

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON AFRICAN CHILDHOOD

Constructions, Histories, Representations
and Understandings

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Table of Contents

	<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>v</i>
	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>vii</i>
	De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway	
Chapter 1	<i>Omo boti and Omo pako: Social Construction of Childhood, Livelihood and Health in Southwestern Nigeria</i>	1
	Mofeyisara Oluwatoyin Omobowale and Olukemi K. Amodu	
Chapter 2	<i>Our Stones, Our Livelihood: Urban Working Children's Survival Strategy and its Implications in the Daglama Quarry Site in the Ho Municipality of Ghana</i>	15
	Samuel Bewiadzi and Richard Awubomu	
Chapter 3	<i>Childhood in Africa: Health and Wellness in Body, Mind, Soul, and Spirit</i>	37
	Waganesh A. Zeleke, Tammy Hughes and Natalie Drozda	
Chapter 4	<i>Efua Sutherland and African Children's Literature: Representations of Postcolonial Childhood</i>	65
	Andrea Y. Adomako	
Chapter 5	<i>On the Innocence of Beasts: African Child Soldiers in Cary Fukunaga's <i>Beasts of No Nation</i></i>	83
	Debbie Olson	
Chapter 6	<i>Boys and Girls in the Bush, Bosses in Post-Conflict Society: Liberian Young Veterans Rising to Power</i>	109
	Komlan Agbedahin	

Chapter 7	White Poverty, State Paternalism and Educational Reforms in Southern Rhodesia in the 1930s	133
	Ivo Mhike	
Chapter 8	Childhoods Rooted in Land: Connecting Child Development to Land Using Cultural Practices of the IsiXhosa Speaking People of South Africa	161
	Zethu Cakata	
Chapter 9	“Adults are just obsolete children . . .”: Child Fancy Dress Parades as a Carnivalesque Suspension of Adultism in Winneba, Ghana	171
	Awo Sarpong and De-Valera N.Y.M Botchway	
Chapter 10	Mending the Broken Fences: A Study of the Socialized and De-socialized Child in Laye’s <i>The African Child</i> and Kourouma’s <i>Allah Is Not Obligated</i>	197
	Mawuloe Koffi Kodah	
	<i>Epilogue</i>	217
	Charles Quist-Adade	
	<i>About the Editors and Contributors</i>	221
	<i>Index</i>	229

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Distribution of Daglama Working Children by Sex, Age, and Education.	25
Table 2.2. Age and education distribution of parents/guardians.	26
Table 3.1. Different disciplines and their contributions to the understandings of childhood.	39
Table 7.1. Offences committed by white Juveniles and Juvenile Adults, 1935-1938.	141
Table 10.1. Socialization stages of the narrators in the two narrative texts under study.	207

Introduction

De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway

Background and Focus of Study

This edited volume, titled *New Perspectives on African Childhood: Constructions, Histories, Representations and Understandings*, contains multidisciplinary works of scholars in the humanities and social sciences that interpret and present accounts, ideas, notions and portrayals about African childhood constructions, histories, representations and understandings. The focus of the studies includes analyses of the depictions of African children and their lived childhood experiences in wars and movies, especially Western-made ones; interpretation of conceptions of creative writers and novels, both African and non-African, about African children and nuances in African childhood; and reinterpretation of the meanings of being an African child and living the life of one in the context of indigenous cosmologies and knowledge systems and how such meanings are similar to or different from certain universalised Western-spawned notions. Other concerns of the studies include the articulated ideas, creativity and agency of children in relation to labour; notions of African health and wellbeing lifeways and their interrelations with African children and their childhood experiences; and representations of the post-colonial African childhood. Despite the fact that each study is not an exhaustive coverage of the subject, a synthesis of the views that they present offers a rich addition to the burgeoning area of childhood studies especially within and for the African context and needs.

The academic inquiry into the area of children and their experiences in social settings and the aetiology and ontology of the notion and state called childhood is steadily and encouragingly attracting various conceptualisations, interpretations and reinterpretations, historicisations and case studies. Thus, research is becoming internationalised, expressed through international conferences, research cooperation and transnational projects which have yielded monographs, anthologies, journal articles and visual and performing arts products such as paintings, poems, songs and drama. Some strands of the interrogation have manifested in different chronological frames or revolved around interesting thematic poles or proceeded from novel theoretical perspectives. Also, others have either explained issues within a single geo-cultural space or comparatively analysed them within geo-cultural spaces. Despite this process, it is apparent that Africa, which hegemonic discourse

arbitrarily considers as part of the so-called “Global South”, in comparison with the so-called “Global North” of European and North American societies, has not received a lot of attention in the global context of investigative works in childhood studies. In other words, research has been conducted on childhood globally but there is still opportunity and ample room for a higher level of studies to be conducted to bring out more of the contours of the area and stories as they apply to the African historical and contemporary contexts. Indubitably, the several important works that have been produced from childhood studies for the Western terrain – European and North American societies – help to deepen academic and public understanding about children and their lived experience and how adults define and categorise them in the West. Relatively, the case for and in Africa is not so despite the fact that the continent has a large youth population, with a significant percentage of that demography being children. Thus, the need for extensive production and amplification of works that probe into aspects of African childhood, such as childhood belongings and the cultures of childhood, is important.

The scarcity of such works in the African context should not exist because African childhood is real, and as Agya Boakye-Boaten has shown and argued, there is childhood in Africa.¹ The concept and state of childhood can be found in what he calls “traditional Africa, which is the unadulterated Africa, that is prehistoric Africa, and contemporary Africa, that is Africa after the period of slavery, colonialism, and post-independent Africa.”² Within the cosmology of traditional Africa, children were seen as spiritual beings who had reincarnated after living and dying in previous generations. Thus, they were accorded respect by members of the society; however, children were also deemed human beings who were biologically vulnerable and in need of help and direction, protection and proper socialization to perpetuate their family and cultural legacies. This trapped the childhood period and its political and social spaces and meanings in a socializing mode.³ However, as he shows, the delicate concept of childhood continues to undergo transformations and re-definitions that even impact society’s obligations to its children, because of economic, socio-cultural and political dynamics,⁴ including the cultural ef-

¹ Agya Boakye-Boaten, “Changes in the Concept of Childhood: Implications on Children in Ghana,” *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, The Journal of International Social Research*, 3 (10), (2010): 114 (104-115).

² Ibid. 107.

³ Ibid. 109.

⁴ Boakye-Boaten, “Changes in the concept of Childhood”.

fects and forces of colonialism, globalization, HIV/AIDs, corruption, civil and ethnic unrests and neoliberalism and commercialization of children.⁵

It can be concluded from the foregoing that it is important and necessary for attention to be given to Africa's situation through childhood studies. As Benedict Carton has demonstrated in "Africa" in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, where he attempts to briefly trace the rise of scholarship on African childhood, "research on African childhood gathered momentum in the 1980s with the publication of *Maidens, Meals, and Money: [Capitalism and the Domestic Community]*"⁶ (1981), by Claude Meillassoux (1925-2005), the renowned French neo-Marxist economic anthropologist and Africanist. According to Carton, Meillassoux's work of anthropology which examined elder and youth interactions in Africa south of the Sahara, similar to *Centuries of Childhood* by Philippe Aries which was a significant work of history about Western family and childhood, offered a good model that depicted the various age shifts and changes within "precapitalist" local environments including simple agrarian communities to "preindustrial" states which world religions and international trade amalgamated.⁷ However, as Carton observed, certain crucial questions, such as: "When did adults reckon that children succumbed to 'original sin'?" and "When did parents turn childhood into a stage of indulging innocent individuals?", were not asked or adequately addressed by Meillassoux's work.⁸ Thus, African childhood and the multiple ways in which it can be understood required and still requires further explorations as studies like "Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods: Introduction"⁹ and "From the singular to the plural: Exploring diversities in contemporary childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa"¹⁰ have shown. What this means is that inquests which reconsider childhood from multifaceted angles are needed to cause a detour in the trajectory of some of the extant scholarly studies about the lives of African children and African childhood, which have become sterile and repetitive in a tradition that has often looked solely at children as victims of social injustice and exploitation and peripheral subjects of the world

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Benedict Carton, "Africa," in Paula S. Fass (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, (New York: Thompson Gale, 2004), 30.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tatek Abebe and Yaw Ofofu-Kusi, "Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods: Introduction," *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research*, 23 (3), (2016): 303-316.

¹⁰ Afua Twum Danso Imoh, "From the singular to the plural: Exploring diversities in contemporary childhoods in sub-Saharan Africa," *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research*, 23 (3), (2016): 455-468.

of adults. What is true, and which the underlined need for a detour supports, is that there are more regions of African childhood, obviously happy and hope-giving ones, worth interrogating. These include, but are not limited to, creative expression in childhood, perceptions of happiness in childhood, childhood versus adulthood, childhood spirituality, hijacked childhoods and brave negotiations of safe havens for self-expression, and child(ren) constructed understandings of the African childhood. More especially, opening up discussions about African children and childhood within an interdisciplinary space will enrich the area of childhood studies within the African context. It will offer broader insights into the area from an interdisciplinary perspective where the voices of history, political and social studies and literature, along with visual and performing arts and other subfields of the humanities and social sciences, such as psychology and sociology, and education in combination will use the broader exchange of concepts and ideas to enrich the growing understanding about children and their childhood in the African context. Thus, as Tatek Abebe and Yaw Ofose-Kusi have also opined aptly, “The future for African scholarship on childhood and children must be hinged on greater collaboration and cooperation on childhood research and studies regardless of which part of the continent takes as a vantage point”¹¹

Moreover, there is the need for critical windows, especially scholarly ones, to be opened to the world to have an analytic and broader insight into African childhood to balance the journalistic print and media ones, many of which often provide sensationalist stories about poverty and pain as the characteristics of African children and childhood. This will contribute to bringing forth the understanding that not every child in Africa is hungry, sick and terrorised by civil unrest; for others who have limited views and perceptions about the African situation, such new windows can make them appreciate the fact that African childhood is not static but dynamic and with a long history, a versatile present and negotiable and promising future. They will know that African childhood also manifests aspects that have similarities and differences because of the different geographical regions and cultural zones on the continent.

Childhood can be a happy one and can be a sad one. While chores like fetching water, taking care of younger siblings, herding, gathering firewood or farming to support the family characterise some rural-based childhoods, there are some childhoods that are devoid of these because they manifest in certain urban spaces where such activities do not exist. While some childhoods feature income earning activities like hawking, work in the fields and

¹¹ Abebe and Ofose-Kusi, “Beyond Pluralizing African Childhoods: Introduction,” 314.

prostitution, others are free from such activities. As such, studies like what this volume contains and offers serve as windows and new perspectives into and about aspects of childhood making, representations and understandings in the African situation.

For the African context, Steve Howard has aptly observed and reminded us in his fine seminal and pioneering bibliography of children and childhood in Africa that there generally exists a dearth of reference matter and textbook material on the area under discussion.¹² Boakye-Boaten also laments about “the paucity of research on the concept of childhood in Ghana specifically *and Africa by extension*” (italics mine).¹³ In walking us through the few extant works of his bibliographical compilation, Howard explains them as being predominantly works “produced by either intergovernmental agencies or nongovernmental agencies and are often annual statistical compilations”, or general summaries of “background, definitions, and social context for discussions of childhood”, or works that offer “reviews of literature on a large topic in the field, such as children and work” or provide a sketch “of methodological techniques for researching children”.¹⁴

In making a case for more studies that specifically focus on excavating understanding about the lives and childhoods of children in Africa to be undertaken, Howard was correct with his observation that while a number of anthropological and related studies provide some knowledge about life in rural African society and a sense of the systems that take care of socialisation of children and lead them into adulthood, only a “few” are specifically centred on children. This is because most of them secondarily append children or mortise them into wider contexts of discussions and examinations of “African families, communities, and the wider society.”¹⁵ Furthermore, because of an existing privileging of political history and economic history, two areas where children and their lives have not been necessarily foregrounded, much of the literature of historical studies too have not offered in-depth points and facts about the lives of children and childhood.¹⁶ Consequently, we reasonably agree with Howard’s implied observation that there is more room for the production of scholarly research and reference and textbook material on the subject of children and childhood in

¹² Steve Howard, “Children and Childhood”, Oxford Bibliographies, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0045.xml>. Accessed on February 19, 2018.

¹³ Boakye-Boaten, “Changes in the concept of Childhood”.

¹⁴ Howard, “Children and Childhood”.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Africa because despite the fact that few scholars have made the historical study of children and slavery a significant field, and some have focused on children basically through the extension of institutions, such as health and education, there exists a dearth of material on the topic.¹⁷ Even the limited-in-circulation literature on socioeconomic development of African children as administered by governmental, nongovernmental, and private-voluntary organizations has an “in-house” nature which makes it difficult to catalogue or collect.¹⁸ Thus, regarding the African terrain and context, it is ultimately time and imperative for more works to be done to showcase the situation and provide insights, views and ideas about it to African and global scholars, policy makers and readers, and enrich, amplify and complement debates about children and childhoods in the corpus of works and researches done globally for intellectual, public and academic consumption.

History of the Evolution and Trajectory of Childhood Studies. A Short Introduction

We can trace the genesis and genealogy of the contemporary academic enterprise known as Childhood Studies to different historical moments. However, it is a product of the academic twists and turns of the so-called West or Western societies. Thus, its origins in the West are anchored in the Enlightenment process and era which promoted a strong interest in understanding human nature and by extension that of “children”. Drawing insight from David Kennedy’s *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education*,¹⁹ Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin aptly aver in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* that: “But exactly how the conception of childhood has changed historically and how conceptions differ across cultures is a matter of scholarly controversy and philosophical interest”.²⁰ Philippe Ariès, for example, argued, “partly on the evidence of depictions of infants in medieval art, that the medievals thought of children as simply ‘little adults.’”²¹ By contrast, Shulamith Shahar had evidence-based reason to aver that “some medieval thinkers un-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ David Kennedy, *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education*, (Albany: SUNY Press 2006).

²⁰ Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin, “The Philosophy of Childhood”, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/childhood/>. Accessed on 6 February, 2018.

²¹ Ibid.

derstood childhood to be divided into fairly well-defined stages”.²² The Age of Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Jacques Rousseau, for example, saw – imagined and constructed – the child as an object and a symbol for their “adult” ideas of governance.²³ The romanticized notion and figure of the child took the centre of the intellectual works, political debates and prose, poetry and other literary productions of many thinkers, policy makers and creative writers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Such ideas of the child, produced from the Romantic thought, influenced adult literature such as that of William Wordsworth, the English Poet Laureate from 1843 to 1850. “Often credited with discovering the Romantic child” by creating “a cult of childhood during the Romantic era, which continued well into the Victorian period and beyond”, the “Wordsworthian child most often act[ing] as a child of nature” was “the product of the adult’s nostalgia and memory as much as he or she is the product of nature.”²⁴ British Romantics often figured children in adult literature and poetry because of their conjured ideas about the child’s closeness to nature and innocence. “The child, some Romantic poets believed, had access to a unique worldview, precisely because a child has not yet rationalized and assimilated the workings of society the way an adult has.”²⁵ As Stephanie Metz has aptly observed, the romanticised notions and figure about the child continued and “The literary and political influence of Romanticism retains its potency even today as it still colors our perceptions of children *in European societies and also non-European worlds where European cultural imperialism and colonialism promoted Europeanisation and Westernisation*” (emphasis rendered in italics are mine).²⁶

Cultural discussions about children even reified the child as an observable object, a material of inquiry, which could be used to explain racial superiority or inferiority. For example, G. Stanley Hall, the renowned psychologist and

²² Ibid.

²³ John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, from *The Works of John Locke*, Vol. 5, (London: Sharpe and Son, 1823); Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans., Charles Frankel, (New York: Hafner, 1947).

²⁴ Stephanie Metz, ““The Youth . . . still is Nature’s priest”: Wordsworth and the Child of Nature,” <http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/wordsworth-and-the-child.html>. Accessed on 6 February, 2018.

²⁵ Stephanie Metz, “Romanticism and the Child: Inventing Innocence,” <http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/childhood.html>. Accessed on 6 February, 2018.

²⁶ Ibid.

arguably the “leader of the ‘child study’ movement in America”,²⁷ endeavoured to rank “races” according to their supposed advancement alongside an evolutionary range analogous to individual human development – with some in childhood, some in adolescence, and some in adulthood – in his opus magnum *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1904). This effort by Stanley, who held the opinion that “The child and race are each keys to the other” whereby the adolescent point, a time of “storm and stress”, represented also the sprout of promise for the race because it was the significant exemplifier of the past of the race, was a form of evolutionary theory. This theory held the view that the development of races from the supposed primordial type to the so-called well developed in that progression could be understood by observing the growth of children.²⁸ Sigmund Freud’s area of psychoanalysis, as Kenneth Kidd has concluded, also paid attention to the child only due to the fact that psychoanalysis obtained some of its growth and insights because it explored books for children. Arguing that “Freud and Jung make a compelling case for the intimacy of childhood and the fairy tale,” Kidd reveals that psychoanalysis then used ideas from children’s literature to express and demonstrate its topics and methods by using folklore and fairy tales, and materials from psychoanalysis of children and children’s literary texts, such as the classic stories of *Peter Pan* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.²⁹ Thus, children were not actually studied to understand children. Rather, studying the child was a reification of them into tools and an attempt to theorise, explain and comment on them as subjects of many isolated studies of particular subjects to elucidate and make sense of the world of adults. Primarily then, they were not studied to understand them and make sense of their world. Ignoring prevailing ideas and opinions that understanding children could shape better relations between adults and children, some early European scholars in the mid 19th century rather believed that knowledge produced by academics about children could offer understanding about the genesis and evolution of human beings. Even Jean Piaget (1896-1980), the Swiss epistemologist known for his pioneering work in child development and the formulator of the theory of cognitive development and epistemological view known

²⁷ Review of G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, by Alexander F. Chamberlain, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 6 (4), (1904): 539, (539-541).

²⁸ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 Vols, (New York: Appleton, 1904).

²⁹ Kenneth Kidd, *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children’s Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

as “genetic epistemology”, was interested in studying children to have knowledge about how we came to comprehend and perceive the world. Still, for some investigators, understanding the development of children was necessary for comprehending development in general than what it could tell us about children. But the interest in children by the turn of the 20th century also produced other aspects of inquiry and interests. Knowledge about children produced an aspect of scholastic concern in which scholars sought to use their lessons to engineer educational, social welfare and management policies and theories. Thus, some scholarship in the humanities, as well as the social and behavioural sciences, became committed to a utilitarian comprehension of children in a quest for an enhanced knowledge of children and their life experiences and a need to engage with the lives of children in order to be able to dictate how such lives should be shaped. This led to the expansion of both the disciplines of child psychology and child development under the umbrella of developmental psychology as dominant providers of defining academic discourses in relation to children.³⁰ They also largely focused on mining for biology-determined laws of childhood behaviour and using knowledge about genetic formations and conducts to understand the actions and development of children.³¹ Nonetheless, other disciplines in the social sciences, namely sociology and anthropology, started to centre children instead of leaving them on the periphery of their epistemic interrogations of family, household and community. This centring was fundamentally driven by a desire to know about how children are prepared for adult life and as adults in society. To the sociologists and anthropologists, this preparation was done through the process of “socialisation” which Talcott Parson’s functional structuralist theoretical perspective supported.³² However, when Anne-Marie Ambert, a sociologist, realised and opined that “socialisation” was not actually about children at all, but was about how adults and their adult society transformed them into adults, and the studying of children was not a major route to becoming famous in sociology,³³ it contributed in making clear the fact that there existed a real, but blurred and camouflaged, lack of interest in children in sociology and even anthropology. Thus, a defining moment for a new academic interest in

³⁰ W. Kessen, *The Rise and Fall of Development*, (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1990).

³¹ J. Morss, *The Biologising of Childhood: Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth*, (Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990).

³² T. Parsons, *The Social System*, (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1951).

³³ Anne-Marie Ambert, “Sociology of Sociology: The Place of Children in North American Sociology”, in P. A. Adler and P. Adler (eds.), *Sociological Studies of Child Development*, Vol. 1, (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1986), 24 (11-31).

children and childhood started to emerge gradually as Childhood Studies. However, this emergence did not emanate from one specific source, rather through and from a variety of sources and trajectories of thought. The map of the genealogy of Childhood Studies is, therefore, a complex one to read because of the multiple geneses of the inspiration, the variegation in chronology of its beginnings and the numerous pioneers of this interest. For example, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* published in 1960³⁴, known in English by its 1962 translated version as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, by Philippe Ariès,³⁵ is definitely one of the early decisive works citable as a pioneer initiator that heralded a turning point in promoting a novel academic concern for children and childhood. Ariès was a historian, a social one at that, and not a social scientist per se, who had an interest in the lives of children and their social meanings, characterisations and manifestations in history. For history, Ariès's work mortised the lives of the so-called ordinary person, in this case, the child, into the narratives and concerns of social and cultural history. This fertilised a growing awareness of the historical nature of childhood and promoted the practice and tradition where childhood came to be studied as a state which had different spatial and temporal manifestations and representations in and across history. Some works of non-historians, like anthropologists, energised this awareness with the views that they provided to shades of childhood systems and experiences outside the Western experiences. Such views, which offered more illumination to this awareness about children and childhood, assisted in promoting and sustaining a growing interest in the thought that childhood was not a naturally constructed and determined universal phenomenon as was conceived by many in the West, but relative to and produced and shaped by and from specific historical, cultural and social experiences and circumstances. For example, the earlier ethnographical study done by Margaret Mead in Samoa offered a discourse that suggested that as part of childhood, stress in adolescent girls was induced by "cultural conditions" and not universally-experienced phenomena.³⁶ Thus, unlike Piaget who claimed that "his subjects [in Europe], Swiss children in the first half of the 20th Century, were animistic in their thinking (Piaget, 1929)",³⁷ Mead's work which supported the view that the notion of a child is both historically and culturally conditioned "presents

³⁴ Published by Plon, a French book publishing company in Paris.

³⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans., Robert Baldick, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

³⁶ See for example Margaret Mead, *Coming in Age of Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation*, (William Morrow & Company, 1961).

³⁷ Matthews and Mullin, "The Philosophy of Childhood".

evidence that Pacific island children were not".³⁸ Moreover, a work like *Children of Their Fathers: Growing up among the Ngoni of Malawi* by Margaret Read, which aimed to show how adults brought up children to fit into Ngoni society and assimilate and keep alive their cultural values,³⁹ had demonstrated that the cultural conditions in and of a society and the need by the society to shape, perpetuate or discard them were key factors that determined and gave character to childhood.

Additionally, when earlier staple epistemic normative conclusions and "specialized" assertions of psychology of child development were attacked and deconstructed as domineering and potentially dangerous in the latter half of the 20th century from post modernist perspectives,⁴⁰ it also consequently encouraged a new movement of scholars in the UK, Europe and US from the 1980s to engage and interrogate the way scholarship approached and made claims about children and childhood in the areas of sociology, anthropology and child psychology.⁴¹ For example, some scholars charged psychology with the fault of confining childhood within its strong alliance with medicine, education and government agencies,⁴² and criticised Piaget's entrenchment of contemporary understandings of the child in positivism and rigid empiricism.⁴³ Proposing a new childhood sociology, scholars like Alan Prout and Allison James said that childhood should be understood as a social construction which is a variable of social analysis; secondly, children's social relations and cultures should be studied in their own right and their agency in constructing and determining their own lives and those around them recognised; and a new childhood sociology was a necessary response to the process

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Margaret Read, *Children of Their Fathers: Growing up among the Ngoni of Malawi*, Case studies in Education and Culture, (New York & London: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

⁴⁰ S. Greene, "Child Development: Old themes, New directions," in M. Woodhead, D. Faulkner, and K. Littleton (eds.), *Making Sense of Social Development*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁴¹ C. Jenks, *The Sociology of Childhood: Essential Readings*, (London: Batsford, 1982); C. Jenks, *Childhood*, (London: Routledge, 1990); A. James and A. Prout, (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, Second Edition, (London: Routledge/Falmer, 1997); B. Mayall (ed.), *Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced*, (London: Falmer, 1994).

⁴² A. James, C. Jenks, and A. Prout, *Theorizing Childhood*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 17.

⁴³ Ibid. 19.

of reconstructing childhood in society.⁴⁴ In this trajectory, they opined that children were active actors and agents instead of passive recipients of socialisation, and that nature did not bequest childhood, rather it was constructed by society. Childhood, therefore, varied in cultural, geographical and time frames. Accordingly, in Europe a scholarly call for a new sociological thought about childhood also emerged and was amplified from the 1980s through the 1990s from the academic views of the Finnish Early Childhood Education scholar Leena Alanen⁴⁵ and some sociologists,⁴⁶ and it helped to birth the “childhood as a social phenomenon programme”, a project whose “task was to map out childhood as a structural form in its own right to illustrate the place children occupy and the roles they play as social actors”.⁴⁷ Furthermore, some scholars in the US became convinced that children and childhood had to be properly inserted into sociological studies thematically and conceptually. It was in line with this thought and realisation that an essay such as “Is there sufficient interest to establish a sociology of children?” was written in

⁴⁴ A. Prout and A. James, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, promise and problems”, in A. James and A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, Second Edition, (London: Routledge/Falmer, 1997), 8.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Leena Alanen, “Rethinking childhood,” *Acta Sociologica*, 31(1), (1988):53-67; Leena Alanen and Marjatta Bardy, *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon: National Report, Finland*, (Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, [1990], 1991).

⁴⁶ J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, and H. Wintersberger, *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*, (Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1994). Additionally, a work like J. Qvortrup, W.A. Corsaro, and M-S Honig (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) will also sustain the momentum of interest in Childhood Studies.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Anne-Marie Ambert’s book reviews of *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon*, and *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics* edited by Jens Qvortrup, Marjatta Bardy, Giovanni Sgritta and Helmut Wintersberger, in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 56 (4), (1994):1043-1045. Ambert explains that the Childhood as a Social Phenomenon project was initiated in 1987. The project was sponsored by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna. It was characterised by “meetings and collaboration among scholars from 19 European and North American countries”. *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon* (16 National Reports and Statistical Compendium), constituting a key publication of the project, was published between 1987 and 1994. Additionally, *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics* was published in 1994.

1991. The writer, Gertrud Lenzer, also argued for “a genuinely interdisciplinary multidisciplinary new field of study”.⁴⁸

The radical views of sociologists and other scholars in the UK, Europe and the US about childhood and children did acknowledge children holistically as persons with agency, advocated for the study of the plurality of childhoods, and pushed for the study of childhood in cultural contexts. Yielding the fledging disciplinary perspective which became labelled by many as the “‘new sociology’ or ‘new social studies’ of childhood”⁴⁹, this radical conviction and advocacy added more verve to the materialization of “Childhood Studies” as a new disciplinary viewpoint that gives children conceptual independence and expressly centres them as the principal personages of study. Having been produced primarily from efforts in Western academia, its orbit and function were mainly concerned with children and childhoods in Europe, North America, UK, Australia and New Zealand. Thus, its current status and plans for its future trajectory have largely been subjected to the historical, social and political needs, movements and environment of the academy in the European and American areas.

Childhood Studies, in both the global “North” and “South” now, is, thus, a fairly burgeoning multidisciplinary endeavour that spans various epistemologies and methodologies. There have been several recent reflections and groundbreaking studies from this field such as the papers included in Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (eds.), *Researching Children's Experience: Approached and Methods* (2005),⁵⁰ Ginger Frost's *Victorian Childhoods* (2009),⁵¹ and articles included in J. Qvortrup et al.'s *Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (2009).⁵² Others are B. Mayall's *A History of the Sociology of Childhood* (2013),⁵³ David Oswell's *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Hu-*

⁴⁸ Gertrud Lenzer, “Is there sufficient interest to establish a sociology of children?,” *Footnotes of the American Sociological Association*, 19 (8), (1991): 8.

⁴⁹ P. Christensen and A. Prout, “Anthropological and Sociological Perspectives on the study of children,” in Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (eds.), *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Methods*, (London/California/New Delhi: SAGE, 2005), 42 (42-60); M. Woodhead, *The Case for Childhood Studies*, (Dublin: Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, 2003).

⁵⁰ Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (eds.), *Researching Children's Experience: Approached and Methods*, (London/California/New Delhi: SAGE, 2005).

⁵¹ Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods*, (Westport, CT/London: Praeger, 2009).

⁵² Qvortrup, et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*.

⁵³ B. Mayall, *A History of the Sociology of Childhood*, (London: Institute of Education, 2013).

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Index

A

adultism, x, xxxvi, 172, 176, 179,
180, 182, 184, 186, 189, 192, 193
Africa, vii, viii, ix, x, xi, xx, xxviii,
xxix, xxx, xxxiii, xxxiv, xxxv, 4, 19,
24, 25, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42,
43, 44, 45, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55,
56, 57, 58, 59, 68, 69, 72, 81, 84,
85, 86, 87, 98, 99, 100, 102, 104,
109, 111, 133, 140, 146, 149, 150,
155, 162, 163, 164, 165, 168, 170,
171, 172, 173, 175, 204, 205, 210,
212, 217, 218, 219
African child soldier, xxxii, 83, 85,
87
African Children's Literature, xxxi,
69
African cultures, 48, 166
African Societies, xxvii
African Traditional Religion, 56
Afrikaner, 140
Afro-pessimism, 42
Agu, xxxiii, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90,
91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100,
101, 102, 103, 104
ajebota, 4, 9, 10, 12
ajepako, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12
AmaXhosa, xxxv, 163, 164, 166, 168
ancestors, 56, 164, 167, 168, 169,
177
Anlo Ewe, 20

B

Beasts of No Nation, xxxii, 83, 85,
87, 99, 102, 103

Blackness, xxxi, 66, 68, 69
Bosses, xxxiii, 124
Boy Scouts, 137

C

Carnavalesque, xxxv
Cary Fukunaga, xxxii, 85
Charles Taylor, 117, 127
Child Protection, 117
childhood innocence, xxvii, xxxii,
83, 87, 97, 102, 103
civil war, xxxiv, 109, 114, 123, 130,
200, 209
coming of age, xxxiii, 166
Compulsory Education Act, 135,
137
cosmologies, vii, xxxv, 165
creativity, vii, xxvi, xxvii, 53, 174,
178, 185

D

Daglama quarry, 17, 34
decolonisation, 69, 80, 81
Department for International
Development, 22
de-socialized child, 198, 200, 202,
203, 211, 213, 214, 215
diasporic notions, xxxii, 67
dreams, 57, 121, 123, 167

E

economy, 2, 3, 16, 20, 26, 134, 144,
148
educational reforms, 134, 145
Efua Sutherland, xxxi, 65

Enlightenment, xii, xiii, 197
 epistemicide, 161
 ethics, xxi, 161, 169

F

Fanon, xxxi, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 73,
 75, 80, 81
 female, 4, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 78,
 123, 166, 167, 174
 feminist, xxxii, 76, 79
 First World War, 137, 140
 folktales, 67
 freedom, 72, 73, 79, 187

G

gender, xxxi, 38, 50, 67, 73, 77, 78,
 134, 166
 Ghana Statistical Service, 20, 27
 Global North, viii, xxxiii, 84, 94, 97,
 104, 218, 219
 Global South, viii, 87, 94, 218
 Great Depression, xxxiv, 133, 138,
 142, 148

H

higher education, 142
 Ho Municipality, xxx, 23, 27
 holism, 46, 47
 holistic wellness, xxx, xxxi, 38, 49,
 50, 51, 58, 59

I

immigration, 136, 150, 151, 152
Integral Model, 49
 interconnectedness, 50, 165
 International Labour
 Organization, 18
 International Year of the Child, 39

IsiXhosa, xxxv, 161, 162, 163, 165,
 169, 170

J

juvenile delinquency, 133, 140,
 141, 213

L

labour market, 16, 17, 20, 24, 26, 33
 Liberia, xxxiii, 111, 112, 115, 122,
 123, 129, 130, 200, 204, 208, 209,
 210, 211
 Liberian Young Veterans, xxxiii

M

Malinké, 203, 211
 malnutrition, xxx
 mental health issues, 59

N

néo-négritude, 213
 NGOs, xxxiv, 85, 110, 113, 129, 130
 Nigeria, xxvi, xxix, xxx, 1, 2, 5, 6, 11,
 13, 24, 70

O

obesity, xxx, 10
omoboti, 3
omopako, 3
 othering, 43, 162

P

parents, ix, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 17,
 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31,
 32, 33, 34, 37, 52, 53, 59, 85, 117,
 139, 140, 142, 145, 150, 151, 154,

166, 167, 179, 180, 184, 187, 199,
201, 203, 205, 207, 208, 212, 214
peacebuilding, 117, 121, 122, 126,
130
peacekeeping missions, 117
Pedagogy, 146
pickaninnies, 83
Pidgin English, 89
Postcolonial, xxxi, 73, 76
Post-War Mendicants, 124

Q

Quantum Field, 56

R

rehabilitation, xxxiv, 104, 113, 122,
134, 147, 148, 149, 154
resilience, xxx, 8, 38, 42, 45, 53, 56,
57, 58, 59, 60
rites of passage, 162, 169
rituals, 43, 169, 178

S

sacrifice, 144, 165, 169, 178
Saltpond, 182, 183
Samanta girl, 67, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79
saviour fantasies, 45
school fees, 31, 32
seclusion, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169
Social Darwinism, 133, 139
Social Welfare Department, 34
Socialization, 201, 205, 207, 208
socialized child, 204, 208, 214
Soul, xxvi, xxx, 54
South Africa, xxxv, 52, 54, 156, 162
South African War, 140
Southern Rhodesia, xxxiv, 133,
134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140,

141, 142, 145, 146, 150, 151, 152,
155
spiritual, viii, xxx, 6, 38, 46, 56, 58,
86, 147, 162, 164, 166, 169, 172,
214
spirituality, x, 48, 50, 51, 56, 57, 58,
161
St. Pancras, xxxiv, 134, 146, 148,
150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155
State Paternalism, xxxiv
Strika, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 97, 98, 99,
100, 101, 104
Structural Adjustment
Programmes, 3
Sustainable Livelihood Approach,
21
symbolic, 5, 52, 88, 100, 112, 113,
128, 133, 163
Symbolic Interactionism, 113

T

Tarzan, 68
totem, 165, 169, 208

U

UNICEF, 117
United Nations, 39, 117
urban, x, xxvii, xxxv, 5, 21, 26, 27,
59, 148, 154, 176, 182, 192
Uzodinma Iweala, xxxii, 85, 86, 87

W

white domination, 66, 67, 73, 133
WHITE POVERTY, 133
WINNEBA, 171
Working Children, xxx, 17, 19, 24,
25
worldview, xiii, 77, 85, 179, 181
Worst Form of Child Labour, 24

Y

Yoruba, xxix, xxx, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13
youth apprenticeship, 150

Z

Zimbabwe, xxvi, xxxiv