Westernised fostering
Contemplations on Ghana's Care Reform Initiative

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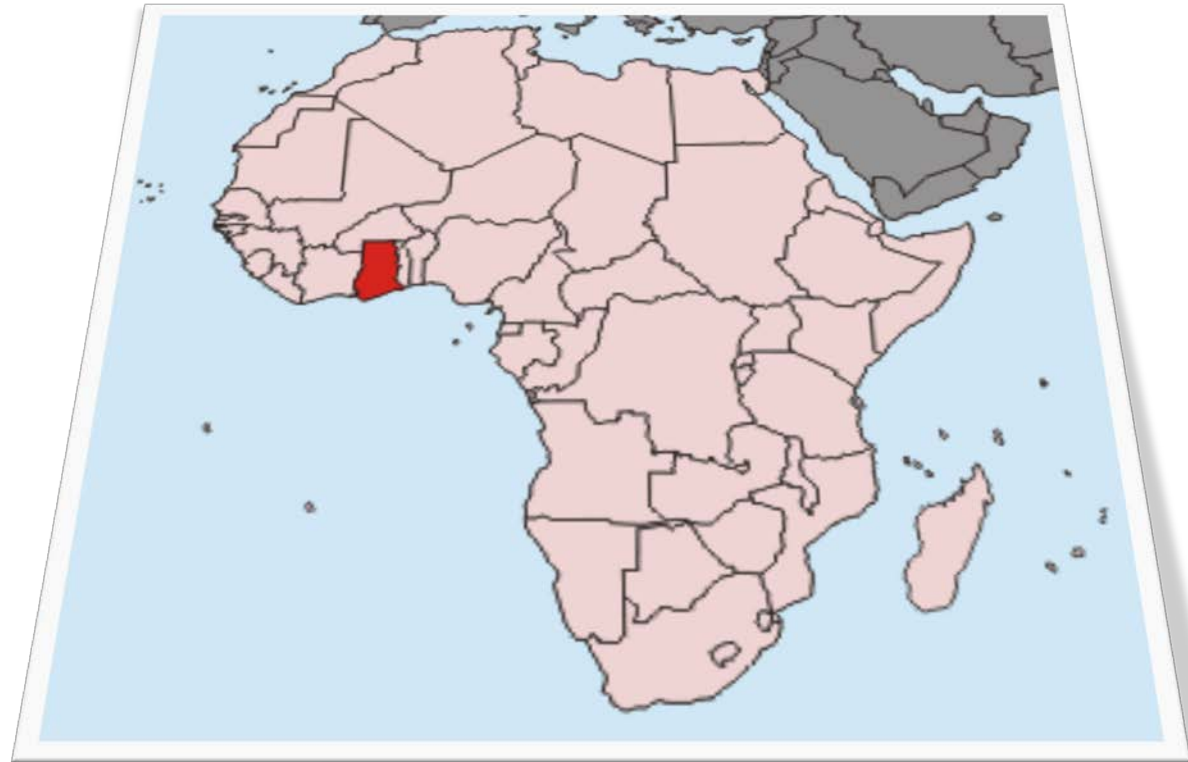**6th International Foster Care Conference**

Agenda

1. Research Background
2. Methodology
3. Models of the child being presented
4. Theorising care arrangements
5. Conclusion

Research Background

2006 concluding observations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child on Ghana:

- led to the drafting of the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (hereafter Plan)

- most important part of the NPA: the Care Reform Initiative (hereafter Reform)
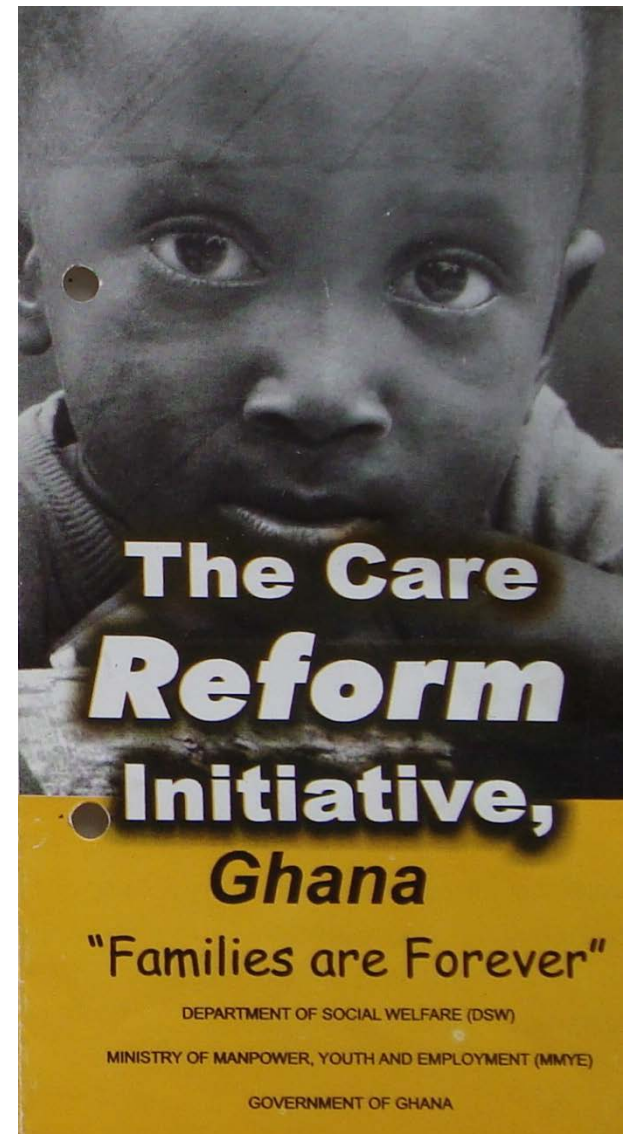

Location of Ghana within Africa

Research Background

Ghana's Care Reform Initiative...

'seeks to de-emphasize over reliance on care systems for vulnerable children based on institutions and move towards a range of integrated family and community based care services for those children without appropriate parental care' (CRI Office, n.d.)

Research Background

- Estimated 4000 children living in more than 160 'orphanages'

- Children regarded as being at risk and in need of 'a permanent home in a supportive and loving family' (CRI Office, n.d.)

Methodology: Framework

- Framework: Governmentality (Foucault 1991)

- concerned with how governmental activity seeks to 'cultivate particular types of individual and collective identity as well as forms of agency and subjectivity' and how such subjectivity becomes embraced, adapted or refused by individuals (Inda 2005: 10).

NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

GHANA

JUNE 2010-2012

REPUBLIC OF GHANA
MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE

unicef

REGULATIONS FOR CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN WITHOUT APPROPRIATE PARENTAL CARE IN GHANA

PART 1 - RESIDENTIAL CARE AS A LAST RESORT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE (DSW)
MINISTRY OF MANPOWER, YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT (MMYE)
GOVERNMENT OF GHANA

Methodology: Research questions

- concerned with how to govern (Gordon, 1991)

- gives a certain priority to 'how' questions (Dean, 1999)

Rationalities:
(i) *epistemological*: how are the subjects of government conceptualised in order to render them amenable to political programming?
(ii) *Teleological:* how are the aims of governmental practice framed as problems?
(iii) *Moral:* how is the exercise of power justified?

Techniques:
(i) through which technical means are the objects of government rendered calculable and programmable?
(ii) through what programs and interventions is reality acted upon?

Models of the child being presented

Epistemology

- all governmental rationalities have an epistemological character (Rose 1996)

- conceptions 'both foster and rely upon assorted forms of knowledge and expertise' (Inda, 2005: 8)

Models of the child being presented

Stripping the child from the broader context

- governmental action is aimed at identifying children whose care and protection is not regarded as being 'appropriate' and to stipulate suitable ways of caring for them

- 'psycho-technocrats' tend to describe the child in psychological and medical terms (Howell, 2006:)

- Categories such as '[n]ormal and abnormal child development' (DSW, 2008: 45) revive ideas of a standardised development and rehearse the notions of development and socialisation

- minimum standards promoted throughout the regulations completely strip the child from the broader cultural, political and social context of human life

Models of the child being presented

Promoting a liberal subject

- emphasis on school and play, and inherent renunciation of work reflect the space to be used by children (cf. Cunningham, 2005)

- notions of vulnerability and participation, two core elements of contemporary constructions of childhood (cf. Prout, 2005), are particularly apparent throughout the *Regulations*

- 'the home enhances every child's independence and opportunity to make everyday choices' and provides the child with the means to live an independent life through the acquirement of 'appropriate skills for productive life and eventual independence' (DSW, 2007: 13)

- liberal government is aimed at creating individuals who will govern themselves (Rose, 1996)

Models of the child being presented

Language as a technique for rendering reality thinkable

- use of language designates 'itself a set of intellectual techniques for rendering reality thinkable and practicable, and constituting domains that are amenable - or not amenable - to reformatory intervention' (Rose, 1996: 42)

- 'techno-rationalisation' of human life, to use the terminology of Kendall, seems to be most apparent in the context of regulations concerning food (Kendall 2008: 380)

- characteristics of food are described using nutritional science terms including 'varied diet', 'enough protein', 'wholesome', and 'nutritious', which render food into a purely technical object (DSW, 2008: 19ff)

Models of the child being presented

Pathologisation of the South

- *Regulations* both reflect westernised ideas and depict children and adults as being ignorant and incapable of knowing what's best for them

- e.g. staff need to be literate in 'safe food handling and hygiene', and 'aware of the very real danger of dehydration in Ghana's hot climate' (DSW, 2008: 19)

- international children's rights regime propagates the 'need for external advocacy on behalf of the child' (Pupavac, 2001: 101-3)

- 'pathologisation of the south', a 'shift towards an elite therapeutic politics' which empowers external governmental and non-governmental actors (ibid)

Theorising care arrangements

Classifying certain experience

- studies conducted in other countries 'would suggest that many children are residing in the homes because of poverty with relatively few being double orphans or there because of abuse or neglect' (OVC Committee, 2008: 17)

- such categories reflect the tendency of hegemonic regimes to define what constitutes a 'normal human being' (Goffman, 1963: 7)

- labels tend to stigmatise people and designate a social action in themselves (de Moura, 2002)

Theorising care arrangements

De-legitimisation of institutional care

- 'the institutionalization of babies has severe and irreversible effects on early brain development', 'homes are unable to respond to the psychosocial needs of children' and 'poor staff-to-child-ratio leads to neglect' (DSW, 2008: 6)

- reflects what a 'medical approach to humanity' (Goffmann 1963: 7)

- proliferation of a body of 'psy' knowledge (Rose, 1996)

Theorising care arrangements

Promoting the ideal family

- Family promoted as a site that fosters 'personal identity', 'social integration', 'cultural identity', 'capacity for economic self-support' and 'attachment' (DSW 2008: 9ff)

- 'family is for life', as 'no other social unit offers the hope and promise of a lifelong connection to others who care about them in the world' (ibid.)

- understanding of the family is, however, rather narrow

- children living with their extended family regarded as 'living away from home' (OVC Committee, 2008: 16)

Theorising care arrangements

Transnational adoption as a way to establish permanent solutions

- Among core 'challenges' to be addressed by the Reform is 'the low rate of adoption of orphaned children' as well as 'the large number of non-orphans who are simply needy children being kept in children's homes permanently, with little or no prospects for adoption' (DSW, 2011a)

- One of the 'Intended Project Results' of the Reform is that '[a]doption rates will increase both on a national and international level' (OrphanAid Africa, 2008: 1)

- the Plan demands that '[n]ew methods of marketing adoption need to be explored with simple, less costly but unimpeachable processes' (OVC Committee, 2008: 28)

Theorising care arrangements

Adoption as a form of benevolent control

- adoption 'particularly well suited for benevolent control' in terms that it seeks to govern society towards specific ends (Howell 2006: 151)

- '[g]overnment funding is scarce and cannot meet the overgrowing population' (Osu Children's Home, 2009)

- adoption as a means to emptying institutions (Fonseca 2002: 209)

Theorising care arrangements

The ambivalence regarding care arrangements

- Care homes designate the only type of child protection services available

- institutions serve as a 'poor man's boarding school', a 'routine element on the circuit of child circulation' (Fonseca 2002: 204)

- leaving the child in the home becomes regarded as abandoning the child

- translation of the juridical concepts of consent and abandonment as imagined by legislators tend to be culturally insensitive

Conclusion

- Care Reform apparently aims to eradicate one of the most visible and the same time easily accessible forms of the consequences of (global) inequality: institutional care of 'orphaned and vulnerable' children

- in line with contemporary perceptions that institutional care is substandard per se in terms of the UNCRC (George et al., 2003: 349)

- Care Reform strips the individual child from its cultural context

- Individual child becomes rendered as an object of savoir in the light of 'psy' knowledge

- Transnational adoption as a 'permanent solution' is culturally insensitive and based on the assumption that children, once adopted, are no longer at risk

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