Working Paper
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The Positives and Negatives
of Children's Independent Migration:
Assessing the Evidence and the Debates

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September 2006

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgements

Introduction

For the most part the independent migration[1] of children tends to be presented in the policy literature as pathological, since it is often assumed to be the outcome of disastrous situations (such as war or famine) that lead to the breakdown of family relations, or result in the increasing vulnerability of children to economic exploitation, dangerous working conditions or abuse. However, data from ten months of fieldwork carried out during 2000-2001 in the village of Tempane Natinga in the north-east of Ghana suggested an alternative reality, where children were both choosing to migrate and were frequently positive about their experiences. The reasons they gave were that this often afforded them the opportunity to develop important relationships or skills, and/or to earn an income that allowed them to buy the things necessary for their progression into adulthood or to pay for education. The research was not focussed on child migration and so I did not systematically interview returning migrant children or children who had moved into the village, although I did include interviews with some children in both categories. An additional period of fieldwork, funded by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, was carried out between May and July 2004, the purpose of which was specifically to explore children's independent migration from the very north-eastern part of Ghana to the cocoa-growing areas of central and southern Ghana. A total of twenty parents (ten fathers and ten mothers) of independent child migrants were interviewed in Tempane Natinga, along with ten migrant children (five girls and five boys) who had returned from migration. Following this, a further thirty boys and thirty girls who were living as independent migrants were interviewed in eighteen different locations within a 100 mile radius of the capital of the Ashanti region, Kumasi, some 500 miles from the children's home area.

Full details of the research methodology and the general findings can be found in Hashim (2005a). The current paper looks broadly at the positives and negatives of children's experiences of migration. It focuses on the dangers and pitfalls that independent child migrants reported, along with the perceived benefits and opportunities. The paper goes on to assess the manner in which independent child migrants are positioned in social policy and legal discourse, in light of children's own evaluations of their experiences, and argues that the two primary categories utilised in considering children's independent movement – fostering and trafficking – are not

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[1] This refers to children who migrate independently of their parents. The decision to move may or may not be an autonomous one; they may or may not make their journeys in the company of known adults or other children; and at their destinations they may or may not be living with other family members.

helpful in assessing the extent to which children are vulnerable, since these vulnerabilities emerge from the inherent insecurities, risks and dangers attached to the process of migration itself. In contrast the paper argues that, when assessing the costs and benefits of migration, it is important to listen to and take into account children's own perspectives, but that in doing so consideration needs to be given to the broader context of the children's situations that place constraints, at many different levels, on children's choices.

The Economic and Cultural Context of Migration

In order to understand the process of migration it is necessary first to provide some background information regarding the environment in which the research was carried out and the nature of inter-generational relations in the area. Although not all the current migrant children interviewed came from the village of Tempane Natinga, this background information is broadly characteristic of the district from which all the children interviewed originate. The village is located in the Upper East Region, one of the smaller regions of Ghana, situated in the north-eastern corner of the country. The region historically has had little investment in infrastructure or services, and this is reflected in the fact that 90 per cent of the population is poor, and unable to meet basic nutritional and non-food needs, and almost 80 per cent is extremely poor (Canagarajah and Pörtner 2003). It is also amongst the regions in Ghana with the poorest literacy rates and lowest access to primary schooling, and it has the highest incidence of under-nutrition in children under five (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and World Bank 1998).

The majority of the population is rural-based and the principal economic activity is farming (GSS 2002), but this is limited agriculturally as, in addition to the region's relative inaccessibility, it is located in the Sudan savannah, which is characterised by a single and short rainy season, and decreasing soil fertility (Awumbila 1997, Dietz and Millar 1999). Agricultural production consists of a mixture of cash crops and crops for household consumption. Agriculture is largely non-mechanised and, with the exception of dry season gardens, cultivation is rain-fed. Farming is organised around the household, which for the most part is large, both because polygamy is practised and because households are not always based on a conjugal core of one man and his wife or wives, but consists of a complex extended family. The social organisation of farming is quite complex, being subject to divisions of labour according to age, sex and status hierarchies. Although there are clear-cut divisions of labour, all able-bodied household members, including

children, are required to work under the direction of the household head in the household farm to produce the staple necessary for domestic consumption for the year.

Children begin to contribute to household livelihood from a very early age. By four or five they can be carrying out tasks such as caring for younger siblings, caring for small livestock, cleaning, running errands and guarding crops. Between seven and thirteen they are much more substantially involved in farm work, in the case of boys, and the maintenance of the household and the carrying out of female-designated farm-work, in the case of girls. By fourteen, children are able to work on a basis almost comparable to adults of the same sex[2]. By this stage, like adults, they are also engaging in private farming (where individuals work an area of land for personal profit or consumption), petty trading or casual work. This is especially important as by this age they are expected to provide for themselves those personal items, such as soap, that are seen as the responsibility of the individual, and also to begin to buy the items necessary for their progression into adulthood; namely pots, basins and bowls, in the case of girls, and livestock to rear in the case of boys (Hashim 2004).

While children are encouraged to adopt the economic roles expected of them, this is not a conflict-free process and, up until the age of about thirteen, parents or elders may impose sanctions for non conforming, such as denying them food, withholding affection, or even corporal punishment. As children mature and begin grow into their roles, new conflicts emerge. A fine balance is to be achieved between the somewhat contradictory roles of contributing to households' livelihoods while also being, to some degree self-reliant. Children have to ensure, on the one hand, that they fulfil their obligations to parents and seniors while, on the other hand, they wish to carve out the space to pursue their own personal endeavours, which is both in their material interest, and is also perceived as an aspect of the development of their identity and as a mark of the 'good' child. For their part, seniors need children's labour to secure livelihoods, while at the same time they must ensure that they provide children with the time and means for pursuing their own endeavours (ibid.).

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[2] Children at this stage have the *ability* to work as adults but they do not necessarily have the *possibility* to do so as they are limited by factors such as access to resources; for example, land to farm or, importantly, command over their and others' labour, since the cooperation of others is necessary for farming.

Thus, in this cultural context there is an explicit inter-generational contract[3] where inter-dependence and autonomy coexist, albeit the relationship is unequally balanced in favour of seniors and parents[4]. Nevertheless it benefits both the child and her/his seniors to achieve some degree of equilibrium.

This inter-generational contract is also evident in the negotiations that come into play when children migrate. The area in which the village is located is one which has a long history of migration, the historical roots of which lie in the colonial era when the north of Ghana was treated as a source of labour by the colonial administration (Thomas 1973 in Whitehead 2000: 16). This movement is also evident now, and a household survey conducted during the first fieldwork revealed that over 68 per cent of the 96 households in the village had one or more adult males away on migration and that half of the households reported having a migrant child (Hashim 2004: 68). This historical experience of migration effectively means two things. First, that extended families are dispersed. If migrants to the south or relatives back home lack labour either to carry out household work or for farming activities they may call on their families elsewhere for a child to assist them. The case study below gives an indication of the variety of locations and distances involved in families' dispersal, the kinds of links that exist between households and the extent to which children's movement between households is perceived as normal and necessary.

Links between Households

The Assambila[5] household is in the Bawku East District of the Upper East Region and is currently headed by a young man, Peter, aged thirty. He is the junior-most of five brothers, the other four brothers being migrants in the south of Ghana (3) and in Côte d'Ivoire (1). There are seven other household members consisting of Peter's mother (aged 70), wife (22), daughter (2), wife's sister (15), Brother No. 1's second-born son (17), Brother No. 2's first-born daughter (13) and Brother No. 3's first-born son (14).

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[3] A number of recent literatures have used the idea of the inter-generational contract to describe the relationships between parents and children in order to capture "the fact that a great deal of interaction within the family is not random, idiosyncratic, intuitive or rationally chosen, but rather governed by norms and customs which make up the social meaning of the family in that context" (Kabeer 2000: 466, see also Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen (2005).

[4] Other case studies illustrate, too, that whatever the legal status of children, in practice in many contexts parent-child relationships can consist of mutually coexisting areas of dependence, autonomy and interdependence (cf. Punch 2002).

[5] The names of all the respondents have been changed to protect their identity. The use of italics and quotation marks indicates verbatim quotes by respondents, as translated to me.

Peter is a farmer and has also worked off and on with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the area. He is also the only member of his family to have completed senior secondary school. His wife is a tailoring apprentice and also undertakes some petty trading in the local market.

His wife's sister has been living with them since their daughter was born and was picked[6] to help Peter's wife with child-care and trading activities.

Brother No 1's son has been living in this household since the early nineties. Peter explained that as he was taking responsibility for the care of their mother, his brothers had a responsibility to support him with this. For this reason Brother No. 1's son was brought in to assist Peter with caring for the animals, to begin with, and farm work later. Prior to this Brother No. 1's first born son was, between the ages of nine and sixteen, living in this household and playing the same role. He was then collected by Brother No 3. Brother No 3 is farming in Côte d'Ivoire and trading between Ghana and Nigeria. Consequently he required a trustworthy male to protect his goods and support his family while he travelled.

Brother No. 2's daughter has been living with Peter since January 2004. She moved to this household in order to help her grandmother, who is becoming too old to collect water and carry out other domestic work. Prior to this she had lived with Brother No 1 for three years, because her parents, who had lived in the same village, had moved away, and she had wanted to remain a student in the school where she had begun her education.

Brother No. 3's first born son suffers from epilepsy and was not responding to any 'conventional' treatment so his parents sent him to Peter in order to receive Kusasi[7] 'traditional' treatment. He has been living in Peter's household since 2001.

Peter himself has also been an independent child migrant. After his father died when he was a young teenager, Peter used to travel to his brother in the Western Region of Ghana during the school holidays to help him with his farming, usually returning with sufficient funds to cover his school costs and some of the costs of 'by-day' labour (paid daily contracted labour) to farm the farms his father had left and to care for his mother. His brothers continue to send money home occasionally.

Peter's wife, Christina, has also been an independent child migrant. She was collected by her

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[6] People frequently used the words 'collected' or 'picked' to refer to a child's movement at the instigation of another, while 'followed' tended to be used to refer to a child's initiation of the movement.

[7] The numerically dominant ethnic group of the children interviewed.

aunt when she was about eleven years old to help her with domestic work. After one year, an Ashanti woman asked her aunt if she could take Christina as a housemaid and Christina lived and worked for her for about three years. She was rewarded with clothing, a sewing machine and some ¢300,000 (as Peter put it, 'Big money in those days'). However, her aunt appropriated these things and Christina eventually returned to the north with very little to show for her time in the south.

Although the older four brothers have all been absent for some years, the expectation is that they will eventually return and settle in the north.

The second impact of this long history of migration is that there is knowledge of alternative labour markets. Children are aware of the relative ease with which they could find contracted farm-work or by-day work in the lush climates of the south, or alternatively (and increasingly[8]) the possibilities of working as domestic help, shop and restaurant workers or petty traders. They witnessed migrants returning home with plumper bodies and consumer items, as well as trendier clothes and hairstyles. Given the lack of opportunities in the north, the cocoa-growing areas of Ghana, consequently, are a very attractive alternative for young people, particularly for those entering the stage where they are beginning to pursue their own private endeavours or, as will become clear, attempting to pursue a formal or informal education. These factors are reflected in the reasons given by current and return child migrants and parents for children's migration, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons Given by Children and Parents for Children's Migration[9]

Reason for Migration	Female	Males	All
Work/Poverty	8 (6)	19 (6)	27 (12)
Education	7 (1)	9 (3)	16 (4)
To help a relative	14 (3)	1 (1)	15 (4)
Health	2	3	5
Neglect	4	3	7
Totals	35 (10)	35 (10)	70[10] (20)

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[8] Although most of the return child migrants interviewed during this and the earlier period of fieldwork were rural-based, a small number were urban-based, reflecting the fact that growing numbers of villagers were relying not only on farming as a livelihood (Hashim 2004), but were diversifying into livelihoods that might lead them to be more urban-based, such as trading and/or more white-collar jobs.

[9] Figures in brackets are the responses of parents and those out of the brackets the responses of children.

[10] This includes return migrants as well as current child migrants.

Children's Experiences of Migration

Before going on to a discussion of children's experiences of migration, it is first necessary to point out that of the 60 child migrants interviewed in southern Ghana, 38 were located in rural areas, as were nine of the ten return child migrants, although two had also lived in urban centres. Consequently, while children were not exclusively carrying out farming work, their activities were dominated by this, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2: Child Migrants' Activities

Activity	Females	Males	All
Farm-work	11	20	31
Household work[11]	9	1	10
Small enterprise/petty trading	6	5	11
Apprenticeship	3	4	7
Attending school	3	1	4
Attending school and doing farm-work	1	3	4
Attending school and working in small enterprises	1	-	1
Attending an apprenticeship and doing farm-work	1	-	1
Loading buses at the transport park	-	1	1
Totals	35	35	70

The first thing to note with regard to children's migration is that the vast majority (67) of both return and current child migrants were not compelled by anyone to migrate. Child migrants in the younger age category of seven to thirteen rarely initiated their movement themselves, usually stating that they have been asked to migrate by a senior. However, they also rarely said they did not wish to move, only three reporting being compelled to do so. In contrast, older children (13+) did frequently choose to migrate, often having to negotiate with parents or other elders for permission to do so or, occasionally, simply running away. As shall be discussed later, this is an important finding since a key issue in policy research that looks at the factors that affect children's independent migration is the ambivalent treatment of the relative roles of the parent and the child

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[11] It should be noted that all the girls reported doing some domestic work, and so only those who reported no other activity are included in this category. It should also be noted, however, that even though they might not report farming, this does not necessarily mean that girls were not also undertaking some farming related activities since there is a linguistic equivalence in Kusaal, the language of the Kusasi, between the word 'farm' and men's farming tasks. Thus, females 'do not farm' (Hashim 2004: 74).

in decision-making; the emphasis tending instead to be on the degree of compulsion or coercion from parents or other adults (Whitehead and Hashim 2005: 3).

In order to capture as fully as possible the potential problems children experienced as a result of their migration, two separate questions were asked of children. The first enquired whether they experienced specific problems, such as with food, health, accommodation and the people with whom they lived or for whom they worked. For the most part children did not report problems. However, fourteen of the seventy children (six boys and eight girls) told me that they were experiencing or had in the past experienced problems, with two girls reporting bad experiences in two different households[12]. In seven cases the mal-treatment was at the hands of relatives, while in the nine others it was by individuals who were not related. Thus, working for and/or living with a relative did not appear to have any significant effect on the likelihood or not of a child being maltreated. Children's complaints included being overworked (5), not receiving sufficient food (6), being verbally abused (4) and being beaten (5). Children who were selling items for an employer also reported that while on the whole they might not have problems with food, if they did not make a sale during the day they would not receive *chop* money, with which to purchase food.

The second question asked whether these children were treated the same as the children of the household in which they were living. Some insisted that it would not be possible to tell they were not the biological daughter or son of a household member. Certainly there was a view that 'you cannot discriminate because that is not seen as good if you are a Kusasi', reflecting long-standing traditions of adults other than biological parents operating within a cultural paradigm that defines their position as classificatory parents when accommodating another's child. Others, however, suggested that they were not treated the same as the house children, though no explicit references were made to maltreatment. Some said that they were expected to do more housework, while others said they missed an affective relationship. For example, one young girl told me, 'They don't rock me like they rock their children'. Others stated that they were not bought items such as clothing as frequently: 'My sister might buy clothing for her children but not for me'. If they were bought items, they might not be as good: 'My thing will be small and theirs will be big, theirs will be beautiful and mine not'. On the basis of this question, which brought out a range of qualitative issues, a further seven children were regarded as not being treated well; or at least as well as the household's children or how they would expect to be treated at home.

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[12] See Hashim (2005a: 11) for a discussion of the measures instituted to assist children found to be in difficult circumstances.

Turning to the issue of remuneration for labour, the research found that all girls and many boys under the age of thirteen working for relatives were not paid. Children were sometimes given sums of money as gifts or an area of land and the necessary inputs to farm for themselves. In addition, two girls were having their apprenticeship fees paid by the relative for whom they were working and five girls and two boys were having their school costs covered. Sewing machines (which cost around ¢600,000[13]) were also a means by which girls were occasionally rewarded. In total, one return migrant and three current migrants had been bought sewing machines. Older boys working for a relative – i.e. those over thirteen – were either given a share of the proceeds from the sale of crops or were farming for themselves in addition to helping a relative.

Some children who worked for non-relatives were also not remunerated. These included some apprentices, who were paid only *chop* money, which could be as little as ¢4,000 every couple of days, but in the case of two boys was ¢10,000 per day[14]. Other children, who received no remuneration when living with non-relatives were described by the adults with whom they were living as 'foster' children because they had been orphaned. In talking to the children it appeared they were essentially house-helps. This was rare, though, and involved three young runaways.

Those children that were being remunerated could be paid derisory sums. For example, one sixteen year-old girl was receiving ¢5,000[15] per working day (plus ¢2,500 for *chop*) which regularly consisted of more than twelve hours. She was among the sixteen cases of recorded maltreatment of children. Girls, on the whole, were paid poorly, while boys' earnings as agricultural labourers could range from ¢200,000 to ¢800,000 per year, with food and accommodation on top of this. They tended to be paid at the end of the year, and although two had reported problems with this system, most preferred it as 'that way it stays', meaning children would not be tempted to squander the money. If they were farming for themselves boys in their late teens could make up to ¢1.5 million per year, often living with relatives and occasionally assisting them as repayment for food and/or lodgings. Girls also tended to report lower earnings for 'by-day' work, with boys on average receiving ¢15,000 per day, while girls (and boys under 12) averaged ¢10,000.

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[13] Sixteen thousand Ghanaian Cedi (¢) was worth roughly £1 between May and June 2005.
[14] My impression was that it was fairly rare to receive so much *chop* money and was likely to be related to the fact that boys were 'apprentice' drivers but also working as 'lorry mates', which involved assisting the driver of a tipper truck with his work. See Hashim 2005b for a detailed discussion of apprenticeships.
[15] The daily minimum wage was raised from ¢9,200 to ¢11,200 on 1 April 2004.

The levels of remuneration a child could expect to receive, therefore, appeared closely linked to a child's age and gender, and reflect both the system of control and command over labour mentioned earlier, that are hierarchically organised along age and gender lines which affect the value placed on girls' and younger children's work, and the rates of return for the types of work in which children are engaged.

The research specifically focused on children in the rural sector living with relatives, as most of the little research that has been done on child migrants tends to centre on those working for a non-related person and in the urban sector. However, in order to capture potential differences in experience arising from rural or urban location and on whether a child was living with and/or working for a related or non-related individual, interviews were also carried out with children who fell into these categories[16]. As has been noted, living with a relative did not guarantee that one would be treated well. Similarly, no outstanding differences emerged in the experiences of migration between those children who were living in rural areas compared to those who lived in an urban area. However, from the interviews with children in the urban areas my general impression was that they were more likely to experience greater difficulties with both access to food, since their employers or the relatives they were living with were not growing food crops, and poorer access to opportunities to earn an income, as most rural-based children could at least go 'by-day' to earn cash or might acquire access to a small plot of land in order to undertake some private farming. None of those urban-based children interviewed specifically commented on this, however, and it might be that the perceived benefits of living in an urban area (whether this be bright lights, access to pipe-borne water or opportunities for formal and informal education) outweighed these disadvantages.

If one were to consider only how children were compensated for their work and their comments regarding the manner in which they were treated, it would appear relatively easy to conclude that the costs to children of their migration are significant. However, almost half the children interviewed stated they preferred their host environments, including those who were paid derisory sums or complained of being in difficult circumstances. This was either because they had been 'suffering' more at home or because of the rewards they would or might receive as a result of

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[16] Of the sixty current child migrants interviewed, nineteen boys and nineteen girls were living with a relative and/or living in a rural area, while eleven girls and eleven boys were living in an urban and/or working for a non-related individual.

their migration. Taking into consideration children's own assessments of their circumstances, it would seem that despite the hardships of migration, many children preferred this to being at home because of the real and potential opportunities migration afforded them.

On the face of it, while one might conclude that relatives were taking advantage of children by utilising their labour and not compensating them, from the point of view of the children interviewed it was perceived as inappropriate to expect payment for their labour from a relative, as indicated in this quote from an interview with a young teenage girl: 'Because she is my sister she is not paying me'. Boys held the same view, one telling me, for example, 'I don't get paid because you can't be working for your brother and ask your brother to pay you'. Consequently, children rarely viewed not being paid for work undertaken for family members as anything but normal.

Moreover, there was a general expectation that when they were to return home the relative with whom they had been living would give the child money or other items. The father of one of the migrant children said: 'If a child is coming home and she has been staying with you, you should send her home happy'. When asked what he meant by happy, he explained, 'If you compare it to a child you have picked as a labourer then you have to send her home with some clothing and some small money so she can buy her things'. Similarly, another father stated, 'I would expect that she would come with something, because how can a child help you and you not give anything?' Migrant children voiced the same expectations. For example, I was told by one teenaged girl, who at the time of being interviewed was helping her sister with her domestic work freeing her sister for farm-work, 'Because she is my sister when I go home she will buy something to send with me'. When I asked her what sort of item she might expect her sister to send her home with, she responded, 'A sewing machine or she will allow me to enter [pay for] an apprenticeship'. As mentioned, some girls had been given sewing machine and a further two girls were expecting to be given sewing machines. Six girls were also hoping their relatives would pay for or help them pay for an apprenticeship.

Even when children stated that they preferred home to where they were currently living, they usually qualified this with comments such as 'here is easier', either because of the ease with which they could get paid work or because of the fact that food was relatively easily available, if they were living in a rural area. This ambiguity regarding children's preferred location is reflected in something told to me by Tofiq, who said, 'Here they are difficulties but because it is my land I have to take it, while there I was enjoying'. In other words, despite enjoying the comparative

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benefits of the south, he felt that he had to put up with the hardships of the north because that was where he was from and where his family was located. When I asked him to clarify what he meant by enjoying, he replied, 'having money and plenty of food to eat[17]'. Even factors such as the less harsh climatic conditions of the central areas of Ghana were commented on as a reason for the host environment being a more preferable setting.

In addition, despite many children saying they worked harder as migrants than they did at home, children still had two reasons for finding work as a migrant more attractive than living at home. As has been noted, in the rural Upper East children's independent income and economic activity is a culturally defined area of their autonomy. Boys use income from farming to buy livestock, such as chickens, and to purchase items such as furniture that is increasingly seen as being necessary in order to indicate one's readiness for marriage. Girls, for their part, increasingly are being expected to bring something to their marriage in the form of both articles such as pots and bowls, and in the form of some training by which they can earn an independent income. Although the amounts the children were earning were comparatively little, the sums were far more than they would have been able to earn had they remained at home. The claims elders have on juniors' labour time, the lack of opportunities for paid labour in the Upper East Region and the very low level of incomes for farmers there, all contribute to this. As one migrant boy put it, regarding his payment for a one-year contract as a labourer on a cocoa farm, 'I've never had in my hand ¢250,000, so I was happy'.

As discussed in detail in an earlier paper (Hashim 2005b), migration also afforded children the potential for pursuing formal or informal education. Increasingly, education is viewed as carrying more income potential than farming and for girls vocational training is being seen as important. However, poor schooling, few apprenticeship opportunities and the straightened circumstances of parents, encourages children from the north to migrate to access education or a training, which they did either by earning the income necessary to pay for this, or by providing a relative with labour in the hope of support with apprenticeship or schooling costs. Young people often went to considerable lengths to pursue formal and informal educational opportunities, even at some considerable cost to their comfort and well-being, as illustrated by the example of the teenaged girl mentioned earlier who worked over twelve hours a day to earn the money with which to continue her apprenticeship. Children have a strong incentive to migrate particularly as, in their

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[17] The relevance of the reference to 'plenty of food' relates to the experience of the 'hungry season', when the previous year's crops are about to, or have, run out.

home villages, the age at which school or apprenticeship fees become payable coincides with the time when children are expected to start taking on responsibility for personal expenditure such as educational costs.

Children's decisions to migrate are not necessarily rooted solely in economic reasons. Rather, 'production of income is only one aspect of this complex behavioural system' (Schildkrout 1981: 83). Thorsen's (2005) interesting work with child migrants in Burkina Faso illustrates how children's migration is best seen as part of the process of transition from being small children with few obligations and limited say in decisions to being young adults with some responsibilities to their parents, including the generation of income. According to Thorsen, migration 'represents an avenue to pursue their own desires of earning money, being independent and seeing some of the world, while at the same time fulfilling the expectations their seniors have of them materially and socially through promises of gifts and remittances that partially make up for their absence in the day-to-day work' (ibid. 12). The transition to adulthood is rarely experienced by children as simply becoming the same as their parents and migration may have a strong aspirational element. This may be for something as ill-defined as new experiences beyond the village, as well as for new opportunities for earning an income (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2005).

Thus, children are aware of the possibility that migration might entail hardships associated with being away from one's home and family, or those involved in long working hours and/or for arduous work, or that they may fail to secure work or even be cheated, but these disadvantages and potential dangers were often considered to be more than offset by the potential benefits, tangible or otherwise. As a result, the children I talked to were sometimes quite circumspect about their circumstances. For example, although some children reflected on the differences between how they were treated compared to the children of the household, they did not necessarily perceive this to be a problem, seeing it instead as an aspect of their circumstances and as a price they were willing to pay. One older teenaged boy, of about seventeen, told me, for example, that 'The place where I am staying now they are not treating me as their children, but because I'm a stranger anything small they give you, you have to appreciate it'. Alternatively, children could report difficult living and/or working conditions but still prefer to remain in their current residence because of the opportunities available. Nonetheless, the extent to which a child might be willing to suffer was alarming, as illustrated by this extract from my diary, following an interview with a twelve year-old girl.

> Diary Extract 12 June 2004
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> We then interviewed a young girl of about eleven or twelve who started crying about the physical abuse she was suffering. I stopped the interview and comforted her, and then went through the routine we'd devised of trying to find a solution for children in difficult situations. However, she was adamant that she didn't want the chief involved nor to go home because she wanted to 'buy her things'[18]. It's her half-sister she is living with and who is beating her.

This example raises two important points – the issue of children's own choices in the processes of migrating to and from home, and assumptions regarding children's welfare within their family – that have implications for the manner in which policies deal with children who leave home to live elsewhere, as will be discussed next.

Assessing Policies Relevant to Children's Independent Migration

There are two principal categories employed in the policy literature to address the issue of children that leave home to live elsewhere in Africa; fostering and trafficking. Fostering, which is seen as 'a strategy that redistributes the costs and benefits of childbearing' (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994: 171), is a long-standing tradition across Africa, and, as Pilon (2003) points out, its causes vary widely. They include illness, death, divorce, parents' separation, socialization/education, mutual help among family members, and the strengthening of family ties. Fostering takes place across distances because various kinds of migration flows have been and are very common throughout sub-Saharan Africa, particularly among poor families. This results in communities that are fairly fluid in composition, with individual households and family members often scattered across space (Young 2004: 472). Individual households may be supporting several extended family members, either through remittances or the migration of those in need of particular assistance (ibid., see also Locoh and Hertrich 1994). And it is often between these households that children are fostered.

The circulation of children in Ghana is well-documented (Fentiman, Hall and Bundy 1999, Goody 1982). Figures referred to by Pilon (2003) suggest that in 1998 as many as 16 per cent of rural

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[18] This is a reference to girls' desire to acquire trousseau items.

households in Ghana and 15 per cent of urban ones contained children under 15 living without their parents. Although some authors have suggested that there are potential dangers involved in fostering (Ansell and Young 2002), on the whole it is perceived as a benign phenomenon.

Trafficking, on the other hand, is not. According to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (often referred to as the Palermo Protocol), child trafficking is defined as the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation' (UN 2001) and an intermediary who gives or receives payments (or expects to give or receive payments) can be considered a child trafficker if there is intent on the part of the intermediary to exploit the child.

The issue of trafficking is receiving significant attention in the West African context (see IOM 2003, SCF Canada 2003, UNICEF 2002). Moreover, the institution of fostering, formerly perceived as benign, is increasingly seen to be corrupted by ill-meaning individuals, intent on exploiting children. The International Labour Office (ILO), for example, claims that, 'Central to the phenomenon of trafficking in Africa is abuse of the tradition of placing children with extended families or other care-takers when they cannot be cared for by their parents' (ILO 2002a: 3). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) similarly warns that 'Traffickers are now exploiting this age-old tradition [of fostering] resulting in parents inadvertently but effectively selling their children' (IOM 2003).

In Ghana, too, the issue of trafficking is high on the agenda and I recorded several references to it on the state television's evening news bulletin while conducting the research. On more than one occasion, for instance, an initiative to reunite over one thousand children who had been 'trafficked' into the fishing industry in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana with their families was mentioned. This initiative was supported by ILO, IOM, Ghanaian authorities and a number of NGOs. This involved a programme. There was also an awareness-raising campaign regarding the risks of child trafficking being regularly aired on both the television and the radio, and one of the leading newspapers had articles on trafficking at least three times during the month of June. Despite the enormous amount of attention that the issue of trafficking receives in Ghana, I only personally encountered one situation where a child very clearly could be considered to have been trafficked. This was a 14- year-old boy who, at the age of 12, had left his family in Tempane Natinga with a Muslim cleric, ostensibly to attend a Koranic school. He recalled:

There were fifteen of us. The Maalim [cleric] would collect [acquire] a farm on contract. We would farm and he would collect all the money, and there wasn't enough time to study. … He had many houses and he would move us around depending on where he got the contract. In one place we were there five weeks harvesting maize. … He was feeding us, but when we told him we weren't studying enough he said, "If that should be the case, you should find your own food". Meanwhile we continued to farm but not study.

The deception involved in the movement of this child south and the fact that he was not receiving any remuneration for his labour as well as the child's own assessment of his situation, make it relatively easy to identify this case as one of trafficking. There were other instances where children could arguably have been considered to have been trafficked, since they had been recruited for work in their home villages and were being paid derisory sums for their work. However, unlike the previous child, these children were satisfied with their circumstances, for the reasons that have been discussed above, namely, the opportunity to earn an independent income. In fact, as has been noted, there may be advantages associated with working under contract for a third party rather than for a relation. This aspect is captured well in the difference between the experiences of two sisters interviewed during the first fieldwork, both of who had been migrants. Barakeso had been recruited by a neighbour to work on a commercial farm in Côte d'Ivoire. She said of her work, 'Here [Tempane Natinga] you won't get so tired, but you won't have anything for yourself. There [Côte d'Ivoire] you are tired but you get money'. Despite the arduousness of the work and being paid only ¢500,000 for three years, Barakeso was satisfied with her treatment and what she had been paid. By comparison, her older sister Fostina said that she preferred it in Tempane Natinga because 'here I can do my own rice farming but there I couldn't'. Fostina had been fostered by an aunt in southern Ghana who needed help with her domestic work. She was not poorly treated or overworked; but she was also not 'working' and consequently received no cash remuneration for her contribution to her aunt's household, although she was given some clothing and other small gifts. Moreover, because of where she had moved to, she did not have the opportunity to carry out any farming for herself, one of the few means available for girls to get an income. Consequently, despite the comfort of her circumstances, relative to her sister's, she was not as satisfied with her experience of migration as Barakeso (Hashim 2004: 104).

While Fostina did not complain of ill-treatment, other children who had been 'fostered' did. For instance, I encountered one Kusasi man in Kumasi town who informed me that, because as a

community they were concerned with the number of Kusasi children migrating to the south, they had mobilised to assist these children. He told me that they had learnt of three buses carrying a number of children from the north for work in the south. In addition to holding meetings with transport unions to alert them to be on the lookout for large groups of children, they had also placed some 20 children travelling south in this manner in various households. Effectively, this intervention placed 'trafficked' children as 'foster' children in other Kusasi households.

I interviewed three of these children and two of them were among that minority who were unhappy about their circumstances, complaining in one case of physical and verbal abuse and insufficient food to eat, and of overwork and verbal abuse in the other. They were among the few children who wished to be removed from their current households.

These examples throw considerable doubt on the usefulness of the emphasis on different categories of migration such as 'fostering' or 'trafficking'. In the following three case studies I interviewed both the children and their parents. The stories illustrate both the diversity of outcomes of children's migration and the fluidity of the boundaries of categories used to describe it. These stories also demonstrate the importance of not relying only on what adults' say about children's migration, and the necessity of listening to children's accounts.

Case Study One: Pursuing an Education?

Afifo was then a twelve year-old girl whose father and mother had both told me had been moved to her uncle's in order that she might have a better education, since her uncle lived in a large town with better schools and with electricity. On tracing Afifo to her uncle's, however, she informed me that although she was attending school, she had in fact moved to cook and clean for her uncle as his wife was a full-time student.

She complained that she was shouted at a lot by her aunt. She also said, 'When I was at home I would eat in the morning and they would give me chop money, and when I came home they would give me food. Here it is not until I return home that I eat'.

This family was one which I knew very well. Afifo was already living away from home in 2000-1 and her father often commented to me during the first fieldwork that it was at her insistence that she stayed with her uncle. Afifo's version of events, when I traced her to her destination, contradicts his claims. Potentially she was receiving a better education than she would have

done had she remained in Tempane Natinga[19]. However, since she also had greater domestic responsibilities than she would have had, had she remained in Tempane Natinga, and as she complained about lack of food and verbal abuse, it is not possible to be certain that she was able to reap the benefits of a better school and physical environment.

Case Study Two: Neglect in both Places?

Susie was an 11- year-old girl that I traced to Kumasi town. I had been told by one of her father's wives in Tempane Natinga that she had been collected by an aunt to help with her beer-brewing business. However, on tracing Susie I was told by her aunt that she had been informed by a neighbour in the village that Susie was not being properly cared for, as Susie's father had died and her mother had married outside the village[20]. The lack of attention to a skin condition afflicting Susie was mentioned as an example of her neglect.

On interviewing Susie herself, she told me that although her skin condition was not being treated, she preferred it in Kumasi as at home she was suffering. When I asked her how, she explained, 'When I wake up early I don't eat straightaway and I can sleep hungry'. Susie was also helping her aunt a little with her brewing, but said she worked in Kumasi a lot less than she had in Tempane Natinga.

Case Study Three: The Benevolence of Strangers

After a huge amount of effort and detective work on the part of my translator, we eventually traced Elijah to a suburb of Kumasi town. His father in Tempane Natinga had told us that he had been collected as a young boy to look after the pigs at the agricultural station in nearby Garu. The manager of the station had been sent south to open another station and had taken Elijah with him to continue his work there. When we did eventually trace Elijah we found him to be sitting at a computer playing music. He spoke excellent English and had just completed junior secondary school and was hoping to become a doctor. We discovered that he had been with the same family since he was a newly born baby and essentially had been adopted. He did not know much of the circumstances of his adoption so we spoke to his brother (by adoption). It seems that Elijah's birth mother had died in childbirth and his father had run away, so his birth mother's mother had brought Elijah to the agricultural station because the manager's wife worked on family healthcare. Being an elderly widow she told them that the child would be a

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[19] Students and teachers in the north generally thought that schools in the towns, particularly further south, were better equipped and staffed than those in Tempane Natinga.

[20] Children are seen as their fathers' 'property' and always remain in their fathers' households if their parent's marriage ends in divorce or if a mother remarries outside the family on the death of her husband.

burden for her, so the family had adopted him as their own.

My translator believes the reason his birth father did not divulge this story, rather preferring to suggest that his son was taken as a labourer, was because the father was ashamed of his failure to pay for his wife's medical care that led to her subsequent death.

These case studies illustrate that there can be positive *or* negative outcomes arising from children's movement between households, since migration itself is an inherently risky process. The extent to which children are vulnerable to the inherent insecurities, risks and dangers attached to the process of migration has to do with migration itself and not whether children fall into the categories of 'fostered' or 'trafficked', making these categories not necessarily helpful to any assessment of the vulnerabilities children (may) face.

One difficulty, as several theorists have pointed out, is the degree of overlap between categories distinguished in policy discourses. For example, O'Connell Davidson (forthcoming) notes:

> Without a neutral measure of 'exploitation', it is … unclear how 'trafficking' is to be distinguished from the legal movement of women and children into households, for instance, through marriage, adoption, and fostering. Expectations regarding the amount of unpaid labour that women and children will provide within households vary cross-nationally and within nations, as do social norms regarding the powers that men can properly exercise over women and that adults can properly exercise over children.

Other theorists have pointed to the difficulties associated with the assessment of trafficking on the basis of the Palermo Protocol definition. For instance, some suggest that the emphasis on trafficking results on a tendency to focus on intermediaries:

> The main problem with this and similar definitions, and national legislation that stems from them, is that operationally the focus tends to be put on intermediaries generally without consideration of the complex issue of intent to exploit, perhaps for the simple reason that *determining such intent is obviously very difficult* (Castle and Diarra: 2003: 208, *emphasis added*)

I came across such a case during the research, as illustrated in the following diary extract.

Diary Extract 29 June 2004

Today we heard about one woman in a village near where we were interviewing. Apparently she is a trader and travels regularly between the north and south. I was told that people in the village and in the area where she lived would request a child if they needed someone to work and, 'because people in her home village in the north know she will take care of children', children are given to her. She apparently brings six or more children at a time and travels four or more times a year. The informant told me that she knew of one girl whom the trader brought two years previously, 'who was not yet grown' [meaning she was not yet of marriageable age of about 15]. It was agreed that the child would be paid ¢300,000 for the first year, and ¢400,000 for the second and this year it was negotiated at ¢600,000. This woman then takes the money back to the family in the north (presumably receiving some payment for her services).

It is difficult to gauge whether or not this woman could be considered a trafficker on the basis of the Palermo Protocol, since it is not clear whether there was 'intent on the part of the intermediary to exploit the child', nor whether the trader received payment for her services or what happened to the child's wages. Castle and Diarra (2003) argue that because intent is hard to gauge, attention simply becomes focussed on whether or not an intermediary is involved[21]. However, as they point out, 'this is particularly problematic in many West African settings where the use of an intermediary is almost obligatory for most social and economic activities or needs' (ibid.: 208). In my own research, most children travelled with an intermediary (38 with relatives, five with an employer and one with a neighbour). Other children also reported intermediaries, both related and not, assisting them to find work. Assuming one considers that a relative can be an intermediary, it is clear that in the majority of cases children travelled with an intermediary (44) or relied on intermediaries to secure work for them. Significantly, according to the children and parents interviewed, the presence of the intermediary ensured the child's security whilst travelling and/or secured the most favourable contract for the child. The previous informant's reasoning for why parents where happy to send their children with the woman trader similarly suggests that an intermediary is seen as ensuring the children's welfare. Castle and Diarra also found with their work in Mali that the 'consensus was that if you had a relative to hand or another intermediary you could rely on, you were less likely to experience hardship' (ibid. 55). No child in this research

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[21] See Kielland and Sanogo (2002) for another discussion of the difficulties of operationalizing the concept of exploitation, intermediaries and intent.

reported that an intermediary was paid for any help, but anecdotal evidence, such as that in the diary extract above, suggests it might be the case that intermediaries would be compensated in some way. As in the case of Castle and Diarra's work in Mali, because the use of an intermediary in many social and economic activities is almost obligatory among the Kusasi, this potentially criminalises routine cultural practices.

To summarize, the categories of 'fostering' and 'trafficking' can lead one to the conclusion that, on the one hand, if a child is within their own family they are 'fostered' and thus that there are no risks or dangers involved; and on the other, if an intermediary is involved in a child's movement, there is always harm associated with being trafficked. Consequently, one is left in the position where, in an example such as Barakeso's discussed earlier, she is considered trafficked, despite her own desire to be in such a situation. By contrast, children living with relatives are considered fostered, despite children reporting difficulties in their circumstances.

In fact, it may be that those children who are 'fostered' because of difficulties in a household are more likely to be maltreated if they are resented by their new household, who feel obliged to take on the child but begrudge the resources that are needed to be spent on the child. One child told me, for example, that the cousin with whom she was staying 'insulted' her by saying, 'No one asked you to come here'. Similarly, another young teenaged girl explained that she had been brought to her father's senior brother's home because, 'We were many [children in the household] so they were not taking care of us and we were not eating to satisfy or going to school'. She said of her uncle and aunt: 'They normally tell me that when I was in Bawku I was not eating to satisfy and now I'm eating to satisfy so I should work'. By contrast, those children who are 'fostered' to fill a labour gap in a household or who are employed may be more valued for their labour contribution and consequently better treated and cared for.

When taking into account these broader contexts of children's movement and children's assessment of their circumstances, trafficking becomes a category almost impossible to operationalize or measure, while fostering refers to such a wide range of circumstances that it cannot be considered to be necessarily benign or harmful. Children may have been 'suffering' more at home, because of their parents' poverty, or they may be better off in terms of getting enough food to eat, but worse off in terms of their emotional treatment. They may be faced with homelessness and destitution due to being orphaned, and thus be better off in their foster homes, even if not cared for as well as the household children. Alternatively, children may be doing the

same sort of work in their foster homes as they would have done had they been at home, but they may see their fostering arrangements as an opportunity to obtain skills or life-experience, such as learning another language or living in an urban environment, and consequently value the arrangement; or they may equally be doing more work and yet still value their experience in spite of this. Similarly, given that there is a general expectation that any relative with whom they had been living would send a child home with gifts, children may relish the opportunity to be fostered in order to fulfil a relatives labour requirements, particularly as this may be tied up with their being seen as a 'good child'. Alternatively, children working for a relative may perceive themselves as workers, and consequently have expectations of being remunerated in particular ways that are not discussed openly but are asserted in subtle claims for clothing, money or vocational training, while their kin feel they meet their obligations to the children by feeding and housing them. Children, consequently, may feel hard done by or exploited if their expectations are not lived up to.

I would agree with Castle and Diarra (2003: 210) therefore, that considerable attention needs to be paid to 'how children's work is viewed, and to what degree exploitation, non-payment and maltreatment usually associated with "trafficking", may also apply to the very many "regular" workers in households, markets and fields around the country'. This would enable an understanding of why children such as sisters Barakeso and Fostina viewed their differing situations as they did. Or why those children of Castle and Diarra's research who were repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire to Mali because they were categorised as 'trafficked', reported being humiliated at being returned home empty handed (ibid. 116). Thus, it by no means suggested that children are not exploited and abused. Instead, it is argued that instead of a narrow focus on 'trafficking'– and more recently the re-categorising of fostering as trafficking when it is found to be harmful for a child -- attention must be paid to the welfare of all migrant children which:

> will depend, inter alia, on what has been the trigger for migration, what kind of living situation they secure in their places of destination, whether they work or go to school, what kind of work they do, what kind of social support is in place for them, and whether they fall prey to the many hazards and dangers posed by intermediaries, bad employers, or bad working conditions and so on (Whitehead and Hashim 2005: 3).

This is where the second issue becomes relevant; namely the role of children's own wishes in their migration and the scope they have for choice. For the most part, in much of the literature on children's migration, children have been constructed as lacking in agency and consequently conceptualised as exercising no choice in their movement. The emphasis tends to be on the degree of compulsion or coercion involved in children's migration, which in international legislation, in any case, is assumed for children under the age of 18. This is because, according to the Palermo Protocol any 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation' (UN 2001) is considered 'trafficking', irrespective of whether a child has consented to this. Thus, while the Protocol distinguishes between smuggling and trafficking – where smuggling refers to the movement of individuals where the individual has consented and trafficking involves the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or abuse of power – Article 3 of the Protocol makes it explicit that in the case of those under the age of 18 the issue of consent is irrelevant (ILO 2002b, UN 2001). This effectively disavows the myriad motivations children may have to migrate in this context – children's sense of obligation to family and kin, their desire to learn a trade or further their education, their need or desire for income, their interest in new life-experiences, and so on. In particular, as they become older, children in the context in which the research was conducted do see themselves as economic agents with a responsibility to contribute to their households and their individual livelihoods. Earning capacity is greater in the southern areas of Ghana and children seek work where opportunities are better.

Policies that are not mindful of this can serve to end up doing harm to precisely those individuals they seek to protect, and a number of authors have pointed out that one of the paradoxes of child protection is that as well as protecting, it can disempower. For example, a finding of Castle and Diarra (2003: 210) is that the measures put in place to protect children from trafficking, such as the checking of identity cards and other documents, have negative effects since they have to be taken into consideration in determining the costs and methods of migration, making journeys more clandestine and dangerous, and forcing children into the hands of potentially unscrupulous drivers or intermediaries.

Increasingly arguments are being made that children do make strategic life choices and negotiate with adults to do so (Hashim 2004, Liebel 2006, Reynolds 1991). This is an important step towards better understanding issues related to children's welfare. However, it is of fundamental importance not to go to the other extreme, where a child's 'choice' is seen to represent the choice

of a self-determining individual who is able, unilaterally, to choose from a range of real options. It is also necessary to consider the constraints on children's agency; constraints that operate at many different levels. For example, the earlier fieldwork in the rural Upper East found that work is profoundly implicated in the identity of children in Tempane Natinga if they are to be seen as a 'good child'. Moreover, children need to work in order for their own and their families' livelihoods to be secured. The household economy, and the resulting nature of the inter-generational contract, shape normative judgements regarding the distribution of resources and the command over labour, such that children have to work for parents and seniors first, rather than for themselves, in order to both satisfy expectations of them and to secure the resources with which to pursue their individual enterprises. Children do negotiate the nature of the support they receive and, thus, are actively engaged in manoeuvring within these differential rules influencing resource distribution, autonomy of labour and so on[22] (including by threatening to migrate). Nonetheless, the outcomes of these differences do result in inequities since children do not necessarily receive rewards that are commensurate with their labour input. Children are aware of these inequities and do sometimes attempt to challenge the inter-generational contract that governs the distribution of resources. The ability to bargain is relatively higher for boys because of the real and perceived importance of their labour contribution in a more highly valued area of work: crop production. Girls, on the other hand, have a working role that is less valued, but they are also less constrained in terms of their obligations to familial kin, since they 'do not belong'. Therefore they are more able to pursue alternative relationships or activities, although these are limited in their scope. As a result, inequities emerge differentially both along age and gendered lines, such that in Tempane Natinga girls and boys have different opportunities and constraints (Hashim 2004: 184-5).

All these inequities are at play in the context of migration. As we have seen, although it was found that only three children had not wished to move, and the vast majority stated they had wanted to move, many of these had been asked to move. In this sense, children are social pawns in extended kin relations, being sent to help in already migrant households. Although it has been noted that many children were well-cared for in such situations, others did comment on the differences in the treatment they received by comparison to the household children. In particular, as discussed in Hashim (2005b), in at least ten cases a child stated that they were treated

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[22] Reynolds' work similarly demonstrates how children negotiate the nature of the support they receive, which is partly shaped by the way in which a child 'nurtures alliances with those tied by the kinship rule into a network of obligation and responsibility' (Reynolds 1991: 144).

differently because the household's children attended school while they did not (although the children themselves did not always comment negatively). Thus, while children may be fulfilling their obligations to their seniors, by agreeing to move to a relative's, they might also be placed in situations where they are treated unequally in the distribution or appropriation of resources. It is their labour, for example, that may be used in place of the labour lost in a southern household from sending a child to school.

Moreover, as has been noted, while there is a view that 'you cannot discriminate because that is not seen as good if you are a Kusasi', a child in Tempane Natinga also said 'if my mother and father are not there, how do you think they are caring for me?', and I was reminded of a Kusasi saying that 'if you don't watch your meat on the fire it won't be properly cooked'. Thus, wanting and needing to be a 'good child', children are likely to choose to move at their parents' behest, but these choices can have serious costs. This was evident in the case of one student, Janet, whom I knew quite well. She had suddenly dropped out of school and moved to Kumasi to live with her brother. This was particularly shocking to the teachers because she was a good student and was in senior secondary school, which was quite an accomplishment given the low levels of girls in the village enrolled in senior secondary school. Her parents said she had left in order to attend school in the Kumasi area, but I eventually discovered from her older brother that the wife of another brother, who was a migrant, had left him and Janet had been dispatched to care for their children (Hashim 2004: 106).

Similarly, girls were constrained both by the fact that their roles and identities are tied up with caring for others and by the attitudes to their farming tasks, where, despite carrying out tasks necessary for the production of crops, they were not seen as farmers. The opportunities for them to earn an income, therefore, were far more constrained than boys and, as is clear from Table 1 earlier, they were more likely than boys to be helping a relative; thereby relying on a relative's good fortune and good will for the possibility of rewards for their contributions. Children, and especially girls, consequently may prefer the more overt arrangements of an employer/employee relationship, even if the paltry sums they are paid means that they fall into the category of 'trafficked'. As has been noted, it is for this reason that children often 'choose' to work for others, even in situations of some hardship. These children are exercising agency to choose the least worst option. This helps to explain how one encounters cases where children seem to choose to remain in situations where they may not be harmed but which are nonetheless inequitable, or when they are in blatantly difficult circumstances. Children understand that it is the poverty of

their home circumstances that drives them to migrate in order to make the best of these difficult circumstances.

It is not just children who are constrained in their choices. Many of the children were collected by a relative, and parents were under some pressure to accept such a request. As one man put it, 'if your brother asks for your child you can't refuse because it's his child too'. Other motives that parents mentioned were that migration enabled children to contribute to the household's expenditure or because this enabled children to acquire the items necessary for their marriage or for their livelihood activities. Thus parents who allow their children to migrate often take the decision sorrowfully and are acutely conscious of ways in which the household and community offer their children far too little. Parents seemed to feel they could not dissuade children from migrating if they had no means to provide for them, as reflected in this father's statement that, 'I am not happy but I don't have control. I don't have a job here to be supporting him'. They are also concerned about the risks of migration, the potential for abuse and the limitations of opportunities in new places. It is important, therefore, to reiterate that rural under-development and the absolute or relative poverty that accompany it constitute the primary constraints for both parents and children in relation to the migration decisions that are made (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2005).

Conclusions

The movement of children away from their families, I argued earlier, is often seen as a reflection of a pathological situation. In particular, a rupture in family relations is often assumed to be at the heart of children's migration. Children's migration may indeed signal a breakdown of the inter-generational contract, indicating that parents or guardians are not caring adequately for their children within locally specific norms (in fact seven of 70 children gave this as the reason for their movement)[23], or alternatively that children want to break the bonds of their responsibilities to their seniors (ibid.).

Certainly in this research one of the triggers found for children's migration appears to be being orphaned or losing one's father. Traditionally, these sorts of crises were absorbed by the

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[23] Although this represents 10% of those participating in the study, the methodology of the research is such that it does not aim to make statistical claims. Another study carried out with child migrants in Ghana by Anarfi and Kwankye (2005) found that only 3.7% of the 301 children interviewed in Accra gave parents' inability to care for them as the reason for their migration and none of the 142 children interviewed in Kumasi.

extended family network and fostering is a risk-coping mechanism in response to negative transitory, exogenous shocks (Akresh 2003). I found ample evidence that these family networks do still secure children's welfare. However, it is also obvious that in some cases families cannot adequately absorb these shocks[24]. The results might either be that children are neglected or that they become susceptible to unscrupulous individuals who take advantage of the children's vulnerability.

However, the possibility that independent child migration entails significant rupture in family relations has to be established and cannot be assumed. It may also be that faced with a variety of options on how to spend their time, migration ranks ahead of schooling and village-based agricultural work for young people (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2005). Alternatively, given the long history of migration in the area, a child's migration can be a continuation of the social relations of the immediate family, but played out in a different spatial locality. Thus, the movement of children between households does not necessarily reflect the breakdown of family relations and an automatic vulnerability to harm.

This is not to suggest that children are not subject to unjust, abusive and harmful working conditions, having made the decision to migrate. While migration sometimes enables young people to access opportunities they might not otherwise have been able to, children also put themselves at risk or have their desire to pursue opportunities taken advantage of. Certainly, some of the children I spoke with had been maltreated and most were very poorly paid, and in some cases not paid at all. However, in addition to the fact that children's movement between households might be a significant manner in which poor rural households attempt to secure their well-being, on the whole the children I spoke with were very positive about their experiences, as this afforded them the opportunity to develop important skills or to earn an income that they had significant control over. Those children (particularly girls) who were working for others also sometimes preferred this to working for their own families, since they were remunerated for their work.

Their own positive views regarding their migration, however, need to be set in the context of the extreme poverty and limited opportunities in the north of Ghana. They tell us only what people choose given their circumstances, not what they would choose given alternatives. As Kabeer

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[24] This probably accounts for why it is that views are divided on the effects of fostering on children (cf. Akresh 2003, Andvig 2000, Ansell and Young 2002 Engle, Castle and Menon 1996, Pilon 2003).

points out 'choice necessarily implies the possibility of alternatives' (Kabeer 1999: 447, *emphasis in the original*). As Bryceson (2002) argues, the current increasing diversification of off-farm activities in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa is a survival strategy and no longer provides a route to accumulation. She suggests that new forms of migrations, especially of young people seeking any kind of small income, are part of this trend. Certainly poverty in Ghana's Upper East Region is widespread, severe and persistent, and far from sharing in the nation's modest growth, its farming households are getting poorer (Whitehead 2006). However, the many references that I heard to child trafficking and child labour while I was in Ghana made little mention of this; instead the (possibly) increasing incidence of children's independent migration has been accompanied by accusations of poor parenting, further stigmatising already marginalised communities.

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