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Terminating Childhood: Dissonance and Synergy between Global Children's Rights Norms and Local Discourses About the Transition from Childhood to Adulthood in Ghana

Introduction

Much has been written about the dissonance that exists between children's rights standards embedded within international laws, and the reality of children's lives in countries whose cultural traditions and intellectual philosophies have developed along trajectories quite different to those taken by Western European and North American societies.[1] In fact, culture and global children's rights principles have, especially in the years since the adoption of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, been presented as polar opposites.[2] In particular, the Western bias evident in dominant human rights traditions, which emerged within the context of the Enlightenment, the French and American Revolutions, the Rights of

[1] Erica Burman, *Local, global or globalized: child development and international child rights legislation*, *CHILDHOOD*, vol.3, pp. 45-66 (1996); Erica Burman, *Morality and the goals of development*, in MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (Martin Woodhead. Dorothy Faulkner, Karen Littleton, eds., 1999); Jo Boyden, *Childhood and the policy makers: a comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood*, in CONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF CHILDHOOD (Allison James and Alan Prout, eds., 1997); Sonia Harris-Short, *Listening to "the other"? The Convention on the Rights of the Child*, MELBOURNE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, 2 (2): 304-47 (2001); Alex de Waal, *Realising child rights in Africa: children, young people and leadership*, in YOUNG AFRICA: REALISING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH (Alex de Waal and Nicolas Argenti, eds. 2002); Sonja Grover, *On why post-modern social science attacks on universal children's rights fail,* ORIGINAL LAW REVIEW, 4 (2), pp.61-67 (2008); KRISTEN CHENEY, PILLARS OF THE NATION: CHILD CITIZENS AND UGANDAN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (2007); Kareri Valentin and Lotte Meinert, *The adult North and the young South: reflections on the civilizing mission of children's rights*, ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY, 25(1) 23-28 (2009); Thoko Kaime, *"Vernacularising" the Convention on the Rights of the Child: rights and culture as analytic tools,* THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, 18 (4) pp637-653 (2010); Nicola Ansell, *The discursive construction of childhood and youth in AIDS interventions in Lesotho's education sector: beyond global – local dichotomies*, ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING D: SOCIETY AND SPACE, Vol 28 pp791-810 (2010); KATE CREGAN AND DENISE CUTHBERT, GLOBAL CHILDHOODS: ISSUES AND DEBATES (2014).

[2] Kaime, *supra* note 1

Man and the growing dominance of capitalist ideologies, has been central to critiques aimed at global children's rights discourses. This Western-bias that is said to underpin dominant discourses on children's rights is perceived as one of the key reasons behind the limited implementation of global children's rights standards in diverse contexts, especially in the Global South.

What has received less attention is the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and domesticated by member states who were charged with governing countries which had been, and continue to be, affected by global social change and the legacy of historical developments, especially those associated with colonialism[3]. Thus, the Convention was introduced into contexts in which there was a diversity of attitudes, perspectives and lived realities in relation to understandings of childhoods, entitlements of children and approaches to child rearing. This has implications. Specifically, while dissonance may be the appropriate noun to describe the experiences of some childhoods *viz a viz* the global ideal, this does not provide a full account of the interaction between global children's rights discourses and local norms and practices. Instead, in addition to the dissonance that can be said to exist between certain types of childhoods in many countries in the South and the ideal embedded in dominant children's rights principles,

[3] Sharon Stephens, *Children and the politics of culture in late capitalism* in CHILDREN AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE (Sharon Stephens, ed., 1995); Burman, *supra* note 1; Olga Niewenhuys, *Editorial: Theorizing childhood (s): why we need postcolonial perspectives,* CHILDHOOD, 20 (1): 3-8 (2013); Samantha Punch, *Possibilities for learning between childhoods and youth in the Minority and Majority worlds: youth transitions as an example of cross-world dialogue*, in HANDBOOK OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD (Johanna Wyn and Helen Cahill, eds., 2015); Samatha Punch, *Cross-world and cross disciplinary dialogue: a more integrated, global approach to childhood studies*, GLOBAL STUDIES OF CHILDHOOD, 6 (3) 352-364 (2016); Afua Twum-Danso Imoh, *From the singular to the plural: exploring diversities in contemporary childhoods in sub Saharan Africa*, CHILDHOOD, 23(3) 455–468.

these same societies have also witnessed the emergence of reactions and attitudes about how children should be treated, trained and protected that are in stark contrast to the dominant norms of their settings.[4]

Therefore, this paper seeks to move beyond a focus on the dissonance between global children's rights norms and local realities and instead, explore the extent to which it is possible to identify both distinctions and commonalities in conceptualisations and definitions of childhood between local and global discourses. Further, it will explore their implications for how we study and discuss both childhoods and children's rights within southern contexts. To achieve these objectives, this paper, will, first, review existing literature which predominately highlights the extent to which there is dissonance between global standards and local realities of children's day to day lives. Second, it will proceed to discuss alternative literature which highlights not only dissonance, but also synergies between the global and local as well as discuss the reasons for any synergies identified. The focus of much of this discussion will be on definitions of childhood and understandings of the transition between childhood and adulthood. Third, in order to highlight the need to be aware of synergies as well as dissonance in understandings of childhood – adulthood transitions, a case study is presented of community understandings of childhood and its termination in two communities

[4] Susan Shepler, *The rites of the child: global discourses of youth and reintegrating child soldiers in Sierra Leone*, JOURNAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 4, No. 2, pp.197-211 (2005); Susan Shepler, *The rites of the child: global discourses of youth and reintegrating child soldiers in Sierra Leone* in CHILDHOODS AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL (Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Robert Ame, eds., 2012); Hind Khalifa, *Caught up inbetween change and continuity: challenging contemporary childhood in Saudi Arabia* in CHILDHOODS AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL (Afua Twum-Danso Imoh and Robert Ame, eds., 2012); ORNA NAFTALI, CHILDREN, RIGHTS AND MODERNITY IN CHINA: RAISING SELF-GOVERNING CITIZENS (2014); Author, *supra* note 3.

in Accra, the capital of Ghana which was the first country to ratify the Convention in February 1990.

Synergies between Global Children's Rights Discourses and Local Norms and Practices

For much of the past 27 years the progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and global children's rights discourses more generally, have been characterised by arguments about their inapplicability as well as the challenges they face in diverse contexts primarily in the South. A key tenet in these critiques is that the conceptualisation of childhoods, child development, child protection and children's entitlements within global children's rights discourses are based on developments which took place in Western Europe and North America from the 17th Century onwards and are now being disseminated to, or imposed upon, societies that have historically had different ideas and traditions relating to childhood and child development.[5] This global diffusion of rights that have emerged within the specific historical circumstances of Western Europe and North America is seen as problematic as they are perceived to be incompatible with the 'so-called communitarian and consensual communities of the South'.[6] This incompatibility, it is argued, leads to a situation whereby children (and their families) who fail to conform to a particular model of childhood are either

[5] see Burman, *supra* note 1 (1999); Boyden, *supra* note 1; Stuart Aitken, *Global crisis of childhood: rights, justice and the unchildlike child*, AREA 33 (2) 119 – 127 (2001); de Waal, *supra* note 1; Rachel Burr, *Global and local approaches to children's rights in Vietnam*, *Childhood*, Vol 9 (1), pp 49-61 (2002); Cheney, *supra* note 1; Ansell, *supra* note 1; Naftali, *supra* note 4; Cregan and Cuthbert, **supra** note 1; KAREN WELLS, CHILDHOOD IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE (2015).

[6]Kaime, *supra* note 1, 638; Harris-Short, *supra* note 1; Sonja Grover, *On recognising children's universal rights: what needs to change in the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, 12:259-271 (2004); David Rosen, *Child soldiers, international humanitarian law, and the globalization of childhood*, AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, 109 (2), pp296-306 (2007).

stigmatised or rendered invisible[7]. Hence, in the 27 years since the Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly, it has been attacked as a form of cultural imperialism that overlooks local peculiarities and conditions relating to constructions of childhoods and children's lived experiences.

However, it is also important to explore if there are exceptions to this narrative at the local level. Notably, what are we supposed to make of the emerging groups in countries in the South who define human rights or children's rights in light of dominant global discourses? Further, how do we make sense of those actors who use the indicators set by global rights norms to measure the wellbeing of children (and indeed, other groups) in their own contexts?[8] For example, Shepler[9], in her work on childhoods in post-conflict Sierra Leone, demonstrates how both adults and children in local communities use the Western construction of childhood and the children's rights discourse strategically, particularly to facilitate the reintegration of former child soldiers into their communities.

In particular, children and young people have been found to lay claim to these rights articulated in the Convention and other global documents. For example, in a study involving

[7] Boyden, *supra* note 1; Aitken, *supra* note 5; Louise Holt and Sarah Holloway, *Editorial: theorising other childhoods in a globalised world*, CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES, 4 (2): 135-142 (2006); Ansell, *supra* note 1; Diane Hoffman, *Saving children, saving Haiti? Child vulnerability and narratives of the nation*, CHILDHOOD, 19 (2) pp155-168 (2011).

[8] See Steven Archibald and Paul Richards, *Converts to human rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural central Sierra Leone*, AFRICA, Vol. 7 (3), pp.339-367 (2002); Sonia Harris-Short, *International human rights law: imperialist, inept and ineffective? Cultural relativism and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, HUMAN RIGHTS QUARTERLY, 25: 130-181 (2003); Sally Merry, *Transnational human rights and local activism: mapping the middle*, AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST, 108 (1) pp.38-51 (2006); Abamfo O Atiemo, "*Punish my husband but not so hard": religion, customary values and conventional approaches to human rights in Ghana*, RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS, Vol. 7 pp77-93 (2012); Kaime, *supra* note 1.

[9] Shepler, *supra* note 4

child advocates who took part in deliberations that led to the adoption of the South African Children's Bill in 2005 and 2006, Mniki and Rose[10] found that these young advocates considered the draft Bill of Rights insufficient. Instead, they proposed that it be revised to include the rights stipulated in the Convention as well as those embedded in the 1990 African Charter on the Rights of the Child. Cheney[11] too demonstrates that the concept of children's rights has permeated Ugandan society to such an extent that 'even children – often more than their parents and guardians - emphasize attaining their rights as essential to full citizenship'.[12]

These attitudes and actions that exist complicate narratives about global children's rights discourses and their progress (or lack thereof) in different contexts. In particular, they show that narratives about the inapplicability of children's rights in relation to contexts in the South do not provide a sufficiently holistic portrayal of the diversity of childhoods that exist in these societies. Furthermore, they do not demonstrate the varying ways these diverse constructions of childhood respectively interact with global rights discourses. In contrast, those studies that present alternative reactions to global norms illustrate that in addition to the challenges that children's rights and human rights traditions more generally face, there are sections within a given population who see, or wish to see, the applicability of these principles and provisions in their own contexts. This has led to questions being increasingly asked about the continuing relevance of critiques that continue to challenge the applicability

[10] Namhla Mniki and Solange Rose, *Heroes in Action: Child advocates in South Africa*, CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENTS, 17 (2), pp179-197 (2007).

[11] Cheney, *supra* note 1, at 44

[12] see also Archibald and Richards, *supra* note 8;Kaime, *supra* note 1

of global children's rights norms.[13] As Naftali, writing about childhoods and children's rights and modernity in China, puts it:

> From a pragmatic point of view, however, the fact that the child rights discourse 'claims to be universal but is really the product of a specific cultural and historical origin' (Kennedy, 2004:18) may be irrelevant. Just as the Western origins of the child rights tradition may cause some people in non-Western countries to regard it with suspicion, for others these specific origins make it all the more attractive. [14]

These differing reactions in a given context, which can be attributed to variables such as social status and education, lead to children experiencing different types of childhoods and child rearing practices. As a result, while the lived realities of many children in these societies are far removed from the childhood envisioned in dominant global human rights discourses, the experiences of others may be more mixed – consisting of both dissonance and synergy. Thus, instead of presenting childhoods in the South as only being in sharp contrast to the global hegemonic ideal which underpins the Convention, the concept of a continuum may better represent the wide range of realities found in practice. The existence of such a continuum, which allows us to highlight the diverse nature of childhoods and their respective interactions with global rights norms, makes it more difficult to continue arguing about the dissonance between childhoods in the South and the vision of childhood underpinning global children's rights discourses. The reality is, in fact, more nuanced.

[13] Burman, *supra* note 1; Kaime*, supra* note 1; Niewenhuys, *supra* note 3; Naftali, *supra* note 4.

[14] Naftali, *supra* note 4, at 11

That such a diversity of childhoods in countries in the Global South exists is attributable to various factors. Two are especially notable for this discussion. Firstly, the intensification of global processes relating to transnational flows (of capital, people, ideas and norms), which have been driven by developments in media, technology, travel, migration, global politics and international business, has been central to the circulation of new ideas and values about childhoods, child rearing and family practices as well as social relations.[15] As Punch[16] states 'in a globalizing world there are possibly more similarities than we might imagine'.

Secondly, there is a need to consider what Niewenhuys[17]refers to as 'the unstable and contingent result of a situated encounter', specifically between the colonised and the coloniser in many of the countries that now form part of the South during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.[18] Of particular significance are two developments that are especially notable. The first relates to European colonisation of territories in primarily Africa, Asia and the Pacific in the years after the Berlin Conference in 1884-85. The second involves the arrival of missionaries seeking to spread, through evangelization, their particular

[15] Stephens, *supra* note 3; Peter Stearns, *Conclusion: change, globalization and childhood*, JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY, 38 (4) pp 1041-1046 (2005); Loretta E. Bass and Fatou Sow, *Senegalese families and the confluences of ethnicity, history and social change* in AFRICAN FAMILIES AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY (Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi and Baffour K. Takyi, eds., 2006); Erdmute Alber, Tabea Haberlin and Jeanette Martin, *Changing webs of kinship: spotlights on West Africa,* AFRICA SPECTRUM, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 43-67 (2010); Khalifa, supra *note* 4; Naftali, *supra* note 4; Geraldine Andre and Mathieu Hilgers, *Childhood in Africa between local powers and global hierarchies*, in CHILDHOOD WITH BOURDIEU (Leena Alanen, Liz Brooker and Berry Mayall, eds, 2015); Wells, *supra* note 5; Punch, *supra* note 3

[16] Punch, *supra* note 3, 2015 at 690

[17] Niewenhuys, *supra* note 3

[18] see also Stephens *supra* note 3; Burman, *supra* note 1; Sarada Balagopalan, *Constructing indigenous childhoods: colonialism, vocational education and the working child*, CHILDHOOD, 9 (1), pp. 19-34 (2002); SARADA BALAGOPALAN, INHABITING 'CHILDHOOD': CHILDREN, LABOUR AND SCHOOLING IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIA (2014); Mike Kesby, Fungisai Gwanzura-Ottemoller and Monica Chizororo, *Theorising other, 'other childhoods': issues emerging from work on HIV in urban and rural Zimbabwe*, CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES, 4 (2): 185-202 (2006).

denomination of Christian teachings to 'backward', 'uncivilised' and mainly brown, 'savages' wherever they found them[19]. Children, in fact, were a critical component of the colonial project of different European powers due to the belief that they were "relatively easy to influence, and partly because they could be instrumental in civilising 'the rest'". [20]

While not seeking to overstate the transformational effects of these historical and global developments, it must be acknowledged that they have produced inter-linkages and interconnections between certain groups in the North and South who now share similar ideas, values, norms and visions about social relations, especially within the context of the family, including those that relate to the construction of childhoods, education and child rearing.[21] For instance, in the case of contexts in sub Saharan Africa, these developments linked to colonization and missionary education constitute major components of what Ali Mazuri[22] has called Africa's 'triple heritage' and as such, have influenced the transmission of new ideas and values within certain sectors of the population. This group, which has been growing since European colonial rule, consists of those who work hard to preserve imported values, while scorning more local beliefs or, who incorporate both local and Westernised values in their

[19] see Sally Merry, *Anthropology, law and transnational processes*, ANNUAL REVIEW OF ANTHROPOLOGY, 21 pp357-379 (1992); Stephens, *supra* note 3; Valentin and Meinert, *supra* note 1; SAHEED ADERINTO (ed) CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN COLONIAL NIGERIAN HISTORIES (2015).

[20] Valentin and Meinert, *supra* note 1, 23; see also Lisa McNee, *The languages of childhood: the discursive construction of childhood and colonial policy in French West Africa,* AFRICAN STUDIES QUARTERLY, 7 (4), pp. 20-32 (2004); Audra Diptee and Martin Klein, *African childhoods and the colonial project*, JOURNAL OF FAMILY HISTORY, 35 (1) pp. 3-6 (2010).

[21] see Balagopalan, *supra* note 18 (2002); Kesby *et al*, *supra* note 18; Niewenhuys, *supra* note 3; Naftali, *supra* note 4

[22] ALI MAZURI, THE AFRICANS: A TRIPLE HERITAGE (1986)

worldview, picking and choosing which cultural heritage to adopt and which to flout at any one time.[23]

The resulting outcome of these interconnections is that for some sectors of the population, what is Western and what is non-Western is no longer clearly distinguishable.[24] This is further supported by Burman who claims:

> The distinction between local and general needs to be understood in relation to historical dynamics of colonialism and Westernization. Hence, there may be some material basis for claims to general aspects of childhood. Conversely, those ideas about childhood upheld as local and culturally specific may be less different from others than they appear. [25]

It is developments such as these that have led scholars such as Holloway and Valentine[26], Holt and Holloway[27], Kesby *et al*[28], Niewenhuys[29] and Punch[30] to attempt to understand local cultures as products of both local norms and global influences. This leads to a situation whereby the global and local are not perceived as mutually exclusive, but as 'intimately

[23] see also RHODA HOWARD, HUMAN RIGHTS IN COMMONWEALTH AFRICA (1986)

[24] see Author, *supra* note 3; Atiemo, *supra* note 8

[25] Burman, *supra* note 1, 1996 at 48. See also Balagopalan, *supra* note 18 (2002) and Kaime, *supra* note 1 who make similar arguments.

[26] Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine, *Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood*, SOCIOLOGY, 34(4): 763-783 (2000)

[27] Holt and Holloway, *supra* note 7

[28] Kesby *et al*, *supra* note 18

[29] Niewenhuys, *supra* note 3

[30] Punch, *supra* note 3

bound together'.[31] This connection between the global and the local has ramifications for how children's rights are perceived, and indeed, operationalised, by different actors within a locale. The varied ways that childhoods are constructed, defined and understood is a noteworthy example.

Transitions from Childhood to Adulthood: Dissonance and Synergy between Global Definitions and Local Constructions

In debates seeking to demonstrate the so-called dissonance between global and local ideas around childhood and children's rights one key area that is often highlighted is that which relates to constructions or definitions of childhoods. Within international law and global children's rights discourses more generally, the age of 18 has become firmly fixed as the dividing line between childhood and adulthood.[32] For example, Article 1 of the Convention establishes the definition of childhood which provides the basis for all its other articles:

> For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.[33]

While this definition has been criticised for its limitations,[34] in its application various actors have interpreted it to mean that all those under the age of 18 are children and thus entitled to the rights stipulated within this treaty. For example, the Committee on the Rights of the

[31] Holloway and Valentine, *supra* note 26

[32] see Christina Rose Clark-Kazak, *Towards a working definition and application of social age in international development studies*, THE JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, Vol. 45 (8), pp. 1307-1324 (2009)

[33] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20th Nov 1989, Article 1.

[34] Grover, *supra* note 6

Child, the body established to monitor the Convention, has encouraged State Parties to raise the age of majority if it is lower than 18, and to increase the level of protection for all those under the age of 18 within their national boundaries. Furthermore, the Convention is now used as the guiding framework for the programmatic activities of many international and national child-focused NGOs and agencies. For example, it has become a 'a sort of unofficial constitution' of UNICEF which has organised its programmatic framework to ensure that 'every facet of its operations [is] directed toward the Convention's implementation, at least at a rhetorical level'.[35] Additionally, international non-governmental organisations have used the Convention as a basis for the development of their programmes.[36] The point here is that as these organisations frame their activities around the Convention's principles, the definitions of childhood conceptualised in their mission statements and applied in their strategy documents are also similarly influenced. Subsequently, through their programmatic activities at global, regional, national and local levels, this definition of childhood has been applied to different contexts.[37]

As ratification of the Convention requires governments to ensure that their legislative framework corresponds with its standards, national constitutions have been revised and child-focused laws have been introduced to explicitly take into account the Convention's standards, including its definition of childhood.[38] As a result, a review of child-focused laws introduced into the legislative frameworks of numerous countries since 1989 reveals a consensus in

[35] Joel E. Oestreich, *UNICEF and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, 4 (2) 183-198 (1998:187); see also Cheney, *supra* note 1

[36] Rosen, *supra* note 6; Wells, *supra* note 5

[37] see Cheney, *supra* note 1; Clark-Kazak, *supra* note 32; Ansell, *supra* note 1; Wells, *supra* note 5

[38] Wells, *supra* note 5

understandings of the stage at which an individual transitions from childhood to adulthood, with most countries setting their general age of majority at 18. However, it is worth noting that some of these amendments in national law have been motivated by the desire of some governments in developing countries to meet conditions set for the receipt of development assistance.[39]

This 'straight 18'[40] definition of childhood has implications. Specifically, those under the age of 18 are now firmly recognised as a separate group with separate characteristics (mainly defined as innocent, physically weak and mentally immature), of whom specific behaviour is expected.[41] Additionally, it is recognised that they require special protection and rights specifically designed for them because of their immaturity, lack of sound judgment and lack of experience in the ways of the world.[42] Thus the use of chronological age frames what we expect of childhood, the roles and responsibilities of those in this phase of life, providing them not only with certain freedoms and spaces, but also certain restrictions. [43]

Despite the increasingly widespread acceptance, especially within law, of the age of 18 as the dividing line between childhood and adulthood, the use of a fixed chronological age to define

[39] see Clark-Kazak, *supra* note 32

[40] Rosen, *supra* note 6

[41] see EUGEEN VEERHELLEN, THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD: BACKGROUND, MOTIVATION, STRATEGIES, MAIN THEMES (1994).

[42] Welshman Ncube, *The African Cultural Fingerprint? The Changing Concept of Childhood,* in LAW, CULTURE, TRADITION AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (Welshman Ncube, ed, 1998).

[43] see Gill Valentine, *Boundary crossings: transitions from childhood to adulthood*, CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES, 1 (1), pp37-52 (2003).

the transition from one stage of the lifecycle to the next has been widely critiqued.[44] Drawing on the arguments of Pain and Aitken, Ansell argues that "global discourses of childhood are declared 'dangerous' for inspiring the export of policies and practices that falsely assume universal experience or aspire to globalise a middle-class Western ideal of childhood". [45] In fact, one of the key points of contention during the drafting of the Convention was the definition of childhood to be adopted as the foundation on which the treaty was based. Many countries in the South objected to the use of 18 to define childhood as they felt that 'the definition of the *child* was too narrowly delineated according to Western standards that did not aptly categorise children in their own countries'. [46]

This contrast has been borne out by a significant number of academic studies. In sub Saharan Africa, for example, various authors have shown how the attainment of adulthood was historically based on landmarks other than chronological age such as marriage, especially for girls).[47] Key to defining this transition from childhood to adulthood are adults within communities who monitor children's abilities and capacities to determine when one phase of the life cycle has ended and another has begun.[48]

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[44] See Lea Dasberg, *What is a Child and What are its Rights* in OMBUDSWORK FOR CHILDREN: A WAY OF IMPROVING THE POSITION OF CHILDREN IN SOCIETY (Eugeen Verhellen and Frans Spiesschaert, eds., 1989); Boyden, *supra* note 1; Ncube, *supra* note 1; de Waal, *supra* note 1; Cheney, *supra* note; Rosen, *supra* note 6; Clark-Kazak, *supra* note 32; Ansell, *supra* note 1.

[45] Ansell, *supra* note 1 at 795

[46] Cheney, *supra* note 1 at 58

[47] Enid Schildkrout, *Age and gender in Hausa Society: socio-economic roles of children in urban Kano'* in SEX AND AGE AS PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION (Jean S. La Fontaine, ed., 1978); A. BAME NSAMENANG, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT: A THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE (1992); Ncube, *supra* note 42; Cheney, *supra* note 1; Clark-Kazak, *supra* note 32; Ansell, *supra* note 1.

[48] Ncube, *supra* note 42; Nsamenang, *supra* note 47; Kaime, *supra* note 1.

The persistence of such local understandings has often clashed with global ideals around childhood and children's rights. A notable example is that of Nigeria where the government, which was one of the first to ratify the Convention in 1991, introduced a Children's Rights Bill in October 2002 as part of its attempt to ensure that national legalisation corresponded with the Convention's standards. However, the Bill was overwhelmingly rejected by the House of Representatives (the Nigerian federal legislative lower Chamber) at Second Reading primarily because a significant number of the representatives objected to the establishment of 18 as the minimum age for marriage. [49] This definition, they felt, was incompatible with religious and cultural values in the north of the country in particular where many women are sent into marriage before the age of 16.[50] Other countries have experienced similar resistance to the Convention's definition in their attempt to ensure that their laws and policies correspond with its standards.[51] Therefore, much of the empirical evidence that exists demonstrates two points: 1) differing constructions of childhood remain clearly visible in numerous societies in the South today; 2) these distinct constructions often challenge dominant political agendas which underscore and emphasise the universality of childhood and children's rights.

It is widely accepted, then, that local and global ideas around childhood may contradict each other and clash, leading to a situation whereby the progress of children's rights at the local

[49] The Nigerian Child Rights Act was passed at the Federal level in 2003. However, due to the federal structure of the country, it is only effective if State Assemblies also enact it. As of May 2016, 23 of the country's 36 States had passed the Act. Of the 13 states that have failed to enact the law, 12 are based in the north of the country.

[50] IRIN, 12th November 2002; Afua Twum-Danso (2009), *International children's rights*, in CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORLDS: DEVELOPING FRAMEWORKS FOR INTEGRATED PRACTICE (Heather Montgomery and Mary Kellet, eds., 2009).

[51] see, for example, Harris-Short, *supra* note 8

level, especially in the South, is more often than not, limited. However, given the intensification of global processes and the impact of colonialism, there is a need to also explore childhoods within the South, not only in terms of their local constructions, but also through the lens of global discourses which additionally shape these constructions.

Methodology

To explore how definitions of childhoods are shaped by both local and global norms and discourses, I returned to, and re-analysed, my PhD study which explored local perspectives of children's rights, constructions of childhood and the socialization of children and the implications for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ghana.[52] The study especially focused on the implementation of Article 12. Data, collected between May 2005 and March 2006, focused on two communities in the heart of Accra - Ga Mashie and Nima, which are major slum areas where unemployment, illiteracy and overcrowding are extremely high.

Following the approach to the study of childhood promoted by James and Prout[53], the study assumed that children are social actors whose perspectives about their lives and experiences are invaluable for understanding the reality in which they live. To this end, fieldwork

[52] AFUA TWUM-DANSO, SEARCHING FOR THE MIDDLE GROUND IN CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: IMPLEMENTING THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN GHANA (2008), http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/453/

[53] ALLISON JAMES AND ALAN PROUT (eds.), CONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF CHILDHOOD (2nd Edition, 1997)

methods that enabled children to have a direct voice in the research allowed me to foreground their perspectives, rather than simply lean towards, and listen to, more dominant voices in society who are usually consulted on children's rights such as government officials and community leaders. In addition, recognising the important perspectives of adults who have a key role to play in children's daily lives, I also sought to elicit the views of adults within these two communities. Hence, as part of the first phase of the research, participant observation was undertaken in the two focus communities over a period of two months, using two schools and two service delivery NGOs in each community as entry points. Subsequent phases of the fieldwork adopted a mixed method approach to collect data[54] from both adults and children in these two communities as well as elsewhere as it enabled me to collect richer data, corroborate findings, and examine any inconsistencies found in the data gathered by either the quantitative or the qualitative methods adopted.

While it was my intention to hold only participatory workshops with children, due to the ability of time children had to offer and also, the limited timeframe of the study, such workshops were only held with two groups of school children and one group of out of school children over a period of two weeks, in one instance, and five weeks in the case of two other groups. FGDs were conducted with all other children. However, it is worth noting that participatory activities such as mapping were also incorporated into these sessions. In total, then, twenty-one FGDs or participatory workshops were organised for children in Nima and Ga Mashie. 243 children participated in these sessions including school children, those who had dropped out of school, or who had never attended. The table below presents a breakdown of the number of participants in each community.

[54] see JOHN W. CRESWELL, QUALITATIVE INQUIRY AND RESEARCH DESIGN: CHOOSING AMONG FIVE TRADITIONS (3rd edition, 2013)

Table 1: Profile of Children Participating in FGDs in Nima and Ga Mashie: Numbers of School Children vs. Out-of-School Children

	Nima	Ga Mashie	**Total**
School-Going Children	99	73	**172**
Out-of-School Children	30	41	**71**
Total	**129**	**114**	**243**

In both communities most children who participated in the FGDs or workshops were aged between twelve and sixteen. However, due to local conceptions of childhood in these communities, some participants in the child-focused activities were eighteen or slightly over. To explore the extent the views and experiences of children from these communities were similar to children from more affluent areas, FGDs were also conducted with children in three different private schools. Furthermore, questionnaires were administered by myself and two fieldworkers to a total of 133 children. Of these fifty-six were in Nima (thirty-seven in-school and nineteen out-of-school), sixty-one in Ga Mashie (thirty-four in-school and twenty-seven out-of-school) and sixteen in the three private schools. All children who responded to the questionnaires had been participants in the FGDs or workshops conducted in each community. FGDs, workshops and questionnaires were either conducted/administered in English, Ga or Hausa depending on the literacy levels of the participating children. Only data

from FGD or workshop discussions with children within the two communities are presented in this paper.

Within the communities of Nima and Ga Mashie, seventy-eight adults participated in seven FGDs (thirty in Ga Mashie, forty-eight in Nima). While in Nima, men and women participated equally in FGDs, in Ga Mashie the majority of participants in the three FGDs held were women. In fact, only nine men participated in all three FGDs conducted in this community. In order to obtain a greater range of perspectives on the key issues, two further FGDs were undertaken with key stakeholders. The first extra group consisted of eight media professionals who often report on children's rights and protection issues across the country. They included editors and reporters from both the print and broadcast media. The second group comprised twelve mature students from the Social Work department at the University of Ghana, Legon who had previously worked as police officers, social workers, teachers or as staff members of service delivery NGOs focusing on children. Therefore, in total nine FGDs were held with ninety-eight adults. This approach enabled me to recruit a wide range of participants despite the limited resources available to a PhD student. While the FGDs with media professionals and mature students were conducted in English, all FGDs with adults in the communities were conducted in the local language of the community: Ga or Hausa. Data collected in lanuagues other than English were translated before transcription.

A thematic analytical approach was then used to code the findings of the research. This was done manually utilising Wolcott's[55] and Coffey and Atkinson's[56] frameworks. Bearing in

[55] HARRY F. WOLCOTT, TRANSFORMING QUALITATIVE DATA: DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS (1994)

mind the central questions underpinning the study, I sought to identify key patterns and themes across the data collected from different groups. An inductive approach was adopted which enabled me to familiarise myself very closely with the data and also facilitated the identification of a theoretical framework from the data instead of imposing one upon it.

Since completing my PhD, my research activities in Nima and Ga Mashie have continued. In 2009 I undertook a further study in these communities. Further, between 2013 and 2017, I visited these locations on my annual trips to Ghana. Added to that, in 2016 and 2017 two of my undergraduate students undertook faculty-funded research on child labour in Ga Mashie which I supervised on site. These visits – be they formal or informal - enabled me to engage in observation and informal conversations with different community members on various topics, including the nature of childhoods. These observations and discussions further confirmed the continuing relevance of the data.

The Integration of Social and Chronological Ages in the Construction of Childhoods in Ghana

That social constructions of childhood are critical to understanding the nature of childhoods in a specific context emerged in the study conducted in Nima and Ga Mashie. During the data collection process for this study it was evident that various factors such as the ability to undertake certain tasks reserved for adults, parenthood, especially motherhood, and the achievement of a certain level of independence, sense and maturity were used to make distinctions between adults and children. Different groups of adults in a number of the FGDs organised in both communities expressed these sentiments as follows:

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[56] AMANDA JANE COFFEY AND PAUL ANTHONY ATKINSON, MAKING SENSE OF QUALITATIVE DATA: COMPLEMENTARY RESEARCH STRATEGIES (1996)

Once you know how to fish you can get married so you are no longer a child (FGD with Media Professionals, 14th September 2005).

In Ga Mashie, if a girl gives birth, it means she is no longer a child (FGD with Media Professionals, 14th September 2005).

Anyone who is not married is a child. So, if you are 40 and you are not married, you are not regarded as an adult or a child (FGD with Mature Students from the Social Work Dept at Legon, 8th November 2005).

When you are out of your parental home and have a meaningful job, you are an adult (FGD with Mature Students from the Social Work Dept at Legon, 8th November 2005).

Someone is 20, but is still seen as a child because they are given money at home and if you go to a social gathering with adults, they will tell you to go away because you are a child (FGD with Adults at Freeman's Memorial Chapel, Bukom Sq, 26th February 2006).

The rite of passage that is done tells them that they are of age (FGD with the Elders at the Sempe Mantse We, 8th February 2006).

As soon as you start menstruating you can get pregnant so you are no longer a child... even from the age of 9 (FGD with the Elders at the Sempe Mantse We, 8th February 2006)

A child is someone who has never been married (FGD with Adults at the Mosque of the Kardo Community in Nima, 15th December 2005).

When a child begins to be responsible; even if the child is 14 and is acting responsibly then he is no longer a child (FGD with Congregation at Islamic Institute Mosque, Saturday 5th November 2005).

These constructions of childhood that are closely linked to the particular social, cultural and economic features of specific communities in Ghana also emerged in children's own understandings and discussions on this issue:

You are no longer a child when you can bring money home (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children I, October to November 2005).

You are no longer a child when you can do hard work (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children I, October to November 2005).

You are no longer a child when you can take care of your parents (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children I, October to November 2005).

You are no longer a child when you can work to feed yourself (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children I, October to November 2005).

A child is someone who cannot look after himself or herself because he/she does not work (FGD with Nima School Children I, October to December 2005).

> A child is someone who cannot do things adults can do such as having sex (FGD with Children from Ga Mashie School Children I, 24th February 2006).

> If you can look after yourself you are no longer a child (FGD with Ga Mashie School Children II, 8th and 15th February 2006).

> Adults can marry, a child cannot. If you are a child and married you are no longer a child because you are mature (FGD with Nima School Children I, October to December 2005).

> When you are married, you are not a child; if you are 13 and married you are no longer a child (FGD with Nima School Children II, October to December 2005).

> When you have a baby, you are no longer a child (FGD with Nima School Children II, October to December 2005).

Therefore, different generations in these communities continue to use indicators that they have long valued to frame their understandings of childhoods.

This notwithstanding, the use of chronological age to define who was a child as opposed to an adult was also increasingly evident within the focus communities of the study. However, the use of chronological age did not necessarily correspond with the Convention or dominant children's rights discourses more generally. In fact, a variety of ages as well as 18 were used to signify the end of childhood. Amongst some adult participants, the age at which children attained adulthood was fixed at 10 or 13 while for others this occurred at 20, 30 or 40:

In Chorkor by the age of 14 you should be married. By 16 as a boy you should have 2 wives. For girls, they should give birth by 14 (FGD with Media Professionals, 14th September 2005).

In the coastal areas, you can find a 15-year-old who is married and you can't label him as a child (FGD with Mature Students from the Social Work Dept at Legon, 8th November 2005).

From 13/ 12 years you are no longer a child because if you are a girl you can have a child (FGD with Adults at Freeman's Memorial Chapel, Bukom Sq Organised, 22nd February 2006).

In other countries at the age of 18 the person will be seen as an adult, but here 18 doesn't mark the end of childhood. It is not until they are 21 because that is when the person's mind is opened up enough to do things (FGD with Women organised at the Islamic Charity Centre for Women's Orientation, 31st December 2005).

Similarly, for child participants diverse ages were used to signify the transition from childhood to adulthood:

At 16 you are no longer a child because you can work (FGD with Ga
Mashie Out of School Children I, October to November 2005).

From 9 to13 you are a child; from 13 you can take care of yourself so you are no longer a child (FGD with Ga Mashie School Children III, 8th February 2006).

In Ga Mashie, a child is someone up to the age of 10. After 10 you are seen as an adult and do everything adults do e.g. give birth, look after yourself (FGD with Ga Mashie School Children IV, 28th February 2006).

In Ga Mashie, from 13 you are an adult because you do what adults do – get pregnant. Once you are pregnant you are an adult (FGD with Ga Mashie School Children II, 8th and 15th February 2006).

When you are 19 years and you are working, you are no longer a child ((FGD with Nima School Children I, October to December 2005).

If you are 16/17 and have a child then you are no longer a child (FGD with Nima School Children I, October to December 2005).

Children are those who are not grown – you are seen as an adult from 18/20/30 (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children II, 10th February 2016).

You are an adult when you are a mature enough – between 20 and 30 years (FGD with Nima School Children I, October to December 2005).

Therefore, even when individuals used chronological age as the landmark between childhood and adulthood, it was not necessarily in line with global definitions and understandings. What emerged was the way chronological ages put forward by community members as marking the transition between adulthood and childhood were intricately linked to the local indicators

they have long used within their communities to make these distinctions: economic independence, motherhood and marriage. Within this process, the role of the family in determining what an individual of a certain age should be able to do, a key component in local constructions of childhood as noted above, remains important in this context. This role the community plays in linking chronological age to social age was noted by an adult FGD participant in Ga Mashie: 'It is us in the community who make children who are 12, 13 years as adults so we need to stop thinking like that' (FGD with Adults at Freeman's Memorial Chapel, Bukom Sq Organised, 22nd February 2006).

This use of different chronological ages to outline the boundaries of what is perceived as adulthood also indicates that within these communities, entry into adulthood is not immutable or fixed. Instead, the age at which a person becomes an adult is rather more fluid or mutable – a landmark that shifts in line with more traditional constructions of childhood and assessments of an individual's capacity or ability to undertake certain roles. This demonstrates that local markers which are linked to the construction of social age have been integrated with chronological age to determine what individuals should be able to do at certain stages and ages. The implication of this integration of chronological and social ages is that not all those under the age of 18 are positioned as innocent, incapable, incompetent, immature, vulnerable and in need of special protections.

At the same time, however, the findings also revealed that there were emerging voices within the focus communities who also used the fixed age of 18 as the dividing line between childhood and adulthood. This emerged in discussions with both adult and child participants in Nima and Ga Mashie. Within adult FGDs some explained that:

A child is someone below 18 (FGD 1 with Adults at Freeman's Memorial Chapel 22nd February 2006).

At 18 she shouldn't be talking rubbish (FGD with Women organised at the Islamic Charity Centre for Women's Orientation, 31st December 2005).

Maturity starts at 18 (FGD with Congregation organised at Islamic Institute Mosque Organised, Saturday 5th November 2005).

Some children too used the age of 18 to define who was a child as opposed to an adult in their contexts:

[A child is] someone who has not reached 18 years (FGD with Ga Mashie School children IV, Wednesday 1st February 2006).

At 18 you can vote so you are no longer a child (FGD with Ga Mashie Out of School Children I October - November 2005).

A child is someone who has not reached 18 years (FGD with Ga Mashie School children IV, Wednesday 1st February 2006).

I am child because I am not mature. I will become mature when I am 18 years (FGD with Nima II School Children, October-November 2005).

> When you are 18 [you are no longer a child] because that is what they said in Integrated Science class (FGD with Nima II School Children, October-November 2005).

> If you are independent and making money for yourself you are still a child because you have not reached [the age of] 18 (FGD with Ga Mashie School Children I, Friday 24th February 2006).

These understandings are consistent with definitions of childhood underpinning the legal and policy frameworks in Ghana. For example, the 1992 Constitution, the 1998 Children's Act and the 2003 Juvenile Justice Act all define a child as someone below the age of 18 and proceed to outline provisions for this group based on what are considered their special needs and vulnerabilities. Hence, the data outlined above show the extent to which legal and policy discourses surrounding conceptualisations of both childhoods and adulthood have filtered into community discourses and are now drawn upon by individuals in their articulation of how they understand who a child or an adult is. Further, this 'straight 18' definition of childhood is now being utilised by some to not only mark the boundary around childhood, but also to outline the treatment that should be provided to those who fall under this age of 18. As one participant stated in a FGD with older children in Nima, '18 years is the end of childhood because someone of that age would not play with children' (FGD with Nima Out of School Children I, Tuesday 14th February 2006). Similar sentiments were expressed by an adult participant in Ga Mashie who stated: 'A child is someone who is under somebody, parents provide the necessities of the child and this is as long as the child has not attained the age of 18' (FGD 1 with Adults at Freeman's Memorial Chapel 22nd February 2006). The period of life before an individual attains the age of 18, then, is positioned, according to these

participants, as a time of play, dependency and being *provided for*, instead of *providing for oneself*.

This use of 18 to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood is a relatively recent development in parts of the country as noted by a male community leader who participated in a FGD at the palace of a traditional ruler in Ga Mashie:

> It is only these days that they have started using 18 as a mark to end childhood in affluent areas (FGD with Elders at Sempe Mantse We, 8th February 2006).

However, the fact that the 'straight 18' definition was drawn upon in discussions about transitions from childhood to adulthood in both Nima and Ga Mashie, two slum communities in Accra, indicates that these 'new' ideas about the termination of childhood have filtered into less affluent communities as well – at least in urban areas. A statement by a female FGD participant in Nima gives an insight into the extent to which these new ideas have had an impact on her community's understandings of the factors that determine the termination of childhood:

> In the olden days, a child grows up to 20 years and above and the adults marry for the child and after that they are no longer a child and so they [the adults] can concentrate on the other children. In modern times, it is no more like that – you cannot marry for the child so it [childhood] doesn't depend on when they marry anymore (FGD with Adults organised at the Mosque of the Kardo Community in Nima, 15th December 2005).

The data collected from both Nima and Ga Mashie demonstrate that although the use of the age of 18 to define the transition from childhood to adulthood has its origins in developments that took place in Western Europe, this approach has also been imbibed by some individuals within communities. The infiltration of this definition of childhood within these communities

can be attributed to the enormous transformations that have taken place in wider Ghanaian society in the post-colonial period such as: the increased availability of, and desire for, so-called Western education; the widespread acceptance of, and adherence to, Christianity; increasing urbanisation and its impact on relations within the kinship group; exposure to global media products, including American television programmes; and national policy discourses that have been influenced by more global discourses around childhood, children's rights and human rights more generally[57].

These changes notwithstanding, it is important to note that chronological definitions of childhood have not replaced more local constructions or notions of social age in these settings. Both chronological definitions of childhood and constructions of childhood based on other indicators which are context-specific exist in parallel, both in the views of individuals, or in exchanges between different individuals. For example, for some participants, age and other social constructions were combined in their definition of who was an adult. This is evident in the following statement:

> 18 is correct because the person can think for herself, she can vote, can go to prison, you can give her hand in marriage without fear, can work, can go to university, can take part in decision making. Therefore, you can see an 18-year-old girl with 2 children feeding herself….*as long as she is wise* (FGD with

[57] JEAN ALLMAN, J. AND VICTORIA TASHIJIAN, I WILL NOT EAT STONE: A WOMEN'S HISTORY OF COLONIAL ASANTE (2000); Isabella Aboderin *Decline in material family support for older people in urban Ghana, Africa: Understanding processes and causes of change*, JOURNAL OF GERONTOLOGY, Vol. 59b, No. 3 pp. 2128-s137 (2004); Christine Oppong, *Familial Roles and Social Transformations: Older Men and Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, RESEARCH ON AGEING, Vol. 28 (6), pp. 654-668 (2006); Robert Ameh, *Reconciling human rights and traditional practices: the anti-Trokosi campaign in Ghana*, CANADIAN JOURNAL OF LAW AND SOCIETY, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp51-72 (2004).

Women organised at the Islamic Charity Centre for Women's Orientation, 31st December 2005).

This female participant in an adult FGD in Nima combines both chronological and social age definitions in her understanding of the termination of childhood. For her, childhood ends at 18 because by that time a girl can have some degree of economic independence and undertake a number of responsibilities, including marriage. However, she sets a caveat that for this chronological definition to take effect, the girl needs to be 'wise'. The implication of this is if someone attains the age of 18 but is not considered 'wise' in her community, she may still be perceived as a child and treated as such. This shows a duality in conceptualisations of childhoods in the perspectives of individuals. Further, in discussions with children disagreement sometimes emerged between how different participants defined childhood:

Participant 1: When you start your menstruation you are no longer a child so you can get married and have a baby, even at 12.

Participant 2: No, you are still a child when you start your menstruation. You can't get married until you are 18.

Participant 3: If you have a baby at 12 you are still a child because it is not the right time for you (FGD with Nima School Children III, 13th December 2005).

Participant 1: If you are 13 and get married you are still a child because parents pushed you into it and also because you still have a lot to learn about.

> Participant 2: If you are 13 and get married and you are no longer with your parents anymore then you are no longer a child (FGD with Nima School Children I, October – December 2005).

These contrasting views illustrate the extent to which both global and local constructions of childhood have come to co-exist within the consciousness of some children. This is supported by Cheney[58] who found, in her study of children's involvement in national development processes in Uganda, that children showed 'awareness of both legal definitions and cultural observances of age-based identity'. The resulting outcome is that discussions around childhoods in the context of Ghana have to incorporate both definitions if they are to resonate with the diverse perspectives and understandings that can be found locally.

Conclusion

The data from Nima and Ga Mashie illustrate that while these communities have long constructed, and continue to construct, childhoods and adulthoods based on indicators other than chronological age, new ideas have filtered into the communities, leading a number of participants to not only put forward the age of 18 as marking the transition between childhood and adulthood, but also to use this definition to challenge what are perceived as more traditional definitions and constructions of childhood and its termination. The very assertion of this 'straight 18' definition of childhoods in discussions with participants in both communities is noteworthy as it demonstrates that there is diversity within communities in how boundaries are drawn between childhoods and adulthoods, notably as a result of

[58] Cheney, supranote, 1, 55

variables such as socio-economic background, geographical location, family type and education.[59]

However, these chronological definitions that can be identified in discussions around childhood and children's rights in Ghanaian society have not replaced more local constructions of childhood. Instead, they exist in parallel within a community or even within the perspectives of an individual. Furthermore, these communities have taken the use of chronological age as a framework to define childhood and adapted it to their context by integrating it with their own local understandings. Specifically, they have taken age-based definitions and linked it to constructions of social age, which tend to be based on the ability to undertake certain tasks in order to determine at what age childhood terminates. Such a linkage does not necessarily correlate with global definitions of childhood articulated in the Convention or other global children's rights policies. Thus, these communities have localised or indigenised[60] global frameworks, bearing in mind their own local norms and traditions, leading to constructions of childhoods that are neither completely local nor purely global.[61]

The existence of varying definitions of childhood within these communities - be they based on local constructions, global definitions focusing on the age of 18 or a hybridisation of the two conceptualisations – is critical to the argument of this paper. Plural understandings of childhoods in a given context are accompanied by a diversity in how child wellbeing, child protection and children's entitlements are also conceptualised and operationalised by

[59] see TOBIAS HECHT, AT HOME IN THE STREET: STREET CHILDREN OF NORTH EAST BRAZIL (1998); Marida Hollos, *The cultural construction of childhood: changing conceptions among the Pare of northern Tanzania,* CHILDHOOD, 9 (2), pp.167-189 (2002); Naftali, *supra* note 4; Author, *supra* note 3.

[60] ANJUN APPADURAI, MODERNITY AT LARGE: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF GLOBALIZATION (1996).

[61] see Burman, *supra* note 1 (1996); Holloway and Valentine, *supra* note 7

different individuals within a community. Such intra-societal diversity in communities and countries in the South must make us query the dissonance that is repeatedly said to exist between childhoods in the South and global children's rights discourses. While there are those childhoods that bear little resemblance to global rights norms and standards, either in relation to their definition or the roles allocated, such childhoods cannot be generalised to an entire population of children in a country or even a community. Instead, there is a need to view conceptualisations of childhoods and children's experiences of global children's rights discourses along a continuum which connects the local to the global. While at one end of the continuum there are many children whose lives are in stark contrast to the global ideal embedded within dominant rights discourses, at the other end, are those whose lived realities of their childhoods correspond closely with global conceptualisations, ideals, norms and expectations. In between these two polar opposites are points along the continuum which reflect realities of childhoods that combine both global and local conceptualisations to varying degrees.

An approach to conceptualisations and analyses of childhoods and children's rights in context in the South which acknowledges this continuum will allow for the inclusion of more comprehensive and holistic perspectives on the study of childhood and children's rights within a particular context. This would ensure that approaches to, and research studies focusing on, childhoods and children's rights, have more relevance to societies whose histories, present-day realities and future trajectories are situated at the crossroads of both the global and the local.