompromising attitude and inadvertent wish to rescue Panashe from his mother's people means that returning to Germany might not be a risk-free alternative to remaining in Zimbabwe. The cinema scene is a pivotal moment in the novel in which play and storytelling link everyday childhood to a larger canvas of social practices, making clear that the doctrine of protecting childhood innocence can be 'a potentially exclusionary form of social practice' (Garlen 2019: 56), operating at the expense of a nuanced understanding of African childhoods as racialised, gendered and impacted by global power dynamics.

Another Zimbabwean novel that has prompted lively and polarised critical debate is NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), which began as the short story 'Hitting Budapest' that won the Caine Prize in 2011. This bildungsroman follows ten-year-old Darling from her home in Paradise, a squatters' settlement in Bulawayo, to a new life as an illegal migrant in the US. The narrative mode is mischievous and picaresque as the children cross borders and 'invade' other neighbourhoods:

> We are on our way to Budapest: Bastard and Chipo and Godknows and Sbho and Stina and me. We are going even though we are not allowed to cross Mzilikazi Road ... even though mother would kill me dead if she found out; we are just going ... There are guavas to steal in Budapest, and right now I'd rather die for guavas. We didn't eat this morning and my stomach feels as though someone took a shovel and dug everything out.' (Bulawayo 2013: 8)

Focalised through Darling, the text traces meaning making processes through which the children combine their immediate needs and wants with an awareness of global history and geography. Chanting '*Who Discovered India? Vasco da Gama Vasco Da Gama*' (Bulawayo 2013: 8), they reverse colonial histories of invasion and pillage by entering Budapest, an area of 'big big houses with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat graveled yards or trimmed lawns' and taking fruit that 'nobody here seems to know what to do with' even though they imagine the streets spitting at them 'to go back where we came from' (Bulawayo 2013: 10). As Felix Ndaka (2021: 79) explores, 'this playful "invasion"' both confirms their marginality in having to steal to eat and 'provides them with imaginative resources that transcend their everyday.' Budapest becomes 'a space where they act out agential versions of themselves—albeit limited and precarious' (Ndaka 2021: 79). For these children who ignore parental rules and the class-based divisions of the city, 'play becomes an avenue of hope, opening up horizons of possibility and being' (Ndaka 2021: 79).

Viewed from another perspective, however, the novel also reveals play to have a darker side: while it can enable agency for child characters, it can also involve children replaying world events for the consumption of adults in a macabre fashion. In the 'country game' that the children favour there's a hierarchy from 'the country-countries' (including USA, Britain, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and France) to second-rate options (including Dubai, South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania) and, finally, 'rags of countries' (including Congo, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Haiti, Sri Lanka) (Bulawayo 2013: 38). The children designate 'this one we live in' as a 'kaka country' (Bulawayo 2013: 14), a 'terrible place of hunger and things falling apart' (Bulawayo 2013: 49). While Ndaka proposes that these games—which also include World Cup and Find Bin Laden—are part of a 'complex negotiation of [the children's] vulnerability, powerlessness, ennui, and agency' within the context of geopolitics, the question of who play is really *for* in the novel provokes critical disagreement. Isaac Ndlovu (2016: 133) argues that Bulawayo's 'stark depictions of squalor and suffering' come close to 'poverty porn' and that she 'gains capital' in a competitive global literary market by 'unrelentingly focusing on the violated rights of the underprivileged, especially children' (Ndlovu 2016: 133) who entertain even as they evoke pity.

The self-actualisation gained through play is only successful—and indeed is only possible—in *We Need New Names* because the children have their own codes and operate in familiar terrain. They are, in fact, 'parochial' as Jaji (2021) defines it; although they filter world events into their games and mix African and American versions of reality, their neighbourhood remains 'the center of the world' (Jaji 2021: 235). Play means they can process the world as it comes to them. In contrast, when Darling migrates to the US and experiences 'ruptured kinships' (Moji 2015: 182) and alienation play takes on the dangerous limit-pushing of adolescence and she no longer recognises it as pleasurable. Though Bulawayo's reader may place faith in 'innocence,

naivety' and 'a childlike curiosity and vulnerability' as rescripting the 'global dynamics of power' (Ndaka 2021: 76) in the first part of the narrative, Darling's trajectory indicates that it is not the innocent/ignorant perspective of the child that is valuable in itself but the capacity of childhood (as a set of social practices) to map a situation, to highlight the parameters of community and the overlapping forms of social life.

In this sense, childhood overlaps with the importance of the everyday, the 'clandestine forms' which Michel de Certeau famously suggested could creatively disturb centralised systems of 'discipline' (Certeau 1984: xiv). Joe Moran argues that the influential French theoretical framing of the everyday in the late twentieth century needs to be repurposed because it 'values the creative and recreational over the banal and boring' (Moran 2005: 10). Moran investigates 'those forms of lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts, conceal resilient power relationships' (Moran 2005: 13). He doesn't discuss childhood but his insights are consonant with Ouma's observation (2020: 43) that contemporary African writers explore childhood through 'micro-worlds' that counteract 'adult regimes of authority.' Childhood is one of the aspects of the everyday most obviously characterised by the 'cliches, mythologies, stereotypes and unsourced quotations' (Moran 2005: 14) that pepper lived reality and children must therefore provide new scripts for themselves. Because adults take for granted but are also heavily invested in the roles that children ought to play (whether relating to education, morality or social idealism) childhood constitutes an important form of social organisation and one that needs to be deliberately examined, and sometimes resisted.

Returning to *We Need New Names*, while it is tempting to agree with Ndaka that play provides 'a curative intervention' (Ndaka 2021: 83) for the children, the novel's own plot undercuts such a reading, conforming to Moran's suggestion that the everyday 'makes sense of, but also obscures, the reality of cultural change and social difference' (Moran 2005: 14). Darling reports that in Paradise the children have playful encounters with NGO workers that mock the humanitarian recycling of stories about Africa: they dance and sing and pose for pictures in the torn dirty clothing that they are ashamed of because 'After the pictures; the gifts' (Bulawayo 2013: 41). The assumed 'everyday' innocence of childhood is undercut by the children's hidden knowledge of how it is routinely consumed, revealing that evaluations of childhood continue to 'produce and reinforce asymmetrical power relations in new and complex ways' (Rivas 2018: 166).

Later, in the US, Darling experiences an episode in which the discomfort of being labelled a victim returns with a vengeance and, isolated from her childhood friends, she's unable to ameliorate it with humour. In the bathroom at a wedding Darling is approached by a smiling woman who asks 'Can you just say something in your language?,' pronounces it 'beautiful' then expands abruptly into 'Africa is beautiful ... But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo? Just awful' (Bulawayo 2013: 118). Darling struggles to respond;

> My brain is scattering and jumping fences now, trying to remember what exactly is happening
> in the Congo because I think I am confusing it with some other place, but what I can see in
> the woman's eyes is that it's serious and important and I'm supposed to know it, so in the end
> I say, Yes, it is terrible, what is happening in the Congo (Bulawayo 2013: 118).

The elliptical organization of this passage mimics the circular reasoning on Africa that the woman is engaged in—as she moves on to discuss 'poor African children' in general Darling tells us 'I'm seeing myself in the woman's face back there ... when the NGO people were taking our pictures' (Bulawayo 2013: 118). The woman is the audience for the photos that Darling wondered about when they were taken. Rather like Tambu, who is addressed as 'you' in *This Mournable Body* because of her dislocation from herself, Darling is made vulnerable by an interlocutor who believes herself to be empowering Africans. Darling has proven herself to be an active interpreter of global politics yet here she confronts herself as a passive victim through a forced show of sympathy for African children whose experience is not hers.

The scene encapsulates the dangers of persistently associating African childhoods with lack as well as the failure of the ideal of a universalised transnational childhood that Darling chases but cannot possess. Darling has lost the idiosyncratic, 'parochial' solidarity through play that allowed her to subvert adult realities and is trapped between the ideal (white/innocent) child that is an object of desire and the African child in need whose image is used to prove the worth of what they themselves can never possess. In this sense, Ndlovu is right that the novel's attempt to 'rescue' Africa entrenches the negative stereotypes it tries to resist, forcing the African child away from everyday, mundane concerns towards weighty situations that 'illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa' (Wainaina's 2005: 94, also cited in Ndlovu (2016: 134).

Conclusion: new adventures in childhood

I'll finish this brief review with reference to two novels that resolutely and positively frame the African child not as 'elsewhere' but as 'right there'. Ugandan writer Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's *The First Woman* (2020) is a bildungsroman featuring Kirabo, an inquisitive 12-year old on a determined quest to find out about her mother. Khadija Abdalla Bajaber's *The House of Rust* (2021) is a fantastical feminist anti-quest in which the heroine, Aisha, takes to the sea to save her father and pursues the secret power-hungry monsters of Mombasa rather than marriage and domesticity.

Like Dangarembga's Tambu, Makumbi's Kirabo and Bajaber's Aisha are exceptional—indeed they are magical—and these writers combine African feminism and East African folklore into a mixture that Irenosen Okojie describes as 'the headiest of feminist brews' (Makumbi 2020: n.p.). While Tambu centred her own story in *Nervous Conditions*

with the famous opening line 'I was not sorry when my brother died' (Dangarembga 2004 [1988]: 1), Kirabo is a teller of others' stories, always awaiting the chance 'to wedge in her call to storytelling' (Makumbi 2020: 4) and Aisha uses 'storycraft' to her advantage in defeating monstrous creatures (Bajaber 2021). Kirabo's quest begins with a visit to the local witch (and enemy of the family) and is punctuated by the political tension of Idi Amin's rule and a more open-ended historical everyday consciousness on the other. In 1970s Uganda, families still display out-of-date calendars on their walls, 'attempting to wish Amin away' (Makumbi 2020: 19) and 'newly hatched ghosts' (Makumbi 2020: 20) carry out chores on their way to join the ancestors. As Alex Clark (2020: n.p.) puts it, 'the story captures the surrealism of living in unpredictable and violent times, folding awareness of vast events into the minutiae of daily life.' Similarly, the Mombasa that Aisha inhabits in *The House of Rust* is strewn with decaying colonial relics that are nevertheless marginalised by the focus on the daily practices of the Hadrami community and the promise of the life at sea that Aisha craves. The postcolonial city in *House of Rust* is the scene of 'an old game' (Bajaber 2021: 229) that the heroine must play, 'galvanizing' her to adventure (Bajaber 2021: 4; see also Barnsley 2021).

These are not 'parochial' narratives in Jaji's terms. Indeed, *The First Woman* shares much in common with the cosmopolitan dreams of *Nervous Conditions* as Kirabo seeks a Christian/Western education, securing a place at a girls' Catholic school that she views as 'a ticket to success' (Makumbi 2020: 165). However, unlike Tambu, who tries to stay strong in the face of racial discrimination that destroys her ambition and her pride in her heritage, or Nyasha whose anticolonial rage drives her to collapse, Makumbi and Bajaber's protagonists navigate towards revitalised versions of female identity. In *The First Woman* Kirabo practises 'mwenkanonkano' (the Luganda word for feminism) and freely explores her beliefs and her sexuality with her partner: 'The first time Sio said he believed in mwenkanonkano, he had used the English word feminist. Kirabo ignored it because as far as she knew, feminism was for women in developed countries with first-world problems. But this time he had used the Luganda word.' (Makumbi 2020: 219). *House of Rust*'s Aisha insists to her grandmother that she be freed from the demand to marry, stating 'I don't need you to believe in the story ... I just need you to believe in *me*' (Bajaber 2021: 255).

These novels' explosion of the 'myths' that control women—that 'take the sting out of you' (Makumbi 2020: 430)—also collapse the edifice of the child as either innocent or ignorant. Kirabo and Aisha are too enterprising to be innocent and too perceptive to be ignorant. Despite repeating 'I don't understand' Aisha believes in attaining knowledge that is meant to be shared and will risk her life to access it. This capacity to articulate truths that partially silence Tambu (and Darling) through a combination of everyday experiences and epic-style quests suggests that new ground is being cleared for representing African childhoods. I don't mean to suggest that Makumbi and Bajaber are outliers in this regard—many writers

including Abi Dare, Chigozie Obioma and Lesley Nneka Arimah are undertaking adventures in writing childhood. Dangarembga's recognition of 'the paucity of happy endings in African literature' (2020b: 468) is being balanced by a plenitude of new beginnings.

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