

Centre for the Study of Political Economy

**MANCHESTER PAPERS  
IN  
POLITICAL ECONOMY**

ISSN 1756-0837

*Manchester Papers in Political Economy* is the working papers series of the Centre for the Study of Political Economy at the University of Manchester. It aims to provide a forum for preliminary dissemination, discussion and debate of work in progress across the field of political economy, and welcomes submission from scholars both at Manchester and outside.

Submissions will be subject to a light-touch refereeing process to ensure their suitability for the series and to maintain quality. All enquiries about the series should be directed to its editor (keir.martin@manchester.ac.uk).

Manchester Papers in Political Economy are published online at  
<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/cspe/publications/wp/index.html>

ISSN 1756-0837

© the author, 2011

If you would like more information about the Centre for the Study of Political Economy,

please visit

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/cspe/>

Social Sustainability in Agriculture: An Anthropological Perspective on  
Child Labour in Cocoa

Amanda Berlan

Working paper no. 9

Date October 2011

Social Sustainability in Agriculture:  
An Anthropological Perspective on Child Labour in Cocoa

Dr. Amanda Berlan  
The Brookes World Poverty Institute &  
The Sustainable Consumption Institute  
University of Manchester

**Abstract:** *There have been widespread concerns about child labour in cocoa, a key ingredient in chocolate, since evidence of labour abuses in West Africa surfaced almost a decade ago. Even though policy interventions have been put in place to try to address these, serious concerns remain about children being involved in the production of cocoa, especially when they are involved in tasks defined as hazardous by the ILO. Based on historical sources and ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana, the article argues that efforts to address child labour in cocoa have been hindered by a fundamental lack of understanding of the historical context and of the local social dynamics which impact child rights in cocoa-producing communities. The paper treats child labour not simply as a symptom of poverty but as one of the outcomes of a complex myriad of micro-level factors such as family breakdown and the vacuum left by the erosion of long-standing indigenous norms. It argues that a more detailed and nuanced ethnographic analysis needs to form a greater part of academic analyses of labour relations, which tend to focus on deconstructing wider political and policy prescriptions. These raise important and necessary questions about the often problematic discourses in which labour issues are framed. However, such an approach is itself problematic as it obscures the vital household dimension of poor labour practices, and especially child labour, and does not fully acknowledge the plurality of factors which create conditions for their occurrence. This includes a failure to recognise that the causalities behind such practices are not homogeneous across gender and therefore also creates an androcentric biases in debates on labour.*

## 1. Introduction

Concerns about child labour abuses in cocoa production became widespread in the UK and other countries in 2000-2001 following documentaries and newspaper coverage alleging the use of child slaves in West Africa (Blowfield, 2003; Anti-Slavery, 2004; Bales, 2007). These focused on the discovery of enslaved young men on a cocoa farm in the Ivory Coast, and soon spread concerns that such practices were also being used in other West African countries. Fears of abuse in the chocolate supply chain also rose when a ship found in the Gulf of Guinea carrying migrants was initially thought to be carrying a cargo of 'children to labour in the sprawling cocoa plantations' (McGreal, 2001). However, some of these allegations were never fully substantiated and many commentators have since expressed doubts about the validity of some of the claims made and the true scale of the problem (Anti-Slavery, 2004; Bales, 2007; Berlan, 2009). As Blowfield points out, based on the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture research on the subject, 'initial reports that 90% of cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire used forced child labour have been revised down to less than 2%' (2003: 18). There has also been some discussion about whether conditions on cocoa farms in Ghana met the ILO definition of the worst forms of child labour (Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2007). These concerns notwithstanding, there is evidence to indicate that cocoa production in West Africa does involve some use of illegal child labour, defined as child trafficking or the involvement of children in hazardous activities. For example, the 2007 pilot survey on labour practices in cocoa production in Ghana (commissioned by the Ghana government National Programme for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Cocoa) found that in the 2005-2006 cocoa season, children aged between 5 and 12 were involved in the spraying of insecticides, application of fertiliser, bush burning, clearing land, and felling trees. Though the proportions of respondents in some categories was low (for example only 0.7% of children surveyed in that age group reported being involved in land clearing), all of these tasks are hazardous because of the risks such activities pose to the health of children (NPECLC, 2007).

Since concerns about child labour in cocoa started to emerge, a considerable range of interventions have been put in place to investigate and combat these issues. These are much too numerous and complex to expand on here,<sup>1</sup> especially as these span a range of countries and stakeholders, and some of them have been discontinued. However, it is clear that considerable resources have been invested into research and interventions on this subject. For example, the International Cocoa Initiative<sup>2</sup> (ICI) total budget for certification, monitoring, verification and related educational remediation/rehabilitation interventions between 2003 and 2007 comfortably exceeded US\$3 million (Tulane University, 2007: Appendix 4; See also Bales 2007). Tulane University reports that the total funds for direct and indirect interventions received since 2001 by the organisations in Ghana and the Ivory Coast they have surveyed exceeds US\$15 million (Tulane University, 2007: Appendix 11). Despite such sizeable investments from government, industry and other stakeholders, concerns remain that not enough has been achieved on the ground, and the media still report cases of child labour in West African cocoa (for example, the March 2010 Panorama programme on children working in West African cocoa farms). According to Global Exchange, Green America, the International Labor Rights Forum and Oasis USA:

‘It is clear from this report that the cocoa industry is not doing enough to address these problems. The world’s largest chocolate manufacturers must do more to monitor their supply chains to combat child labor, forced labor and human trafficking.’ (ILRF, 2010).

While these are valid views, the article wants to show that poor practices also need to be questioned and examined beyond the paradigms of world trade and corporate social responsibility. In interviews, many key informants expressed considerable frustration that child labour remains a problem in cocoa production in West Africa. Many of them did not feel that interventions to date had been effective (one key informant referred to them as ‘a complete waste of money’) or even that the problem was sufficiently well understood. Reasons given for the enduring presence of child labour in cocoa often remain fairly general, many sources citing poverty or social traditions of child participation in the

household economy. For example, the UK Fairtrade Foundation issued a statement following the March 2010 *Panorama* programme, saying:

‘Child labour is caused by deep seated poverty exacerbated by unjust terms of world trade, conflict, drought and extreme weather conditions triggering forced migration. This is the reality that those on cocoa farms in Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Ghana have to deal with on a daily basis.’ (Fairtrade Foundation, 2010).

Although of course significant, ‘poverty’ as a single justification for child labour is not only problematic because it is very vague, but also because in some cases of child labour, it is an inadequate and even misleading explanatory framework (Nieuwenhuys 1996; Anyihodo and Ainsworth 2009).<sup>3</sup> Based on historical sources, long-term anthropological fieldwork carried out in Ghana from 2001 to 2003, subsequent shorter visits to the field and interviews with key informants in the UK, the present paper presents a more complex view on the reasons behind child labour in cocoa. It argues that historical and anthropological knowledge provides a necessary insight into the imbedded socio-local dynamics which have hitherto failed to achieve sufficient recognition in either policy or academic labour debates.

## **2. Child labour and unfree labour**

The subject of child labour relates problematically to much of the literature on unfree labour. As identified by Nieuwenhuys (1996), the analysis of children’s work is considerably limited by prevailing notions of labour and exploitation which sit uneasily with the reality of many children’s lives. In the policy arena especially, there is a distinct emphasis on excluding them from the production of value because:

‘The dissociation of childhood from the performance of valued work is considered a yardstick of modernity, and a high incidence of child labor is considered a sign of underdevelopment’ (Nieuwenhuys, 1996: 237).

The case of child labour in cocoa provides a salient illustration of such thinking as child labour is indelibly associated with poverty and backwardness. However, more broadly, while there have been critical evaluations of the complexity and variety in patterns of child labour, and the subjectivity of the moral indignation it arouses, debates on the rights of children have been plagued by a considerable ethnocentrism (Boyden, 1997; Woodhead, 1997) and fallen awkwardly between different disciplinary chairs. The result of this, Nieuwenhuys argues, is an emerging picture of ‘conceptual confusion, in which ill-grasped notions from diverse analytical fields are indiscriminately used’ (1996: 241). In view of this, it is important to situate the issue of child exploitation very carefully within the body of literature on unfree labour.

This caveat notwithstanding, it is also important to acknowledge that some of this literature broadly supports the approach being advocated in this paper. Lerche (2007) discusses the ILO strategy towards forced labour of creating public awareness of the phenomenon by quantifying it, a strategy which the ILO has also used in its campaign to raise awareness of child labour. He contends that quantification is problematic because estimates vary – an issue also borne out in the issue of forced child labour in cocoa which, as previously stated, were revised from an initial 90% to 2%. More broadly, Lerche argues that the ILO does not challenge the overall system that created the conditions for the occurrence of forced labour in the first place and that it problematically attempts to deal with them in isolation from their wider social and economic context. Interestingly, he draws attention to how some of the popular and academic literature on forced labour (for example Brass and van der Linden, 1997; Brass, 1999; Banaji, 2003; Bales, 2004, 2005) present forced labour ahistorically. The abstraction of labour practices from their wider historical context is one which is particularly evident in debates on cocoa production,<sup>4</sup> and which the present article attempts to address. However, while Lerche makes a compelling case for

a more ‘empirically coherent analytical approach to unfree labour relations’ (2007: 426), the discussion of the social context of unfree labour relations remains secondary to the wider political discussion of capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation and no detailed level of ethnographic observation is provided. In most of the literature, there is no mention or very limited reference to the household context of unfree labour relations. This is problematic, especially in analyses of child labour, but also in other discussions of unfree labour as it overlooks a key component of entry into such relations and of their perpetuation.

While Rogaly (2008) also focuses on unfree labour in relation to capitalism, he simultaneously provides a more fluid analytical approach incorporating the perspectives of individual workers, and contends that such labour relations are spaces of negotiability where workers have agency. This is important as it presents a more nuanced approach to the power dynamics in labour exchanges. Rogaly argues that the concept of scale (for example, from nation to household) is important in understanding these because it reveals important disjunctures and contradictions between different scales. This idea is central to the work of Silvey, a feminist geographer, who argues that the prevailing critical theorisations of labour and migration fail to acknowledge the critical segmentation of the processes which shape them, and how these are significant right down to the individual level. She argues that this approach enriches theorisations of power because:

‘Attention to the national scale as gendered, and concern with the politics of scales both finer and coarser than the national scale allows for the conceptualisation of relational linkages between bodies, households and the transnational sphere’ (2004: 494).

She argues that a feminist focus on the politics of scale, and against the exclusion of particular scales such as the body and the household, is not a mere call for an additional perspective in an otherwise complete interpretive framework. Instead, she contends that:

‘It develops understandings of these scales as integral to the analysis of mobility and salient to the operation of forces and processes at those scales conventionally viewed as most central to migration such as the region and the nation. In so doing, feminist migration research breaks ground for re-theorisations of the dynamics between scales and the working of power within particular scales.’ (Silvey, 2004: 494).

Similarly, the present paper is not arguing for a more detailed ethnographic approach to child labour in cocoa for its own sake. Rather, it is to show that the individual and household dimension of child labour in cocoa cannot be dissociated from critically important wider politics of gender without which analyses are at best partial and at worst, misleading and potentially detrimental to addressing this problem.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Background on labour in cocoa production**

As previously argued, the socio-historical antecedents of child labour in cocoa have been largely overlooked and these will now be discussed in order to provide the context on current practices described later in the paper. To fully understand the wider scale and dynamics of labour issues in cocoa production, it is important to note that while abuses have become familiar news stories in recent years, they have been well-documented for much longer, even if the use of coercion has not been consistent across cocoa production globally and throughout time. Clarence-Smith (2000) identifies some of the reasons why it was more widespread in certain areas at particular times and the general trends in the use of forced labour, which he argues culminated in the second half of the eighteenth century. Forced labour in cocoa is documented in many regions ranging from Mesoamerica, South America, to Africa and the Caribbean from as early as the 1650s to the twenty-first century (Clarence-Smith, 2000: 195-226; Satre, 2005: 221-222). In the twentieth century, the use of slavery in cocoa production was uncovered on the island of Fernando Pó (now known as Bioko) and in Cameroon, both on German and on Duala elite plantations (Clarence-Smith and Ruf, 1996; Anti-Slavery, 2004). Anti-Slavery (2004)

reports that the use of slaves from Angola was common on Portuguese plantations on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe from the 1880s and that slavery in cocoa production continued there well into the 1950s.

Interestingly, such practices were the reason why UK chocolate companies stopped buying cocoa from this area in 1909 and opted to purchase cocoa from Ghana instead (Satre, 2005). Indeed, labour conditions in Ghana were reported to be much better than in competing countries and it was said to be unlikely to develop a system of colonial slavery. In 1908, William Cadbury (who was disillusioned by labour abuses in São Tomé and Príncipe and under considerable pressure to find a more ethical alternative) reported to his friend and confidant, E.D. Morel, who was a journalist and human rights campaigner, that he had heard positive things about the British colonial authorities in Ghana (still the Gold Coast at the time) and that the ‘natives’ there ‘[are] exceedingly prosperous, and that the Englishman has no chance to get the upper hand’ (cited in Satre, 2005: 112). Ghana became Cadbury’s main supplier of cocoa shortly after this. Following training and investment in cocoa production techniques, cocoa underwent a significant expansion in Ghana and it went on to become the leading global exporter of cocoa before it was overtaken by Côte d’Ivoire in 1977.

One of the reasons why labour conditions in cocoa were better in Ghana than other countries was because the government had a policy against slavery and slave trading, combating it ‘wherever it was obvious’ (Sutton, 1983: 466). This was said to place European cocoa producers at a disadvantage over colonial growers elsewhere, who had government backing for the use of forced labour (Austin, 1996).<sup>6</sup> Another reason for better labour practices in cocoa in Ghana was because the crop was being grown by smallholders rather than on plantations, a system which had begun to dominate global cocoa production by 1914 (Clarence-Smith, 2000: 189). Smallholder production undermined (although did not rule out) the use of coercion in cocoa cultivation, not just in Ghana, but also in other countries. Clarence-Smith reports that:

‘The world’s cocoa was mainly produced by free workers from the middle of the nineteenth century, partly because of labour reforms, and partly because of the spread of smallholdings.’ (2000: 195).

However, it is important to point out that some forced labour was used in Ghana; Clarence-Smith reports that smallholders occasionally coerced labour but this was not commonly used because they had access to family labour and cheaper and more flexible arrangements, such as sharecropping (2000: 195). Sutton (1983) reports that the production of agricultural produce such as palm oil and cocoa on a large-scale required more labour than the extended family was able to provide. As a result, Sutton argues that ‘A general picture emerges of the use of slaves, pawns and other bonded labour in the nineteenth century’ (1983: 466), but also goes on to explain that it was gradually replaced by wage labour in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Irrespective of the extent to which forced labour was used in cocoa in Ghana, it is clear that the family labour provided by spouses and children made an enormous contribution to the early development of cocoa. Ingham states that:

‘Lower *cash* costs of production associated with plentiful supplies of *family* labour probably provided the basis for the entry of Ghana into the world cocoa industry’ (1981: page. Italics in original).

Hill describes how farmers, due to their shrewd and forward-thinking financial planning, were ‘reluctant to ‘waste their savings’ on the employment of labour’ (1963: 188) and therefore were heavily reliant on the family labour provided by their wives and children. The family labour provided was a crucial aspect of farm expansion, although the labour of women has gradually shifted to the production of foodstuffs for family consumption or sale at local markets, which many writers argue have disadvantaged them

(Hill, 1963: 116-117; Bukh, 1979: 26; Mikell, 1997: 101). Austin (2005: 304-310) provides an excellent and detailed discussion of the role of women in cocoa.

The relevance of this data to the present discussion is because it illustrates the shifting discourses relating to forced and child labour in the historical context of cocoa production. The reliance on family labour, however unacceptable today if it results in children being involved in hazardous activities, as well as cases of trafficked child labour and other abuses, at least represent a huge improvement on, and appear to be occurring on a smaller scale than, previous widespread (and often state-sanctioned) systems of labour involving slavery, human pawning, debt bondage and other abhorrent practices. As Bales points out, in contemporary times:

‘for every criminal using slaves to grow cotton or cocoa or sugar, hundreds or thousands of farmers are producing the same crops without using slaves’ (2007: 183).

However, more fundamentally, because both good practices and labour abuses in cocoa have strong historical antecedents, they cannot be seen as exclusively symptomatic of the modern consumerist era, or simply caused by poverty or rapacious multinationals, as is often alleged (Berlan 2004). The historical data, which focuses heavily on the household dynamics underlying labour practices, stands in sharp contrast to current literature constructed according to anti-globalisation agendas which, however well-intentioned, place a quasi-exclusive emphasis on market processes. While authors such as Lerche or Brass are right in asserting that labour issues cannot be dissociated from the wider economic system which fuels them, the lack of engagement with factors on other scales is clearly problematic, especially as historical sources show them to be central. The difficult balance between the transnational politics of power and local linkages between the individual, the household and labour is well-evidenced in the issue of world prices. Excessive attention has often been given to world market prices when discussing various aspects of cocoa production (Clarence-Smith and Ruf, 1996) and child labour in cocoa is no exception (Berlan 2004; Bøås and Huser 2006; Anyidoho and Ainsworth 2009). However, while low or

heavily fluctuating world market prices may be a contributing factor to contemporary child labour in cocoa, earlier labour abuses clearly occurred for other reasons and this suggests that excessive attention should not be paid to this.

#### **4. Social issues underlying child labour in cocoa production in Ghana**

This section presents some of the factors in the children's personal circumstances which affected how and whether they would become involved in the ILO defined worst forms of child labour. This is in order to further illustrate that market processes and the global politics of power, if taken alone, are insufficient paradigms to explain child labour in cocoa. On a basic level, fieldwork in Ghana revealed that farmers and their children had much more agency than one might assume. The negotiation of children's work, and the meaning and value it had acquired in the community, were highly indicative of the children's agency, a factor which is both discussed in relation to children and other groups of workers in literature on labour (Nieuwenhuys, 1996; Rogaly, 2008).

Many personal beliefs influenced farmers' decision to involve a child in farm work, such as the belief that work has a formative value and social traditions, whether the local school was deemed good enough and how far away it was, the age and gender of the child, how interested he or she was in school, whether the child was also working in a different form of employment and how much he or she was earning, whether they were local or migrants and the level of financial investment in farm expansion relative to the investment in schooling. From the perspective of the children, their decision to work in cocoa was influenced by factors such as malnutrition, whether food was available on the farm and/or in school, having a poor educational environment and limited support for school at home, teacher absenteeism, and corporal punishment in school, among other factors. As these are discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Berlan 2005, 2009; Casely-Hayford, n.d.) they will not be discussed here.

Instead, this section focuses on some of the household dynamics and issues relating to gender which affect child labour and have largely been neglected in debates on cocoa production. Indeed, aside from

factors just mentioned, a key finding during fieldwork was that family breakdown was both a widespread problem in rural areas and a key factor in determining whether a child would end up in the worst forms of child labour. In the villages where I was based, divorce was very common.<sup>7</sup> Few children whose parents were divorced regularly saw both parents and the village Assemblyman complained that divorce was a major factor in the non-payment of school fees. Most children stayed with their mother after divorce, which placed an enormous financial burden on the women who reported that fathers, irrespective of their financial standing, refused to pay their former wives allowances for the children<sup>8</sup> as they did not want the women to 'benefit' from them financially, especially if they had remarried. As such, inter-household sexual politics played an important part in determining the fate of children. As most women in the village worked in activities such as subsistence farming or selling, which typically generate small profits (Manuh, 1997: 78), mothers were unable to bear the costs associated with education, such as school fees, uniforms, exercise books and so forth, if they did not have male support.

Many of the children in the village who were not in school said that their parents were divorced and that their mothers could not pay their school fees. In virtually all the cases I knew, the mother had remained in the village and the father was working in a nearby town or in another region, thus showing that local labour pressures and spatial mobility also exerted an influence on the rights of children. In most cases, the mothers had remarried and their new husband refused to pay for the upkeep of children from a former marriage, thereby showing that intra-household sexual politics also had a demonstrable impact on the rights of children, and on whether and when they entered the workforce. Teachers sometimes got involved and went to talk to the mother and stepfather of the children to try and convince them to send the children to school. However, in most cases no-one intervened in favour of such children and this caused considerable hardship. Some of the children who were not in school and who drifted around the village during the day or worked in various occupations (some of them hazardous) told me that their fathers did not want to support them. They said that their mothers took better care of their stepbrothers and stepsisters for fear that their new husbands would accuse them of

favouring children from their first marriage and leave them. This finding is supported by another study of child labour in cocoa which found that:

‘Cases of children being taken out of school to work on cocoa farms were most prevalent among families which had lost a breadwinner and could be considered female headed’ (Casely-Hayford, n.d.: 27)

In some cases, the children’s ingenuity, resilience and hard work enabled them to return to, or remain in, school in spite of conjugal breakdown, depending on the sort of employment they were able to find and whether they had an alternative support network to draw on. However, this was rarely through agricultural labour and mainly involved short-term migration or daily travel to a nearby town to work in trading or transport.

In order to explain child neglect Casely-Hayford states that within the Akan tradition<sup>9</sup>

‘children are the property of the wife’s family and less interest is taken by the father in bringing up his children since ultimately they will inherit from the wife’s brother. Several interviews with both community members and district stakeholders revealed that this inheritance pattern and tradition often results in fathers neglecting their parental responsibility towards the child.’ (n.d.: 22).

From a historical perspective, this claim is slightly problematic. Austin (2005) argues that family labour in cocoa primarily revolved around the conjugal unit rather than traditional matrilineal systems; children (generally male) mainly, though not exclusively, provided labour on their parents’ rather than on their maternal uncles’ farms, and this seems to have been the case from the nineteenth century. Foster reports that in the late colonial period:

‘Particularly among the Akan, there was an increased desire to pass on cocoa lands and income derived from cocoa production to one’s own offspring rather than through the matrilineal line. This led to a progressive weakening of traditional lineage ties and to an increasing desire to avoid traditional kin obligations.’ (1965: 127).

Allman (1997) also argued that the matrilineal system was weakened (though not destroyed) by the relations of production in cocoa. More broadly, there is a widely accepted view that cocoa drastically altered previous economic relations between husband and wife (see Allman, 1997: 306 for full list of references).

Therefore, the claim that adherence to traditional matrilineal inheritance systems was the cause of fathers’ neglect towards their offspring is surprising and my own fieldwork also did not substantiate this claim. From interviews, it was clear that the matrilineal system of inheritance was not as robust as in former times. When I asked informants in the village if women could request financial assistance from their brothers as part of the matrilineal system, they replied that matrilineality was only very rarely invoked in such situations. Fathers, rather than uncles, were now deemed responsible for the upkeep of their children. The Social Welfare Department was increasingly being used by women and their children to put pressure on men to pay child allowances. If this preliminary social-work mediation was unsuccessful, many women took their case to a family court (as explained in Mikell, 1997: 105). In one of the local schools closer in a nearby town, three children had approached the Social Welfare Department and been successful in obtaining funds from their fathers.

This exemplifies some of the anthropological literature on changing parental and conjugal relations in Ghana. Mikell acknowledges that:

‘Traditionally, Akan domestic affairs were handled through lineage mediation outside of the state apparatus’ (1997: 96).

but goes onto argue that:

‘Akan women are resorting to the courts because they resent their inability to receive adequate domestic help from either lineage members or husbands, and they are frustrated at the absence of alternative mechanisms for encouraging or pressuring husbands to meet changing domestic needs.’ (1997: 105).

Changes in legal provisions for women and children were also secured by the passing of the *Intestate Succession Law* in 1985. This law guaranteed certain rights for women and their children (such as the right to inheritance or to child maintenance payments) in the event of their husband’s death or of divorce, and overruled traditional matrilineal or patrilineal systems of obligation (see Manuh, 1997: 77-92).

Therefore, contrary to what Casely-Hayford suggests, it would appear that father neglecting their children is not necessarily because they believe that their children will inherit from their wife’s brother, which in my experience, seldom ever happened, if at all. Rather it would be more accurate to say that social change as a result of the expansion of cocoa and formal education, both of which radically altered the family economy, has eroded the matrilineal system and left a vacuum of obligation. Allman argues that:

‘As a father's rights grew increasingly inalienable in colonial Asante, they were detached from any reciprocal obligations to his children. A father owned his children whether he provided them with subsistence or not. This transformation occurred at a time when the economic cost of rearing children, particularly as a result of school fees, was rising dramatically (...) A father would not be obliged to meet them in order to retain his rights of use in his children. Indeed, there were increasingly fewer ways to encourage/force/persuade a father to view those costs as

his obligation, because none of his actions or inactions could threaten his ownership of the children. Fatherhood was now a position endowed with inalienable rights; it was not something you did, that you negotiated via extended processes of exchange involving rights and service.’ (1997: 312).

In view of this background, it is not surprising that men were reported during my fieldwork to not want to benefit their former wives in any way, or feel a duty towards paying the school fees of their children. Lingering matrilineal kinship ideology and practices were a part of this, however weakened matrilineal systems may be (Okali, 1983), but this is not strictly related to inheritance patterns.

While courts and other systems of mediation are by no means a new phenomenon (see Allman, 1997 for examples), they were having a visible and increasing impact in this area, although change was only occurring at a slow pace. At present, women and children in rural Ghana appeared to be suffering as a result of the fact that the traditional matrilineal system of support had been eroded by social change but that its modern replacement – in the form of family courts and other systems of mediation – were not yet yielding the necessary results on a large enough scale. Unfortunately, this directly undermined children’s rights. By depriving many children of the opportunity to receive an education, it was a key factor influencing whether children would end up in the worst forms of child labour in cocoa communities. This suggests that supporting and consolidating organisations, such as the Social Welfare Department or the Women and Juvenile Unit of the Police Force (which deals with cases of child labour) could help to fight child labour in rural Ghana. It also raises the question of whether debates and policymaking on child labour and child rights should integrate considerations of the rights of women to a greater extent. More fundamentally, the data presented here illustrates that it is not only capitalism or market processes which have shaped child labour in cocoa in Ghana. Overlooking localised factors is deeply problematic as it both obscures possible solutions and reinforces an androcentric focus on labour issues.

## 5. Conclusion

In initiatives to deal with child labour in cocoa production in Ghana, there has been a considerable push towards sensitising communities about the risks and dangers of child labour, although informants in the UK and Ghana had differing views on whether this had been a successful approach. Irrespective of the success or failure of such interventions, based on the information presented here, one could question whether it is the communities, or perhaps policymakers and academics, who need sensitisation on child labour in cocoa. The data suggests that because of its long socio-historical antecedents, tackling child labour requires grassroots, rather than top-down approaches. It also suggests that unless the policy net is cast wider to include interventions to support the rights of women, the effectiveness of interventions in this area may be hindered in the long-term.

In cocoa and other sectors there has been a tendency to pathologise child labour and focus on its negative and harmful consequences. There can be no doubt that children who end up in the worst forms of child labour suffer considerably, not only through the physical and psychological damage that may result from such work, but also because they are robbed of the precious opportunity to receive an education. However, treating child labour as a social ill may be misleading because in the present case, it is very much symptomatic of a much broader malaise linked with family breakdown and gender inequality than a social 'disease' in its own right. In a practical sense, conjecture cannot address labour abuses; empirical knowledge, contextualisation and a holistic appreciation of the causes and factors underlying them need to form a greater part of such debates.

While some academic literature acknowledges the need for more empirically-led critiques of the prevailing paradigms on labour and the need for scalar differentiations within labour processes, the extent to which this has been realised is disappointing. In spite of well-argued critiques favouring more subjective and context-based approaches, there remains a distinct emphasis on much wider and

unilateral paradigms of causality. Until these are addressed, the extent to which analyses can make a constructive contribution to labour debates remains limited.

## 6. References

Allman, J. (1997) Fathering, mothering and making sense of *Ntamoba*: Reflections on the economy of child-rearing in colonial Asante. *Africa*, 67(2), pp. 296-321.

Antubam, K. (1963) *Ghana's heritage of culture* (Leipzig: Koehler and Amelang).

Anyidoho, N.A. and Ainsworth, P. (2009) Child rural-rural migration in West Africa. Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana and Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex.

Anti-Slavery International (2004) *The cocoa industry in West Africa: A history of exploitation* (London: Anti-Slavery International).

Asuming-Brempong, S., Sarpong, D., Amoo, P., and Asenso-Okyere, K. (2007) Cocoa child labour study in Ghana. Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment, Accra, Ghana.

Austin, G. (2005) *Labour, land and capital in Ghana: From slavery to free labour in Asante, 1807-1956* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press).

Austin, G. (1996) Mode of production or mode of cultivation: Explaining the failure of European cocoa planters in competition with African farmers in colonial Ghana, in: W.G. Clarence-Smith (ed) *Cocoa pioneer fronts since 1800: The role of smallholders, planters and merchants*, (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan).

Bales, K. (2005) *Understanding global slavery. A reader* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

Bales, K. (2004) *New slavery. A reference handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO).

Banaji, J. (2003) The fictions of free labour: Contract, coercion, and so-called unfree labour. *Historical Materialism*, 11(3), pp. 69–95.

Bales, K. (2007) *Ending slavery: how we free today's slaves* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Berlan, A. (2009) Child labour in cocoa: whose voices prevail? *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 29(3/4), pp.141-151.

Berlan, A. (2005) Education and child labour among cocoa producers in Ghana: the anthropological case for a re-evaluation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of Oxford.

Berlan, A. (2004) Child labour, education and child rights among cocoa producers in Ghana, in: C. van den Anker (ed) *The political economy of new slavery*, (New York: Palgrave).

Blowfield, M. (2003) Ethical supply chains in the cocoa, coffee and tea industries. *Greener Management International*, 43, pp. 15-24

Boås, M. and Huser, A. (2006) Child labour and cocoa production in West Africa: the case of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Fafo Report 522. Fafo Research Program on Trafficking and Child Labour.

Boyden, J. (1997) Childhood and the policy makers: A comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood, in: A. James and A. Prout (eds) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, (London: Falmer Press).

Brass, T. (1999) *Towards a comparative political economy of unfree labour: Case studies and debates*. London: Frank Cass.

Brass, T. and van der Linden, M. (eds) (1997) *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*, (Berne: Peter Lang AG).

Bukh, J. (1979) *The village woman in Ghana*. (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies).

Casely-Hayford, L. (n.d.) Situational analysis of child labour in the cocoa sector of Ghana. Report submitted to the International Cocoa Initiative.

Clarence-Smith, W.G. (2000) *Cocoa and chocolate, 1765-1914*. (London: Routledge).

Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Ruf, F. (1996) Cocoa pioneer fronts: The historical determinants, in: W.G. Clarence-Smith (ed) *Cocoa pioneer fronts since 1800: The role of smallholders, planters and merchants*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan).

Danquah, J.B. (1928) *Gold coast: Akan laws and customs and the Akim Abuakwa constitution* (London: Routledge).

Fairtrade Foundation (2010) *Fairtrade Foundation statement after BBC Panorama report on child labour in West African cocoa industry*. Available from:

[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press\\_office/press\\_releases\\_and\\_statements/march\\_2010/panorama\\_special\\_report\\_press\\_release.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/march_2010/panorama_special_report_press_release.aspx)

Foster, P. (1965) *Education and social change in Ghana*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).

Hill, P. (1963) *The migrant cocoa farmer of Southern Ghana: A study in rural capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ILRF (2010) New report offers evidence that cocoa industry not addressing child, trafficked labor.

Available from: <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-forced-labor/cocoa-campaign/news/12408>

Ingham, B. (1981) *Tropical exports and economic development: New perspectives on producer response in three low-income countries* (London: Macmillan).

Kaye, B. (1962) *Bringing children up in Ghana* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd).

Lerche, J. (2007) A global alliance against forced labour? Unfree labour, neo-liberal globalization and the International Labour Organization. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 7(4), pp.425-452.

Manuh, T. (1997) Wives, children, and intestate succession in Ghana, in: G. Mikell (ed) *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

McGreal, C. (2001) Aboard the slave ship of despair. *The Guardian*, 16 April. Available from:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/apr/16/chrismcgreal>

Mikell, G. (1997) Akan women and family courts, in: G. Mikell (ed) *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

Nieuwenhuys, O. (1996) The paradox of child labor and anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25, pp. 237-251.

NPECLC (2007) Labour practices in cocoa production in Ghana (Pilot Survey). Accra: Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment.

Okali, C. (1983) *Cocoa and kinship in Ghana: The matrilineal Akan of Ghana* (London: Kegan Paul International for the International African Institute).

Oppong, C. (1974) *Marriage among a matrilineal elite: A family study of Ghanaian senior civil servants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Rattray, R.S. (1969) *Ashanti law and constitution* (New York: Negro Universities Press).

Rogaly, B. (2008) Migrant workers in the ILO's global alliance against forced labour report: A critical appraisal. *Third World Quarterly*, 29(7), pp. 1431-1447.

Satre, L.J. (2005) *Chocolate on trial: Slavery, politics and the ethics of business* (Ohio: Ohio University Press).

Silvey, R. (2004) Power, difference and mobility: feminist advances in migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(4), pp. 490–506.

Sutton, I. (1983) Labour in commercial agriculture in Ghana in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. *Journal of African History*, 24, pp.461-83.

Tulane University (2007) 1<sup>st</sup> Annual report: Oversight of public and private initiatives to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Payson Centre for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University.

Tulane University (2009) 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual report: Oversight of public and private initiatives to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Payson Centre for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University.

Woodhead, M. (1997) Psychology and the cultural construction of children's needs, in: A. James and A. Prout (eds.) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, (London: Falmer Press).

---

<sup>1</sup> To name a few, initiatives (either research or interventions) on this have included Tulane University, the West Africa Commercial Agriculture Programme (WACAP), the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Sustainable Tree Crops Programme (STCP), the International Cocoa Initiative (see below), the International Labour Organization and many governments and NGOs such as Save the Children and Anti-Slavery International. The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual report of Tulane University ‘Oversight of Public and Private Initiatives to eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor in the Cocoa Sector in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana’ (2009) provides a comprehensive list of many direct and indirect funding initiatives in this area.

<sup>2</sup> The International Cocoa Initiative is a collaboration set up in 2007 between the global chocolate industry, civil society, labour unions and governments to work towards ensuring that no illegal child labour or forced labour is used in cocoa production.

<sup>3</sup> Anyihodo and Ainsworth (2009) for example show in a study of child migrant workers from Burkina Faso that poverty was not the main driver of migration.

<sup>4</sup> For example Bales (2007) provides an interesting discussion of forced labour in cocoa but does not engage in any way in its historical dimension, presenting the victims of exploitation as the victims of ‘today’.

<sup>5</sup> See Nieuwenhuys (1996) for a more detailed discussion of the link between gender-based ideologies, labour exploitation and child labour.

<sup>6</sup> A full account of the decline of coerced labour in Asante (at the time the epicentre of cocoa growing in Ghana) between 1896 and 1950 is provided by Austin (2005).

<sup>7</sup> The issues of marriage and divorce in Ghana have been covered extensively in anthropological literature (Danquah, 1928: 162; Kaye, 1962: 135-136; Antubam, 1963: 117-124; Rattray, 1969: 22-32; Oppong, 1974; Mikell, 1997: 96-117) and many of these sources draw attention to the commonness of divorce. Antubam states: ‘To [the Ghanaian], God gave man and woman their free will either to come together or to stay apart. The marriage strings that bring them together, therefore, are made flexible enough to make it possible for either member of the partnership to break away, if and when he or she chooses. Divorce is, for that reason, regarded neither as an anti-social act, nor a serious religious sacrilege.’ (1963: 117).

<sup>8</sup> See for example the story of Kofi in Casely-Hayford (n.d.: 22-23), a story which strongly echoed the narratives of many of my own younger informants.

<sup>9</sup> The Akans are a matrilineal ethnic group living in the southern and central parts of Ghana where cocoa production is prevalent. It is made up of the following sub-ethnic groups: Asante, Akwapim, Akyem, Brong-Ashanti, Fanti and Kwahu.