Being in fosterage

An exploration of the experiences of Ghanaian children and youth

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Thesis submitted to the

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UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Spring 2009

Abstract

This thesis is based on a six month fieldwork in Accra, Ghana. It explores the diverse experiences of children and youth in fosterage in Ghana. I have looked into the place of fostered children within family networks. And analysed how they move within and between family networks, and maintain and create family relations and bonds of relatedness.

I explore the position of fostered children within intergenerational contracts, and argue that their position and their welfare and experience of being in fosterage is significantly influenced by their relation to the foster-parents, and the relationships between the adults within the family network. I show how the position in negotiations with seniors is also determined by the age, gender and socio-economic status of the fostered child.

With empirical examples I show how the factors of age, gender and socio-economic status, and the place of the fostered children and youth within the family network all affects to what extent the fostered have possibilities to impact on their own and others life. The analysis of the children's agency is based on the concept of navigation, where the focus is on the children and youth's choices and actions within a changing environment where they continuously consider their short term and long term needs as well as dreams. The concept of 'thin' and 'thick' agency is used to acknowledge the agency of this navigation, but also to take into consideration the cultural as well as economic aspects that limit the agency of children and youth in Ghana.

Acknowledgement

Preface

Long ago there lived a King who had a son and a nephew. He loved his son so much that he was prepared to do everything for him since he was very rich. [...] The boy did not do any work in the house; there were servants who gave him food, washed his clothes and ironed them and they gave him whatever he needed.

As for the nephew, the King made him do all kinds of chores and treated him like a slave. He got up at five o'clock in the morning while the King's son got up about eight o'clock. Having done all the work in the house the nephew was sent to the farm to go and weed. He would clear the bush and cut down the trees and prepare the land for the planting of various crops. During the harvest, he would go alone and work from morning till evening and bring back plenty of food for the whole family to eat. Yet with good cheer. He was happy and did every piece of work with enthusiasm. So he grew into a tall and strong young man and very handsome indeed. Everybody in town admired him as a respectable and respectful gentleman. He was obedient and hardworking and fatigue did not seem to tell on him.

However his cousin, the King's son was a great contrast to him. [...] This boy grew into a very lazy man unable to use his hands at anything.

A few years later the King died and [his] son had to leave the palace to go into the world to try and fend for himself. Soon, he found the world staring bleakly at him; he had nothing to do. He could not till the land because he had never held a cutlass for anything, nor had he knowledge of any craft. He could do nothing for a living and became a pulpy mass of misery and gloom. As for his cousin he had become very rich. [...]

So while the King's son was roaming about very hungry but unable to go and beg for food or to go and steal, he thought of going

to see his rich cousin in case he could give him food to eat and give him a place to sleep. He had become lean and emaciated by hunger and illness. Fortunately for him, his cousin welcomed him cordially into his house and accepted to live with him. The King's son was […] ashamed […]. He was sorry that while he remained in the palace and ate good food, his cousin worked on the farm, working all day and scarcely eating anything. He asked his cousin to forget whatever hard treatment his father gave him and take him into his house, for he was prepared to learn to do any menial job and even work on the farm.

But the King's nephew asked his cousin also to forget about those days. He comforted his cousin by saying that he bore neither his uncle nor him any grudge. For it was as a result of the hard work he did that he had attained his present position. […]. The King's son never stopped blaming his father for the way he brought him up. It was he who had made him poor, unhappy and miserable by indulging him while he was young.

(Appiah 1997:76-79)

Contents

1. Introduction: Fosterage in Ghana

The story retold in the preface depicts some commonly held assumptions about, and attitudes towards fosterage and fostering of children in Ghana. And it shows how children and youth in fosterage have both advantages and disadvantages when compared with children living with the parents who bore and begot them. This thesis is concerned with how *being in fosterage* was experienced by people in a multi-ethnic, urban setting in Ghana. Research was carried out between January and July 2008 in suburbs of Accra; mainly Haatso and Atomic, but also Legon and Korle Gonno. Accra is the capital of Ghana and had in 2000 an estimated 1, 8 million inhabitants while the region of Greater Accra was estimated to have 2, 6 million (International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI] 2000:4).

Fosterage is the "institutionalised delegation of the nurturance and/or educational elements of the parental role (Goody (1982:23)". These delegations of parental roles can also be seen as shared parenthood (cf. Fonseca 2003). Sharing of parenthood in Ghana had similarities to Brazil as in both places there were "always a number of people who may be ready to share child-raising responsibilities" (Fonseca 2003:117). Fosterage was mostly, but not always, practiced within family networks. Thus perceptions of family as well as practices of relatedness by fostered children and youth are central analytical perspectives. Relatedness in this context are the strong bonds that are made and maintained between people that often but not always consider each other to be family (cf. Carsten 2000).

In Ghana, as many as 29.4 percent of children between 10 and 14 live away from their mother (Whitehead et al. 2005:7). There are several explanations to the practice of fosterage in West-Africa, many are functional and specific to the society where they are practiced, but none account for the widespread institutionalisation of

fosterage in the region as a whole (Goody 1982:179-180). An economic interpretation of the widespread existence of fosterage, as well as the widespread existence of patrimonialism, has been that in Africa access to people has been more important than access to land which has been in abundance. For people of means it was necessary to continually extend their social network in order to have access to labour (cf. Robertson 1984: 12, Akyeampong & Obeng 2005: 29). A social, economic and material environment, such as that of a city in a developing country, which changes rapidly, will demand flexibility and adaptability of the people residing there. There is little help to get from the state in challenging situations that are often financially rooted, and people rather rely on social networks that they have created over time. Fosterage practices are a part of flexible and adaptable family relations that are not a result of challenges met in the cities, but well suited to handle some of these challenges. Children, youth and adults have extended social networks that they ideally are supposed to be able to rely on when challenging changes occur.

In addition to functional explanations newer anthropology increasingly acknowledge intrinsic values of peoples actions, and the social and cultural aspects of fosterage have been emphasised (Piot 1999, Bowie 2004).This does not undermine the importance of having children in societies where wealth is not only measured in things, but also in people (cf. Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:4).

I have not aimed to write a generalised thesis about why fosterage is practised or what the practices mean to these children and youth in general. My main focus will rather be the variations of how fosterage is practised from the perspective of those who were or had been in fosterage. By presenting individual experiences, disagreements and recollections, thus stressing the particularities in each case it is possible to show how cultural norms and ideals are *lived* (cf. Abu-Lughod 1993:13-14).

Dreams and plans for changes towards a more stable and financially secure future was a recurring subject among youth in Ghana. The special position of some youth in fosterage was that they were on various stages of the journey that might make these dreams and hopes happen. What I will describe throughout the thesis will show that practices of fosterage were by some youth in fosterage seen to enable their socio-economic mobility. This does not suggest that fosterage was always perceived of in positive terms. But for some this was their *only* possible hope of change.

In this context both migration and education will be of interest. Several of the youth in fosterage had migrated to their currant household, or had parents that had migrated nationally, regionally or internationally. Education was constantly presented as the surest and safest way to gain upward socio-economic mobility, and access to both social and formal education was a common reason behind fosterage. From literature on fosterage in the region of West-Africa there seems to have been changes in both views and practices of fosterage over time (Goody 1982; Alber 2004b). These changes are a result of internal changes as well as international influence. International conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[1] have been implemented into the national laws, the churches preached what was seen as European family values, and migrants brought new ideals and norms back to Ghana. In Benin practices of fosterage are viewed in as increasingly negative light because of influence of European family images, where the child is seen to belong to the biological parents (Alber 2004b:37). This family image was disseminated by missionaries and the churches during the colonial period and is written in the countries laws, and the younger generations are increasingly positive to this family ideal (Alber 2004b:37). Throughout the thesis I will discuss changes in attitudes towards practices of fosterage among Ghanaians. It seems as though the practices were viewed more negatively as a result of an increased focus on the benefits of the nuclear-family[2].

Still, fosterage was a common practice and a viable choice when parents and significant others were acting to ensure what they saw as the best interest of a child, the family-network and the larger society. But the reasons for children to be in fosterage seem to have changed.

While fosterage has not originated as a result of poverty[3], it is a matter of raising children in a best possible manner, towards adulthood, in relation to the resources being available. From Goody's (1982) accounts children were often in fosterage to learn a profession, which could not be taught by the biological parents. What I observed was that children and youth were often in fosterage to gain formal

[1] UNCRC was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in 1989, and is legally binding for ratifying states (Stephens 1995: 35).
[2] A nuclear family is here to be understood as a unit of biological parents and their children living in a household, and comprising a relatively independent unit (Bowie 2004:7-8).
[3] I use the term poor and poverty when the economic standing of informants made it difficult for them to afford nutritious food on a daily basis, healthcare and education.

education as a step in the direction of becoming a (economically) self sufficient adult. Thus the aim of fosterage might not have changed much, but some of the forms of the practice have changed. Thus economic, cultural or social capital, has always been, and still is at the core of practices of fosterage.

What emerges as interesting then is how economic, cultural and social capital is given, and received, and what obligations and rights this gives to the fostered children in relation to significant others, i.e. practices of reciprocity. When children are in fosterage there are often no recognised biological bond between the children and the adults who are providers of daily care. Therefore, no bonds perceived of as natural or biological will give a sense of relatedness. And the relationship is mostly recognised as social. Therefore, unless the reciprocal relationship is honoured by several of the involved parts, the entire substance of the relationship can disappear.

Reciprocity has been central in several studies of fosterage. Mostly it has been in relation to how the giving and receiving of children establish or strengthen social relations between foster-parents and biological parents as well as their extended family networks. In this way literature on fosterage and adoption has mainly been concerned with the views of, and relationships between, adults (cf. Notermans 2004 b; Alber 2004a, 2004b; Lallemand 1993). This analytical perspective is valuable but gives little understanding of how practices of fosterage impacts on and is perceived by children and youth who are fostered.

By not giving children and youth a voice, their agency and their agendas are largely unknown. On the other hand we have literature that focuses on children and youth in poor countries, and especially in relation to work and migration, where attention is paid to the forms of agency that children and youth might have (cf. Nieuwenhuys 1994; Reynolds 1991; Hashim 2004; Iversen 2002).

I will draw on both of these directions in anthropology. The analytical focus here is on fostered children and youth as *givers* and *receivers* in social relations with significant and insignificant others within family networks. By keeping the analytical focus on the fostered it becomes clear how they have their own expectations when they are fostered. They have their own agenda and act on that according to cultural understandings of gender and age, and also economic possibilities.

Fostered children and youth have social relations both with their foster-family and their biological family, and these relations as all other social relations are made and maintained through acts of reciprocity, and potentially break down when one or several of the actors do not meet their obligations of giving and receiving care, money or recognition (cf. Mauss 1954). The negotiations the youth engage in within these social networks will be discussed as part of 'intergenerational contracts' as defined by Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen (2005:3,14,32). The concept of intergenerational contract draws attention to the interdependencies between generations, and what each person owes and can expect from members of the family network:

> *It is less the idea of a fixed and binding set of exchanges that we try to emphasise than the many different kinds of interaction and values and processes which affect the everyday relations between parents and children over short and medium term. Using this term avoids assuming that the child is by definition a dependent and instead emphasises that both child and parent have agency, objectivities and interests (Whitehead et al. 2005:3).*

These negotiations are neither random nor rationally chosen but are based on norms and customs that have existed over time and is a part of the wider society (Whitehead et al. 2005:12):

> *These 'contracts', thus, are more implicit than explicit, and refer more to associations and co-operations between individuals that are flexible and negotiable (Whitehead et al. 2005:12).*

By using 'intergenerational contract' I will analyse how children relate to their biological parents, foster-parents and other members of their family network, and how this is a site of potential conflict where both dependence, interdependence and independence co-exists (cf. Whitehead et al. 2005:38).

Family networks, reciprocity and economy

The family networks wherein children and youth are in fosterage are largely built up around a core of people that see each other as biologically related. But as I will come back to, this is not what keeps the family networks together. The essence of these networks is rather commonality and relatedness through reciprocity and common belonging over time. The reciprocal relations have both social and material aspects which are interwoven and tend to be mutually enforcing. Children and youth in fosterage are not only used by adults, but also act themselves, to create and maintain these family networks (cf. DeBoeck 2005:209). Through focusing solely on the relationship between the adults and viewing the child as a gift, Mauss recognised the integrational properties of fosterage. Mauss (1954:12) writes that in Melanesia the fostered child is a gift from the biological parents to the family of the foster-parents, and that through the lifetime of the child, gifts will be given to the biological parents of the child from the foster-parents. The sacrifice of the biological parents of giving up their child facilitates a system of property exchange (Mauss 1954:12).

How bonds of reciprocity and fosterage were practiced among informants varied, but the general feature was that practices of fosterage often, but not always, strengthened and/or expanded family networks which individuals could rely on for a diverse range of support. Seemingly regardless of economic background, family networks functioned as a base for maintaining and enhancing individual's socio-economic status.

Literature on fosterage from West-Africa accounts for a widespread practice with little stigma related to it. Goody (1982) claims children in fosterage can even have an advantage over children growing up with their biological parents. This is related to local notions that the biological parents are not necessarily the best fosterers for their children (Goody 1982). As is clearly depicted in the story of the king and his son (preface) biological parents are thought to be inclined to spoil their children, and as a result be in their children's way of success by not teaching them how to struggle (cf. Bledsoe 1990). During the fieldwork it was often emphasised by people how being in fosterage provide children and youth with opportunities to learn how to work hard for what they want to achieve. At the core of the positive attitudes towards

fosterage is the important role of an extended family network to be able to accumulate social, cultural and economic capital in order to generate socio-economic mobility.

The way fosterage of children was practiced was not an act of rupture where one set of fosterers was substituted with another, but rather an overlapping practice where the fosterers complemented each other. Fosterage, unlike adoption, does not change the jural status of children, nor their jural rights and obligations. In this manner fosterage is about the process of rearing (Goody 1982: 23, 30-31). Children are not seen as the sole responsibility of the biological parents, and advice, care and sponsoring is given from several significant others (Goody 179-180), i.e. the parenthood is shared.

Though children were not the sole responsibility of their biological parents, *children were expected to be the first priority of their biological parents and especially their mother*. Thus the biological parents were expected to care about their children, something that was done in numerous ways and could defy spatial distances and economic difficulties. I experienced that attitudes towards practices of fosterage were many and often ambivalent. Practices of fosterage were *not* seen as neglect, but were often coupled with troubles in Ghanaian society. These troubles were frequently connected to poverty, but also included what some termed social decay, where neglect of both the young and the elderly were seen as growing problems both by the elders and the young. Discussing with informants what was seen as acceptable and non-acceptable reasons for leaving children in fosterage the variations of norms regarding the practice became apparent. While some saw fosterage as beneficial to children, others saw it as a last resort for families faced with challenging situations.

Within social networks the care given from biological parents and foster-parents as well as various significant others are expected to be reciprocated both continuously through various work for the fosterer, and in a long term perspective including care in old age and/or public acknowledgement of the fosterer.

Adu, a middle-aged man in charge of an orphanage I visited told me that he treated all the children there as if they were his own children. As he did not know what they would become when they grew up, he hoped that they would remember him if they had success in their lives. This shows how reciprocity is significant for the everyday practises of fosterage, and the stakes invested into the intergenerational contract. If any of the children at this orphanage do have success in their lives Adu

will expect them to give something back to him for the time and effort he spent on them, either material or in form of praise and public recognition of his efforts. The intergenerational contract is also an arena of conflict, and some of the youth at the orphanage proved this. They said they felt Adu went too far in securing their reciprocal relationship. They claimed that he did not want them to keep in touch with their family. And they thought this was to prevent them from having stronger bonds with that family, than with Adu. They said Adu feared they would rather honour their family, and share their hypothetical wealth with the family rather than him.

Public recognition enhances the reputation of the fosterer, i.e. the person's social capital. This social capital has intrinsic value in the form of honour, but can also be transformed into economic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1977:179). The reciprocal relations seemed to be strongly enforced, mostly by talking explicitly about what one has given to others, and through continuous complaining when returning of care or money was delayed. Thus the strict form of reciprocity that Mauss (1954) writes about applies well to the reciprocal relationships involved in practices of fosterage. All gifts are expected to be reciprocated, and in relations of reciprocity there is a felt obligation to give, receive, and give back (Mauss 1954:4-5,11-12,16-17). To be in a network and refuse to give, accept, or give back is the same as rejecting network bonds (Mauss 1954:17). All gifts are expected to be returned even when they are given as alms, or thought of as a pure sacrifice (Mauss 1954:4,22-23).

It should also be kept in mind that some of these social/family networks had evident aspects of patrimonialism which can be defined as:

> *A system of resource distribution that ties recipients or clients to the strategic goals of benefactors or patrons. In the distribution of 'patrimony' or public resources, both patrons and clients attach more importance to personal loyalties than to the bureaucratic rules that should otherwise govern the allocation of such resources (Bangura in Vigh 2006:48).*

There were cases where family networks were interwoven over time, and where one family network, or one part of the family network was dependent on the other for education as well as employment. This is where the relationship, mostly talked about as family relations, and in terms of love, and care also could be

categorised as patron-client relationships. Those with the material, cultural and social resources, as well as those lacking in these resources, are trying to maintain their socio- economic position or striving toward a socio-economic growth by keeping or increasing these interconvertable resources (cf. Bourdieu 1977:175-76).

What I have been able to extract from narratives of youth and young adults is that children coming from a poor socio-economic background saw fosterage as an opportunity to be able to attend school. Other ways poor people could afford the cost of education was for the children to migrate independently[4] for work during school holidays. I will add here that fosterage or migration and work were seen to not only have material benefits, but the experiences were seen to give children and youth valuable social and cultural capital (Thorsen 2004; Whitehead et al. 2005 & Howard 2008).

Being children and youth

There is in anthropology an emerging literature on the views and visions of youth (cf. Honwana and DeBoeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006; Howard 2008). But considering that children and youth constitute the majority of people in Africa they are *still* understudied as a group (Honwana and DeBoeck 2005:xi,1). But how can anyone define this diverse group that constitutes more than half of the African population? The UN defines a child as any human being under the age of 18 (Stephens 1995:336), and the predominant view of children and youth in international law is that they are pre-social, innocent, vulnerable, immature and dependent (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:3). This understanding of children is based on recent Euro-American middle-class notions of what children and childhood is supposed to be (cf. Ariés 1962).

Childhood and youth is a cultural construct imbedded with local notions of power, knowledge, rights, obligations and personal agency (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:4) that needs to be acknowledged by anyone studying this heterogeneous group.

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[4] 'Iindependent child migrants' is a term used for children under the age of 18, who migrate without their families (Howard 2008:6).

This makes a universal definition of childhood and youth based solely on biological age problematic. Honwana (2005:35) writes that both childhood and youth are socially understood, that the categories are not set permanently, but are changeable, and do vary from one setting to another as well as from one society to the other.

In Ghanaian perceptions of children they are seen as a source of joy for the family, the village, the neighbourhood and friends. Fortes (1970:204) describe how among the Tallensi of northern Ghana "the social sphere of adult and child is unitary and undivided". What I observed was that children were from a young age expected to participate in the daily activities of the household. Children and adults shared in many ways the same social spaces. This is different from America and Europe where "children typically inhabit different social spaces from those populated by adults" (Gottlieb 2004:5). The children were not "protected" from any aspects of life, they knew about challenges the family faced, and were both expected to and ready to contribute according to their age, gender and economic ability. An example of this is Ahusia's four year old son who told his uncle how his mother had struggled to be able to pay his school fees, but that she now had a plan, and that it would work out just fine.

Societies in Africa have commonly been described as gerontocratic (cf. Clark1994, Miescher 2005, 2007, Ebron 2007). In a critique of her former work, Alma Gottlieb does not contest the significance of age in social organisation in African societies, but emphasises the respect given by elders to children and friendships that occur across generations (Gottlieb 2004:10). A valuable lesson from her critique is to pay attention to negotiations of what is seen as age and gender appropriate behaviour, and recognise the intercultural variations:

> *Being a child, adolescent or youth is, […]about creating, negotiating and renegotiating identities with adults in general, and with parents and or guardians in particular, as well as with other children, adolescents and youth (Thorsen 2006:94).*

If a child is any individual under 18, youth can be both children and adults. In placing a set of informants in the category of youth I do so based on the position the individuals have in their society. Takiywaa, 16, and Efia, 18, the two girls in fosterage

in the household I lived during most of my fieldwork, both described themselves as children, youth and women depending on the context. The younger youth are often seen as children, and describe themselves as children, while older youth commonly fall under the category of adults. In this way youth are transcending the boundaries set between adults and children (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:4) as they are locally understood.

I did observe and was told about relations between adults and children that could be described as close, warm and trusting. This seemed to be most common for young children (up until the age of seven to nine), or in the relationship between mothers and their children or grandmothers and grandchildren. But the main impression I had was that the extent to which children and youth were expected to obey and respect (and even fear) their seniors created a form of distance between many young people and their seniors especially their father. What Whitehead et al. (2005:34-35) found in their material on independent child migrants in Africa and South-Asia was that the age hierarchies to a large extent constrain children and youth's access to key resources which are material and social and include information and knowledge. This is further supported by Honwana & DeBoeck (2005:1) who writes that a commonality of youth in Africa is that they are generally an underprivileged group in the society, lacking both in economic and political power.

Becoming women and men

From early childhood people are taught how to become women and men. One of the roles of parents as well as other members of the family, and household is to "produce particular sorts of persons with specific attributes in ways that are congruent with socially established patterns of power" (Moore 1994:93). In Ghana the roles of men and women are clearly distinct, and so are also their access to resources and socio-economic mobility (Whitehead 1984).

As I wrote above, children are included in the social space of adults, and boys and girls are expected to participate and contribute in the daily work of the household, in accordance with gender appropriate behaviour. Young girls were expected to look after children younger than themselves, they all attended school but were often asked

to help with cooking and cleaning, too. Boys were also expected to participate in ways that contributed either practically or financially to the household, but had fewer chores and spent more time playing with friends. This I interpret to be directly related to common norms across Africa that the house is the responsibility of women (cf. Goody 1977, 1982; Clark 1994; Hansen 1997; Talle 2005; Miescher 2005). Goody (1982) writes that boys are expected to help their fathers on their farms. In Accra, however, there is little farm work to be done. Sons of fishermen used to work with their fathers from a young age, but this type of work is now illegal for children.

Once I sat next to a boy on the bus. He could have been seven years old, and he travelled alone with his sister who seemed to be about one year old. I noticed this because it was unusual. Seeing girls looking after younger children in the bus or at the market was common. This supports the understanding that in Ghana the roles ascribed women and men leave most domestic work to women and girls. But boys as well as men perform domestic work, including taking care of their younger siblings or their children. The largest difference is that it was rarely required of them. Another household responsibility men engaged in, was cooking. The Ghanaian men I know can cook. Thus, boys and men often have the skills to prepare meals and look after children, but will mostly do this if there are no women or girls present.

Goody (1982:64) conducted fieldwork among rural people in northern Ghana, and writes that girls have limited freedom to move around outside the compound which leads to the girls often having one or two close friends which normally are the ones they live and work with. Boys, on the other hand, are free to roam about and often do so in groups of peers (Goody 1982: 64). Also in Accra the girls had less free time than the boys. This was often due to the work they had to perform in the household, but it can also suggest a wish from adults' side to control the mobility of girls. Girls working outside the home could have great freedom of movement, but the sheer amount of work left them with even less free time than their peers doing "only" domestic work.

The different roles of women and men that were reproduced within the family-network and households were understood by many Ghanaians as based on biological differences between the genders. This is not particular to Ghana, but is widespread also in the rest of the world.

As part of a feminist approach to gender where different expectations, behaviour and status between women and men are questioned, some anthropologist divided the understanding between the biological 'sex', and the social 'gender'. Gender was thus seen to be interpretations of the biological/natural 'sex' (cf. Rosaldo 1980; Moore 1988). Judith Butler (1999:11) argues that it is *within* discourses on the social gender that we have created what is seen as "a natural sex". By this she means that what we see as biology, how we understand it, and use it, is social and not pre-society and natural (Butler 1999:11).

What Butler leads us to do is to take into consideration the power imbedded in a discourse that not only can make sex pre-discursive/natural, but also conceal the fact that this is a discursive production (cf. Butler 1999:11).

It is with gender as with relatedness that it is not biology, but the idea of the biological, natural and pre-discursive that has major significance in how social relations are understood (cf. Edwards & Strathern 2000).

Issues of what was "natural", either in the context of "natural parents" or "natural behaviour" occurred in several conversations. Men would make statements such as "Men are naturally better at reasoning than women" or "It comes more natural for a woman to cook than it does for a man". But despite being presented as natural the attitudes were negotiated. Discussing gender roles with Kofi and John, I told them that I disagreed with them. I continued and said that it really did not come natural for me to cook. Both men were quiet for a few seconds while I looked from the one to the other. John then said that I was different because European women *were not raised the same way* as Ghanaian women. John illustrated Butler's point clearly: Nature as we understand it is a part of discourse, what nature is and what it does is continuously negotiated. It is not always as clearly done as by John, but as Butler claims, it is nevertheless part of discourse and negotiated. What a Ghanaian man defined as "natural" for Ghanaian women, he did not necessarily see as "natural" to for European women. Not because Ghanaian and European women are biologically different, but because we were socialised in different manners.

Just as age appropriate behaviour is negotiated, and renegotiated, and different statuses might be drawn on in changing circumstances, so is gender appropriate behaviour. I did not observe the roles attributed young girls and boys contested by themselves, or others. This rather became an issue among youth, and adults.

Economic hardship makes it difficult for many young people to obtain the status of adulthood. Vigh (2006:33-60) describes young men in Guinea-Bissau who are stuck in the role of youth because they lack the resources, and possibilities to acquire what is needed to obtain a more independent status of manhood.

Because of the high rates of poverty in Ghana[5] it is likely that the scenario described by Vigh also will be found there. However, the participants in this research were relatively privileged as most had access to education and work, and thus possibilities of social mobility. A move away from poverty as well as childhood and youth.

Goody (1982: 13) writes from Ghana that after the first years of early childhood boys are trained by men, and girls by women. Of the female informants most of them were fostered by women. Of 14 girls, 12 were in fosterage with or had been in fosterage with women. Among the male informants the distribution was more ambiguous. Four had been or was in fosterage with women, five with men and two with a couple where they recognised both as fosterers. These numbers, and the general attitude shown towards men as fosterers, mainly fathers, show that men was on a daily and practical basis often more peripheral to the children and youth, both to the girls and boys.

It seemed as if less was expected of men when it came to the practical care of not only infants, but also older children and youth. Men were rather expected to be the main providers financially, and function as heads of households. The gendered roles of men seem less diverse than that of women. But I also got the impression that men had the biggest challenge in being able to meet gender specific expectations. I was repeatedly told how the expectations that both boys and girls had of their fathers were not met. With the poor economy of the country, and the subsequent difficulties of finding work, men of all ages were "victims" of disdain from their wives and children because they were not able to provide for them.

The descriptions of women's position in Africa and Ghana differ greatly. There are those who claim "African women" to be subordinate and discriminated (cf. Cole 2007: 270-71, Adepoju 1994: 17; Population Crisis Committee 1988; Whitehead 1984:97-107). On the other hand there are descriptions like that of Oppong

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[5] 29% of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2007 (World Bank).

(1987b:25) who claims that women in Ghana are ambitious, individualistic, and do have a good position in relation to men. Some of the disagreements on the position of women and men are a result of the different people that have been subjects of study. The variations in custom, morals and ideals within Ghana are significant. While Goody studied the rural north, Oppong studied the urban middle-class and elite. Thus the accounts of gender roles are right in their social setting as gender appropriate behaviour varies according to ethnicity, religion, place, and economy. Some women were respected *because* (not despite) of their individualism and independence. Other women were expected to sacrifice their own ambitions for the sake of *'family'* (cf. Goody & Groothues 1977), and were respected for this.

The story of the king, his son and nephew (preface) depicts gender specific roles of young men, but the moral issues of hard work, and struggle as means of attaining success was the same for girls and boys.

Youth of both genders that were in fosterage were concerned with much of the same issues: They wanted an education, so that they could get a job and be able to provide for themselves. The quest for education would likely be more difficult for the girls than the boys I met as boys are often prioritised when it comes to education (cf. Kwankye, Anarafi, Tagoe & Castaldo 2007:11-12). A mother of ten children (biological and foster children) had a contradictory view. She claimed it was more important for her to provide her daughters with an education than her sons. Her explanation was that without an education the girls would end up like her, in a marriage lacking mutual trust and respect. She wished her daughters would have independence, and the freedom to do what they wanted. She was not the only one who thought that man needed an education to be able to provide for a family, while a woman needed it to be more of an equal to her husband.

Young women are finding ways of obtaining education and employment in their struggle towards a more independent (both of parents and husband) and financially secure future. Fosterage is one of these ways both for girls and for boys. Whyte (2006:259) writes "Youth are changing Africa", he thinks that while young men are heard and seen more, it is the young women and girls that are making the real changes, as their roles vis-à-vis and interaction with their fathers, brothers and husbands are changing. This must of course also be put in relation with the continuous

lacking possibilities of men to live up to the roles of manhood (cf. Whyte 2006:259).

Agency: Navigating and narrating

Being a youth, or even more a child, puts limits to a persons possibilities to make decisions for him or her self. Parents, uncles, aunts and grandparents as well as teachers or priests have significant influence over children and youth (Honwana & De Boeck 2005:5,9). Still, the opinions, attitudes and desires expressed by children are listened to by elders, and children make life changing decisions of migration, work or fosterage both in agreement with their guardians, but can also be respected when these decisions go against the wishes of parents or other guardians (cf. Thorsen 2006).

But for the poor many dreams and hopes for the present and future are left out of reach. Vigh (2004) depicts this clearly when he describes how youth struggle to become adult men. The status of being a man requires an income and ones own home, i.e. an ability to provide for a wife and children. As long as poverty makes this impossible to obtain, the young men are stuck in what Vigh terms a moratorium of youth (cf. Vigh 2006:45-46).

Despite limitations, children and youth in fosterage made decisions that were meaningful. The decisions were meaningful because they had direct or indirect impact on their own life. I see the opportunities the children and youth in fosterage had to make an impact on their own life as agency. But I will divide agency into 'thin' agency and 'thick' agency.

> *'Thin' agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out*
> *within highly restrictive contexts, characterised by few viable alternatives. 'Thick'*
> *agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options. Between*
> *'thick' and 'thin' agency there is a continuum along which all people are placed*
> *as actors with varying and dynamic capacities for voluntary and willed action*
> *(Klocker 2007:85).*

Individuals who make decisions and impact on their own and other's life "are always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in

which they are enmeshed" (Ortner 2006:130) 'Thick' and 'thin' agency as an analytical tool tries to avoid a dualistic relationship between structure and agency, and rather focuses on power as relational, and acknowledges that also the disempowered do act (Klocker 2007:85).

I will look at two ways agency is practiced. First it is agency through action, i.e. what they do when others decide they should live in a different town with relatives they may or may not know; how they handle situations when resources are scarce, and/or the prospects of an education look bleak. This first form of agency I will call 'navigating' inspired by Vigh (2006). In his analyses the youth engagement in conflict in Guinea-Bissau is seen as a form of social navigation (Vigh 2006). The youth act to ensure their immediate needs as well as fulfilment of their long term dreams:

> *Navigation is thus centred on both the near and the far, a here and a there*
> *(de Certeau in Vigh 2004:54). When navigating we imagine and actualise a path*
> *through unstable terrains, simultaneously moving across the next obstacle or*
> *wave and negotiating the many more to come on one's way along an envisioned*
> *course (Vigh 2004:54).*

The choices made and actions taken were negotiated within the generational contract, and on the basis of age and gender appropriate behaviour. A large group of significant others were participants in these negotiations of how to navigate towards the horizon of a wanted future. This inclusion of a mostly large family network was important in the creation and maintenance of family bonds and relatedness.

The other form of agency is found within narratives. When telling their stories the youth in fosterage decide how to portrait themselves. By narrating their experiences and "who they are", they also "create their life". The narratives are thus a reflection of the past as well as a guide for the future (cf. Bruner 2004:708). Embedded in narratives is agency to constitute our social identities (Somers 1994:606). Despite the freedom and agency in narrating ones own story the repertoire available for this representation is limited (Somers 1994:629), i.e. the narrative represents the cultural background of the narrator and "the possible lives" that are part of it (Bruner 2004:694). This becomes evident when the fostered children talked about the hardship they had lived through, and the difficulties they had to endure. The

narratives contain children and youth that are resilient and strong people that will benefit rather than succumb when facing severe challenges. This presentation of youth is in accordance with cultural norms both in Ghana and West-Africa (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:4). Though mainly a form of 'thin' agency, narratives contribute here to make sense of the social life by placing the youth life stories within cultural values, norms and ideals. And I will show in chapter 5 the significance this could have daily life was characterised by hardship and pain, as was the case for some children and youth in fosterage.

2. Methodology

Issues of place: Urbanity and migration

   My fieldwork was conducted in the urban setting of Accra, the capital of Ghana. But Accra can not be categorised as the home of most of the informants. From the definition of Rapport and Dawson (1998:9) "'Home' […]is where one best knows oneself - where 'best' means 'most', even if it is not always 'happiest'". Most informants were migrants, and not from Accra, and few expressed any feelings of belonging to the city. Some had moved from remote villages and had only spent weeks in Accra. Others had lived in several different cities across West-Africa. Also there were those moving between Europe and Ghana.

      Some of the narratives told by university students, or trading women, well accustomed to urban life of Accra, were of a past in rural Ghana. And among the informants that migrated between Europe and Ghana, there are some that I met in Europe, and not Ghana. Others I met in Ghana had come back after living in Europe for several years. The informants continuously relocated, often to enhance the possibility of realising their hopes and dreams for the present and future, whether this was going to Europe for education, or going back to Ghana to be closer to their family. The emerging question is then how I can do any form of generalisation over such a diverse and dispersed group of people. What they had in common was experiences of living with others than their perceived biological parents for parts of their childhood and/or youth. And that their perception of this was based on their personal experiences as well as different norms and ideals, both local and foreign. Their contesting experiences and perceptions can thus shed light on currant values

and ideals of family and fosterage among Ghanaians that are or have been in fosterage.

Where we lived and those we lived with

I did not do this fieldwork alone. I brought my son, Abayomi, who was one year and five months when we left Norway. At arrival in Accra we rented a room in Korle Gonno. This is a poor part of Accra, and living there with my adventurous son was a great challenge. I spent most of the days trying to save him from stray dogs and dangerous waste. There were *no* public toilets in Korle Gonno, and places like the beach, and open gutters served this purpose, and as we got to experience, this and the malaria mosquitoes that thrived there, posed a great threat to our health. While living there I got to know Owusua. Daily she shared with me her worries about the conditions Abayomi and I was living in. After a time she asked me if I would like to move in with her mother. We moved into her mother's household, and as both my son and I could worry less about being sick, I could focus more on my research.

Living in the household of Owusua's mother, who we addressed as Nana, became vital to the research. Including my son and me we were seven people living there. Nana, the land-lady, was a trader in her 60s. She had two employees in the household. This was the elderly woman, Amma, who worked as a housekeeper and nanny. Busia was about 50, he was the son of Amma' sister, and worked in the household as gatekeeper and gardener. Takiywaa and Efia were two girls in fosterage with Nana.

Nana had kindly taken us all into the house. But she talked little and kept to herself. And for the months I stayed we only exchanged polite phrases. She would enjoy talking with Abayomi, and he quickly found a friend in Nana. The two girls, Amma, Busia, Abayomi and I spent most of our time behind the boy's quarters where Amma and Busia lived, letting Nana have her privacy in the house.

When I first came to the household I got the impression Takiywaa and Efia had both lived there for a long time. They seemed to have a strong bond between them. They gave an impression of being confident with each other. Talking and laughing together as well as touching and holding one another. When we watched TV Takiywaa would use Efia's stomach as headrest or the other way around. Observing

this closeness I was surprised when I learnt that Efia had only stayed in the house four weeks before I came. After some time I was also included in this closeness, though I hesitated at first and felt out of place. This became the way we spent many evenings: We would lay in a "bundle" on the floor watching Venezuelan soaps, and often inspired by the dramas we watched we discussed everything from household budgeting to how the man of our dreams had to look like.

"You are now an African woman!!"

I brought to Ghana two types of carrying devises for Abayomi, and a pram. I never tried the pram as I could see on my first day that the condition of the roads would force me to carry not only Abayomi but the pram as well. The carrying devises had worked well back in Norway where I could use them when I knew I didn't have to walk far, or had nothing else to carry. But in Accra I had to carry Abayomi everywhere. I was exhausted and I constantly fought with the carrying shawl that hurt my shoulders. This was observed by the trading women in Korle Gonno, but was never discussed with me.

I asked the lady who let me a room if she could show me how they carried children in Ghana. The first day I walked to the market with Abayomi tied to my back the women talked with us, touched us and held my arm while denying me to walk on. They laughed and cheered, and exclaimed that we were friends. They would ask: "Who taught you?"[6] pointing at the shawl, and "This African boy, he be yours?"[7] I had been to the market before, both with and without Abayomi, but was allowed to walk quite anonymously. People were polite, but not particularly interested in talking. Some would talk to Abayomi, but stayed reserved. Going home, a trader I had talked to several times as she was the one closest to our compound ran down the road towards me while she laughed loudly holding her arms out. She said they had talked about "dat green ting" (my green carrying shawl, brought from Norway). They had never seen anything like it. She then said "You are now an African woman!", while putting her arms around me.

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[6] When quoting informants I have tried to write as close to how they talked as possible.
[7] Abayomi's father is Nigerian.

I understood then the significance not only of bringing my son, but to learn from the women and men how to carry him, what food to feed him, and what he was allowed and not allowed to do. It was a great method to show that I appreciated their practices, and wanted to learn from them. The message was embodied by me, and made clear for everyone to see. This gave me access to people, and their lives. A few days later, trying to get through town to where I had found a school[8] for Abayomi, a taxi driver told me when I got into the car that I had made him very happy that day, and asked me if I knew why. I said I did not know why. He turned, smiled and said he was so happy to see me carry my child in a proper way, like an African. He confirmed my assumption that this was a method of importance, a method that positioned me as an "apprentice".

The relationship of black/white, African/European carries significance in a field where the researcher is a white European and the informants are black Africans. I had thought about how I could handle this before I left, and read two very different experiences of this by Moore (1996) and Clark (1994). Moore argues that although she was not seen as a categorical white, British woman, and she never saw her informants as categorical black Kenyans, the categories still held significance as they were a reminder of black/white politics during and after colonialism (Moore 1996: xvi), Clark (1994: 18), on the other hand, writes that the Ashanti were not overly impressed with European culture and did not hesitate to correct her.

When I came to Ghana I heard from people's statements that many had an admiration for Europe. Some would compare Accra with European cities, and say that the European cities are clean and not congested like Accra. Others would compare politics and claim that African politicians were more corrupt than European politicians.

The other side of the talks of Europe versus Africa also showed that some had resentment, if not towards me personally, then towards Europe and especially the results of colonialism. The experience from the market shows that people were not ready to teach me how to carry my son, but rather to show their approval once I had come to carry him in their manner. Later experiences were similar to what Clark writes. People would correct me, and tell me what to do, especially if Abayomi was crying. On the bus at least one person, but often as many as four people would tell me

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[8] This was a day-care service for children between 1 and 5 years.

how to comfort him. To my frustration they all gave different advice while they looked at me waiting for me to do as they had told me. I first saw this behaviour as an intrusion, and felt uncomfortable.

After some time I understood that people are expected to care about children, whether they know these children or not: What I saw as intrusion was care. And rather a form of shared parenthood. A few weeks on, it became natural for me to show the same kind of care, and I often found myself sitting in a bus joining in with the group of people trying to cheer up a crying child. These observations support the literature that claims children to be not the "property" of one family, or the parents. The responsibility of raising children is rather shared, and distributed to both significant and insignificant others.

Anthropologist, sister and mother

The information I have on children below the age of 12 was either observed through participant observation, where both children and adults were present, or from youth and adult's narratives of their childhood. When I had conversations with youth alone, I took time to inform them about my research, and assured them that they only had to talk with me if they wanted. Of those between 12 and 18 I also asked the consent of their teacher, biological parents or foster-parents. Mostly they seemed disinterested in my research, but enjoyed that full attention was given them by an adult. I observed that children and youth often agreed with adults, out of respect or fear, and cautious of this I always changed the subject if they seemed uncomfortable, or avoided a topic.

Considering what I had learned about a proper informant/anthropologist relationship I had a clear idea that *I* was to learn from *them* and their point of view and try not to be too opinionated myself. This was not a problem when informants were older than me, as they often felt the need to guide and teach me. And with peers I would have lengthy discussions where we both agreed and disagreed.

When older than the informants, especially when living in the same household as them, and having a young child of my own, I was expected to participate in their fostering and rearing (cf. Goody 1982; Gottlieb 2004). And being an anthropologist

did not exempt me from that. Also children and youth were expected to take part in the fostering of younger children, and even peers. Girls of only five years were set to take care of Abayomi and to tell him right from wrong.

One thing Takiywaa and Efia complained about again and again was that Nana did not give them guidance. From the girls' point of view Nana failed one of her duties as their foster-mother. So soon I was given the role as big sister. I offered advice and consolidation when that was asked for and needed, while they helped me looking after Abayomi.

I often asked adult informants questions based on what the girls in the household wanted to know. This was to avoid giving inappropriate advice. How could I as a Norwegian give young Ghanaian girls advice on everything from sexuality and marriage to education and work?

These questions show that the role as researcher can be just as problematic when doing participant observation among youth as with younger children (cf. Fine & Sandstrom 1988:63).

The role I was ascribed, as at times mother and at times sister, placed me within an intergenerational contract with Takiywaa and Efia and contributed to create a sense of relatedness between us. This participation thus enabled my integration as a significant other in their social network.

The first weeks I was there I pitied the girls when they complained that they didn't get enough money for food and that Nana did not talk with them. But as I got to know Takiywaa and Efia, and learnt ideals of fostering and fosterage in Ghana, as well as understanding more of the negotiations of the intergenerational contract, I began to view their experiences and complaints in a different light. It was true that they did not get much money for food, but when they got money they tended to use it for clothes and phone credit. They were urged by older significant others to be sensible, take responsibility, and manage much on their own, but they were not necessarily expected to always do this. They were reprimanded for their irresponsibility, but discussing their at times irresponsible behaviour with Owusua she would laugh and brush it away as typical of youth.

As a fieldworker I had my own agenda, and so did the informants. I believe the girls enjoyed the newfound sympathy from the unknowing European. One day

when Takiywaa complained I thought I should show them that I had now a more nuanced view on their situation in fosterage and I asked Efia and Takiywaa harshly if anyone forced them to live with Nana, or if they could not move out, or even go back home if they wanted to. First they looked shocked at me, and at each other. They were quiet for a few seconds before Efia said "It is true", and added that they should be glad that they got this opportunity of someone taking care of them, and sponsoring them.

I had acted as a responsible adult. But I felt like a terrible anthropologist. Again I had said too much, and was afraid I had spoiled my research by letting them know my opinion in a moment of passion. Looking back I see that I took part in social interaction within the culturally embedded expectations where I was expected to know best because of my age and my position as a mother. This might have had disadvantages, as Takiywaa and Efia could hold information back in fear of me telling them my mind. But by being part of the negotiations in the household and the intergenerational relations I have gained first hand experience of how youth in fosterage negotiate their position in relation to significant others. Fine and Sandstrom (1988:65) writes that the ethnographer working with adolescents need to work out a set of rules that are commonly agreed upon in turn to have a trusting relationship with these informants. The rules were already there when I entered the household, it was the rules of age and gender appropriate behaviour that I was expected to follow.

Both Abayomi and I became a natural part of an Accra household that was mostly composed of relatives, family, relatives of in-laws, friends, children of friends, and friend's of friends that needed a place to stay. Every household had a unique composition. What many had in common was that the people inhabiting these households created meaningful relations, often structured by the use of family-terms, both with and without sharing bonds of relatedness.

Saying is not doing: Emphasis on participation and observation

I emphasised participation and observation in my research, and aimed to rely as little as possible on interviews with people I did not already know. Though, in anthropological literature, fosterage is not presented as a particularly contested practice in the region of West-Africa, it was among the informants in Accra. And

often there were discrepancies between the ideals, the practices, what was said to be the practices, and how children, youth and adults perceived of the practices and the ideals. Thus the information I got from asking questions in an interview were one dimensional in a way, i.e. it revealed only parts of the picture and would not have enabled me to look closer at how the youth see their position, how they navigate, and relate to norms and ideals in their society.

With all the youth I got to know I asked the hypothetical question "When you have children, will you let anyone other than you foster them?" Most informants said no to this. I continued and asked what they would do if they got a job in Europe, and were unable to bring their children. To this most said they would take the job, and leave the children in care of relatives they trusted. Overwhelmingly, that person was their mother, thus the child's (maternal or paternal) grandmother. But even if they stay in Ghana the possibility to make the choice of *not* letting their child be fostered might not be there. As I mentioned before, poverty has often limited the choices of those in fosterage and their biological parents.

This shows an interesting divergence between practices and ideals which I will discuss in detail later. But it also shows a weakness in the method of doing interviews. The question was hypothetic and there is no way of knowing for certain how one will handle a hypothetic situation. Based on interviews I could have concluded that the practice of fosterage was only seen as a last option for youth and young adults in Accra, something which was not supported by my observations. Thus I aim to show some of the complexity of attitudes towards and practices of fosterage.

When I use the interviews, I contextualise the information with the experience I had with people's situation through participant observation to better understand the information obtained in interviews. When I interviewed John, Maxwell and Kofi they all emphasised their (non-biological) brotherhood. But despite the fact that they told me they were brothers, I did not understand the depth of their connection before I coupled this interview information with observing their interaction. This was even clearer when observing Takiywaa and Efia's interaction and watching how they made meaningful bonds and connections between them by engaging in activities together and being physically close to each other. The observations of the everyday life in the household gave insight into the process of creating relatedness, how fast these bonds

can be created and how strong they can be. Without this observation I would not have understood the depth of the felt relatedness narrated by other informants.

3. Within and between family networks

Keeping the focus on the viewpoint of children and youth in fosterage I describe in this chapter some perceptions of *'family'* in Ghana. Rather than writing about kinship and kin-groups I use *'family'* as an emic term. *'Family'* is the term used by informants about a group of significant others, often with a core of people that are understood as biologically related in addition to people not biologically related.

Those that had been or were in fosterage were mostly fostered by someone categorised as *'family'*. Household arrangements and *'family'* arrangements did not necessarily coincide. Several members of at least one family network lived in the households I visited. But as far as one can claim there to be any patterns of household organisation it was that no household I visited constituted of only a nuclear family of mother, father and their biological children. People living in the household could also be excluded from the family network. Shildkrout writes of similar observations in Kumasi, Ghana, in the 1970's. The households were not constituted of only family (Shildkrout 1978:126). And normally family was an open entity that included more than the people living in the household (Schildkrout 1978:98).

Family terms were frequently used in the household I lived during my fieldwork. Everyone called the landlady *'Nana'*, which can mean grandmother, or it can be a respectful term for an elderly person (Van der Geest 2004:51). The two girls started out by calling me Auntie Camilla, but after a few weeks they called me Sister Camilla.

Informants would introduce me to their friends and family saying "Meet my sister, Camilla." Kofi introduced me on three different occasions to older women

whom he presented by saying "This is my mother in Accra", followed by statements like "She would always cook for me" or "I would never survived in Accra if not for this woman right here". These statements were answered by a big smile on the women's faces. They would hold his hands and touch his face. A friend often asked me "How is our son?" while others would say "I miss my son", referring to Abayomi. Does it mean that they are family? Or that they considered my son and me family? Or were they *just* being polite?

> *It is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively. And, often but not always, these connections can be described in genealogical terms, but they can also be described in other ways (Carsten 2000:1).*

In Ghana I observed that social connections of special importance with few exceptions were described in genealogical terms. On the other hand, the use of genealogical terms was not necessarily an indication of there being a social connection with any special weight. Thus, the use of genealogical terms both reveal and hide the nature of the relationships between people, and to know who see each other as *'family'* and not is often a challenge.

I will discuss the use of family-terms, the meaning behind the various uses of the terms, and the significance of the uses, in regard to children in fosterage. I thus take a closer look at how the use of family-terms could be, but was not necessarily, an expression of bonds of relatedness between children in fosterage and their significant others. And the different variations and levels of significance embedded in the use of genealogical terms.

John who had lived in fosterage his entire childhood and youth, and never knew his biological parents said: "Those who took care of me are my real parents. I care more about them than my natural parents". Still he had sought to find his biological parents, and expressed disappointment in their lack of care. The perceived bond between biological parents and their children brought forth a desire to know the parents and why they had abandoned him.

I will show how the fostered children and youth can relate to biological- and foster- parents as *'family'*. Analysing these relationships I use the term relatedness as defined by Carsten. The analysis is thus based on "implications and the lived experience of relatedness in local context" (Carsten 2000:1).Carsten's definition of relatedness allows a study of the meaning of the relationships without a presumption of the significance of biology as true and unchangeable. The lines between the biological and the social are allowed to be blurred, and a discussion of the diffuse and not easily categorised relationships, such as foster-parent/foster-child, and subsequently the place of the fostered within family networks is made more accessible.

Lisa Åkesson (2004:101), when using 'relatedness' to elaborate on kinship and family relations in Cape Verde, uses the term to emphasise the social aspects of kinship, but still uses it as synonymous with 'kinship'. 'Relatedness' as I use it here is not synonymous with 'kinship' or *'family'* but is analytically intended as an *expansion* of the term 'kinship'. Neither is 'relatedness' just *any* social form of being related or bonded to others. It is the strong, long lasting (not easily broken) bonds that were by the informants mostly, but not always, associated with *'family'*, and contributed to extend the family from an egocentric viewpoint[9]. *'Family'* and relatedness can thus overlap, but while people who consider one another *'family'* are expected to share a feeling of relatedness, this does not *have* to be the case.

Though relatedness often follows the chains of perceived biological bonds and can theoretically include all of humanity this is not how inclusion of *'family'* is practiced (cf. Edwards & Strathern 2000:158). Just as important as inclusion is exclusion and "the biological vestige" is only significant when in interaction with specific individuals (Edwards &Strathern 2000:158).

What is special about children and youth in fosterage is that they navigate within and between family networks. And while some are able to extend their *'family'* through creating bonds of relatedness within an extended family network, others are left with weaker bonds of relatedness to their biological *'family'*, and excluded rather

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[9] This manner of applying 'relatedness' avoids it being too narrow, used as 'kinship', or too general where it includes all kinds of social relations and lose its usefulness as an analytical term which Carsten has been criticised for (Carsten 2000:5).

than included as part of the foster '*family*'. Thus children in fosterage bear a larger responsibility in creating family-networks than a child living with its biological parents. This responsibility can be 'thinning' or 'thickening' the agency of the children and youth depending on their age and gender, and to what degree they are able to handle this responsibility. And within the intergenerational contract this 'thinning' of 'thickening' of children and youth's agency is also greatly dependant on the choices, and actions continuously made by seniors.

Practices of fosterage were contested, and at the core of discussions was to what extent it leads to integration of the '*family*', either it was the nuclear or extended family, or if it was contributing to, or being a result of, disintegration of the '*family*'. As part of this discussion I would like to pay some attention to the strong bonds of relatedness that can be maintained also when spatial distance, related to migration, challenges common ways of maintaining these bonds, such as sharing in daily activities of cocking, eating, working and sleeping. Significant practices of care become the sending of remittances, frequent phone calls, and visiting.

Before I set out to discuss current conceptualisation of '*family*', and also ways fostered children and youth navigate within these family networks, I will give a short introduction to the background of the critique of the study of kinship that have inspired some anthropologists to develop analytical theories of relatedness.

Anthropology of kinship

The first half of the 20th century was the peak of anthropological studies of kinship, and especially among the British anthropologists conducting research in various parts of Africa. Studies of kinship and family in Africa tended to focus on structure and function, and societies' norms and ideals are well documented. Kinship and family, as well as household organisation are presented by these anthropologists as ordered and almost rigid.

One of these British anthropologists who focused on kinship was Fortes. He conducted most of his research in The Gold Coast, which is today's Ghana. His main contribution to the study of kinship was his study of continuity and change and the analytical division of kinship into two domains. Fortes (1949a; 1970) theoretical

approach to time and social structure is based on functionalist notions where people's everyday practices are seen to contribute to uphold a society's structures. He argues that what might seem like changes are more often circular changes that are part of people's 'life cycle' and repetitive with the rise and fall of the generations (cf. Fortes 1949b; 1970). Kinship was divided into the political and the domestic sphere. The political sphere is based on descent and lasts over generations, while the domestic sphere is based on the family where obligations are moral rather than jural (cf. Fortes 1945; 1949a; 1969).

From the 1970s the study of kinship started to decline as increasingly more complex questions were being asked. In Europe and America new reproductive technologies emerged. Divorce increased, new technology for knowing biological connections, as well as technologies of reproduction appeared and the answer to who belonged to whom, and who is related to whom and how, did not seem as clear any longer.

The analytical framework for the study of kinship that was largely based on Euro-American notions of a pre-given relationship between kinship and biology, analogous to a rigid division between nature and culture, was in need of rethinking to be able to answer what constitute kinship and family, and how this is understood cross-culturally (cf. Howell 2006:40; Carsten 2000:2). The feminist movement also gained strength the second half of the 20th century, and where kinship had been the focus it now changed to women and then gender.

Studies of kinship were now to a larger extent conducted outside Africa. Barnes (1967) was one of the first to point out that the kinship structures used as an analytical framework in Africa did not fit the practices found in Melanesia. Schneider's (1968) studies show how American kinship is not necessarily tied up to biology, but that kinship ties can be made without *any* reference to biology. In 1984 Schneider wrote *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* where he criticises the basis for the analysis of kinship. With this critique Schneider was part of a period of deconstruction within anthropology, where theories of not only kinship but also that of gender (see: Yanagisako & Collier 1987; Butler 1990) were starkly criticised for being based on Euro-American assumptions of biology and nature as being pre-society, unchangeable and true.

Schneider claims that the anthropologists' assumptions and presuppositions which is part of the scientist's culture is brought with him/her, and the society which he aims to understand will be understood within these pre-set frames (1984:196-197). Among these pre-set frames is kinship as based on biology. The western anthropologist assumes that "blood is thicker than water", an understanding where ties between individuals who share substance ("blood"/DNA) are stronger than bonds between individuals not sharing substance (Schneider 1984:174-175). This understanding of biology has been seen as a universal basis for kinship (Schneider 1984:174-175,177). The analytical concept 'kinship' is based on western folk notions and is *not thoroughly defined* (Schneider 1984:185). Because of this it has no substance as an analytical construction (Schneider 1984:185).

Through her critique of the nature/culture divide in anthropology Strathern (1992), like Schneider, questions the analytical concept of 'kinship'. The prevailing understanding of nature was as pre-given and to a certain degree unchangeable while culture was changeable constructions based on the same omnipresent nature (Strathern 1992:2-3). And kinship, like gender, was studied as the social (culture) variations of degrees of acknowledgment of a biological "fact" (nature). The problem with 'kinship' then, is the intimate relation between the indigenous English [Euro-American] notions of kinship and the anthropological theories (Strathern 1992:3,8. cf. Schneider 1984:175). Assumptions about kinship "is as much a part *of* English kinship thinking as it is of social constructionist theorising about it" (Strathern 1992:3). Strathern further claimed that making these implicit assumptions explicit, removes the main analytical problem which is its paradigmatic status. By this I understand that she sees the possibility of a continued use of 'kinship' as long as assumptions made by the anthropologist are made explicit. Schneider on the other hand is more apprehensive as to the continued use of 'kinship' as an analytical tool. He doubts the possibility of removing a strong assumption of the centrality of biology in any analysis of kinship (Schneider 1984:112-113).

The re-introduction, or re-invention in a non-modern spirit (Latour in Carsten 2000), of kinship studies have by some been with an ambition to circumvent the issue of biological versus social. And to develop an analysis that can account for how people perceive themselves as being related to significant others cross-culturally, without Euro-American presumptions of biology as the fundament of kinship. Carsten

uses the term 'relatedness' to account for relationships that are not pre-given, but continuously produced, and is composed of various elements such as substance, feeding, living together, procreation and emotions (Carsten 2000:34). Relatedness accounts for, to use Schneider's (1984:53) words, bonds which entail diffuse and enduring solidarity.

The meaning of applied family terms

The use of family terms does not in and by itself signify a feeling of relatedness or even recognition of being related in any way. When I moved to the household in Haatso I was never introduced to the landlady as anything but 'Nana' (grandparent) and thus I called her 'Nana'. This did not signify that we saw each other as related. This was the appropriate way for me to address an elderly woman that had been kind enough to take me into her house.

Takiywaa and Efia first called me Auntie. I asked if they categorised me with Auntie Owusua, they laughed and said "Not really". After that they called me Sister. I asked them this because I wanted them to open up to me, and consider me more like an equal than Auntie Owusua whom Takiywaa respected and Efia feared. Never saying my name without using sister first was also a sign of respect. I discussed this with Owusua and said I was happy that they called me Sister rather than Auntie. She smiled and said I would never be able to get them to say my name without using Auntie or Sister. Their respect for me as a senior made it impossible to address me without using a family term. What I had seen as a sign of our close bond could also be *just* a sign of respect. But in many cases the significance attributed the use of a family terms was placed somewhere on a chain between a feeling of relatedness and respect or fear. Though Takiywaa and Efia sometimes presented each other as sisters they never address one another as Sister. Because they were equals they would only address each other by name.

Among the Tongu, an Ewe speaking people in eastern Ghana (Fiawoo 1974:172) relationships within the nuclear family is extended and generalised beyond this group, and the term 'brother' is used for any male peer of the same clan, while any man of the same generation as a person's father is classified and treated as the

father's brother (Fiawoo 1974:172). My data from Accra shows that people here use family terms classificatory similar to that of the Tongu. The difference was that someone categorised as a father would not necessarily be treated, or expect to be treated, as such.

There were three main ways in which family-terms were applied. (1) Family terms were used when introducing people (to me and others). (2)When talking about people that were present; it was used when describing a relationship to, or talking about individuals that were not present. And (3) it was used to address people in a respectful manner.

The women Kofi introduced to me as his mothers were neither his biological mothers nor foster-mothers. When Kofi and I discussed his childhood and youth it was only one woman he considered his mother: The woman who bore him. While he frequently talked about her, the other women he introduced as his mothers were hardly mentioned. He told me how they had helped him when he first came to Accra, and made it clear that he appreciated their care, but he did not talk about them as his mothers. There were no recognised biological connections between him and these mothers, nor did they come from the same village, or ethnic group which was often brought forth in narratives to emphasis a common descent and belonging. What connected them were common experiences over a few years of living together in Accra. Kofi had come to know the women through work, and had lived in the household of two of them.

The point I am making is that there is unlikely to be a perception of being *'family'* between Kofi and these women. In Ghana using family-terms in an introduction can be a performance of respect, which is one of several ways of reciprocating care. By talking about the women as mothers in my presence he demonstrated to them that he appreciated what they had done for him. And in front of any listener he contributed to enhance the woman's reputation as a caring mother. This is a vital form of reciprocity to many women in Ghana, like Notermans observed in Cameroon, women gained respect and contributed to creating and maintaining relationships by sharing food, and being mothers, i.e. "Much food and many children symbolise women's strength" (Notermans 2004a:14).

The reason for presenting someone by family-terms when they were absent seemed to diverge from when they were present. Talking with me about significant

and insignificant others the obligation to show respect for others by using family terms was not as pertinent. Those that were talked about in family-terms in their absence often later proved, through practices of mutual care to be considered *'family'*.

To analytically be able to understand how the fostered children were related to significant others one has to go beyond the use genealogical of terms by not taking for granted what form the relationship has based on how it is classified. In addition it has to be observed how these individuals interact, or how the relationships are narrated besides the use of family terms. The quality of relationships between individuals depends on practices of mutual care. The expectations of care children and youth have to *'family'* varies according to gender and age, to spatial distance, cultural norms and socio-economic status.

'Caring about' and relatedness

'Care' was a word frequently used by the informants. They would say "She has always cared for us", "She does not care about me" or "He never cared about us". Thus there is a need to define 'care' based on what the informants meant by it.

Though relatedness is neither the same as *'family'*, nor the same as care, they are interrelated and embrace most people in the active social network often categorised as *'family'*. *'Family'* is a matter of doing rather than being (cf. Schneider 1984:72,131). It is thus 'caring work' and to 'care about' that forms much of the fundament of relatedness which ideally was the essence of the bonds of *'family'*. People were included or excluded depending on to what degree they practiced reciprocal care according to prevailing norms. This did not mean that those not practicing the existing norms of reciprocal care were automatically excluded though it did often strain the relationship between individuals.

The division of care into 'caring for' and 'caring about' can be useful here. 'Caring for' is defined as "caring for the material and general well-being of the one who receives care; cooking-, cleaning-, and washing for, as well as listening to and healing" (Lynn and McLaughlin in Yeates 2004:371). 'Caring about' is "having affection and concern for the other and working on the relationship between the self and the other to ensure the development of the bond" (Lynn and McLaughlin in

Yeates 2004:371). 'Caring for' is of an economic and practical kind, while 'caring about' is more emotional and social. This division is similar to the difference between 'care work' (cf. Hochschild 2002) and 'caring work' (cf. De Vault 1991). While 'care work' is the work done for insignificant others, 'caring work' is the care given and received by significant others (Leifsen 2006: 52) and is thus the essence of self-enforcing bonds of reciprocity practices within family networks.

It was 'caring about' and 'caring work' that was the topic when the fostered told me "They do not care about me". Lack of care was always practical and/or economical, but the core of the issue was emotional and social aspects of neglect. What confirms this is some children's and youth's approval of, and confidence in, the 'caring work' they received by their parents (foster or biological), even when the parents were too poor to provide their basic need of food, shelter and schooling. Takiywaa's narratives of her experiences living with her mother illustrate this point well. At times they did not have money to buy food, and they would go for days without a proper meal. Still she never talked about this as painful, though she admitted it was when I asked her. She explained to me how the mother had cared about her and her siblings. To keep her children from focusing on their hunger and acing stomachs she told them stories; one after the other until they all fell asleep.

What 'caring about' and 'caring work' *is* could be numerous as it is not the action in and by itself, but the action seen in the context of previous acts, material and spatial factors and the *intention behind* the act that together can form a basis of a person as 'caring about' and performing 'caring work' or not.

Who are 'family'?

As I mentioned earlier, family networks are based on a core of biologically related individuals, who are included and excluded depending on daily practices of care, on personality, and spatial proximity/distance as well as biology. It was all the different factors put together that led to more or less inclusion or exclusion of the fostered children in a family network.

There was no oppositional relation between biological family and the outside world: Bonds of relatedness were made and maintained within *and* beyond the

biological family. It was common among the informants to view someone they were not biologically related to as *'family'*, and my impression was rather that *the biological family was not enough*. And practices of fosterage were one way to expand family networks.

Åkesson observed in Cape Verde that there was an openness to the kinship system, and, "in theory, kinship extends outwards from Ego in never ending chains" (2004:112). The same could be said about the organisation of family networks in Ghana. And in a setting where feelings of relatedness associated with *'family'* existed beyond the biological family, fostered children or youth were in a special position to extend their group of significant others. The ideals and norms as well as economic reality which give importance to large social networks contribute to a continuous expansion of individual family networks and an opening up for relatedness within larger groups of people.

Within expanding family networks the relatedness between biological parents and the fostered children are not seen as threatened by forms of shared parenthood, which is an additive rather than a substitute form of parenthood (cf. Bowie 2004:9)

This is different from for example international adoption where one set of belongings are attempted completely substituted with another through a process of "kinning" (cf. Howell 2006). When every individual has a unique family network like outward extending chains it is meaningless to analytically treat *'family'* as a entity, or a closed unit.

The fostered children and youth have a different role within the family networks, and thus different experiences from children living with their biological parents. They can be said to be filled with social connections rather than defined in terms of essential belonging by one constitutive relationship (cf. Leifsen 2006:120). Within this discourse, a child growing up in the household of its biological parents would subsequently have a smaller group of significant others than a child in fosterage. And having a small social network was frequently viewed as a potential disadvantage.

My observations of the organisation of *'family'* in Ghana, as described above, diverge from older anthropological accounts of family and kinship organisation in the region of West-Africa. While there are several accounts of how the matrilineal Akan

organised their families as opposed to the partlineal Ewe, Ga and Tallensi there were some, but few evidences of family-organisation based on ontological ideas of the specific ethnic group of a *'family'* or person (See; Rattray 1923 & Fortes 1949b,1974 for Akan; Fiawoo 1974 & Kumekpor 1974 for Ewe; Azu 1974 for Ga; Fortes 1949a for Tallensi).

Many of the ethnic-specific norms might still be there, but the practice of inclusion and exclusion seemed to be more pragmatic and based on everyday practices, i.e. fostered children of Ewe descent, an ethnic group known to be largely partlineal, could just as well be living with female relatives as male relatives. Rather there was a continuous process of negotiation where norms and ideals were drawn upon to justify and/or make sense of own and others choices.

The everyday practice and feeling of care made up a substantial part of the bonds that held the individual members of family networks together. This was more significant than biological bonds, and thus fostered children could be included in family networks where biological bonds were not recognised. Biology was not rendered irrelevant, but only one out of several connections that could contribute to an inclusive *'family'* relation, and a sense of relatedness.

To understand biology as socially constructed is at the core of a study of relatedness, just as it is in Butler's approach to gender. Though anthropologists have argued that biology in social worlds is best understood as a social construct, this view is not commonly shared by other disciplines (Howell 2006:40). From my empirical data the place of fostered children within the *'family'* in Ghana is best understood when biology is seen as socially constructed.

This is because the informants *knew* to whom they were biologically related and often emphasised this. Still their understanding of biology was not necessarily the same as that of a biologist. A notion that there is a link of substance, which for example could be "blood" or "spirit" (cf. Fortes 1974:31) between parents and their biological children, was a commonly shared view. A child could be begotten through sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, but it was also known by some that this was not always the case when a child was conceived. Efia told me about the wife of her father's late brother. She claimed her child, who was born more than a year after her husband's death, to be the man's biological child.

As Edwards and Strathern write; the central issue is not what is counted as 'biological' or as 'social', but it is the "power of imagining their intersection" (Edwards & Strathern 2000: 150). The perceived intersection between the biological and social among the informants was that the connection by a biological bond between parent and child was supposed to entail care and trust. When it did not include care and trust people talked about it as a breakdown of norms and values. People that had been in fosterage and had biological parents that had neglected them seemed disillusioned in regards to parent-child relations. This was shown by not practicing 'caring work' for their parents, and also by not being able to answer my question about why they were in fosterage but rather asking the same questions themselves. Talking about this the informants would often shake their head or hold out their arms, i.e. showing signs of frustration.

People talked about a negative spiral where neglected children would be liable to neglect their own children and thus escalating and affecting the whole society. The children did not feel neglected by their parents *because* there was a biological bond, that was pre-discursive or natural, and the breaking of such bonds inevitably leads to trauma for the children. They felt neglected because of how biology was imagined to influence behaviour. The failing of biological parents to practice care in accordance with expectations of them formed on a culturally based notion of biological bonds leads some children and youth in fosterage to feel neglected and abandoned by their parents.

For all the norms concerning family there are other norms that are somehow contradictory and make negotiation of the first one possible, while still keeping the discourse within acknowledged cultural norms and ideals. This opens a significant room for negotiating who was and who was not *'family'*, as well as negotiation of rights and obligations between people who considered each other *'family'*.

An example is a norm saying that parents have an unquestionable right to be taken care of by their children because they begot and bore them (Fortes: 1970:177). Still it is not taken for granted that a child will take care of his/her parents as they get older. The actual practice of care depends on the relationship that has been made over time between parent and child.

Another norm is that a parent can not reject his or her child (Fortes: 1970:177). If a relationship of reciprocity and relatedness is to develop between a child and its

parents, culturally acknowledged practices of care have to be performed. When the parents who from the birth of their child have the full responsibility of generating a relationship of relatedness vis-à-vis their child, do not fulfil their ascribed role as parents, the reciprocity of the relationship is weakened or ceases to exist. In such cases the children are not made to feel responsible for their parents when they grow older and the main responsibilities in the reciprocal relationship would normally be shifted to the children.

In this way there is room for negotiation within the norms of parent-child relationships. The failure to create bonds of relatedness between parents and children did not erase the perceived fact that the biological parents were still parents to their children, but the relationship, though still talked about in genealogical terms lost its most important social significance, which is as a *'family'* relation. This is visible in a proverb that was cited to me both in English and Twi: If your parents take care of you till you grow teeth, you ought to take care of them till they loose their teeth! (Sɛ wo awofoɔ hwɛ wo ma wo se fifi a,wo nso hwɛ wɔn ma wɔn se ntutu!)

It is the reciprocal care that is emphasised, and when it is not practiced by the one part, there is no longer a matter of course that it will be practiced by the other, i.e. if the parents are not supporting and 'caring about' their children, the children are not obliged to care for their parents.

Again the position of children and youth in fosterage stands out. Reciprocity are always of significance, but when children are in fosterage reciprocity becomes of great importance as there is not necessarily any recognised biological bond between a child and its foster-parents that stresses a minimum of social contact or at least politeness between children and parents. If the foster-parents do not care about the children or youth under their supervision the parental status, and thus the current form of the relationship, as parent – child, can cease to exist. This is because the foster-child – foster-parent relationship is perceived of as a predominantly social one. But both with biological and foster-parents, the relationships the children have with them depend greatly on relationships between other members of the family network. "The greater the number of persons that mediate the link the more tenuous it becomes" (Edwards & Strathern 2000:157).

"My foster-parents are my real parents"

John had lived his whole childhood and youth with his mother's sister who also was the sister of Kofi's mother. I was first introduced to John as Kofi's brother, just as I was told about John's foster-parents as nothing but "his parents". After I had talked with both John and Kofi several times there were things that did not ad up. And I carefully tried to ask how John and Kofi could be brothers when Kofi had told me that he was the only living son of both his parents.

The men called each other brothers because they had grown up spending every day together, and often the nights as well. They grew up in a small village and John said they had all considered each other family, and still did now that many had migrated to Accra. John's parents had left him when he was an infant; they left him in the village and moved to Accra.

John was never told about his biological parents by the foster-parents, but had come to know that his foster-parents were not his biological parents when he was 12. He had attacked a friend because he insulted his foster-father. The friend then mocked him for being so upset over an insult towards a man that was not even his "real father".

Out of respect, John never discussed the matter with his foster-parents. John did not criticise his foster-parents for not telling him about his biological parents, and gave me no indications that this was a problematic issue, or that he thought they should have told him.

Despite the care from his foster-parents, John struggled as he grew up. Most people in the village lived in mud houses where they had no electricity or piped water. There was a health clinic there which gave access to basic medical help. People were mostly subsistence farmers and though public school was free, they had difficulties earning money for school-uniforms, pencils and books. His foster-mother suffered from bad health, and could not work enough to ensure the material wellbeing of the children in her care.

The foster-parents had treated John like all the other children in the household. The only way that anyone could know that he was not their biological child was by watching him work. He would always hurry to do his chores, unlike the other children that would delay and find excuses to escape their duties. The question arising from

this is whether he worked more diligently than the other children of the household only from he was 12, or if there had been suggestions in the behaviour of the foster-parents or their biological children which had led John to understand that he needed to be the most industrious of the children.

Most of those that were or had been in fosterage made statements that suggested they were treated differently from the biological children of the parent. Owusua, who for a few years had lived with her father's sister, said: "It was never anything big, and I was treated well. But they always made me feel that I was different, that I was not their child." Kwesi (who I will write more about later) said: "I could not just ask for anything. If it is not your parents they will not mind saying 'no'". Children in fosterage did not expect to be treated exactly the same as the biological children of their foster-parents, but they all expected to be cared about.

Being treated differently did not necessarily hinder feelings of relatedness, while not being 'cared about' would. The care John received from his foster-parents had created bonds of relatedness, and he was mindful of the reciprocal relationship to his foster-parents, who he consequently talked about in praising terms.

There was also a significant social bond between John and Kofi. This was a result of them growing up together and having parents that considered each other and their children to be *'family'*. This laid the foundation, as they grew to know each other as *'family'*, but the relatedness has continued to be produced through their everyday practices as youth in their home-town and as adult men depending on each other's support in Accra.

By acknowledging the foster-parents as "my real parents", John did not deny that he was related to his biological parents and thus is in line with the norm that the biological bond between parents and their children is unbreakable. But he denied a connection of relatedness, and the practices that can generate and maintain these long-lasting bonds to significant others were practiced with his foster-parents. John would rather buy gifts for, and help his foster-parents than his biological parents. He trusted his foster-parents and he claimed he felt as a brother to their biological children and the children of aunts and uncle's living in the same village. It was the foster-parents that he talked to me about in family-terms. Thus reciprocating the 'caring work' of his foster-parents also by showing respect of their parenting role vis-à-vis himself.

John told me that he had found and visited his biological parents after he had moved to Accra. They said they were happy to see him, and claimed they had tried to keep in touch with him; that they had sent money but that his foster-parents had taken the money for themselves. John did not believe what his biological parents said, and was disappointed that they had never performed any form of care for him. He did not understand how they could leave him, and never make sure he was fine. The trust in his foster-parents and the lack of trust in his biological parents was mutually enforced when they did not tell the same story regarding sending money for John. The case of John and his parents show how bonds of lasting trust and reciprocity creates relatedness which is not created by just acknowledging to be related to someone.

Bonds of relatedness can be made independently of biology. The narratives of John show both the significance of perceived biological bonds, and the significance of care.

When children feel abandoned, or in cases where they have no memory of their biological parents, they still recognise that they are related based on the notions of shared substance between parents and children. I have described *'family'* above, and the biological parents of John were not treated as *'family'*. He did not help them in any way though they were old and in need of assistance. He did not visit or call them, but said he would greet his other siblings (that the parents had after they moved to Accra) if he met them, but claimed he did not *feel* anything for them. He said: "They are my sisters and brothers, but I don't know them".

While John shared experiences, household and hometown with the siblings he grew up with, all these connections were missing in the relationship between him and his siblings that grew up in Accra. The lack of shared experiences between John and his siblings caused a lack of relatedness (cf. Edwards & Strathern 2000: 152). They had nothing else that bound them together other than biology which alone will not generate relatedness. Some might talk about each other as *'family'*, but then referring to the biological bond that was *expected* to be, or imagined as, the basis for *'family'* and relatedness, and not referring to the practices performed by people constituting a family network.

The biological family is of importance to Ghanaians and one should try to practice relatedness with those who are seen as biological family. Goody (1977:154) writes that it is unconceivable for some Ghanaians that it could be possible to sever

the links between parents and their biological children which are reckoned to be basis for the children's identity in adulthood. Those that had been or still were fosterage saw it as significant to "know" one's origin, but on the other hand the feeling of relatedness between parents and their biological children could be, and in some cases like that of John, were severed because the fostered felt the parents had not cared about them. Where the practice of care was not met by a biological parent, the children's sense of obligation was instead felt towards a neighbour or the father's brother, or mother's sister who had *practiced* relatedness through 'caring work' when having the child or youth in fosterage.

Leaving a child in fosterage does not subsequently lead to the child feeling abandoned, as the practice is widely held to be a sensible solution to a variation of challenges. These challenges could range from how to; give children a large family-network; place children begotten outside of marriage, or in a previous marriage; provide better education; handle children seen as difficult and stubborn; or provide for children of parents too poor to satisfy their need for food, healthcare and schooling.

John's experiences are to a large extent in tune with literature claiming that fostered children are treated the same as the biological children of the parents (cf. Goody 1982; Piot 1999). But John also said that he worked more diligently than the other children in the household because he was fostered. The most common in narratives of children and youth in fosterage, and in narratives about children and youth in fosterage was that they were often treated harshly; they had to work hard, and were often not given more than the absolutely necessary, and they commonly stated that they were not cared about. There are some boundaries here, but as long as the children are not neglected, or abused, the harsh treatment of children in fosterage is seen to be to the advantage of these children in fosterage as they will not have the opportunity of being spoiled.

A place in the family network

The possibility was there for fostered children and youth to navigate within a larger group of significant others, i.e. within several family networks and thus create their own extended *'family'*. This possibility was valued highly by Ghanaians that

were or had been in fosterage, and should not be underestimated as a tool for both personal growth and socio-economic mobility. But to what extent they viewed their foster-parents, and these parents' siblings and children as *'family'* was not a matter of course. The possibility puts a large responsibility on the fostered children and youth. When a child is seen to be "filled with social connections", it is partly their responsibility to handle these social connections and to navigate within family networks to generate bonds of relatedness. Some fostered children more or less successfully "fitted in", and were able to create this form of *'family'*. Others had difficulties and ended up "falling through" the network rather than finding a place within the family network. Especially those that had migrated alone like Efia and Esi (the latter whom I will write about later), where their relationship with biological parents and siblings, as well as friends, suffered as a result of spatial distance. And additionally they found it hard to establish bonds of relatedness with a whole new set of people.

Most children and youth in fosterage had strong bonds with their biological parents, though the relationships could also show signs of strain, possibly brought on by a feeling of neglect on the part of the children or youth. When a child was in fosterage, the possibilities the parents and children had to conduct practices associated with *'family'* were for some limited (though not terminated) and the parent-child relationship took on different forms from what it had when children lived with their biological parents. Children and youth living with their biological parents were under their daily care, and shared multiple connections with them through sharing home, eating together, and working together. George who had lived with his grandmother said that after he had moved back to his parents it had taken him a long time to become as close to his biological parents as he was to his grandmother, and it was only when he moved back to his biological parents that he realised how much they loved their children. Persons belong to one another on the basis of what belongs to them, and "these mediators may be other persons, possessions, individual characteristics" things that are material or not, human or not (Edwards &Strathern 2000:153).The limited possibility to *share* feelings, household, arguments, and food makes the creating and maintaining of bonds of relatedness more difficult, though not impossible.

Susan had lived with her paternal grandparents since she was four, when her biological parents moved to England. Still, she told me several times how close she felt to her parents, because her parents had worked hard to keep them together as a family. Her mother would call her almost every day, and her father at least a few times a week, they sent remittances, and paid for her to come and visit them in England. The distance that was part of the difficulties for Efia and Esi, was not a challenge to the same degree for others in fosterage. Again it is the combination of factors. Where Susan in addition to having parents with the financial means to call on a regular basis and send her money and visit, also had a close relationship with her grandparents whom she lived with. The possibility of maintaining a close relationship between individuals despite spatial distance as was narrated by Susan is emphasised by McKay (2007). She claims that sending money can be a demonstration of affection, and that frequent talks on the phone can uphold a close relationship (McKay 2007).

When the possibility is there for the children and youth to maintain close relationships with both biological parents and their foster-parents, they are likely to take advantage of being in fosterage through gaining an extended network. An extended network means more people to rely on when having difficulties. In practise, more people are involved in the intergenerational negotiations, and thus more people for the children and youth to draw on in navigating towards their hoped for future. For some of the fostered, the opportunities are not there for creating or maintaining close relationships with the foster-parents. This might be hindered from the part of the foster-parents who for various reasons do not want to include the child or youth, or it could be hindered by the behaviour of the child/youth, or both, as well as the relationship between the biological parents of the child and the foster-parents, as well as other seniors within the social network. The fostered who were not able to maintain a close and caring relationships with their biological and/or foster-parents, i.e. those finding themselves "falling through" the network, found their situation difficult and told me about neglect.

The case with some of the children who lived in fosterage was that they still lived in the same neighbourhood as their biological parents, who thus were physically available for their children. It would be tempting to claim that lack of relatedness, or an inclusive *'family'* relation, especially between parents and their biological children,

is the result of poverty. But people made individual choices under similar conditions in an ongoing dialogue with prevailing norms and ideals in their society. And the children and youth were also in a dialog with seniors that were or were not considered *'family',* but were seen to be able to impact on their chances of navigating towards the present and future the children and youth saw for themselves.

In the same line of thought, I will claim that it is not practices that led to a physical separation of children and their parents that generate lack of family-networks, but the choices of the adults within the family network that was available for the children and youth. Adu said to me during a discussion on street children: "They are not neglected because of poverty. If it was that simple, there would be no neglected children in Europe." When the children and youth felt abandoned and neglected, as not only children in fosterage could feel but also children living with their biological parents, this was a breakdown of the intergenerational contract, where individuals concerned no longer gave and/or received what was expected.

What happens when children and youth grow up with a sense of being abandoned by significant others, seniors who their culture dictates they can expect to rely on? I am not able to answer this here. The adult informants narrating these forms of experiences from their childhood and youth were seemingly well functioning members of their society. And as far as the children and youth I talked with and observed, it still remains to see how they will cope with the difficulties they are being faced with. The question, though unanswered, arises as significant when the practice of fosterage was contested, and several informants worried about the consequences it could have on the society at large.

I will claim that practices of fosterage is not the problem, i.e. fosterage is not what creates a lack of network for some children and youth, and neither does it have to be a symptom of other practices that lead to children and youth being neglected or abandoned. Sometimes fosterage is a result of neglect, because someone has taken in a child not being cared about by the biological parents. But just as often fosterage was, a form of shared parenthood, a sign of *both* the biological parents and other members of the family network caring for children that were largely seen as the property and responsibility of the larger community.

Relatedness and spatial distance

Much of the literature concerned with adults migrating and leaving their children in their home country to be taken care of by family focus on the negative consequences for the children (cf. Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2002; Parreñas 2002). This critical view of migration and child parent separation is in tune with the UNCRC. In paragraph 7.1 it is stated that children have the right to be cared for by their parents (Stephens 1995:337). Thus it is also in tune with the work of governmental and non-governmental organisations concerned with children's rights (cf. Howell 2006:14). Those I met in Ghana who had parents living in Europe did so well in many aspects of their lives that I would like to discuss their life chances. Chances they possibly had due to their parents' migration. These were chances of socio-economic mobility and security.

When it is claimed that children lose out, that less caring work is performed for them when parents, especially the mother, migrate, it is taken for granted that biological parents are always the main care takers of children and youth. And the concept of shared parenthood has no analytical role. This is not taken for granted in Ghana, even though practices of fosterage are contested. A discourse taking for granted the significance of biological parents in lives of children and youth inevitably leads to a conclusion that fosterage in most of its forms should be avoided, and that children and youth in fosterage are in some way at a disadvantage compared to children growing up with their biological parents.

When parenthood is shared, there are several adults that are significant others for the children and take an active role within intergenerational negotiations. These seniors are drawn on by the children to accomplish their short-term or long-term goals, and often play a significant part in the training, disciplining, and supporting of children and youth. In cases where the parents leave the country to work abroad this might not in itself be a major transition for the children. It is likely that children having previously lived with their parents undergo stress when these adults are removed from their daily lives. And the extent to which both parents and children go to, in order to maintain their bonds of relatedness, proves to a large extent the conceived importance of the parent/child relation among Ghanaians.

Still, there can be other changes occurring as part of fosterage practices that can feel more traumatic for children and youth than the fact that they are separated

from their biological parents. In a paper on Cape Verdean transnational families, Carling (2008) emphasises that other changes, such as relocation to a new environment or the separation from significant others that are not the biological parents, can also be experienced as traumatic for children in fosterage. Again the economic situation for many in Ghana has to be taken into consideration. The choices that are available for those trying to make a life for themselves are often limited because of poverty, and a minimum of financial security will often be prioritised. On the other hand, separation is not necessarily viewed as traumatic in and of itself. What was narrated as traumatic, and did have a bad impact on the welfare of children was when the parents were not available, and the relationship with the foster-parents was not close, and did not entail care to the expected extent.

Remittances

Remittances become an important economic, but also social aspect of fosterage when children are in fosterage because their parents' have migrated to work abroad to support themselves, their children, and often the wider family-network. Remittances become one of the ways of sharing that contributes to the continuation of relatedness. In 2003, $2.5 billion was sent to Ghana as remittances by Ghanaians (Adepoju 2005). This gives an indication of Ghanaian emigrants' economic significance to the *'family'* still living in Ghana[10].

The fostering role of the migrant parent was largely to ensure their children's economic security by sending remittances. In cases like this the parents were not replaced by other fosterers, but they took on a fostering role that is complementary to the daily care given to the children by other members of the family network.

In this way these young Ghanaians had access to a life which was out of reach for most other informants. Susan was a single mother in her late twenties, but despite that, she completed a higher education while I was there, she lived in a large house, had her own car and travelled on holidays to Europe, which was mostly paid for by her parents.

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[10] It is of course also important to acknowledge the immense negative economic impact emigration has on Ghana. This is especially related to the brain drain factor (Nyonator & Dovle 2005; Manuh, Asante & Djanmah 2005).

Kwesi's mother had migrated to England in an effort to support her children. When the mother left, Kwesi and his siblings lived with his mother's sister. The aunt had no children of her own and Kwesi and his siblings had been taken well care of. Still Kwesi attributed some of his hardworking character on the struggling he had to endure as a fostered child who found it hard to ask anything of his foster-mother and thus worked from a young age to support himself. Kwesi was 22 when I met him; he studied at the university and spent much of his free time engaging in student organisations and volunteer work. I will compare Kwesi to another informant, to make explicit the significance of his mother's remittances. The comparison is with Yaw who like Kwesi was in his early twenties. Because of poverty Yaw grew up partially with his mother, and partially in orphanages. He was sent to an orphanage the first time when he was seven. An NGO had found him, his five siblings and their mother all working in a stone quarry where combined all seven of them earned less than 1 Cedi[11] a day, barely enough to pay for food.

Yaw told me that he had top grades from school, but he did not have anyone to sponsor his university studies. He still hoped that either the orphanage or he would find someone with the means to get him through higher education, but while he was waiting for a hoped for future, there were little to do, and he spent his days helping out in the orphanage.

The reality of these two young men was far apart: Yaw had the grades to continue his education, but the financial means were lacking, and with no higher education he had little hope of getting a well paid job, or a possibility to enhance his position in a socio-economic hierarchy. Kwesi on the other hand could realise the potential he had and get a higher education, and by that have hopes of a well paid job, and financially secure his future. It is expensive to study in Ghana, and also the participation in certain student organisations is expensive by Ghanaian economic standards. The differences in the situation of Yaw and Kwesi show the significance of remittances and the fostering role some migrant parents are able have. The economic aspects 'thinned' the agency of yaw while it 'thickened' the agency of Kwesi as they both navigated in a search for their long term goals.

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[11] 1GHC equals 0.65 USD (http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic).

Contradictions in the discourse on fosterage and 'family'

It is difficult to say anything about attitudes towards fosterage and family relations without contradicting what I was told during my six months stay in Ghana. Informants had varying views of both, and often they seemingly contradicted themselves as well. These contradictions were mostly a matter of what parts of practices of fosterage that was discussed in each particular setting. Kwesi and Susan talked about fosterage practises in different terms depending on if they were talking about their own experiences of fosterage or fosterage in more general terms. When they narrated their stories, fosterage was presented as a positive experience, but when I asked questions of fosterage in general they both coupled the practice with neglect.

The first time Susan and I talked about fosterage was the first time I met her. She asked if the boy I was carrying was my son, and what I was doing in Accra. She told me it was good that I had brought my son with me to Ghana (and did not leave him behind). I answered that I was happy to hear that, as it was the first time anyone had expressed this opinion to me. The others who had said something about it had asked me why I had brought him, and told me that it would be better if I had just left him home in Norway with my mother. Their explanation was that this would have given me time to focus fully on my studies and my research. Susan said that people always told her the same thing; that she should send her son to live with relatives so she could focus on her studies. Friends and family had also told her that she should send her son to live with relatives for her to find a husband. Because of ideals, likely related to her socio-economic position, it was not an option for Susan to let her son live with anyone but her.

We had our long conversations about her childhood years in her house when she invited me over on weekends. We would talk as we cooked, while the children played freely around the house.

She did not condone the practice of fosterage unless it had what she saw as a morally just cause:

I never want to send my son to live with anyone. So many
young women abandon their children to go out and party, and be
with men, but my life is fine. My friends say that I have to go out

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more, and that a life without a husband is boring, but it's not boring
for me. Between my son, my studies and work I don't have time to
get bored. And I couldn't send my boy anywhere; I would miss him
too much. I know how my mother suffered when she left us. She has
even lost her hair because of the stress.

Susan's parents were young when they got married and had their first children. The parents lived in her paternal grandfather's compound as they did not have jobs or money. First her mother got a job offer in England and emigrated. Shortly after the father also got a job, and left to live and work abroad. Susan was four years old when she and her sister were left in fosterage with their paternal grandparents. Susan was explicit about the pain it had caused her mother to leave her children. How she describes her parents choice and how she experienced being in fosterage stand in stark contrast to how she in general terms talked about women who decide to have their children fostered by others than themselves:

Our grandfather had two wives, and many children and
grandchildren, but he took good care of us. I was very close to my
grandparents and my parents too. My parents cared about us even if
they were far away. They would call almost everyday, and they still
do. We are a close family. I know we live far apart, but my parents
have worked hard to keep us close, and even my younger sister
which is born abroad comes to Ghana every year to visit us, and I
used to go to visit them, but now it has been about two years since I
was there. It is just because I am too busy.

Susan, and also Kwesi talked in positive terms about their own fosterage experiences, but had a negative attitude to the practice in general. This could be related to the increasingly important role assigned the nuclear family among some people in Ghana. Also the children of parents who have migrated to Europe might be more exposed to Euro-American family values through their parents. Neither Susan nor Kwesi blames their parents for leaving them, but rather talks about it as an act of

sacrifice. This is pronounced when Susan tells me about the trial her mother have went through as a result of emigrating to get work, and also when Kwesi told me that his mother had to migrate to find a way to support her children. I return here to Kwesi to show how he talked about fosterage in more general terms:

> *Many elderly people are being neglected in Ghana, and that is because parents send their children away. And then when the children grow up, and the parents are old the children neglect their parents, and often also their children. That is how they have been trained. They don't see anything wrong with the neglect. The second thing is that child labour is still occurring in Ghana. Sending one's children away to others enables this as some children go to stay in homes where they work hard as house maids, or do other kinds of work.*

The way Susan and Kwesi talked about it illustrates that they did not necessarily see the practice in and by itself as a bad practice. Kwesi did also see benefits of fosterage and mentioned that he had learnt how to work hard as well as to be independent:

> *I did not get the opportunity to become spoilt like I probably would have been if I lived with my mother. Knowing that my aunt would not hesitate to say 'no' if I asked for anything made it more difficult to ask, and I tried to find ways to avoid it. This is different from how children living with their parent relate to them, as they can ask for anything. A result of my upbringing is that I early got a job to earn my own money. And I have always worked hard. I always seek new challenges so I am engaged in different organisations; some of the work related to these organisations has been projects helping poor children, especially in the villages. It is fortunate that I grew up with a relative as this enabled me to do the volunteer work. The work is often in remote villages, and the*

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volunteers need to travel great distances. Those who live with their parents are often denied to do this work because their parents worry about them if they leave the city. Relatives do not worry that much about the children staying with them, and this made me freer to do the things I wanted, and explore my opportunities.

Susan on the other hand never spoke of any benefits of fosterage, though she remembered her own experiences as good. Awareness of the many deviations from the norms and ideals of fosterage that was actually practiced they were concerned about its role in enabling neglect and/or abuse of children. Another reason for people's negative view of fosterage was the seemingly increasing significance of the nuclear family. But the notions of what constituted a nuclear family were not unanimous.

Susan told me that the minister at the church she attended tried to get her to go back to her son's father, and that she was tired of him trying to tell her what to do. Contesting the minister she also contested gender and age appropriate behaviour. The church and Susan had both been influenced by a European family image, but in different ways. I never heard the conversations between Susan and the pastor in the church she attended, but I witnessed a sermon dealing with issues of family ideals.

At a Pentecostal church in Korle Gonno, a suburb of Accra, the pastor talked with engagement about conformation versus reformation. He said that the Christians these days were conforming to a sinful life, where they saw drinking, inappropriate dancing and extramarital sex as normal. He then continued by loudly exclaiming that this was not what Christians should do; Christians should reform, and take back their moral standards. He elaborated on this for some time, and came to the case of extramarital sex. He looked at all of us, pointing at one after the other while he said in a thundering voice: "Do *you* have *'unofficial wives'*[12]?" or "Are *you* a man's *'unofficial wife'*?" People laughed, looked around at each other and others just looked

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[12] The term was used about extramarital affairs that could be a short term love affair or an extension of polygyny (cf. Mann 1994; Notermans 2004a; Miescher 2005:18). This is often because the man does not have the financial means, or do not want to use the financial means, necessary to make the woman an official wife (cf. Notermans 2004a).

down at the floor. The minister continued and said that Christians should not contribute to destroy families, but keep to their spouse. For this pastor the nuclear family was in focus when he spoke about the family, and he condemned practices such as polygyny.

While the church focused on the bond between spouses, Susan focused on the bond between a mother and her children. At the same time as Susan gets tired of the priest when he tries to guide her into what is likely that he sees as the ideal for a nuclear family. Susan claims she wants a husband who values a European family image, but her first concern is for her and her son to be a nuclear family living together. In the process of negotiations and renegotiations of what is in the best interest for the children and the family values and norms, the terms Ghanaian an European were often used as contrasting opposites. The informants had not adopted what they saw as European values with no questions asked, but they transformed them into something genuinely Ghanaian through discourse and practice. These observations are supported by Thomas (2007:49) who argues that transformation in ideals should not be seen as a colonial invention as this is to deny the efficacy of African ideas and practices. Many, both young and elders were suspicious towards what they saw as unhealthy Euro-American influences on their cultural norms. Others again saw no problem with changing norms.

During a discussion with an informant I asked if it was not a threat to the integrity of Ghanaians if they adopted European values of the nuclear family as the only proper context of raising children. The answer I got was that the nuclear family had always had a place in Ghanaian notions of family, and that it was not particularly significant where changes came from as long as they could improve the society.

4. Intergenerational Negotiations

Throughout the thesis I emphasises the significance of recognising both the opportunities and the limitations of children and youth in fosterage. I have explored some of the positions they can have within family-networks. In this section I will discuss their different positions in negotiations with seniors. Many of those in fosterage were there because of poverty related challenges, but some were in fosterage of other reasons and I will try to also account for their experiences of fosterage.

When talking with children and youth in fosterage, the matter of education arose repeatedly. Being able to attend school was often the reason why children and youth were in fosterage. Also the prospects of becoming educated were often the single most important motivational factor to stay in fosterage for youth who found their life situation in fosterage challenging.

In the first cases I analyse in this chapter, the main reason for the youth to be in fosterage was the possibility of gaining an education that would provide them with a job. The foster-family had in these cases a better socio-economic status than that of the youth and their biological parents. These cases show how there can be a close link between education, patrimonialism and fosterage. But also patrimonial relations vary, and while some children and youth in these forms of fosterage are included as *'family'* others are excluded.

Thus, not only the economic position of the children and youth but also how they were related to those they were in fosterage with had significance for the position of the child within an intergenerational contract. This determined to what extent they felt cared about as well as to what extent they could perform agency.

Youth in search of education and socio-economic mobility

In search of work, or education and prospects of socio-economic mobility, children and their biological parents enter into or maintain close relations with *'family'* or friends that have a higher socio-economic status than themselves.

In search of a way to enhance one's socio-economic status poor people with few choices are likely to also engage in patrimonial relationships where they sometimes are being exploited. As Vigh has documented from Guinea-Bissau: When the poverty is grave, a patrimonial relationship that is exploitative is better than not having a patron, as this at least leaves open a possibility of reciprocity (Vigh 2006:49). Children and youth of a poor economic background are left with few opportunities to change their position as poor, and their agency is thus 'thin'. Their choices are often limited to endure the exploitation, and possibly gaining an education, or to move back to the parents and try to find work. Going back is likely to lead to unemployment with minimal chances of rising out of poverty.

The choice then for many children and youth is to stay in fosterage even though the reciprocal relationship is not always favourable for him or her.

Still it was a repeated topic among children and youth who were in fosterage to obtain an education, which they felt they had to give too much for the sponsoring given them in return. Many worked too much, were fed poorly, and had to beg every time they needed money for school purposes. The narratives of their situation have repeatedly been confirmed by adult Ghanaians with whom I have discussed issues of fosterage. Common statements about the situation of children in fosterage are "They suffer a lot" or "Life is hard for them". Life was considered hard for them, but what were their choices? Life is hard for those who do not have money for food on a daily bases, education, medical care and housing. The hard life of a child or youth being in a patrimonial fosterage relationship to obtain an education that could otherwise not be obtained, is thus a hard life that they cannot escape because they have been born into poverty. When this is said, it makes sense to recognise the opportunity a patrimonial fosterage relation can be for these children and youth, and view it as a possibly 'thickening' of the agency of poor children and youth.

There were various degrees of conflicts of interest between the foster-parents and the youth. The foster-parents wanted the children to work, and saw this as their

obligation. The youth also perceived of it as their obligation to work for those who sponsored their education. Taking their age and gender in account, children and youth were expected to "bear their burden" and to contribute to the upkeep of the household and *'family'*. The negotiations between the children/youth and their seniors concerning what was the right workload depended on the age and gender of the child/youth in fosterage, as opposed to what was perceived as exploitation.

Takiywaa complained that it was difficult for her to focus on her school work because she had too much work to do around the house. I knew she had her chores to do every day, but normally it would take her an hour. She had enough time to work on school, but rather prioritised to watch TV, dance, listen to music, and talk with the others in the household. She also told me that she had to help her mother trading water and bread when living with her. Her workload was larger when she lived with her mother. In the case of Takiywaa, her complaining might be a way of saying that she was happier living with her biological mother. The problems they faced were mostly talked about in terms of concrete actions such as working too much or not being given enough food. They rarely talked about personal feelings of pain. A common phrase uttered by Ghanaians when anyone talked about painful matters was: "Don't think about it". There seemed to be little acceptance for elaborations of feelings of pain.

Foster-parents told me again and again how much they cared about the children they had in fosterage. The importance of portraying oneself and being portrayed as caring is significant here. The honour in being a caring patron, of having people depending on you and praising you for your generosity, i.e. being a *'big man'* or *'big woman'*, has an intrinsic value, as well as a way of expanding a social network which is also that persons safety-net. The reasons for caring for foster-children, and elaborating that care could be a genuine reflection of generosity or relatedness, but is likely to also be influenced by a wish to be considered a *'big man'* or *'big woman'*, and gaining the honour given people who are seen as generous.

In Ghana, the difficulties many young people have trying to find a job, or an education is mounting. Seen in this setting the patrimonial relation between Takiywaa and Efia, and Nana might be better treated as an opportunity rather than as exploitation. The patrimonial relationship between Takiywaa, Efia and Nana was rather benefiting all parts. While the girls gained an education, Nana's house was

filled with people, laughter and life. She was an old woman with no young children of her own, and having the girls in the household did not only provide her with young able-bodied girls that could do all the physical work that needed to be done, but also valuable company.

Obligations and Rights

It seemed to be common knowledge that fostered children should work more than other children. And the hard work was seen character building. The exception was the boys living with their grandmothers. These boys seemed to have fewer chores than children living with their biological parents. But variations went beyond this.

Youth, in fosterage or not, were often given extensive responsibility. They were expected to manage on their own to a large extent, and some also to contribute financially to the household. And inevitably some decision making, and thus 'thin' agency comes with the responsibility. At the same time decisions were frequently made by seniors on the behalf of youth without them being consulted, or at times even knowing about it.

The discussions about children's' roles, and labour reached far beyond households and families. In an interview with a policewoman working for a special unit for cases including children, I was told how they in Ghana had implemented the UNCRC into their national legislations regarding children, and how they worked continuously on information campaigns to inform people about the rights of children. She also pointed to the challenges they met implementing the UNCRC when traditions collided with new legislations. The fishermen in Chorkor (fisher-village on the outskirts of Accra) had for hundreds of years sent their sons to work as apprentices for other fishermen. "But now, after the new legislations the fishermen doing what they have always done are criminals because the UN has decided work at sea are too risky for children." And she added that in Ghana children are expected to participate, and take responsibility and what might seem to me as too much work was normal for them. By emphasising the *obligations* of children she shows how they are seen as full members of the society, and are not exempt from the social world of adults. Her attitudes can be seen to have general consent as her views was also

emphasised after the UNCRC was drafted, and later on The Organisation of African Unity agreed on the formulation of The African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (cf. Howell 2006:176). In this charter children are regarded "as integral members of their communities, not as isolated individuals" (Howell 2006:176).

Children and youth are thus recognised as full members of the society, with the obligations and expectations that follow. Still age and gender based hierarchies often 'thins' the agency of children and youth in general, but in different ways according to their age and gender (cf. Klocker 2007:85). A few days before I was leaving Ghana, a friend of mine threw a farewell party for me at the beach. I was surprised when her father said we should go to a different beach than my friend had first decided. I asked "Your father decides which beach we are going to?" She looked at me and said "Yes. He feels that this beach is better." It was also the father who called us at the beach and said it was time for us to return back home. Again I was surprised. It was 17 of us at the beach. It was my friend and her married brothers and their wives and children. This and similar experiences has made me rethink the significance of age based hierarchies. The father was accepted as the one who knew best. Most informants valued advice given them by elders, but in varying degrees followed them. I heard youth complain about the decision that had been made, but never about the fact that it was *made for* them.

 Questions were rarely asked, i.e. answers were waited for until they were offered. Much of the behaviour from children and youth was aimed at generating approval from their seniors. And the wish to be part of the family, to fit in and be seen as a well behaved girl or boy was a motivational factor just like hopes of education, and employment.

As shown in the gerontocratic way decisions are made in families, the strict hierarchy that is common in the patrimonial relationships is not restricted to this arena and thus the relationship in that respect does not differ much from family-relations. Hierarchies are often explicitly recognised, and during discussions with adults in the field, and especially students at the university, it was evident that the gerontocratic hierarchies were contested. But I never observed direct confrontations to this way of ordering power relations within family networks. This, in addition to the way economic, social and emotional aspects of patrimonial and family relations are

entwined make it difficult to detect if relationships are "just" patrimonial or if they are family-relations. Thus it is at times difficult to establish whether children or youth are in fosterage because of social reasons, financial difficulties or both. In the same way it might be futile to separate patrimonialism from practices of care within *'family'*, and in the case of patrimonialism the use of genealogical terms is not necessarily to hide "the truth", but a genuine reflection of a felt relatedness. As a man said while we discussed the sending of remittances; "It is good to *feel* that you have some kind of relation". He tried to explain to me why he enjoyed paying for the education of a younger cousin. Though he had entered into a relationship with his cousin that could justify defining it as patrimonial, the importance for him was the ability to help, to be part of the *'family'*, and the value of *feeling this through the material*. The different aspects of material, emotional and social ties reinforce each other.

Children and youth in fosterage, also where it was a patrimonial relation, would compare themselves with grandchildren in the household, or the biological children of their foster-parents and argue that they were treated differently. Though this was generally expected, their comparison suggests that the children and youth hoped for a family-relation even when they were in a patrimonial relationship, and that this was not unheard of.

Withholding of information

When I first visited the household where I was to live for the most of my fieldwork, I observed a conflict between Owusua and Efia:

> *[Owusua] had just showed me the house and introduced me to*
> *her mother and we were just about to leave. [Owusua] picked up*
> *some garbage from the ground and told a girl [Efia] briskly that she*
> *should always make sure the compound was clean. The girl stood*
> *straight and looked down while she mumbled that also [Takiywaa]*
> *had left the garbage there. [Owusua] said loudly that she were*
> *never to compare herself with [Takiywaa]. And continued:*
> *"[Takiywaa] is mother's grandchild. You are not. And if you don't*

behave I will send you right back to your village!" The girl kept

looking down and just repeated "Yes Ma". (Fieldnotes: 10.02.2008)

Owusua left neither Efia nor me with any doubt that she did not view Efia as *'family'*. Takiywaa was included while Efia was excluded as *'family'*. After having lived with the two girls for several months and having several talks with Owusua, I could piece together their stories to an understanding of why one was included while the other was excluded.

As I have written before, it did not seem natural for the informants to talk about difficulties and painful feelings, and Efia was no exception. Still I was given information little by little; always in fragments, and often when I least expected it. Efia did not know why she had been sent to live with Nana. Only when she was with her family in Accra for a funeral was she informed that she had to stay in Accra. Efia had lived her whole life in the far north of Ghana. Her mother had left her father when she was seven, and since then her siblings and herself had lived with her father and father's mother. While Efia had a close bond with her father, the relationship with her mother was strained and she questioned choices her mother had made: "How can you leave your children?", "My brother was only two years", "She just left us." Efia talked about the conflicts within her *'family'* from the point of view of her father. I never questioned her way of viewing negotiations and conflicts within the family network. But there were conclusions she made where I suspected she did not know all aspects of the conflict. Again, this show how children and youth are often forced to make decisions, while lacking potentially significant information, because this information is kept from them by their seniors (cf. Whitehead et al.2005:34-35).

Efia had only brothers and her grandmother was old. Therefore, and in tune with gender ideals, Efia did most of the cooking and cleaning around the compound. All the responsibilities put on Efia as a result of the parents' divorce, her living with the grandmother, and the fact that she was a girl, had left little time for school work. She had completed JSS[13], but her exam results were poor.

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[13] The Ghanaian educational system is comprised of 6 years primary education, and three years of junior secondary school (JSS). Senior secondary school (SSS) is the beginning of post basic education (Kanchat 2006).

Efia told me that her father was haunted by witches. He would wake up in the night screaming that the witches were there, trying to get him. The witches took his money, or made him waste his money. Because of this, finances remained a problem despite the father having a relatively well paid job. Owusua told me that Efia's maternal uncle lived in Europe, and by sending remittances helped the children of his sister financially. But now his children had started university and the economic burden became too great. He had therefore turned to his friend, Owusua's husband, for help. This was how Nana and Efia's uncle, without Efia's knowledge, came to an agreement where Efia was to work at Nana's store, and in return Nana would provide an apprenticeship position or formal education for Efia.

When school enrolment started Efia waited every day for anyone to tell her that she was going back to school, not knowing any of the plans her seniors had made for her. Owusua knew Efia wanted an education, but it might be difficult to assure as she had bad results from former schooling and as Owusua said: "She is getting older". The gender is of importance here as a boy would not be seen to be "getting older" at the age of 18. The period of youth is shorter for girls than boys, and they are expected, by adults and peers, to take on adult responsibilities, get married and have children at an earlier age than boys (cf. Whyte 2006:258-259).

In tune with gerontocratic norms of who makes decisions and when these decisions can be questioned, Efia never asked anyone why she was living with Nana. Neither did she complain about the fact that she was not asked or even told that she was to move to Accra.

But she did raise her voice in protest when she got to know that her father was never told about her moving to Accra: "How can they make this decision and not talk to my father?" The father had been in a different town working, and only got to know months later when he came back to their village and realised Efia was not there. He was furious and had beaten Efia's mother over the head with a wooden stool. For several days she talked with her father on the phone regularly. In time he settled with the idea, and the conflict faded out. But Efia still did not ask why she was there, for how long, and what she was to do there. It is likely that her mother told her father, but Efia never asked him either. The extent to which information was kept from Efia is not common among all Ghanaians. But still it was common enough not to be questioned by either Efia or Takiywaa. Other informants would claim that children

are mostly consulted, even when they are not making the final decision. The variations here are great, and are likely related to differences in socio-economic status and education, as well as ethnic, regional and religious background.

Efia said she missed her brothers and her friends. When I asked her direct questions about her situation she always laughed. She said she would cry if no one sponsored her education, and she laughed. When we had disagreements she would also laugh, and I understood that the laughing was not necessarily a sign of being happy, but just as much a form of defence; a way of diverting attention away from the pain or the conflict. But as I lived in the household Efia became sick more and more often. She complained about headache and stomach ache and got terrible rashes on her arms. She would go to a room by herself, and stay there for hours without talking to anyone, while she also increasingly picked fights with Amma and Takiywaa. Though I can not be sure, I am tempted to interpret this to be signs of stress. Withholding of information from Efia left her unknowing of what the future would bring and subsequently with few possibilities of changing or even impacting this future.

A place within patrimonial family relations

Though Owusua talked about Takiywaa as Nana's granddaughter, it was early on indications that Takiywaa did not always view Nana as her grandmother. Still, other times she expressed feelings of love and concern for Nana, and was happy the few times Nana made time for her. Though the relationship between the two most correctly can be characterised as ambivalent and changing there was a bond or relatedness between Takiywaa and Nana, as well as between Takiywaa and Owusua. The relatedness was at times strained because Takiywaa felt that there was lack of care for her from the side of Nana, as well as Owusua. There were tensions between several people in this family network and this was likely at least one of the factors affecting the relationship between Takiywaa and Nana.

Takiywaa was the daughter of Nana's driver. The driver had been working for the family since Owusua was just a child, and Owusua said "they are like family". Takiywaa's mother had once went with Nana to England where she worked for some time, but conflicts between her and Nana's daughter living there had made her return

after a short while. Both parts of the family network were Ashanti and came from the same village. Takiywaa told me that they were related and tried to explain to me exactly how they were related: "We have the same animal. I do not know… It is some animal that we have… We can't eat it!" The explanation was difficult to make sense of. That was until I read about, what Fortes (1950: 259-260) deemed a dying tradition among the Ashanti: Each clan has a taboo animal. This made sense of what Takiywaa had said. I assume the families saw each other as related by belonging to the same clan, as well as ethnic group and village (cf. Edwards and Strathern 2000:151).

When I came to the household Takiywaa had lived there for about two years. Before that she had lived with her mother, but also with her mother's sister in their hometown, and also with her maternal grandmother for some time. According to Takiywaa Nana had seen her selling water, and found it unacceptable that Takiywaa should be doing this form of work. This had made her decide that Takiywaa should stay with her and attend school.

Inclusion and exclusion

The relationship between the two family networks, or the two parts of the family network, can be categorised as patrimonial as the one was dependent on the other for education, employment and money. Not only was the one family network dependent on the other, but the relationship was talked about in genealogical terms, emphasising family relations as is common in patrimonial relations (cf. Vigh 2006:48). Owusua told me that Takiywaa had been named after Nana, and as a result of that honour she had always regarded Takiywaa as her granddaughter. Takiywaa said Owusua had wanted to adopt her when she was born, as Owusua herself had only sons. But Takiywaa's mother had refused. Takiywaa recollected that as a young child she would spend time with Owusua and her sons. They would go to the beach together, she would visit Owusua's house, and Owusua would arrange her birthday parties. This had changed, and Takiywaa said she did not know why there was an increasing distance between her and the foster-family.

It could be that due to her age she was left more to manage on her own. In many ways she was no longer a child but becoming a woman, and thus not in need of

the same type of care as given her before (cf. Goody 1982:23). Her biological father was often at the house as he worked there, but the mother visited only twice during my stay in the household. It might be that some of the tight bonds of care were being deliberately cut by the adult significant others in Takiywaa's life, to prepare her for a more independent life as an adult. But as far as this was the case it was done without giving any explanation of this to Takiywaa.

In tune with cultural norms of inclusion and expanding family networks, Owusua defined herself, her mother and Takiywaa as *'family'*. While Takiywaa was categorised as a grandchild, Efia was categorised as the child of a relative of a friend that was poor and in need of help, i.e. a stranger. But even being a stranger does not make it impossible to be included as *'family'*. When *'family'* expands in never ending chains from an individual there are no norms that hindered an inclusion of Efia as *'family'*. But where some are included there have to be others that are excluded (cf. Edwards & Strathern 2000:153), and while there are no norms stopping an inclusion of Efia there were neither any ties of connectedness that had lasted over time, such as sharing substance, household or hometown, that might have induced a sense of relatedness and resulted in an inclusion of Efia into the family network. And while a future inclusion of Efia could happen she had no voice within this family network as long as the seniors viewed her as stranger they had agreed to help.

The bonds developing between Efia and Takiywaa through the sharing of experiences, household, and food, as well as a mutual wish to include the other in ones life was the beginning of bonds of relatedness that might last for a long time. They might in the future be central individuals of each others family networks. In this was shared parenthood contribute in expanding *'family'* in unforeseen directions.

Owusua said that Takiywaa living with Nana had nothing to do with poverty, while the case of Efia was a result of poverty, Takiywaa herself believed she was with Nana because her biological parents were poor and could not afford to sponsor an education for both her and her sister.

Living with her parents before moving to Nana Takiywaa had to work every day to help the family with money for housing, education and food. To be fostered because of financial or social reasons are not mutually excluding. And to use Goody's term (1982:23) 'crisis fostering', when the children or youth are fostered out of necessity, as opposed to fosterage that is entered into voluntarily (Goody 1982:23),

would be an artificial boundary. And also to know to what extent the fosterage is entered into voluntarily is a challenge because these are children and youth, and are at times not even asked their opinion. In the case of Takiywaa it is likely that both economic and social reasons played a part in the decision of taking her into fosterage as well as for her mother to let her daughters move away from her.

When Takiywaa first moved to Nana she moved with her younger sister, Comfort, but the younger sister was sent back to the parents after just a few months, when she proved difficult to control. Despite the fact that Owusua said to Efia that she, as opposed to Takiywaa, would be sent home again if she did not behave, the threat of being sent back to the parents was very real also for Takiywaa.

One day I was sitting in my room I heard Nana shouting angrily at Takiywaa. I listened, but did not understand much as they spoke in Twi. What I heard was the anger in Nana's voice and that Takiywaa was begging and crying. Takiywaa came straight to my room after the argument. She just stood right on the inside of the door leaning against the wall, not saying a word. After a while I asked her to sit down. She sat on my bed, and I asked her what had happened:

> *She wants to send me back to my parents...*
>
> *I always forget things. Today when Nana went to have her bath, the buckets were not in the bathroom because I had forgotten them outside when I cleaned this morning. I begged her… I sat on my knees, and I begged her... I said I would do everything right. I don't want to go back to my parents. I want to stay.*

I asked if she thought Nana would really send her home, or if it might have been an empty threat:

> *She was very angry. She said that she would go and have her bath and think about it. She said she will see if her heart becomes any lighter, and if it does she might let me stay.*

We sat there and talked, and after some time Efia also came, and wanted to know what had happened. Abayomi fell asleep in the bed where the three of us sat discussing the matter till late in the evening. It became apparent that Nana would not talk with Takiywaa that day. The next day Takiywaa was told she could stay, but that she had to learn to perform her duties properly.

This situation again blur the difference between Takiywaa and Efia, as it seemed Takiywaa was *'family'*, but still the kind of *'family'* that could be thrown out of the household for not bringing the buckets into the bathroom after having cleaned the room. Or it could be that this was an empty threat that was just a part of disciplining Takiywaa, and teaching her to take responsibility, and perform her chores. But then it could also be an empty threat when Owusua threatened to send Efia back to her parents. Depending on what aspects of their fosterage experiences that are focused upon the situation of Efia and Takiywaa could seem more similar than different. And despite the fact that Owusua emphasised the familial bond between her mother and Takiywaa, this emphasis was not always shared by Takiywaa, and rarely showed by Nana.

Both the girls were troubled by insecurity, though Efia to a larger extent than Takiywaa. Takiywaa knew that her best chances of an education was staying with Nana, and while she had not decided to move there, she had decided she wanted to stay to gain an education, and to live with people of an higher socio-economic status which she said taught her "how to sit with big people", i.e. how to behave around people with education, living in the city, and having money. Efia did not know what the future would bring, and it bothered her that she just had to wait while she hoped someone would tell her why she was in Accra, for how long she was going to stay, and what she would be doing there. Efia never said a nice word about Nana or Owusua, and fear seemed to dominate her relationship with them. It should of course be kept in mind that Efia had not lived in the household for long, and time might help her get used to her new life situation. Takiywaa would at times talk about Nana with warmth, but then mostly about things they had done together in the past. Often she expressed frustration that Nana never listened to her, did not ask questions about how she was, or showed any interest in her education. At the same time she also expressed appreciation that Nana paid for her education as she knew her parents could not afford it. Again the difference between the situation of Takiywaa and Efia emerges. Despite

the insecurity Takiywaa felt, and the way Nana marginalised her in the household by threatening to send her back to her parents, there has been a connectedness over time, and shared experiences that bonded Takiywaa and Nana in a family-relationship, and sustained a sense of relatedness between the two. The patrimonial aspects of the relationship do not hinder bonds of relatedness, if the willingness to establish that form of bond is mutual.

Grandmothers and grandsons

A very different form of fosterage experience was retold by men who had lived with their grandmothers. George lived with his grandmother from he was 8. His mother worked and travelled a lot, and the father attended a course in a different part of the country. The father's course only lasted a year and George did not think it was their intention for him to stay with his grandmother much longer than that. He enjoyed staying with his grandmother, who always had time for him. He would help her run errands and do what she told him, but she put few demands on him and let him use his time playing with his friends.

Oko who lived with his grandmother because his mother died when he was three, narrated much of the same experiences of freedom, and care. The grandmother would spoil her grandchildren and especially Oko as he was the youngest one. Though they often did not have money for much more than basic food, school, and clothes, she would always try to give him what he asked for.

I have mentioned Ahusia and her four year old son earlier, Ahusia and I enjoyed each others company, and I often stopped by the household where they lived. They stayed with an elderly couple that had taken on the role as the boys grandparents. The little boy would pay more attention to his grandparents, and especially the grandmother than he would to his mother. When the grandmother told him to eat, he would eat, if she said it was time for him to take his bath, he would go immediately. I never heard him challenge his grandparents.

There were many situations where I observed children do exactly as their seniors told them, but it was often accompanied by fear of punishment. With this little boy this was not the case. The grandparents did not punish him, which was the role of

his mother. I'm sure she would punish him if he disobeyed the grandparents, but he was also punished when disobeying his mother.

It was also the grandparents he went to if he wanted food, or someone to play cards with him. The boy would light up and smile and laugh whenever the grandparents made time for him, and if they told him to wait before they could play with him he sat still, and waited patiently. On the other hand he would constantly challenge his mother. While he would be in bed by 7 o'clock when the grandparents were there, when they were not in the house he would still be roaming around at 9 o'clock, refusing to take his bath.

The balance of indulging and discipline is interesting ass it traverses, not what I have observed, but everything Ghanaians have taught me about how to raise children in a proper manner. I've been told over and over again that it is necessary to punish children, and let them have some sense of fear, and warned that if not, they will lose their respect of their seniors, and become *'spoilt'*[14]. But the treatment of the boy is similar to what I have observed many times. The emphasis is often on discipline, but children are often allowed freedom (cf. Gottlieb 2004:12-13), they would be threatened by punishment if they were not obedient, but the threats were often empty. I heard the sentence "I'll beat you" countless times, and it was one of the first things my son learnt to say, but he also learnt to laugh when people told him "I'll beat you". Most young children were not afraid when this sentence came from seniors, and there were few times that I observed the threat being followed by action. Though I did see mothers slap children who were seen to misbehave, and I have heard several narratives of severe corporal punishment. The age is here significant. While the young children were given freedom and rarely punished, the older children and youth told stories of brutal corporal punishment.

The three examples above show that the relationship with grandmothers, both when they have the role of foster-parents and not, can be one dominated by mutual love and care. Of course also other family-relations can be experienced in much the same way. The relationship of care between grandparents and grandchildren have been emphasised in literature from Africa, but have also been challenged. Fortes claimed that while the relationships with parents are often that of authority, that with grandparents is one of love and care (1949a:236-240). The relationship between

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[14] In Ghana the term has a strongly negative connotation.

grandparents and their grandchildren is expected to be one of trust, warmth and love (Fortes in Alber 2004:31). In tune with that grandparents are known to pamper and spoil grandchildren (Whyte & Whyte 2004:87). And though age hierarchies are significant, it is less so between grandchildren and their grandparents than between children and their parents (Radcliffe-Brown in Whyte, Whyte and Geissler 2004).

Van der Geest states that the assertion about the affection love and care between grandchildren and their grandparents are based on the fact that focus was on the young children and not the older children and youth (Van der Geest 2004:57). His analysis show that in Ghana the young men/youth, spend little time with their grandparents, and the respect shown in their narratives were not practiced in other ways (Van der Geest 2004:55) . Van der Geest concludes that the bond is not necessarily as close and caring as previously assumed, but rather based on a performance of respect.

Alber who have done her research in Benin among grandparents who have their grandchildren in fosterage, claims the role of grandparents change when they foster a grandchild, and that they again attain the role of parents (Alber 2004: 29,41). While Notermans, writing from Cameroon claims:

> *Not only do women perform Grandmotherhood differently from motherhood, children also experience grandmother's motherhood as highly different from mother's motherhood. Grandmothers are 'calmes' and 'sur place' they no longer move between different sexual relationships or marriages, they are not bothered with unfaithful husbands or jealous co-wives, they have time to set up an intimate relationship and they are not overly demanding[…]Children who live with grandmothers say that they also live calmly themselves (Notermans 2004b:16)*

These heterogeneous accounts of grandparents/grandchildren relations are not necessarily contradictory. The literature above all account of some aspects of what I observed and was told by those that had been fostered by their grandparents. The

relationships between foster-parents and foster-children varied, and so did the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. The category of grandparents might not be that salient in analysis. Because of gender differences there are significant differences in the roles of grandparents as foster-parents, or in other ways participate in shared parenthood. It is significant if we are talking about the relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter, or a grandmother and her grandson, the same would also be the case with grandfathers.

From my observations the loving and caring relationship men said they had to the grandmothers they lived with, and which I also observed boys have, was not experienced in the same way by girls. While the boys seemed to be pampered by their grandmothers the older girls were demanded to perform household chores, and received little attention.

The caring relationship between Oko and his grandmother seems to have lasted even into adulthood.

Significant in all the relations was the reciprocal nature of the relationships, and how explicit this was often made.

Not all grandparents were expected to take on any parenting role towards their grandchildren. The expectations were often based on previous experience. Those who felt the parents had neglected them did not expect the parents to take part in the fostering of their grandchildren. And while the son of Ahusia had grandparents living with him that participated in the fostering of the boy, this was never expected of his maternal grandfather who not only lived far away, but who had often disappointed his own children by what they saw as lack of willingness to consider their needs, and to put theirs in front of his own.

'Thicker' agency

The information I got supports a view that children staying with *'family'* with whom they shared relatedness had a relatively strong position when negotiating where to stay, and for how long, and also with whom. How this 'thickens' these children and youth's agency should be recognised.

The stories vary greatly, and Efia did not know why she stayed with Nana, what the plans for her future was or for how long she was going to stay. Most children had not made the decision of going to fosterage by themselves, but while some had no say, others had a possibility to contest decisions made for them. When children are placed in patrimonial relationships because of financial difficulties the agency of the child is already limited by the lack of material resources available, and in order to find a way out of poverty, difficult choices often have to be made by children, youth and adults. Lack of opportunities can leave children "at the mercy" of foster-parent. We see with the case of Efia that also those in a weak position negotiate, but their position is none the less weak. This will also be evident in the next chapter when I write about the experiences of Esi and Peter. Here I will show how a negotiation can proceed when the child/youth in fosterage have a relatively strong position, though still within a gerontocratic hierarchy.

The first time George's parents wanted him to move back to them they had just come to visit him and the grandmother in the evening. He assumed they did not think he paid attention to their conversation, but as soon as he heard that he might move back he jumped up and started to protest. His parents left the issue, and let him stay with his grandmother. When George was around 12 the parents again wanted him to move back with them.

They were hesitant to let him stay with the grandmother for the same reasons he wanted to stay. The grandmother did not demand much of him, either in the home or in terms of schoolwork. He was allowed his freedom to play with his friends. The parents on the other hand thought he could benefit from more discipline, and monitoring of his school work. George wanted to stay with his grandmother, and when his mother took him home, just to visit his parents, he had cried and cried until the mother took him back to his grandmother.

Negotiating with his parents George also convinced his parents that because his grandmother was old someone needed to stay with her and help her around the house. George said: "It was true, she needed the help, and I wanted to help her. And eventually it also gave me the freedom I wanted." He persuaded his grandmother that she should talk with his parents, and told them that he should stay with her. Again the parents let him stay with his grandmother. The twelve year old boy had decided where he wanted to live, and stayed there despite his parents' wishes.

This did not strain the relationship between him and the parents, rather his choice was accepted. This is similar to the accounts of Thorsen (2004) as well as Whitehead et al. (2005) they both show how children and youth migrate with or without their parents consent, but that in most cases this does not terminate the relationship, and the children are respected for their ambitions, and ability to act.

The way George also used his grandmother to plead his case was similar to an experience I had in the household I lived. As I have written, Takiywaa had a quarrel with Nana, and Nana threatened to send her back to live with her parents. Takiywaa and Efia wanted me to talk with her if everything else failed and I agreed that I would. I knew my role as an anthropologist, but if I could be of use in this situation I was willing to give it a try. Luckily I never had to take on that role, but I learned that the children/youth see other adults as their possible allies in conflicts, and to plead their case if necessary. Negotiations involving children's residence do not just involve parents, foster-parents and the children, but several significant others. Taken the emphasis on the extended family, and that children belong to the community rather than just its biological parents the significant others also have stakes in the welfare of children and youth (cf. Goody 1982). This form of shared parenthood shows the significance of recognising that there are several adults that see the children as their responsibility. This again underlines the significant point in the analysis of intergenerational contract where negotiations are not seen as conducted between two individuals but takes into account all the involved parts of intergenerational negotiations.

By negotiations George managed to stay with his grandmother for a few more years. Later when he reached the age of 15 his parents again wanted him to move back with them. Now several things had changed and George moved back with his parents. As he said "I was 15, how much could I cry?" While it is accepted of a 12 year old to go crying to his grandmother to be able to stay this was not an option for a 15 year old. Though still not recognised as an adult, he was older and thus the expectations of him had changed.

The main reason that his parents wanted him to move back with them was that his educational performance worsened. Both he and the parents knew that the grandmother was not the right person to make sure he worked hard in school, and did his homework, and thus he moved to his parents without any argument. He said that

he understood the decision. But also the fact that his parents were angry at him for performing badly in school gave him little opportunity of contesting their decision.

The children or even more the youth would analyse their possibilities before they contested their seniors. As in the case of George, he knew he had himself to blame, he was the one not performing in school. Having no counter arguments, he left the case. The position of George within the family network, where he was cared about by his parents and his grandmother was stronger than for children and youth that feel they receive little care, and are unsure of their position within the family network, or even fall between family networks. But also the access to information strengthened the position of George in negotiation with his parents and grandmother and 'thickened' his agency. He knew the circumstances under which his parents had decided they wanted him to move, and he could choose his arguments on the information he had.

Contesting the seniors

It seems as several conflicts between parents/grandparents and their children/grandchildren, and what the informants saw as an increase in disrespect of the elders can be rooted in the children and youth analysis of the situation they are in where many realise that the authoritarian seniors, the father especially, often has nothing to offer. Poverty has made it impossible for many parents to provide for their children.

Whereas before, children would often learn their parents' occupation, or get a piece of land of the father to farm, the resources were no longer there, and the authority of the senior that could offer nothing but their advices were increasingly challenged. I observed both. I saw children and youth, even adults doing what their parents told them to do, no questions asked. However, I was often told and also saw a few times that the advice given by a senior was contested or even neglected.

Some of the issues attached to the intergenerational contract in Ghana were that the seniors were often seen not to give children and youth what they felt they were entitled to. All relationships are expected to hold some form of reciprocity. This is the issue when some write about that there is a breakdown of "the Ghanaian

family" (and others "the African family") (Badasu 2004; Nanbigne 2004; Richter, L. & Morrell 2006). Nanbigne (2004:77) write that the ideals of informal balanced reciprocity is no longer a true reflection of Ghanaian society, as the most outstanding care given to elders are when they are dead and the family gathers to organise their funeral.

From narratives, and also what I saw of care given to elders I cannot agree to the pessimistic view of Nanbigne. I observed that reciprocity was continually negotiated and often involved conflict. Many have had difficulties in giving their dependents what they were seen as obliged to, and a topic of discussion here was often education. In the cases where the parents had not been able to or willing to pay for the children's education this impacted on the willingness of the children to care about their parents. Again the intent behind the care given is of significant. A parent that could not provide an education for his or her child was likely to receive more respect, and care than a parent not willing to provide an education.

While education have been said to increase the level of conflict between generations, and undermine the authority of elders (Caldwell, Reddy & Caldwell in Whitehead et al. 2005:24), the inability of giving education was among my informants a constant source of conflict within the intergenerational contract. And as Kabeer (in Whitehead et al. 2005:24) argues, in Bangladesh parents investment in education for their children serves to strengthen the child's sense of duty, and thus to secure the parents in old age. I was told the same by Ghanaians. The parents willing or able to secure an education for their children was more likely to be provided for in old age. When children and youth participate in negotiations, with 'thin' or 'thick' agency trying to navigate towards their short-term and long-term goals they take into consideration their alternatives as well as their hopes and dreams for their future, but just as important they consider their past experiences. Thus care needs again to be highlighted. In past experiences the intentions of the care given (or not given) by significant others will impact on their decisions. When taking the needs of their elderly parents into consideration for how they navigate towards the future, not only the abilities but also the willingness of the parents to take care of them when they were younger becomes significant.

Even with 'thin' agency children and youth contributed to how the relationships developed, and they decided to a large extent to stay or not. Takiywaa's

sister, Comfort, was sent from Nana and back to her parents. Comfort was 12 years old and lived at the time I was in Ghana with her parents. Like Takiywaa, she had never wanted to move in with Nana. And unlike her older sister Comfort never settled down in the house. Pleading to be sent back had not worked, neither had crying herself to sleep every night. The decision was not for Comfort to make, but she could try to make others take decisions for her. More or less deliberately she acted in ways which eventually made Nana send her back. The incidence that had triggered this was when Comfort went on a trip with the church, over night, without informing Nana.

What made Takiywaa stay was the hope of an education. Comfort had never cared about school, and mostly her parents would make empty promises of gifts to make her perform in school. Takiywaa lived up many of the ideals for a young woman, and this made people like her. She was always polite, talked to people with respect, she tried to do her duties and when she cooked, something she did well, she shared with everyone. I heard adults praise Takiywaa's calm and caring conduct on several occasions. Her sister was her complete opposite. I met her only twice, but was surprised how direct she was. She would ask anything, say anything that was on her mind, and though we all laughed, she did not behave appropriate for neither her age nor gender. Discussing this with Owusua she said "Can you believe that those two girls come from the same womb?" Takiywaa said it was because she was *'spoilt'* by their father. The younger sister and the father would often sit and talk together for hours, and Takiywaa said disapprovingly: "They look like a married couple! People talk, oh!" Again the dangers of spoiling children was emphasised, and seen as the reason for what they deemed to be bad behaviour.

Despite being sisters, and having the same background and opportunities, the two girls have made very different choices, and relate to their seniors in different ways. While the younger sister's choices seems to have the present and near future as it's concern, the choices of Takiywaa was made with a more distant future in mind.

5. Narratives, Memorialization and 'Thin' Agency

In this chapter I analyse how youth and young adults who experienced hardship in fosterage created a life for themselves, and how they managed this in a situation of mounting adversity. The fostered youth in this chapter are what Honwana and De Boeck (2005:2) describe as young Africans who show tremendous creativity in making a living for themselves despite difficult conditions. Dealing with difficulties and pain while striving to create meaning they reach inside and tap into their own sources of strength (Honwana & De Boeck 2005:12), as well as the cultural ideals in which they might find both strength and consolidation. The first part of the chapter deals with narratives of the past and present. Through analyses of memorialization of the past and conceptualisation of the present, and how both past and present is actively narrated within hopes for the future, I outline aspects of the practice of creating one's life, and making continuity despite hardship, pain and disruption. Through studying disrupted lives and the efforts people make to regain a sense of continuity, entails a close look at the cultural context in which disruption occurs (Becker 1997). An analysis of fostered youth in Ghana's memorialization of difficult situations of their life is also a study of how Ghanaian cultures are embedded when they try to make sense of pain. As Bruner (2004:694) writes "One important way of characterising a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life". Stories of people's lives also enables a study of the cultural resources that are used by people to reconstruct life experiences (Gullestad 1996:16) I will show this by bringing into the analysis Ghanaian ideals regarding hardship and struggle.

I have in the previous chapters discussed some aspects of agency and its limits for children and youth in fosterage. Here I will continue this discussion by looking at

the ambivalent place of children's and youth's 'thin' agency in situations of hardship and pain.

Narratives of a painful past

I stood at Legon University and waited. The man I was waiting for was a fellow student of another informant. Peter, a lean tall man came smiling towards me. He had errands to run and asked if I did not mind coming with him before we started the interview. After his errands we sat down on benches at the campus premises and I interviewed him about his fosterage experiences.

Until he was 15 Peter lived with his parents. At that time his parents' fragile financial situation worsened[15] and his older cousin (his father's brother's son) asked Peter to stay with him. He stayed for five years. The cousin was seldom there as he worked long hours; most days he came home in time for the evening meal before they all went to bed, and in the morning he would be away before Peter and the others woke up. The wife of the cousin was in charge of the household. She did not want Peter in the house, and because of that she would not let Peter eat when she cooked. The only daily meal he had was the evening meal with his cousin. Peter told me how he had looked for ripe fruit to eat on his way to and from school; he would even eat semi-ripe papaws and mangoes, just to have eaten at all before the evening. Constant hunger made it difficult to focus in class, and he often thought about food instead of what the teacher said. He passed all final exams, but at the time we met he still suffered health problems as a result of years of malnutrition. He said the treatment from his cousin's wife was unacceptable, and regretted that his health still suffered.

The cousin's wife saw the resources used for Peter and his education as a wasted investment that would have been better used for their own children. Peter told me that she wrongly assumed he would not fulfil his obligations of returning the favours given him by her husband, and she feared he would only care for his nuclear-family, and their investment in his education would not benefit her or her children. The cousin's wife lacked trust in Peter and therefore found it reasonable to doubt his

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[15] In the three northern regions of Ghana, the area where Peter was from, as much as 80% of the population is defined as poor, and 70% as extremely poor (Kwankye et al. 2007:6).

intentions of reciprocating the sponsoring he was given. This lack of trust can be related to what Goody (1982:16) writes about reciprocity and parenting:

> *The nurturance, training and sponsorship aspects of parenthood [...] generate characteristic patterns of reciprocal obligations, and transactions about these aspects of parenthood are about the right to enter into a relationship which implies more-or-less self-enforcing reciprocities.*

The nature of an obligation that is *self-enforcing* is that the means of claiming reciprocity, when for instance nurturance and sponsorship is given, are limited. One can remind people of their obligations, quarrel, and complain, but as long as the obligation is *self-enforcing* there are limited possibilities to make individuals live up to their obligation of reciprocity. Because of this, relationships of nurturance, training and sponsorship requires mutual trust between the person that takes on this parenting role and the child or youth who are taken into fosterage. At the same time these relationships can generate trust through cohabitation and practice of daily routines that can prove the individuals' reliability.

What can explain the lack of trust and the behaviour of the cousin's wife are practices of inclusion and exclusion in family networks, conjugal relations and economy. The lack of trust could be because Peter came from the husband's side of the family network which often is not regarded to be *'family'*. As I have written previously relatedness expands beyond the biological family, and enlarges it. But the feelings of relatedness do not always include affines (cf. Notermans 2004a). As a result it might be that Peter was seen by the wife as an outsider.

Peter did not tell his cousin about the problems with the wife. His cousin was temperamental and the couple had frequent fights. Peter knew if his cousin was aware of the treatment he was given by the man's wife it would have had serious consequences for her, consequences that Peter would have to take responsibility for. Peter and his cousin were close, and he feared his cousin could go as far as to divorce the wife.

While Ghanaian men have responsibilities towards their wife/wives and children, they also have strong ties and responsibilities towards others they regard as *'family'*, and conflicts similar to this, over a man's use of resources are frequent (cf.

Vellenga 1983, Abu 1983, Miescher 2005). The relatedness felt by Ghanaians (women or men) towards their mother, siblings and children are closer than the relatedness felt towards conjugal partners (cf. Ware 1983:17). This tension in the conjugal unit is amplified by financial hardship. The limited material resources often prove it impossible for an individual to satisfy all his or her dependents. As a result some Ghanaian women fear being the last to be prioritised in competition over a husband's resources because these might be channelled to the man's mother, sister, brother, or their sibling's children, or in some cases *'unofficial wives'*. While the first form of priorities seemed to make sense to the informants, and cohere with notions of relatedness, the second was by both men and women talked about as *irresponsibility*. In cases where the men's priorities left the wife without finical support this was seen as a valid reason to leave the marriage (cf. Azu 1974:104; Notermans 2004b:1). While *'family'* have the quality of being infinitively expanding it *needs* to be limited when resources are scarce, and *'family'* expect to be given a helping hand by anyone in the family network. While the lack of social security systems in Ghana people are dependant on their social networks when met with challenges, but the same challenges, often economically rooted, leads to exclusion of people. The exclusion does not have to lead to a termination of family bonds, but strain them, and leads to conflicts.

When Peter moved out he had no one to go to for sponsorship for higher education and despite good results in school he was not able to attend university. He then started teacher's training college, which is a paid study in Ghana. After three years at the college the students are obliged to work as teachers for three years. After three years of working he got a four year study leave with pay that enabled him to do a bachelors degree at the university.

Peter continued to live under difficult conditions. With the minimal wage he received as a studying teacher he used half his salary on three of his sisters. He sent monthly remittances for food, school books and for the girls to rent a room in proximity of school. He said his income was not sufficient to support four individuals, but "I have to give my sisters the same opportunity as I have." He wanted to share the benefits of education with his family. Also Peter had to make a choice of who to "include more" when he wanted to help his sisters. All three sisters had the same mother and the same father as Peter. His father had a second wife who also had

several children. This wife was furious with Peter for not sponsoring the education of any of *her* children. And while Peter understood her anger he was not willing to change his decision, but hoped that he could help them at a later point. The poverty of the family network as well as the conflicts and pain it brought were mounting, and during prayers Peter would cry and ask why *he* had to carry all this responsibility. How did Peter deal with the ordeals of his past which also continued into the present?

Memorialization

Crapanzano writes that people give difficult pasts meaning through memorialization which he describes as an active use and creation of memory (2004:159). Furthermore he claims that the action of memorialization gives the past certain governance over the present and the future (2004:159). By remembering the past as a part of a *rise* to a better future, Peter did not only let the past govern the present and future but contextualised the past within hopes for the present and future. Through analysing narratives I will show how they are an act of memorialization where fostered youth can give painful experiences of the past meaning as a generator towards a better future.

In narrating his past Peter also focused on the future. The time he spent living with his cousin had enabled him to study, which he saw as the way to financial security and knowledge. It was not a narrative of the past or the hopes for the future, but of both simultaneously; where either one would be less significant alone. Hopes are in this context not open-ended without a clear definition and the subject of chance, but specific hope that borders on desire (Crapanzano2004:100). Through painful experiences in the past or present, such as starvation and being unwanted, informants' hopes for the future plays a central role, partially because it is seen as realistic to obtain what one hopes for. "They do not strive after things that have 'no place', but after things that have 'no place *as yet'* but can acquire one" (Moltmann in Crapanzano2004:101).

A narration of past pain in direct relation to present and future success can be related to West-African notions of struggle as a way to success. Antze and Lambek (1996:vii) claim that memories are interpretive reconstructions embedded with

features of *cultural assumptions*, practices, and social contexts of recall and commemoration. Cultural assumptions of significance are West-African ideologies that emphasises the positive outcome of hardship put on children (cf. Isiugo-Abanihe 1985, Bledsoe 1990). Significant in the memorialization of the past among the fostered youth who experienced pain, is that past or present struggle is seen by their society to enable success. A *'spoilt'* child on the other hand, will never succeed in life. This ideal is a part of Ghanaian daily practices of fostering children. One informant used the proverb "Spare the rod and spoil the child", and with mothers it was a repeated topic of conversation. They would say: "My brother says I am spoiling him [my son]" or "They [members of the family-network] say he is *'spoilt'* because he does not have brothers and sisters". Also narratives like folk tales, as the story in the preface, moralise about the danger of spoiling children. These stories are often orally transmitted, and are told to show how children and youth can succeed. They contribute to support and sustain prevailing ideologies by being told as a fictive story, but still real in the sense that their essence is seen to have common truth.

Bledsoe (1990) shows how a man in Sierra Leone navigating, and negotiate by using an ideology of "No success without struggle". He tries to persuade a foster-father not to evict his son. In despair over a fosterage situation where he was not given sufficient food and where it was impossible for him to find time for his homework because of the amount of work he was set to do, the son had turned to his father for help (Bledsoe 1990:71). The father talks with the foster father but instead of showing support for his son and his painful experience he begs the foster-father to keep his son there and treat, who he calls his ungrateful son, even more harshly and keep disciplining the boy towards his own advancement (Bledsoe 1990:71,83). This same ideology is also used similarly to exhort children and youth into persistency in their training when encountered with difficulties (Bledsoe 1990:77, 78).

Youth in fosterage in Ghana used notions of the relationship between struggle and success to "persuade" themselves, through memorialization, that the experienced pain was part of their growth; financially and personally. What Simpson (2005:572) saw in Zambia was that the focus in the narratives changed with age. He interviewed men first when they were in their teens, and then again 20 years later. The details of their narratives were the same, but the moral evaluation of their experiences had changed. While they as teenagers had been critical to their fathers harsh treatment,

they would 20 years later be grateful of their fathers harshness, who had taught them how to suffer, and become real men (Simpson 2005:572,581-582) Peter's painful experience is through memorialization transformed into variations of cultural specific ideals where pain, struggle and hardship are valued as a method of moulding children and youth into responsible adults. Ideals of hardship give children and youth that experience pain and hardship a sense of meaning. Still the manner in which Peter was fostered was perceived of by Ghanaians as *unacceptable* as children and youth have a right to be fed and nurtured. But the treatment Peter was given is not far from the acceptable as some hardship is seen to do no harm, and the children/youth is believed to gain personal growth also from extreme hardship. In addition to the positive effects struggle is seen to have on youth; the knowledge that their pain is related to ideals can be a source that gives meaning to pain through relating one's own experiences to local ideology. Hence, work as a way to "persuade" oneself that the pain was not in vain. This again points in the direction of the importance of hopes for the future; that it will entail access to education and knowledge, and financial security. The narratives show a way of finding the good in the bad, i.e., to be able to turn something painful into useful tools for one's own growth both personally an economically.

Conceptualising the present through hopes for the future

Esi was a 16 years old girl living in fosterage with the elderly couple who was our neighbours. Efia and Esi went to the same church, and that's how they became friends. Now and then Takiywaa and Efia told me about Esi, and shared there concerns about her welfare. Efia was shocked that Esi on some Sundays had to sell food outside the church, and thus was not given the time off to attend the sermon. The neighbours were frequently fighting, and often shouting at Esi. Takiywaa and Efia would gather next to the wall that separated the compounds and listen when they quarrelled.

Esi used to stop by from time to time; mostly to collect cassava peel for their goats. She never said much. And after the greetings she would turn her head down and continue gathering the cassava peel, or leave the compound. Esi still agreed to talk with me about her experiences. I also interviewed both her foster-parents and

talked with another female relative. They would let me talk to Esi, but I assume, due to the conflicts in the household they wanted to be heard as well.

Esi had come to the neighbours household two years earlier to attend school, and was supposed to stay two more years until she had completed JSS. As her father was unemployed, the parents had difficulties financially taking care of their five children, and only Esi and the younger sibling was still in school. When her uncle wanted to bring Esi to Accra her mother had urged her to be obedient and stay where her uncle decided so that she could get the opportunity of going to school.

Esi's hopes for the future influenced her in her actions, and how she spoke about the present. She contextualised the present within a process that could lead to a better future. Esi, like Peter, painted a bleak picture of her fosterage experiences:

They (the foster-parents) do not want me to go to school. They only let me stay because they want me to work for them. I do everything in the household. Anything they ask me. Often I help the lady to prepare and sell kenkey[16]. But they do not take care of me! Now and then I get money for transport and food at school. They will give me 30 pesewa (100 pesewa is 1 Cedi), from which I will use 10 for the bus and 20 for food. But when I get home in the afternoon they always offer me food. They treat the little girl different because she is their granddaughter. They give her everything she needs. When I need something I have to ask my uncle, but all his children are attending school, and sometimes he do not have enough money for me. I am not happy here! But I will stay! I want to complete JSS, and then I want to attend SSS. I want to be a nurse. By all means I will find a way to keep attending school!

Esi grew up in the Volta region and her parents and siblings still lived there. I asked her if she missed them. She said yes and stated she had not been back for two years. Her mother had come to Accra once. Esi's uncle had visited the hometown and she was disappointed that he did not ask her to come with him. Esi's position within an intergenerational contract was in many aspects similar to that of Efia. Not only was her parents economic position so fragile that she had few opportunities, but also her

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[16] Ghanaian staple food made from fermented corn dough.

age and gender as well as the relationship she had to her uncle all played a part in marginalising her negotiating position. The result for Esi was that her position as a child and junior to her uncle was not able to question his decision by asking if she could come, or ask why he did not invite her. Esi's behaviour supported the statement that she was unhappy: She seldom smiled, laughed or giggled like Efia and Takiywaa did, she looked down and gave the impression of trying to be "invisible". I wrote previously that Efia's laughing was just as much a way of diverting attention away from painful feelings and conflicts as sign happiness. But the two girls often had fun, and laughed wholeheartedly forgetting about their worries.

At a later time I was at the neighbours' compound when a conflict erupted. During the conflict one woman turned to me and said "Can you see how this girl is a thorn in their [the foster-parents] side!" The adults argued loudly while Esi did not utter a word, but stood leaning against a tree with her arms crossed and head up, looking straight at her seniors. She looked resolute and defiant. The attitude during this conflict allude to how determined she sounded when I interviewed her and told me what she wanted to do in her life, and that "*by all means*" she would succeed in attaining an education. Esi was in a difficult situation, where her choices were limited, but she showed a strength that would be unmistakable for any observer. She knew what she wanted, and she seemed to have no illusions of a quick way to a better life. She knew she had to endure the difficulties she met if she were to have any chance at all of changing her life. But she did not keep this determination and her ambitions to herself, but let the foster-family know that she to, had her goals and her reasons for being there. Again, within the family-network Esi was not given much room (if any at all) for direct negotiation. But even without uttering a word she made a strong statement, which impacted on the situation. If she did not gain much from her statement, she had at least proved her presence, and could not be ignored.

Like in Peter's narratives of the past the ideologies of hardship and success, where those that can handle the hardship are the ones that will be able to fight their way upwards, these were also in Esi's narration of her present.

The hope for the future that was most clearly voiced by Peter and Esi was the hope of an advanced education. Peter was proud that he would be the first from his village to complete a bachelor degree. This indicates how difficult it is for rural people with a low socioeconomic status to access higher education, and the

limitations this put on the possibility of socio-economic mobility. Peter talked about the importance of formal education in generating individual socioeconomic mobility, but also as a collective project of bettering the Ghanaian economy.

With an advanced education youth are more likely to find professional work that can secure their future financially, and hence be part of generating socio-economic mobility, and move them from youth to adulthood as well as from poverty to financial security (cf. Vigh 2006). For youth from lower socio-economic classes this mobility comes to the centre of their narrative through the hopes they present for their future, as well as the choices some are able to make. The possible outcome of their struggle could be a life that is safer financially, and where they are respected as adult women and men, because they by navigating between their few opportunities, have attained this position that acquire social, cultural and economical capital. Situations that Ghanaians in general terms would characterise as intolerable becomes acceptable by being a stage in a process towards these larger goals.

'Thin' Agency

I have described above how youth with painful experiences actively create their lives through memorialization of the past, and imagining the present. The painful experiences that last over time can be seen as a form of disruption (cf. Becker 1997) "Disruption and efforts to create continuity ultimately lead to issues of agency, resistance, and power" (Becker 1997:192). The informants chose *how* to deal with disruption and difficulties, and one of these creative ways of handling these difficulties or disruptions is, as shown, by active use of local ideology. The choices made in relation to difficulties are stressed by Becker in the quotation above.

Agency is an ambiguous aspect of the lives of fostered children and youth. I focus on how they navigate within changing structures and in relation to their significant others, as well as how they create their lives through their narratives. By imagining ones life in ways that are personally and culturally defined, the youth and young adults make decisions of how they will handle the difficulties they face. The importance informants put to their ability to make choices despite limiting circumstances indicate that the idea of having agency in memorialization of the past, in conceptualising the present and in the hopes for the future, can give youth a feeling

of self-empowerment. This was shown by informants through their narratives, where they kept focus on their choices and by that actively distanced themselves from victimisation. But they did not distance themselves from their significant others as individuals independent of *'family'*, and social networks. And they commonly interpreted their agency within the frameworks of the family-network

Honwana and De Boeck describes how structural restrains affect the lives of many young people across Africa: Youth are often pushed and pulled into situations and acts over which they have little or no control, and they are often at risk, hurt or broken in positions of exploitation (Honwana and De Boeck 2005:3). They also point to what is shown in the narratives in this chapter that agency under difficult circumstances such as violence and pain, are always painful (Honwana & DeBoeck 2005:8). The choices that are made under difficult circumstances do not necessarily lead to anything being easier or better either in the present or future. But even though the social category of children and youth often holds little social or economic power, they have both direct and indirect ways of practising agency (Thorsen 2006:88).

The agency of the children and youth could also change over time as "structures, contexts and relationships can act as 'thinners' and 'thickeners' of individuals' agency by constraining or expanding their range of viable choices" (Klocker 2007:85).

When the youth choose to do what is expected and seen as age and gender appropriate behaviour they will be acknowledged for this. This acknowledgment has intrinsic value, at the same time as acknowledgement and recognition is needed also for socio-economic mobility. To be able to act in an age and gender appropriate manner are signs of being in possession of social and cultural capital. As can be seen in the case of Takiywaa and Comfort, the well sought at girls and boys that knew their place in society and how to navigate within this seemed to have an upper hand in gaining a patron, which often is *the only* way of accomplishing a socio-economic mobility. I will add that when it came to gender, women who did not act in ways that was seen as gender appropriate ways was respected for this, when they were financially independent. The women that did not have, and financially, did not need a husband were by some (both women and men) rather admired for their courage.

Neither Peter nor Esi described their ordeals in fosterage as a situation that was forced upon them, by people or circumstances. In Peter's narrative of the past he

was a victim of maltreatment, but had deliberately chosen to stay in the situation to obtain his educational goals. Even though Esi knew her parents could not afford to take care of her, and it was not her choice where to stay or to leave her home, she presented her *staying* in fosterage as her choice. In stressing that she had made up her mind to stay she emphasised her own agency and that she had choices and made strategies within existing structures. The opportunity to make choices concerning where to live, and how to deal with these living conditions, in this way carries significance to individuals, in generating an understanding of being in control; of self-empowerment. When Peter chose to stay with his cousin it was partly a choice of necessity generated by poverty, and an independent decision based on his hopes for a more distant future. Esi and Peter knew they would attend school if they stayed in fosterage, something which heavily influenced the choices they made.

Those children and youth who make these difficult choices are "looked up to". They gain a status as hardworking and resilient. They live the ideal of hardship and struggle, and have learnt how to sacrifice. The children were expected to understand this. Again I turn back to the expectations on children and youth: Depending on their age, they are expected to participate and contribute in and for the family-network and the wider society. Children are not "protected" from the lived life of adults. Not only the youth attains respect from others by being able to endure, and sacrifice, the same is also the case with adult women and men. And the practices are conducted in negotiations with ideals of age and gender appropriate behaviour. A young woman told me that women in Ghana were supposed to forgive their husbands almost anything. And continued to say that as a woman she was expected to *forgive* and *endure*. Susan did not live up to this ideal and said that the neighbours might respect her if she forgave and endured, but she would not be happy. So if anyone wanted to disrespect her for leaving her child's father she claimed she would not care. What Susan says about the ideal of female forgiving, sacrifice and endurance is the subject of a young Nigerian writer, Emecheta Buchi, as well. In her novel *The Joys of Motherhood,* which is an ironic critique of gender roles in Nigeria, she narrates a story of a woman who forgives, sacrifices and endures for her husband and her children. While alive the woman never receives anything in return, and dies mad and alone by the side of the road. After her death her migrant children gives her the largest funeral anyone in the village has ever seen.

Both the woman telling me about the ideals of womanhood in Ghana, and Emecheta Buchi is part of a discourse that debates and challenges the ideals of both age and gender appropriate behaviour. The ideals debated and discussed was also about masculinity. On a picture of a bus at the back the book *Making Men in Ghana* (Miescher 2005) it is written "To be a man is hard". Common across the African continent is that to be reckoned as a full man, a man must be married and have children, and be able to provide for both the wife and the children (cf. Lesejane 2006; Vigh: 2006; Miescher 2005; Fortes 1984). This ideal was difficult for several of the male informants that I talked with, and while I never heard any men dispute the "correctness" of the ideals they voiced frustration over women that did not want to settle with men who were not able to secure them financially. The ideals are for many impossible to reach because of poverty and the lack of opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

How children and youth navigate and make decisions within and outside what is seen as appropriate for their age and gender was indicated also by Adu, the head of an orphanage I visited several times. He claimed that some children and youth *choose* to stay on the street. This he said was because they had problems with authority, and wanted freedom. He added that when children live on the street for a long time, they get used to the hardship and the freedom it offers, and it can be hard for them to accept the hierarchy and strict rules of an orphanage.

Adu accepted the agency of the orphaned children and youth and reflects ideals of the region, where to relocate and migrate is seen as an option both for children and adults (cf. Howard 2008:41; Kwankye, Anarafi, Tagoe & Castaldo 2009:23-24). That children/youth can practice agency is, as Adu is an example of, widely acknowledged by Ghanaians. And as Whitehead (et al. 2005) writes it is also common in literature on children in poor countries.

They do not necessarily end up in a position that is better than what they left, but their 'thin' agency is perceived by them as choices made and need to be taken into account when trying to understand how youth understand their situation in fosterage, or how adults look back on experiences of fosterage.

Not all could choose to attend formal education and fewer had the possibility to attain a university degree. Lack of education was something informants regretted. Older informants that complained about their lack of education and structural

elements such as poverty that had deprived them of an education concluded that they did have choices, but that they and/or their guardians had made the wrong ones. An example of this is Kofi. I was talking with Kofi and John when Kofi claimed he was not educated because his father had neglected to sponsor him. John immediately replied that he at the time had the money, but used them for his business ideas that had gone wrong. Kofi agreed, but said he had invested his money with the hopes of gaining enough money for a more advanced education.

All the above examples show that instead of making strategies in a linear manner in a stable terrain they move *within* a moving society that also moves them while they aspire to create a life for themselves; navigating through the pushing and pulling of the changing society within which they live (Vigh 2006:54-55). I will also add that the possibility they have, to make decisions for themselves and participate in intergenerational negotiations is important in the creation of a feeling of self-empowering. The youth in fosterage expressed a wish to prove they could impact on their own and others' lives, even if this form of navigating agency was painful and the one choice might not be more fruitful than the other.

In a hypothetical situation where the parents of Esi and Peter had a better economy they might not have been in circumstances where they had to choose to stay in a household where they were not wanted. I did not discuss this with them. But I did talk about it with other informants. They said that their life would have been *easier* if their parents had enough money to support them, and they did not have to live in fosterage. Commonly they used the term *easier* and not *better*, a use of terms that is concurrent with the ideal that links struggle and success, and the subsequent notion that *easier* is not necessarily *better*. An easy upbringing can lead to a *'spoilt'* child, and a *'spoilt'* adult which will find it hard to succeed in life, as the story of the King's son (preface) clearly depicts.

Two years earlier when she arrived in Accra, Esi had never met her foster-parents and believed she was coming to live with her uncle. Despite this lack of control of the situation she presented it as her choice that she had stayed in fosterage when being unhappy and maltreated. Esi wanted to complete her education, but also told me "It would be *better* for me living with my mother". Esi did use the term *better* and is an exception in this matter. Her narratives show that she was ambivalent towards her situation. The relation between what she felt about the treatment she was given and

the goals and hopes that she had for the future. On the one hand she saw it as an advantage to be able to get an education which she considered as *better* than being uneducated, but on the other hand it would also have been *better* to be wanted. She was in a position where any of her limited choices leads to pain, and none of the choices would necessarily have made her life *easier*.

When Peter did not tell his cousin about his difficulties, this was a form of 'thin' agency. It is a form of agency that shows the importance of seeing the choices individuals make in a larger context of cultural influence, and a communitarian thinking that does not give room for a theory of the individual that constantly seek to maximize their own gains (cf. Ortner 2006:130-131). Peter did not want to be the direct cause of his cousin's marital problems so he never admitted the troubles he had with the wife, and the fact that she refused him food. Within the limited choices Peter had, this was one of the choices he could make; to say something to his cousin or to stay quiet. He made his decision based not on how he was treated, but on the consequences his choices would have for the *'family'* he stayed with, and the possible impact it would have on the social relations in the *'family'* if he was the cause of the marriage dissolving.

The fostered youth believed that the sacrifices they made could affect to what extent their hopes would be realised. I believe their presentation of the past to be a creative way of empowering themselves, or giving themselves a sense of empowerment, and in so doing contributing in their own process of self-realization. Just as important as how the past is remembered are hopes for the future. The narratives, by telling a life story where both past, present and future is included holds 'thin' agency. By narrating a hoped for life course they position themselves within cultural norms, and they position themselves in the mind of the listener. They told me that they would succeed. Within the few choices they had, they could choose to show the anthropologist that they were strong, resilient youth that would defy any obstacle. The narratives were of youth that struggled but were confident that they would obtain their dreams in the future.

6. Concluding remarks

I have through this thesis explored various experiences of being in fosterage, and analysed the significance of family relations, socio-economic status, age and gender and how this might impact on Ghanaians experiences of being in fosterage.

I ended this thesis by analysing narratives of painful fosterage experiences. I have argued that in their narratives informants memorialize the past, and conceptualise the future in specific ways to handle painful experiences. Ghanaian values and ideals are drawn upon to contextualise harsh treatment of children and youth that informants normally would deem unacceptable. My argument has been that they draw strength from local ideals of hardship and pain. The story in the preface show how these ideals stress the significance for children and youth to learn how to struggle and work hard to be able to succeed in adulthood.

When fosterage was criticised it was because of situations as those I described in the last chapter. Those informants who were most critical towards practices of fosterage emphasised that shared parenthood lessened the control held by biological parents and could facilitate both neglect and abuse of children. When children were neglected, they were believed to be predisposed to neglect their own children in the future, as well as their aging parents. In this context, fosterage was seen to be part of, and generate, a downward spiral contributing to a breakdown of common Ghanaian ideals of reciprocal care between individuals considering each other *'family'*.

Those who criticised fosterage would commonly separate carefully between their own experiences, and what they saw as the experiences of many others in fosterage. They had not necessarily been neglected themselves. But would rather tell me that their own parents had sacrificed a lot for them, their children, as they left

them with caring relatives to be able to work and provide for them. There were thus contradictions in the discourse on fosterage. As long as the sharing of parenthood was practiced in tune with local ideals of childcare, children and youth were seen to benefit from living away from their biological parents. Biological parents are believed to be inclined to spoil their children, while foster-parents are seen to demand more of the children, and therefore the children in fosterage will learn how to struggle, and then be able to become hardworking and successful adults.

Also, children and youth in fosterage, by living not only in one household, are ideally to benefit from an extended family network. The enlarged family networks can provide fostered children with multiple adults that can be drawn on for various needs, ranging from moral support, to education and employment, or someone to talk on their behalf when that is needed.

The wide spread practice of fosterage have led me to conclude that shared parenthood was seen to have significant benefits. And the practice was not stigmatising even though it was discussed and negotiated to what extent it should be practiced, when and how it should be practiced, and also the short and long term effects of the practice.

One of the important reasons for children and youth to be in fosterage was the quest for education. Poverty made life hard for many Ghanaians, both adults and children, and their choices were limited. But both poor youth and those who were better off saw education as the surest way of maintaining or improving one's socio-economic status. I show in the case of Efia and Takiywaa how a fosterage relation to a large extent can be patrimonial. When the biological parents could not afford education for their children, sharing this parental role with others was a viable option. To describe how the children and youth in fosterage strive towards their goals, both short and long term, I have used the term navigation (cf. Vigh 2006) which is meant to put focus on how people move within a shifting environment, and continuously have to negotiate and renegotiate how to reach their short and long term goals.

The empirical data suggest that those who were in fosterage because their biological parents could not provide for them because of poverty, had a relatively week position within the intergenerational contract.

I have used the terms 'thin' and 'thick' agency to both acknowledge the agency of children and youth in fosterage, as well as the limitations of their opportunities of creating changes in their own situation (Klocker 2007:85). 'Thin' agency describes situations in which children and youth in fosterage have few viable options when trying to impact on their own life. My observations as well as narratives show that the agency of children and youth in fosterage was 'thinned' because of gender, age and socio-economic status, but not by being in fosterage. Because hierarchies, and distribution of resources such as education, information, and employment to a large extent were based on age, gender and socio-economic status, these also contributed to the 'thinning' or 'thickening' also of children not in fosterage. I argue that fostered children's narratives of painful experiences is a form of 'thin' agency as the informants choose how to present themselves and their experiences. They make use of ideals that avoid them being seen as victims, but rather as resilient youth who will reach their future goals by sacrificing their immediate needs. 'Thin' agency implies that although they make independent decisions, these are decisions that ultimately does not change their difficult situation substantially.

I have used three examples of the relationship between grandmothers and grandsons to show how children and youth can gain a 'thicker' agency when parenthood is shared with significant others that are willing, often based on cultural values of childcare, to contribute to strengthen the position of the children and youth in intergenerational negotiations . But these narratives and observations also suggest that boys can be given a stronger position in negotiations than girls, and that they because of their gender are granted a somewhat 'thicker' agency.

Fostered children largely navigate within family networks. I started out by placing the experiences of children and youth in fosterage in relation to their position within family networks as most of them were in fosterage with seniors they regarded to be *'family'*. The openness to the organisation of, as well as in how people think about *'family'* makes room for inclusion of fostered children into the household and the family network. Fostered children were often included, but sometimes also excluded as part of the foster family. The essence of *'family'* in the fieldwork context was reciprocal practices of care, which often led to bonds of relatedness between individuals that could be, but did not have to be, biologically related. Biology was locally understood as being of significance in creating bonds between people, but it

did not offer any form of relatedness if there were no reciprocal practices of care between the individuals. This friction between common understandings of how social relations were embedded in biological connections were revealed in the narratives of John. John had been in fosterage, and never knew his biological parents. His feelings of obligation and care were related to his foster-parents whom he talked about as his "real parents" He recognised his biological parents as *'family'*, but he also explained how he did not *feel* anything for them. His story underlined both the local expectations of bonds seen as based on biology and the marginal significance of biology when no forms of mutual care are practiced between the biologically related individuals.

The concept of shared parenthood, where the children and youth are seen as the responsibility of the family network, and not only the biological parents, was valued by the informants and was seen to integrate children and youth into the family network and the larger society.

Though I explore the agency of children and youth in fosterage, I have also argued that the choice of including or excluding children, and to what extent to care about them, that are made by senior members of the family network, to a large extent determines if a child or youth in fosterage have the conditions to establish a sense of felt relatedness to the people he or she shares their daily life with. Thus the welfare of children and youth in fosterage depended on the relation they had to their foster-parents, but also the relationship between other senior members of the family network.

As opposed to children who live with their biological parents fostered children and youth can be said to be filled with social connections rather than defined in terms of essential belonging by one constitutive relationship (cf. Leifsen 2006:120). This gives fostered children and youth a significant opportunity to, but also a larger responsibility of, creating and maintaining family relations as well as bonds of relatedness within an extended social network.

By recounting the various experiences of fosterage that I observed or was retold by Ghanaians in Accra, I have been able to show that they did not only depend on their biological parents, but how they depended on and drew on seniors that were not their biological parents. What these same examples have shown, is that the fostered children and youth were not defined as a member of a closed family unit, but

they navigated within the family networks and made up their own extended family that was unique to every individual depending on the bonds formed between individuals.

The family is like the forest: if you are outside it is dense; if you are inside you see that each tree has its own position.

Abusua te sɛ kwaɛ; sɛ wo wɔ akyire a wo hunu sɛ ɛbom; sɛ wo bɛn ho a na wo hunu sɛ nnua no bia sisi ne baabi nko.

(Ghanaian proverb in English and Twi)

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