BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOODS
IN HEALTH AND AFFLICTION

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INTRODUCTION

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOODS IN PERSPECTIVE

Efua Prah & Susan Levine

From the kitchen window, Efua's eyes traced the edge of the tall trees, a mottled green mile that stretched ahead of her. She lifted her arm to draw the line from what she liked to imagine was the beginning of her journey into adulthood and the ending of her childhood. She could not recall explicitly, the moment at which she entered adulthood. Had she elegantly walked across the finish line? Or had she somehow stumbled, eyes blindfolded across some invisible threshold? Sometimes she was the elegant walker and sometimes she was the crumbled remains of an embattled past, twisted and bent. Both images existed alongside each other as she tracked the time that had passed gradually. Casting her thoughts into the depths of childhood, snapshots of past experiences lingered like an echo. Efua recalled a memory of looking at her feet as she walked along fields and dust-roads in Maseru, Lesotho, feeling a strange sense of quietude that she was thinking about thinking. Most vividly in this recall was the awareness that as a child she both possessed powers of observance and simultaneously experienced a greater powerlessness to be understood on her own terms. As she sat drinking cocoa, it was clear that a great deal of what she observed as a young child was only ever given a cursory glance by the adults and communities in which she was raised. Too often the world and its constricting parameters hedged Efua's thoughts and instructed her how to feel, think and act. Sitting in her kitchen, it occurred to Efua that perhaps she had existed as a means to an eventual end rather than a full human in the time of childhood. In part, it is for her child-self that this work on children and childhoods is for, an act of restoration if you will, for all the things that were silenced and erased in earlier years.

As the sun sank low flushing the sky a dreamy orange, Efua mulled into the idea that as an adult she often lived in the shadowy childhood remains of frustratingly dead-end answers to her endless questions about why things were the way they were. In thinking about it now, she chuckles at the barrage of questions she ploughed at any adult that paid attention. In some ways, she wishes that her parents had asked for hers and her sibling's reflections more often and acknowledge that children understand their worlds and make history in their everyday activities and ideas about their activity. Her wistful desire raised questions about the symbolic representation of childhood that is seemingly narrowly linear in its presentation and reified in its imagining. These thoughtful memories resonate with Daniela Caselli's reflection that "childhood is memory, past, [and] nostalgia." (Caselli, 2010:247). But what is it, to be in a time of childhood?

In efforts to build onto and extend the social representations of childhood in our discipline of anthropology, the body of work offered here is less about cultures of childhood, and even less so about the reified experiences of children in remote geographies. Rather, this collected volume of essays by young scholars, poets, writers and artists, is invested in contributing to an anthropology of youth that pivots on an embodied ethics of care and creativity. The ethnographic chapters interrogate sites and settings in which children live, die, heal and thrive. The contributing authors focus on the experiences of children and youth in South Africa, Swaziland and Ghana with a specific interest in the embodied experiences of disease, debility and strength in making and stretching the limits of recovery and well-being. The work showcased here, emerges out of an academic programme in 2010, where the National Research Foundation (NRF) supported six postgraduate anthropology students at The University of Cape Town (UCT) to conduct research on children's health and illness in Southern Africa. Drawing on and expanding anthropology's sustained history of child and youth focused research in Southern Africa (Henderson, 2013; Honwana, 2011; Burman & Reynolds, 1986), students set out to craft intimate portrayals of childhood and family life in contexts of social and health affliction. The essays contribute to the unfolding history of child-centered research on suffering, resistance, resilience and healing. We signpost case studies that cast young people and their experiences within multiple layers of social, cultural, interpersonal and intersubjective interactions. We ask how children imagine, interpret and make sense of mortality and being in the world. We consider how young people confront their fears, the symbols of hope they

deploy and their sense of changing identities in the wake of feeling a stranger in their bodies and their resolve to keep going, even if that means consciously succumbing to illness.

This body of work provides an occasion for students to engage with scholars in their chosen field and the opportunity to engage with the work of their peers. The more ways we find to circulate the research of young scholars, the greater the possibility of extending academic and epistemic communities. The multiplicity of theoretical orientations advanced in this volume underscore our interdisciplinary approach and underpins our critique of hegemonic representations of childhood that reify childhood as a social category. We like to think of this collection as a bouquet of critical renderings that imprints onto a larger anthropological study of childhoods that ask after the different “figurations of childhood” within society (Castenada, 2002). The collective voice of the contributors enlivens our curiosity into how we can continue to question what we know about childhood and indeed how we come to shape our understanding of what a child is. Our central aim is to showcase the multiple and creative ways in which childhoods are represented, and to offer a critical analysis of childhood in the context of systemic social, political economic precarity. We draw reflections from artists, academics, poets and literary scholars who all present a body of knowledge that carefully considers the multiple figurations of childhood.

Figurations is a powerful metaphor deployed by Claudia Castenada (2002). We aim to develop this work by lifting out the polysemic nature of childhood and youth. By way of contrast with this fluid orientation towards the vastness of child and youth experience, note Heidi Morrison’s *The Global History of Childhood Reader* (2012) in which she refers to children as people between the ages of 6 and 12 years. As anthropologists and readers of ethnography, we are wary of such reductionist numerical markers except as an analytic concept. An anthropology of childhood and youth reveals deeper societal factors that shape childhood and youth experience in everyday contexts. Accordingly, there is a robust scholarship that critiques the neat and solid categories of childhood and youth in favour of penetrable and mutable models that are influenced by philosophical, cultural, social and economic fields of meaning and context (Levine, 1996; 2013; Müller, 2006; Goldson in Scraton, 1997; Jordanova & Ruddick in Scarre, 1989). Distinct age markers such as those put forward by Morrison often support biomedical metrics that notate the beginning, middle and end of childhood (Marchant, 2001;

Burmeister, 2012). While age is an indisputable symbol of childhood progression in any given social field, 'early' illness, 'early' employment, or 'premature' death is often the cause of moral panic and untold grief. These ruptures trouble normative frameworks that fail to reckon with the disconnect between ideal visions and actual versions of the pathways of youth. Thus, this collection accounts for different registers of childhood and youth even as they reify and lend credibility to them.

South African scholarship on childhood is notable for its intersectional approach, one that situates child and youth studies at the crossroads of class, race, and gender dynamics. Sandra Burman and Pamela Reynolds (1986), Helena Pohlandt-McCormick (1994), Filip De Boeck and Alcinda Honwana (2005), Jean and John Comaroff (2006), Sean Jones (1990), Rachel Bray (2011), Nolwazi Mkhwanazi (2010); Mamphela Ramphele (2012), Deevia Bhana (2011) and Andrew Dawes and David Donald (1994), all account for the experiences of children and youth illiciting important reflections about the complex ways through which childhood and youth are situated. Youth studies in other African countries include Beverly Carolease Grier's fine-grained research on child labour in Colonial Zimbabwe (1994), Saheed Aderinto's study of adolescents at risk in Nigeria (2008), Uyilawa Usuanlele's research on literacy and education in British Colonial Nigeria (2016), Abosede George's remarkable work on girlhood and labor in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria (2014), Afua Twum-Danso's provocative discussion of child punishment in Ghana (2013), Ana Leao's research on youth struggle and activism in Mozambique (2005), Kwesi Aning's distressing account of war and youth in Sierra Leone (2015), and Nicolas Argenti's path-breaking research on young people's responses to violence in Cameroon (1998), to name but a few. The desire to come to grips with how children and young people craft their lives across the African continent is abundantly clear from the plentiful literature at hand. These foundations have overwhelmingly accounted for and situated children and young people's experiences amidst strained and dense political realities, highlighting the fissures and fractures born from war, conflict and displacement (Penn, 2005; Straker et al., 1992; Ramphele, 2002; McIntyre, 2005; Gabarino, 2008; Boyden and de Berry, 2004; Rock, 1997; Dawes et al., 2007; Grier in Morrison, 2012; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005).

What this book adds is a sensitive and critical rendering to further understand how young people in South Africa, Ghana and Swaziland, living in different sites and settings that are not typically framed by HIV/AIDS or war, but rather other

sites of illness and care that include cancer and tuberculosis. We consider the politics of a non-profit orphanage in Swaziland, the occurrence of youth spirit-possession in South Africa, girlhood in Ghana, and children exposed to lethal poisons in a South African informal settlement. We also consider the impact of internal displacement and the precarity of urban childhoods in temporary zones of human settlement in South Africa. This collection is the combined effort of a cohort of young researchers and artists who shared a critical curiosity for understanding and representing youth, childhood and children. This loose collective celebrates the mutual determinations of creative South African and Ghanaian scholarship and also seeks to forge pathways of cross-disciplinary exchange. As young researchers and artists from the continent, now more than ever, it is important to create epistemologies that embrace multi-dimensional, multi-modal and sensorial methods that seek to incorporate the different ways in which we examine and understand our world (Adebe et al., 2016). As we move into a different experience of pedagogy, activism and knowledge-sharing, a book of this kind offers an entry point for scholars to develop and share ideas that rarely circulate outside classroom contexts.

The ethnographic chapters in this volume are interrupted by an artistic or literary portal for reflecting on childhood and youth memory and experience. Academic writing has long relied on images to extend theoretical insight, depth and playfulness. These collected works remind us that glimmers of our experiences of childhood are intricately lived out as continuous indices of emotive power and memory that inform our experiences as adults. Like Derrida's (1993) dramatic idea of hauntology, childhood haunts us all. Our effort here is to enliven ethnographic accounts of childhood led by young scholars by contributing to the emergent field of health humanities and the arts, a field that asks us to lean into the affective dimensions of storytelling in multiple forms and in dialogue across disciplines.

Accounting for children

Lifting out from the remains of archeological records, Kathryn Kamp sheds light on the nature of children's work (2001). The wizardry of this science enabled Kamp to capture shifts and antagonisms in the symbolic representation of children and childhoods. Susan Levine's work on child labour in South Africa uncovers children's work in South Africa's more recent history and suggests that children are central

to the political economy of the country's wine industry yet peripheral producers in the eyes of the state (2013). These expressions reveal the diversions from normative configurations of what is understood about children and childhood. While we can point to the many historical erasures of childhood in the social sciences, the rainbow arch of representations is in fact generative and generous. From the reified cultural collectives captured in ethnographic accounts, to the European Middle Ages, stretching further to the French Renaissance period, and even further through to the early 20th century, children have been cast as beings in the making (Mead, 1928a; 1928b; Malinowski, 1929), miniature adults (Aries, 1962), both as innocent babes and sinful younglings needing the guidance and instruction from less corrupted adults (Kamp, 2001).

Beginning in the 19th century in Western countries,¹ a particular interest in the well-being of children's rights was taken up with great enthusiasm in literary and journalistic texts. Concern was given to the plight of children being economically exploited and steps were taken to abolish child labour and enroll children in school as a compulsory measure in what is described by Robert Levine as the 'child-saving' movement. He writes:

It was within this climate that anthropology entered the discussions around children and childhood. In the West, the marked attention given to children in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the increasing attendance of children at schools, "called public attention to the process of learning and developmental change during childhood and stimulated the emergence of child psychology and educational psychology" (Ibid., 248).

This launch into the scientific (particularly psychological shift) analysis of childhood situated future discussion within a particular rhetoric of child protectionism. This cloak of protectionism however did not cover all children evenly, and certainly not the childhoods lived out in Africa, although this differed for white colonial childhoods (Duff, 2015) that were sheltered from the brutality of colonial administration and domination. Rather, for childhoods in Africa, journeying through slavery to colonialism, to freedom fighting, and post-independent states, the image of black African children and childhoods on the continent of Africa has been one replete with trauma, bare resilience and survival (Ensor, 2012; Scheper-Hughes,

1 For much of Europe's early history (c.1600s to 1800s) eurocentric texts about children's activities and their social roles were visible in the form of parental advisory texts from clergymen's and also travellers' reports on the behaviours of children in settings that may have appeared different to the ones these travellers and clergymen had left behind (Levine, 2007).

1995; Cohen in Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1994; Pohlandt-McCormick, 1992; Aderinto, 2015; De Boeck & Honwana, 2005). Within these figurations of African childhoods, the historical record shows us quite clearly that certainly for Africa, ideas about, roles for, and definitions of children and childhoods (Kamp, 2001:4; Aderinto, 2015; Grier in Morrison, 2006) were exposed to multiple oppressions in ruthless and callous ways. Aderinto (2015) argues for instance that childhood as measured by chronological age arrived at the advent of colonialism's regimented surveillance of bodies. This meant that the dating of children became paramount to the financial sustainability of systemic oppression. The combined effort of missionaries (both black African and white European) and colonial rule, (re)cast childhoods in Africa within a skewed protectionist rhetoric, framing young people as potential sources of productive labour that needed protection solely for their productive potential. Thus, the modernizing of childhood in colonial Africa meant that young people and children on this diverse continent were set on a course largely determined by Europe's demands of conquest and production (Aderinto, 2015). For childhoods lived out in Western Europe and the United Kingdom, the protectionist rhetoric created an image of children as objects upon which the world occurs. In essence, children lacked agency and their ability and indeed relevance to speak of their worlds in their own terms was not considered. This imagining remains within contemporary configurations and perceptions on childhood and children and is particularly difficult to reconstitute (Mastey, 2018; Burman & Reynolds, 1986; Castañeda, 2002).

For anthropology, ethnographic accounts of children and childhood in the early 20th century emerged as foundational monographs. The classic works of Margret Mead – subsequently heavily critiqued for her methods and processes of analyses – depicted the everyday lives of children in Samoa (1928a; 1928b). She challenged American psychologist Granville Stanley Hall's² insistence on a linearity of growth in which adolescents moving out of their childhood naturally experienced disturbances and turbulence associated with hormonal functions. Radical for her departure from this deterministic model, Mead argued that the behaviours of young people experiencing changes in their life course were more culturally influenced than biologically determined. Another iconic anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia*

2 For a concise composition of Hall's life work see Granville Stanley Hall: 1846-1924. *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 100, no. 3/4, University of Illinois Press, Oct. 1987, pp. 367-75.

(1929) provided detailed observational data supporting the idea of cultural variations in child experiences of maturation processes. These early accounts have left indelible impressions on how anthropologists' approach and conceptualise children and childhoods (Levine, 2007) and leave critical questions about the nature of social patterning, learnt cultural behaviour and the role of power. A pioneer in the field, Franz Boas's work on plasticity³ in young immigrant children added a dimension of analysis not previously present within discussions on the body (Synnott & Howes, 1992). His findings, published in 1912, were based on his analysis of anthropometric data gathered between 1909 and 1910 of European-born immigrants and their offspring born in New York in a 15-year age range (Boas, 1912). His study supported the idea that not only is human growth influenced by environmental factors, but that it is also influenced by the gradual maturation of the human nervous system. The marrying of biology and the cultural aspects of childhood development meant that the "child's 'mental make-up' must also be affected by the social and geographical environment" (Boas, 1912:217-218 in Levine, 2007:249). Building on this influential body of work, his students Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Margret Mead among them, went on to establish what became known as the culture and personality turn in anthropology. It was then presumed that thinking through childhood from the earlier psychological framework revealed little explanation when accounting for children and childhoods around the world. The record on childhoods and children showed cracks and gaps in reflections that left western expressions of childhood and children ambiguous and threadbare (Levine, 2007).

Changing the assumptive narrative

Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) changed the tide of childhood studies when they drew attention to the fruition in 20th Century understandings that "childhood and children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own

3 Cranial plasticity refers to the idea that the cranium responds to environmental phenomena during growth and development, suggesting that it can be shaped primarily by environmental phenomena. It must be noted that an important study in 2002 by Sparks and Jantz, titled 'A reassessment of human cranial plasticity: Boas revisited' reconsiders and successfully critiques Boas' findings. Through a reassessment of the statistical and biological validity of data gathered by Boas, Sparks and Jantz use modern statistical and quantitative genetic frameworks to show that "very small and insignificant differences between European and American-born offspring and no effect of exposure to the American environment on the cranial index in [these] children" (Sparks & Jantz, 2002:14636) occurs, rendering Boas' findings and conclusions obsolete.

right, and not just in respect to their social constructions by adults" (1990:4). This critical turn invited scholars to view children as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and of the societies in which they live (1990). Indeed, the necessity to "avoid a rendition of children's lives reflected through their appropriation by adults" (Henderson, 2012:10) became paramount in understanding children and childhoods. Furthermore, an important call to recognise the agential role children play in configuring and conveying meaning to adults and adult worlds is explicit to the anthropological endeavor to account for children and their childhoods (Attard, 2008; Grugel & Ferreira, 2012). The ethnographic models forwarded by early anthropologists served to remove the insistence on universal experiences of children and childhoods (Rosen, 2007:297; Jung, 1972), accounting for the diversity of possibilities of understanding children and childhoods. The increased inclusion of the ethnographical account shifted the lens of analysis from explanations of childhood to descriptions of childhood, where the scope of reflections in the latter part of the 20th century focused essentially on kinship, religion, the family, and sociality. John Whiting's six culture study (SCS) of socialisation, published in 1954, "described the variability of child rearing within a community as well as its culturally distinctive ideals and practices" (Levine, 2007:253). It is asserted that "the most enduring ... contribution of the SCS may have been the introduction of systematic naturalistic observations of children – that is, repeated and aggregated observations of children in their routine 'behaviour settings' as a method for recording the interactions of children with their environments in diverse cultures" (Ibid.).

After the 1960s the ethnographic lens of childhood shifted to incorporate children's social relationships, social participation (Lockhart, 2008; Burman & Reynolds, 1986; Reynolds, 1989; Reynolds, 1995) and the role of language in shaping figurations of childhood (Das, 1989; Lancy, 2007). This direction added to the tendency to view children as something other than adults, somehow distinct, if not estranged from the adult world. The premise for studying children and childhood reflected a detached approach that bordered on a politics of 'othering'. This collection of student driven essays aims to represent children in less objectifying ways by revisiting the ideas that may describe what Levine identified as the core "...relationship between 'childhood' [and adulthood] as a social space" (Levine, 2007:270).

Imagine if you will, that life is a river and that the classified stages of maturation are more fluid than deterministic. The saying that you can never step in the same river twice – even as it retains the same name – is an apt metaphor to index the ephemeral transitions that attend our life course. While our skin sheds cells and gives life to new cells and as our muscles and bone tissue grow and change morphology, our understandings of the world are simultaneously shaped by experience. The child is arguably always within as a stranger or familiar or a familiar otherwise. Just as a river flows, chronological age does not always fit neatly with social expectations or cultural values. The stories in this volume amplify this existential discord with instances of shifting roles within the expected life stages in order to survive. The general tendency in social life globally is to reify life stages into clear categories of maturation and responsibility. This obstacle to acknowledging the messiness of these classifications in everyday contexts underpins a robust anthropology of children and childhoods that considers for instance, the rights of children as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in terms of three guiding principles of how we think about children and childhood. The convention articulates these principles as protection, provision and participation (Bardy, 2000). This 1989 document remains a “pivotal event, not only in the development of policies for children but also in terms of scholarship” (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007:241). The extent to which this UNCRC policy extends to the rights of children to determine their treatment in hospital contexts or in the context of their overall well-being in a world that preceded them is explored in this collection of essays. With our focus on children’s sense of vulnerability, strength, and capacity to make history we push forward ideas spearheaded in the 1990s that childhood and youth are complexly situated and that their invisibility in social science statistical records indicated the conceptual marginality that the discourse experienced. It was highlighted that childhood operated within a political economy framework, where class, gender, history and geography (amongst other life experience-shaping factors) were all contingent on the idea and the construction of childhood.

Implicit within the UNCRC document is the claim to universality that is, at the outset, problematic, and counterposes the already vast ethnographic material available within anthropology. Alison Dundes Renteln (1988), pointing to the epistemic problem that arises from such definitions, states that the philosophical groundings of assertions to universalities are never sufficiently explicated, which

undesirably makes for a rather dubious claim to universality. Similarly, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008) highlights the necessity of going beyond Eurocentric claims to universality asserting that Human Rights “are not universal in their application” (Santos, 2008:12). He argues that the only universalism that can be posited is the idea that all cultures are relative. No universalism of one culture over another is applicable because of the obvious presence of a multitude of ways in which the world is culturally understood. Despite this weakness, the UNCRCs three underlying principles – protection, provision, and participation – encourage a particular kind of sensitivity and awareness to include the perceptions of children. It is the third principle that we wish to draw attention to. This principle has been essential in stimulating research and policy agendas that include the perspective of children as agential members of society (Sartain, Clarke & Heyman, 2000). Anthropology’s long history of emic encounters along with the orientation toward multi-vocality, mixes agreeably with attempts to better describe and share the life worlds and perspectives of children and childhoods. It is important, however, to retain the knowledge of the structural reification within which children and childhood operate, and to keep in mind the idea that children do not experience the world without the influence of emotional, social and political densities (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007).

Figurations of childhood

The situating of childhood in western social science theory can be further understood using Jean Piaget’s model developed in the 1920s that asserted a linear trajectory along which children travel to an eventuality that is adulthood. In this reflection, children are viewed as being in a process of becoming. They are people who are not complete. They are people in the making as opposed to adults who are complete, whole and made. According to Sandra Burman and Pamela Reynolds (1986), the prevailing perception of children is that their opinions and perspectives are “unformed...their actions without consequences of importance until such time as they are old enough to take their place in the social machinery” (Burman & Reynolds, 1986:1). This idea is discussed in Castañeda’s groundbreaking book, *Figurations*. She asserts the prevailing perception that informs the ideology that children’s lives act as conduits to an eventuality that is adulthood. Castañeda points to the underlying assumptions that children are adults in the making, who must be equipped with the necessary skills in order to

navigate themselves through to adulthood. Furthermore, how a child gets treated will hugely affect the adult he or she will become (Castañeda, 2002). Castañeda argues that “embedded within these assumptions is a conceptualisation of the child as a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being: an entity in the making” (Ibid.:1). She goes on to state that there is an implicit message or fact that “a child is by definition not yet that which it alone has the capacity to become” (Ibid.).

Castañeda employs the notion of a figured body as a descriptive tool for accounting for the presence of the child in discourses. Figuration is used as a lens in which one can come to understand the processes “through which the child is brought into being as a figure, as well as the bodies and worlds that this figure generates through a plurality of forms” (Ibid.:4). Figuration is also used to highlight or bring into being different landscapes of meaning. There are multiple figurations and these all exist within differing sites of power and value. The increasing visibility of the multiplicity of life-worlds by default opens up deeper reflection on how children experience life and indeed how they participate in the making of that life. Certainly, there is a greater visibility of children around the world that stems from the attention to the effects of global economic and social movements on communities. These studies have generated awareness of the idea that “children are not only acted on by adults but [are] also agents of political change and cultural interpretation” (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007:242). Thus, as the basis of interrogation, the intention behind this research is to position the study of children and childhood not as a separate and ‘othered’ field, but rather it is viewed that this study could be useful to integrate the discourse on children and childhood into a more “multi-vocal, multi-perspective view of culture and society” (Ibid.).

No one site is the same as another, and each study on children and childhoods that is presented offers commentary or analysis that is location specific and occurs within a rubric of socio-political history and a loose frame of time. It is important that this insistence be maintained through the reading of this research. In extension to the idea of the necessity of incorporating the study of children and childhoods as a means to have a ‘multi-vocal’ and ‘multi-perspective’ reflection of life, Allison James (2007) articulates the problems in trying to ‘give voice’ to children. These are evidenced in three ways – claims to authenticity, the plurality of voices, and the nature of participation in the research process. Claiming authenticity negates

the fact that the presenter of 'the voice' has in no way contributed to the shaping of that 'voice'. Furthermore, claims to authenticity deny the presence of framing as indeed, every text is framed within a specific ideologue (Goffman, 1974; Lindholm, 2007). Additionally, there is a multi-presence of children's perspectives that cannot be clumped as giving one voice. The numerous ethnographies⁴ on children and childhood describe a variety of voices and perspectives that cannot claim to speak as one united voice on children and childhoods. One only needs to explore the rich data available on the Human Relations Area Files to know that variations on experience and expression exist. This kind of a database gives the world a comprehensive archive for ethnographic texts on children and childhoods.

David Lancy writes, "the ways in which modern, well-to-do Westerners view and treat their children is unique in the annals of culture. But because we invent the theories and write the textbooks, our views are taken as the norm" (Lancy, 2008:1). This is a cursory remark, not only because it highlights the bullish, normative agenda of who and what a child is, prescribed by the western canon but also for the unashamed bias of knowledge production that is so often unacknowledged. So, it is no surprise then that when we currently think of young people, children and childhoods in Africa, we think of their childhoods as deviations from the ideal childhood. Overwhelmingly the image is of them as lambs to the slaughter, herded off by massive over-determining violent structures (Morrison, 2012). From the scope of texts about Africa's children, they figure overwhelmingly as child soldiers, HIV/AIDS orphans, and sex-slaves, buckling under the weight of extreme poverty, gendered inequities and political subterfuge. To challenge this idea of African childhoods, it is important to create alternatives to reading childhoods. Essentially the turning point comes through a critical saturation of the deviant image of childhoods in Africa with a heterogeneous display of experiences that are not necessarily only about war, HIV/AIDS and instability. The contributions in this book work toward that goal.

Book chapters

This book is organized as an assemblage of academic texts, poems, and other types of creative pieces. The more traditional academic texts are presented as Chapters (Chapters 1-8). Chapter 1 to 4 critically attend to ongoing theoretical

4 See Henderson (2011) for a more situated discussion on children's creative expression as a theoretical potential for the development of multi-modal pedagogies and epistemes.

debates in the anthropology of children and childhood studies. These chapters problematise representations of children drawing attention to the parochial ways that threaten to derail meaningful discussions on the variability of childhood expressions. Chapters 5 and 6 situate health and well-being as an entry point to consider structures of care and how these structures operate to shape children's perceptions of illness and wellness. Chapter 7 moves the discussion onto a more ontological plane, recasting the discursive mood to incorporate youth. The final ethnographic chapter directs our attention to radical shifts in anthropological understandings of childhood development by pointing to the social forces that impact on maternal and embryonic crisis. Braided into these chapters are two artworks (Plates 1 and 2) and two poems (Poems 1 and 2). The final contribution is presented as a short story. This creative arrangement reflects our desire to distribute the caches of how childhoods are imagined and expressed, and how children describe their worlds. It is through the multiplicity of renditions of childhoods that we gain ground on reflecting the complexity of being a child and indeed, listening attentively to what children say.

Anthropology's occupation with children's renderings of well-being in our precarious world adds a critical layer to a largely adult centered discipline. Especially in the sub-discipline of Medical Anthropology and the Health Humanities, emic perspectives of childhood illness are limited at best. This volume addresses children's agential capacity in relation to unfolding and complex sites of child and youth affliction even as we also lift out the methodological limits of such a project. The book's structure navigates a route that considers how children make sense of illness, health and well-being in constantly shifting socioeconomic and cultural landscapes.

We open the book with Ali Aschman's artwork titled, 'The collapsing dark'. This piece invites us to tear back the permeable membranes that are characteristic of the myriad assemblages of self. Aschman is a London-based visual artist and animator from South Africa and the United States whose work explores the ephemeral fragmenting self, daring to look into the lesser trodden paths of identity. This kind of a provocation fits well into the broader construct of the mercurial aspects of childhood that we explore within this volume.

Aschman's work is followed by Rosemary Blake's precise ethnographic observations on the method of documenting how children receive and perceive care in an oncology ward. Her discussion of everyday disruptions in the ward and the

affective dimensions of children's embodied experiences of cancer offer a critical account of how illness is wrapped up with family, morphological anxieties, and hope. Her use of embodiment enables a layered unpacking of how children made sense of their diagnosis and prognosis as a series of 'penetrations' imbricated within their lives. Her contribution also examines theoretical work on pain and the complexity of touch in providing care for those who are in pain. Blake's chapter positions our collective theoretical and artistic renderings of children's agency and the political, economic, and diagnostic realities that curb them. Following on the heels of our introduction, Blake's chapter also deepens our awareness of the positionality of children and childhood studies within the broader field of anthropology and medical anthropology.

In chapter 2, Efua Prah explores the construction of home in what was initially established as a temporary residential camp in the wake of mass unrest at the height of xenophobic violence and the expulsion of immigrants from more established townships in the Western Cape. Looking back to 2008 from the vantage point of 2021 it is clear that Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area (TRA) was never really intended as a gateway to more permanent housing but has remained a place deeply wounded by false promises of transformation. How children in this abject zone negotiated safety and fostered a sense of belonging within proximal violence is the focus of this chapter. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," the chapter aims to reveal the ways in which young people come to make home in such precarious zones. Prah considers the effects of internal displacement among children and the violence that accompanies being forced to constantly be on the move. This movement creates a cacophonous symphony of violence filled with ruptures and discord in the shaping of sociocultural identity. Children's reflections and creative modes of storytelling lie at the heart of this chapter offering readers some insight into their varied perceptions of belonging.

In contrast, Chapter 3 disrupts the idea that the home offers a refuge from toxic environments. Quite to the contrary, it brings into sharp focus the issue of toxic harms that transgress the borders between indoor and outdoor spaces. Set in precarious zones similar to Symphony Way, authors Susan Levine, Hanna-Andrea Rother and Alison Swartz shed light on instances of childhood poisonings in Cape Town. It documents the circulation of agricultural pesticides into the hands of 'street sellers' who repurpose them for the illegal use as poison that kills rats, mice, cockroaches and other unwanted pests. Called 'street pesticides' by the authors,

this chapter considers how caregivers protect their children from the harmful consequences of rodent bites and exposure to household pests by deploying the strongest means to combat rodents. It offers a model of toxic layering that indexes political, environmental and historical modes of structural violence through the lens of permeable and unstable housing infrastructures. The children in this chapter at the time of research were incapacitated and literally unable to speak during poisoning episodes and so the chapter is told by their mothers who expose the bitter realities of laying waste in a wasteland of economic inequality.

Katlego Tlabela's artwork titled *The Kids Wear Crowns Over Here* (Plate 2.) interrupts the academic narrative. Tlabela is a young South African artist who is passionate about creating work that connects to a broad audience. Prah had the pleasure of meeting Tlabela in 2011 when she started a creative arts project for children called Creative Education. Tlabela was interested in using art as a channel for communication with young people. His contribution here builds on the preceding chapters' effort to critically shift our understandings of what value we place on childhoods. His artwork pushes us to reconsider our collective assumption about the value of children and shows us the habituated symbolic patterning of childhood that society continues to replicate from generation to generation. His reference to his childhood as "Disney-like" is in stark contrast to the preceding chapters that locate South African childhoods in sites of poverty. For Tlabela, his childhood was a site of gaiety and safety. What is clear from being in conversation with Tlabela, is that although often-documented narratives about childhoods in South Africa paint a picture of violence, illness and lack, there are other variations of childhood that puncture that kind of a narrative. Furthermore, we cannot only read childhoods in South Africa, particularly black childhoods as ones that are beset with socioeconomic structural inequalities that create both social and financial precarity. Therefore, his contribution acts as a fulcrum to challenge stereotypes that assume a singular narrative that black childhoods are ones lived-out in poverty.

Chapter 4 offers a departure from South African case studies and brings us to Swaziland. Author Naomi Marshak speaks of the fissures in the 'rehabilitation' of orphaned children in Swaziland. Marshak, now an expert yoga instructor who opted to leave academic life but who left a lasting imprint of her brilliant time as a young anthropologist, details the lives of care-givers working in the context of HIV/AIDS at an orphanage in an abandoned asbestos mining town in Northern

Swaziland. Her focus on the religious underpinnings of this American funded orphanage reveals the extent to which childhoods can be made through an ideology of following 'God's way'. Marshak's chapter provides a searing account of international development work that plays itself out through modern forms of missionary work.

Poem 1 brings into focus structures that tend to universalize representations of childhood. Poet and anthropologist Katleho Shoro's poem explores the uneven nature of childhood experience in South Africa. Trained initially as an anthropologist she is comfortable with word stanzas that point to the plurality of experience that often contradicts normative frameworks that index childhoods as easy, happy, and abundant with the space and time to dream. Images of children 'running', performing 'cartwheels' and playing with 'balloons' are deconstructed and exposed as colonial ideals that are undermined as much by race as they are by class. This marks an important contribution into the complex ways in which claims to universality of what childhood is and who children are, paintbrush over the potential for an understanding of childhoods and children to reflect the necessary dynamism.

Chapter 5 considers figurations of pediatric patients. Kate Abney signals the gaps in medical care that are reproduced through an ideological construction of patient care. Her argument commits itself to the reading of children's experiences of living with Tuberculosis (TB) through a rigorous examination of children's life worlds in a TB hospital in Cape Town. Abney argues that children's knowledge and awareness of health and well-being is fueled by visceral experiences, notably indexed as *embodiment*. Her work documents the experience of how children cope under the convergence of a multitude of socioeconomic challenges. Like Marshak, Abney shines a light on the ways in which care for children is administered in sites of official healthcare provision.

Toni Stuart summons death, change and letting go in her poems, 'The Funeral' and 'Spiegel Im Spiegel'. The poem excavates turbulent and unspoken emotions that attend the death of a child. It handles silence and resignation as a necessary pathway of acceptance and offers hope as a salve to the passage of death. A well-established young South African poet, Stuart is a performer and spoken word educator. Her body of work ushers in a deep inner-reflective mirror that showcases lived experience as a powerful tool to shape the production of knowledge. Her

contribution is a painful reminder of young people's and children's experiences of loss. Firstly (in her first poem, 'The Funeral') as a young girl of four and secondly (in her second poem, 'Spiegel Im Spiegel') as a young woman journeying through the death of her mother and the generational patterning of loss, fear and mourning. It at once casts a dual identity of being both adult and child, where the grief is expressed in relation to being a child of a recently 'passed' mother and also as a young adult coming to terms with the silences between generations and the stories their silences leave behind.

Alicia Ernstzen's research in chapter 6 is situated at a large hospital complex in the Western Cape. Her focus on the conditions under which it is possible to neglect the needs and responses of children undergoing medical treatment is tackled with a sensitive ethnographic eye. Her work echoes past contributions to the field of medical anthropology that have critically engaged with how care is administered and received. Importantly, Ernstzen offers insight into how care is experienced by children. To this end she dwells on children's dreams of death and the afterlife in the face of imminent mortality.

Chapter 7 is set in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa where Stephen Pentz conducted research on the relationship between spirit possession, modernity and masculinity in the context of healing and well-being. This chapter invites us to consider young people and their engagement with cultural practices in the context of health awareness. In pursuit of health and well-being, the prickliness of the 'tradition versus modernity' debate is a central discussion point as young boys learn and redefine themselves in response to a seemingly fragile landscape of social and economic inequity.

The final ethnographic chapter by Mutsawashe Mutendi considers the gestational life of the fetus as an early framing of childhood. Building on a new international interest in the first thousand days of a child's life as formative if not predictive, the chapter considers the complex political economic realities and multiple forms of vulnerabilities faced by female miners pertaining to their experiences of pregnancy. The chapter marks a critical moment in our discipline's history, one that brings into conversation, epigenetics and the structures of power that stitch lived childhood experience to social worlds.

The last contribution is from Nana Yaa Asante-Darko who brings us to the northern regions of rural Ghana where we learn about the experiences of a young girl as she grapples with multiple expectations and duties associated with being the youngest girl child in an impoverished Ghanaian home. Whilst Pentz's chapter challenges notions of boyhood and masculinity, Asante-Darko lyrically exposes the pin-hole futures of girlhood and femininity. This fictional narrative offers a window into heteronormative gender roles, gender inequality and childhood marriage in Ghana.

Apart from Susan Levine and Hanna-Andrea Rother's contribution (Chapter 3), the works offered are from young scholars and artists. The academic chapters and artistic interruption explore the multiple meanings and penetrations that children live through and seek to understand. Each shows the slippages in descriptions and categories of children and the adults who look back and inward. The stories reflect a fluidity of identifications and responsibilities that crisscross through notions of what it is to be a child, youth or adult in different settings. Findings presented here speak directly to the multiple figurations present in the everyday, as children living in differing settings forge identities, negotiate health and illness and determine their sense of space and place. As a work primarily drawn from the fields of medical anthropology, the health humanities and the arts, this book also offers a considered set of commentaries on the socio-political and economic realities of the vast majority of South Africans, Ghanaians and Swazi people. The children who were part of these works provide commentary on our social world.

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PLATE 1

THE COLLAPSING DARK

Ali Aschman