



**Lilian Ayete-Nyampong**

**ENTANGLED REALITIES AND THE  
UNDERLIFE OF A TOTAL INSTITUTION**

**AN ETHOGRAPHY OF CORRECTIONAL  
CENTRES FOR JUVENILE AND YOUNG  
OFFENDERS IN ACCRA, GHANA**



## Propositions

1. The official power of correctional centres is defective and deficient, but they must keep up the appearance of a total institution. (This thesis)
2. Assuming the double role of being a practitioner and a researcher working with youngsters in a detention centre can be beneficial as well as problematic (This thesis).
3. Law and practice must inform each other rather than law being the focus of a linear process (Brogden 2009) that seeks to transform law into practice.

Brogden, M. (2009). Commentary. The Piggy-in-the-middle. In S. Jensen & A. M. Jefferson (Eds.), *Repopulating state violence and human rights*. London: Routledge.

4. Studies of governance should not only address the discrepancy between official standards and practical norms (Olivier de Sardan, 2008) but also their entanglement.

Olivier de Sardan, J. P. (2008). Researching the Practical Norms of Real Governance in Africa. *The Africa Power and Politics Programme*. Discussion Paper no 5, Dec. 2008. London: Overseas Development Institute.

5. Being a voice for children in conflict with the law entails being interested in listening to their own stories.
6. The determination, mind-set and courage that a Ghanaian woman requires to learn to ride a bicycle are enough to push her to undertake a PhD degree.

Propositions belonging to the thesis entitled:

*Entangled realities and the underlife of a total institution: An ethnography of correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders in Accra, Ghana.*

Lilian Ayete-Nyampong  
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**Entangled realities and the underlife of a total institution**

**An ethnography of correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders in  
Accra, Ghana**

**Lilian Ayete-Nyampong**

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This research was conducted under the auspices of the Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS).

# **Entangled realities and the underlife of a total institution**

## **An ethnography of correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders in Accra, Ghana**

Lilian Ayete-Nyampong

### **Thesis**

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor  
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To my dear husband, Sam, my three cherished children, Daisy, Angelina and John and special mum, Rose.



## Acknowledgement

I commenced this research in September 2008, having been away from a rigid student and study routine for more than a decade following the attainment of my master's degree in 1996 in Aberdeen, Scotland. I am grateful to my employer, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and to the Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NUFFIC) for the opportunity to undertake this study and to, once again, partake of 'a student life' experience. Assuming a student status with its attendant disciplinary regime after a relatively long period of professional life was an arduous task. The Dutch winter that confronted me in 2008 coupled with the schedule of courses and examinations was harsh enough to make me conform to the student routine.

I am much indebted to the detaining authorities, staff and youngsters of the correctional centres in Ghana as well as their oversight bodies for granting me access to the centres and immensely supporting this research endeavour.

The PhD journey though challenging and sometimes lonely, was an interesting and exiting one. I am thankful to Professor Dr Leontine Visser who accepted to supervise a thesis topic on children in conflict with the law and prisons, a topic that one could easily classify as strange to the Wageningen University's typology of expertise. In fact a number of people including professors from other universities have wondered why I ever considered Wageningen and not elsewhere such as the Hague, Utrecht, Amsterdam or elsewhere for my study. Professor Leontine, you supported my methodological choice of embarking on an inductive approach and provided the necessary resources that supported my choice for an actor perspective as well as Michel Foucault's viewpoints on power and resistance. Your first visit to the field did not only help to sharpen my anthropological eye but was also useful in making initial crucial meaning of my field notes. Last October, our final discussions in Ghana, which followed the editing of my drafts, required that I put in some additional effort, and set me on the path of completion. Professor Visser, thank you sincerely for being tirelessly committed through the entire process in ensuring that my wish of completing on schedule was fulfilled.

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observed. Your first reading of the hundreds of pages of field notes and the comments that followed guided my initial first draft. Discussions on my second draft unearthed key concepts such as the total institution and the underlife, and set me onto the path of a thesis outline which subsequently led to the organisation of my thoughts according to chapters. Your usual question: 'So what is the argument?' repeatedly confronted me and challenged me to make my thoughts explicit to the reader as well as avoiding the rush to make abstractions without concrete empirical backing.

I am sincerely thankful to you both for guiding me in this scientific and theoretical encounter particularly given that from my educational background I was not, at the onset of this journey, well acquainted with sociological theory or ethnography.

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My initial periods in the field were quite lonely and boring, firstly given that I was working in a closed environment where activities were mostly repetitive and, secondly because I was undertaking ethnography for the first time. Within the same period however, I established contact with a network of prison researchers - later to be inaugurated as the Global Prison Research Network - by virtue of my literature review. This network was an academic home away from home as I interacted with other scholars who shared their diverse ethnographic experiences. I am indeed indebted to the members of this special network.

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## Table of Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Acknowledgements.....  | ii   |
| Abbreviations and Acronyms .....   | viii |
| Chapter 1  |      |
| Human rights of children. A case for prison ethnography.....   | 1    |
| 1.1 Introduction.....  | 1    |
| 1.2 The evolution of this research .....   | 5    |
| 1.3 Objectives of the study .....  | 6    |
| 1.4 Research questions and objectives .....  | 7    |
| 1.5 Ghanaian institutional and legislative background .....  | 8    |
| 1.6 Children in conflict with the law: definitions and age controversies .....                                       | 10   |
| 1.7 Relevance of the current study: The case for prison ethnography in Africa .....                                  | 12   |
| 1.8 Key concepts.....  | 16   |
| 1.9 Methods and techniques.....  | 25   |
| 1.10 The chapters of this thesis .....   | 36   |
| Chapter 2  |      |
| The illusion and practicalities of the totalizing grip of Ghanaian family structure on children and youngsters ..... | 38   |
| 2.1 Introduction.....  | 38   |
| 2.2 Narratives of young detainees .....  | 38   |
| 2.2.1 Unpleasant beginnings .....  | 44   |
| 2.3 Views from literature on growing up experiences of Ghanaian children .....                                       | 47   |
| 2.4 The gap between literature portrayals and youngsters' views .....  | 50   |
| 2.5 The social world of youngsters in non-familial settings.....   | 55   |
| 2.6 Spirituality, a resource of strength for children and youngsters .....   | 58   |
| 2.7 Conclusion .....   | 60   |
| Chapter 3  |      |
| Hidden and public transcripts: the ambiguities and entanglements of total institutions .....                         | 62   |
| 3.1 Introduction.....  | 62   |
| 3.2 Detention centres .....  | 64   |
| 3.3 Youngsters in police custody .....   | 68   |
| 3.4 Total institutions and youngsters' mortification processes.....  | 71   |
| 3.5 Mortification process, is staff mortified too? .....   | 76   |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 3.6 Reproducing compliant inmates, an illusion? .....   | 78  |
| 3.7 Conclusion .....  | 88  |
| Chapter 4   |     |
| The social underlife of Ghana's correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders .....               | 89  |
| 4.1 Introduction.....   | 89  |
| 4.2 The underlife .....   | 91  |
| 4.3 Underlife in police custody .....   | 92  |
| 4.4 Underlife at correctional institutions .....  | 94  |
| 4.5 Conclusion .....  | 108 |
| Chapter 5   |     |
| Paradoxes of escapes and complexities of confinement .....  | 110 |
| 5.1 Introduction.....   | 110 |
| 5.2 Escapes and the paradox of reinforcing totalistic measures .....                                      | 111 |
| 5.3 Escapes reinforce totalistic measure but also open up detention life.....                             | 116 |
| 5.3.1 Afua's case: Violence evokes violence.....  | 117 |
| 5.3.2 Theresa's case .....  | 125 |
| 5.3.3 James' case: Threats and collusion .....  | 128 |
| 5.4 Conclusion .....  | 132 |
| Chapter 6   |     |
| Sidetracking and appropriation .....  | 133 |
| 6.1 Introduction.....   | 133 |
| 6.2 Educational provisions: A source of pride for institutions and a<br>status symbol for youngsters..... | 134 |
| 6.2.1 Vocational and Technical Education .....  | 138 |
| 6.2.2 Non-formal education .....  | 139 |
| 6.3 Religious observances and spirituality .....  | 143 |
| 6.3.1 A means of correction and a source of material and non-material support ....                        | 144 |
| 6.3.2 Appropriating religious observances .....   | 145 |
| 6.3.3 Forms of spirituality among youngsters .....  | 147 |
| 6.4 Other forms of appropriation .....  | 151 |
| 6.5 Conclusion .....  | 154 |
| Chapter 7   |     |
| Conclusion  |     |
| 7.1 Introduction.....   | 156 |
| 7.2 Pertinent research findings.....  | 156 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 7.3 The contribution of this thesis.....   | 164 |
| Bibliography .....   | 169 |
| Websites.....  | 178 |
| Annex 1  |     |
| Methodological and ethical reflections of doing ethnography in correctional<br>centres for juvenile offenders in Ghana ..... | 179 |
| A.1 Introduction.....  | 179 |
| A.2 Some ethical considerations.....   | 184 |
| Annex 2  |     |
| Maps of research sites .....   | 192 |
| Annex 3  |     |
| Ground maps of research sites .....  | 193 |
| Annex 4  |     |
| Pictures.....  | 193 |
| Endnotes.....  | 196 |
| Summary .....  | 197 |
| Samenvatting.....  | 202 |
| About the author .....   | 207 |
| Completed Training and Supervision Plan .....  | 208 |

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AIDS   | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome                   |
| BECE   | Basic Education Certificate Examination               |
| CHRAJ  | Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice |
| CRC    | Convention on the Rights of the Child                 |
| DSW    | Department of Social Welfare                          |
| FGD    | Focus Group Discussion                                |
| GES    | Ghana Education Service                               |
| GHS    | Ghana Cedi  |
| GOG    | Government of Ghana                                   |
| JCC    | Junior Correctional Centre                            |
| JHS    | Junior High School                                    |
| LEAP   | Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty                |
| MMYE   | Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment            |
| NGO    | Non-Governmental Organisation                         |
| NHIS   | National Health Insurance Scheme                      |
| NSPS   | National Social Protection Framework                  |
| OIC    | Officer-in-Charge                                     |
| SCC    | Senior Correctional Centre                            |
| UDHR   | Universal Declaration of Human Rights                 |
| UNCRC  | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child  |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme                  |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                        |
| USD    | United States Dollar                                  |
| VTE    | Vocational and Technical Education                    |
| WASSCE | West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination     |

# **Chapter 1 Human rights of children. A case for prison ethnography**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis is the outcome of two years of ethnographic research in Ghana from September 2009 to September 2011 in two confinement sites for children in conflict with the law. The study evokes a Goffmanian perspective (Goffman, 1968) of detention life characteristic of total institutions. The research describes in detail how young and juvenile offenders manoeuvre and negotiate their way through everyday detention experiences, partly in cooperation with staff. The major outcome of this ethnographic research suggests that the everyday formal and informal lives of youngsters and staff in total institutions are beset with entanglements, ambiguities, and paradoxes. By focusing on detention practice, this thesis conceives prisons from the inside out and depicts the social entanglement of everyday detention life with the governance of correctional centres. The study portrays perspectives of juvenile offenders as social actors who are structurally constrained and whose lives are wrapped in rejection, abuse, abandonment, material and emotional deprivation in addition to the difficulties of incarceration. Yet, in their state of powerlessness youngsters demonstrate the capacity to negotiate the structural and everyday challenges they encounter.

In addition to the new data produced, this thesis provides lessons for human rights and criminal justice professionals. Whereas normative principles of human rights as enshrined in international human rights conventions are not part of youngsters' everyday language, human rights are indeed embodied in the lives and actions of youngsters and officers. The embodiment of human rights in detention practice entails that they are able to negotiate institutional, social and economic boundaries of everyday confinement life. Youngsters are able to circumvent these barriers by embarking on acts of resistance, creation of privacy, forging friendships, drawing on various forms of spirituality and appropriating institutional objectives.



### *Motivation for the study<sup>i</sup>*

After a decade of work experience with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), a state funded institution in Ghana, I have wondered whether the efforts of human rights promoters have yielded meaningful results in practice.

The past 60 years have seen numerous developments and efforts to promote human rights at the international, regional and national levels. Indeed, six decades after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), the human rights community can boast of substantial strides and successes in promoting human rights. The UDHR set the stage for the emergence of critical standard-setting for international and regional treaties.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) is the first legally binding international instrument that draws extensively on the UDHR by incorporating the full range of human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The adoption and the subsequent entry into force of the UNCRC in 1989 was based on the realization that the situation of children in many parts of the world remained critical as a result of inadequate social conditions, armed conflicts, exploitation, illiteracy, hunger, and that children or persons under 18 years often do require special care and protection that adults do not require. In adopting this Convention world leaders therefore accepted that children had human rights too.

Ghana was the first country in the world to ratify the UNCRC on February 5, 1990 and by doing so demonstrated its commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, who constitute a substantial proportion<sup>ii</sup> of Ghana's population. Two years later, the Ghanaian Republican Constitution of 1992 was promulgated and this saw the entrenchment of children's rights in Ghana's supreme law. The promulgation in 1992 of the Constitution provided an opportunity to harmonize national laws with the provisions of the Convention and enjoined Parliament to enact laws such as the Children's Act (GOG, 1998a) and other laws as were necessary.

Subsequently, Ghana formulated relevant policies<sup>iii</sup> and established state institutions<sup>iv</sup> so as to demonstrate its commitment to implementing requisite legislative provisions for children. In 2007, a year prior to commencement of my doctoral study - a National Social Protection Framework (NSPS) was instituted that sought to promote specific programmes for poor communities including children while contributing to achieving the Millennium

Development Goals. In March 2008, the Ghanaian Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MMYE) launched a programme known as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), a component of the National Social Protection Strategy. This strategy guarantees the implementation of specific programmes for poor and vulnerable groups including vulnerable children in Ghana (Schrofer, 2008; Sultan, 2008).

Undoubtedly, these legislative, institutional and policy measures constitute commendable efforts to promote and protect the rights and welfare of children in Ghana. Nevertheless, over the years these laws, policies and programs have not translated successfully in practice for diverse groups of children in Ghana (DSW, 2005; UNDP, 2007).

An examination of the CHRAJ's annual statistics on the basis of cases filed with the CHRAJ from years 1998-2010<sup>v</sup>, shows an alarming increase in human rights violations, particularly the rights to health, education and maintenance of Ghanaian children. These cases run the gamut from negligence of parents, particularly fathers, to maintain and meet the basic needs (such as food, shelter, clothing and education) of their children. Complaints regarding alleged abuses of children's rights have over the years maintained a substantial lead over other categories of complaints such as women's rights, civil, political, economic and social rights. For instance in 2009 and 2010, complaints regarding the rights of children constituted about 40.1% (4,768 in 2010 and 4,472 in 2009) of the total number of complaints (11,884 in 2010 and 11,176 in 2009) filed with the various offices of the Commission. CHRAJ's officers<sup>vi</sup> (CHRAJ, 2007) in contact with various communities in Ghana discuss during a training seminar that while some rise in the level of awareness and education has taken place, the majority of children still have just a crude idea of what human rights entail in practice. Teachers and pupils sometimes perceive human rights to be something 'out there' which does not affect their everyday life in school. Others consider human rights as just words on a page or discourses about human rights mechanisms and conventions, thus consigning human rights to the preserve of law schools, lawyers, and human rights commissions.

To the ordinary school child, therefore, human rights education in text books may have little to do with everyday accounts of school girls fleeing their town to escape genital mutilation, sustaining fracture as a result of bullying, female children becoming *trokosi slaves*<sup>vii</sup>; children rendered paralyzed and incontinent due to rape and defilement and children denied the right of care and education by their parents.

Reflecting on the meaningfulness of human rights actions to everyday practice, my attention was drawn to my own professional work as a practitioner actively involved in the planning and implementation of monitory and human rights programmes for implementation by the CHRAJ, for various actors in Ghana. Often human rights and other professionals who work with children have tended to rely on their own assumptions and that of others about the needs of children and how children lay claim to these needs. Other times institutional efforts have relied on statistical and other research information based on surveys which, though providing useful information, lack relevant details about the lived realities of the children.

While considerable attention in terms of advocacy and research has been accorded to children who have suffered various forms of abuse including culturally related practices such as *trokosi*, child labour in its worst forms, child trafficking, and rape, hardly any attention is paid in Ghana to child offenders in detention (DSW, 2005). This is possibly due to the criminal guilt associated with juvenile and young offenders in committal, and perhaps with the difficulty of accessing such detention institutions. Yet, by being held under restraint and lawfully kept away from the public eye, such children find themselves in rather difficult circumstances. Issues regarding children in conflict with the law are easily relegated to the very bottom of Ghana's priorities for vulnerable children (ibid). Consequently, the daily lives and experiences of juvenile and young offenders, relative to other children, have received very little attention from practitioners, governmental and civil society groups, and researchers.

The reality for me as an educator of human rights was to share in the actual life experiences of children and respect them as human beings who are rights holders so as to appreciate their narratives and experiences. On account of these thoughts, I tried to put aside normative conceptualizations of human rights as well as my assumptions and that of others about children, and to attempt to penetrate the subjective world of child detainees so as to find out about their everyday lives and experiences. My senior position at the CHRAJ and, subsequently, as a social science researcher in the Netherlands allowed me to access the correctional institutions.

## **1.2 The evolution of this research**

I embarked on a preliminary research on the basis that prisons and correctional institutions in Ghana are not easily accessible to researchers and the general public, as inmates of these institutions are lawfully deprived of their liberty based on their criminal status. Although it could have been possible for me to access these detention institutions by virtue of my employers' mandate, it became necessary to ensure that in my new role as a PhD researcher, accessibility would still be guaranteed. I therefore undertook this preliminary field research from January to February 2009 to ascertain the feasibility of the research, discuss research methods to be employed and also to acquire formal permission to access these institutions.

Letters of notification were sent to oversight authorities, the Department of Social Welfare and the Ghana Prisons Service informing them of the purpose and dates of my visits. A number of follow-up visits were conducted to relevant authorities and officers in charge of the Senior Correctional (SCC) and Junior Correctional Centres (JCC) to establish the actual location of these institutions as well as to gather relevant contact information and to agree on specific dates for visits.

I visited all correctional institutions for juvenile offenders in Ghana with the exception of one whose existence could not be established by oversight authorities.

The following institutions were visited:

1. The Senior Correctional Centre for boys in Accra located in the Greater Accra Region (the only senior correctional institute in Ghana);
2. The Junior Correctional Centre (the only female correctional institute in Ghana) located in Accra, in the Greater Accra Region;
3. The Junior Correctional Centre for boys, located in Swedru in the Central Region;
4. The Junior Correctional Centre for boys, located in Sekondi, in the Western region.

During my interactions with inmates in various correctional centres, I preferred to draw on unstructured interview methods to highlight the difference to the surveys employed by the CHRAJ during their annual monitoring exercises. I therefore distinguished my research activity from that of my CHRAJ employers, though not entirely as I still depended on interview questions that were semi-structured and partly defined from the outset. At the initial stages of the preliminary research, I held discussions with the directors of the respective institutions to develop rapport and explain the purpose of my visit, methods to be

employed, mandate etc. These meetings, which constituted the first line of interviews and discussions with the main officers in charge of the various sections - counseling, welfare, administration, security etc., were fruitful. This is because they offered the opportunity to clarify certain thoughts on my mind and also that of the researched<sup>viii</sup>. I proceeded after these meetings to study registers and files, followed by a tour of the institutions while I held interviews and focus group discussions with youngsters and staff. I also conducted focus group discussions, one-to-one interviews and observations based on institutionally determined differences such as age, length of stay, and dormitory occupied.

I maintained some level of flexibility by making room for emergent and evolving issues. My unit of analysis was initially juvenile and young offenders detained in correctional centres. However, I noticed upon commencement of the preliminary research that the social lives of youngsters and staff were not as markedly bounded as I envisaged; on the contrary, these two worlds were enmeshed.

Similarly my central research question was far from fixed; this is how the research question began to evolve. At first, I was primarily interested in what sense juvenile offenders make of human rights and framed my research question as: *‘What sense do juvenile offenders make of human rights in their day-to-day life in detention’?*

I embarked on the preliminary research work of 2009 based on my almost framed central research question as a starter and a loose guide. Then I saw the need to alter my research question again slightly. Upon commencing preliminary research, I realized that young offenders seldom had anything to say about human rights. The way I conceived human rights did not just seem to be part of their language. Conducting a field research on the basis of this research question would entail disaster for the youngsters and me. Not only would my insistence on this question come across as another adult and practitioner’s imposition on them, I would also rid myself of my freedom as a researcher. It appeared ever more necessary to put aside normative conceptualizations of human rights and to go with the research question: *How do juvenile and young offenders make their everyday life meaningful in correctional centres in Accra?*

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The objective of this study is to contribute a unique empirical and ethnographic knowledge to the mostly legalistic body of knowledge on juvenile and young offenders in detention and

to constitute a distinctive perspective to bridging the gap between policy and practice for child detainees in Ghana.

#### *Short term objectives*

1. Examining growing up experiences and everyday detention lives of juveniles and young offenders as social actors, considering how they construct their lives as social actors while drawing on strategic skills to meet their basic needs and access a range of material and non- material resources
2. Studying how correctional institutions manifest as Goffmanian institutions and how they are organized in terms of regimes, routines and everyday practices
3. Construing the dynamics of everyday detention life within the context of power and continuous entanglements of social life in detention
4. Reflecting on the contribution of this research to the critical discourse on human rights and institutional interventions and giving regard to juveniles' practical experiences in detention.

#### *Long term objectives*

1. Contributing to the body of knowledge on juvenile offenders as well as children and young people as social actors across disciplines of human rights, education and anthropology
2. Providing practical advice about governing correctional centres in Ghana giving due consideration to youngsters capabilities and their role in power relations
3. Situating human rights and criminal justice policy and reform in the different local contexts of prisons and correctional institutions.

### **1.4 Research questions and objectives**

#### *Central research question*

*How do juvenile and young offenders make their everyday life meaningful in correctional centres in Accra?*

#### *Sub-questions*

The following sub-questions draw on the central research question:

1. Who are the juvenile offenders? Where do they come from? What are their past experiences and life histories?
2. How are the growing up experiences of children in Ghana presented in Ghanaian literature, and how do the children's own perceptions compare with that?
3. How do correctional centres manifest as Goffmanian institutions?
4. In what ways do youngsters lay claim to everyday needs in confinement?
5. What is the social underlife of juvenile and young offenders in correctional centres in Ghana?
6. How do youngsters exhibit open defiance and resistance as they seek to let themselves off the grip of total institutions through escapes?
7. In what ways do youngsters appropriate institutional goals and manifest indirect sidetracking in encounters with staff?

The understanding of everyday detention life based on these research questions incites the need for practitioners in the field of criminal justice, human rights, and other related fields to make transitions of their own, based on practical experiences in confinement and to reconstruct and adjust policy and practice accordingly.

### **1.5 Ghanaian institutional and legislative background**

Detention institutions have been utilized from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through periods of Ghana's checkered political past characterized by military and civilian rule, as repressive instruments and weapons of punishment as well as means of ridding society of unsafe elements. Ghana employed an English Common Law tradition that guided various spheres of social, economic and political life from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until independence in 1957 (Ellis, 1971). Prisons were established in the same period as well as the Prisons Ordinance of 1860 which outlined regulations for the management and upkeep of prisoners. By the early twentieth century, the British colonial administration managed the nation's prisons<sup>ix</sup> until the period after World War II when local officers began to assume oversight<sup>x</sup>.

There was no formal provision for juvenile delinquents during the period of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century although juvenile delinquency had been addressed informally through non-custodial processes such as restitution, compensation, fines, mediation, apologies and, occasionally, punishment (DSW, 2005). This customary system has survived the period

spanning pre and post-colonial administration through post-independence administration till the present, in the hands of family and clan heads, chiefs and councils of elders.

The early twentieth century marked the onset of a non-state initiated custodial system or committals for juvenile offenders. These institutions such as the one established in Agona Swedru in the Central Region by the Salvation Army Church,<sup>xi</sup> trained delinquent youth in vocational and technical skills. The government of the Gold Coast later established other industrial schools and institutions. The Ghana Borstal Institution as well as a remand home in Accra and in other regions was established in the 1940s. The Ghana Borstal Institution was under the supervision of the Social Welfare Department until the mid-1950s when the Prisons Service took over its administration.

After independence, the Criminal Procedure Code of 1960 (GOG, 1960) was passed which saw the repeal of earlier statutes and the incorporation of what was contained in previous ordinances. The period after 1970 realized the need to shift from committal to the strengthening of non-custodial options such as probation and community service. This was partly on account of budgetary constraints in maintaining juvenile institutions and partly due to the realization that incarceration did not pose enough deterrence to juvenile crime (DSW, 2005). The Criminal Procedure Code of 1960 saw amendments in 1994 and 1998. Under section 4 of the Criminal Code Amendment Act (554) of 1998 (GOG, 1998b) the age of criminal responsibility was raised from 7 to 12 years. In the same period, discussions were held about the need for greater emphasis on probation work and alternatives to custodial sentencing as well as rights based approaches which gave prominence to the best interest of the child. Subsequently in 2003, Ghana passed the Juvenile Justice Act 653 (GOG, 2003), a comprehensive Act which introduced innovative provisions<sup>xii</sup> and incorporated relevant provisions of instruments that had existed since the 1940s. Presently, the Juvenile Justice Act, the Children's Act 560 of 1998 (drawing on the UNCRC), and other related instruments constitute the basis for promoting the human rights of juvenile and young offenders in Ghana.

I draw on the Juvenile Justice Act, the specific instrument for promoting the human rights of juvenile and young offenders in Ghana, to discuss some controversies in terms of age and other definitions with respect to children in conflict with the law.



## **1.6 Children in conflict with the law: definitions and age controversies**

Age is crucial to the definition of a juvenile and young offender and as such critical to magistrates and social workers that hear the case of juvenile and young offenders. In accordance with Sections 46 and 60 of the Juvenile Justice Act 653 of 2003, a juvenile offender is a child under the age of 18 who is in conflict with the law and has been convicted of an offence. A young offender is someone who is 18 or more years of age but below 21 and has been convicted of an offence. The Juvenile Justice Act does not set a lower level limit for a juvenile offender; this gap is however filled by Section 4 of the Criminal Code (Amendment Act 554 of 1998), which sets the legal age of criminal accountability at 12 years<sup>xiii</sup>. The Juvenile Justice Act, Section 47 (3) sets the upper limit for children in conflict with the law at 21. By this age, young offenders in committal will have completed their term in the state's senior correctional centre<sup>xiv</sup>. The legal definition of juvenile and young offenders in detention in accordance with the relevant laws in Ghana thus covers persons between the ages of 12 and 21. Similarly, the legal definition of a juvenile delinquent in most African countries is usually restricted to persons under 21 years, though the exact lower and upper age limits differ from country to country (Igbinovia, 1985).

In spite of the above legal definitions and age delineations, the definition of children and young people in practice is tricky<sup>xv</sup> and sometimes culturally or arbitrarily determined. Young people as social 'shifters' (Durham, 2000), oscillating between childhood and adulthood, and assuming somehow an analogous status, tend to pose some advantage for scholarly work as the loose definition of 'youth' can be employed for various research interests. This analogous status can also be problematic when local definitions of youth and childhood within Africa are different from those employed by international organizations (Leopold, 2005). In the midst of such ambiguity, youngsters and other actors also take advantage to pursue their own interests. Discussions about age usually incite laughter and giggles among juvenile and young offenders as they tend to be doubtful and sometimes raise questions about one another's ages. In interviews with youngsters, they did not hesitate to cite two different ages, one for office records and the other, the actual age.

The Juvenile Justice Act provides that ages of juvenile offenders be determined medically in the absence of a birth or medical certificate:

In the absence of a birth certificate or baptismal certificate signed by a medical officer as to the age of a person below eighteen years of age

shall be evidence of that age of the juvenile without proof of signature unless the court directs otherwise. ...Where it appears to the court that the person brought before it has attained the age of 18years, the person shall for the purposes of this part, be deemed not to be a juvenile... (Juvenile Justice Act 653: 2&3)

Medically determined age however raises some questions in terms of accuracy as this age is approximate and not the actual age. In an interview with the centre manageress or the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the female correctional institution, she mentioned that the verification process of the ages of juvenile and young offenders can sometimes be problematic as doctors are only able to ascertain an age range and not a definite age of the child. The OIC is however not worried about accuracy of age. According to her, what is quoted on the detention orders of youngsters is the age the institution works with. She admitted though that there were occasions where they considered it necessary to verify the ages of some young offenders as provided by detention orders, so as to determine what treatment to give to them.

At the point of arrest, most juvenile and young offenders have virtually lost contacts with relatives (Chapter 2). The majority of young offenders are reportedly abandoned at very early ages; they also stopped schooling<sup>xvi</sup> long before arrest and often did not have any formal employment. Some even have little notion of what birth registration documentation entails and age determination becomes problematic for them. Besides, the medical determination of one's age requires the payment of fees (UNICEF, 2005), fees that youngster offenders can seldom afford.

Juveniles are also reportedly advised by the police to inflate their ages so as to spend shorter terms in adult prisons and avoid spending the mandatory three years in a juvenile correctional institute (CHRAJ, 1986-2005). Upon arrest, most juvenile and young offenders are virtually abandoned by their parents and are usually at the mercy of state agents. Such children, who have little knowledge about judicial procedure coupled with negligible support from relatives and parents, have little option than to heed the advice of state agents. Prior to the passage of the Juvenile Justice Act, juvenile and young offenders were in most cases committed to correctional institutions for a mandatory three years. The passage of the Juvenile Justice Act in 2003, however, provides for shorter periods of detention, in which case the argument of avoiding longer sentences by inflating one's age becomes invalid.

State agents may likewise recommend inflation of age stemming from their own interest. The regional commander in an annual report of the CHRAJ (2001:37) on Inspection of Prisons and Police Cells states:

...the procedure at juvenile courts is cumbersome and that accounts for the inflation of ages of juveniles on the recommendation of the police so as to avoid going through the process.

During interview sessions with prison officers they attested to the fact that the process of committing and conveying juveniles to correctional centres was more cumbersome than if juveniles were sentenced to adult prisons.

Ambiguities in age definitions and determinations can contribute to general distortion of statistical data on juvenile and young offenders in committal, in police detention and in adult prisons. Apart from ambiguities in the definitions employed by the law and in practice, the label 'Juvenile Justice Act' is also quite misleading as it suggests an Act for juveniles only, excluding youngsters. Not surprisingly, key reports on access to justice by children in Conflict with the Law in Ghana (DSW, 2005; UNICEF, 2005) as well Ame (2011) in his article on *'The Rights of Children in Conflict with the Law in Ghana'* dwelt predominantly on juveniles and not young offenders. Further, the word "senior" as in Senior Correctional Centre is an equally misleading term, which makes the term "senior" analogous to a youngster, and yet in common usage it refers to older adults. The present label that the Act carries, is not only confusing when matters concerning age determination are considered but may also blur the distinction that the law seeks to create between correctional institutions for juveniles and young offenders.

In view of the foregoing controversies, a working definition is required. For the purpose of this study the age definition will cover juvenile and young offenders between ages 12 and 21. Discussions will mostly employ the usage of the terms 'youngsters' and 'children' within this age category. Reference will also be made to other terms such as juveniles, young offenders and children in Conflict with the Law.

### **1.7 Relevance of the current study: The case for prison ethnography in Africa**

A review of available literature indicates that the period prior to the 1980s saw significant scholarly interest in prison life and confinement sites (Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1968). Ethnographic research in confinement sites or prisons saw a gradual decline since the 1980s, particularly in the United States (Rhodes, 2009; Wacquant, 2002) but currently, interest in prison ethnography is picking up slowly. Rhodes (2009) conducted an extensive eight year ethnographic research of a maximum security control unit, popularly known as "supermax" in Washington State and later, of a therapeutic community prison in England.

Some research has been done in Canada (Stein, 1955), the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe (Crewe, 2009; Earle, 2012; Jewkes & Johnstone, 2006; Liebling, 2004), Latin America (Darke, 2012; Garces, 2012), Asia (Bandyopadhyay, 2007; Martin, 2009; Piacentini, 2004) and Africa (Jefferson, 2007; Lindegaard, 2009; Sauls, 2009).

In the field of youth justice remarkable scholarly work has been undertaken, for example on criminal justice and behaviour (Weenink, 2009); law, human rights and criminal accountability (Arts & Popovski, 2006; Goldson, 2008; Lappi-Seppala, 2006; Long, 1992; Muncie, 2008; Pitts & Kuula, 2006; Storgaard, 2004; Vivien, 2006); reformation and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders (Blevins, Cullen, & Sundt, 2007); health and psychological disorders (Trulson, 2007); alcohol and drugs usage (Cropsey, Linker, & Waite, 2008); violence (Trulson, 2007); social welfare and family and faith based approaches (Cox & Matthews, 2007); and young people in school and other state residential settings such as orphanages and residential homes (Zeira, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2003). However, the majority of these studies are survey based, with the exception of studies such as Goldson (2002, 2008) which employ interviews and direct testimonies from young people. Such survey-based studies aim at formal penal and criminal justice reform and are not well situated within the context of everyday prison practices.

Studies on juvenile justice identified for Africa are relatively few in number. South Africa is credited with a high proportion of these studies in the areas of HIV/AIDS in prisons and correctional centres (Gaum, Hoffman, & Venter, 2006); diversion programmes (Cupido, Kritzing, & Van Aswegen, 2005); sexual violence, youth gangs and child soldiers (Petersen, Bhana, & McKay, 2005; Steinberg, 2004). Other studies are identified on sentencing policy for juvenile offenders (Howes, 1993), criminal accountability and rights of children in South Africa (Pillay, 2006) and countries such as Sierra Leone and Rwanda (Arts & Popovski, 2006).

Ethnographic research on deviance, crime, gangsters and related areas (Hobbs, 2001; Taylor, 1990) provide invaluable information about doing ethnography in challenging settings but they seldom address young offenders and correctional institutions. In a study by Ashkar and Kenny (2008) young offenders' subjective experiences of incarceration were described. Although its title, '*Views from the inside*' gave it the appearance of ethnography, the study was based mainly on semi-structured interviews. In another study entitled, 'An ethnographic study of staff members in a Juvenile Correctional Facility', Inderbitzin (2006) examined the role of staff members as guardians, counsellors and role models, but

leaves out the youngsters. In a related work by the same author (Inderbitzin, 2007), the role of staff in balancing custody and treatment in maximum security prisons for juvenile offenders was examined with reference to a similar study (Kivett & Warren, 2002) that provides inside views of power relationships in prisons.

Ethnographic field studies in Africa's prisons and correctional institutions are scanty. The research by De Kock (2005) on youth in conflict with the law examined life stories of young people awaiting trial in Gauteng, South Africa, but it does not include young offenders in detention. Jefferson (2007) in an eight-month ethnographic field study on prison officers' training and practice in Nigeria, examined penal philosophy and practice of the Nigerian Prisons Service<sup>xvii</sup>. Lindegaard (2009) did some work on male youngsters in Cape Town. Similarly, Sauls (2009) researched violence and the daily management of children in a place of safety in Cape Town. Some ethnographic research in Uganda focusing on the ethnography of the justice sector and policy transfer in the global south<sup>xviii</sup> is currently underway.

Generally, literature on African youth as social actors (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009; Christiansen, 2006; Christiansen, Utas, & Vigh, 2006; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Omoniyi, Scheld, & Oni, 2009; Peters, 2006) is mostly preoccupied with 'free youth' in contexts of war, conflict, violence and politics. Scholarly work in Africa on confined youth or youngsters as social actors deprived of their liberty is scanty (Jensen, 2001; Lindegaard, 2009). Confined persons are either presumed to be isolated from wider socio-economic or cultural processes or are considered incapable of negotiating the boundaries of confinement seemingly imposed on them. This thesis on the basis of its findings that confined youngsters manage to circumvent detention barriers, challenge such perceptions (Chapters 4 & 5).

The criminal justice system and policing efforts usually perceive children in conflict with the law as deviant and rebellious, requiring close monitoring (Blok, 2001; Presdee, 2000; Trulson, 2007). This perception, which can be hostile and discriminating, tends to view crime as a single event that targets juveniles as offenders and fails to give recognition to the social worlds of young offenders. Similarly, lawyers and human rights officers are usually preoccupied with compliance with standards and laws (Ludwidge, 2006; Muncie, 2008; Sarkin, 2008)<sup>xix</sup>. Such pre-occupation results in detainees being projected as a homogenous group devoid of diversity<sup>xx</sup> (Allison & Gabrielle, 2001; Ludwidge, 2006; Sarkin, 2008). It also blinds the professionals from seeing the hidden perspectives of

detention life or the social actor(s) behind the legal labels. Consequently, the appreciation of real life experiences of children in conflict with the law and prisoners relative to other target groups in Ghana, suffer from a lack of interest both at national and international levels<sup>xxi</sup>.

This thesis is innovative in its departure from a legalistic approach to the study of detention life, and the fact that such sociological and ethnographic viewpoints in Africa and the global south are almost non-existent.

The research also turns the gaze away from the dominant domestic, regional and international discourse on African prisons and detentions institutions, which are also adhered to by the CHRAJ. Such discourse focuses on prisons in Africa as old colonial warehouses characterised by appalling conditions such as overpopulation<sup>xxii</sup>, poor ventilation, incarceration of juvenile offenders in adult prisons and overstay of remand prisoners (CHRAJ, 1986-2005). The study thus constitutes a break from literature and the standard perspective that characterizes African prisons as poor conditions and requiring criminal justice and human rights reforms. In fact Sarkin (2008) notes that worst conditions in prisons are prevalent in other parts of the world such as Central and Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia. While it is important to draw attention to prison conditions, such perspectives are over-rehearsed and the continual calls for reform and change have yielded modest improvement over the years. According to Jefferson (2007) such reforms make little change because penal institutions in the South are approached from without as though they are uniform entities conceptualized by default as monolithic and resistant to change.

The novelty of this research therefore stems from its ethnographic focus on children and young people in Ghana who have been lawfully deprived of their liberty but not of their agency to actively engage in shaping their everyday life conditions. This study thus contributes to prison ethnography in Africa and to literature on children's rights and human rights as a whole.

Given that prisons and correctional centres in Ghana and most parts of Africa are run mostly by the state (Sarkin 2008) this study also brings to the fore manifestations of the state and state officers as its subjects, thus contributing to scholarly work on the ethnography of the state. The relationship of state officers with inmates is beset with various forms of resistance, collusion and sidetracking which provides a picture quite different from the perception that the state is almighty and state officers execute their function perfectly (Chapter 3).

The complementarity of this study to conventional prison research in Africa is therefore clearly established by its ethnographic evidence of practical detention life. First-hand observations and descriptions of their views, everyday experiences and negotiation unearth the social lives of these juveniles in detention. Its actor-oriented approach challenges major normative discourses that tend to view detainees as a homogenous group. On the contrary, it portrays juvenile and young offenders as a highly heterogeneous group, diversified for example, on the basis of their family, religious and parental background.

Crucial to this study is the ontological assumption and methodological viewpoint that there is no unitary or fixed reality about detention, but that juvenile and young offenders as social actors construct multiple realities of confinement life in their interaction with other offenders and staff.

## **1.8 Key concepts**

In order to make sense of the ethnographic data, this research draws on various key concepts that shed light on the interpretative framework of this thesis. The concepts discussed here are total institutions, the underlife, multiple realities and entanglements, the dynamics of domination, collusion, and resistance.

### *Total institutions*

Erving Goffman's fine descriptive detail from his one year ethnographic fieldwork at St Elizabeth's hospital, Washington DC which he published in 1961 (Goffman, 1968) is useful for studying correctional institutions in Ghana. Goffman (idem) writes about human interactions in social settings from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. Ghanaian prisons and correctional centres exemplify Goffman's concept of total institutions especially regarding the manifestation of institutionalization and mortification processes that strip inmates of their identities.

Goffman (1968:xi) defines a total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated-individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." Though differences may exist in terms of 'totalness' from one institution to the other, correctional institutions are total in so far as a barrier to social and physical intercourse with the outside

exists, marked by physical characteristics such as walls, locked doors and a large mass of inmates who are confined and engage in same routinized and structured activities.

The process of mortification and institutionalization for youngsters as portrayed in this thesis starts from initiation ceremonies when youngsters purportedly begin the process of being homogenized into total institutions until they are socialized into roles of compliance (Chapter 3). Upon entry, youngsters come with distinct stories and attachments to the outside world but they are immediately stripped of these personal attachments and distinctness. The institutional attack on the individual is exemplified by identical uniforms and shoes and sometimes youngsters bearing the same name (Chapter 3). The total institution in this regard is likened to a “forcing house” (Goffman, 1968:22) that trims, programmes, shapes and encodes inmates into an object that can be “fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment” (Goffman, 1968:26), to be worked on smoothly by routine operations.

### *The underlife*

In the face of mortification procedures of the total institution likened to a forcing house resulting in dispossession of role, name and identity of inmates, inmates adopt a system of techniques as secondary adjustments. Secondary adjustments describe “...habitual arrangements by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means or obtains unauthorized ends...” (ibid: 172). These techniques do not pose direct resistance or confrontation to staff management but allow inmates some level of satisfaction through unauthorized means. A vital aspect of secondary adjustments is that they provide the inmate with some evidence that he is still, as it were, his own man and still has some protective distance under his own control (ibid: 53). Earlier on his book *Asylums*, Goffman (1968:171-176) had construed primary adjustments in order to explain his main focus, secondary adjustments. According to Goffman, when an individual undertakes his or her primary or expected role in an organization, such an individual has a primary adjustment. Goffman distinguishes two types of secondary adjustments, disruptive and contained adjustments. The former has to do with participant’s intentions to radically disrupt or alter the structure of an organization. Contained adjustments share the features of fitting into existing structures of primary adjustments, but without introducing the pressure for a radical change. Secondary adjustments that are “primarily contained and not disruptive” (ibid: 181) are



what Goffman refers to as underlife. It is this underlife as conceived by Goffman that sheds light on the social world of youngsters in Ghana's correctional centers (Chapter 4).

In Correctional Centres, various aspects of social relations occurring in an underlife are marked by rituals and illustrate the hierarchical relationships that are to some degree quasi-institutionalized through the positions of captains, seniors, inmates and newly admitted inmates or 'brannies'. Discussions also dwell on the usage of 'corners', a term variedly employed by inmates to connote diverse meanings such as the creation of privacy and intimacy. For instance, whereas boundary markers such as flowers or mosquito nets serve as symbols defining youngsters' private space and the hierarchy among them, these markers are far from fixed. On the contrary, the differentiated meanings of these symbolic markers and their associations are constantly created and recreated.

Not only do these detention centres harbour an extensive social underlife which is known to and shared by inmates and to a fair degree also by prison officials, but power to command punishment and compliance with rituals or insider rules is evident (Chapter 4). At the same time power is exerted to draw on resources both material (such as food, money, gifts) and non-material (such as kindness, care, protection, love) through patronage practices, thus creating among inmates of different levels of hierarchy and also between inmates and staff. Thus both the powerful and the powerless manage to carve out social, economic, private and even spiritual spaces in order to meet their everyday needs.

#### *The underlife from an actor-oriented perspective*

Rather than defining the underlife as a structural characteristic of total institutions, I depart from Goffman and apply an actor-oriented (Long, 2001) approach to give recognition not only to the multiple realities of detention life but also to the diversified ways that youngsters demonstrate their capacity to access certain skills, and material and non-material resources. The term actor-oriented is preferred to actor-centered (Arce & Long, 2007) given the former term's appropriateness to allow for the constitution of social actions within a range of contextual circumstances.

This approach is a dynamic one that does not treat young and juvenile offenders as a homogenous group, hampered by structural constraints prior to committal and while in detention. Similar to the critique by Gigengack (2006) of essentialist notions of *the street child* by United Nations' definitions and other institutional sources, this approach is not

about the singularity of a detainee, juvenile or young offender. On the contrary, an actor oriented approach is a counterpoint of structural analysis in development sociology (Long, 2001) which recognizes that youngsters have differential responses to similar structural causalities of crime and delinquency. The approach acknowledges the efforts of social actors such as juvenile and young offenders as invaluablely contributive to any change concerning them. A social actor in this respect is not merely a synonym for an individual, nor is it a fixated social category such as social class or gender, but it is a social construct (idem). Thus correctional institutions, social workers, religious organisations, prison officers and young offenders are examples of social actors to whom agency can be attributed. Agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life even under the most extreme forms of coercion (idem). Agency can also be equated to power to pass on a command or enlist the involvement of others in a scheme, by the ability to influence others, for instance, politically or socially. Strategies employed by social actors are not their intrinsic possession nor does it reflect one's structural location. Rather, strategies are culturally constructed and shared by other actors. The underlife from an actor-oriented perspective thus depicts critical points of intersection or interfaces between various hierarchies of inmates and also between staff and inmates in accessing material and non-material resources such as friendships and spirituality. Such interfaces are also characterized sometimes by cynicism, lack of trust and betrayal.

The dynamism of escapes in correctional centres brings to the fore the diverse forms of control that actors exert, such as regional head offices, staff and youngsters (Chapter 5). For instance, I document how diverse interests and meanings are contested and also negotiated by various actors in what Long (2001: 242) calls arenas - spaces or sites of struggle where contests over issues and meanings occur.

The contestations of power and interests, such as the open confrontations amongst staff and also between staff and inmates characterized by cynicism and contempt, are evident in diverse arenas. Such contestations result in the construction of diverse, parallel, opposite and distancing positions by the various actors. Interfaces that develop between, for instance, staff and inmates constitute the basis for sharing resources through the development of patronage relationships and strengthening communication. Yet, the same interfaces unearthed open confrontations, distancing and conflicts of power and interests between staff and inmates (Chapter 5). Contestations encountered at the interface have

repercussions not only for actors at various levels of power, but also for actors who are absent, such as oversight authorities tasked with the responsibility of ensuring security. In other words, such interface situations transcend physical place or face to face encounters.

### *Multiple realities and entanglements*

This ethnographic study of correctional centres addresses the everyday intricacies, dynamic paradoxes and entanglements of detention life. It ascertains empirically that detention life is characterized by diverse realities constructed by the different actors. It explicitly outlines the ways in which youngsters as social actors, in cooperation with other actors, make meaning of everyday social processes in detention. Detention life is not devoid of totalistic features such as mortification procedures; neither is detention and pre-detention life characterized by a singular, unitary or monolithic power or reality. Actors themselves are actively involved in structuring their everyday detention life which abounds in diverse realities, ambiguities and paradoxes.

Confinement life therefore parallels the observations of Arce and Long (2007) in terms of multiple realities of development which they conceive not only regarding intervention processes, but also with respect to the social life of development itself. According to these authors, development has a social life of its own, a life that abounds in multiple realities. Similarly, my ethnographic data illustrates an active social life that breeds in correctional centres.

Multiple realities should however not be conceived as a multiplicity of unitary realities. Conversely, each reality is differently constructed and there exists a multiplicity of such differentiated constructions stemming from the empirical evidence illustrated throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis. For instance, the narratives I collected of youngsters do not only depict a variety of encounters of youngsters while growing up, but they also show that youngsters construct diverse meanings of their variegated experiences. In spite of the preponderance of essentialist notions in existing literature on child rearing practices (Chapter 2), my study using the narratives of youngsters (ibid) exhibit differentiated realities in terms of neglect, punishment, mobility and spirituality.

Multiple realities also feature in the description of the correctional centres as a total institution (Chapter 3) where internal dynamics of power appear to be ambiguous and dotted by practices of informality. Despite these diverse manifestations of reality, the total

institution still manages to keep a total appearance. While criminal justice practitioners adhere to the ideal of correction as reflected in the name of the correctional centre, correction is in real life constructed differently by staff and youngsters.

My actor-oriented approach to the underlife likewise depicts the multiplicity of an underlife that is not based on fixed statuses and hierarchies; neither do patronage practices and an informal economy characterize the underlife as unitary. The underlife is replete with multiple realities where actors process their varied social experiences differently as they draw on material and non-material resources. Consequently, the practical experiences incited by the underlife at the centres seldom evoke a bleak image of young, hopeless and despaired criminals at the mercy of a unitary life imposed on them by the forcing house of a total institution. Finally, also in the Chapters 5 and 6, detention complexities and realities in terms of escape occurrences provide examples of the various ways by which institutional goals are appropriated and sidetracked.

### *Entangled social relationships*

The actor-oriented approach is relevant in appreciating the complex dynamics prevalent in entangled relationships between the various structural hierarchies without restricting such dynamics to dualities, binary oppositions or fixed boundaries between officer and inmate, oppressor and oppressed, or micro and macro levels. Correctional centres have a social life of their own that is characterized by entanglements between the official and the unofficial, yet this social life is not restricted to confinement only, nor is this life clearly severed from the wider society. The total institution is in fact continuously interacting not only with the Ghanaian communities in which they are located but youngsters are also involved in wider social processes as they watch Television and are acquainted with latest fashion wears, music and theatre.

I draw on the notion of entanglement based upon a number of usages from scientific encounters. The notion of entanglement was employed in discussions following the presentation of conference papers at a conference in 2010 on the theme: “*Dissecting the ‘non-western’ prison*”<sup>xxiii</sup>. Entanglement was meant here to deconstruct the dyad of prisoner-staff relations and see more as an entangled web of dependency and reciprocity. While the connotation behind this usage is beneficial, the image of an “entangled web” may suggest a kind of a trap from which one cannot free oneself. A more flexible and favourable

usage is evoked by (Arce & Long, 2007) in their reference to complex entanglements of social relationships from an interface perspective. They explain the notion interface as entailing social relations that are on the move and characterised by diversions and negotiations. An actor-oriented approach practically brings to the fore the diverse and complex contestations, contradictions and ambiguities that are prevalent amongst actors of various hierarchical and social positions as discussed in this thesis. Such complexities of everyday detention practice cannot be understood from general principles that explain how social orders are constituted and transformed nor from reifications of the state and its subjects or of total institutions and inmates.

I agree with Arce and Long (2007:121) that the usage of an “entangled social logic” employed by Olivier de Sardan (2005) tends to suggest some sort of rationality or normative principles, thus missing out on the uncertainties and ambivalences of everyday detention life. It is within the context of such dynamics of entanglements that this thesis gives focus to embroiled or entangled relationships.

#### *The dynamics of power in correctional centres: Goffman’s silence on power*

This study, by conceiving the dynamics of the underlife exhibited by youngsters within the context of power, takes a departure from Goffman. He portrays how various selves act out various roles, contexts and aspects of interaction in a total institution. For instance, he refers to how inmates act out the role of a perfect inmate or take over completely the official or staff’s view of themselves (Goffman, 1968). While he portrays that total institutions wield substantial control on inmates, referring to a “forcing house” (ibid: 22), an “iron home” (ibid:12) and an “echelon” (ibid:46), he remains silent on the direct usage of power and its attendant enactments. This is remarkable in view of his reference to the underlife and secondary adjustments, which contradict the portrayal of power as neutral. In other words, Goffman’s reference to the underlife does not merely depict inmates as passive recipients of the echelon authority of total institutions, yet he does not go as far as conceiving inmates as having agency.

The underlife as exhibited in correctional centres in Ghana implies more than secondary characteristics exhibited by inmates to get around the demands of everyday detention life. It is an active social life, characterized by power and hierarchy which engages various actors while acknowledging the survival efforts, intentionality and creativity of youngsters in drawing on material and non- material resources. In other words,

juvenile and young offenders within the confines of a total institution, evince agency in their everyday detention practice. It is within this context of the missing dynamism of power in Goffman's conceptualisations that the interpretative framework of this thesis finds some expression in Foucault's manifestation of power and resistance in everyday social life.

### *Power and resistance*

I demonstrate empirically that power is not possessed by any one person or institution, but that it is acted out in their relationships (Chapter 2; Chapter 5).

Although Michel Foucault's accounts (1978) lack the rich descriptive details of Goffman, the latter does account for the variedness and diversity of power and resistance that are at play between the various social actors, every day practices and correctional centres as institutions. For instance, Foucault's notion of power sheds meaning on the divergence in various constructions of child rearing practices, relative to youngsters' narratives. Contrary to some views and perspectives in the literature (Chapter 2) youngsters do not grow up and grow out within a particular fixed or predetermined moral or practical hierarchy and power. Conversely, my research depicts resistance as pervading various socio-cultural practices. The three escape incidents involving Afua, Theresa and James (Chapter 5) portray everyday life as characterised not only by paradoxes of violence but also by resistance and defiance.

Power, according to Foucault (1978:95-96) permeates a range of disciplinary sites, such as the correctional institutions, the courts etc., concurrently intersecting with the force of resistance. Resistance is present wherever power is, and vice versa:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power... These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network.... there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous... They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter<sup>xxiv</sup> as an irreducible opposite (idem).

He thus moves the dynamics of power operations beyond the oppressed-oppressor dichotomy where the latter is at the mercy of the forcing hand of the former. Mills (2003) argues that Foucault does not seek to simply do away with the state in his description of how power operates, but rather seeks to extend power relations beyond the confines of the

state. Thus, power, from a Foucauldian perspective, does not permanently reside in officers or in an inmate. On the contrary, power is beset with the multiplicities of resistance.

Foucault was however not too far from Goffman when he conceptualized power as emanating from the top in the form of disciplinary power, drawing on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (Foucault, 1977) whereby a single guard can watch numerous prisoners but himself remains unseen. Whereas this centralized form of power appears to make no space for resistance, Foucault argues that this power is diffused into wider society. This view makes meaning in terms of youngsters' admission to a more disciplined and structured life<sup>xxv</sup> relative to the seeming lack of structure, which according to youngsters, characterized their lives prior to detention (Chapter 2.2.1). By such admissions, other subtle ways by which power works through different disciplinary techniques and procedures is manifest.

Useful to discussions in Chapter 3 are Scott's notions of domination and resistance. The weapons of the weak (Scott, 1990) and the hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990) of seemingly powerful actors or officers who complain off stage about the difficulty of managing youngsters, are relevant. Scott (1985) captures the complexity of relationships of resistance in ways, that depict the powerful and the powerless constrained in their behavior in power relationships.

Whereas Scott (1990) demonstrates the dynamics of power as enacted on stage and off stage, such dynamics of power, however, tends to be limited to the dichotomy of the powerful and powerless and does not extend beyond binary oppositions between the oppressor and the oppressed. Consequently, he misses out on how power relationships can be entangled manifesting compromise, collusions and cooperation of a hierarchy of inmates and staff in a mutual exchange of material and non-material resources, as I show in the Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

From an actor-oriented perspective, I discuss forms of diverting from institutional goals by means of sidetracking, whereby youngsters and sometimes officers tend to go along with institutional goals of reform and correction. In Chapter 6, sidetracking is seen as different from resistance, as sidetracked efforts do not oppose or confront institutional goals head on. Like in the case of resistance I draw on the actor-oriented approach related to the conceptualisation of development projects (Olivier de Sardan, 2005) to demonstrate how institutional goals of reform and correction are appropriated by youngsters as they devise

practical methods, drawing on their own local resources. The central motive being that youngsters manage to appropriate institutional goals for their own interests rather than that of staff and other professionals, and that sidetracking directs the development process in unforeseen ways.

## **1.9 Methods and techniques**

### *Selection of correctional centres*

Of all the institutions that engaged my attention during the preliminary period, only three were functional and two of these constituted the focus of my main field work. The selection of these institutions stemmed from their uniqueness and the fact that they exemplified difference and diversity. The Senior Correctional Centre (SCC) is the only institution in Ghana for young male offenders and the Junior Correctional Centre (JCC) is also the only institution for juvenile female offenders.

Clear differences exist between the two institutions in terms of numerical strength of staff and youngsters. The average daily lock-up of male youngsters as well as the numerical strength of staff at the SCC far outnumber the average daily lock-up of female youngsters and total number of staff<sup>xxvi</sup> at the JCC. The SCC which can hold a maximum of 250 inmates has since year 2001, held an average daily lock up not exceeding 150 youngsters. During the period of field work, the daily lock-up ranged from 100 to 140. The SCC has six dormitories (dorms); each dorm measures 13 by 70 feet and holds a minimum of 15-20 male youngsters.

The average daily lock-up at the JCC, on the other hand, has not exceeded ten in the last couple of years. The average number of girls held in detention during the period of field work was eight. The JCC has two dorms, each measuring 16 by 23 feet and holds a minimum of four female youngsters.

The main shift at the SCC runs from 7am to 4pm and hosts an average of 80 staff. At the JCC, six officers who are supported by part time instructors on as and when basis, oversee activities of female youngsters. Staff at the JCC is predominantly female; similarly, the majority of dorm warders at the SCC are female<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Technically these institutions are also manned by different oversight authorities, which required some skills in negotiating access to actors who differed in terms of gender, and in professional expertise, besides the official bureaucracies that characterised the



institutions. Methodologically, this diversity suggested some differences in terms of methods employed and questions posed. For instance I embarked more on one-to-one interviews at the SCC, but not at the JCC as it was impossible to do so due to the lack of openness of the social atmosphere at the JCC<sup>xxviii</sup>.

Differences in correctional centres also evoked variegated responses from me in terms of impression management. Being partly aware of how I was perceived by staff and youngsters, I made the effort to convey an impression that distinguished me from staff and also from my status as a CHRAJ practitioner. I dressed in traditional blouse (*kaba*) and cloth, a traditional outfit which matches a 'mum's role anytime I visited the Senior Correctional Centre (SCC). This attire distinguished me from prison officers who were all dressed in formal uniform. When I began to hold focus group discussions and engage in one-to-one interviews with youngsters, most youngsters would call out to me from their dorms addressing me as 'Mum'. However, at the JCC, I dressed casually in jeans and top as officers who were mostly social workers were rather dressed in their traditional Ghanaian attire and not in uniform. I consciously reminded myself not to convey a 'monitor' or 'inspector' status which is usually associated with officers of the CHRAJ who visit prisons or correctional centres as this would create a power gap and inhibit a free flow of conversations. Conversely though, where necessary, I drew on my monitor status to facilitate access.

While these institutions provided a rich diversity in terms of age, gender and the nature of the offence committed by juvenile offenders, the direction of the research was not always predicated on these institutionally established differences as there were issues that evolved from the research process.

#### *Interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions and narratives*

I employed a variety of research methods characteristic of ethnographic research such as unstructured, open and conversational interviews, focus group discussions, narratives, participant observation, and examined official records (footnote xiv). In all I conducted 95 interviews at the SCC and 90 interviews at the JCC; I also conducted 51 participant observations at the JCC and 65 participant observations at the SCC<sup>xxix</sup>. I held 15 focus group discussions at each of the institutions. Narratives were provided by eight youngsters including one female youngster (Chapter 2).

By virtue of my field research, I recognized that interviews in closed institutions could pose a tremendous challenge, as noted by Halsey (2006:152) that anyone familiar with conducting interviews in custodial settings will know the vast and varied range of factors apt to influence the tenor of the interview on any particular day such as: suitability of interview settings and the prospect that the interview will be interrupted by the noise and commotion associated with admitting inmates; the mood or disposition of the young person in light of recent events.

Thus, finding space for interviews was difficult amidst the regimentality of daily detention life. I did not always decide the time of the interview, though my suggestions were usually not turned down by officers. Given that I had undertaken participant observation for prolonged periods prior to the conduct of my individual interviews, I was quite familiar with daily routines and activities, so I managed to squeeze in interview slots. Familiarity with staff, officers and youngsters also offered an immense advantage in accessing youngsters. However, daily detention practice could seldom be programmed based on some sustained acquaintance or some acquired skill as regular surprises are thrown up, sometimes requiring a further negotiation of access to the youngsters. Whilst following a set of methodological principles can be a useful guide as to what to do within a particular context, yet, detention practice cannot always be anticipated; each day presents a practical experience that requires the exercise of judgment in a particular context (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007).

#### *Whom to interview and what questions to ask*

In virtually all cases, I dwelt on non-random convenient sampling and chose who to interview but I had to rely on gate keepers who could facilitate my access to youngsters and officers. Interactions with senior officers and certain key people required that I prepare questions ahead of time to ensure that issues discussed were covered by a set of questions. My objectives and research questions were a good guide though I also drew on certain issues that stemmed from participant observation, narratives and conversational interviews and which required further clarification. For instance, selections of whom to interview and what questions to ask were based on participant observations that I had previously undertaken. My first one-to-one interview with youngsters followed my participation in a church service which was more or less an initiation ceremony. I was motivated to speak to

youngsters who were keen to tell their story and yet unable to do so in public as the church audience had little interest in listening to them (Chapter 3).

As youngsters related their diverse experiences, I also identified certain commonalities which I further pursued in subsequent interviews. The conduct of narratives also unearthed some occurrences in certain dormitories such as dorms one and two which I followed up through further interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. For instance, I spent a relatively longer period sitting by officers-in-charge in front of the first and second dorms due to youngsters' alleged experiences in such dormitories (Chapter 4). The selection of questions and cases about escapes, and dwelling for instance on Afua's case (Chapter 5) also determined the duration of interviews, the social and physical setting, spontaneity of the interactions and who provided what information.

Since fieldwork in a correctional centre demands careful treading and patience, selection and sampling of cases was not pre-determined, homogenous, nor a one-off activity but it evolved with the progress of the research process. My aim was not to seek a representative sample but to elicit as much diverse information on a particular theme and from as many different sources as possible. While on some occasions, I targeted people who could have the desired knowledge, I relied mostly on unsolicited responses particularly in researching about escapes. Such spontaneity of responses did not only make a vital contribution to the theme I researched, but also provided the social distribution of knowledge and power among the various actors in correctional institutions (Cramer, Hammond, & Pottier, 2011; Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007).

I participated in church services, educational lessons, workshop sessions, staff durbars, and farm activities as well as daily parades of both staff and inmates. Observations did not always dwell on predetermined discrete behaviour to be observed. I assumed the status of a participant as well as an observer, whose role was not entirely known to those involved in the research. I could not give a detailed introduction as to what I intended to do from the onset as I entered the field only with loose notions. This approach sometimes kept detaining authorities in some sort of suspense. For instance in the course of my field work, one of the OICs asked what indeed I was up to and demanded that I clarified certain processes again.

I undertook conversational interviews with staff and inmates every day. These type of interviews arose during daily conversations or in the course of performing some activity and

with some few probes, such conversations tended to bring up some relevant information. I was with warders (who are all subordinate officers) and inmates most of the time though occasionally I would interview some senior staff.

The difficulty in conversational interviews is being able to negotiate a particular conversation path as youngsters and officers tend to determine what to say and how to say it. Given their familiarity with interrogations young offenders usually detest conversational attempts that seek information related to the offences they committed. Personal issues such as family or offence related information seldom come up as privacy is not always guaranteed since youngsters are usually in the company of other youngsters or staff. The detention environment is a highly suspicious one, as shown in this thesis, where youngsters suspect officers and vice versa. Youngsters and staff are therefore cautious when releasing any information.

Social access to male youngsters appeared to be easier than female youngsters, as the social environment of the latter was less open. Holding in-depth interviews at the JCC was therefore a difficult task. Not so with focus group discussions where female youngsters spoke without inhibition. In a closed environment laced with suspicion, merely being in a group and chatting outdoors without the usual detention regimentation tended to encourage youngsters to freely express themselves. Besides, youngsters expressed themselves freely possibly because of the feeling that no single inmate could be held responsible for a response. However, both boys and girls were cautious about issues pertaining to personal backgrounds such as occupation and marriage status of parents and were sensitive to teasing from other youngsters. Focus group discussions besides being an additional data source also played a vital functional role in selecting whom to interview and what questions to ask during in-depth interviews.

I consider familiarity combined with trust a precondition to focus group discussions as I observed that in speaking with other practitioners who come and go and even with officers, youngsters are selective in terms of what to say and usually responded only when a question was posed. Sometimes, youngsters tended to steer discussions in their favour, as is the case in Chapter 6 on interrogative encounters.

### *Narratives*

At the onset, it was not clear to me where to begin an observation or whom to interview. Though I had few set of questions in mind the first day, these questions bore little relevance for the various scenes I had observed and the events in which I participated. This uncertainty was soon to be replaced by another kind of confusion of having rather to make a choice out of several issues that came gushing at me due to my participant role. For instance, by participating in an institutional ceremony where newly admitted youngsters were introduced and also participating in a ceramics workshop while chatting with the teacher, many issues came gushing at me. I was therefore soon confronted with the choice of which one to pursue.

On the basis of a gradually developed acquaintance and some compelling events such as participating in the initiation ceremony, I selected some youngsters and listened to their narratives. These stories, unlike conversational interviews and focus group discussions, were narrated on a one-to-one interview setting with each session lasting for a minimum of one hour. The place of the interview was at my discretion; sometimes it was under a tree or in the assembly hall<sup>xxx</sup> always visible to most staff in the yard but distanced from them.

Prior to my commencement of these in-depth interviews, I explained to officers in the yard (who were usually subordinate staff) the need to interview youngsters in private while acknowledging their fears on security issues. No objections were expressed, possibly due to the acquaintance and trust established by the long periods of participant observation prior to the onset of the narratives. My CHRAJ practitioner status may have contributed also. I devised the strategy of choosing a sitting area that was open to the view of staff in the yard but which gave privacy and safety to the children; I usually sat facing the view of officers while the interviewee sat next to me and was shielded from them. Initially I had occasional visits from staff while I spoke with youngsters but with time they had gotten used to my presence and so were less bothered. Once in a while, an officer might decide to sit in ( at the SCC) not necessarily due to security reasons, but on account of his/her own interest. On one occasion for instance, a lady officer sat with us throughout an interview process; she did not seem interested in our conversations though occasionally she would make some interjections. When the interview was over she asked whether I could speak with her too, and she ended up narrating a long story about her family.

Youngsters may have had numerous interrogative encounters and interviews with state officials and the general public for administrative and other purposes. During such interviews and interrogative encounters, information provided is usually at the dictates of

the enquirer and the central focus for such information often is the offence history and circumstances surrounding committal of offence, evidence of torture, types of punishment, conditions of detention or officer inmate relationships. Contrastingly, the narratives as relayed to me by youngsters provided a different impetus as they dwelled upon growing up with their families and daily occurrences in detention. In fact, there was sometimes an initial expression of surprise on the faces of the young people when they realized that my interest and the direction of our conversations did not emphasize their offence background. With the progress of the narrations the youngsters tended to assume a strong lead over their stories, and demonstrated eagerness and profound interest as they shared their experiences. I noticed that in talking about their families, biographic details and matters relating to their offence background surfaced spontaneously. On a number of occasions, youngsters would become emotional and shed tears when narrating their stories.

Besides the data I gathered stemming from observations and interviews, I had no other prior biographic information about them. I consulted official documents<sup>xxxix</sup> only at the latter phase of my fieldwork. My motivation to present these stories stems from the youngsters' eagerness and interest to share them. Also, the fact that I have in the past years interacted mostly with adult detainees and employed surveys as means of gathering information. Consequently, Individual accounts from the perspective of young offenders have featured little in my past encounters with them.

Overall, narratives depict fearless, tough, defensive, witty, and smart young people who at the same time are timid, fearful, and sometimes confused. While each story depicts a sense of distinctness, there are also strings of commonalities that run through all the narratives.

#### *Unsolicited and spontaneous responses*

Youngsters' accounts and those of officers, although guided by semi and unstructured questions, were to a large extent unsolicited and spontaneous. Youngsters related their experiences with limited prompts and questions; enabling them to describe and recall events uninterrupted. I sought clarifications from youngsters through follow-up interjections. These clarifications facilitated details and elaborations, thereby reducing the effect of my own invented meanings, that which Becker (2001) and Hammersely and Atkinson (2007:101) refer to respectively as researcher influence and co-construction.

I attribute spontaneity of responses to long periods of participant observation in promoting acquaintance with the various settings. While unsolicited responses have a greater likelihood of curtailing the researcher's influence on responses and narratives, one could easily lose focus. I regard youngsters and staff and other respondents as actors participating in a social world and capable of constructing their own views as they participate in their social world and do not seek to falsify or make truth claims merely because their accounts are subjective. Also, I consider such subjective accounts a useful contribution to scholarly work on deviancy in ensuring that the juvenile is not disconnected from his total life experiences and social formations (Plummer, 1983). These stories emphasize the human person behind the legal label and dwell on the wider life experiences of juvenile offenders beyond the walls of correctional institutions. While I sought to reduce researcher influence, my aim was not to collect data that was devoid of bias, as I am well aware of the fact that my presence and that of others have an influence on my data. My preoccupation was to gather data employing a variety of methods but without disregarding the influence that various settings had on the data I produced.

#### *Discrepancies and gaps in information*

In the course of fieldwork, discrepancies and gaps between official documents and other sources of data became evident. For instance, certain ages quoted in official documents did not tally with disclosures by youngsters in their narratives. Youngsters were not hesitant to state that their official ages were different from actual ages. I also observed instances where youngsters who were known by certain names in accordance to their official data were later found to have borne other names. Besides, certain everyday occurrences such as those related to escapes were seldom recorded officially. Thus such official data tended to document identities that were different from those gathered from interviews and participant observation.

While in the field, I observed interactions between youngsters and other practitioners and noted that youngsters withheld certain information either due to how questions were structured or what appeared to be a deliberate effort to conceal information. Following interactions with a clinical psychologist, youngsters met to discuss and giggle over their attempts to remain silent and not disclose certain information (Chapter 6). I also encountered officers from the CHRAJ on their monitoring visits and I sat in interview

sessions with some youngsters while CHRAJ officers administered a structured questionnaire. By virtue of the structuredness of questions, I observed that officers missed out on a considerable amount of qualitative information which could have been relevant for their exercise in assessing the status of human rights which constituted their main focus.

I also noted discrepancies between interviews with some key informants and information gathered from other sources. I observed discrepancy between interviews with officers whom I occasionally met and those with who I interacted on a daily basis. For instance, as I advanced with my fieldwork, I saw the need to interact more frequently with youngsters preparing to be released or discharged from the institution. I noticed that only a few were escorted out of the gate by their relatives and even with these few, there was little guarantee that youngsters would settle with relatives upon discharge from the centre as indicated to me in narratives and focus group discussions. In fact, most youngsters at the time of discharge had little or no contact with their relatives (Chapter 2). On a few occasions, I have had to take youngsters to the lorry station to connect to their various destinations as there was no one to collect them; in fact, I observed that some had little idea where the stations were and sometimes had insufficient money to cover their transportation cost. Therefore, I was surprised when one of the workshop teachers spoke about parental involvement in the return of youngsters to their families upon discharge. He said:

When youngsters are discharged from correctional centres, many a time parents are invited to the centre to see the progress of their children, what they had done during the period. Upon discharge, parents are invited to accompany their wards home and in the absence of that officers accompany young offenders to entrust them to their parents. And so far most students settle well. (SCC, June 2, 2011)

Triangulation in terms of employing variety of methods was invaluable for my research process in terms of disclosing these discrepancies, inconsistencies and gaps in information. Further, I underscored the usefulness and relevance of qualitative methods in sensitive contexts or settings such as confinement sites where information is regularly monitored.

### *Practitioner and researcher*

My status as a CHRAJ practitioner was clearly known to the institutions I visited as I emphasized a distinction between my current research role and my role as a CHRAJ human rights monitor. Generally though, I was perceived as a practitioner who undertook research that sought to draw on the perspectives and experiences of youngsters and staff. Thus I



presume that in the eyes of officers I was both a practitioner and a researcher, while I perceived myself predominantly in the latter role. With time institutions tended to perceive me as a researcher possibly because practitioners do not usually spend that length of time doing research in one setting or they possibly must have perceived me as a special kind of practitioner.

At the onset, I was formally introduced to staff and youngsters by the officer in charge as one who worked with the CHRAJ but who was now involved in some long term practitioner research so as to improve professional practice. Youngsters and officers conceived my role diversely and located me within the social landscape defined by their experiences (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). Youngsters conceived of me as staff or as a social worker, and sometimes as a CHRAJ lady. Given the long duration of my presence in the institution or 'the field', I later assumed a 'mummy' role; one that youngsters tended to identify with given that most of them had lost contacts with their family. This role facilitated social access to youngsters as they shared narratives and conversational interviews without inhibition. However, it also meant that they counted on me for the fulfilment of certain material needs and special treats on their birthdays.

With the passage of time, officers particularly those in the yard, tended to regard me as one of them as I sat through their meetings when they discussed insider matters. I myself, however, began to sense a social mismatch between their expectations of a CHRAJ officer who they considered an expert and one who sat and observed mostly and sometimes acted as a "novice" (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007:79) who counted on officers and youngsters' local knowledge about detention practice. This ambiguity initially contributed to some suspicion as some subordinate officers were really unsure of who I was and hardly engaged in conversations. As I developed better acquaintance and friendships this difficulty was surmounted, though not entirely. Officers who initially were hesitant to discuss insider matters now conversed spontaneously without inhibition about matters ranging from how difficult it was to work with youngsters, through occupational grievances to personal matters. My challenge thus switched from trying to get them to speak to being able to prevent manipulative conversations that were directed toward their area of interest.

During CHRAJ's monitoring visits, CHRAJ officers sought to clarify with me certain procedures to follow given my oversight of such visits previously, thus identifying with me as an insider within CHRAJ. On the other hand, officers in charge of correctional centres introduced me as one of them and even asked jokingly that I show the CHRAJ team around

on their behalf. The same prison officers addressed certain issues to me regarding the CHRAJ's visiting mechanism, the fact that visits were organised regularly and yet only few changes occurred in terms of material conditions of detention.

The question of how I am perceived confronted me during the entire research process and I never assumed a complete insider status. During the initial stages at the SCC, officers hardly beat young offenders with the cane. Later, I noticed that they used the cane and seemed completely oblivious of my presence. Somehow, it was an indication that I had blended in and this seemed to have augured well for me as a researcher. On the other hand, I wondered whether my familiarity had grown to the extent that I had lost my practitioner self. I also wondered whether I had lost my human rights sense of judgment and so could no longer perceive an abuse. I grappled with other questions such as whether my research priorities and the quest for information had taken precedence over my professional ethics and wondered how I would have reacted if I had visited as a monitor. I was torn between my own views, my views as a researcher and practitioner.

At the SCC, officers underwent regular transfers and so the process of negotiating access to officers was almost a continuous one; this made attainment of complete acquaintance difficult. I encountered three different OICs at the SCC during the two years of fieldwork. On account of the frequent transfers there was always the possibility of bumping into one new officer or another who had little idea who I was or what I did. In such cases I found it useful (contrary to what is usually recommended) to draw on leading questions. These questions immediately identified me as an insider who was well aware of everyday happenings and acquainted with insider vocabulary (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) rather than being categorized as a complete novice who could be taken advantage of.

In conclusion, I have attempted by virtue of foregoing discussions to problematize the research reality that stems from my fieldwork experience. I conceptualized my dual role as a practitioner and a researcher, though the latter constituted my foremost and predominant role. By paying tribute to my human rights status which facilitated access to institutions, I also acknowledge that this double role was fraught with challenges that I grappled with throughout the entire research process. These challenges are further outlined in my Methods chapter (Annex I). They include being able to carve out a role for myself, the interactions between strange and familiar contexts, and the realization that negotiation and access were an on-going process.

## 1.10 The chapters of this thesis

The remainder of this thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter 2 addresses the pre-custodial lives of juvenile and young offenders based on their narratives. By juxtaposing their own stories with views from the literature on Ghanaian family life and upbringing, I argue that this body of literature is predominantly of an essentialist and functionalist character and tends to portray youngsters as a homogenous category in the powerful grip of a totalising traditional family structure. Conversely, tracing the trajectories of juvenile and young offenders through the period of growing up and out of their families does not only depict a variety of growing up encounters, but it also shows that youngsters construct diverse meanings of their differentiated experiences. The chapter maintains that youngsters grow up and grow out without a particular pre-determined moral or practical hierarchy and that power and various facets of socio-cultural practices are beset with multiple forms of resistance.

Chapter 3 presents the argument that whereas correctional centres foist on youngsters, processes of mortification and institutionalisation, youngsters are not rendered absolutely compliant or devoid of the capacity to act. Not only is the forcing house of total institutions defective and unsuccessful in rendering inmates entirely compliant, but detention life is full of ambiguities and entanglements between the official and the unofficial. Further, everyday detention life is dotted by a continual negotiation of power where the support of youngsters or the seemingly powerless is enlisted.

Chapter 4 discusses the social underlife of correctional centres and describes in details how youngsters position themselves as active players and seek to create a social space, despite being in the grip of the closed and total institutions of Accra's juvenile detention centres. This action is seemingly outside the gaze of prison officials, and yet it is in cooperation with them. I also document various aspects of social relations occurring in this underlife marked by rituals and hierarchy amongst various positions inmates take, namely as captains, seniors, inmates and brannies. The chapter further deals with the creation of privacy – the so-called *corners* – where inmates lay claim to privacy, share some intimacy with certain friends (*corner boys*) and create spiritual meanings. Constituting this complex practice are also patronage relationships developing between individual inmates,

captains and officials, where resources are mutually shared but where trust can be a scarce commodity.

Chapter 5 argues that while institutional power is beset by various forms of resistance which manifest as escapes, escapes from correctional centres should not merely be reduced to the interplay between power and resistance. Such reduction glosses over the complexities of confinement practice which characterize and manifest escapes as forms of contestation, power dynamics, resistance, collusion and entangled relationships. This chapter thus endeavours to portray the dynamism and paradoxes that surround escape attempts in daily detention life and illustrates through the narration of three cases that detention life by virtue of how it is organized, invites escapes.

Chapter 6 conceptualizes correctional centres as a development project and argues, based on empirical data that in spite of actions and interventions that aim at correction and rehabilitation, youngsters and sometimes also staff employ their own practical methods such as appropriation and sidetracking to meet their own objectives in everyday detention life.

Chapter 7 concludes with the major findings of this research and outlines the relevance of an ethnographic study to social science and to practitioners. It invites human rights practitioners as well as related practitioners to undertake reflections, based on practical experiences with confinement, and to reconstruct and adjust their policy and practice accordingly.

## **Chapter 2 The illusion and practicalities of the totalizing grip of Ghanaian family structure on children and youngsters**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses growing up experiences of children, juxtaposed with viewpoints of literature. My research advances the argument that literature characterized by essentialist and functionalist views (Section 2.3) seeks to predominantly establish homogeneity in child rearing practices by portraying youngsters as being in the powerful grip of a totalising traditional family structure. Contrastingly, the collected narratives of youngsters do not only depict variegated growing up encounters but also show that youngsters construct diverse meanings of their differentiated experiences. Moreover, youngsters are not always pinned to a powerless status. In spite of the preponderance of essentialist notions in literature portrayals, such views of literature evince varied, ambivalent and sometimes contradictory constructions.

Whereas some Diasporan scholars (Boakye Boaten, 2009, 2010; Twum Danso, 2009) tend to reify Ghanaian culture by locating child rearing practices within a rigid family structure that resists change, yet the same scholars, along with a few local scholars acknowledge that the cultural setting is not as homogenous and monolithic as portrayed. For instance children are considered fragile and requiring adults' circumspection in handling them and yet children are beaten and punished and sometimes cursed to death. Besides, children assume a sacred spiritual powerful status but at the same time occupy the lowest rung in the family hierarchy (Boakye Boaten, 2009, 2010). Discussions which reflect a gap between constructions of literature and narratives of children and youngsters, centrally maintain that youngsters grow up and grow out without a particular pre-determined moral or practical hierarchy and that power and various facets of socio-cultural practices are beset with various forms of resistance.

### **2.2 Narratives of young detainees**

Discussions in this section open with narratives of eight juvenile and young offenders. Out of the eight, only one is female<sup>xxxii</sup>. Youngsters who stated their ages as mostly between 18 and 19 years sometimes made a clear distinction between their actual and official ages. All youngsters, except one, had acquired some level of basic education. These children in conflict

with the law share commonalities of backgrounds characterized by deprivation, divorce, maltreatment and misfortunes such as occurrence of death. All youngsters grew up with a feeling of rejection from parents and relatives.

In spite of the commonalities that the stories of these youngsters' share, coupled with the central string of rejection that runs through their narratives, youngsters' growing up experiences are far from being homogenous. This is contrary to views of literature which tend to suggest notions of a singular and homogenous child.

Youngsters' narratives which they never seemed to have had the opportunity to tell, depict children who are differentiated on their accounts of rejection and their varied capacities to act in difficult situations. Stories are dotted with variegated experiences of unwantedness, coupled with encounters of rampant mobility within diverse social settings. However, narratives also depict pleasant phases, characterized by peer associations, friendships and careers but which at the same time portray cynicism and betrayals. Amidst their variegated experiences of rejection, youngsters in their state of powerlessness, neglect and sometimes abuse still shoulder critical capacities to act within their small circles.

### **2.2.1 Unpleasant beginnings**

This section opens with the narrative of a sixteen year old boy namely, Kwesi. Kwesi's story unearths distinct accounts of certain unpleasant experiences youngsters encounter as they grow up within their families. He, along with other newly admitted boys were introduced during an institutional church service to a kind of an initiation ceremony (see section 3.3). Kwesi was the only one who shed tears during the service as he tried to relate his story which he never got to tell in full. I became interested in Kwesi's story but interviewed him five months<sup>xxxiii</sup> after his introduction.

Kwesi like the majority of young boys and girls in conflict with the law recounted beginnings which they considered unpleasant right at the onset of growing up with their families:

At the time I was born, my parents had already divorced and so I stayed with my paternal grandmother. I had a distasteful life before moving in to my grandma's end. My father never liked me and anytime I came late from playing football, I was beaten severely. He never took care of me. He beat me often and I never wanted to set eyes on him. Anytime I see his face my heart beats. That was why I moved to stay with my grandma. My father after the divorce remarried and now resides in Accra; he is now a store keeper. My mother, I was informed, travelled

somewhere after the divorce and she has never returned. (SCC, April 23, 2010)

Kwesi's account depicts rejection and mal-treatment at the hands of his father. As a result of the beatings and rejection, Kwesi moved on to stay with his grandma. According to Kwesi, his stay with his grandma was not pleasant either:

She said I was not smart enough and so she beat me often with her walking stick. I tried however to stay with her to attend school at least until primary two and when I could not bear it any longer I stopped school. I left to stay with the sister of my maternal grandma and started primary one again and continued till primary school grade 6. Upon completing P6, I was taken to stay with my paternal grandmother where I continued my education till Junior High School<sup>xxxiv</sup> (JHS) form one. (SCC, April 23, 2010)

The frequent beatings Kwesi received obviously put him in a category of an abused child or a victim of domestic violence and Kwesi's carers, regardless of their gender, tended to be his abusers. While Kwesi detested the painful treatment he endured, and quit school as a result, his main concern was not the beatings per se but the rejection that such beatings symbolized for him, which was evidenced by the statement: 'My father never liked me'. Also, Kwesi said about his father, *wanhwe me* meaning the father never took care of him. In other words, his father could have provided for him but deliberately did not.

In spite of these difficult situations, Kwesi managed to survive by engaging in some economic activity:

I started collecting pieces of metal scraps and from the purchases I earned a minimum of 2.50 GHS (1.4 USD). Children like myself would go and collect these scraps and sell. One day, I went as usual to find some scraps; my grandma had gone to the farm and I was hungry and so I decided to make some money. The owner of the house caused my arrest when I collected some coal pot scraps in his compound. They asked about my family and as there was no one at the time, they thought I must have been a bad person and so I was taken to a police station. (SCC, April 23, 2010)

Kwesi's claims that his efforts to collect metal scraps coupled with the absence of his family at the time of arrest must have created the impression that he was a bad person. The turn of events was shocking for Kwesi who was arrested and kept under police custody for a month:

I was surprised about the whole incident as I could not believe that collecting scraps of metal could end me in the police cell. (SCC, April 23, 2010)

Kwesi's situation was obviously a powerless one; he suffered beatings, neglect and rejection from his own family. Yet in spite of his powerlessness, Kwesi managed to initiate certain moves such as changing location and engaging in the collection of scraps to earn some

additional income. However, in attempts to make meaning of these difficult situations, Kwesi found himself in the custody of the state of alleged offenders.

The second account is about William, nineteen years of age and an inmate teacher. I decided to speak with William when I observed him teach an elementary class. This is a class for inmates who according to the institution have the lowest educational background. William's active class and the confidence he demonstrated while he taught, contrasted with Kwesi's timid outlook during the service. William is also senior to Kwesi in terms of age, educational attainment and duration spent in committal.

I am an Accra boy and stayed at Adabraka most of the time. My parents divorced when I was nine years and I have one sibling. My father is a mason and my mother is a trader. My father abandoned me, all he did was to smoke and it was my mother that took care of me. I got attracted to friends in and out of school when I turned twelve years. I was on drugs, drank alcohol and chased girls and had a lot of fun in night clubs and street jams during Christmas. (He paused and sighed and said that his mum had really suffered, taken him from one church to the other as his life was a mess). I was part of a gang and we robbed people, almost all the members of the gang were older than me. I was very short and my height gave me a lot of advantage because people actually thought I was a child and did not suspect bad things about me. (SCC, July 26, 2010)

William though did not suffer beatings and physical abuse, yet like Kwesi, suffered neglect from his father: *'My father abandoned me, all he did was to smoke'*.

William coped with his situation of neglect differently from Kwesi. The activities of the gang he was involved with provided him some source of livelihood. Besides, stemming from his reference to 'bad things' he tended, unlike Kwesi, to conceive the idea that he engaged in delinquent practices. His attraction to friends cannot be attributed entirely to neglect as he admitted being cared for by his mother, of whom he spoke fondly.

Nana Bonsu is a nineteen year old boy who was preparing for discharge from the institution and looking forward to advancing his skills in welding and draughtsmanship which he had acquired while in committal.

I would not go to my mother's so as not to be tempted to offend again but would rather go to my father, who knows nothing about my offence or my committal. I was only three years when my parents divorced. My mother trades in yam and my father is a diamond dealer. My mother was most often in Accra to find work and had very little time for me. I stayed with the uncle who had four children. My uncle did not take good care of me and so I stole often from both my mum and uncle. (SCC, April 28, 2010)

Nana's account is yet another example of divorce experienced at a young age. Nana admitted to committing an offence and attributed his involvement in theft to the neglect he suffered



particularly from the mum who had little time for him. Neglect from Nana's viewpoint was not really deprivation, rather Nana was concerned that he was not worthy of the mothers time. Nana was, on the contrary, explicit that his maternal uncle deprived him of material needs. Thus Nana construed neglect as both material deprivation and rejection from core family members. Like William, Nana depended on a gang to steal, but the latter, unlike William stole from his own family in order to make a living.

The next narrative is from a female youngster. Grace, eighteen years of age is one of two girls I managed to speak to on a one-on-one basis at the JCC. The physical environment for female youngsters at the JCC was more open relative to the SCC; the former resembled a school and not a prison. However, the social atmosphere at the JCC was rather constraining, and laced with suspicion as girls were sensitive to the reaction of staff and sometimes of fellow inmates. As a result, I could hardly obtain a full length narrative. It was relatively easier to engage in focus group discussions than one-on-one interviews at the JCC. My participation in classroom lessons, vocational lessons, farm and grounds work and during church services however yielded useful information as I could observe and listen to girls as they participated in these activities and chatted amongst themselves.

I realized through participant observations that Grace was most often by herself and interacted very little with others. Almost all the teachers had labelled her the laziest. According to the teachers, she could not acquire any skills nor learn any vocation. I had observed that she was indeed not interested in any of the vocational lessons with the exception of hair dressing which she did with some enthusiasm. On the day we spoke, I was with all the girls in the hall where they usually held their lessons. No teacher had turned up yet, except the care taker, and the atmosphere was quite relaxing. Grace was preparing and looking forward to be discharged and so it was a good starting point. Grace said she would like to be a hair dresser upon discharge though she was not really interested in any vocation taught at the girls' institution. She soliloquized mostly as she told her story, in fact at a certain point it seemed as though she was not very conscious of my physical presence as she spoke mostly to herself though she intermittently provided some eye contact. Grace, whose parents had also divorced, strikes an initial contrast in her narrative of like and dislike between her grandmother and the officer at the JCC:

This place is a very difficult place. The woman sitting there always shouts at us and insults us. My grandma with whom I stayed never shouted at me, she liked me very much. My father<sup>xxxv</sup> and mother divorced when I was very small and so I stayed with my grandmother. (JCC, February 19, 2010)

In the course of her narrative, Grace however expressed dislike for her grandma:

My grandma, though she liked me very much, was also the one who spoilt me (*ono na osei me*). [She paused for a while]. My grandmother is a witch; she asked me to change my father into a cat so I would ride on it and I said I would never do that. No one really wanted me nor cared for me. My grandmother gave me witchcraft and my father had to take me to a pastor and when the pastor saw me immediately he knew that I was one. The pastor told my father to go home and that he would deal with the case. The pastor asked me to bring a towel, sponge, a candle, and a fresh dress and said that what I wore previously I should not wear again. When the pastor prayed for me I became unconscious and very weak but later the next day, I felt strong and my father came to collect me. (She paused). As for my grandma, she is the cause of all my bad behavior. (JCC, February 19, 2010)

Grace thus expressed ambivalent views about her grandma, for while in some regard she was fond of her, in other respects, she was unhappy that the grandma had bewitched her, and she attributed her bad behaviour which she explains as stealing, and the use of drugs and alcohol, to her grandma:

I started stealing when I was in the nursery and I would steal my father's coins. I also started going after boys at an early age because I was unhappy, felt unwanted and neglected and tried to find some happiness. I aborted only thrice and used cocaine for just a short while but I like Don *Simon*, the alcoholic one. I attended a party with a boy and while the party was in progress, I accompanied this boy who went to cut the window net of the woman in whose house the party was being held and stole five phones and he gave me one. Unfortunately when someone dialed the *kasapa*<sup>xxxvi</sup> phone I responded. It did not occur to me to switch it off and so I was found out. I was then fifteen years old. As for me, (she sighs), no one knows my character; I am very bad and very wicked. (JCC, February 19, 2010)

Grace's account, like the others, depicts experiences of neglect and rejection and she attributes her involvement in stealing and other activities to her search for happiness. She however also attributes her present demise also to the doing of the grandma. By so doing, Grace tends to absolve herself from accepting responsibility for what she termed bad activities and positions herself as a victim of her grandma's influence and not a perpetrator. Yet, Grace's association with witchcraft may rather have reinforced her 'perpetrator' image, given that persons alleged to be witches in the Ghanaian and African context are regarded as bad, harmful and dangerous and as a result are stigmatized (Adinkrah, 2011; Akoko, 2007; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Meyer, 1996; Onyinah, 1997) thus explaining why Grace and the father made efforts to free the former of this spiritual label.

Grace is the only youngster whose growing up experiences with family depicted some involvement with spirituality, specifically, witchcraft. Grace's account also shows that she engaged in diversified activities while growing up - stealing, sexual activity, abortion,

drug use and alcoholism - prior to committal. These activities, as well as that of other girls demonstrate much more diversity than activities engaged in by boys. This is in keeping with a similar observation by Agnew (2009) on the relationship between gender and delinquency<sup>xxxvii</sup>, that women tend to engage in more diversified criminal activity.

*'My mother abandoned me'*

Kojo is a nineteen year old boy and due for discharge or release from the boys' institution. This was the only interview carried in the presence of an officer and the officer insisted to be present. Kojo looked partly dazed with weak eyes and spoke with little regard to the officer. While the interview was in progress, inmates kept calling out to him: '*rootman*'. When asked what that meant he said this was his nickname which meant someone who smoked a lot. Kojo said that he had not gained anything from being committed and that he tried to learn auto mechanics, but he could not continue as some of the officers continuously shouted at him. He lamented about being locked up most of the time while the other inmates moved about freely. The restraint imposed upon him angered him and he decided not to learn any trade any longer. He blurted out:

I am no longer interested in anything here; all I am waiting for is to serve my sentence and leave this place. When I leave, I will find something to do. My childhood was not pleasant either. My father died when I was very small. My father used to sell second hand items. My mother was just in the house and did not do anything, she did not trade, and she did nothing. I spent most of my time with my grandma and my paternal aunt. I got on well with my grandma than with any other relative including my own mother. After the death of my father, my mother abandoned me and I was not even breastfed. (SCC, June 22, 2010)

I asked him how he got to know about all this and he said that it was his grandma that narrated this to him.

My mom had eight different children with different men and my father also had three children elsewhere but between my father and my mother were two of us and I am the oldest. My father took good care of me but after his death, my aunt (comes after the father) with whom I stayed overworked us on the farm. I therefore hardly had time for school. We farmed cocoa and food crops. My aunt was very quick tempered and beat us often. She kept making comments that her obligation was to take care of her own children. Her own children attended good schools and we were almost abandoned. On reaching JHS, I decided that enough was enough and I stopped school.

Kojo, whose story depicts no record of divorce but rather the loss of a parent vents out anger and frustration against all adults he encountered with the exception of his father and grandmother. Like the other stories, his narrative features abandonment and rejection by the

mother and other relatives. However, Kojo, despite his difficult circumstances, did not quit school early, but did so only at the junior high school level.

Yaw, eighteen years of age, and also due for discharge, was a recidivist or a repeat offender who experienced committal at the SCC twice. He claims he has benefited from education programmes at the boys' institution and that even though he was eighteen, he would still like to go back to Basic School upon discharge as he realized the need to learn the names of his working tools. However, he dreaded going back to the family in the village from where he came:

I look forward very much to going back though I would not go to the village as my grandpa and grandma always cursed me and said I would never succeed in life and this makes me feel unhappy and worried. I would rather stay with my brother who is ready to accommodate me and has always been advising me though he has no idea that I am at the correctional centre, I intend to inform him later. I have never known my mother as my aunt told me that my mother died after giving birth to me; I have never seen pictures of my mother... My father also died in a car accident - he was a taxi driver. I liked school but was mocked at school and accused of everything that got lost and went wrong even when I was not responsible. This made me dislike school very much. On account of my father's death and the fact that I lost interest in school, I was not doing well and so I decided to stop nursery school and that was at age of three years. (SCC, March 2, 2010).

Having lost both parents at an early age, Yaw had no account of rejection by his parents. Yaw's account however suggests rejection rather than neglect from his grandparents as there was no account of *wanhwe me* (he was not taken care of) in his story. His story brings to the fore another source of rejection, the school. None of the youngsters in foregoing narratives made reference to the school as a source of rejection. Yaw attributed his action to discontinue school, partly to the rejection he suffered at school.

John, nineteen years, had played leadership roles throughout his period of detention and seemed popular among staff and youngsters. Because he managed to write his Senior High School Certificate Examinations and had passed, he was held in high esteem by many. He seemed a quiet and gentle young man and resided in the last dorm, where youngsters enjoyed a good amount of freedom and were allowed to go on errands in town often. Though staff and warders were hesitant to vouch for youngsters' behaviour, a number of them said that John, in spite of his drinking habit, could be relied upon.

I grew up with my parents and siblings at Mampong, in the Eastern Region. We had a large family; ten siblings, three of whom were female. I liked school and enjoyed my lessons and also had a lot of friends who kept me happy. On completing Junior High School, I wanted to continue school outside Mampong for a change as I had lived

in Mampong all along but my parents did not allow me. (JCC, February 1, 2010)

John attributed his involvement in certain activities such as hanging out with friends and eventually the offence that led to his arrest to curtailment of his freedom of choice and movement by his parents and also to other influences like alcohol:

My parents said it would be difficult for them to know what was going on with me if I was not with them. I felt they wanted to monitor me and this angered me and so I decided to give myself some freedom and started hanging out with friends; I did that often and with time I realized my parents were no longer providing for me as they ought and this angered me further and kept me farther away from home.

One day in January 2007, we held an athletic competition and I became very angry during meals time. You know when you do athletics at school, you have admirers, you are treated well, and you eat good food and have fun. It was meals time and the food was not forthcoming and so I confronted some of the guys whom I thought were causing the delay. I as well as some of the boys had drunk alcohol and we were intoxicated. In the course of the confrontation, two boys got infuriated and hit my face with the lid of a *waakye*<sup>xxxviii</sup> bowl. I was furious because we were very hungry and did not understand why the boys were keeping the food away from us. I picked up a knife in the kitchen and stabbed one of them. I regretted when I was arrested and put in police cells and I prayed to God that the boy should not die. [He sighed]. I'm glad I ended up here otherwise I would definitely have been worse. (SCC, February 1, 2010)

He kept repeating that it was good he was brought here otherwise he would have been worse.

Unlike other youngsters interviewed, John lived with both parents until arrest and his account did not depict neglect. The majority of youngsters however demonstrate through their narratives, as having suffered diverse degrees and forms of neglect and rejection which was manifested in both material and non-material deprivation. Youngsters clearly indicated the unwillingness rather than inability of their parents and relatives, to provide for their needs. The unwillingness of parents to provide for youngsters was further established in focus group discussions where youngsters expressed feelings of vengeance and retaliation against their parents. The rejection that youngsters suffer from their families tends to contribute to the arrest of youngsters, according to their narratives. In fact, at the point of arrest, most youngsters have virtually no contact with relatives. Prior to arrest, youngsters had frequently moved from one setting to the other to being by themselves. Relatives in most cases must have been simply unaware of the arrest of youngsters. Kwesi for instance lamented that there was no relative present in court and that though he wished he was bailed, no one did. John, Kofi and Yaw shared the same sentiments:

My parents were not present and so the judge decided that I should be brought to the Borstal. Sometimes when the judge realizes that you have responsible parents you can be put on probation to be supervised by a social worker or so. (SCC, John, February 1, 2010)

Neither my mother nor any of my family was in court-maybe if they were, I would have been given fewer years. (SCC, Kofi, May 14, 2010)

I stayed in police cells for a short period and then my case was heard. No family was present and so I was sent to the Borstal. (SCC, Yaw, February 1, 2010).

Youngsters such as Kojo deliberately kept family out:

When I attended court I was asked to bring my parents so they could settle the case at home but none of my relatives were available. In fact I did not want my family to be involved as they did not care about me. I said to the police officer that they should do whatever they wanted with me. (SCC, June 22, 2010).

Yet, parental and family involvement is considered central<sup>xxxix</sup> to the decision of whether or not juveniles should be committed. The Juvenile Justice Act 653 of 2003<sup>xl</sup> clearly outlines the role of parents and relations in various alternative methods of dealing with a juvenile offender besides committal to a correctional centre. These alternatives to committal are contingent on parental responsibility and support. While some of these alternatives are virtually not functioning well reportedly due to poor financing and resourcing (DSW, 2005), the absence of support from family, according to youngsters narratives, is a key contributing factor to their present demise.

The rejection that youngsters suffer from their relatives persisted through to committal. Approximately, eight out of ten youngsters do not receive visits from parents and relatives while in committal. In a focus group discussion during my preliminary field work (February and March 2009), male youngsters when asked to share their feelings and thoughts about their fathers and mothers shouted vengefully 'upon discharge, we shall jail our fathers'.

### **2.3 Views from literature on growing up experiences of Ghanaian children**

In this section I discuss views from various authors on Ghanaian children and the growing up experiences of these children within the family and I juxtapose these views with lived experiences of youngsters as depicted in the above narratives.

While there is a growing effort to develop some consistent discourse on African children and youngsters in their own respect (Abbink & Van Kessel, 2005; Anarfi & Kwankye, 2009; Christiansen et al., 2006; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Richards, 2005), social interest and research about incarcerated children is deficient. In spite of the modest rise

in prison ethnography studies in Africa (Chapter 1), literature is lacking on life trajectories of incarcerated juvenile and young offenders prior to being held in state custody. Not many researchers on human rights or juvenile delinquency are interested in the life trajectories of these youngsters. Greater attention is accorded to the period in state custody and post custodial experiences (Cunha 2005;2008) and the world of detainees before custody is usually detached from their custodial worlds. However, pre-detention experiences have recently received some attention by researchers such as Christian (2005) and Jefferson and Bandyopadhyay (2010). They are of the view that longitudinal studies should not limit detainees' past and future reference points only to their criminality and release or post custodial experiences. Detainees' pre-custodial worlds should be considered.

One reason that accounts for the deficiency in ethnographic research on pre-custodial lives is that persons including children in legal custody in Ghana are not easily accessible to researchers. Consequently, obtaining interviews and narratives from detainees about their past can be difficult. Most literature on experiences and practices of Ghanaian children as they grow up is therefore either located within the family context, or in other contexts such as practices on the street, child labour and its worst forms, and child mobility within and outside of the family. This section draws on such available literature to discuss the growing up experiences of children in Ghana, stemming from narratives of children.

Most Ghanaian scholars (Boakye Boaten, 2009; Porter, Abane, Blaufuss, & Owusu Acheampong, 2011; Twum Danso, 2009) tend to situate the growing up experiences of children within the family. According to writers such as Oppong (1977), Chant and Jones (2005), Coe (2008) and Twum Danso (2009), respectfulness and obedience is rewarded by parents. There is a general expectation that children must demonstrate respect, obedience, submissiveness, and acquiescence toward adults at all times. Parents command obedience and respect from children by insisting on these values right from the onset when children are tender<sup>xli</sup>. Twum Danso (2009:420) explains the kind of obedience and respect demanded of children:

They are not expected to challenge adults and certainly, not expected to question what they are told to do...Children must not consider themselves as superior to elders and must submit themselves to parental control.

Ghanaian parents may therefore choose to send a child who is obedient to school, in preference to one who is not; an action that evokes a sense of responsibility that urges children out of volition to do what they think is expected of them without being told to and

thereby earn the blessings of parents or other adult family members. Conversely, parents seldom devote resources to children that provide little guarantee for better returns (Coe, 2008; Twum Danso, 2009) and parents are hesitant to invest in children who are recalcitrant due to the belief that such children will not safe guard family property and inheritance in future (Assimeng, 1981; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006; Rattray, 1929). Reciprocity therefore plays a vital role as children who are well taken care of are required to give back to their parents as soon as they can (Twum Danso, 2009) and resources are vested in children who at later ages can offer good pay-offs.

Twum Danso (2009) dwells predominantly on children's duty to parents and vice versa and portrays a family or community hierarchy between parents, and children, where parents occupy a more powerful position relative to children. Conversely children who tend to challenge the authority of parents are denied the benefits of the obedient child and tend to be neglected. In other words, according to above mentioned authors, a child who is neglected and whose basic needs are unmet is likely to be a recalcitrant child.

Corporal punishment as a form of discipline and correction is commonplace in many Ghanaian homes and is usually employed by one's nuclear and extended family and also by educational authorities in forms such as caning, slapping and pulling one's ears, among other measures. Household members mete out at least one form of physical punishment to 89% of children aged between two and fourteen years (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2011). From an early age, rewards and punishments are employed to motivate children in the performance of their duties. Refusal to respect older adults or parents or even an older sibling (Hashim, 2007) or to execute one's duties, may attract severe punishment and even curses which can result in illnesses for such children. Without even necessarily intending to punish them, parents by complaining about their children's disobedience, can evoke the spirit of the ancestors to lash out against such recalcitrant children (Twum Danso, 2009). A child in the first class of primary school in 2006, affirmed this in an interview that if one respects one's parents, one will get a long life. Failure to do so will result in a short life because of the likelihood of being cursed (Twum Danso, 2009). Children who dare to be assertive and express their views anyhow to adults or parents, besides standing the risk of being cursed, are also likely to be branded witches (Twum Danso, 2009).



## **2.4 The gap between literature portrayals and youngsters' views**

Viewpoints of Ghanaian literature and those of the subjects themselves tend to be situated in two different spheres. Whereas narratives of children and youngsters are replete with diverse forms of rejection, neglect and abandonment that they suffer mostly at the hands of parents and family, not so with views of literature representations. Where there are instances of deprivation, the latter lays the blame of rejection and neglect at the doorsteps of the children. In other words, pursuant to portrayals of literature, youngsters such as Kwesi, William, Grace and Kojo are themselves to blame for their beatings, curses, rejection and abandonment on grounds that it is only the rebellious child that gets to suffer such treatment. Thus youngsters who suffer beatings and rejection are easily categorized by the authors mentioned as recalcitrant and not 'smart' enough and such youngsters do not offer the hope of a good pay-off at a later stage and are considered unworthy of the investment of parents or family. Foregoing literature representations therefore seem to share the viewpoints of youngsters that child neglect is not attributable to parent's inability to assume responsibility of care but is a deliberate effort not to do so.

By depicting 'the child' as singular, the above authors do not conceive of heterogeneity of experiences and own constructions of children. Such authors do not only miss out on diverse efforts and actions that children embark upon to survive in difficult situations but are inclined to simplistically reduce such desperate but differentiated and creative efforts that make meaning of challenging encounters as 'bad' activities.

### *Youngsters' rampant mobilities*

In discussions that follow, I examine youngsters' rampant motilities in accordance with narratives, as an example of efforts and actions that children embark upon to survive in difficult situations. Whereas youngsters' frequent movements are so important and crucial to their livelihoods and survival, these movements are not adequately represented in literature. The latter, conceives of growing up experiences of children predominantly within the familial context. Youngsters' frequent movements within the family which is self-initiated is different from fostering which is initiated by parents or other family members. Other scholars, who dwell on children's growing-up experiences outside the familial context such as child labour and migration activities, tend to reduce youngsters' activities to an economic or criminal motivation.

Frequent movements from one social setting and occupation to another, was typical of pre-detention lives of most youngsters. Kojo's narrative was replete with several of such movements:

Following the death of my father, I lived with my paternal aunt and later with my grandma and then went back to my aunt. While with my aunt I stopped school and got connected to a contractor. I went back to my mum after poor working conditions with the contractor and when I realized I had nowhere to go. My mum provided no support and so I went back to my timber work and decided to rent my own house. Along the way, my grandma decided to put me in apprenticeship for 3 months to learn carpentry but I found it difficult working as an apprentice. My older brother tried to teach me how to drive; I did that for 8 months and stopped and tried to learn masonry for two and could not continue that either. (SCC, June 22, 2010)

Following the death of his father, Kojo embarked on several movements within the family and as a result schooled at different locations. He also undertook several movements outside the family in order to earn a living and also to engage in some apprenticeship. In all, Kojo undertook approximately twelve different movements; the majority of these movements were on his own initiative and at one time, having encountered several frustrations of not being able to settle in a stable apprenticeship and occupation, he even moved to a village unknown to him before:

I moved to another town as I was informed that sawing business was thriving in the villages. I travelled to this village which was initially unfamiliar to me and managed to secure some sawing work later. However I was paid a very low wage and I got frustrated. It was in the process of considering what to do next that I committed the offence and got arrested. (SCC, June 22, 2010)

Kojo maneuvered from one setting to the other until he was eventually on his own. In all these attempts, Kojo needed to survive and so embarked on several, attempts to learn a trade and make some income. His movements were more like drifting from one family, career and apprenticeship to the other; a kind of sporadic, but somehow purposeful movements that initially seemed to go nowhere but always ended somewhere and eventually in detention. Yaw also experienced frequent movements in varying situations:

I stayed with my aunt following the death of my mother... I found it difficult to stay with my aunties as I farmed a lot and so I left to stay with friends at a lorry station in Accra. While with my friends, there was misunderstanding about sharing of booty after a robbery act, in the process, I got arrested (SCC, March 2, 2010)

Yaw's frequent movements depicted less family settings and family involvements as compared with Kojo. Nevertheless, the attempts of both youngsters, to explore and exhaust residential options available to them, are courageous, one dotted with uncertainty and characterized by 'trial and error' experiences, disappointments and difficulties. In this

respect, youngsters might not even have an idea what their next destination would be, yet regardless of their challenging situations, youngsters always managed to find a place to perch.

Portrayals of literature about child mobility are at variance with the narratives of youngsters. Mobility from the viewpoint of the latter is at the initiative of youngsters themselves and incited by the rejection and abandonment that youngsters encounter; it is more or less an escape as well as a coping attempt. Such movements are more diverse, not limited to the familial context only and resembling driftings, movements that oscillate frequently from one location to the other.

The former, or views of literature, on the other hand conceives of child mobility as located predominantly within the family context and strategically planned by the family and parents. According to various authors, whereas parents bring forth children, child upbringing is a shared responsibility for all adults within the extended family. Child mobility from one relative to the other, as part of shared parenting is therefore a common practice (Boakye Boaten, 2010; Nukunya, 2003; Twum Danso, 2009). A key process by which children leave home to reside elsewhere is fostering, a practice that is widespread and well researched in Ghana. Reasons for child fostering may include death, illness of parent or to receive formal education or skilled training from adult mentors. Parents may also give their children to relatives or even non-relatives as companions for elderly people, or for domestic or marketing assistants (Kielland & Maurizia, 2006; Pilon, 2003). Thus from birth to adulthood, a child may pass through the nurturing hand of numerous adult members of the family. As far back as 1982, Oppong & Bleek (1982) had documented mobilities of children. Such movements which were at the initiative of adult family members are contrasted with the movements of youngsters such as Kojo; where mobility was sporadic, uncertain and at the instance of Kojo and not adult members of family. In terms of migration, Anarfi and Kwankye (2005) document that children move from one location to the other at the initiative of both adults and children. However, regardless of whose initiative it is, there is usually the commitment of the migrant child to make some contribution at a later period to the family income, even if the child does not return to the home community. Thus viewpoints of literature emphasize child mobility as a form of fosterage and a means by which the families execute their collective supervisory and social control roles in assuming their shared responsibility (Arthur, 1997), thus yielding benefits for parents and children.

Whereas constructions of both adults and youngsters admit the prevalence and frequency of child mobility, the phenomenon is construed differently, with the views of the former being predominant. Such adult-centric views maintain that 'the child' belongs to a family, a kin group or a community and the rearing of the child was the responsibility of not only the family, but of all well-meaning members of the society. Consequently, the strong network of kinship ties and support, makes child destitution, neglect or abandonment a rare occurrence, except that the child is rebellious. As already indicated, lived experiences and viewpoints of children and youngsters command very little interest from adults and stories of youngsters are seldom told, thereby resulting in a preponderance of adult dominated perspectives of child rearing practices over perspectives of children.

In spite of the essentialist views advanced by scholars who tend to locate child rearing practices within a rigid family structure that resists change and one that projects sameness and lacks diversity, portrayals by the same writers exhibit ambivalence. For instance, Scholars like Boakye Boaten (2010) and Twum Danso (2009) who are mostly writing from the diaspora, dwell mostly on essentialist views of Ghanaian child rearing practices but they also acknowledge that the cultural environment is not as homogenous and monolithic as it is portrayed. For instance, with respect to the child as the most powerless who occupies the bottom rung of the family, Boakye Boaten (2010:5) turns the argument about the classic image of a robust Ghanaian family on its head and accords the child a powerful position. He argues that children command respect due to their sacred spiritual status:

Childhood in Africa also entailed a spiritual component. In traditional African religion, the belief in reincarnation meant that children were reincarnated people who had lived and died in previous generations. Children were thus not only accorded respect by members of the society, it was also the responsibility of the society to ensure the protection and proper socialization of children.

A child is thus perceived to be sacred and in need of protection, physically and spiritually. This view also enjoys some acceptance from other authors who share the notion of the sacredness of childhood (Boakye Boaten, 2009; Chukwukere, 1978; Clarke, 1930; Nukunya, 2003; Rattray, 1929), particularly among some ethnic groups of Ghana and the Ivory Coast, where childhood was likened to holding an egg in one's palm. Holding the egg too tight crushes it; a careless handling of the egg may result in the egg falling from the palm and being broken. Boakye Boaten (2010) as well as Badasu (2004) and De Vogli and Birbeck (2005) admit that concepts on childhood are changing and that the traditional African family may have been overrated in its potential to be a stabilizing unit and a protector of children.

Boakye Boaten (2010) exhibits further ambivalence when he argues from a functionalist perspective that regards the family as a system that is capable of resisting and purging itself of changes regardless of exogenous changes that confront the system. He reiterates the notion of 'the African child' as one that is trained to conform to tenets of culture since children are trained to follow the prescribed paths set by the custodians of the culture. By maintaining that children are trained to follow prescribed pathways, Boakye Boaten tends to lay responsibility and blame at the doorsteps of the child. Once a child has been trained to follow prescribed paths, even if confronted with the power of external forces as he claims, the child must remain toughened in the face of such confrontation and remain loyal. Yet, the egg metaphor cited by Boakye Boaten suggests fragility rather than robustness with respect to the child. Besides, this metaphor emphasizes parents and adults' circumspection in handling children, thus places responsibility for the breaking of the egg or the destruction of the child, upon parents and other adults rather than on the child.

Writers such as Oppong (2006) and Twum Danso (2009) having upheld the orthodoxy of Ghanaian child rearing practices, nevertheless admit that the family structure is far from being monolithic and that the extended family is retreating from its roles. According to Oppong and Bleek (1982) and De Vogli and Birbeck (2005), urbanization has tended to reinforce conjugal bonds and strengthened monogamous relationships resulting in the weakening of shared responsibility shouldered by members of the extended family. In a similar vein, Duncan (2011) states that the rise in the prominence of the nuclear family is reflected by International Human Rights Conventions which integrate provisions of the family with provisions on parental obligations and marriage relationships. Oppong and Bleek (1982) and Apt (2005) argue that fosterage and migration, which is presumed to be motivated by cultural reasons, may be more economically and commercially related than cultural. According to Apt (2005), when parents cannot clothe or feed their children, usually due to large families, they send them to another household where they stand a greater chance of having their basic needs met.

So far I have mainly discussed narratives of youngsters in contrast with scholarly work focusing on the familial context. My empirical data based on the narratives of children and youngsters in the institutions support those authors who state that the family is not as robust as often portrayed, and that the extended family is retreating from its roles. Also, my data show that children's mobility is often driven by familial rejection rather than fostering relationships.

In the next section I will focus on another aspect underrepresented in Ghanaian scholarly work, namely the social world of youngsters such as friendships and spirituality, which feature prominently in the narratives of youngsters and yet seldom in views of literature.

## **2.5 The social world of youngsters in non-familial settings**

The social world outside the family setting with peers was probably one of the most pleasant times for youngsters relative to their experiences with parents and family. Friendships, which encompassed peers as well as older youngsters, constituted a good source of social support for youngsters. Nana Bonsu shared his experience:

My uncle did not take good care of me and so I stopped school at primary two and left to stay with my Mum in Accra. I was with friends who were between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five and quarried for my friend's mum. We used to visit night clubs in the evenings to dance and I was very good at dancing. (SCC, April 28, 2010).

Besides sharing friendship with other boys of varying ages, Nana Bonsu also shared intimate gender relationships:

One day, a girl who was in Junior High School saw me dance and she became interested in me and we became friends. The girl came from a wealthy family and attended school for wealthy people. (SCC, April 28, 2010)

Nevertheless, youngsters such as Yaw admitted that their offences were linked to the activities they engaged in with their friends:

I had many friends and was happy. I remember that one time there was a dance which I wanted to attend and I did go but was sent out as I did not pay the entrance fee. I felt sad as I did not have the money; I therefore went home and took my father's money... (SCC, March 2, 2010)

Some friendships, according to Yaw, carried unpleasant experiences:

While at James Town, I made friends quickly but anytime we stole and shared the money I was cheated, possibly because I was very young. I decided to be by myself but once again I found myself in the company of another person and we stole money to the tune of 800GHS (about 471 USD) and yet he gave me only 2GHS (1.2 USD). I got very angry I thought that was so mean of him and decided to report my friend to the man whose money was stolen. My friend was caught and the money was taken from him but my friend did not know that I gave him away. Later both of us broke into the room of the same person again and stole 3,400GHS (about 2,000 USD) and then we left for the village. (SCC, February 1, 2010)

Friendships are therefore diverse; some intimate, desirable while others were opportunistic, resembling mere associations with peers such as in Yaw's case which tended to be constituted based on resources at stake. Friendships are also laced with power and resistance, for while Yaw's friend exhibited control over the sharing of booty, Yaw though younger, courageously defied the age gap between him and his friend and reported the latter, thus resulting in the arrest of the friend. This action however carried further repercussions and backlashes for Yaw:

...My friend for some reason got to know that I reported him about the first case and so he told other people that I was a wizard and I was shunned as a result of this when I was admitted to the SCC in 2005. For the same reason, I was also seriously maltreated by inmates in the first dormitory...The isolation and the maltreatment was beyond me and so when we were asked on one occasion to go and weed, I seized the opportunity to run away and that was after four months of stay. (SCC, February 1 2010).

From the foregoing, youngsters relied heavily on friendships, which were constructed differently. Activities that youngsters engaged in were embroiled in youngsters' livelihood efforts as they interacted with friends in a bid to meet their survival needs. In this regard, youngsters did not necessarily assign discrete categories to such activities, for instance, they did not label such activities offences – though some admitted engaging in what they termed bad activities - they considered such activities inseparable from their daily efforts of survival. Thus it sometimes came as a surprise to youngsters when they were arrested for activities they engaged in to meet their basic survival needs. In fact, youngsters' friendships tended to position them within a continuum of practices usually associated with childhood and adulthood thereby rendering them children in some respects and in other regards, adults. For while the practice of creating fun and experimenting diverse activities with their peers resonated with child fun, yet their economic and occupational and social independence equated them to fully functional adults.

The above narratives depict the social world of youngsters' outside the familial setting with peers as mostly pleasant, one that re-instated acceptance and constituted a good resource of social support for youngsters relative to their experiences of neglect with relatives and other adults.

Interestingly, the literature reviewed above is silent about the social world of children with no familial support. Scholars within the Ghanaian and African context rarely discuss the social world of children outside the familial context. Scholars who attempt to advance discussions in diverse non-familial settings such as practices related to the street, labour and

migration restrict the motivation for such practices of child mobility mostly to economic reasons. The emphasis on the economic motivation for child mobility tends to overlook other non-material livelihood supports that youngsters' narratives emphasise.

Besides, literature portrayals tend to associate such non-familial settings with criminal practices and yet, for most youngsters, the initial effort to engage in some activity that yields some economic gain is a desperate endeavour of youngsters to escape familial hostilities and also to survive, besides the opportunity to forge friendships and have fun. Engaging in what views of literature would label criminal or delinquent activities in this regard is thus construed differently by youngsters. The latter consider such activities as embroiled in their individual livelihood efforts and peer associations as they seek to meet survival needs, both material and nonmaterial needs. Thus the youngsters regard what is considered a criminal or delinquent act by adult authors or rights practitioners, merely as an effort to meet material and non-material needs.

Further, literature committed to practices such as child labour, the street and migration, assume that African children always have some family support network or that children or youngsters always keep some contact with the family (Aptekar, 1994; Orme & Seipel, 2007; Schimmel, 2006). Bourdillon (1994) for instance, based on his study "*Street Children in Harare*" recommends that attention should be directed at policies which seek to improve the lot of children along with their families rather than policies that move children out of their communities. In the first place, Bourdillon's generalized usage of term community suggests that the child's community is assumed to be the family and yet youngsters may construe their community differently; the latter may refer to their peers, occupational or religious associates. Besides, the presumption by scholars and other writers of the existence of a family network for children tends to overlook the fact that some children and youngsters may have no such familial support as demonstrated by narratives of youngsters.

Drawing binary connections between the home and practices of child labour, the street and migration may also result in analytic limitations. For instance certain practices of children on the street are construed as involving both the street and the home, that is, children make a living on the street and retire to the home at the end of the working day. Similarly, there is a connection established by literature, between the home and other non-familial settings such as children who migrate and yet, make efforts to maintain contacts with the home. The binary relationship between such contexts and the home, however impose a



dichotomous limitation. This limitation overlooks dynamic and complex relational aspects involved in the diverse processes of growing up within multi settings and sometimes oscillating between and betwixt diverse settings as depicted for instance in narratives of Kojo and Yaw's frequent mobilities. The narratives of Kojo and Yaw depict pathways that are far from linear; they crisscross from one setting to the other and also from one actor to another.

## **2.6 Spirituality, a resource of strength for children and youngsters**

A final point for consideration is children's spirituality. Spirituality permeates every facet of Ghanaian society; in fact, more than 90% of Ghanaians are religious<sup>xlii</sup>. Youngsters in their narratives also construct diverse meanings from their religious experiences. Yet, foregoing literature on child rearing practices is virtually silent on practices of spirituality besides arrogating to children a sacred status or invoking the spirits of the gods or ancestors on the disobedient child. These views of literature on spirituality attribute to the child an adult imposed status as in the case of Grace who was accused of practices such as witchcraft. Besides, views that situate children's experiences within non-familial settings give no regard to how children and youngsters draw on religious resources in their everyday practices. Christiansen's paper on "Youth, Religiously and the AIDS pandemic" (Christiansen, 2006) is relevant in terms of how youth perceive of their agency in religious terms though there is little focus on how youngsters construct their own forms of spirituality, different from the formal religious practice in which youngsters faith is embedded. De Boek's (De Boek, 2005) account on witch children is useful contribution though witch children are viewed within the context of an adult imposed status rather than how children themselves draw on such practices as a resource. Conversely, youngsters, pursuant to narratives, construct their own spiritual experiences and draw on spirituality as a resource for diverse reasons, mostly as non-material support in their everyday encounters.

Most youngsters claimed some involvement with spiritual activities during the period they had grown out of their families and resided by themselves or with friends. Spirituality, thus assumed an active place in later lives of youngsters. For instance, Yaw's association with witchcraft was within a friendship context rather than a family setting as was the case with Grace. Yaw's friend allegedly employed this means so as to settle scores with him because the former gave him away in connection with a robbery act prior to committal. Yaw

as a result, suffered maltreatment at the hand of fellow inmates as indicated in his narrative. Finally Yaw absconded as a result of this treatment but was later apprehended for another offence. While awaiting trial, Yaw decided to draw on some spiritual resource which offered him the opportunity for reflection:

On return from escape, while at the remand home, many people visited to advise us. It was upon the advice of a black American that I reflected very much on my own life and decided to do a seven day fasting to pray for repentance and then I was determined when I was admitted the second time that I would no longer run away. I took my church attendance very serious and would rally other youngsters round in the dorm to pray sometimes. I sing and play the school drum during church services and I have trained others who will take over from me. (SCC, March 2 2010)

Thus in the case of Yaw, while spirituality was employed as a tool of vengeance by his friend against him, Yaw drew on spirituality as a source of comfort, personal reflection and change. Other youngsters also rely on spiritual power for protection and success in committing acts such as theft and robbery. In his narrative, Kofi and William stated their dependence on spiritual powers:

We do not usually sell items stolen immediately as we would like to listen in to hear what people say. Sometimes, those whose items are stolen contact fetish priests to find out culprits but what we do is they put the money in water and then the spell or curse does not affect us. (SCC, Kofi, May 20, 2010)

We rely on spiritual powers for our *operations*<sup>xliii</sup>; some work, others do not. We sometimes have cuts on our body, sometimes we are made to swallow concoctions and put talisman round our waist. Prior to being brought here, I visited a *Malaam* (spiritualist) with my friends most of whom were older than me – I am very short and my height gives me a lot of advantage as people think that I am a child and so do not suspect bad things of me. The *Malaam* demanded 50 GHS (29 USD) from my friends. The *Malaam* made some incantations on the money and then asked us to give the money out to people on the streets. The first operation was successful but the second one was not and this is what landed us here... These powers make us fearless, daring and confident. (SCC, William, July 26, 2010)

Seeking spiritual power for protection, according to the narratives, is largely in connection with traditional sources such as *fetish* priests and *Mallams*<sup>xliv</sup>. Church pastors are consulted for exorcism purposes as shown in Grace's case or when youngsters feel the need for change in behaviour as shown in Yaw's narrative.

In most instances however, these spiritual sources make certain demands on these youngsters. In Grace's situation for instance, the pastor asked that she brought a towel, sponge, a candle, and a fresh dress. In William's case, the *Malaam* demanded 50 GHS (29 USD). Thus, an informal economy is nurtured as consultations with various spiritualists come

at an economical cost incurred by youngsters who require some means of income. Such income contributes to sustaining consultations with various spiritualists and a cycle of dependence is evoked. For instance, attendance of night clubs and dances come at a financial cost to youngsters which require that youngsters make an income. Yet, youngsters require protection when they engage in robbery and other activities that serve as a regular source of income that can guarantee youngsters' participation in social activities. Dependence on spiritualists therefore provides youngsters the fulfilment of crucial material and non-material needs. The relationship between youngsters and spiritualists is therefore far from being one way as the latter is also dependent on the former. In fact, the social and economic activities of spiritualists such as *Malaams*, fetish priests and pastors, tend to thrive on the regular consultations by their customers<sup>xlv</sup>.

These data clearly show that spirituality constitute a rich resource for youngsters who draw on the former for diverse reasons. Yet, scholarly work on growing up experiences of children is virtually silent on experiences of spirituality. This silence by scholars may suggest that children's construction of religion or spirituality is viewed through an adult lens and that children's practices of spirituality are not considered worthy in their own respect. On the contrary, narratives of youngsters demonstrate that spirituality assumes crucial roles for their daily experiences and for their survival.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented that representations of West African scholarly literature discourses on child rearing practices, including punishment and child mobility are constructed often from the diaspora, and without a direct empirical basis. Children and youngsters are portrayed as growing up in a totalising family context where parents, adults and extended family wield supreme power over powerless children who are at the mercy of adults. Yet, the evidence of this research contradicts the moralist and traditionalist viewpoints that the family in practice is ideal. Particularly in the case of the subjects of this research, first hand narratives from the youngsters show a less harmonious family structure and a weakening of extended family ties.

Irrespective of manifest differences in portrayals of the family system and how change is constructed, youngsters narratives, though sharing some lines of commonality, are largely at variance with constructions of the West African essentialist literature and evince

diversity and heterogeneity; demonstrating various forms of resistance to an overpowering family structure.

Both narratives and literature constructions show that child neglect is not necessarily attributable to some structural occurrence such as poverty, divorce, occupational status or death of a parent. Though these factors may contribute in some regard, these viewpoints establish that in most cases, children are deliberately abandoned by the family. The process of rejection is however construed differently by the two viewpoints; youngsters' constructions are variegated whereas literature portrayals tend to uphold the notion of a homogenous child and family.

Further, the phenomenon of child mobility is construed differently by youngsters and also perspectives of literature. Whereas most adult-centred views and policy initiatives are based on the presumption that children in Ghana tend to always have some familial support, youngsters' narratives indicate otherwise. In other words, at an early stage of their lives, there seldom is familial contact. This over-association of familial contexts with youngsters misses out on the relevance of their membership of peer groups that offer material and non-material resources to the youngsters, as demonstrated by narratives. Narratives also unearth the relevance of spirituality in their everyday encounters and thereby accord significance to youngsters' spirituality in their own respect and not within the context of an adult sphere.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the divergence in various constructions of child rearing practices. Research among youngsters in correctional institutions has shown that they grow up and grow out, without a particular fixed moral or practical hierarchy and power and resistance tend to permeate various facets of socio-cultural practices between and betwixt a variety of cultural repertoires. Narratives clearly demonstrate that while youngsters encounter challenging and difficult situations, they are seldom pinned permanently to a status of powerlessness where they are beaten to submission and obedience.

On the contrary, youngsters manoeuvre their way through variegated everyday harsh encounters, embarking on certain pertinent actions such as to quit school, move to another setting, negotiate friendships, take up an occupation or draw on some spiritual resource. Thus, in their state of powerlessness, youngsters in their very small circles evince agency. Neither is their mobility the result of a foster child relationship, but very much of their own making.

## **Chapter 3 Hidden and public transcripts: the ambiguities and entanglements of total institutions**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines various institutional procedures in correctional institutions in keeping with, Goffman (1968) by which the self upon entry into a total institution, is mortified or stripped of its stable social arrangements. I argue that whereas correctional centres with their attendant institutional and mortifying procedures aim to act as a “forcing house” (Goffman, 1968:22) to change youngsters and render them compliant, in practice, this is a difficult task. Not only is the forcing house of total institutions unsuccessful in rendering inmates entirely compliant, but everyday detention life is also dotted by a continual negotiation of official power where the support of the seeming powerless or youngsters is enlisted. This support of the powerless is meant to keep up the appearance of the powerful perceived as being efficiently able to produce disciplined inmates. Centrally, narratives manifest ambiguities of state care while inciting thoughts about permeable boundaries the official and unofficial.

Conceptually, formal detention centres such as police cells, remand homes and correctional centres exemplify total institutions in keeping with Goffman’s characterization of total institutions. According to Goffman (1968:11), total institutions are places of residence and work where “a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society, for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”. The state of confinement, formal administration and isolation from wider society, positions police cells, remand homes and correctional centres as total institutions. However, differences exist in terms of how these confinement sites are structured physically and administratively.

Primarily, police cells and remand homes are transitory sites of confinement that house persons awaiting trial. Inmates in correctional centres are presumed to have completed their trial process and are committed to serve a certain amount of time in detention. Police officers wield a primary responsibility of law enforcement and as part of this role, maintain control of inmates temporarily in their custody. The prison assumes a dual role of control of inmates as well as the management of a wider scope of everyday routine actions which includes oversight of dorms.

Youngsters' accounts of police cells though compelling, are brief and constitute the only source of data on police cells as no observations were undertaken in cells. Girls' accounts relative to boys' were few and provided no details about their experiences in police detention. Although accounts of police cells featured only in narratives by male youngsters, youngsters attach prominence to these accounts in all narratives hence their inclusion in this section.

The high escape rate (Chapter 5.1) at the girl's institution (JCC) frequently evokes stringent institutional measures which in turn invites backlashes from female youngsters in the form of frowns, verbal aggression and rude behaviour (ibid). Methodologically, this social atmosphere made it difficult to obtain in-depth interviews and narratives from female youngsters. Consequently, only few girls provided account of their pre-committal experiences. I dwell predominantly on observable institutional rituals and routines at the SCC, such as militaristic acts of salutes, marching, counting and parades, which were not observed at the JCC neither were they covered by narratives of male youngsters. While differences exist structurally and administratively between police cells and correctional centres, I conceptualize both as total institutions.

Firstly, I introduce briefly confinement or detention centres within the framework of this study, after which I discuss youngsters' encounters in police cells. The section advances discussions on state officers who, though are expected to enforce the Juvenile Justice Act, in practice violate them. Coupled with this illegality or unlawfulness is a structural deficiency given that state's resources are barely adequate for the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act. This inadequacy of resources somehow gives justification for police officers to extort money from the families of youngsters for the performance of official responsibility.

Secondly, I outline institutional routines, rules and disciplinary procedures which tend to arrogate a certain form of concreteness to correctional institutions suggesting their exercise of power over youngsters. These institutions seek to shape the conduct of youngsters through processes and rituals such as supervision, parades, counting and marching, towards the achievement of specific objectives of confinement such as rendering inmates mortified (Goffman, 1968). On the basis of participant observation, narratives and focus group discussions, I illustrate these procedures and rituals which depict a "forcing house" (ibid: 22), that which acts on youngsters and changes them.

However, in everyday detention practice, this forcing house does not only act on inmates as conceptualised by Goffman, but also acts on staff, thus both staff and inmates are mortified. The state views disciplinary procedures as one that make staff capable of rendering inmates compliant. Yet total compliance of youngsters by means of mortification processes is not an easy task for officers who admit in offstage<sup>xlvi</sup> (Scott, 1990) discussions, their inability to ensure conformity with institutional rules. This failure to enforce total compliance suggests a discrepancy or inconsistency of total power, that which Sykes (1958:40-64) refers to as “defects of total power”. Sykes applies the functionalist viewpoint that total power is a system that contains inherent pathologies. Conversely, by admitting their inability to ensure conformity with institutional rules, even staff, question the existence of a system.

My research establishes that the defect in official power of correctional centres manifest as ambiguities of power, rather than a system, which in keeping with Das and Poole (2004), does not conceive of the state as territory of unquestioned control and power. Similarly, youngsters, by virtue of discussion in this chapter, are not conceptualized as mere occupants of territorial margins of total institutions. By means of informality of official power and practices such as officers pampering youngsters with kind acts and sometimes cajoling them to conformity, even prison officers perceive youngsters as sites where defiance is enacted.

As state institutions, correctional centres manifest an official gaze characterized by visible and or legible forms of rituals by which correctional institutions, control youngsters and act as a forcing house on them. Yet, there also exists acts of informality which tend to be illegible and not seen on the official scene that portrays youngsters’ defiance and resistance, requiring officers to seek cooperation with youngsters towards conformity with rules.

### **3.2 Detention centres**

#### *Pre-trial detention centres*

In accordance with the Juvenile Justice Act 653 of 2003, section 23 (GOG, 2003), juveniles who upon arrest are not released on bail, receive a court order either for committal to the care of parents, close relative or anyone willing to take care of juveniles, or to be remanded in state

custody. Upon arrest, juveniles must be sent to places of safety or remand homes within 48 hours of arrest (ibid, section 14). The maximum period for a remand warrant shall be seven days; the warrant is renewable at the next appearance of the juvenile at a court hearing. The total period of remand of a juvenile shall not exceed three months except in the case of an offence punishable by death where the period of remand shall not exceed six months (ibid). It was observed that youngsters such as Yaw, was kept in police custody for four months and in remand custody for as long as one and a half years (ibid, section 3.2). Thus youngsters are unduly detained in police cells and remand custody in contravention of the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Act.

Remand homes for male and female juvenile and young offenders in Accra are housed in the same premises as the girls' institution (JCC) and headed by the same director. The remand for females is a one room commonly labelled 'remand'. This room performs a multi-function as it houses youngsters awaiting trial, newly committed youngsters and those in committal who as a result of punishment are detained. According to detaining authorities, no state provision is made for education or skills training while youngsters await trial given that this period of detention is temporal. In practice however, male youngsters in remand homes engage in educational lessons sponsored by non-governmental organizations. Female youngsters on remand arbitrarily engage in educational and vocational activity organized by the correctional centre for girls. No provision for educational activity exists for inmates in police cells.

Most police cells are overcrowded with barely any standing, sitting or even sleeping space. In some police cells, inmates take turns to sleep on card boxes spread out on the bare floor due to the lack of space. Not so with remand homes and correctional centres. There is space enough for the beds and mattresses of all inmates. Relative to remand homes and the SCC, the centre for girls (JCC) has the most spacious dorms (two dormitories) and accommodate less than half its capacity. The SCC which has six dormitories also has the capacity to accommodate 200 inmates and yet has not exceeded a lock-up of 140 inmates since 2001.

#### *The Junior and Senior Correctional Centre*

The Junior Correctional Centre (JCC) and the Senior Correctional Centre (SCC) have their differences in terms of architectural lay out. These institutions are manned by different



oversight authorities. The Ghana Prisons Service, under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior, has direct oversight of the SCC, the only correctional centre for young male offenders in Ghana. The JCC, the only correctional centre for female juvenile offenders is manned by the Social Work Department under the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare. The SCC or the boys' institution gives an appearance of a stricter security arrangement relative than JCC. At the security checkpoint of the SCC is a huge cross bar supported by two big pillars and with the inscription SCC. However, this arrangement at the SCC does not match the kind of maximum security encountered in adult central prisons with their imposing high walls. The feeling of a prison is however not missed due to the large numbers of prison officers in their uniform, almost as conspicuous as inmates.

The head of the boys' institution is a Deputy Director of Prisons who doubles as the Regional Commander of Prisons in the Greater Accra Region. The head is supported by eight senior officers that occupy various hierarchical ranks from Assistant Director of Prisons, Chief Superintendent of Prisons, Deputy Superintendent of Prisons and Assistant Superintendent of Prisons. The head and these senior officers constitute the management of the SCC who oversee other staff such as teachers and workshop instructors and nurses. Two yard officers also assist the management to supervise other staff in the yard such as clerks, drivers, dorm wardens, kitchen staff, store keepers, among other staff. The SCC experiences frequent transfers of staff and at the time of field work, I regularly encountered new faces. Within the two years, I had encountered three different Officers-in-Charge.

The number of youngsters in committal changes daily as admissions and discharges are done on a daily basis. Official records<sup>xlvii</sup> of the Ghana Prisons Service show that the average daily lock up of male youngsters at the SCC from 2001 to 2006 did not follow any trend of increase or decrease. However, years 2007, 2008 and 2009 realized an increasing trend from an average lock-up of 108 through 118 to 122 respectively. In an interview with the Officer in Charge (SCC, July 26, 2010) who had newly assumed post, he quoted the lock-up on the day of interview as 131, with one escape occurrence, commenting that the population of male youngsters had seen an increase over recent years.

The SCC assumed its present name since the passage of the Juvenile Justice Act in 2003 yet the former name 'Borstal' is commonly referred to by staff and youngsters. The Borstal, according to youngsters is a prison for bad boys. An assistant officer in charge however maintains in an interview that the philosophy of the institution is different from that of an adult prison and that the Borstal Institute gives emphasis to vocational, technical

training and moral correction. The motto of the institution “I shall rise again”, according to the officer, encourages inmates to avoid criminal tendencies that do not promote peaceful co-existence (SCC, February 3, 2009). In spite of this assertion by the assistant officer in charge, I observed that the SCC appeared to be a name only on paper.

At a meeting with senior staff (SCC, May 21, 2012), they complained that the institution was run by prison officers who virtually had no training in handling children and youngsters; in other words, the centre was still run as a prison. Similarly, another assistant officer in charge lamented, ‘This institution was governed by rules formulated by the Ghana Prisons Service and yet these inmates are children. Almost all of us are transferred from adult prisons and so we do not have any particular training to equip us to work with them’. (SCC, July 20, 2010). A newly appointed director however indicated that he did not welcome just any type of training. He states: ‘We need to handle training ourselves instead of always depending on outsiders to train us for we understand our problems better than the trainers’ (SCC, April 28, 2010).

In focus group discussions with youngsters (SCC, December 14, 2009 & February 26, 2010), they were surprised that the institution was supposed to be a correctional institution and not a prison. Eight of ten youngsters, prior to committal, had heard that the Borstal, was a prison for bad boys. Kojo for instance stated in an interview, ‘Prior to committal I had heard about the Borstal and that it was a place for bad boys’. (SCC, June 22, 2010). Other youngsters such as Kofi provided a metaphorical representation by likening the Borstal to fetching water with a basket,<sup>xlvi</sup> which according to him, implied that the Borstal was a place of impossible tasks where bad youngsters were made to perform tasks that were beyond them. Kofi said: ‘I had heard earlier that the Borstal was a place where one fetched water with a basket and one was lashed most of the time and had to do very difficult tasks’. (SCC, May 14, 2010). The media is neither familiar with the new name, for nine years following the passage of the Juvenile Justice Act; reference is still made to the Borstal or a prison and not the SCC<sup>xli</sup>.

The Junior Correctional Institution (JCC) does not have the appearance of a prison but portrays a school-like atmosphere and under the oversight of the Social Welfare Department. Notwithstanding its school-like appearance, the JCC is not without regimentation. The constant reminders verbally by staff who are all women, of rules routines and the fact that one is being constantly watched gives the feeling of being observed and monitored. Control and power is mostly defined by people, than by architectural layouts. Military-like parades,

matches and salutes, are absent at the JCC. The management of the JCC comprises a director who is assisted by an assistant, both of whom are social workers. The director, assistant, a social worker and a caretaker reside on the premises. The JCC is supported by other non-resident staff who provide instruction in vocational skills.

At the time of field work, an average of eight girls whose ages ranged from 12-17 was in committal. There is no presence of prison officers at the JCC and similar to the SCC, walls are low. There is no security bar or checkpoint and anyone can come in and exit at will though a gate which is not locked. Apart from a signboard that points to a correctional centre, there is little indication from the general outlook that it is one. The JCC is popularly known as *mmmofra bonne sukuu*. This literally translates as schools for bad children and like the Borstal, is more often conceived by female youngsters as a prison.

Whereas the SCC and the JCC are bounded by low walls so as to emphasize the correctional policy of these institutions, in practice the prison existed. In fact, lower walls evoked the connotation of a prison for youngsters who rather preferred higher walls (Chapter 5.5).

### **3.3 Youngsters in police custody**

This section discusses youngsters' encounters upon arrest, when the state reportedly assumes the responsibility of care. Section 15 of the Juvenile Justice Act provides that a juvenile when arrested, "shall be under the care of an adult of the same sex" (GOG, 2003) when detained in a police station or whilst being transported to a remand home or a place of safety.

While detained in the police station, juveniles have:

...The right to adequate food; medical treatment if required;  
reasonable visits from parents, guardian, lawyer or close relative;  
and any other conditions reasonably required for the welfare of the  
juvenile (ibid:15).

Thus upon arrest, the Juvenile Justice Act imputes to the state officer the responsibility of care, in ensuring conditions reasonably required for the welfare of juveniles. Represented below are interviews with youngsters about their practical experiences in police cells. John (19 years), Kofi (20 years) and Kwesi (16 years) share their initial experiences:

It was difficult life in the cells, there was little food and we  
defecated in the same cells. (SCC, John, February 1, 2010)

It was filthy and smelly; we did the toilet in the cells and also ate in  
the same cells. (SCC, Kofi, May 14 2010)

It was hard life as I was the only youngster in the cell, all the others were adults and I stayed for a long time in the cells. We did everything in the cells, we ate, urinated and eased ourselves in the cells and sometimes it took days before we were able to dispose of our excrement. (SCC, Kwesi, April 23, 2010)

Police cells, according to youngsters housed both youngsters and adults and served an all-in-one function of toilets, dining rooms and sleeping places. There was no official provision of food in cells and youngsters devised their own means of survival (Chapter 4); sometimes police officers are relied upon for food<sup>1</sup> as stated by Kojo: 'I did not have to pay cell fees. There were only three persons at the time but the number increased later on. The police officer gave me food regularly'. (SCC, June 22, 2010).

Philanthropists, charity organizations and churches, who provide material and non-material support to prisons, orphanages and remand homes rarely visit police cells. Besides, only few religious organizations visit<sup>li</sup>. Kwesi was the only youngster who received regular visits from a pastor: 'When I was first remanded, I received regular visits from a pastor who provided us with food; I was then 16 years of age' (SCC, April 23, 2010). At the time of arrest, youngsters do not have much contact with family either. Kwesi narrates how one of his family relations chanced upon him while in police cells:

One day while in the cells, to my surprise, I saw the sister of my grandma (with whom I stayed) passing and I asked someone to call her. She was surprised to see me in police cells and cried a lot and said she had only one Ghana cedi (0.60 USD) and that I should take 50pesewas (0.30 USD) to buy some food and I declined and said she should keep it and that I would manage to find some food in the cells. (SCC, April 23, 2010)

Youngsters such as Yaw also spoke about long periods in police custody. In fact, besides the period of committal, the next longest stay in detention encountered was in police custody. Yaw, for instance narrated that he spent almost two years in police and remand custody before being committed finally to the correctional centre:

I was in cells for four months prior to being arraigned before court and it took the intervention of one of the chief officers who visited the cells one day. When the chief officer saw me he asked the other officers why I was still in the cells. He quickly arranged that I be brought before court. The judge remanded me to a remand home as he said none of my relatives were forth coming. I spent one and a half years in the remand home and it took the intervention of one of the teachers namely Mr. Asiedu to send me to the police station. The police officer prepared relevant papers and also went to court to collect a social enquiry report and I was admitted at the Borstal. (SCC, March 2, 2010)

Contact with the police and subsequent detention in police cells for several months tend to evoke feelings of ambivalence and confusion where youngsters do not understand their encounters and processes in police custody. Kwesi, who was reportedly arrested for collecting scraps of metal also expressed surprise for being arrested and yet at the same time considered himself deserving of such treatment. Similarly, Yaw who had spent a considerable amount of time in police custody said he did not question the length of stay in the cells. He stated: 'I did not question why I was in the cells for that length of period. I thought that maybe I deserved it. One day, a police officer visited and commented that I had kept so long in the cells and asked that I should be sent to the Borstal.' (SCC, May 14, 2010). In other words, Yaw's trial process was completed and yet he was still kept in police custody and Yaw tended to accept his fate without question.

Life in police cells apart from being long also induces suspense as youngsters never know when they would be picked up. Yaw for instance, would not have been discovered if the chief police officer had not visited. In fact, youngsters' narratives reveal that police officers<sup>lii</sup> sometimes depend on their parents and relatives for transportation money to execute official duty as was the case with Kwesi: 'One day, a police officer visited and commented that I had kept so long in the cells and asked the CID to send me to the Borstal. The police depended on my daddy for money to transport me to the Borstal' (SCC, 23, April 2010). Yaw stated same that the police took money from his family in order to convey him to the Borstal.

The majority of youngsters still harbor a feeling of rejection which they encountered while residing with families prior to custody. In fact, youngsters manifest a feeling of vengefulness against police officers and fathers as they sometimes blurt out in focus group discussions: "We will jail our parents" or "We would jail the police".

First experiences in police custody on the basis of above narratives, depict youngsters who hold differentiated conceptions of themselves and state officers. Some conceive of themselves as being damped in police cells and forgotten about until other police officers chance upon them. Others portray state officers as persons who switch from being powerful and wicked to seemingly kind officers who feed them (youngsters). Yet same officers forget that youngsters are in their custody and should be conveyed for trial or to correctional centres. Also, a poorly resourced state that has barely enough resources to cater for children under its care and officers who reportedly exploit the feeble resources of children in their care to execute official duty is manifest. The ramification for

youngsters who seldom have contact with relatives to resource the state is lengthy stay in police cells without court attendance or conveyance to correctional centres. Nevertheless, state officers may have their own reasons for keeping youngsters in police custody for unduly long periods as police custody may be less expensive for the state than keeping youngsters in correctional centres. In terms of the latter, demands to safeguard the safety of wider society also oblige the state to make some investment in terms of material conditions in detention.

This first section has brought to the fore various manifestations of police cells as state institutions, acting forcefully on youngsters, but also exhibiting defectiveness. The state bends its own laws by not ensuring conditions reasonably required for the welfare of juveniles as provided by the Juvenile Justice Act. For these officers, it is a way of finding practical solutions round structural challenges. Other research have also identified similar rule bending in other countries (Martin, 2009; Sparks, Bottoms, & Hay, 1996). Martin (2009) in his ethnographic study in Indian Prisons, explains that rule bending by staff tends to augur for the smooth running of the prison institution and should not be conceived as borne out of deviant behaviour.

### **3.4 Total institutions and youngsters' mortification processes**

The section dwells on committal experiences and initiates discussions that are later advanced in the next couple of chapters. It provides a descriptive context based on ethnographic material, detailing everyday routines and rituals which constitute processes of mortification in correctional centres.

Goffman (1968) explains mortification as processes by which inmates upon entrance into total institutions, become stripped of stable social arrangements in their home world and begin a series of abasements, degradations and humiliations. These procedures include the creation of a barrier between inmates and outside world; role dispossession, a lack of control of what one does through the enforcement of routines and regimentation; dispossession of identity through wearing of uniforms; admission procedures such as counting, listing, assigning numbers and categorization of dormitories (Goffman, 1968:24-26). Goffman (ibid:26) also refers to these procedures and others such as undressing, bathing and hair cutting as “trimming or programming” because the new arrival or inmate

is shaped and coded and fed into “an administrative machinery” of correctional institutions.

Institutional procedures act on youngsters and mortify them; the self, according to Goffman is “systematically mortified” (ibid: 24). Goffman (ibid: 22) thus likens the total institution to a forcing house for changing inmates. Inmates, having been trimmed and programmed into objects by institutional procedures, can be “worked on smoothly by routine operations” (idem).

### *Initiation ceremony*

I begin with an institutional ceremony which is an initiation rite that welcomes youngsters who are keen to narrate their diversified experiences yet who are made to conform to the homogenizing demands of a Goffmanian total institution. Initiation ceremonies are rites of passage, which according to Goffman (1968:27), are elaborated forms of admission procedures called “the welcome” and constitute socializing moments that seek to indicate to the inmate that he is merely an inmate. By obtaining initial cooperativeness from the inmate right from the onset, that which Goffman (ibid: 26) describes as “obedience tests”, inmates learn not to challenge orders.

Thus in the following initiation ceremony, youngsters are accorded a welcome to a homogenising total institution where their audience ignore their distinct stories despite youngsters’ eagerness to narrate these stories. Soon, their inmate role is enforced and stories are quietly tucked away, possibly never to be told.

### *Welcome to the group!*

Today was one of the routine church services usually organized on Friday mornings and which sees the attendance of both staff and youngsters. Having listened to the sermon and danced round for the offertory, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) invited newly admitted inmates to line up in front of the gathering. The OIC asked them to introduce themselves and to state what crimes had brought them to the institution.

One after the other they did their narrations with each taking about three or four minutes. Their offenses run the gamut from petty pilfering, through defilement to armed robbery and other offenses. Those who had committed robberies were asked to state the specific amount of money involved and the specific items stolen.

New arrivals told their stories amidst various interjections from staff and giggles and mumblings from youngsters seated. Some shouted: ‘stop telling tales and go straight to the point’; ‘the story is too long,

not necessary, cut it short'. The narrators, who seemed absorbed in their stories and oblivious to the reactions, showed little sign of shyness; they did not stutter. Most youngsters spoke as though they were in a dialogue with themselves and this sustained interest amidst the seeming distractions.

In the course of the narrations, my attention was caught by Kwesi, a sixteen year old boy who was equally adept at narrating his experience yet seemed to lack the courage to carry through with his story; he broke down in the process and cried. He said he could not believe that collecting a metal scrap that earned him two Ghana cedis (less than a dollar and fifty cents) would contribute to his present demise. My curiosity and interest were whipped by his sense of innocuousness, innocence and naivety, yet Kwesi had little opportunity to tell his story. (SCC, November 6, 2008)

Goffman (1968) explains the function of “institutional ceremonies” of total institutions, as

“Institutional practices through which staff and inmates come close enough together to get a somewhat favorable image of the other and to identify sympathetically with the other’s situation. These practices express unity, solidarity, and joint commitment to the institution rather than the differences between these two levels”.

Religious services are therefore institutional ceremonies meant to promote unity between staff and inmates. Given however that unity and solidarity still has to be enforced during such ceremonies, differentiations between positions, is not entirely absent. For instance, youngsters such as Kwesi express eagerness in narrating his distinct story. The fact that he ended up in detention after collecting pieces of metal scraps worth 1.40 USD and like other youngsters, he suffered sustained rejection from his family. Yet, listeners are far from being interested in such stories and rather make every effort to curtail youngsters’ freedom of expression so as to enforce unity with other members of the confinement society. The interjections of the audience are a seeming indication that youngsters have been convicted already and that their identity and distinctness should therefore remain in the past. In other words, upon entering these centres, youngsters are immediately stripped of their personal attachments and stable social arrangements in their home world and begin a series of degradations and rituals until the self is systematically and unintentionally mortified.

### *Rituals and routines*

Routines in total institutions, according to Carrabine (2004), can be beneficial in the sense that they allay anxieties evoked by unpredictability that characterize daily encounters. In other words, youngsters know that at a certain definite time, they will eat, hold lessons or be in their dorms. However, as depicted in discussions that follow, routines and rituals



offer an analysis of disciplinary procedures which gives the expectation that such procedures act as a forcing house on youngsters resulting in the production of disciplined inmates.

### *Loss of identity*

Upon committal, youngsters are made to put away personal belongings and are clothed in identical uniforms and shoes and sometimes bear the same name. One boy quickly retorted when I addressed him as '*Kweku*', (having heard one of the officers address him by that name) that this was not his real name and that the officer in question addresses all of them as '*Kweku*'. Through these stripping processes, mortification of self and loss of identity is expected to occur and inmates are made to assume mass, homogenized and standardized identities. Daily, one observes a large number of like-situated individuals of young people and children engaging in activities that are repetitive and regimental. A typical day for a young male offender is a 12 hour day, well packed with tasks. The day's chores commence at approximately 6am, run an array of activities ranging from fetching water, morning preparations, breakfast, and morning assembly through classrooms lessons, vocational and technical workshops, religious discussions and counselling sessions. These activities continue till evening at 6pm when youngsters take supper and then prepare to be locked up until the following morning.

### *Youngsters involved in governance and mortification processes*

Not only are youngsters objects of mortification processes, youngsters are enlisted by staff to participate in governance and in ensuring that other youngsters are mortified. Counting, which is referred to as *shooting*, (a slang used by warders and understood by inmates), is a regular exercise not only for staff but for youngsters also. Often a warder would shout out *shoot* and then counting begins. Counting is done by both captains (inmates in charge of dormitories) and officers when exiting or entering the dormitory, the classroom, workshop, dining hall, church services. In fact counting is done virtually everywhere. Staff manages to do such counting without missing any number; though sometimes there is the reliance on leaders of dorms, namely captains and their assistants to undertake this task. On one occasion when youngsters were almost done with their counting and about to leave, the warder who was seated by me shouted to the last youngster to say: '*Last 15*', meaning he

is the last person and also the 15<sup>th</sup>. This reduces the burden of the officer having to always remember the total number. Marching is usually paired up with counting. In the process of changing shifts, marching follows once numbers are checked, in other words, youngsters usually march away once they are counted.

*Structuredness of daily routines: Medicalization invites illness*

The routinization and structuredness of detention rituals such as changing shifts, marching, and counting, gives little room for one to question the relevance or sometimes the legitimacy of such routines. Tasks are carried out with due diligence regardless of whether they are required or not. For instance, officer nurses call out for medicine when it is time to do so and not necessarily because inmates are sick and are in need of them. I observed on a regular basis that once there is an invitation or call for painkillers such as Paracetamol, youngsters respond accordingly:

The officer shouted to them that those who needed some medicine should let her know. She specifically mentioned Paracetamol- soon two boys passed in front of me to register complaints'. (Field notes. SCC, Dec 11, 2009.)

In other words, upon hearing a call from an officer nurse, youngsters seem to evoke an illness to fit the invitation for medicine. In a focus group discussion with youngsters about their health, youngsters almost in unison said jokingly that the place is choked with pain relief and that 'they are tired of taking medicines', meaning *yeanom abre*, and are sick of them. While youngsters may have serious health problems that require attention that goes beyond the provision of Paracetamol, the generous continuous supply of pain reliefs create an impression that all is well in terms of medical care and that institutions cater adequately for the health needs of inmates.

Further, the routine of handing out painkillers keeps officer nurses busy otherwise they may seem to be rendered redundant when they are seen not to be doing anything; and in the event of the latter, they risk being sacked. Thus when young people play a sick role and officers perform their duty of providing pain relief at certain times, it is not only an indication of the structuredness of daily routines, but it also guarantees employability. In other words, when youngsters are fit and healthy always, it may pose a threat to the job security of officer nurses.

*Youngsters must eat whether or not they are hungry*

Similarly, meal times are equally orderly and regimental; a large number of youngsters are observed matching in a file from their respective dorms with their bowls and dishes to collect their meals from the kitchen. Sometimes youngsters collect food for others but in most cases, each youngster collects his own food. The server ensures that the same amount is dished out to each person. During breakfast, a standard cup is utilized to fetch the porridge from the bowl for them. Boys use cups, bowls, plastic containers and all sorts of containers to collect food for themselves and others. In an interview with the kitchen woman who served the food, she said she ensured that each youngster got a serving without any one cheating the other, she said usually she knew the exact number and so there was little chance for them to cheat though some still attempted to cheat. The boys wait until the serving is done and then march to their rooms to take their breakfast. Thus similar to the relationship between job security and medicalization, there is the expectation that youngsters must eat once meals are served even if one wishes not to eat.

On the whole therefore, the repetitiveness of routines and rituals does not only aim at successful mortification of inmates so as to render them totally compliant, but also fulfills other institutional interests thereby providing the justification for the existence of these institutions.

### **3.5 Mortification process, is staff mortified too?**

Goffman's mortification processes are directed at inmates on whom the total institution, likened to a forcing house, acts. However, discussions that follow demonstrate that this forcing house does not only act on inmates as suggested by Goffman (1968), but acts on staff too, in other words staff as well as youngsters, are expected to be mortified.

On entering the Senior Correctional Centre (SCC), one is usually struck by an overbearing number of officers, all neatly dressed in their uniforms. The SCC has average staff strength of 30 prison support officers, 202 subordinate staff and 10 senior staff. The main shift which runs from 7am to 4pm has an average of 80 staff. It was difficult at the very onset to distinguish between officers and youngsters as they were all dressed in uniform.

Superior officers issue commands powerfully while officers in the yard go about their duties, taking orders promptly with their salutes. A small parade is held thrice daily

that allows for a change of shift. In all there are about four shifts, some of which overlap, a nightshift that runs from 8.00 pm to 7.00 am the following day and four other shifts during the day. The longest and main shift during the day is from 7.30am to 4.00 pm and this shift can host about 80 officers. On light shifts such as 6am to 2pm and 2pm to 8pm, fewer officers up to 20 officers serve on each shift; these light shifts usually, are overlapping ones.

During one of such change of shift parades, I observed about seven officers lined up facing two other officers, a yard's master and a senior officer. The latter held a kind of a writing board from which he read out the names of officers, their titles and their duty post e.g. 'Sergeant A, House master, dorm 2' (SCC, March 20, 2010). Upon hearing their names, officers respond and take salutes. Change of shifts is usually a short ceremony lasting about five minutes; the essence being to note officers who report on duty and to assign officers to specific schedules.

During parades, commands and salutes are issued and one should not interrupt the sequence of recitals. Such utterances, commands and salutes are commonplace throughout the day and power and hierarchical levels are not missed. I was at a small office near the gate chatting with one of the officers, when an officer at the gate suddenly went out to respond to greetings from a senior officer. She took a salute in front of the senior officer who was in her vehicle, having just crossed the security bar. The subordinate officer blurted out: "Good morning madam, 200 in custody, permission to carry on". This recital is often heard at the gate and also anytime there is a contact between a superior and a subordinate officer who has charge of some group of youngsters. The number called out at the gate, for instance 200, is inclusive of both staff and inmates whereas in the yard officers call out only the number of youngsters in their charge.

Thus, upon entry the senior officer has already a general idea of the total number of persons and keep track, monitor or control the movements of staff and inmates. The break down as to the number of staff and inmates is displayed openly on a board in front of the administration office.

Homogeneity in dressing, uniforms, routines, and the uniformity of issuing and carrying orders gives an appearance of officers who are unilateral with one voice. Officers have a well-respected hierarchy observed strictly by superiors and subordinates by the way they take their salutes, and their promptness in carrying out orders, not challenging

authority. Officers attribute this to a well-disciplined force and are proud to talk about their discipline and training. Some two senior officers commented that though they appear disciplined, the present discipline is nothing compared to the past:

Change of shifts used to be longer with emphasis on small details such as inspection of handkerchiefs and boots and when you were found without these, you were sanctioned to perform extra duty. When we were recruits, our training was thorough; we were not entitled to visitors for the initial six weeks and were put on a very modest feeding ration. We got up as early as 3am for jogging thereafter engaged in many other activities. By the time classes started in the morning, we were already tired and would usually doze off during lessons and yet we were expected to write competitive exams and pass; anyway, our tutors also went through the same training. (SCC, February 18, 2010)

Officers also show a strong adherence to ranks and designations. Few weeks into my field work, one of the officers did not hesitate to assign to me a rank - cadet officer; officers thus cherish a well-respected hierarchy observed strictly by superiors and subordinates by the way they take their salutes, promptness in carrying out orders, not challenging authority. Generally, detention space for staff is structured, orderly and dotted with daily routines and rituals, coupled with staff who show a strong adherence to hierarchy, ranks and designations, characteristics that are in keeping with the structure of total institutions (Goffman, 1968).

In sum, institutional processes such as attendance of parades, wearing of uniforms, monitoring of staff attendance and adherence to commands are all ways by which a prison officer is shaped and coded into an “object that can be fed into an administrative machinery” of correctional institutions, to be “worked on smoothly by routine operations” (ibid:26).

### **3.6 Reproducing compliant inmates, an illusion?**

While detention authorities are trained towards specific tasks, their disciplinary procedures go beyond merely being able to handle certain types of equipment, or to protect people. According to officers, these disciplinary processes ensure that officers are disciplined enough so they can execute their tasks effectively thereby ensuring the production of compliant and disciplined inmates. Thus, detention procedures though they are an end in themselves ensuring that officers are monitored, disciplined and controlled, are also according to officers a means to an end, which is to produce disciplined inmates as a

result. In practice, however, this is not the case and disciplined and compliant inmates are not always produced as admitted by staff in offstage discussions.

### *Hidden transcripts and defective official power*

This section represents off-stage discussions about officers' admission of the difficulty to produce disciplined and compliant inmates and to command the required authority. In other words, officers admit to a defect in official authority and power. Consequently, there is disparity between public transcript (Scott, 1990:2),<sup>liii</sup> how officers at these centres execute their duties officially commanding authority and compliance, and offstage (ibid:10)<sup>liv</sup> talk or the hidden transcript of the difficulties and frustrations they encounter.

Most officers admitted to difficulty in adequately keeping youngsters under control and rendering them compliant to institutional rules. Officers complained that working with youngsters was difficult relative to adult prisoners. According to officers in the yard, youngsters do not yield to discipline; they do not take orders promptly. One officer shared his frustration:

I was transferred from my former station following its closure and I find working with these children difficult. They are difficult to manage. In adult prisons, very strict shifts are run, from 6am to 2pm, from 2pm to 8pm and then from 8pm to 6am. The administration runs from 7.30am with a short break in between and then they close at 4.30pm. Because of these shifts, inmates are tuned to waking up at early and working according to a strict timetable. Adult prisoners have little comfort, the cells are crowded, and there are no toilets or water closets and so they have to get up early and empty their pans. Here, young offenders take life easy and sometimes at 7am some are still not out of their dormitories. Sometimes I think the boys are pampered and so they behave anyhow they like. (SCC, February 3, 2010)

Crawley (2006:212) in commenting about the difficulty of keeping young offenders under control states: 'There is general agreement amongst officers that young offenders are noisier and more boisterous than adult prisoners...'. At the SCC, a female officer had to virtually beg youngsters for about ten minutes to attend lessons, against lots of excuses by the boys that they were unwell and tired. Finally, the boys followed her and she complained to me that almost all the boys feigned illness and yet they were preparing to write their major exams soon in few months. Another officer who supervises the everyday running of the yard observed that adult prisoners are not as defiant as young offenders:

Adults who have experienced life and its difficulties quickly submit to instruction and so they are easy to control. The prefectorial system for adults is very effective and their leaders can be trusted to maintain order and this gives some freedom to us. Adult inmates have various levels that they can rise to – stars, rose and other ranks and they have their own court sittings where they have their lawyers, judges and secretaries, among other roles. If a judge pronounces a sentence and you do not comply, you are subjected to punishment and in fact you dare not exhibit non-compliance. (SCC, July 13, 2010)

Thus, officers admit that despite mortification processes of correctional centres which seek to render inmates compliant, success is not always assured, a suggestion that official power can be defective. According to the above narrative, the reliance on inmates to govern is crucial for the maintenance of order and discipline. Ewoame (2011) described in neat detail inmate hierarchy in adult prisons in Ghana and the involvement of such inmates in governance. Inmate participation in governance of detention institutions have also been observed in prisons in India (Martin, 2009) and Latin America (Sacha, 2012).

Involving youngsters in the governance of centres however has its own ramifications as the officer quoted above also raised concerns about trust and cynicism as he further advanced his conversation:

The leaders here can hardly be trusted. There was this assistant captain who upon my recommendation was to be promoted to dormitory six and yet just recently he misbehaved. On this day, there was a delay in providing meals as it had rained and the kitchen was an open one. Coincidentally that same day an NGO had also prepared food and had come to share with them, yet this assistant captain influenced the boys to protest. I demoted him and as a result, he is now in dormitory four. I did this to teach him a lesson. In fact these boys can never be trusted to change completely.

Concerns were also expressed about youngsters' lack of interest in institutional provisions such as educational programmes. The same officer stated:

They do not seem interested in what we offer them, only about three out of ten do. When I was at my former station, the adult prisoners showed such immense interest in the educational programmes. Here, it is the opposite. With all the efforts we put in, the boys show little interest and they have to be forced and coaxed sometimes in order to show some seriousness; this makes our work difficult.

Foregoing narratives underscore the relationship between the structuredness and functioning of confinement settings. In other words when youngsters do not respond to institutional provisions such as health, food and education, the general functioning of staff

and the institution is threatened. Consequently, officers resort to repressive force and compulsion to enforce compliance. Yet even with such force there is little guarantee that inmates would comply.

Thus officers are frustrated when they are unable to enforce compliance and do admit to a limit of official power thereby resulting in reliance on cooperation from inmates.

### *Feminization of prisons*

At the SCC, a regular complaint by male officers concerns the overbearing presence of women<sup>lv</sup>. Official data on staff puts the total number of female subordinate staff at 100, two less than the total number of male subordinate staff. The majority of women are deployed in the yard to oversee youngsters hence the overbearing presence of female staff. Some male officers consider this heavy presence of female officers as contributive to the limit of repressive power as female officers are not tough enough. According to such officers, female officers pamper youngsters and spoil them:

These children (he paused), they need to be subjected to discipline otherwise they will never be serious. You know, sometimes the women here also pamper the youngsters and that is why they misbehave, in fact this is a big problem for us. (SCC, July 13, 2010)

Others are of the view that this defect would be corrected if female officers are trained to be tough like male officers or are replaced entirely. Even some female officers lament that youngsters do not respect them: *wommu yen o*, 'these youngsters do not respect us'. Thus 'pampering' may well be a means by which staff negotiate cooperation and compliance, where there is an agreement to be soft on inmates so the latter in turn would submit to rules.

However, the officer quoted above continued that such agreements were not always adhered to as youngsters still absconded regardless of however kind officers were to them:

One of the lady officers took such good care of one of the boys, she cooked for him regularly just to encourage the boy to stick to the rules and not abscond. But this boy absconded while this same lady was at post. When the boy was questioned he said he knew that the kind lady with her big buttocks could not run after him so he decided to run away while she was on duty. So you see, this is what you get for being good to the boys.



The officer maintains that when officers get tough with youngsters, they sit up and comply:

There was this other student who, after writing his examinations, decided he would not do anything. He sat up and became serious only after suffering a lock up by one of the male officers. Now, he participates actively in general electrical workshop and has been active since. So you see, you spoil them when you pamper them.

This concern 'not being tough' or an attitude of softness was also extended to human rights.

### *Feminisation of human rights, the metaphor of women and human rights*

Staff particularly superior staff professed that human rights were useful. Often, staff exhibited training manuals on human rights in their offices as well as their libraries as evidence of their appreciation of human rights. However, in their everyday work, human rights assumed various and sometimes divergent connotations.

Human rights officers or the CHRAJ were sometimes considered by staff as a weak advocate, one that could not represent the needs of prisons and correctional centres adequately. During a monitoring visit in 2010 by officers of the CHRAJ, the officer-in-charge spoke passionately about the fact that management of the correctional centre was frustrated by the bureaucracies of oversight institutions and could not implement certain changes that ensured the institution's compliance with the Juvenile Justice Act. He stated:

When we wear this uniform, we are expected to behave in certain ways, we cannot just say anything even when we are unhappy about a particular situation; in fact our hands are tied. Often ministers of state classify young people as criminals and yet most of them seldom visit and have little idea what pertains inside these centres. He continued: that is why we count on you (the CHRAJ) to speak on our behalf; while we are glad that certain conditions such as feeding rates have improved, we feel that you can do better. It looks like now, you are becoming more or less a toothless, and you cannot bite'. (SCC, July 26 2010)

The expectations which correctional centres have of the CHRAJ as their advocate, are therefore not always met.

On a visit to the car mechanical workshop at the SCC during the initial stages of my field work, one out of six officers I met at the workshop lamented about the conditions of staff and asked: Does it matter to the CHRAJ that the conditions of service such as housing for prison officers are poor? What are the human rights of officers who are denied their due, for instance promotion?' (SCC, November 5, 2009). On a visit to the living quarters of staff,

one senior officer said to me: ‘Look we are more overcrowded in our homes than the boys’ and yet you do not speak about our rights being violated?’ (SCC, February 3, 2010). Thus officers do not only blame poor conditions of service on their employers but also blame the CHRAJ for not being a strong advocate. Thus despite professing the usefulness of human rights, human rights were considered not practicable in promoting conditions of staff.

While descending a stair case from the administrative office, I met an assistant officer in charge who was conversing with a subordinate officer. The superior officer said to me: ‘Come and pass before we do our human rights abuse’ (SCC, Field notes, March 23, 2010). In other words, we respect human rights on stage but off stage, it does not work for us’. During staff meetings that discussed the need for harsher punishment, the chair would occasionally turn to me as if to say ‘this is our domain and not that of human rights, leave us alone to do as we please’.

In a meeting with some senior staff, one officer in charge of an adults’ prison located within the same premises forcefully opened the door to the room in which the meeting was being held. He went direct to speak to the chair about a youngster who was being kept in one of his cells for punishment. In the course of their discussions, this officer-in-charge was informed that we were in a meeting and that I was part of the meeting and he retorted: ‘Okay but I really mean business and I am here to talk about man’s rights and not woman’s rights’ (SCC, Field notes, May 21, 2010). I understood this as implying, these are men’s issues, tough issues that matter and should be addressed with urgency. In other words, the prison had no place for softie, woman-like issues such as human rights. The encounter with the officer in charge of the prison institution, reminded me of some views that CHRAJ’s officers working in various communities in Ghana shared during a training session (CHRAJ, 2008). According to them, some communities often mistook human rights as the rights of the woman, as human sounded like woman. Also human rights were considered women’s rights as most human rights abuses were allegedly perpetrated against women.

Human rights therefore assume diverse meanings, predominant among these is the view that human rights constitute a soft option and tended to impede the logic of correctional institutions. This logic sought to impose a disciplinary order by meting out tough and severe punishment. This clash between promoting human rights and governing detention institutions was also addressed by Goffman as classic dilemmas (Goffman, 1968:75). He cited an example of such dilemmas as the contradiction between ensuring humane standards and efficiency of institutions. According to Goffman, the advancement of human standards and

dignity of the inmate lies in his or her personal possessions. Yet, for efficiency purposes, the inmate must be dispossessed.

This seeming inconsistency between human rights as principles and standards (Wilson, 1997) and what pertains in practice has also been observed by other researchers. Englund in his ethnographic study of Malawi draws attention to the contradiction between rhetoric and practice as regards the disconnection between the rhetoric of human rights elitists and popular responses. According to him, human rights elitism in Malawi maintains the status quo by its association with certain indices and institutions and yet “bears little relevance to the impoverished majority” (Englund, 2006:9). Merry (2006) also speaks of human rights programmes retaining their normative human rights code in spite of their translation, thereby concluding that such programmes are never indigenised.

While acknowledging the gap between human rights rhetoric and practice, the salient point made by this thesis is the fact that human rights is accorded various meanings by diverse actors. Some of these connotations, though discrepant, co-exist and contribute to the appearance of a well governed institution. At the SCC for instance, human rights are regarded as an impediment when everyday control of inmates is concerned. This is in spite of the fact that human rights are considered vital in the broader perspectives of promoting change and correction policy. These discrepancies are therefore not viewed by a total institution as negative in terms of their impact on the effective governance of institutions. On the contrary, officers device ways of circumventing the gap between normative principles of human rights and what actually pertains in practice. They do so by sometimes relegating the ‘actual’ to offstage as was the case of a senior and subordinate officer who said that I should come and pass by, so they could do their human rights abuse.

Martin (2010; 2012) in a similar observation in Ugandan prisons makes reference to the polyvalence of human rights. He discusses how the prison management employs human rights to solicit funding, strengthen support networks and manage change and yet administers corporal punishment in seeming contravention of human rights principles. According to the author such officers in Ugandan prisons circumvented this inconsistency by adapting corporal punishment. Consequently, they labelled corporal punishment reasonable caning, thereby distinguishing it from torture.

Thus for correctional institutions, the classic dilemmas are not confined to dichotomies of compliance and non-compliance, rhetoric and practice, but they are about

adopting practical rules and norms (Olivier de Sardan, 2008)<sup>lvi</sup>. Rules and norms that are applicable to everyday situations and the negotiation of boundaries between these opposites to suit specific contexts.

Similarly, one should not restrict oneself to the binary opposition between ‘softness’ and ‘toughness’ of female and male officers, respectively. I have observed that female officers sometimes command the parade even more authoritatively than their male counterparts – with a stronger voice and sometimes with a more firmly peering eye contact. I have also observed male officers who act in a timid way in front of ‘dangerous inmates’, speaking in whispers and being exceptionally careful (Chapter 5). Thus detention life does not project a unitary or singular reality but is dotted by multiple realities (Arce & Long, 2007). Such multiple realities of detention life though may be viewed by some as negative, yet are indications of the practicalities of everyday detention life.

### *Contempt and structural constraints*

The meeting with the officer-in-charge on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2010 revealed structural constraints that confronted senior staff and which reportedly impeded efforts at promoting change. In an earlier interview with the officer in charge, he commented: ‘Now I just try to concentrate on internal changes, I have asked officers to do some contributions themselves so we could repair the roofs of some of the dormitories. Over the past years I have sacrificed everything for the purpose of change but now, I realize that I must not do so. Look at Mandela, he served his nation with all his heart and yet lost profoundly in terms of his personal life’. (SCC, July 20, 2011).

Officers were also fraught with poor working conditions, low salaries and deplorable housing conditions. A senior officer lamented to me that the salaries of police, army and fire service personnel were better than theirs (SCC, July 20, 2010).

Off-stage frustrations of officers reveal antipathy and contempt about discrepancies in the social status of youngsters and officers. According to them, youngsters they train do much better than them and attain enviable positions while they still mark time. Such comments were made by officers at the SCC and not at the girls’ institute, where all staff are female. At the SCC, boys undertook certificated examinations as part of their formal educational, vocational and technical training and this enhanced their general progress upon completion. Girls though were trained to acquire various vocational skills, had no

formal certificated training. For such, their general progress is hampered as there is little guarantee of being integrated into the formal educational system.

In an interview with one of the assistants in charge at the SCC, she lamented about the housing situation of officers which I had also observed during a visit to their living quarters. She said: “officers sleep on the veranda and have to unpack their furniture each night to make space for their beds; their fridges and freezers are all kept outside” (SCC, February 3, 2010).

An officer candidly expressed his desperation coupled with other structural challenges encountered:

One of the inmates we trained became a successful person and was later taken to Australia- look, he earns USD while I earn Ghana cedi. We are trying our best and it is a lot of work here but people do not recognize our work. Another boy became a police officer and I could not recognize him. One also passed out of dormitory two and is a journalist now with TV3. Look at us, we train the people, they earn big money and even USD and look at what happens to us. Here I am the only one, the work is slow and yet we have many orders and I cannot meet all the orders. (While we spoke, a man came to collect his order and complained that it had taken too long to work on it).

Coupled with structural frustrations cited above, officers also harbour a feeling of envy, rancour and frustrations against fellow staff. The same officer continues:

Look, prison officers are not expected to build but look at the other side, our supervisors are putting up huge buildings, it's the same with the police, and we are here marking time

Look, a whole place like this, there is no water; a tanker supplies water every other day but you know there are 113 inmates and the water is used for cooking, bathing, and everything. Look at this huge compound, it is not fenced. Last week, one of the boys said he was going to use the toilet and he never returned, so you see... when it happens like that then you are queried. (While I was with him, one of the senior officers asked him to send one of youngsters studying under him to run an errand) You see, these are some of the challenges, now if the boy runs away then you are in trouble... (SCC, November 5, 2009)

Another subordinate officer but senior to this officer who chatted with me joined ahead of this conversation and sighed in agreement as if to say this is our plight.

Apart from the centre being devoid of security fencing, other structural constraints such as scarcity of water incite additional security challenges. One female officer stated that she escorts seven male youngsters at a time and this can be risky for her sometimes as

youngsters can do anything to her or decide to escape and sometimes she has to resort to enticements: “An inmate once escaped under my command, but what you do when there is no water, I just do my best; coax them or joke with them, so they cooperate with me”. (SCC, December 10, 2009)

Situations such as the ones cited above, compounds the powerlessness of officers and their susceptibility to possible attack by youngsters. Should any inmate escape, the officer in question suffers ramifications of possible sanction. Consequently, officers, in such instances, find little use in the singular expression of repressive force and rather intersperse force with cajoles and enticements.

In sum, official power, repressive force and disciplinary procedures in everyday practice are no guarantee that perfect disciplined inmates will be produced. Consequently, the correctional institution is unsuccessful in manifesting as a forcing house as it is continuously met with youngsters’ weapons of non-compliance. The forcing house of correctional centres which is met by the weapons (Scott, 1985) or defences (Mathiesen, 2006) of the seeming weak should however not be viewed as dichotomies between the powerful and the powerless as Scott (1985; 1990) tends to suggest in the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. On the contrary, there is a continual negotiation of power, where the powerful enlists the cooperation of the powerless.

The manifestation of official mortification procedures and informal practices of state officers of total institutions parallels the concepts of ideal and real governance of Olivier de Sardan (2008) in his article “*Researching the Practical Norms of Real Governance in Africa*”. Good or ideal governance carries a normative definition as promoted by development partners such as the World Bank. The definition is contrasted with real governance which refers to how public policies are actually implemented or practical norms which constitute the rules that actually govern the action of public officials. This entanglement between the official and the informal, as depicted by my research, should however not be viewed as a kind of incongruity or discrepancy as suggested by Olivier de Sardan (ibid). Neither is this informality limited to only Africa (idem). Crawley (2006), in an ethnographic research in the United Kingdom, speaks to such informality in her research on “Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private lives of Prison Officers” Similarly Jewkes and Johnstone (2006) in citing Mathieson (2006) in a research in Norwegian Prisons, observed that forms of official power are born of both formal and informal institutional practices. According to them, the actions by prison

officers which impinge directly on the everyday lives and well-being of inmates though are officially sanctioned, yet are informal and unpredictable (Jewkes & Johnstone, 2006).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

I have detailed institutional procedures in the form of everyday routines and rituals that characterize total institutions. Police cells differ from correctional centres in terms of how they are structured, yet by their imposition of confinement, formal administration and isolation from wider society, I have conceptualized both institutions as total institutions. Outlined in this chapter are mortification procedures of correctional institutions, likened to a forcing house (Goffman, 1968) that act not only upon youngsters but also on staff.

I have argued that whereas correctional centres act as forcing houses on children in conflict with the law aiming at promoting conformity with institutional norms, rituals and rules, the realities of detention life are multiple. The power of the forcing hand of the total institution is limited, defective and characterized by practices of ambiguity and illegality. Youngsters are not always relegated permanently to the fringes of a total institution; they are enlisted to govern and by so doing mortify other inmates. Further, youngsters impose a disciplinary procedure on state offices by being non-compliant. They wield weapons that render weak and defective the forcing hand of official and institutional power as evidenced in offstage admissions by staff.

The boundaries of everyday detention life are not fixated between binaries of the powerful and the powerless. On the contrary, they are permeable and characterized by a continual negotiation of power where the everyday lives of the seeming powerful and powerless in an offstage social life are interdependent and entangled. In sum, the hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990) of total institutions characterized by internal dynamics of power dotted by ambiguity and permeable boundaries play a functional role. Such hidden transcript should not be viewed as negative, rather, they keep up the public transcript (ibid) of staff thus giving the appearance that total institutions are able to perform their roles in producing disciplined inmates.

## **Chapter 4 The social underlife of Ghana's correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders**

### **4.1 Introduction**

I draw on Goffman's concept of "underlife" (Goffman, 1968:161-162) to discuss the social underlife of youngsters, an implicit and invisible perspective of a total institution. This social aspect of correctional centres has received less attention from researchers given that it is invisible and difficult to research. Like the hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) of staff discussed in the previous chapter, underlife of youngsters tends to be hidden from the public eye and yet is well patronized not only by youngsters but also by staff. Underlife, according to Goffman (1968:172) comprises all "practices" of an individual employed in an organization to obtain "unauthorized ends". It is to an institution "what an underworld is to a city" (ibid: 180).

This chapter documents certain aspects of social relations prevalent in detention institutions and seeks to address the research question: What is the social underlife in police cells and correctional centres of juvenile and young offenders in Ghana? I demonstrate on the basis of empirical data that these centres harbour an extensive social underlife. In addressing this research question, I present the argument that even in closed and total institutions of Accra's juvenile detention centres, youngsters position themselves to create a social space, which though seems to be beyond the gaze of prison officials and yet is in cooperation with them. The underlife in correctional centres researched, should not be equated with a prison subculture of inmates as suggested by Hensley et al (2003:290). According to them, a prison subculture is an area in which occupants of total institutions retain some degree of control and develop unique values, norms and behavioural roles. They state:

Understanding the micro level operations of Correctional Institutions are the world of inmates. Inmates, obviously, live lives different from their counterparts in free society; prison inmates live in a total institution. total institutions are closed and separated from society socially and physically.

These authors, by suggesting a subculture of a common inmate code with its attendant norms and values, confine such a culture to the world of inmates. Such inmate culture is therefore clearly bounded from staff and from society 'out there'.



The underlife in detention institutions on the contrary, is not analogous to an inmate culture. Such underlife does not conceive of homogenous culture of inmates characterized by a common inmate code. Neither is such social life clearly bounded from formal processes of total institutions, nor is it confined to the world of inmates. In fact, discussions that follow unearth a social underlife that is not only known to and shared by inmates, but to some degree shared by state (police and prison) officials. Similar to the functional role of hidden transcripts of total institutions (see chapter 3) characterized by internal dynamics of power dotted by ambiguity and multiple realities, the underlife of police cells and correctional centres is characterized by an entangled social life of state officers and inmates. In a similar way that the ambiguities of official care and power are contributive to the appearance of an effective functioning institution (see chapter 3), so is the underlife; it is vital to the everyday life of inmates as well as officers. In such social life, youngsters' capacity to process social experience and devise ways of coping under difficult situations of confinement is manifest and staff and inmates mutually depend on each other as they access material and non-material resources.

By drawing on the narratives of youngsters, this chapter briefly documents certain aspects of an informal economy that thrives in police cells, prior to the committal of youngsters, and is sustained by newly admitted boys, cell leaders and sometimes police officers. Ensuing discussions dwell predominantly on a social underlife within the confines of correctional institutions, considered as Goffmanian total institutions. Various aspects of social relations occurring in an underlife marked by rituals and hierarchy are revealed. Hierarchy is an important aspect of the relationships between inmates, which are to some degree quasi-institutionalized through the positions of the captains, seniors, inmates and brannies. The chapter also deals with the creation of privacy – the so-called corners – where inmates lay claim to privacy, share some intimacy with certain friends (corner boys) and create spiritual meanings.

Constituting this complex practice is also a sort of patronage relationships developing between individual inmates, captains and officials, where resources are mutually shared but where trust can be a scarce commodity. Another aspect that engaged the attention of this chapter is the development of peer links but also the erosion of friendship ties. Finally, I touch on how inmates draw on spirituality to settle accounts amongst themselves.

## 4.2 The underlife

The concept of underlife stems from Goffman's (Goffman, 1968) discussions on primary and secondary adjustments in public institutions, in his book "Asylums". According to Goffman (ibid: 171-172), an individual having a primary adjustment to an organization is one who:

...co-operatively contributes required activity to an organization and under required conditions... the individual is thus transformed into cooperator, he becomes the normal programmed or built in member.

When an individual contributes a "required activity to an organization under required conditions" (idem), such an individual plays his or her expected role, and has a primary adjustment. Goffman constructed primary adjustments so as to explain secondary adjustments, the main focus of his discussion on the underlife of public institutions. Secondary adjustments, according to Goffman (ibid: 172), describe "habitual arrangements by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means or obtains unauthorized ends".

An individual thus exhibits secondary adjustments when he or she employs unauthorized means to get round the expected role in an organization. Goffman provides two classifications of secondary adjustments. Firstly, secondary adjustments are "disruptive" when the individual abandons his expected roles radically. "Contained" secondary adjustments (ibid: 181-182), are exhibited when one's adjustments fit into the institutional structure without requiring a radical alteration. The full set of secondary adjustments that members of a formal organisation severally and collectively sustain is what Goffman terms an underlife. Goffman notes that "contained adjustments have an obvious function of deflecting efforts that might otherwise be disruptive. The settled and established parts of an organisation's underlife tend, therefore, to be composed primarily of contained, not disruptive adjustments" (idem).

Goffman's underlife is applicable to staff and inmates which he describes in fine detail under "*The Underlife of a Public Institution*" and "*Hospital Underlife*" respectively. Given that Goffman conceives secondary adjustments within the context of total institutions, he establishes a clear boundary line between the two thereby categorising them differently. According to Goffman, tasks in total institutions tend to be executed without regard to persons, and pervaded by a spirit of formalistic impersonality. "Social mobility between the two strata is grossly restricted" (Goffman, 1968:19) and an inmate-

staff split is conspicuous. There appears a marked boundary between the official and the unofficial, the public and the private, with officers perceived as executing their roles perfectly and inmates disciplined to be compliant.

Immediate discussions that follow dwell briefly on social life in police cells and demonstrate that the social life in total institutions is not always conducted without regard to persons, marked by a fixed boundary between the official and the unofficial.

### **4.3 Underlife in police custody**

#### *A social life thrives even under harsh conditions in police cells*

Narratives of youngsters undoubtedly bring to the fore difficult and harsh conditions in police detention characterized by overcrowded cells as well as a mixture of pervasive pungent smells of urine, human excreta and disinfectant (Chapter 3.2). Whereas inmates of police cells seem homogenized by these conditions which have been frequently reported by the CHRAJ and has received extensive media attention, youngsters are far from being a homogenous group of detainees. At the mercy of difficult conditions of detention, youngsters manifest an informal life characterized by hierarchy and an informal economy driven by cell leaders, inmates, new arrivals and sometimes state officers. A social life therefore thrives under such harsh conditions and police cells do not only function merely as legal custody but as a differentiated social space as shared by John, Yaw and Kwesi:

Life in cells is difficult, the cells are dirty and smelly and there is no food to eat. We pay cell fees to the cell leader who is the longest staying person. The cell leader is a kind person and always makes sure that there is some food to eat. He also ensures the cell is kept neat though he keeps some of the money to himself. (SCC, John, February 1, 2010).

...there were about sixty people in police cells when I arrived. They were all asleep when I arrived and so I also found some place to sleep. When I woke up in the morning, I am sure it must have been difficult to locate the new face and so they did not take cell fees from me. ...cell fees range from 8GHS (4.7 USD) to 15GHS (8.9 USD). Sometimes the cell captain uses the money to buy Omo (washing soap), food etc. for the common good of all of us. Some cell leaders however would keep the money and when they are transferred elsewhere they take it along. ... (SCC, Yaw, March 2, 2010)

...the cell leader spent about 4 years in the cell this was because of his condition of physical disability and so he could not be taken to prison. He always protected me and gave me food. He could sometimes collect about 30 Ghana cedis a day (18 USD) as each newly admitted person had to pay about 5Ghana cedis (3 USD), this money was usually kept with one of the police officers. Anytime I was hungry the cell leader would provide me some food. (SCC, Kwesi, April 23, 2010.)

Cell leaders assume oversight of cells on the basis of duration of stay in cells, in other words, the longest staying suspect or inmate assumes the position of a leader. Suspects are sometimes transferred from one cell to the other and so one can be a captain in one cell but be reduced to the position of a new arrival in another cell. Thus one can enjoy the benefits of a higher social position with its attendant economic gains that accrue to the post of a cell leader and later assume the status of a new arrival elsewhere, having to comply with the demands and orders of another captain.

Cell leaders charge new arrivals cell fees, an amount that differs from cell to cell but ranges from three to ten US dollars. These monies which are collected regularly - almost daily - due to the regular admittance of suspects, are utilized to purchase disinfectants, food and other material requirements. Thus an informal economy thrives on the resource of new arrivals who are required to pay cell fees; the ingenuity of cell captains who collect these fees and ensure at their discretion that the needs of inmates are provided. Youngsters such as Yaw, mention in their narratives that cell leaders can sometimes be kind but other times take advantage of their position to amass money.

Police officers are not without a role in this informal economy, for according to Kwesi's narrative, officers sometimes provide safe keeping for these monies. Though not explicitly stated in youngsters' narratives, police officers may have been involved additionally in the purchase of food. This is because, once in police custody, youngsters' freedom of movement is curtailed. Once food is purchased, the distribution to inmates is done mostly by cell leaders as indicated by narratives of John, Yaw and Kwesi or by Police officers as stated by Kojo in chapter 3. By providing food and a kind of a bank for safe keeping for youngsters', the police are also depended upon for social relationships or non-material support.

Youngsters share commonalities of difficult conditions of detention characterized by lack of food and penetrating unpleasant smells. These conditions do not only seek to homogenize youngsters, but as observed by Cunha (2012), unpleasant odors including

those emanating from bodies tend to secure isolation, distance and impermeability. Thus conditions in cells create a distinction between inmates and society out there, while at the same time aims at creating leveling and sameness among inmates thereby constituting institutional and mortification procedures. Such procedures condition youngsters with differentiated backgrounds into inmates so they can be worked on smoothly.

Generally, experiences in police cells from youngsters' perspective, though difficult, are from being homogenous. The underlife that breeds in these cells is characterized by hierarchy and an informal economy driven by cell leaders, inmates, new arrivals and sometimes state officers. This underlife does not only meet material needs but is also a means by which youngsters such as cell leaders reassert themselves and create an enclave of power and domination. Here, power went beyond merely commanding economic resources to asserting their human civility and decency by keeping cells neat and disinfected, as stated by Yaw.

Similar to the socio-economic life that thrives in police cells, an underlife also flourishes in correctional institutions. This is in spite of the seeming marked boundary between the official and the unofficial and formal procedures of mortification and institutionalization that socialize youngsters into inmate roles (Chapter 3). These same institutions harbour an underlife with youngsters as active players who sometimes in cooperation with officers, manoeuvre to meet everyday socio economic needs in total institutions.

#### **4.4 Underlife at correctional institutions**

##### *Hierarchy: Captains, seniors, boys, and brannies*

Youngsters at the male correctional centre (SCC) are housed in six dormitories (dorms), numbered one to six. Youngsters progress from dorm one through to dorm six based on length of stay and good behavior. Usually one's discharge is due by the time one reaches the final dorm or dorm six. Factors such as educational level may influence placement in particular dorms. Besides, youngsters that have demonstrated good behavior tend to progress relatively faster than others. Similarly, those who do not comply with institutional rules can suffer demotion (Chapter 3&5) Progression from one dorm to the other comes with benefits of increasing freedom, autonomy and privacy. Thus inmates in dorm six are the most seniors, and enjoy the greatest freedom; they are allowed as far as

the city, though with permission<sup>lvii</sup>. Not so with occupants of dorm one who suffer the least freedom and privacy and are virtually under lock most of the time.

Each dorm holds between fifteen and thirty occupants and is manned by captains and assistants<sup>lviii</sup> who are appointed by staff to supervise the enforcement of rules and safeguard the maintenance of order in the dorms. The overall captain and assistants provide support to warders in ensuring that inmates comply with everyday demands. Hierarchy at the official inmate level thus runs from the overall captain to dorm captains, through occupants of dorm six down to occupants of dormitory one. At the dorm level, hierarchical levels run from the captain through an assistant captain to seniors and then to new arrivals or brannies.

The term brannie implies brand-news or new arrivals to the institution; new arrivals in other dorms are also referred to as brannies, though such references are seldom employed. The most common and public usage of the term among staff and inmates refers to new arrivals who upon admission, are placed under mandatory observation between six months and one year and who are housed in the first and sometimes the second dormitory. It is this latter usage that mostly engage discussions in the section that follow.

A typical day for a young offender from the second to the sixth dorm is a 12 hour well packed day, beginning from 6am to 6pm. But not so with brannies. The monotony of bunk beds, stale air, unpleasant stench emanating from bathrooms and toilets<sup>lix</sup> located in the dorms, and the restriction of being confined within the dormitory walls, can be devastating. Upon arrival, brannies are usually placed under observation for a mandatory six month period, though in some cases, this period can extend to a year. Brannies under observation do not therefore participate in technical and vocational training, a key activity that runs through the day; in fact, some complain that they feel unwell as they do not see the sun for long hours. Brannies encounter other challenges, according to a former captain of dorm one:

...Most brannies arrive empty handed with little money and do not receive visitors, it is a big problem for them. I therefore, as a captain collect gifts from those who receive visitors. We refer to these gifts as 'apparatus' and then I would in turn distribute to those who have none. Many brannies, when they arrive, seem lost and confused and what worsens the situation is that do not receive visitors. (SCC, John, February 19, 2010)

### *Rituals (ammamre)*

Brannies have much to contend with in the first dorm besides receiving no visitors and suffering a lack of food. Away from the public glare, their fellow inmates take them through a series of initiation rituals which they term *ammamre*:

My stay at dorm one was difficult and I nearly absconded. You do not go out, you are maltreated by other inmates-told to salute the TV, they pomp your cheek until blood comes out and you tend to think about bad things. (SCC, Kweku, April 28, 2010)

These rituals are numerous and range from one degree to the other. Examples of rituals of lesser severity, as rated by youngsters, are ‘*Bro Issa*’ which requires that you look constantly outside while bowing your head to greet an imaginable person. ‘*Think for Yourself*’ demands that you stand on one leg for a long period of time, while another entails saluting television as in the above quote. Severer ones include *abodwe down*, you squat and rise continuously with elbows on lap and hands crossed over ears.

By the continuous gaze outside, repetitive salutes and standing still on one leg, youngsters employ rituals to exemplify repetitiveness of everyday detention routines but also the stillness of time and boredom that characterize their occupation of dorm one. Youngsters have admitted in various focus discussions that this period of observation is an emotionally and physically traumatic period. Youngsters who prior to detention have been extremely active, all of a sudden are grounded to a life of stillness where active time passes them by. Medlicott (2012) describes the agonizing and yet abstract pain caused to inmates by the passage of time in an institution which can be likened to a time machine. Medlicott (ibid.) recognizes that the most dangerous time for prisoners is in the first few weeks of incarceration, and that the contemplation of time coupled with the nature of the place in which time must be passed, produces a longing for nothingness. Further, bowing and saluting as depicted in rituals such as ‘*Bro Issa*’ and ‘*Think for Yourself*’ manifest as forms of deference to a superior, depicting power differentials or hierarchical levels between a subordinate and the superior. In one respect, the superior is imagined and not real; in another respect, the superior is camouflaged as an object of pleasure, the television. There is thus a deflection of the oppressor or the superior from fellow youngsters to someone or an object, though the deflection does not take away the severity of the ritual. This is somehow a metaphorical representation of power from youngsters’ viewpoint depicted as real as well as imagined where the powerful is not fixated.

The trauma of doing time in the first dorm may be likened to the painfulness of the ritual; a ritual though administered by youngsters and yet is seen to actually emanate from a superior authority that cannot be visualized in the dorm and therefore is imagined. Within such a setting, even pleasurable objects such as a television may cease to be delightful for youngsters and can evoke a painful experience as one continuously salutes the TV, an object that is laced with power.

Youngsters theorise these rituals differently; according to them, rituals are employed for the purposes of initiating brannies into inmate life in dorm one, but also as a form of punishment for defiant inmates who break insider rules. For instance, failure of a brannie to submit to a ritual attracts sanctions of severer rituals. Some youngsters have admitted that these rituals and peer foisted sanctions are severer than sanctions meted to them at the formal institutional level. Yaw, for instance, could not stand (Chapters 2&5) the emotional and physical trauma of the rituals and sanctions he suffered as a result of being branded a wizard in the first dorm which motivated his escape. Such rituals therefore enforce effective social control among youngsters, quite different from the observation of Goffman (1968) that the hospital underlife does not wield a strong social control.

Apart from few rituals that are known to warders, most rituals are unknown, and constitute a secret code among youngsters. Prison argot (Sykes, 1958), slang or special type of language is employed to confine real meanings of such rituals to youngsters, thus evoking uniqueness, sense of belonging and privacy against a context subjected to continuous surveillance. While rituals represent youngsters own constituted forms of social control, punishment and hierarchy, they also incite a sense of belonging where youngsters carve out a social space for themselves. By means of such rituals, youngsters engage in a social experience characterized by a hierarchical power structure. Though staff is not always aware of the minute details entailed in maintaining such a control over the dorm, they nevertheless benefit from it so far as captains manage to enforce order.

Hierarchical roles and statuses are, however, far from fixed, as brannies occupying the lowest power position among inmates in dorm one, manage to create and to assert privacy and personal power through the creation of what youngsters term corners.



### *Privacy and ownership: dorms and corners*

The term ‘corner’ is coined by youngsters and connotes different meanings such as private space. This is similar to Goffman’s “personal territory”, (Goffman, 1968:216) where the individual makes a private claim on space and “develops some comfort, control, and tacit rights” that he shares with no other except by his own invitation. A corner also denotes physically bounded space where two sides of a wall meet; or a shared space to some while excluding others.

A corner boy within the context of a shared space is one who has legitimate access to someone else’s private space. Corner, as employed in ensuing discussions, denotes private space that is owned rather than a physically bounded space where two sides of a wall meet:

Life initially was very hard and I cried when I was introduced because I thought about my family that I had no one to care for me and the fact that I was here to spend 2 years. Dorm one is a difficult place but when I am in the dorm, I try not to invite trouble, I keep to myself in my corner and I am fine. (SCC, Kwesi, April 23, 2010)

...I took my church attendance and activities very serious and also prayed in my corner often and would also rally other inmates round in my corner to pray. (SCC, Yaw, March 2, 2010).

The sense of ownership and privacy means so much to young people in an environment where everything belongs to everyone and commonness and sameness is pervasive and imposed.

A corner, which in this context is basically construed as a private space, has other connotations. Like Goffman’s personal territory where objects played an important role (ibid: 218) and one could stock one’s private space with objects of pleasure, objects were vital to corners. In dorm one, objects could be identified by the presence of one’s bed and personal belongings such as towels and underwear, which served as boundary markers. As one advances to other dorms, boundaries of corners are marked by flowers, pictures and mosquito nets. Mosquito nets, for instance, assume additional import, besides protection from mosquitoes, for young offenders (Fig 1). Seniors employ these nets to create corners which more or less are enclaves depicting a hierarchical difference between them and new arrivals. Corners as well as objects associated with them are therefore power laden.



Figure 1: Mosquito nets having technical and a social meaning

Boundary markers which are symbols of power and hierarchy defining youngsters' private space are neither fixed. For instance, while an earlier visit to dorm one depicted almost no display of flowers or mosquito nets; the picture was different at a later visit. Diverse associations and meanings are created and recreated of what one may refer to as one's private space or corner. Within the private space of corners, youngsters create a social space where they chat, crack jokes and have fun with their friends. They also create spiritual space where they say their prayers; these associations are far from fixed as new meanings are constructed depending on the need or situation.

The word 'corner', additionally evokes powerlessness, a sense of restriction and deprivation of freedom as one can be confined to one's corner by senior inmates for hours. Brannies can be asked to stay in their corner by senior inmates or captains as a form of punishment. Thus, the same corner that provides fulfilment and privacy as a place where youngsters assert their personal power can also become abhorrent, a place of powerlessness for youngsters. Within this setting of punishment, corners denote a physically bounded space where two walls meet and which is not a necessarily designated private space, to which one can be confined as a form of punishment:

I was made to sleep in the bathroom area most of the time in the corner where the boys used to smoke Indian hemp (*wee*) and I could not stand the smell. The isolation and the maltreatment were beyond me... (SCC, Yaw, March 2, 2010).

Besides being able to assert privacy and a power status through the creation of 'corners', youngsters with part support of staff, devise means of surviving in an environment where state budgetary supply is scanty and strict rules exist about managing one's finances.

### *An informal economy*

Correctional centres are managed based on state budgetary supply. Without hesitation, authorities of correction centres state that their budgetary supply is inadequate for the everyday running of centres and the feeding of inmates (Ayete-Nyampong, 2011). Youngsters during focus group discussions complained that their menu is unvaried and meal portions are small (JCC, FGD, March 19, 2010). Youngsters are however not expected to spend money as they wish or choose for correctional centres have defined rules regarding youngsters' management of their finances. All moneys are expected to be deposited at the administration and juvenile and young offenders are prohibited from keeping money on themselves. Notwithstanding these arrangements, youngsters devise means of earning, spending and saving money as they need money for food, to make calls to friends and relatives and to escape. I observed Afua, a female youngster remove money from her underclothes to purchase food when I interviewed her. Afua said to another youngster to do the purchases for her and the latter did so openly in the presence of one officer who passed by. Yet with the assistance of this other youngster, they concealed the purchase made from another officer.

Youngsters also keep money with some officers as according to them, monies are easier to access in the custody of such officers rather than with the administration. For instance at the SCC, youngsters are required to submit a written request for money from the administration if they wish to make purchases or buy food from the canteen. Those who are unable to write letters forgo part of their money or food for other youngsters who assist them to write such letters. In other words, even to apply for money, youngsters require money to do so. Officers who keep money for youngsters also derive benefits from them as the boys run errands for officers and sometimes pay commission on monies that are kept with staff. The reverse also happens; youngsters also earn money by running errands for their officers for which they are rewarded in kind or cash, monies that are not usually deposited with the administration.

Commissions are not only paid on monies kept by staff but also on the usage of prohibited items such as mobile phones. At the JCC, youngsters secretly communicate on mobile phones with their friends and also use such phones to request money from relations and friends. On one occasion, following an escape incident, it was reported that youngsters who escaped paid an amount of money so as to use the mobile phone of an officer to communicate with friends outside. This is the escape incident that involved Afua and other

youngsters (Chapter 5). On another occasion (JCC, June 9, 2012), a newly admitted youngster was subjected to beatings by other youngsters after she had given away that the captain was in possession of a mobile phone and that the captain along with other youngsters used the phone to communicate with friends and relations outside the centre.

In this informal economy, youngsters employ other means to earn money. Female youngsters said in a focus group discussion that they did their own cobbler work and saved the little money for other necessities.

In an interview, Kwabena a youngster at the SCC who enjoyed greater freedom because he occupied the last dorm and was preparing to be discharged from the institution said that he was desperate for money and so he took money from other youngsters to facilitate their escape. He said: ‘They gave me 6 GHS (3.5 USD) and I bought an *asor* blade for 2GHS (1.2 USD) and so I had 4 GHS (2.4 USD) to myself’ (May 14 2010). Hacksaw blade commonly known as an *asor* blade is a popular instrument that youngsters use to cut metal gauze and burglar proofing in their windows in order to escape.

Whereas every day running of correctional institutions and the provision of various services such as feeding, clothing, supply of food and medicine depend on the budgetary provision of these institutions, youngsters devise their own practical ways and economic exchanges to survive. This informal economy which is patronized actively by youngsters and partly by staff is another example of informality and entanglements of the social and economic worlds of youngsters and staff in total institutions.

#### *Patronage relations and inmate hierarchy*

I now discuss certain relationships that mimic Goffman’s “patron relationships” which he describes as “semi-official indulgences” (Goffman, 1968:253). These relationships are marked by semi-official economic and social exchanges of gifts and acts of kindness between staff and patients. Goffman’s patron relationships, though premised on unequal relationships between staff and inmates, is not as instrumental as Scott (1972) tends to suggest in the latter’s description of dyadic ties between the patron and the client. Goffman’s patient (Goffman, 1968:253) is not merely a passive recipient or contributor but makes demands in the form of expectations which oblige the patron or staff to provide additional indulgencies.

Similarly, relations in the underlife are premised on unequal status of inmates of different hierarchies such as captains of dorms, new comers or *brannies*. Inmates such as brannies are not merely passive recipients; the patron and the client are mutually dependent on each other. These relationships involve mutual exchanges of both material and non-material resources where inmates provide certain services in return for some economic gain (Mechlinski, 2007; Olivier de Sardan, 2005).

In patronage relationships, brannies assume the status of ‘corner boys’. Captains who are in charge of dorms adopt such brannies as ‘corner boys’. The latter share the physical and social space with the captains and run errands such as collecting food from the kitchen for them. *Corner boys* in turn enjoy protection and sometimes exemptions from painful rituals:

I was maltreated by my fellow-inmates in dormitory one. My fellow inmates pulled my nose and did *pump* to me. Kojo was the captain then and was a very quiet person and could not protect me all the time. Kojo however took me as a corner boy and so that helped me; I would go and collect his food for him and run errands for him.  
(Nana Amponsah, May 14, 2010)

Patronage practices are not only limited to inmates but staff are also beneficiaries. Captains or other inmates provide services beside their usual obligations. Such services include being sent by staff to the kitchen to collect food, or watch over an officer’s house when the officer attends to some other duty outside the premises. Youngsters, in turn, are rewarded in kind or cash.

Patron relationships between staff and inmates, though asymmetric, yet exhibit dependence of the patron on the client. An officer at the female center lamented about how she would miss the services of a female captain upon discharge:

I am really going to miss Yaa, the girl’s captain. She was almost like a daughter to me. She could freely enter my kitchen and never touched anything and would not even ask of anything. I do not worry about the possibility of a theft when I go to town as she watches over the house. There is no replacement for her! (JCC, Officer, December 16, 2010).

Thus, it is not only warders or officers that possess the power to command resources, inmates do too. In other words, while youngsters seek to maintain the support of officers or captains, officers also find themselves in powerless situations where they become dependent on inmates. Mechlinski (2007) noted same in his study on transportation in

West Africa that patron client relationships went beyond dyadic or unidirectional relationships to complex set of networks, where sometimes the patron became the client.

The observation about interdependencies between warders and captains show that youngsters do not always portray a unified body of inmates with a functional shared identity. On the contrary, youngsters engage in practices, which are not only in themselves differentiated and diversified, but are embroiled with staff practices. In other words, one does not encounter a body of like-situated youngsters with group cohesion and solidarity against prison staff, characteristic of a unified inmate culture. Whereas to some extent, underlife manifest a social life characterized by rules, norms and rituals, it is far from being internally homogenous and should be contrasted with a unified deviant or alternative culture that resists dominant culture.

Similarly, inmate hierarchies are not necessarily constructed on the basis of identity positions or institutionally defined statuses such as race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality. On the contrary, hierarchies are constructed on the basis of an active creative search for freedom or privacy which is contested by captains and brannies. Statuses and hierarchies are thus far from fixed but are negotiated through practices that result in interdependence and the sharing of resources. In such underlife, power to command punishment and compliance with rituals or insider rules, such as consigning a brannie to a corner or subjecting him to a ritual, is evident. At the same time power to command resources both material (such as food, money, gifts) and non-material (such as kindness, care, protection, love) through patronage practices, is constructed among inmates of different levels of hierarchy—captains, seniors, brannies - and also between inmates and staff. Both the powerful and powerless manage to carve out social, economic, private and even spiritual spaces in order meet their everyday needs. Practices are therefore complex, dynamic and entangled, different from dichotomous relationships as portrayed by Goffman (1968) and Scott (1990) as regards inmates versus staff and dominant versus oppressed.

While trust and reciprocity are crucial elements of such patronage relationships, these elements fade easily, rendering relations sometimes transitory, to the disappointment of one party or the other. For instance, youngsters abscond regardless of however kind officers are to them. A female officer spoke about a female youngster whom she had taken as her daughter but later got disappointed:

I took Tina as my daughter, she ate in my house and did almost everything as my daughter and then she betrayed my trust and absconded. (JCC, Female Officer, Dec 14 2010).

Warders expect that in return for kindness shown to youngsters, such as cooking for them or presenting them with gifts, the latter would reciprocate with good behaviour and not abscond and yet this is not always the case.

In patronage practices, certain compromises are sometimes made as staff and inmates tend to go outside their acceptable boundaries and in the process, gains are yielded to both inmates and staff. For instance, by accepting to run an errand for staff, or to watch over the premises of a staff member, an inmate has to forgo some institutional activity. This may demand that staff members who have charge over the inmate condone such acts as they may also be beneficiaries in future.

This situation which presents blurred or porous boundaries between staff and inmates is contrasted with the suggestion by Crawley (2006) to draw a neat line between prisoners and staff so as not to threaten authority and security. Crawley (ibid) however realizes that this may not be realistic in practice as he also notes that when staff is friendly with inmates it oils the wheels of the system and keeps it functioning the way it should.

As demonstrated by foregoing examples, the kind of underlife manifested in detention goes beyond the neat boundaries between staff and inmates outlined by Goffman (1968). According to him, the creation of a marked boundary between the official and the unofficial, the public and the private, helps officers to perceive of themselves as executing their roles perfectly. My in-depth ethnographic data shows the reverse picture, that the underlife is characterised by blurred boundaries.

### *Crossing borders from total institutions*

Patronage practices such as a youngster exercising oversight over an officer's quarters, engage both the ruler and the ruled, in cooperative and mutually beneficial ways. By watching over officers' homes, youngsters enjoy benefits such as being able to watch television, and the possibility of accessing internet. Each dorm also has access to a television. Thus right within the confines of total institutions, youngsters are consumers of the latest trends, being abreast with latest fashion wears, music, theatre, contemporary forms of spirituality, and criminal activity. Right at the doorsteps of total institutions, youngsters are active players of processes of modernity.

By interacting with families of staff or by watching television together, youngsters are not only consumers but also re-position themselves to act on other people thereby contribute to shaping the social, economic and political processes around them. For instance, youngsters such as John developed a friendship with a girl at a school he attended in the city while in committal (SCC, Field notes, February 1, 2010). Theresa managed to influence the children of a female officer by providing them with food (Chapter 5).

The above discussions therefore add another perspective of blurred and permeable boundaries between total institutions and society out there. According to Jefferson and Bandyopadhyay (2010), this continuity between detention institutions and neighbourhoods is well established in the Global South as evidenced in India, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and that the prison of the global south points to the marked notions of porosity and permeability in terms of boundaries. Similarly, Wacquant in his articles “*On the prison as a surrogate ghetto*” (Wacquant 2000) and “*When prison and ghetto meet and mesh*” (Wacquant 2002), makes reference to a carceral continuum, mesh or symbiosis between the prison and the ghetto, considering the two as kindred institutions.

The findings of my study however extend beyond a dyad between detention institutions and their poor neighbourhoods. It is not fixated between the ghetto and the prison but parallels the observations of Jefferson and Bandyopadhyay (2010) that detention institutions are not binary oppositions and that the inside and the outside are entangled and co-exist. Jefferson and Bandyopadhyay (ibid) and Cunha (2005;2008) note that setting prisons apart from neighbourhoods as distinctive categories is characteristic of conventional prison research and this can be problematic.

Prisons and confinement lives are therefore not merely microcosms of broader society neither are relationships limited to a prison ghetto and neighbourhood dyad (Wacquant, 2000, 2001). On the contrary, the total institution is in continuous interaction, not only with the communities in which they are located but in broader socio-economic processes that extend beyond their geographically bounded neighbours.

#### *Underlife and shallow friendships*

According to narratives of youngsters, approximately eight out of ten young offenders lived and managed their affairs independently of their parents and sometimes other



relatives prior to detention. At the time of arrest and while in detention, familial support for youngsters is negligible (Chapter 2.2.1). John shared that friendships that exist in the underlife though shallow are critical for daily survival:

I have friends I talk and laugh with but I cannot talk about personal matters. It is good to have friends around, I had a good friend though I did not share intimate matters but later he was released. We however continued to chat on the phone. The problem here is that, this place you cannot trust anyone not even a friend, you say something deep to someone and next time you hear it elsewhere and you face punishment because of that. Here, friendship is shallow but you cannot do without someone to talk to and laugh with. It also helps if you have something like food to share as friendship is usually give and take. When you receive visitors and they bring you things and you have a friend you do not keep the things to yourself. In the same way, they also share gifts from visitors with you. (SCC, John, February 19, 2010).

Relationships which take the form of peer linkages rather than friendships, such as in the case of John, constitute a lifeline for youngsters. These links, though are treasured, are short lived. Similar to the observations of Mathiesen (2006), peer links in confinement are transitory, they form, un-form and reform depending on resources at stake. In fact, at the time of arrest, most links including peer contacts are loosened (Chapter 3 & 4). Yet, contacts and links are seldom entirely exhausted; youngsters sustain links while in committal and others also re-form new links with churches and religious organizations. In the process of searching new links, youngsters forge new friendships.

Such friendships and associations are opportunistic and thrive more on reciprocity than trust, though some proportion of the trust is still required for such associations and contacts. This possibly implies that anyone who does not have anything to offer in terms of resources may end up being *ankonam* or a loner, in the sense that the person does not enjoy benefits of material and non-material resources from others. Loners however are rare as youngsters seem to make every effort to forge links, even when such links are opportunistic and lack intimacy (Ayete-Nyampong, 2011).

Peer links and friendships, though are lifelines for youngsters, have their repercussions. Yaw in an interview narrated how a friend who was committed ahead of him made life exceptionally unbearable for him due to a betrayal on his side. This friend, who felt betrayed, decided to retaliate by spreading rumours that he was an *ayen* or a wizard and as a result he was isolated and very lonely at the initial stages to the point that

he contemplated escape and actually escaped (Chapter 2.5). Yaw's experience is a further indication of the entanglement of youngsters' pre-detention and custodial worlds.

Thus peer associations are typified by shallow and opportunistic friendships, and sometimes marked by betrayals. With such shallow friendships, youngsters clutch to an active underlife. Such underlife, though characterized by hierarchy and painful rituals, yet, provides social and economic satisfaction.

#### *Appropriation: Spirituality and culprit identification*

In underlife, youngsters draw on formalized religious observances such as church services, reading the Bible and prayer, to appropriate their own diverse forms of spirituality. John explained how such spiritual practices are employed to solve disputes and settle scores among themselves:

... we use the Bible to determine wrongdoers and thieves in their dormitory but this practice is unknown to staff and inmates in other dormitories. Culprits, who are identified using the Bible, face harsh consequences and are not let to go free. (SCC, February 19, 2010)

Youngsters sometimes emerge from their dorms with bruises or bleeding from part of their body and when questioned they usually provide reasons such as they fell or got hit by an object. John admitted beatings and other harsh treatments are meted out to supposed wrongdoers and culprits found out by the Bible:

After we used the Bible to catch the thief in the dorm it resulted in a fight and some people hurt themselves, one person for instance was bleeding when he came to the parade that day. (February 19 2010).

On the basis that youngsters seldom receive visitors from relatives, youngsters thrive on few resources such as food items, soap, dental cream and bathing towels, and jealously guard these personal possessions. Thus the least attempt to deprive one of such survival needs can result in severe anger being unleashed upon 'thieves', a situation that has the tendency of heightening unease among inmates. Given that staff is already preoccupied with all kinds of daily engagements, an underlife that provides an opportunity to solve its own problems keeps the institution functioning the way it is expected to do.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The practical experiences incited by the underlife at these centres seldom evoke a bleak image of young, hopeless and despaired criminals isolated from broader socio-economic processes of change and at the mercy of a unitary life that the forcing house of a total institution imposes on them. On the contrary, in the claws of a total institution, confined youngsters and children who are seemingly isolated, hopeless and powerless, position themselves as active players of socio-economic processes of which they keep belonging to across institutional boundaries.

Like offstage admissions (Scott, 1990) of staff in chapter 3, this chapter draws a parallel with Scott's weapons of the weak and Goffman's secondary (Goffman, 1968) adjustments. Weapons of the weak and secondary adjustments are employed by the supposed powerless, not glaringly on stage but in subtle ways, to meet their own ends. However, the underlife, according to examples cited in this chapter does not always occur offstage. But, as Goffman correctly observed, some secondary adjustments were practiced in the open, for instance, when he cited the example of the patient who drunk in the open (Goffman, 1968:274). Such adjustments according to Goffman (*ibid*), afford patients a sense of selfhood and personal autonomy "beyond the grasp of the organisation" (*ibid*: 275-276).

Goffman's secondary adjustments could be likened to Scott's (Scott, 1985) weapon of the weak. Yet, the underlife should not be envisioned merely as a weapon aimed at the oppressor or officers. In contrast, it has its own internal dynamics, such as various hierarchies that manifest and ways by which youngsters lay claim to their needs. This kind of underlife transcends marked boundaries of staff roles and patient underlife outlined by Goffman (*idem*), the oppressor and the oppressed (Scott 1985;1990), a total institution and an inmate subculture (Hensley et al 2003). It is not a two-way, binary dichotomous relationship between the powerful and the powerless. Neither is it the underworld of inmates only nor should it be reduced to a homogenous subculture of inmates positioned against a dominant total institution.

According to Goffman, secondary adjustments are relatively unimportant given that it is limited to 'only a handful' and does not receive the degree of official importance accorded primary adjustments. In contrast, the underlife in correctional institutions contributes quite significantly to the everyday life of inmates, staff as well as correctional centres. It is a complex social life that engages the cooperation of a hierarchy of inmates

and also staff in a mutual exchange of material and non-material resources. Further, experiences of the underlife are entangled with youngsters' custodial and underlife encounters as depicted in Yaw's narrative (Chapter 2.5). This advances the argument in chapter 3 about the permeability of boundaries and entanglements of various social worlds. Such blurred boundaries and entanglements can however, only be conceived in the underlife of these institutions and yet this vital aspect of detention life is shielded from legal, human rights and criminal justice debates and considerations

The chapter clearly acknowledges the survival efforts, intentionality and creativity of youngsters in making a social life, drawing on material and non-material resources within or 'beneath' of the institution and its constraining structures such as the difficulty of being confined or not receiving visits from relations due to sustained parental rejection.

The dynamics of the underlife in police cells and correctional centres against the backdrop of rejection by family (Chapter 2) and mortification procedures of correctional institutions (Chapter 3) needs to be seen in the context of a grip between structure and agency. Youngsters do not permanently escape from the paradoxes of domination or the constraining effects of structure; the agency that youngsters exert is after all a power of the powerless. In this vein, I contradict Long's (Long, 2001) view , which tends to suggest complete agency in the face of structural constraints.

## **Chapter 5 Paradoxes of escapes and complexities of confinement**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Regardless of the objectives of penal intervention, life in detention is structured around keeping inmates in custody. Detention authorities are daily preoccupied with ensuring that inmates do not abscond. However, escapes as ensuing discussions reveal are inevitable.

This chapter argues that escapes in correctional centres cannot be reduced to preventing inmates from absconding and punishing those who escape. Such reduction glosses over the complexities of confinement practice (Sparks, 1996) characterized by contestations, collusions, violence, power dynamics and entangled relationships. This chapter portrays the dynamism and paradoxes that surround escape attempts in daily detention life and establishes escapes as constituting an integral part of everyday entangled relationships of confinement life. It illustrates through the narration of three cases (section 5.3) that detention life by virtue of its organization, incites escapes and violence. Conversely, escapes which are usually characterized by violence also results in the strengthening of totalistic measures thereby evoking measures of confinement.

The chapter begins with numerous paradoxes that surround escape events, noting that activities such as educational provisions are purported to bring about correction and reduce the incidence of escapes. Yet, escapes by their occurrence also result in curtailment of activities purported to promote correction. Correction centres, in their endeavour to be circumspect and to keep inmates in custody, need to anticipate escapes and adopt totalistic measures with respect to inmates as well as staff. However enforcing such totalistic measures is not always easy to achieve.

Escape events open detention life and evoke spontaneous narrations by numerous actors. Such spontaneous narrations facilitated the documentation of one elaborate case and two brief cases about youngsters, illustrating that everyday detention life is caught within the grip of interconnected paradoxes of violence, escapes and confinement. These three cases described in more detail below provide instances of open resistance, defiance, collusions and also nuances about how some youngsters position themselves as the powerful, thereby evoking uneasiness and sometimes fear among staff.

In sum, I demonstrate that escape events command attention to everyday detention conduct and relationships that exist amongst inmates and staff. Consequently, considerations about escapes should not merely be reduced to their prevention and recapture of inmates. It should be regarded from all aspects of detention life, particularly the under life and hidden transcripts of total institutions.

## **5.2 Escapes and the paradox of reinforcing totalistic measures**

Escape data as reported by the Ghana Prisons Service, is not disaggregated on the basis of age, thus no separate data on escapes exist for the SCC. The average escape rate based on the average daily lock up of prisoners from 2005 to 2009 is 0.5%. In an interview with the Officer in Charge of the boys' institution (SCC, July 26, 2010) who had newly assumed post, he quoted the daily lock-up as 131 (Chapter 3.1.1) with one escape. However, I observed that a number of escapes occurred during the period of field work. For instance, James had escaped thrice, three other youngsters escaped at the same time and there were escapes of two other youngsters. Thus approximately, an average of four escapes occurred annually within the period of field work, resulting in an escape rate of 3% which is higher than the officially recorded figure.

The girls' institution, (JCC) has a small lock-up population relative to the SCC. Yet, the JCC experiences escapes more frequently than the SCC. The escape rate<sup>lx</sup> was about 50% during the period of field work with four out of eight girls absconding more than once during the period of committal. Akua for instance absconded four times and was recaptured, the fifth time when she escaped, it was for good (JCC, Fieldnotes, November 4, 2010). Generally, official records on escapes, both at the JCC and the SCC do not adequately cover the frequency of escapes observed in practice.

Youngsters cite various reasons for embarking on escapes. The majority of girls during focus group discussions (JCC, FGD, March 19, 2010) said they dreaded being locked up as punishment and so abscond in order to escape such punishment. Yaa escaped because she did not want her hair cut in compliance with the rules of the institution (JCC, Fieldnotes, November 4, 2010). Grace, in an interview said she escaped because she wanted to demonstrate her frustration to her father who was indebted to the centre and so did not visit her often. She feared that the father's indebtedness meant that even when her discharge was due, the centre would further detain her until all debts were paid. (JCC, Fieldnotes, May 28,

2010). James said he escaped to show his disapproval for a demotion he suffered from dorm five to four; the fact that he was branded a notorious boy by most officers and because his stay in an isolation room was unbearable for him. He also cited another boy who escaped as a result of being demoted. (SCC, Fieldnotes, August 19, 2010). Yaw escaped because he was maltreated in dorm one, having been labelled a wizard by a friend who accused Yaw of betrayal during their pre-custodial lives (Chapter 2.5).

In view of the frequency of escapes and the importance that correction institutions attach to escapes, these institutions employ programs such as educational training and religious activity which are purported as crucial means to correct and reform, but also to keep youngsters in custody. A senior officer states:

Over the years the rate of escapes has reduced remarkably as we organize a lot of educational programmes to engage their attention. Even now, we have started the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASCE) programme and we hope that it will pick up with time. (SCC, February 3, 2010)

By participating in educational activities, youngsters are kept busy and the tendency of escapes is reduced. Thus promoting various educational activities is interlinked with promoting the custody of inmates.

However, the event of an actual escape incident would sometimes induce an opposite effect; outdoor activities such as formal and non-formal lessons and workshops and even religious activity come to a halt and young people are kept behind doors longer than usual. Other times, special arrangements are put in place so as to prevent a re-occurrence of escapes. At the initial stages of field work at the JCC, I observed that young girls worked in two groups and these groups alternated their participation in vocational activity such as dressmaking and hairdressing. Given that two vocational lessons were conducted concurrently, the arrangement afforded girls the opportunity to participate in other activities. However following an escape incident the institution would tighten security and monitoring measures at the expense of skills acquisition and youngsters were made to participate in only one type of skills training at a time. This arrangement was to afford monitoring of the movements of youngsters by few available staff. Keeping inmates in custody is therefore an overriding goal which sometimes demands that activities purported to promote correction, are curtailed.

By maintaining an appearance of being able to keep inmates in custody, institutions rather spur on escapes. Detention institutions endeavour to prudently handle escape

information internally and do not always disclose escape occurrences. A senior officer emphasized non-disclosure of escape information, though citing the interest of youngsters.

Inmates who abscond are usually sent to the adult prison and locked up and then on their return, are demoted and sent to the first or second dorm. Sometimes we calculate the days they stayed away and add it to their sentence. We do not report them to the police, if we did, they would be taken to court and given an additional sentence and so we try to handle it ourselves. (SCC, February 3, 2010)

At a staff meeting, a senior staff reiterated to other staff that escape disclosure can have repercussions on staff. At the meeting, one officer who is a dorm warden made reference to a boy who by means of internal arrangements was sent to an adult's prison located close to the correctional centre as punishment. This officer complained that the boy had been detained for too long at the adult prison. The chair retorted:

We are good administrators and we know what we are doing and so the boy should remain there so we can have our peace and quiet.

The officer not convinced about the informal arrangement between the two institutions and unperturbed by the remark of his superior, further said that the institution should level a charge against the boy and to this, the chair responded quite in a harsh tone:

If we charge him you are the very people it will affect, and you know it very well. We must learn to contain things and deal with them our way so it will not go to the top. Even when the top gets to know, we will tell them that we are handling things our own way (giggles amongst staff)'. (SCC, April 30, 2010)

Thus escapes can have adverse ramifications thus requiring that correctional institutions approach escape data with care and circumspection. Officers are quick to react to any disclosure of escape information, which in turn can adversely affect the image of the institution. In a meeting (SCC, May 21, 2010) with senior staff, I mentioned that youngsters reportedly escape because their stay in the first dorm is unbearable for them. After this indication to staff, a number of measures were immediately put in place. Regular meetings were arranged for inmates of dorm one to discuss their peculiar problems and additionally the institution began to consider the possibility of promoting activities for youngsters so they did not have to stay in lock-up for too long a period.

Escape information though may be accessible through published reports of the Ghana Prisons Service; incidences are not easily verifiable due to the difficulty in accessing detention institutions by researchers. The situation of keeping escape information internal to institutions however presents a paradox. Whereas the logic of



detention institutions demand that detainees or youngsters are kept in custody, the attitude of shielding escape incidences as depicted by the chair of the staff meeting (see section 5,2) rather tends to incite youngsters to escape. Although very severe punishment awaits escapees who are recaptured, youngsters, knowing that escapes are not made public, rather take chances and escape and are not deterred by the punishment that awaits them when they are recovered.

All correctional centres for young and juvenile offenders in Ghana seeking to project an image of correction are devoid of high walls. They do so by not putting up high walls around their compounds. Low walls, however, pose a security challenge for staff as shared by some officers:

The walls are so low; some time ago, Yaa and some other girls jumped the wall at the side of the plantation...In fact, the walls are too low and this does not help us at all. (SCC, February 21, 2010)

The compound is not fenced and the walls are very low. One of the boys last week said he was going to use the toilet and he never returned, so you see... when it happens like that then you are queried. You see, one of the senior officers has sent this boy to collect something from me and the boy is by himself, now if something happens, then I am to blame. (SCC, Dec 14, 2010)

Thus the physical structure of correctional centres according to officers is in itself an invitation to abscond and tends to defeat not only the goals of penal intervention but also the very existence of prison officers, whose key function is to ensure that youngsters do not abscond. The paradox here is that they wish to perform as prison officers, in keeping with their formal status. However, the physical structure of the correctional centre challenges this performance as a total institution.

### *High fencing liberates and low fencing imprisons*

Low fencing walls, according to officers, symbolically send the message that youngsters are in a correctional centre or at a school and not entirely cut off from the outside world. Youngsters, however, interpret the existence of low walls differently. In fact low walls according to youngsters induce an opposite effect and give them a feeling of being imprisoned. Youngsters shared their opinion when they were interviewed in a focus group discussion about their views on the fenceless nature of correction centres:

The place should be fenced so that we can move freely. Now, we are locked up for so many hours and followed everywhere because there

is no fencing and officers fear that we might abscond. (JCC, FGD, March 19, 2010)

For most youngsters, the absence of high walls, though it tends to make escapes easier, has a constraining effect. They are closely monitored and their freedom of movement is restricted. The resulting condition is that it makes them feel imprisoned.

The fact that low walls invite youngsters to escape and escapes are kept from public notice, does not imply that no efforts are made by institutions to recover inmates who abscond. Institutions severely punish youngsters that attempt to escape. The diligence of the severity of sanctions that youngsters who are recovered by the institution are subjected to is the sort of diligence described by Goffman (Goffman, 1968:62) as breaking the intransigent inmate or showing “as much special devotion to the rebel as he has shown to it”

Staff meetings are conducted to discuss stringent measures. In one such meeting, one senior officer who chaired the meeting gave the following directives:

The wearing of long sleeves by boys is banned-as they can hide *asor* blades underneath. If the boys misbehave, report them and we shall punish them’...She continued: ‘You must intensify searches as the boys tie all sorts of things to their knees and bodies, even if you need to check their buttocks, do so. (SCC, Field notes, April 30, 2010)

A subordinate officer in response to this directive said that youngsters deliberately did not listen to them and so they would employ more repressive and stringent measures to ensure they were compliant. Martin (2010) observed a similar situation in Ugandan prisons and described escapes as most dramatic and potentially harmful professional experience for Ugandan prison staff. According to Martin (ibid), escapes directly challenge staff’s professional survival and the latter have traditionally responded with brute, if not lethal force, if an escapee is recaptured. Similarly, Bandyopadhyay and Jefferson (2010), observed that escapes symbolically reassert an imagined total institution where warders assert authority and prisoners play a submissive role. Bandyopadhyay (2010) further noted that escapes do not only evoke stringent measures and close detention space but also close research space and restrict access to researchers. She observed that whenever there was a jail break within the period of her field work in India, she was requested by prisoner authorities to avoid being around for about a week. This compliant and submissive role incited by escapes is however not limited to inmates only, escape situations also evoke the need for compliant staff.

Escapes evoke stringent measures for youngsters as well as staff. At the same meeting by staff, the chair further said:

This time I leave the office late and I realize that some of you are not at post at the time I leave. Sometime when I get to the dormitory I honk but no one comes out and I do not see anyone. You remember the last time James said that he and the other boys absconded when no officer was around. So you see that we have our selves to blame. (SCC, Fieldnotes, April 30, 2010).

Upon saying this, the meeting became rowdy with officers talking out loud and blaming one another for various reasons and calling one another liars.

In ending the meeting, the chair said: 'I would stringently enforce my measures. I warn you to be regular and punctual at services; I would start taking note of latecomers'.

One officer had prior to this meeting shared with me his frustrations that officers encounter when inmates who are put in their charge, escape:

When you supervise a youngster and he absconds, there is trouble for you. Your rank is reduced or you forfeit your increment for about six months. (SCC, April 26, 2010)

Thus the anticipation of escapes or the actual event of escapes incites the reassertion of totalistic and repressive measures not only for inmates but also for staff. While inmates are monitored, officers themselves are also monitored and while inmates are punished, officers are also punished. Yet, enforcing compliance is not always easy to achieve. Despite officers' seemingly brute responses, they are not always successful (see Chapter 4) in breaking the intransigent inmate.

### **5.3 Escapes reinforce totalistic measure but also open up detention life**

Escapes also open up detention life and evoke multiple and spontaneous narrations by numerous actors mostly insiders. Insiders in this regard are not limited to staff and inmates only but include anyone involved regularly in everyday detention activity such as hawkers who sell food on the compound and who are privy to daily occurrences. Escapes open up private and social spaces for offstage chat, power and interest contestations, which break the monotony and sameness that characterize detention life. Almost everyone from the officer in charge through the various levels of officers to youngsters have some information to offer as an explanation, either directly or remotely related to the escape. In fact, contrary to Bandyopadhyay's observation (*idem*) escapes in my experience were advantageous because I had somehow attained an insider status and took the opportunity

for engaging in discussions and observations which would not have been possible during a planned interview session.

Below I present three cases that demonstrate the centrality of escapes to confinement life, inmates, officers and correctional institutions as a whole. On the basis of escape incidents involving Afua, Theresa and James, I illustrate everyday complexities that characterize escape occurrences and how these intricacies unfold through multiple narrations that are dotted with violent acts, revenge, intimidation and sometime emotional outbursts.

### **5.3.1 Afua's case: Violence evokes violence**

This elaborate case draws on participant observations over a period of eighteen months and details various spontaneous narrations surrounding an escape incident involving Afua, a female young offender. In this case, I trace various mechanisms in which confinement life invites escapes and vice versa. Afua at the age of fifteen was pregnant when committed to the JCC and eventually gave birth while in committal. She nursed the baby for some time after which to her dismay, the baby was transferred to a children's home.

One morning while the girls were holding their morning lessons, I noticed that three out of eight girls, including Afua were missing. Upon enquiry the girls said they had absconded. I could not speak further with them on the issue as lessons were in progress so I went to the office of the headmistress where I met her and other officers in a meeting. They asked whether I had heard what had happened and the head went ahead to narrate to me what had ensued:

It was in the evening and the girls were watching television. Theresa, one of the girls, with a special case and the oldest among the girls who was inside the dorm, was invited by the other girls to join them watch a TV programme. Upon joining them, she changed the TV channel to a different programme to the dismay of the other girls. A squabble arose amongst them as a result and the girls began to beat up Theresa. Afua and Akua, (regarded by staff as the 'notorious girl'), bit Theresa leaving marks on her body. Even while Theresa was weak and crying in her room, Akua, still followed again and pulled her hair... (JCC, Jan 27, 2010).

The headmistress called Theresa in and showed the scars to me and said that she was receiving treatment at the hospital.

Two weeks after the incident when Theresa was feeling better, I spoke with her. She confirmed the incident and also revealed some additional information about her relationship with other staff.

Theresa narrated her side of the incident:

We were all watching television and I wanted the channel changed. Three of the girls by name Afua, Akua and Akpene got angry and did not allow me but I insisted and Afua and Akua jumped on me and started beating me. Before this incident I had been beaten several times (many a time the other girls just looked on). All the girls with the exception of two had beaten me before. I usually get infuriated by comments that they make such as 'who is your father?' and 'who is your mother?' and so I also insult them. Sometimes an officer looks on while I am being beaten. This officer was the one to whom I was entrusted when I first arrived at the centre and so I visited her often and liked her very much. However, she leaked confidential information from the doctor about me and that made me very angry. (JCC, February 17, 2010)

Theresa's story depicts that escapes are not merely about youngsters absconding. On the contrary, everyday detention life which is replete with conflicting interests and power play, incites violent behaviour including inter-inmate violence.

Stemming from Theresa's story, youngsters such as Afua, Akua, Akpene and Theresa manifest conflicting interests as they seek to dominate one another based on what television channel to watch. Theresa being the oldest among them must have taken the decision to view a particular channel by virtue of her age. Among the girls, Afua and Akua are most noted for their open defiance. Akua, who is older than Afua usually manifests open rudeness in the form of frowns, shouts, insults, and in collaboration with a few others invoke curses on officers. Sometimes Akua places her hands on the hips and takes calculated steps, in the full glare of warders - this gesture of placing hands on the hips and walking confidently in front of others especially adults is regarded by officers as a very rude gesture. Afua and Akua also appear physically stronger than all the other girls. Akua has a heftier build and a reputation of openly assaulting other girls and sometimes even threatening staff with assaults.

Afua bears an innocent face but she is also known for being verbally assaultive. Afua and Akua tend to take advantage of their physical strength and coupled with their earned reputation of being openly defiant and aggressive, they tend to get away with certain acts such as depicted in Theresa's story. These two girls do not however have the upper hand always as they sometimes stand the chance of being sanctioned when reported.

Theresa is usually assigned certain cleaning duties by management which result in girls associating her with the ‘authorities’ of the centre, and suspecting that she might relay certain happenings in the dorm to the authorities. By being older than the other girls and her association with the powerful in the institution, Theresa assumes a power status among the other girls even when she is driven to a state of powerlessness by being beaten. Though Theresa suffered at the hand of the two stronger girls, yet her association with the centre’s authorities’ evoked fear in the two girls because of the possibility of sanction of being put in an isolation room commonly referred to as *remand*. Whereas girls may possess a history of violence stemming from their past prior to committal, happenings such as squabbles, fights and violent acts easily arise when various interests and power clash.

Confinement life does not only evoke violence among youngsters but incites violence that extends to one’s own child as shown in the section below. At the meeting with staff, I asked why Afua who was nursing a three month old baby should abscond. One of the officers at the meeting responded: ‘Afua had already started showing signs of neglect, not feeding the baby regularly, shouting at the baby to keep quiet and to stop crying and she recently locked the baby in a cupboard and also put her in hot water’. The head interjected: ‘I had initiated processes to send the baby to the children’s home’.

Other issues however surfaced in the course of the meeting when I asked why they thought Afua behaved the way she did. The head responded: ‘Once, Afua had mentioned that the baby would rather die than be taken to a children’s home’. (JCC, January 27, 2010). Thus the thought and the possible warning of sending the baby to the children home must have driven Afua to such acts of violence and the latter must have been a way of expressing her disgust and fear of being severed from her child.

Afua had been re-captured and two weeks following the meeting, I asked to see Afua at the remand room. The officer who had the keys, called out to one of the youngsters to accompany her as it was not safe to go alone. The officer said that some time ago, in an attempt to open the door to the remand, a girl in the remand cell pushed the officer away and attempted to run away. We however managed to enter safely and I spoke with Afua briefly. She said:

I put the blame on Akua, who absconded with me as she advised me to do so. But I also decided to escape on account of previous happenings as I did not want to be in the remand cell after the quarrel that arose in the dorm and so I boarded a taxi and left, I did not pay the taxi driver... (JCC, February, 15 2010)

Two days later, I visited Afua again and she spoke further about the escape incident:

I absconded because I feared to be on remand after the incident involving Theresa. I remember when I came newly, I was put on remand for seven months and I decided I was not going back there again. (JCC, February 17, 2010)

Afua had possibly anticipated the repercussions of the incident and considering the punishment the incident was likely to attract she decided to escape, though the bait must have been the company Akua offered. However, a crucial issue for Afua seemed to be that her baby was to be sent to the children's home:

I was unhappy when I heard that the baby was to be sent to the children's home as I wanted to keep my baby. My aunt said that I undertake apprenticeship in hairdressing so I would become a hair dresser. I actually had not planned to return. I hear that babies sent to the home were usually sold and I did not want that. (JCC, February, 17, 2010)

The girls' institution, according to the head, sometimes makes arrangements at the children's home for fosterage<sup>lxi</sup> of babies of youngsters who are unable to provide the required care for their children, though with their mothers' consent. Afua in anticipation of being put in a remand cell and her child being sold began to exhibit aggressive and violent behavior. Youngsters on the whole, are considered by staff as being potentially violent as depicted in the indication of the officer that it was not safe to enter the remand cell alone. Ironically, while officers anticipate violence from youngsters, they also rely on same physically strong youngsters for protection, as an indication that youngsters are not always violent, and can be depended upon to ensure safety of officers. In fact, I have observed in my daily interaction with youngsters that despite the exhibition of certain violent acts, they also manifest pleasant and kind gestures. Afua has on a number of occasions held her baby tenderly, sang to the baby and fed the baby.

The above section unearths varying levels of interest and power clashes that are evident also in staff-inmate interfaces. The management's consideration to send Afua's baby to the children's home clearly clashed with Afua's interest.

In the remand room, Afua shared her frustrations regarding certain structural needs:

My father does not visit often; he has visited only once. Every month my father is expected to pay 20 GHS (11.80 USD) monthly to the centre, which he does not do. My boyfriend was also asked to

clear hospital bills when I delivered but he has not done that. (JCC, February, 17, 2010)

Thus, besides the fear of being put in a remand cell, Afua must have been needing visits from home. While everyday detention life incites certain behaviour in young offenders, structural factors are equally contributive, for Afua's closest relatives, the father and boyfriend were negligent. Starved of the support from the family and the father of her child coupled with everyday detention violence, Afua seemed to have had enough encouragement for her violent actions and physical abuse meted out to her own baby. The interplay of everyday and structural violence in correctional institutions parallels portrayal of violent behavior of children and youngsters by Luis Bunuel's depiction of life in Mexico's slums in the film "Los Olvidados" (Bunuel, 2010). El Jaibo, Petro and other youngsters who come from a background of structural inequality, exhibit everyday violence such as beating up an old blind beggar and a man without limbs. Even within the confines of an institution, Petro's violent actions were driven both by structural factors and everyday occurrences.

At the same meeting with staff, the head also considered another option besides sending Afua's baby to the children's home:

I was considering probation because having spent six months at the centre, Afua could be released on license under the supervision of a social worker and so earlier this month I and some staff went to look for Afua's father, in efforts to explore this option.

The head, at the meeting shared some frustrations the institution had encountered in ensuring that Afua's father assumed some responsibility for Afua's stay when the possibility of probation was then considered:

Upon consideration of a probation option, we decided to trace Afua's father. It was a tiring search; the father had defaulted in certain payments to the centre and so he had tried to avoid any contact with Afua and the home. We left in the morning at about 9am and finally managed to bring to the centre some of Afua's relations including her father at about 4.30pm. Afua had previously not received any visits from anyone apart from the boyfriend who is also a young man of about eighteen years but with no employment.

Another officer confirmed that because Afua's father had defaulted in payments, he was unwilling to cooperate with the institution to trace Afua's whereabouts: 'I'm sure the father of Afua was concealing some information purposively as the correctional centre had demanded payment of 300 GHS (176 USD) from the family towards the upkeep of Afua and the baby and which the father seemed unwilling to pay'. (JCC, February 2, 2010)



Besides attempts by Afua's father to avoid contact with the institution, other issues according to the head made it impossible to pursue the probation option.

On the day Afua's relations and father were brought to the centre, Afua's auntie stayed with her for a while and the auntie even bathed the baby. The father before departure gave Afua 2.00GHS (1.20 USD). Afua apparently got angered because the money was too small and as a result, threw both the money and insults at her father. The father became furious and told us to give the baby up for adoption. The father said to us not waste our time to trace Afua's mother as the mother gave up on Afua long ago. (Head of the institution, JCC, January 27, 2010)

According to the head, the aunt also said that when Afua absconded and came home, she left the baby with her (the aunt) and went somewhere else unknown to the aunt. The aunt indicated that though she was willing to assist Afua, she did not want anything to do with her because of her rude behaviour. The head therefore concluded that the probation option was not viable as no relative was willing to assume responsibility if Afua was released.

Afua's baby was finally taken to the children's home. While participating in a dressmaking lesson, I overheard the girls and the teacher speaking about Afua's baby. Afua then was still under punishment and kept in the isolation room. They said: 'The baby is not feeling well; he is running and not eating well and so he has been admitted to the hospital...' (JCC, Fieldnotes, March 3, 2010). I asked one of the teachers when she would be released. She responded: 'I do not really know, you need to find out from the head.' (JCC, Fieldnotes, March 14, 2010)

Regularly, I arranged a meeting with the head and the assistant to discuss issues that had come up during my observations and interviews and I sought an opportunity to discuss Afua's release from the remand cell as she had spent two months in isolation. In response to the question about the duration of time Afua had spent in isolation, and whether or not the institution was considering releasing Afua, the head said: 'Not immediately'. I asked why they still wanted to keep her in the remand cell and she said:

Afua's presence in the remand room served as a check on newly admitted girls as often newly admitted girls are unstable. Currently there are two new comers and they have already started tampering with the windows and have even broken the ball in the cistern and so the toilet can no longer flush. Afua's presence therefore acts as a positive impact on newly admitted girls. Afua partakes of all activities organized for the other girls and only comes to sleep in the

cell in the evening. The presence of an older one always helps them to settle. (JCC, April 6, 2010).

Whereas Afua must have construed her isolation as punishment for absconding and expected a release from the remand, the institution's attention had shifted from punishment to a different function. Afua's presence was now being employed to demotivate newly admitted inmates to escape; this new intention was however unknown to Afua.

*We want escapees recaptured; we do not want escapees recaptured*

When youngsters escape and staff are not able to recover them as was the case with Akua, youngsters position themselves as having overridden the authority of the institutions. Somehow this indicates that, despite the seeming forcing hand of correctional centres, the youngsters can do as they please. This tends to provide justification for institutions creating the impression or appearance that they make every effort to retrieve youngsters, even when escape incidents are kept internal to these institutions. In practice however, there is little success in recapturing youngsters; besides, some staff would rather not have escapees recaptured.

Two weeks following the staff meeting that discussed the escape incident of the girls, one of the senior officers, said to me:

The head insulted and cursed one of the girls and that must have infuriated the girls and contributed to their escape. The head does not seem interested in bringing back Akua who absconded along with Afua. (JCC, February 15, 2010).

Another officer also shared her views:

Akua wrote a very nasty letter to the head when she was about to abscond and the head also thinks that this notorious girl seems to have a negative influence on the others' (JCC, February 15, 2010)

I met yet another officer who shared similar views with me. She said:

The head is not interested in bringing back Akua. I blame the head for insulting the girls, someone in that position should have known better...As for me, I have decided to keep my mouth shut, after all, the management do not involve us, they take their own decisions. (JCC, February 2010, 2010)

While some of the officers cited here were at the meeting with the head when the escape incident was formally narrated to me, these officers only raised issues about what had ensued between the head and Akua and the non-involvement of staff in decision making

within a different setting and not at the meeting. In fact Akua and the other girl who absconded were never recovered. While Akua managed to escape with impunity, Afua was recaptured and subjected to severe punishment.

This inconsistency of institutional treatment of youngsters who escape may contribute to the low recapture rate of youngsters as some are not wanted back and so no efforts are undertaken to recapture them. As depicted above, when youngsters are finally brought back, they are severely sanctioned, put on remand for unduly long periods as was the case with Afua and by so doing, power is re-positioned in the hands of institutions, a demonstration that the latter is in control. Nevertheless, while manifesting as being in charge, staff exhibit numerous conflicting interests and power, for while central management of institution makes efforts or are seen to make efforts to recapture girls from escape, individual officers exhibit divergent interests. The apparent lack of involvement of staff in decisions pertaining to escape incidents and their attendant distancing of staff (keeping one's mouth shut) is an indication of interests that are apart.

### *Backlash from Afua*

Some staff had begun to complain to one another that they were not pleased with some utterances of Afua. One officer said to me:

I would like you to counsel Afua as she has been talking a lot of late and saying so many unnecessary things (JCC, April 16, 2010)

About one month after, I had also observed that Afua acted quite violently while working on the farm one evening with the girls:

Afua wore a frown while she weeded. The girls whispered to themselves something which I did not hear and then the captain acted as though she was teasing Afua and the latter got really angry. She picked up a big stick so I said to her to be careful and then the captain said to me that she dared not hit her. Soon one of the senior officers joined us with her granddaughter; the latter was playing with a stick. Afua immediately lifted the little girl, took the stick from her and forcefully held her tight in the presence of the grandmother and another teacher who was also with us on in the farm. The little girl cried out loud but Afua continued to hold on to her; eventually she let go. (JCC, Fieldnotes, May 8, 2010)

Midway through the year, Afua was finally released but was replaced by another girl, who also absconded and was sent to the remand cell.

### *Afua's final escape*

Following her release, Afua had become generally uninterested in most activities and seldom participated in lessons. When she did participate, it was with little enthusiasm:

I was with the girls in their hall with two officers. All the girls were busy with their sewing. They all seemed to be doing their work quietly. Afua was not with them; I came out and saw Afua lying on the bench. I asked why she was not with the girls in the hall and she said she did not feel like being with them. I asked about her baby and she said that she had visited the baby in August and the baby was doing well. (JCC, Fieldnotes, October 23, 2010)

In December 2010, Afua escaped again. In an interview with the head, she had this to say:

Afua stole bottles of malt when they were invited to a party outside the centre and she (Afua) suspected that she would be reprimanded (possibly put in the remand cell) as the teachers kept saying that they had been disgraced and that they would not attend any party outside. The father, after the escape incident, admitted to seeing Afua and some boys pass in front of his shop following her escape. However, instead of the father arranging to bring her down, he rather called to ask what the centre was doing to locate Afua. The head said the centre informed the children's home that the baby should not be released to her. (JCC, Fieldnotes, January 26, 2011)

Like the other girls, Afua seemed to have escaped for good as she had not been recovered until September 2011 when I last visited the centre.

The ambivalence and inconsistency in institutional actions against escapes is brought to bear through the hesitance exhibited in bringing back escapees such as Akua. By escaping and not returning, Akua is freed from the confines of a correctional institution as well as being kept in isolation. Afua on the other hand had to face punishment and she had her liberties curtailed upon return to the institution, until she also escaped for good.

### **5.3.2 Theresa's case**

#### *The entanglements of the official and the private*

This case is a brief one about Theresa, who was maltreated by Afua and other female youngsters. In her story, Theresa alleged that one of the officers usually looked on while she was being beaten. On the same day that I spoke to Theresa, I also spoke to this officer. I asked about Theresa's background and why she was admitted to the centre as her case was usually referred to by officers as a special case. The officer in question responded:

Theresa was a special case recommended to the centre on the basis of her high temperedness due to a surgical operation she had undergone. She therefore shared one of the dorms with the female juvenile offenders. The doctor spoke to me upon her arrival and asked that I should ensure she was well taken care of. I tried to provide as much support as possible for her. She got a job in a nearby chop bar and usually brought some food along to my children in the evening. She tried to entice my children with food anytime she came and the door was locked so that the children would open the door for her. (JCC, February 17, 2010)

The officer's intention to protect Theresa was however short lived. She continued:

One evening when I was about to enter the girls dorm, I realized that the dorm keys were not being handled properly and so I warned my children not to take food from Theresa any longer as this will stop her from coming to demand the key. I also warned Theresa not to provide the children with food any longer. This however did not go down well with Theresa and so one evening she came to the door with a bowl of food and one of my children told her to go back. When I questioned why she should still bring food to the children, she said she offered them food because they begged for it. While I spoke with her, she became very angry and hurled insults at me. She dared me to draw closer if indeed I was a lady. On hearing this, I no longer could control myself and I beat her up mercilessly.

Thus a relationship that was initiated on the basis of safe guarding the welfare of Theresa rather ended in an assault case. The officer further continued her story:

Theresa reported the case to the head and she was advised to report the case to the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Police Service, which she did. I therefore was summoned to provide explanations as to why I behaved in that manner. They sent some of their officers to carry out investigations but it looked as though they had been prejudiced against me and was unwilling to listen to my side of the case. I was asked to apologize to Theresa as the latter requested I do. I said would never apologize as I suspected that this was a plot by the management of the centre who intentionally incited Theresa to infuriate me and get me into trouble. I was certain that my action was justified and I was ready to go any length to pursue the case further.

This case according to the officer was further referred to their regional head office to handle. The officers along with other officers were summoned to give their respective views. The officer continued:

I stood my grounds amidst various squabbles that arose in the process and the threat to have me transferred. Finally, we were only advised to learn to live amicably and this ended the case. I have however decided that I would keep a distance from these young girls. I used to counsel and advise them but I realized that they were

adept at playing one teacher against the other. (JCC, February 17, 2010)

The same officer involved in Theresa's case also commented about Akua, the girl usually labelled as notorious, whom she initially considered as her daughter, but who later disappointed her. The officer said: 'I would no longer go beyond my official relationship with these girls as I have learnt so many lessons. I took Akua as my daughter, she ate in my house and did almost everything as a daughter but then she betrayed my trust and rather blamed me for the reason of her escape'. (JCC, December, 14 2010). As in Theresa's case, the officer pledged that she would keep a stricter barrier between the official and the private.

Like the JCC, the boys' institution also abounds in relationships that entangle the official and the private and which are connected to escape incidents. One male officer told, in an interview, of how a youngster took advantage of a particular officer to abscond:

A male youngster who absconded along with three other boys enjoyed so many favours from a female officer. The officer was kind to this boy, cooked for him regularly and treated him as a son. Yet it was the same lady who was at post when the boy absconded. (SCC, July 13, 2010)

A similar disappointment was shared by another female officer who also treated a young boy as the son: 'I took one of the boys as a son; cooked for him, cared for him and advised him. This boy however absconded with a friend who reportedly, took him to a gang of armed robbers... I decided to have nothing to do with him'. (SCC, March 20, 2010)

When officers realize that youngsters are caught in some sort of wrongdoing, they back off and withdraw their kind acts. Enforcing a clear boundary between the official and private can be difficult sometimes and cannot always be guaranteed. In everyday detention practice there always exist some form of mutual exchange of material and non- material resources between staff and inmates. In most cases, youngsters benefit from kind acts and are treated like the children of officers. While officers expect that youngsters who benefit from such acts will be compliant, and not abscond, many a time such trust is betrayed, resulting in repercussions for both officers and youngsters. The third case below is yet another example of officers' entanglement at lower levels.

Theresa's case like that of Afua demonstrates that detention life is structured around violence. Additionally, Theresa's case as well as foregoing examples unearths complexities associated with confinement such as the entanglement of the social lives of

youngsters and staff and also the private and official. These enmeshed spheres and relationships which are not without repercussions, challenge the logic of a total institution, which according to Goffman (1968), maintains a marked boundary between the private and the official.

### **5.3.3 James' case: Threats and collusion**

Youngsters sometimes collude with officers at a lower level to flout the dictates of officers at a higher level. James, a young male offender well noted for his notoriety and attempted escapes was confined to an isolation cell by a senior staff. James found conditions of isolation unbearable; the cell was poorly ventilated and hot. He therefore agreed with the officer who supervised him directly to spend a short period daily with other youngsters whose dormitory was attached to the isolation room. This arrangement, based on trust, gave both the officer and the youngster some relief. James enjoyed some freedom and comfort, opportunity to interact with other youngsters, besides being able to watch television. The officer was also relieved of having to keep a 24 hour eye of supervision on James. This arrangement was also known to other officers who supervised the dorm in which the youngster was allowed, known to James' colleagues, but unknown to the superior staff.

This is yet another example of entangled relationships between staff and youngsters; James by being able to negotiate terms that yielded benefits, managed to collude with junior staff so as to flout the rules of senior staff. The arrangement between James and subordinate officers was however short lived as a senior officer on an unannounced supervision round noticed that James was not in the isolation cell. The senior officer sent James back to the cell and subjected him to severer sanctions. James was angered and commented that despite the severity of sanctions, the choice of escape still lay with him, in other words he could decide whether or not to escape.

During an educational lesson (SCC, June 14, 2010), one male officer came to where I was sitting with another officer and let James into the dorm. The officer looked a bit nervous and I asked him who that youngster was (though I knew the boy) and he whispered to me: 'He is a very bad boy and so we are monitoring him very closely. He was the one who used the *asor* blade to cause the recent escape; he is left with a few months to be discharged from the centre and so we are trying to be careful so he can finish

with his term and leave. I asked him the name of the boy. I do not know whether he heard it or not but he did not respond and I asked him whether he was James and he said: 'Very good'. The look on the face showed that he seemed quite surprised that I knew the name of the boy.

James was also at the centre of an offstage conversation at the security gate (SCC, July 5, 2010) where I was with some officers who chatted amongst themselves: One male officer said that James was a very notorious boy and an expert in crime: 'James doesn't sleep at night and he disturbs all the others through the night. I am fearful of him and very cautious about the way I deal with him'.

Soon, an officer who supervises some duties in the yard joined us. He listened in for a while and joined in the conversation. He said: 'I blame the officers for James' defiant behaviour; they ought to switch off the light so he and the youngsters can sleep but they keep the lights on'. I asked whether that was not dangerous as he could hurt the others in the dark, the officer responded: 'Once the lights went off youngsters would be compelled to sleep. In fact, James uses *juju*, a kind of spiritual protection that deprives him of sleep. You know, armed robbers who use such juju are unable to sleep through the night'.

The lady officer amongst them said: 'James recently threatened me and said that if I drew close to him with the intention of punishing him, he would knife me and that I should not compare my meagre salary that I received to his income and that he worked with big people'.

The junior male officer retorted: 'James also smokes marijuana and that explains his behaviour and it possibly has affected his mind. I am just hoping that he will serve his period and go'. I noticed that James had indeed caused a lot of uneasiness particularly amongst staff. At a couple of staff meetings, James was the centre of discussions as officers wondered what to do with him. For a severer punishment, James was kept in an isolation cell at an adult prison, also located within the premises of the Senior Correctional centre but even there James attempted to escape and so he was brought back to the SCC and officers only waited patiently for him to be discharged.



### *Officers' ambivalence*

Not all officers detested the behaviour of James or were intimidated by him. I sat by a female officer one morning (SCC, June 15, 2010) while observing an educational lesson. This was at the same spot that the male officer whispered to me about James. One of the youngsters was then barbering James hair. I asked the officer why James barbered his hair while the others were in the classroom. She said: 'James had a hair-cut that was not allowed by the authorities and so he had to re-barber again'.

Soon James was done with the barbering and he headed for the dorm, where I was sitting with the lady officer. James greeted me and then he also greeted the lady officer with a very broad smile; James bore a serious face with the other male officer yesterday. She let him in and locked the door. While he was in I asked about James. She said:

I do not consider James stubborn as others thought; James enjoyed a high standard life and that he was always compelled to steal in order to keep this standard.

While sitting with her, she shouted to James and asked how many times he bathed in a day and James muttered something which I did not understand, to which the officer responded jokingly that he was telling lies. The officer turned to me and said: '*I like him and he is very neat; he keeps himself very neat*'. (SCC, June 15, 2010)

A female officer shared another viewpoint about James:

You need to talk with the officers because sometimes they also contribute to boys acting the way they do. James said to me that that even though he is known to have made several escape attempts, he tries to reform but officers do not recognize his effort to change and always brand him as a bad boy. For instance some time ago some items were stolen and officers suspected it was James and yet he was not responsible. He was taken to a senior officer and the latter upon seeing him, shouted out: 'You again?' This hurt James so much that he decided to abscond that week. Sometimes, officers brand inmates and stick to their brand even when there is change. (SCC, April 26, 2010)

Prior to James discharge I held an interview with him. He said his actual age was 21 years though his official record stated 20 years: The officers insisted that I stay with him in one of the offices rather than in the open. I requested that they left the office to us both so we could have some privacy. I spoke to him a couple of days before his discharge:

My father is from France and mother is Ghanaian. I never got to see my father and my mother; they never took good care of me. No one really was ready to care for me when I moved from one relation to the other. I felt content with friends, most of whom were

older than me. I attended night clubs, stole from people, hanged out with girl friends and I enjoyed it but it was also a tough world. My outside world is tougher and even though I went through a lot of tough times I am tough enough to face them. I decided to embark on numerous escape attempts because of the way staff treated me. For instance one of the officers demoted me from the 5<sup>th</sup> dorm to the 4<sup>th</sup> without giving me a reason and so I was very angry and said to myself that at all cost I would escape and it was the following day that I escaped. (SCC, James, August 19, 2010.)

While James narrated his story, there was little indication that this was the same youngster that exhibited such violent behaviour and intimidated other officers, in fact I would have doubted James' violent behaviour if I was a cursory visitor, administering interview questions for a couple of hours, with little knowledge of what pertained in everyday detention life. Following a later visit, I was informed that James upon discharge had re-offended and is now in a maximum-security prison for adults.

Although foregoing discussions are replete with examples about the paradoxes of confinement life and how this life invites violence, the experiences of Akua and James as well as other youngsters are undoubtedly underpinned by structural factors. This is because both youngsters had encountered sustained rejection and neglect by their families, and even while in the correctional institute by some officers.

When youngsters such as James collude with officers to defy institutional rules, such youngsters tend to assume an unusually defiant attitude. James situated himself as one who indeed was in control to the extent that some officers tended to be intimidated by his presence. This defiant behaviour is also evident in the case of Theresa who due to her relationship with the officer could handle lock up keys along with the children of the officer and yet Theresa later positioned herself rather as the powerful and dared the officer to beat her. Though these youngsters are met with an equally repressive hand, some tend to defy even such repressive control and position themselves as being in charge. Regardless of the exhibition of defiance and its accompanying intimidation, the boundaries between staff and inmate relationships are far from rigid. Possibly as noted by one of the officers, youngsters such as James may be set on the path of correction when boundaries are not as rigid and youngsters are not markedly labelled as defiant or delinquent and staff not overly aggressive out of fear and frustration

## 5.4 Conclusion

Ethnographic data in this chapter have demonstrated evidence that the occurrence of escapes in correctional centres cannot be reduced to prevention of escapes and punishing youngsters who escape. Such reduction glosses over the complexities of confinement practice characterized by violence, collusions and entangled relationships between staff and inmates. On the contrary, escapes are vital to confinement life, inmates, staff and correctional institutions, hence they command attention regarding how institutions are run and the relationships that exist amongst inmates and staff. Escapes tend to close up detention space by the resultant reinforcement of totalistic measures. Escapes, on the other hand, open detention life, evoking multiple and spontaneous narrations by numerous actors which happens to be advantageous to doing ethnographic research.

Central to this chapter are numerous paradoxes that characterize escapes and detention life, for instance, while escapes evoke confinement and an increase in totalistic measures, confinement life also spurs escapes. Correctional centres anticipate the occurrence of escapes and also invite escapes by their logic of being structured along bureaucratic arrangements, militaristic lines of regulation, totalistic power (Bernault, 2007; Carrabine, 2004) and order, but also arrangements geared towards increasing the liberties of youngsters. The latter emphasizes the image of a correctional institution, by virtue of low walls or fencing, and not retribution.

Whereas youngsters in correctional centres do exhibit kind and non-violent acts, everyday life as portrayed by the three cases of Afua, Theresa and James, are replete with paradoxes of violence and confinement, given that confinement life is organized around the anticipation of violence and by so doing invites violence. Conversely, the occurrence of violence as depicted in the case of Afua and James also evokes isolation and confinement. Correctional centres are not only repositories or warehouses of violence by virtue of housing inmates who possess a history of structural violence. Everyday happenings of confinement life including entangled relations amongst staff and inmates that are dotted with collusions and defiance also generate and produce violence. Such everyday violence is not limited to the dichotomy of dominance and resistance but characterized by ambivalence, entangled relationships, and collusions with youngsters sometimes positioned rather as the dominant.

## Chapter 6 Sidetracking and appropriation

### 6.1 Introduction

Correctional centres can be conceptualized as a development project. Based on empirical data, I argue that in spite of actions and interventions that aim at correction and rehabilitation, youngsters and sometimes staff sidetrack or employ their own practical methods to meet their own objectives. Sidetracking according to Olivier de Sardan (2005) is a way by which target groups ‘appropriate’ a project. Appropriation is the end sought by development operations, and yet it assumes shaping or re-shaping the project in ways that run counter to the project’s objectives and methods. (ibid: 145).

I employ this development concept to demonstrate on the basis of ethnographic evidence that in correction institutions inmates’ objectives tend to correspond to the objectives of institutions in terms of educational and religious provisions, and also other everyday encounters. Yet, in the process of meeting these objectives, youngsters and sometimes staff pursue their own agenda.

By virtue of the name ‘correctional centres’, correctional institutions project a focus on deviance, thus requiring that delinquent youngsters through participating in religious and educational programs can undergo correction.<sup>lxii</sup> Whereas youngsters tend to go along with these objectives, in detention practice, youngsters exploit opportunities at their disposal and manage to pursue their own educational and religious interests rather than those of staff and other professionals in keeping with their own objectives.

I begin in this chapter by focusing on two key provisions – Educational and religious – that correctional centres employ with the intention to promote correction, while detailing various educational provisions such as formal, non-formal and vocational instructions along with their attendant constraints and lack of interest. Further, I present the case of William, an inmate teacher to illustrate the pursuance of non-formal education as a vital institutional goal. I also depict the capability of youngsters to adapt and appropriate educational methods that are in line with their own familiar experiences but which run counter to methods employed by officers and yet yield useful output such as reading skills. Similar to educational provisions, religious observances permeate the entire fabric of correctional institutions. Such observances are employed as tools of change and

reformation and yet are appropriated not only by inmates but also by staff, to suit their specific needs.

Finally, I discuss other forms of appropriation in everyday detention life such as youngsters choosing to withdraw their participation from church services and being able to steer conversational encounters in their favour. In these various forms of appropriations, youngsters create space to manage and pursue their own interests rather than that of staff and sometimes other professionals.

## **6.2 Educational provisions: A source of pride for institutions and a status symbol for youngsters**

Education plays a key role in correctional centres and is highly esteemed by staff and most youngsters. Approximately 80% of each day, apart from Fridays and weekends are committed to educational activities. Narratives of youngsters depict that prior to admission to these centres, youngsters are already aware of the educational function of correctional centres deriving from their sentence which usually states that youngsters are committed so as to acquire a vocational trade or a skill. Institutions pride themselves in their educational attainments and do not hesitate to conduct visitors round their classrooms and educational workshops to observe lessons and to exhibit the latest equipment. Equipment like books, furniture and machines of use in the various vocational and technical workshops are provided by philanthropists, religious organizations, financial institutions and sometime the state.

Youngsters who perform well in educational lessons and those who pass their national examinations are usually cited when reference is made to the achievements of the institution. Such youngsters are also commended as evidence of change by their teachers to their fellow youngsters but also to other practitioners, philanthropists and charity groups who visit. Educational achievement therefore provides a sense of pride for youngsters. Further, possessing a Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) or a West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination<sup>lxiii</sup> (WASSCE) is a status symbol for most youngsters. Male youngsters in possession of a BECE or WASSCE rise to the level of teachers who teach other youngsters. Youngsters in dorms 1 and 2 who are in possession of these certificates are however expected to undergo their mandatory observation period before assuming a teaching role.

The status of a teacher is cherished by youngsters as the latter get to teach a class themselves and by so doing, command deference and respect from other youngsters as is accorded other teachers and officers. Such inmate teachers in the name of class control sometimes punish their students at will and also reward deserving students by calling for applause by the class and thus generally exercise a level of domination over others.

Youngsters who pass certificated national examinations also stand the chance of being supported by philanthropists, church groups and charity groups so as to further their education upon discharge from these institutions. Additionally, certificates serve as some form of guarantee for continuing one's education or attaining some level of employment upon discharge. Youngsters who possess a certificate but who are not selected to teach also exercise another level of authority as they seem not to be subjected to the command of inmate teachers. These youngsters sometimes sit on classroom rails overlooking the class and talking among themselves. On the whole, possession of certificates and attainment of some level of education is highly rated by youngsters and facilitates social mobility amongst them:

...I was unable to write the BECE and even during workshops I managed to spend only about 10 months ... I therefore do not own a single certificate as at now. On release, I would want to attend JHS and SHS and then see what to do next. I am keen on having some education. (SCC, James, August 19, 2010)

On account of the high premium attached to education by both institutions and youngsters, those who are unable to obtain certificates or complete a required period of training express frustration as in the case of James who could not own a certificate.

At the SCC, all youngsters upon admission who have attained some level of formal education prior to committal are enrolled in an organized, hierarchical and structured form of education referred to by the institution as formal education. Youngsters are assessed upon entry to determine the appropriate level of placement; they are then placed in various classes depending on their level of education and then they progress from one level to the other. By enrolling in formal education, youngsters follow the designated national curriculum and syllabus and also sit national certificated examinations such as the BECE and the WASSCE. Formal classes are taught by trained teachers, some of whom are officers and also national service personnel<sup>lxiv</sup>.

According to narratives (chapter 2) youngsters enjoyed schooling while they grew up and so majority discontinued schooling against their will. As many youngsters have

been out of school for a considerable length of time prior to committal, following a rigid daily programme of education is one major change they encounter upon committal.

Whereas youngsters attach an important role to educational attainment given the status symbol associated with it, in practice youngsters show little interest in participating in formal lessons. I observed a lesson (SCC, November 15, 2010) attended by fifteen students. The class was not interactive; the teacher copied notes on the board after which he taught about the nuclear and extended family. The class seemed bored as the teacher lectured most of the time with no regular eye contact with the students and some students comfortably placed their heads on their tables and seemed to be sleeping. Thus youngsters like the certificates but are not always interested in the lessons.

Educational provisions are also plagued with structural constraints. At the initial stages of field work, one class was held under a tree and later moved to an open structure. Other resource constraints were also evident as teachers lamented about lack of textbooks. An officer shared his views:

We lack textbooks and teachers, the centre has only four teachers; the centre has however formally applied to the Ghana Education Service to take over the management of formal education (SCC, February 18, 2010)

Officers also express concern about youngsters' lack of interest in formal educational lessons. Some were of the view that youngsters with minimal education tended not be interested in lessons. While sitting under a tree with some female officers and observing lessons in progress, some female officers commented about youngsters' lack of interest. They said:

Youngsters who have to be forced to study are usually those who hardly have any educational background. Those with substantial educational background know the benefits of education and are more interested. (SCC, February 18, 2010)

Other officers cited educational programmes in adult prisons and commented that adult prisoners showed an immense interest in educational lessons and that even adult cattle herders or Fulani who had no educational background prior to imprisonment were all eager to learn to write (SCC, Field notes, July 13, 2010). Others were of the view that children who do not show seriousness in their studies should be punished so they would sit up.

Thus, educational provision at the SCC was plagued with all kinds of challenges such as low patronage of lessons, resource constraints and inadequacy of textbooks

coupled with youngsters who were not as interested in participating in formal lessons. Regardless of whether or not children showed seriousness in their studies, there came a time when they prepared to write their exams. It is difficult during this period to distinguish between who is studious and who is not, as all of them tended to show keenness in preparing to write their exams. Teachers and the chaplain also provide all necessary moral support, during this period, to ensure that youngsters are well prepared for their exams.

It is significant to note that education for girls is not taken seriously. There is no provision of formal certificated education at the girls' institution. As a result girls who attain some level of formal education before committal are unable to further their education while in detention. Yaa for instance was qualified for Senior High School and was in possession of a BECE certificate at the time of committal. However there was no opportunity for her to advance her formal education during the period she was in detention. Though she participated actively in all the types of vocational training offered and had acquired useful skills, these courses were not certificated. By the time Yaa had served her sentence, her BECE certificate was already five years old and was reportedly not accepted by the schools she had approached for admission. This required that she went back three years to start junior high school all over again. She was keen to do so but the timing of the academic year did not coincide with the period she was discharged from the centre. Later she reportedly resorted to being an apprentice at a hair dressing salon. In my final conversation with her at the time of discharge, she sounded very disappointed and shed tears, for though she was still interested in continuing her formal education and looked forward to becoming a chartered accountant, there was little hope of achieving this goal.

From 2010 onwards, a one-to-one mentoring un-certificated educational programme at the JCC was introduced by a volunteer group of women professionals, "Women's Voice" a non-governmental organization (NGO). Girls could not hide their excitement about this educational mentoring programme as they unhesitatingly spoke about the topics they treated. I found out more about this programme in an interview with the head of NGO:

This programme is being organized by Women's Voice, an NGO, whose members underwent training from the non-formal department of the Ghana Education Service (GES), and come twice a week to provide literacy lessons and mentoring to the girls at the correctional



centre. Each girl is assigned to one teacher with each session lasting for one and a half hours. The girls are very interested in the programme and tend to develop friendship ties with the mentors. (JCC, May 27, 2010)

In fact, it was after the introduction of this programme that Yaa mentioned that she was considering pursuing accounting upon discharge:

I would either go back to Junior High School (JHS) grade 2 or continue to the senior high school level. I am interested in studying accounting to become a chartered accountant and determined to go back to school. (JCC, Dec 16, 2010).

A nineteen year old girl who had no educational background prior to committal also started considering the possibility of pursuing formal education. She was determined that upon discharge she would start school and later learn Mathematics and Social studies at the JHS level. Thus once youngsters were interested in an activity, they were inclined to overlook obstacles such as the duration of schooling or the difficulty of studying.

### **6.2.1 Vocational and Technical Education**

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) at the boys' institution is certificated, like formal education. VTE focuses on the acquisition of practical skills and provides hands-on training and experience for youngsters. Vocational and technical education at the JCC for girls, is however un-certificated and the performance of girls is not assessed based on external examinations as is the case at the SCC for boys.

At the JCC, VTE constitutes the only form of educational provision; it is un-certificated and includes beads making, batik, tie and dye, hairdressing, dressmaking, catering, plumbing and manicure and pedicure lessons. Lessons are conducted daily and commence after breakfast from 9.00am to 4.30pm. The JCC shares the same premises with a vocational institution that admits girls with formal qualifications such as a BECE certificate. Girls generally show very little interest in their VTE lessons and majority admit that they would not pursue any of the VTE courses upon discharge.

VTE at the SCC comprises practical and hands-on instruction in car mechanics, blacksmithing, tailoring, shoe making, carpentry, car and general electrical, and ceramics making. Vocational lessons are attended throughout the day from 9.30am till 4.30pm. As already indicated earlier, youngsters upon admission, are expected to undergo a mandatory minimum period of observation of six months (Chapter 4.4). In practice, this is not the

case as according to youngsters, the period of observation usually lasts for a year and it is only after this period that youngsters can engage in vocational training and workshops. In other words, youngsters whose sentence is one year are unable to participate in any vocational trade. Richard was one of such youngsters. He states: 'I did not learn any vocation as my sentence was 1 year' (SCC, June 21 2010).

Participant observations show that unlike the low interest demonstrated by youngsters in formal educational lessons, youngsters are highly interested in VTE at the SCC. This also explains why the stay in the first dorm can be frustrating for youngsters such as Richard who, along with some youngsters, are unable to participate in workshops as they are virtually kept under lock for the entire day after non formal lessons.

Generally the relationship between youngsters and their instructors during workshops both at the JCC and SCC is quite informal. For many it gives them the social space to talk with one another, buy food for the instructor and as a reward also have something to eat. Girls who partake of plumbing lessons also seek the opportunity to interact with young boys who are on remand, as demonstration lessons are sometimes conducted on the premises of the latter. Sometimes, instructors are external ones and not always familiar with the dos and don'ts. Generally, youngsters enjoy greater freedom during VTE lessons.

### **6.2.2 Non-formal education**

Non formal lessons at the SCC which are tailored to the needs of boys of low educational background are not certificated; neither do they follow a rigid structure. The focus is on basic literacy and numeracy skills; the provision gives no regard to differences in age or in educational attainment. The youngsters refer to non-formal education as well as all other forms of educational provision as *sukuu*, meaning school. Non-formal education which is also referred to as basic or rudimentary classes by officers runs from 8.00am to 9.30am daily. These lessons precede formal education and vocational and technical training at the SCC.

Rudimentary or non-formal lessons are taught by both officers and youngsters (inmate teachers). To qualify to teach, youngsters must have graduated with a BECE or a WASCE certificate. Topics taught usually are at the discretion of teachers. Rudimentary classes do not usually use textbooks; youngsters employ jotters and exercise books to copy

notes from the board. Often young people read out recitals written on the blackboard and are assisted by the teacher to memorize such recitals. Most inmate teachers are observed teaching lessons with great enthusiasm and interest; classes are lively and usually elicit mass responses (one could hear loud responses far off) as well as mass punishments. I noticed that youngsters are generally reluctant (not only in the classrooms) to give one another away publicly hence the frequency of mass punishments<sup>lxv</sup>. By keeping a cane by the side, inmate teachers keep their classes active, alert and their students seldom doze off. Additionally, the cane is used when students are not attentive, do not behave well in class, are unable to respond to questions or provide incorrect answers. On the contrary, the cane is seldom used by teachers during formal lessons; it is employed more as a pointer and hitting the table to draw attention to what is taught.

Youngsters during focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews could not conceal their interest in non-formal lessons. Interviews also revealed that most youngsters were interested in basic literacy and numeracy skills because it facilitated their vocational and technical career as indicated above. Generally, youngsters expressed the need for additional hours and wished they could further their education upon discharge. Richard said: 'One thing I was not happy about is the duration of lessons; the school lessons were too short'. (SCC, June 21, 2010). Others such as Yaw were pleased they could write their names: 'When I came here the second time, I made up mind to be serious with my work and also my schooling because I could not even write my name but the school has helped me very much and now I can write my name and write some few words. (SCC, March 2, 2010). However, schooling for Yaw meant more than just knowing how to write his name: 'I have benefited much from lessons. Even though I am 18 now, I would like to go to back to school as I realize that I need to know the names of the tools I work with. I am therefore determined that I would attend school and also learn a trade'. (SCC, March 2, 2010)

Thus, compared to formal lessons where youngsters may have to be coaxed in order to attend, interest in non-formal lessons is undisputable high, despite the occurrence of corporal punishment. I illustrate this point in the ensuing case when William, an inmate teacher employs methods familiar to youngsters' experiences. Such methods though may not be approved by trained teachers and yet are able to sustain the interest of youngsters in non-formal lessons and also yield useful learning outputs.

A particular case is William, an inmate teacher. On June 2010, I observed a non-formal lesson taught by William, one of the youngsters and he engaged the interest of his

class drawing on his experience in police custody prior to committal. William employed practical methods which trained teachers would classify as crude and yet these methods were not only familiar with fellow youngsters but engaged the interest and the enjoyment of youngsters and also tended to yield useful learning outputs.

I noticed in the course of William's lesson that he gave attention to individual youngsters. He made sure that each student made every effort to read. His methods were rough but seemed effective; he frowned on anyone who could not read and caned seemingly timid people. He was sensitive to whisperings, comments, and movements and quickly brought the class to order by a few lashes. Wrong answers attracted lashes from other youngsters who got theirs right. Anyone who scorned or teased the other was either caned or asked to read from the board. If they were unable to, he would cane them. The boys were sometimes hesitant to cane their fellow friends and when they caned them softly William would cane them again to show them how they should do the caning. He would ask the boys to put their hands behind them while answering questions and taught them how to clap when someone answered well. Over the period that I observed William, he taught the English and the *twi* alphabet in such a way that almost every single person in the class was able to pronounce the alphabet and also draw the letters. He then followed it with two letter words and soon the class started reading out and writing three letter words. Later he introduced short recitals that contained two and three letter words and the class with little difficulty recited without having to commit recitals to memory. Lessons did not follow any uniform syllabus or timetable and William carried out his work independently without much supervision, though an officer usually sat with the inmates, while he taught. On the whole, William was mindful of his methods, content, class control, and commanded a lot of respect amongst youngsters.

In everyday interactions with youngsters, I have observed that they tend to keep and sustain a sharp and focused attention about little details that are usually taken for granted. The minutest of actions attract their attention which I observed through the rapid movements of their eyes. Without an eye contact with youngsters, one seldom notices such movements and sensitivities. Yet, I have sometimes observed that in the presence of adults with whom youngsters are not familiar with, such as other professionals, youngsters usually manifest differently, they exhibit a neutral stance, staring boringly at one end with their eyes showing very little movements. Thus William's sensitivity to whisperings, comments, and movements of his class did not seem by chance.

Undoubtedly, William was in full control of the class and when he called someone to respond to a question and the person did not do so promptly he would say 'is that not your name or did you pick your name from the police station? (June 14 2010). Whenever he asked this question I thought it was merely an attempt to incite laughter so as to bring the class to order or raise alertness. The question, however, carried a further meaning. I gathered from conversations with youngsters during focus group discussions and interviews that some of them changed their names and ages prior to committal at the point of arrest. Thus there was a possibility for such youngsters not to respond to these new names, probably because they had forgotten that they bore these names.

William's case illustrates that although youngsters do not demonstrate much interest in formal education lessons, they creatively construct their own non-formal educational experiences drawing on familiar methods and joint experience.

On the usage of the cane or corporal punishment, youngsters tend to have their own connotations. During focus group discussions they attributed diverse meanings to corporal punishment which is seldom employed by officers during formal educational lessons but it is administered in the yard and sometimes during parades. Staff who employ corporal punishment usually justify this act on the basis of 'spare the rod and spoil the child'. Thus while staff are aware that corporal punishment contravenes the provision of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), they justify the usage of corporal punishment on the grounds of correction. Some staff also unhesitatingly state concerning youngsters that 'they will never change'; and most staff specially dorm warders tend to share this view thus focusing on the objective of control, order, discipline and compliance which augurs for the smooth functioning of a prison institution (Carrabine, 2004), rather than a correctional institute.

During focus group discussions youngsters also expressed different views about corporal punishment. Some say it toughens them and gives them more recognition among peers, as a result of which they command better respect and are able to stand up to harsher treatment. Such youngsters regard corporal punishment as a training that offers them progression from one level of toughness to the other. Few youngsters share the views of staff by regarding corporal punishment as a form of discipline to civilize them to conform to the image of a total institution. Others consider corporal punishment by officers as a demonstration of love. In other words, officers are ascribed a parental status by children and youngsters who consider corporal punishment not only as a form of discipline but as

an expression of love stemming from a commonly used adage: ‘A child who is disciplined is one that is loved by the parent’<sup>lxvi</sup>.

Thus whereas correctional institutions may formally sanction the usage of corporal punishment as a form of correction along with some youngsters who embrace this objective, other staff have their own motivations for administering corporal punishment. Similarly, youngsters may have their own perspective of punishment. These different views of corporal punishment may well be seen in the light of multiple realities (Arce & Long, 2007), where actors with different experiences, interests and experiences see things differently.

In the next section I discuss religious provisions which, like educational observances, serve a vital objective in correctional centres. Again, youngsters and sometimes staff have their own ways of appropriating institutional religious observances for their own interest.

### **6.3 Religious observances and spirituality**

In Ghana, religious observances in the form of church services, bible studies and prayers permeate the entire formal fabric of correctional institutions. By religious observances, I mean all forms of institutional religious services and activities organized by correctional institutions.

The chaplain, who has oversight of religious activities at the boys’ institution (SCC) explains in an interview held on March 23, 2010 that most religious activities are Christian. He explains that though other religious organizations such as Muslim groups express interest, these organizations have been irregular. The chaplaincy, annually reviews religious activities and on the basis of this review decides whether or not to renew permits to conduct religious service or activity at the centre. The chaplain spoke further about religious activities: ‘Morning devotions are held twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays. On Fridays, institutions hold a prolonged service commonly referred to a Padre hour<sup>lxvii</sup>. During weekends (Saturdays and Sundays), church services are held twice a day and religious organizations also take turns to provide moral lessons and literary classes in late afternoons after workshop lessons’ (SCC, March 23, 2010)

According to the chaplain, although many churches express interest to conduct various religious activities, not all are allowed as some only seek to use the correctional

institutions to pursue their own interests. Some churches by virtue of the services they organize at the correctional institutions, apply for funds from other organizations. Churches raise funds in the name of these institutions, yet such church organizations never make donations to the centre. The chaplain stressed that the institution regulates church organizations very strictly and does follow-ups and also investigates the genuineness of applications before endorsing them.

The conduct of church services, stemming from the interview with the chaplain, is voluntary and so the institution does not pay pastors, churches or religious organizations involved in the institution's religious activities. Offertories taken during church services are strictly for the institution and are utilized for purchases such as hymn books, chairs and other needs. He said: 'the institution boasts of one hundred chairs recently purchased using monies collected during offertories' (idem).

### **6.3.1 A means of correction and a source of material and non-material support**

Correction centres employ religious activities as a tool of correction and change. The chaplain explains this in the interview:

In most prisons and correctional centres, religion is used as a tool to reform or bring about change in youngsters. It is not easy to reform but over time, we have noticed a lot of change. We try to reward good behaviour and so we go to the extent of organizing offertory for boys to be discharged who have behaved well during their period of committal. (March 23, 2010)

I observed during church services that indeed offertories were organized for some youngsters and not for others. The chaplain also spoke about external support from other churches besides the institution's own religious programmes:

Many of the boys have engaged in bad behaviour for so long and it is our duty to encourage them to worship God and change from their bad ways. This is our main preoccupation. It is difficult for institutions to bring about change by themselves and that is why churches need to complement this function. In fact, we notice that inmates respond better if they hear the sermons from other preachers

Youngsters such as Kwesi and Kofi also commented about the usefulness of religious observances: 'Church activities are a good source of comfort and happiness for me, pastors encourage us a lot and I have noticed a lot of change. If I had not been brought here, I would have been killed or something bad would have happened to me'. (Kwesi, April 23,

2010). Kofi also said: ‘Church activities have helped me a lot; I was Methodist before my sentence but did not attend church regularly but now I do’. (SCC, May 14, 2010)

Most youngsters interviewed shared similar views with Kwesi and Kofi and tended to portray a dependence on both religious observances and pastors as a source of material and non-material fulfilment. During church services, pastors, have a number of times pledged to sponsor the education of youngsters upon discharge from correction centres. Other youngsters, upon discharge have moved to reside with pastors. Thus churches and pastors also somehow assume some parental role for youngsters.

I have discussed in the above section the role of religious observances in correctional institutions and how these institutions advocate such observances as a source of change and correction. Similarly, youngsters express the usefulness of religious observances and depend on pastors for both material and non-material support.

In discussions that follow, I explain how youngsters draw on religious observances for their own interests.

### **6.3.2 Appropriating religious observances**

This section discusses the appropriation of formal religious observances by youngsters and staff to meet their own spiritual needs. I employ the usage of the term spirituality to refer to appropriated forms of religious observances which differ from institutionally planned religious activities or formalized forms of institutionalised religious observances.

Whereas at the SCC, religious observances keep a formal appearance and are structured along traditional approaches of hymn singing, bible reading and prayer at definite times, such observances also take other forms. For instance, services sometimes feature clapping, dancing, unstructured movements and episodic happenings of people falling in trance during the course of prayer or the service. In the process of such occurrences, pastors, staff and youngsters seek to construct their own spiritual meanings to meet their spiritual needs. Such appropriated forms of religious observances have their own aftermaths which sometimes run counter to institutional expectations.

One Friday morning, the Officer in Charge said at a staff meeting that she had decided to cancel an intended visit of a group of pastors as the cost of hosting the pastors could not be borne by the institution. She however added: ‘You are however free to make



your own contributions and invite the said pastors' (SCC, December 11, 2009). After the service I met one of the officers for further clarification. She said:

We had held a successful prayer session where there were various revelations by a group of pastors and we were considering holding a second prayer session. The institution bore the cost for the first prayer service. The centre's budget is however limited and so it cannot sponsor the second one and this is what the OIC raised. (SCC, December 11, 2009)

The officer explained that some pastors who were invited for a church programme in the past, said while they prayed they saw coffins, an indication (according to the pastors) that some officers were likely to face death in the near future. The pastors had predicted that about five officers would die and in fact three had actually died and so they all became very fearful as they did not know who was to be the next. Officers were actually thrown into some sort of confusion and so they decided to invite the pastors to pray so as to avert any occurrence of death or misfortune. The OIC was however not in agreement with the arrangement.

Revelatory prayer sessions also target youngsters as beneficiaries. I spoke with the chaplain briefly one morning when I saw some staff praying and carrying out an exorcism exercise, commonly termed deliverance. He said:

Most of the boys come to the institution with charms and amulets and these things bother them spiritually and sometimes the boys request prayer themselves. (SCC, April 30, 2010)

This discussion was advanced on another day with the chaplain:

Boys resort to spiritual powers and sometimes these powers manifest during the service and so the boys are brought to my office for prayer. Some come willingly for deliverance and for those who manifest at the church by suddenly falling to the ground at the church; we assist them, there and then. They manifest all sorts of spirits including witchcraft spirits. Once, one of the boys said to me that he could see through me when he closed his eyes. The OIC encouraged prayers for the boys and invited pastors from outside to assist, there were times she attended the prayers herself. (SCC, July 20 2010)

Religious activities primarily seek to perform a key function of bringing about change and correction in youngsters, an objective that correctional centres seek to fulfil through regular conduct of religious services, counselling sessions other activities. However in the process of pursuing this end, this objective is sidetracked as a means of meeting staff's own interest. These sidetracked forms do not only pose financial constraints on the

institutional budget but also evoke thoughts of death as well as spiritual manifestations coupled with feelings of fear and anxiety. The paradox of appropriating institutional goals in correctional centres is that whereas this process assumes certain forms that run counter to institutional norms staff do not oppose such appropriated forms given that these forms are beneficial to them.

Staff appropriate forms of institutional religious observances for their own interest and also with the aim of ridding youngsters of spiritual powers. In the next section I discuss the efforts of youngsters to appropriate spiritual observances, without the initiative or support of staff.

### **6.3.3 Forms of spirituality among youngsters**

Apart from drawing on institutional religious observances to meet certain needs of youngsters and staff, youngsters by themselves without staff initiative or staff involvement draw on their own differentiated forms of spirituality. Not only do these forms of spirituality vary, the motivations for participating in such spiritual observances also vary. Yaw, narrated how upon his re-arrest, while in a remand home along with other youngsters who were awaiting trial, many people and churches visited to advise them. According to him, it was upon one such advice that he reflected on his own life (chapter 4). Yet other youngsters also employ spiritual observances such as 'divination', to find out culprits of petty thefts (chapter 4). John further explains such practices of finding out culprits of thefts:

We recite Matthew 7 verse 10, put a key inside the Bible, tie the bible with a lace, praise and exalt God and then point it towards the suspect and ask whether or not he stole the item. The Bible spins and whoever it points at is the one who stole the item... (SCC, February 18 2010)

Sometimes, youngsters employ spirituality to blackmail others or as a way of revenge as was the case with Yaw (chapter 4) who suffered maltreatment by his fellow inmates in the dorm because he betrayed his friend.

Youngsters also utilize spiritual practices as a way of punishment and to exercise domination over staff. At the JCC too, one of the officers narrated how some girls invoked curses upon her:

I was hinted that some of the girls were plotting to abscond and so I locked the girls up during the weekend. After the incident, the girls became angry because they had been locked and these girls threw

curses at me, poured water on the ground and invoked spirits to harm me. (JCC, December 9, 2009)

Religious beliefs and spiritual practices also constitute a sense of pride and a power contest for youngsters. On December 15, 2009, while seated with one of the female officers in front of the first dorm I heard a lot of quarrelling inside the dorm. It involved two boys who exchanged words harshly. One accused the other 'this morning when you woke up, you urinated into my drinking cup'. The accused vehemently denied the act and retorted: I never did, I worship God and I would not tell lies'. The other boy shouted back 'By the way, are you the only one who worships God? I am an idol<sup>lxviii</sup> worshipper, but I would not act the way you did'. The accused answered that even if the other boy cursed him, the curse was powerless and it would not affect him. They exchanged words and argued between themselves about who was more powerful. These boys therefore relied on their various spiritual powers, not only to accord legitimacy to their accusations and defences but also as a basis to contest power. Other youngsters also utilize spirituality as a cover up to conceal certain acts, for instance there was one boy who was labelled an *osofo* which means pastor due to his commitment to religious observances and he employed this label as a cover up to smoke marijuana in secret, in contravention of the rules of the institution.

Even before committal, youngsters relied on spiritual powers for their everyday activities (Chapter 2). Joshua, a newly admitted boy shared his experience:

My friends and I stole under the influence of fetish power but this fetish did not like nursing mothers and so whenever we came across a nursing mother we became powerless and we were caught. (SCC, May 26, 2010)

Most youngsters involved in theft and other offences prior to committal admitted to relying on such spiritual powers (Chapter 2).

While youngsters tend to embrace these institutional objectives of correction, their own forms of appropriation on the contrary are geared towards the reinforcement of spiritual powers such as fetish and idol worship which the chaplaincy and the officers do not tolerate and so seek to exorcise. Further, youngsters utilize these forms of spirituality with the aim to engage in stealing, cursing, revenge, and blackmail which run counter to their objectives of correction, though some youngsters also draw on other forms of spirituality to expose the very acts such as stealing that are condoned by others.

I conclude discussions on youngsters appropriated forms of religious observances by examining youngsters' attendance of religious services and the choice of youngsters to participate or not to participate in such services. Religious services are institutional ceremonies which primarily seek to perform a key function of bringing about change and correction in youngsters.

During religious services at the JCC, most preachers are of the assumption that youngsters are bad and are in need of change and reform. Girls at the JCC are punctual at religious services, their participation during services in terms of answering questions is low as they mostly remain silent and do not answer questions to the dismay of the pastor. This observation was made at their morning Sunday services before the girls had their breakfast. Often, the pastor begins with a summary or recap of lessons learnt on the previous Sunday and usually all girls, sometimes with the exception of the captain, remained silent. After a sermon, the pastor usually invited questions but again girls remain silent. The pastor is usually unhappy about the lack of participation and warns girls that he would punish them to kneel down for not being attentive.

On one Sunday, during the course of the service, the pastor welcomed Esenam, a new girl and asked her to narrate to them the circumstances leading to their committal to the centre. I sat behind the girls and could observe an expression of surprise on the faces of the girls as though it was unusual for the pastor to ask Esenam this question. Anyway, Esenam was silent and did not utter a word, she only giggled. The pastor requested a summary of his sermon the previous Sunday but to his dismay the girls remained silent. He warned them that he would punish them if they did not make any contributions but the girls only giggled. After the service he lamented to me and said 'I have conducted church services for the girls for the past ten years but have seen little change' (JCC, February 28, 2010).

On another Sunday after the usual silence, he said to the girls: 'You are lucky to be here, as you enjoy many things free of charge so make good use of your stay here'. The girls immediately giggled, somehow giving an indication that the pastor was mistaken. He again said that the girls were lucky as they were being fed thrice daily and again they giggled. Then Yaa the captain said 'If only the food could taste better'. Yaa continued: 'The government benefit from us as we did service to the government'. The pastor asked what kind of service they offered and she said 'We scrubbed gutters and swept madam's office'. Yaa further said 'The government does not care for us so let us go home! I do not

pay for anything at home either, I get everything for free and besides I have more freedom'. Upon hearing this, the pastor responded 'So do you miss home and wish to see your mothers?' Yaa retorted 'We would never go'. The other girls only giggled and laughed most of the time. The pastor bore an expression of confusion on his face. (JCC, Field notes, March 14, 2010).

Yet another Sunday after his sermon, the pastor paused for questions but as usual the girls were quiet. After a long silence he started mentioning their names one after the other to answer questions. Then he said: 'I know what brought all of you here' He then went ahead to ask Afua a question and she was silent. The Pastor said she should speak out and that she has had so many experiences here and has certainly learnt a lot from these experiences. The pastor made reference to Afua's delivery of a baby, and the fact that she absconded and was brought back. While he urged Afua to speak, she suddenly burst out angrily 'I did not do anything'. The pastor on hearing this showed an expression of surprise on his face. I sat right behind Afua and I could see that she was very angry, placing her hands continually on her waist, though she was seated. (JCC, Field notes, April 25, 2010)

Thus although girls are punctual and attend services giving the impression that such services are beneficial, yet they devise ways of not participating in such services by being silent or steering discussions in their own directions. The responses of Yaa and Afua were not only indications that the suggestions of the pastor were not useful but that he had also veered into their private sphere as one girl said to me in a conversation when the service ended. Whereas the pastor seemed in charge of the services, the girls also were in charge in their small ways as they effectively wielded non-participation and silence as weapons of the weak (Scott, 1985).

Unlike the services at the SCC where officers were in attendance, not so at the JCC (a caretaker occasionally sits in) and staff was unaware of the level of participation and interest exhibited by girls during such services. At a latter period of fieldwork, another service was arranged at the JCC that almost coincided with the time for the first service. The pastor expressed his discontent as sometimes he had to hasten with his sermon so as to allow the girls to attend the other service.

I attended this other service and noted a marked contrast; staff was in attendance including boys on remand and other girls from adjoining institutions. Girls seemed to

enjoy services and actively contributed their views during the service. After the service, the pastor distributed free packs of cooked meals to youngsters and staff.

According to interviews with staff and the pastor, services conducted before breakfast used to include the boys. However youngsters seized the opportunity to exchange 'love' letters among themselves and so the attendance by boys was discontinued. Girls' participation in this other service could thus be attributed to the participation of boys which enhances the social atmosphere, the presence of staff which obliges them to participate, cooked meals they enjoy and how the church is organized.

Regardless of the reasons that explain the difference in the level of participation between the two services, the fact that one service enjoys a better participation than the other, is itself an indication that girls chose to actively participate in one service and not the other.

#### **6.4 Other forms of appropriation**

I now shift attention from religious and educational provisions and their appropriated forms to discussing other forms of appropriation that youngsters employ to steer conversations in directions that favour them.

##### *Interrogative encounters*

In daily detention life, one frequently observes situations where staff questions young people about certain events, a practice I term interrogative encounters. By remaining silent, providing mechanical responses, resorting to tale-telling or exhibiting open resistance, young offenders sometimes are able to deliberately conceal information. For instance, the question 'what is your name?' is likely to attract series of accompanying responses such as 'My name is Kweku, I am 15 years old and I come from Obuasi, my offence is stealing'. These responses situate the youngster in a position of control where he determines what direction an encounter should follow. Others by means of tale telling and dialoguing with themselves (one poses a question and provides answers to the question by himself or herself) keep the enquirer or interrogator partly out of the conversation, and rather places the youngster on the centre stage of the encounter of a rather technical procedure.

An officer questioned a young offender as to the cause of a small fresh cut on his forehead and he responded dialoguing his way through a long narration (interspersed with further questions from the officer) that a mango fruit fell and hit him, he had then come direct from the dormitory and not from the farm.

While in the hair salon with the girls one afternoon on December 14, 2010, Akua entered, crying and looking gloomy. A female officer questioned why she was not participating in the lessons that afternoon and Akua responded that she was unwell. There was a long exchange of question and responses with the young girl sometimes switching from tears to laughter with interjections from some of the other girls. Eventually the young girl seemed to have won the encounter with the officer and went back to the dormitory.

Days later, having closed from a morning service and chatting with Akua and another girl on their way to the dining room, I asked Akua about her health condition:

(Chortled) I am fine. The last time I feigned it; there was almost nothing to do in the class and it was too boring. (JCC, December 20, 2010)

These interrogative encounters are characterized by poses such as begging, crying and at the same time drawing on the support of other inmates as was depicted in Akua's encounter with the officer. In most cases, such bargaining exchanges are usually a means to fulfilling some material or non-material need, such as skipping lessons to afford some sleep or escaping punishment. The youngsters would seldom settle for a simple 'yes' or 'no' response even when it seems obvious that youngsters create these tales.

Besides attempts by young people to employ weapons of silence (Scott, 1985) and negotiating tactics during interrogative encounters to achieve their goals, there is also manifest display of open resistance and sometimes rudeness by young offenders in the form of frowns, shouts, insults and open invocation of curses (Chapter 6.3.3) on their officers. In fact, some warders knowingly or unknowingly acknowledge such power reversals in comments that youngsters rather pitied them, as though they the officers were behind bars and youngsters were their warders. At officers' meetings, management reminds dorm warders to be smarter than inmates and often made comments such as 'they (young people) count 10 when you are at 2' (SCC, Chair of staff meeting, April 30, 2010).

Further, in conversations with other professionals such as human rights officers, clinical psychologists, social workers and NGO workers, youngsters similarly make an attempt to conceal certain information. On one occasion I was with some girls in the hall

where they usually sit while a clinical psychologist held one-to-one meetings with some of the youngsters in the office. The girls looked happy and were chatty particularly Afua and Yaa. Afua who had returned from meeting the psychologist, commented:

This white lady is very troublesome, she continued to ask us what bothers us even when we continually say to her that we did not have any problems and that we were just fine (There were giggles from the others). (JCC, Field notes, April 6, 2010).

I noticed that whereas researchers and other professionals are very eager for information from youngsters, the latter are just as eager to withhold information unless they realize this is in their interest.

Other times, youngsters take on the expression of other professionals so as to fit within the technical process and sometimes attract certain favours. Goffman describes as conversion, when an inmate appears to take over completely the official or staff view of himself and tries to act out the role of the perfect inmate (Goffman, 1968). The word ‘change’ or ‘reform’ pervades most spheres of the correctional center and is common on the lips of staff and other professionals who visit. The chaplain for instance speaks about religion’s role in effecting change:

Many of the boys have engaged in unacceptable behavior for so long and it is our duty to encourage them to worship God so they can reform from their bad ways. This is our main preoccupation. It is difficult bringing about change and that is why we permit churches to complement our work. (SCC, March 23 2010)

Youngsters such as Kofi also accord importance to change:

On the whole I think I have really changed. I am glad I came here, if I had not, maybe something more terrible could have happened to me. When I watch what people suffer as a consequence of bad behavior, it scares me and I do not want to be part of that. Sometimes when I watch TV and see people being killed for committing crimes I get really scared. If I was spoken to when I was young I would not have gotten myself into this. (SCC, May 14, 2010).

Thus youngsters knowingly and unknowingly take on these expressions and speak about change in the same way as professionals do.

Li (2007) speaks of development projects rendered technical by concentrating on the formal sides of counting and responding. In this regard, the subjects themselves, the inmates, are quite capable of rendering their encounters with the institutional staff, technical. Yet in the process of pursuing change, youngsters manifest other interests. For



instance, youngsters express the need for change so as to attract support from philanthropists and religious organizations as these persons and organizations tend to support youngsters who demonstrate the goodwill to change or develop.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The everyday life of correctional centres is pre-occupied with educational and religious activities purported to bring about personal and attitudinal change and correction, an indication of the importance that correction centres attach to these institutional provisions. These institutional provisions are however met with structural constraints and lack of support for institutional interest by youngsters.

On the basis of ethnographic evidence, I have employed the development concept of sidetracking and appropriation utilized by Olivier de Sardan (2005), to demonstrate that whereas youngsters tend to embrace these institutional objectives of correction, in practice youngsters are not always interested to pursue the same objective through their educational and religious provisions. Consequently, they appropriate these objectives to sidetrack or divert them towards their own goals. Although the process of appropriation in correctional centres does not involve the diversion of a material resource such as credit granted by a development project for other purposes (ibid: 144), sidetracking is still manifest. Olivier de Sardan (2005) in his developmental discourse limited sidetracking mainly to those developed or targets. Yet in the context of foregoing discussions, sidetracking and appropriation are not limited only to youngsters but they are strategies exhibited by both youngsters and staff in their entangled relationships.

My research thus adds to this development literature that sidetracking can likewise be steered by staff or state officers. Such officers, who are expected to enforce institutional objectives, are themselves sidetracking from the very objectives they are expected to implement for their own interest and sometimes in collaboration with youngsters. Institutional objectives when sidetracked have their own aftermaths that run counter to institutional expectations and objectives. For instance deliverance and revelatory services can evoke fear and confusion, adversely affect institutional budgeting and can upset the smooth running of correctional centres and yet be beneficial to staff and inmates.

Sidetracking and appropriation should therefore not be viewed as a negative process, for in spite of the ramifications of such deliverance services, such services are considered

useful by staff in terms of averting misfortune. Sidetracking which leads to the appropriation of institutional objectives, presents a paradox; for whereas the process of appropriation assumes certain forms that run counter to institutional norms, staff does not oppose such appropriated forms given that these forms are beneficial to them.

Consequently, I conclude that sidetracking and appropriation should not be equated with resistance though it may entail some form of resistance such as when youngsters utilize forms of spirituality to curse, blackmail or express revenge. Sidetracking and appropriation go beyond the dichotomy of resistance and domination given that both youngsters and staff are entangled to sidetrack from the developmental project.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to address the central research question, ‘How do juvenile and young offenders make their everyday life meaningful in correctional centres in Accra?’ Goffman’s ethnography (Goffman, 1968) in a psychiatric hospital in Washington DC, dating back five decades, still sheds relevant light on contemporary confinement practice in Ghana. His approach of face-to-face interaction is useful in understanding the manifestations of total institutions in practice. His concepts of total institution and underlife prove to be relevant in the context of Ghana (and the Global South). The children in conflict with the law whom I encountered during this research draw diverse meanings from their pre-confinement and custodial encounters and demonstrate the capacity to negotiate barriers amid structural constraints. In everyday life, both the agency and the powerlessness youngsters exhibit are enmeshed with official as well as informal power relations. Total power, exemplified by an authoritarian family structure and institutional state power, ceases to be total not only because it is beset with various forms of resistance (Foucault, 1979) but also because it manifests ambiguity, thereby evoking the multiple realities (Arce & Long, 2007) of everyday detention life. This ethnographic research raises crucial issues about the paradoxes, entanglements and ambiguities of power and official relationships that characterise the everyday detention lives of youngsters and staff in total institutions.

### 7.2 Pertinent research findings

My research has brought to the fore the following findings:

*a. Social life in detention extends beyond the confines of total institutions*

While detention has more or less a life on its own and is severed from wider society as Goffman (1968) suggests, the everyday lives of the young inmates are not confined to the boundaries of total institutions but extend well beyond. Institutional processes of admission and discharge, visits from philanthropists, church groups as well as friends and relations; and the acts of resistance and entangled relationships of youngsters with staff render the boundaries of total institutions permeable. Youngsters position

themselves not only as active consumers of wider social processes but they also influence wider broader social networks through their entangled relations with staff. Total institutions are therefore not only relatively autonomous microcosms of society but are engaged in active interaction with the wider social environment (Chapter 4.4.5).

*b. False assumptions of growing up settings for children in conflict with the law*

This research challenges the taken-for-grantedness in Ghanaian literature of the notion that children and youngsters grow up predominantly with familial support. On the contrary, I found that youngsters from as young as three years of age may already be less supported by their relatives and at such early ages escape family hostilities by embarking on frequent mobilities in order to survive.

As my review of this literature (Chapter 2) reveals, the rampant mobility of the youngsters between and betwixt familial and non-familial settings is hardly addressed. Instead, a moral image of the Ghanaian family is uncritically repeated, while this view remains silent on the diverse efforts and actions that children embark upon in order to survive in difficult situations. Relegating their experiences to familial contexts is not peculiar to scholars only, but extends into the legislative and policy framework of human rights protection for children. Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), the Children's Act of Ghana, the Juvenile Justice Act and other related laws and their subsequent implementation are based on the premise that familial support is indeed existent for children. This empirical research challenges this view and maintains that for children who are the subject of this study, the existence of a supportive family network cannot easily be presumed. Children categorized as vulnerable do not constitute a homogenous group but manifest differentiated capacities and growing up experiences.

Studies and interventions directed at the engagement of children in non-familial settings such as some forms of child labour<sup>lxix</sup>, migratory practices and children's activities on the street tend to associate such settings predominantly with economic and sometimes also illicit activities (Chapter 2). Such interventions often simplistically reduce the survival efforts of youngsters drawing on material and non-material resources to 'bad' activities. Yet this is far from being the case. Youngsters derive social and spiritual meanings, besides economic fulfilment, from non-familial settings.

Perceiving the activities of children in such settings solely from an economic or criminal perspective thus overlooks the multiple realities (Arce & Long, 2007) that characterize the everyday lives of these social actors.

This study accords significance not only to the pre-detention world of youngsters, but also to the fact that this world is not distinct from their custodial worlds. My research is an addition to the few studies of Cunha (2005;2008), Christian (2005) and Jefferson and Bandyopadhyay (2010) who do not treat the world of detainees prior to custody as detached from their custodial and post-custodial worlds. The continuity of these worlds is important for youngsters as well as for correctional institutions. For instance, inmate William drew on previous experiences in police cells to provide non-formal educational instruction to other youngsters in the correctional institute (Chapter 6). Besides, challenges that confront youngsters in custody due to their past encounters, for instance Yaw's previous encounter with his friend (Chapter 2.5; Chapter 4.4.5) show that young offenders are not merely bearers of legal labels but are social actors with past and present social experiences. Such knowledge is invaluable to any consideration and intervention concerning such youngsters.

This study addresses as well as problematizes the disjunctures that are not usually perceived by unitary conceptions based on the notion of the child or youth in conflict with the law, who is in need of correction. Right from the onset at the time of committal, youngsters possess consciousness of their own situations. They perceive themselves as victims of irresponsibility; parents and family who could have assumed responsibility over their needs but did not. Youngsters' survival efforts to meet their socio-economic needs whatever the means are born out of their desperation to survive. From this perspective youngsters rather regard the family as criminal. The consciousness of these youngsters of their own situations may take the form of cynicism and vengefulness. Their vengeful reaction, "We shall jail our fathers" (Chapter 2) is evidential that, according to them, their parents are to blame. Thus youngsters are rather determined to 'correct' (rather than be corrected) a seeming unfairness which is clearly expressed by their vengefulness at the time of discharge from correction homes. This perception of youngsters runs contrary to that of criminal justice or human rights professionals, who may already have perceived and labelled youngsters as delinquent, criminal, in conflict with the law requiring correction or to be worked upon by total institutions.

*c. The entanglements between institutional structure and youngsters' agency*

Children in conflict with the law demonstrate the capacity to negotiate some of the constraints of the material deprivation and rejection of detention. Nevertheless, youngsters are not entirely let off the grip of total institutions; neither does their agency stop the forcing hand from acting. Examples from cases like the desperate attempts by Kojo to survive and get away (Chapter 2.4), the emotional rejection that youngsters such as Kwesi suffered coupled with the physical abuse and frequent beatings he was subjected to (Chapter 2.2.1) did not stop him to engage in an economic venture. In Chapter 3 the forcing hand and power of total institutions is depicted by institutional rituals and routines by which youngsters are subjected to in an enclosed and formally administered round of life. Yet, even in the grip of total institutions, youngsters such as Kwesi and Yaw (Chapter 4) manage to create the private, social and spiritual spaces of their 'corners' and also engage in a social underlife (Chapter 4.4.3). In this social underlife (Goffman, 1968) youngsters reassert themselves, create an enclave of power and domination and lay claim to material and non-material resources. It is therefore against the backdrop of detention walls, locked doors, mortification processes and the legal deprivation of liberty that youngsters' agency becomes evident.

Discussions in this thesis have transcended the obvious constructions of children either as social actors who are competent and capable of surmounting any challenge or as vulnerable, passive, and dependent people who are bound by the walls of confinement. Therefore, my research is not merely another source on children and youngsters as social actors. There is ample evidence about the agency of children and youngsters within diverse contexts (Alderson, 2008; Christiansen, 2006; Christiansen et al., 2006; Manuela Cunha, 2008; Hensley et al., 2003; Honwana & De Boeck, 2005; Peters, 2006; Scott, 1985, 1990). This study is contributing innovatively, however, through its focus on ethnography of detention life, to youngsters and children whose liberties are legally curtailed by the state.

*d. The logic of keeping up appearances*

In detention life staff view institutional processes and disciplinary procedures as one that makes them capable of rendering youngsters compliant; yet official power falls short of this. In Chapter 3 officers admit - in offstage discussions - their inability to

ensure youngsters' conformity with institutional rules. Their failure to enforce total compliance suggests a defect in total power (Sykes, 1958). Officers, by the admission of their inability (Chapter 3.6.1) to command complete compliance from youngsters, recognize that the correctional institution as total institution does not operate as a system. Neither is it a domain of sovereign power. The point that the total institution is unable to enforce complete compliance by means of mortification procedures and the fact that staff admits to this defect casts a doubt on the sovereignty of a total institution. My ethnography of detention life here likewise challenges Goffman's (1968) structural approach to total institutions.

It is not only the correctional centres which as total institutions fail to render inmates entirely compliant, state officers such as the police also exhibit non-compliance with provisions of relevant laws (Chapters 3 and 4). Contributing to the inability to enforce compliance is the deficiency of state resources. This is because state resources are barely adequate to promote the effective implementation of laws such the Juvenile Justice Act. State officers are poorly resourced and yet are expected to execute their tasks expeditiously. Consequently, such state officers tend to rely on the resources of families of youngsters for the performance of official responsibility (Chapter 3) thereby providing justification for engagement in corrupt practices.

The official power of total institutions, despite being arbitrary, defective and deficient, must nevertheless keep up the appearance of absolute power (Chapters 3, 5, and 6). The logic of keeping up appearances is not merely cosmetic but it also functional. It requires that nurses constantly give out paracetamol tablets even when they are not needed (Chapter 3) to ensure employability and to provide justification for the 'need for' or the existence of medical services. Institutions and staff must be seen to be doing their work. Like a factory, they must keep the illusion alive that they manufacture new, reformed, corrected inmates, and guarantee state safety and security by ensuring social control of 'dangerous elements' of society.

In order to keep appearances, officers resort to compromise and negotiation. Officers virtually beg youngsters to attend lessons (Chapter 3.6.1); they also enlist the support of youngsters by pampering them and showering them with kind acts (Chapter 3.6.2). Further, youngsters are drafted into acts of governance as they take on staff duties (Chapter 3). Such arrangements and other everyday detention happenings blur the boundaries between staff and inmates. But, paradoxically, the blurring of

boundaries is crucial for the on-stage maintenance of order and discipline and augurs well for the image of a properly functioning institution.

Other compromises are evident, such as the case that involved a youngster who connived with officers at a lower level to flout the dictates of an officer at a higher level. Such collusion yielded mutual benefits to James, the youngster in question, as well as the officer (Chapter 5). In spite of compromises evident in the cases of James and Theresa in the name of promoting the image of a well-functioning institution, there are usually serious repercussions for such acts of collusion (Chapter 5). The agreement between an officer in the yard and the management to handle escape matters internally, rather than mete out open punishment to the defaulting youngster is an example of compromises between different hierarchical levels of staff, also in an attempt to protect the image of the institution. Keeping up appearances therefore require that certain compromises are made between staff and inmates, but also amongst various hierarchical levels of staff.

Projecting a good image also requires negotiating of what counts as compliance and non-compliance with human rights standards (Chapter 3). Correctional centres boast of their human rights training programmes and have a high expectation of human rights in terms of promoting change and good conditions of service for staff. At the same time, however, correctional centres regard human rights as impeding everyday control of inmates such as officers meting out harsh punishments to youngsters who escape or attempt to escape (Chapter 5). Goffman (1968:75) conceives of such clash between compliance and non-compliance as classic dilemmas. Classic dilemmas according to the author are the contradiction between ensuring humane standards and efficiency of institutions. While the advancement of humane standards and dignity of the inmate lies in his or her personal possessions, yet for efficiency purposes the inmate must be dispossessed (*idem*). Englund (2006), in his ethnographic study of Malawi, also refers to the disconnection between the rhetoric of human rights elitists and popular responses. Similarly Merry (2006) discusses the superficiality of translating international law into local justice.

My emphasis transcends the discrepancy, gap or dilemma between compliance and non-compliance, to emphasizing the co-existence of these dilemmas and contradictions. I observe that correctional centres tend to manage divergent manifestations of human rights by employing means such as projecting normative



standards on stage and relegating the actual situation to off-stage (Chapter 3). Martin (2010; 2012) shares similar observations in Ugandan prisons when he refers to the polyvalence of human rights. He discusses how prison management employ human rights to solicit funding, strengthen support networks and manage change, and yet administer corporal punishment in seeming contravention of human rights principles. According to Martin (ibid), such officers in Ugandan prisons also circumvented such dilemmas by adapting corporal punishment which the officers labeled as reasonable caning, thereby distinguishing it from torture (Chapter 3). Thus detention institutions negotiate and accommodate varied and divergent constructions of human rights as practical rules and norms (Olivier de Sardan, 2008) to govern such institutions and also project an effectively run institution.

*e. The multiple realities, complexities, and paradoxes of everyday detention life*

In everyday detention practice, the forcing house of a total institution seeks to act on inmates as conceptualised by Goffman (1968). My research shows, however, that the total institution likened to a forcing house acts not only upon inmates but on staff too (Chapter 3.5). Institutional processes such as attendance of parades, wearing uniforms and monitoring of staff attendance are ways by which a correctional officer, like an inmate, is shaped and coded into an “object that can be fed into an administrative machinery” of correctional institutions, to be “worked on smoothly by routine operations” (Goffman, 1968:26). In other words, Goffman’s mortification processes are also directed at staff upon whom the total institution, likened to a forcing house, acts. While inmates are monitored, officers are also monitored; while inmates are punished, officers are also punished (Chapter 5).

The logic of detention institutions demand that detainees or youngsters are kept in custody. By participating in educational and religious activities, youngsters are kept busy to reduce the tendency to escape (Chapter 5). Thus promoting various educational activities contributes to promoting the custody of inmates. However, the anticipation of escapes or the actual event of an escape incident sometimes induces the opposite effect; outdoor activities such as formal and non-formal educational lessons and workshops and even religious activity come to a halt and young people are kept behind doors longer than usual. Institutional programmes, although they may assume a correctional function,

are therefore employed and managed in such a manner so as to keep youngsters in custody. Drawing on the elaborate cases of Yaa and James (Chapter 5), the Goffmanian assertion of totalistic and repressive measures of total institutions to render inmates compliant and keep them in custody does not always guarantee the attainment of these goals. On the contrary, such measures rather invite defiance, open resistance and escapes.

The dynamics of power and resistance evidenced by my ethnographic data transcend Scott's (1985, 1990) binary power manifestations between the dominant and the subordinate. I found that the dominant besides its power relations with the subordinate, manifests its own internal dynamics of power by means of both public and hidden transcripts, where officers of various levels of hierarchical power manifest cynicism and complain about one another (Chapter 3). Similarly, youngsters do not portray a unified body of inmates with a functional shared identity; neither does one encounter a body of like situated youngsters with strong group cohesion and feelings of solidarity against prison staff. On the contrary, youngsters exhibit their own internal dynamics of power and hierarchy that are differentiated and diversified both on-stage (Chapter 5) and in the underlife.

Official goals and authority are beset with various forms of subtle defiance where institutional objectives are sidetracked not only by inmates but also by staff (Chapter 6). Whereas youngsters and staff do not dispute the usefulness of institutional goals such as educational and religious provisions, their activities do not always translate in accordance with institutional expectations. The objectives of inmates and staff tend to correspond to the objectives of the institution, yet in the process of meeting these objectives, youngsters and sometimes staff pursue their own agenda in ways that may seem contrary to institutional objectives and yet beneficial to inmates, staff and the total institution.

On the whole, the dynamics of power and resistance and their attendant ambiguities, coupled with subtle defiance of sidetracking and appropriation establishes that detention life is far from unitary, but manifests realities that are multiple and diversely constructed by different actors.

### **7.3 The contribution of this thesis**

Relying on authors such as Goffman (1968), Long (2001), Arce and Long (2007), Scott (1985; 1990), and others, this thesis provides a theoretically informed ethnography of detention life in the Global South. It has brought to light the concealed views of youngsters and their experiences in correctional institutions in Ghana such as youngsters' narratives which they usually never tell to human rights and criminal justice professionals. This study has also unearthed off-stage admissions of staff, and the empirical study of the underlife of correctional institutions as well as the subtle forms in which institutional goals are appropriated and sidetracked by detainees in a bid to pursue their own interests. Since these confinement practices usually remain concealed from policy makers, the public eye, and sometimes also researchers, this thesis is relevant to science, society and policy makers. This usefulness is in terms of locating policy actions, public interactions, future research and scientific debates within such hidden views of detention life.

My observations are relevant for the various disciplines of anthropology, sociology, law, social work, and criminology. These observations contribute to the debate about structure and agency, particularly of confined youth as social actors, using empirical data obtained through regular observations, extensive and repeated formal and informal interactions with the detainees and staff on the premises of the correctional institutions. I go beyond the axiomatic recognition of youngsters as 'bad' social actors to demonstrate the practical ways by which they negotiate boundaries of detention.

This research makes a useful contribution to the sociological and developmental discourse about children and their social contexts of development. This is not only in terms of their emphasis on non-familial settings but also concerning the interaction that occurs between these settings due to the youngsters' mobilities. The study touches on an important policy issue regarding the development of children within variety of contexts. It invites policy makers to reflect on the lack of interest in youngsters' perspectives and the need to pay more attention to the various ways by which these children process their social experiences. Consequently, this research situates children in conflict with the law in need of urgent attention. These youngsters hitherto were not targeted to benefit from social protection programs in Ghana given that programmes, such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) targets households. They automatically exclude children and

youngsters who seldom associate with a particular household. Also, the NHIS registration must cover all children in conflict with the law as provided by the policy. Currently, only inmates of the SCC are beneficiaries; girls at the JCC are excluded.

My research challenges the taken-for-granted notion of the child in conflict with the law by theories on criminality and law. This notion does not question or problematize the *raison d'être* of correctional centres but is pre-occupied with the causal effects of offending and ways of correcting the offender. My research clearly shows the disjuncture between the empirical evidence of the everyday lives of youngsters in detention, on the one hand, and assumptions from criminal justice as well as legal and human rights professionals, on the other hand. Such disjunctures question the premise on which policies and programmes are purported to reform, correct, rehabilitate or reintegrate youngsters upon entry back into society. Further, my data opens the door to discuss the diverse portrayals of family structure within Ghanaian society, its attendant child rearing practices, parental responsibility and notions of punishment. By discussing these varied portrayals alongside children's own stories that are written off by society and usually not told, the research initiates the process of interaction with youngsters in confinement by the media, human rights and legal professionals as well as the general public.

Although not premised on established institutional differences, my study manifests a marked gender gap between the correctional institutions for boys and for girls. The legal protection that the Juvenile Justice Act offers juvenile and young offenders between ages 12 to 21 is of little relevance to young female offenders who are beyond the age of 18 years. Whereas young male offenders beyond the age of 18 can be admitted to the SCC, not so with girls as there exists no correctional centre for young female offenders in Ghana. The implication is that female offenders could be finding themselves in prison at earlier ages than boys.

In terms of pursuing formal institutional goals such as educational provision, a significant gender gap also exists. Denying girls the opportunity to attain or advance formal certificated education is a significant oversight which requires urgent and immediate policy action. In fact, the formulation and implementation of educational provisions of both institutions must be subsumed under the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education respectively.

Escapes are problematic for both types of institutions, although a higher rate of escapes is experienced by the girls' institution relative to the boys' institution. This difference invites to pay attention to the various reasons, mentioned by female detainees that contribute to the high number of escapes. Notably, when girls in detention participate in educational provisions that are of interest to them and have some value in the formal education and labour sectors of society, the temptation to escape might be reduced. Additionally, it invites policy makers and detaining authorities to ponder over the usefulness of institutional programmes both as a means to keeping youngsters in custody but also as an end in itself. In other words, considerations must be given to sustaining institutional programmes even in the event of escapes.

The occurrence of escapes require that detention authorities reflect on the totalistic measures they adopt to control such occurrences of escapes, given that such measures rather invite escapes. Low fencing or surrounding walls of correctional centres tend to project the function of correction and distinguishes such institutions from high walled maximum security prisons. However, the fact that low walls promote the logic of correction is no guarantee that this function of correction is served in practice. For most male youngsters, the absence of high walls, though it tends to make escapes easier, has a constraining effect. According to such youngsters, they are closely monitored and their freedom of movement is restricted. The resulting condition is that low walls rather make them feel imprisoned (Chapter 5). Any effort to address escapes must therefore take the local context, and the views of youngsters and staff into account.

By virtue of this research, youngsters demonstrate the capacity of positively contributing to policies, programmes or actions that concern them. I am convinced that there is a need for policy makers and social workers to show genuine interest in their possible contribution and to listen to the youngsters who are ready to offer their contribution. At the same time, the powerlessness of youngsters demands that youngsters be accorded the support of special protection, given the negligence from policies such as LEAP and the NHIS.

By challenging the notions of an almighty family structure and a total institution, I have shown how power in correctional institutions is beset with various forms of resistance, ambiguity, inconsistencies and blurred boundaries. Such inconsistencies, blurred and criss-crossing boundaries evoke reflection on Ghanaian

penal and human rights policies of reformation and correction based on a marked boundary between the reformer and the reformed. Such policies are also based on the premise that youngsters admitted to correctional centres are to be worked upon and delivered as a 'reformed' being to the outside world. Policies of reformation and correction must not merely be imported but be situated within the local context of detainees. Additionally, this research offers an opening for internal interactions between officers and inmates on detention rules, their relevance and their enforcement, recognizing that youngsters have a contribution to the enforcement of detention rules and safeguarding security and safety for society as a whole.

Given that detention life extends beyond the confines of total institutions, my research in Ghana is relevant for the emerging discourse about the social life of detainees in Africa and the Global South. Prisons are not only microcosms of society, but that their social lives extend into wider society. The permeability of the boundaries between the confinement community and the wider society inspires the appreciation by all social actors, including policy makers, that the inside and the outside interact and may not be as distinct from each other as often conceived by these actors.

Methodologically, my study exemplifies a growing scholarly interest about prison ethnography in Africa as well as the ethnography of the state and how the state manifests variedly in its relationships with its subjects. Further, there is the need for the CHRAJ and other state actors in the criminal justice system to collaborate with other national human rights institutions as well as academic and research institutions so as to accord significance to qualitative and ethnographic research. Dissemination of the outcomes of such collaborative research will be undertaken at a forum where empirical and ethnographic evidence can engage meaningfully with theoretical debates.

On a final, more personal note, this PhD study has contributed invaluablely to my work as a human rights educationist as well as a researcher. I set out at CHRAJ as a human rights practitioner to research about youngsters who do not employ human rights language in their everyday life. Yet, I daily observed during my field research that youngsters, in cooperation with staff, do express and act out their human rights as they lay claim to their social, economic and spiritual and other material and non-material needs. Also, human rights lend itself to divergent constructions by staff in the governance of correctional centres. Such divergent expression of human rights by staff and the subsequent negotiation of the boundaries of compliance and non-compliance

strengthen the image that correctional uphold human rights and freedoms. Professionals must look out for ways in which various actors like these youngsters who do not employ the expert language of human rights and nevertheless do express their fundamental human rights and freedoms in their everyday life.

My inside-out, emic, inductive and roundabout approach does not present human rights packaged as formal principles or standards. On the contrary, the everyday practice of human rights finds expression predominantly in the underlife as well as classic dilemmas of detention institutions. These complexities and multiple realities provide thought for reflection by human rights and criminal justice practitioners. In fact, I may conclude by saying that human rights have their own secondary adjustments or an underlife and this study invites human rights professionals to embark on the journey that unearths such underlife and entangled realities.

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## **Annex 1: Methodological and ethical reflections of doing ethnography in correctional centres for juvenile offenders in Ghana**

### **A.1 Introduction**

This study focuses on perspectives of juvenile offenders as social actors who construct diverse meanings of daily detention practice, while they interact with themselves and staff of correctional centres within the context of their immediate and wider environment. Crucial to this study is an ontological assumption and a methodological viewpoint that does not assume a unitary or fixed reality, but that juvenile and young offenders construct diverse meanings of their daily detention practice. Stemming from this viewpoint I avoided the idea of developing a fixed set of questions from the onset. Instead, the study lent itself to ethnography so as to promote the active participation of the researcher in the day-to-day lives of juvenile offenders.

Ethnography is difficult to define as it is employed variedly by diverse disciplines for varied purposes. O'Reilly (2005) defines ethnography minimally as an iterative-inductive design evolving through a study. According to O'Reilly, ethnography is undertaken within the context of daily life and culture, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions and preparing in-depth written accounts. This research account likewise attempts to respect the social life of juvenile and young offenders in its entirety without reducing it to a legal or criminal label. In this regard, this research study does not aim at generalizations and statistical representations. Rather, it addresses patterns and variations, sometimes observing the same or different situations continuously for the full import of diversity of empirical data from which theoretical and interpretative frameworks emerge (R Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Since the descriptive research of Goffman (1968) approximately five decades ago the role of ethnography has been shifting over the years; this uncertainty does not however undermine its worth. I share the view of Hammersely and Atkinson (2007:3) that one should not seek a standard meaning that is encompassing, but seek to “do what ethnographers actually do” (Hammersely and Atkinson 2007:3) which demands reliance on everyday practical considerations.

In this methodological Annex, I problematize the research reality that stems from my fieldwork experience. I paid tribute to my CHRAJ human rights monitor's status which

facilitated access to institutions and also acknowledged that this double role was fraught with challenges that I grappled with throughout the entire research process. Below, I outline methods of data collection, field note preparation and the process of data analysis. Discussions also evoke ethical issues such as informed consent and going beyond a legal mandate and legislation; the exclusiveness of home and the field and yet the interactions that ensue between the two.

*Delineation: avoidance of fixed boundaries at the onset*

In deciding the delineation or scope of research some concepts and variables were identified as useful starting points in line with the thinking that data hardly stands alone. In other words, analysis pervades all spheres of the research process. While reflecting on research questions, listening to narratives, observing and recording notes and coding, analysis is unavoidably both inductive and deductive, and one tends to move from one to the other continuously in the research process (Emerson et al., 1995). On the whole, this study is not based on hypothesis testing but uses a descriptive and inductive approach, thereby remaining open to emergent issues.

In guiding the search for meanings which juveniles employ as they make sense of their world of detention, I entered the field with a design that had loose boundaries so as to make room for flexibility while, at the same time, preventing a confused or vague start devoid of purpose. The research questions that were developed initially served as a starting point in order to resist the temptation of just going in any direction and falling prey to a study that was either too broad or too restrictive. Delineations, though, have not been rigidly fixed from the start, yet were limited to two junior and senior correctional institutions in Ghana. The study did not cover juveniles in adult prisons. While issues of rehabilitation and re-integration presented themselves, this study was not at the onset predicated on these issues. Besides, I dwelt mostly on the perspectives of the internal actors within the confines of juvenile correctional institutions and did not solicit information from the wider community outside the correctional institutions.

### *Research context and its ramifications*

Collecting empirical data in natural settings of juvenile offenders entails becoming part of their natural settings and feeling part of their daily lives and routine. Therefore, I could not neatly separate the context within which narratives, interviews and focus group discussions in the correctional centres were held from the empirical data gathered. This contrasts with the positivist viewpoint that the social world should be studied in the naturalness of the state devoid of the researcher's influence and methods, and that sources of data must lend themselves to analysis independent of the context of study. Conversely, Hammersley and Atkinson maintain that the same set of experimental questions lend themselves to diversity of responses on different occasions as people interpret stimuli and that these interpretations differ as "events unfold and shape their actions" (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007:8).

Reflexivity was central to the research process as my intentions and emotions were not only inaccessible to the various actors in detention but even to me as researcher. The research process was plagued with the continuous challenge of being conscious that as a social researcher, the interpersonal and institutional contexts and the philosophical and theoretical assumptions could influence the process of data collection, write up process and interpretation of data coupled with the need to maintain a delicate balance between my pre-existing self and researcher self (Angrossino, 2007:xvii; xii). In fact, during the preliminary research period, I had already become aware of my double role as someone known to correctional centres stemming from my practitioner status as a human rights educator, monitor, and now as a researcher. I could not avoid addressing questions to myself continuously such as: 'Who am I in the eyes of the researched?' 'How do I present myself'?

The question of how I was perceived confronted me during the entire research process and I never assumed a complete insider status. I took short breaks from being 'in the field' to consider the direction of the research. During one such break, a journalist who had also visited some correctional institutions published his findings showing some graphic pictures of youngsters being beaten by staff. As a result of these findings, an investigation was initiated which resulted in some staff being implicated. Upon resumption of my field work, one officer immediately questioned whether my research was related to the investigation of the journalist. Thus the dilemma of how I was perceived, characterized the entire research process. While this undoubtedly was a challenging situation, it offered good

opportunity for a delicate and yet innovative interplay as these roles interacted and intersected.

### *Gate keeping*

Prisons and correctional centres are usually clearly bound with gates, labels, locks and walls and can be difficult to penetrate. Social access is equally difficult as physical access does not automatically guarantee social access. One can obtain permission to interview inmates or staff but interviewees especially in a detention environment may decide to remain silent. While silence in itself can constitute data, long periods of silence can be frustrating to a researcher. Gaining access to informants in correctional centres or prisons is therefore as important as negotiating access to a physical setting (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). Initial long periods of participant observations were useful in establishing acquaintance and trust, thereby facilitating social access to inmates.

Furthermore, officers at the onset of my field work were more familiar with my practitioner status despite attempts to clarify my research purpose. This familiarity determined what information they would provide. My switching into a researcher's status and being able to sustain this status – which practically was not entirely possible - demanded reliance not only on insiders who could facilitate physical access, but also on insiders who are acquainted with everyday detention life.

Identifying certain people who police such formal physical and social boundaries was vital in the conduct of participant observations and interviews. I encountered several of such gatekeepers, depending on the setting. The setting in this regard is not limited to physical place or a geographically bounded place, but gives consideration to social, political and other contexts besides the interest of the gate keeper (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). My initial point of contact was one officer who usually conducted visitors around the centre and who was keen on introducing me to other officers, as this afforded him more social interaction than his repetitive office work. However, he became less interested when he realized that I was less keen on tours and sat more often with youngsters and other staff in the yard.

I encountered another officer who though seemed pleasant and showed me around the centre's educational facilities, yet was circumspect as to the information he released to me. His responses and information were more idealized than what actually pertained

(Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I noticed that most information he provided contradicted with what I observed; while he would say for instance that the centre had an abundance of text books and teachers, I realized that the opposite prevailed when I visited classrooms. He continued to facilitate my access to youngsters and to staff, but I no longer relied on him for information when I noticed his insistence to project a particular image of the institution. I however maintained the friendship with him as he facilitated access to both youngsters and officers.

A senior officer was equally helpful in terms of providing access to youngsters and officers. Unlike the previous officer, the information he provided tallied mostly with my observations. However, upon his assumption of a management status (the second in command), this officer assumed a more formal stance in terms of his relationship with me as his interests tended to be steered towards that of management and those in authority.

Virtually each day that I visited, I spent some time in the yard with officers and youngsters even if I did not intend to conduct any interviews in the yard. This yielded the advantage of developing better acquaintance with officers and the youngsters. Some officers tended to use the friendship that existed between us to meet their own interest, such as asking me to present their grievances before superior officers.

Another officer who was friendly and commanded some level of authority amongst subordinate and senior staff, facilitated access to youngsters and staff during interviews and focus group discussions. He promptly ensured that whenever I requested to interview certain youngsters, hold focus group discussions or speak to an officer, these persons were readily made available. During one of the initial focus group discussions he arranged that we could sit in his office, while he was present. Though I tried to conduct the discussion oblivious to his presence, the youngsters to my surprise spoke without much inhibition. His presence nevertheless determined what questions I posed and how these questions were answered. I requested after this event that I could have discussions and interviews with youngsters in the yard, which he obliged.

Whereas one-to one interviews and narratives were held in private, officers in charge of their respective dorms were sometimes present during focus group discussions, reportedly for security reasons though I noticed that such discussions afforded officers to take some rest. In most cases, they sat away from where the discussions were held and often some would doze off or engage in their own chats.

## **A.2 Some ethical considerations**

### *Going beyond a mandate and legislation*

One key consideration for institutions and individuals that visit total institutions such as detention centres is whether or not there is a clear mandate stemming from a legislative instrument that gives power to access these places. The CHRAJ is specifically mandated by Section 42 of the Juvenile Justice Act (653 of 2003) of Ghana to visit and inspect any correctional centre for juvenile and young offenders in the country. As an employee of the CHRAJ<sup>lxx</sup>, I gained entry to my research sites on the basis of this mandate. In my notification letter (signed by the head of my organization), I indicated that I was embarking on a practitioner's research that would employ informal methods, different from the CHRAJ's formal approach.

Notwithstanding the mandate or power to visit, coupled with the acquaintance and rapport I had established over the years, I was struck with some pertinent questions after I had negotiated entry and was preparing to commence my field work: Does Section 42 of the Juvenile Justice Act (653 of 2003) mandate me to enter the personal worlds of offenders? To what extent does a piece of legislative instrument mandate me to penetrate someone else's personal and subjective world? What ethical justification do I have to demand responses from children just because I had negotiated entry with the OIC (synonymous with parents or adults giving consent on behalf of children)? Have the children given me access to their world? Does access to child 'Abena' entail access to child 'Kwabena'? As I reflected on these questions, I realized that, although I could physically access institutions on the basis of the legislative mandate, I still needed to negotiate social access to the youngsters. I began to also reflect on imbalances of power stemming from my practitioner status, my current status, and the status of youngsters. Though I could arrange for an interview with youngsters, I considered the need to respect their right to provide information only willingly and not to impose my power as a researcher on them. I noticed that, although I had obtained formal access to the institutions as a human rights officer, I needed to re-orientate my motives to be considerate of the best interests of the children, a key principle of respecting the human rights of children. Ethics, in this regard, went beyond a legal mandate as mere adherence to a set of principles and rules of conduct or a 'go ahead' nod from an ethical committee, to being sensitive to the

wishes, feelings, sentiments, perceptions etc. of children and other actors. In sum, “access was far more than the granting or withholding of permission for research to be conducted” (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007:43)

### *Impression management*

Being partly aware of how I was perceived by staff and youngsters, I made the effort to convey an impression that distinguished me from staff and partly from my practitioner status. I needed to consciously remind myself not to convey the monitor or inspector status usually associated with officers of the CHRAJ who visit prisons or correctional centres as this would create a power gap and inhibited a free flow of conversations.

Conversely, where necessary, I drew on my practitioner status to facilitate access. For instance, negotiating initial access with detaining authorities would have been difficult without knowledge about my practitioner status and an introduction letter from my employer. Generally, during high level interactions, I maintained a formal impression. Further, personal characteristics such as gender were also contributive to facilitating or inhibiting access. Senior officers - most of whom were male - were delighted to share views with a female colleague. At the same time I blended quite well with the female officers, engaging in womanly talk.

Other factors, such as being able to speak two local languages, were also an advantage. But being conversant with the conversational dynamics such as one posing questions to oneself and providing responses as a means of maintaining the flow of conversations was even more important. In spite of these efforts some officers simply ignored me, while some youngsters were hesitant to speak.

I was confronted with other ethical dilemmas. I was tempted on some occasions to draw on my practitioner status to intervene immediately in certain situations for instance when Afua, a female youngster faced prolonged punishment when she absconded (Chapter 5). While being torn between the ethical challenges that confronted me due to my double status, the acquaintance I had developed was useful in appreciating what the actual views of youngsters were in contrast with what practitioners tended to represent as the interest of children. I also encountered situations where officers required my professional advice. For instance, a committee was instituted to consider certain changes in line with the Juvenile



Justice Act which were being advocated by the centres, and I was invited and accepted to serve on this committee.

### *Equity between the researcher and beneficiaries of the research*

The question of whether or not a mandate was enough also extended to the usage of research instruments. Even though I had sought permission to use a voice recorder and a digital camera and this permission had been granted (these instruments are usually not allowed even during CHRAJ visits), I noticed that the usage was intimidating for youngsters. My compromise was a small note pad but which I cautiously used as I noticed that even the note pad sometimes affected the flow of conversations. Overall, I needed to strike a bargain between what was ethically right in a particular context whether or not to seek information according to my terms at the expense of the feelings of the children. In fact, I had witnessed instances when professionals visited and interviewed youngsters and the latter did not say a word; other times youngsters decided what information to release as has been discussed in Chapter 6.

Generally, while I sought to remain sensitive to matters of access, my continued presence in the field strengthened familiarity and acquaintance with the detention environment and guided my ethical considerations regarding what was acceptable or not. While sticking to blueprints and ethical guidelines may be useful, ethical challenges also evolve with time and demand reliance on everyday practical remedies and considerations. For instance, throughout the process of field work, negotiation of social access to youngsters was a continuous process and not a one-off attainment. This was not due to a feeling of strangeness on my part or that I had not gained familiarity, though that seemed to be the case at the initial stages. It was rather on the basis of indications from the children for fear of victimization or other fears (mostly non-verbally expressed). Sometimes children say 'no' when their nonverbal expression depicts the opposite which gave me a feeling of uneasiness to go ahead without a brief explanation or assurance of confidentiality. My research setting was a seemingly sensitive and structured one and youngsters needed assurance that they were not going to be victimized by the authorities after speaking with me, as some officers got to know whenever I spoke with youngsters. The question of whether it was right not to proceed with an interview also depended on the subject under discussion and indication by youngsters in the form of a pause, a break in

articulation or a faster way of speaking or shedding of tears, which were useful indications to pause an interview.

Similarly, I stepped in and out of my field work, taking two short breaks of one month during the field work period. These breaks offered a defined space for review and reflection on my field notes but they also provided an emotional rest from the sad and despondent stories and from a structured and monitored environment.

### *Have the terms changed?*

Due to the regimentality of detention life one tends to assume that things continue to go the same way, and yet I observed there were frequent changes that particularly outsiders are unaware of.

Similarly, after a break in my visits, I thought I could continue with my regular routines. But I was mistaken; the terms had changed after the break without me realizing. I had planned a short visit on May 17, 2010, as I had not seen the officers and youngsters for some time. I said hello to one of the senior officers and informed him I was dashing to the classroom to greet the youngsters and the officers. Somehow, I noticed some hesitation in his facial expression but ignored it and left. On my way, he sent someone to call me and said to me that he was planning a meeting with the teachers to discuss some of their activities. I came back to say to him that I only wanted to say hello to the youngsters as I had not seen them for a long time. (I was taken aback as he had never acted that way before). Later, when I came back to chat with him, I realized that he was now the second in command and probably he needed to be more vigilant or satisfy other interests.

The remand centre for boys shares the same premises with the girls' correctional centre. Following in-depth interviews with youngsters, it became necessary that I request a visit to the boys on remand. I was in for another surprise when the head demanded that I reproduce my letter of introduction. Having submitted the introductory letter and discussed what I intended to do, she obliged and granted access. Given the incremental nature of the research, it was impossible to explicitly indicate what I set out to do in my introductory letter or during the initial interactions with various actors when I sought to negotiate access. Authorities, on the contrary, demand a clearly demarcated scope of the research and do not want to be in doubt as to the definite demands of the research process. A gap between the intentions of the ethnographer and the authorities is created right at the onset

of the research process, a gap which in my view should not be closed but openly discussed. Keeping direct authorities regularly informed and updated was one effective way of addressing this gap and this I endeavoured with much effort. Despite my efforts the process was never devoid of challenges. The gap between the practicalities of ethnographic research and the expectations of relevant authorities can pose further challenges. According to Hammersely and Atkinson (2007) the deliberations of authorities including ethical committees can frustrate the work of the ethnographer. Ethical committees are most often premised on a psychological, biomedical or survey research model and tend to subject to ethnographic research which dwells mostly on particularistic situations (ibid) to such models.

### *The strange and the familiar*

The home and the field seemed two distinct places as I moved between them on a regular basis. I had to switch regularly from a homely and familiar site to a closed site characterized by strangeness - vulgar language, defiance, verbal and physical confrontation, traumatic experiences, narratives about murder, defilement, assault, unpleasant smells, etc. This required continuous re-conditioning and re-adjusting in terms of the social, physical, emotional and psychological.

These places were however part of one continuous space. On one occasion for example, following a conversation with one of the boys prior to his discharge, I realized that no relative was available to collect him and he hardly had enough money to take him to his destination, besides lacking some basic necessities. I therefore drove him home, gave him some food and some other items before taking him to the lorry station. Some of the youngsters from the rural areas have reportedly not been to the city for the entire period of detention and so they do not know their way round. However, on reaching home, my family bombarded me with a barrage of security related questions; they felt my action was unusual. Undoubtedly, I had struck an acquaintance and familiarity with the 'strange' and I found difficulty understanding my family's legitimate concerns of security and safety. The distinction between the strange and the familiar, for me, had become blurred and while this had its advantages, there were ramifications.

### *From field notes to chapter outline*

On commencement of interviews I observed the unease of youngsters to me taking notes and the usage of a digital voice recorder through their hesitation to speak, detached conversations, repetitions and frequent eye movements. I had also observed and heard youngsters discuss their attempts to conceal certain information from other professionals. Detention space is generally a monitored space with staff and youngsters under regular supervision (Chapter 3) and the least attempt to document conversations or happenings raises suspicion. I therefore took minimal notes on the site and depended mostly on jottings and quick bullets. I also tried to reduce the number of hours I spent each day in the field though sometimes certain occurrences warranted a longer presence. Where figures, numbers and names, and certain seemingly compelling statements needed to be documented, I indicated to the interviewee the importance of noting down those details and quickly documented them. Everyday, during lunch time or upon return from the field I further elaborated the bullet points and scanty notes. I also trained my memory through mental exercises such as sequential and pictorial mapping of images which I found very useful.

I have to admit that working on the field notes was hectic, emotional but also interesting and going over the day's events was like re-living these events. Note writing and the regular review of field notes was an art that I learnt to develop with time, starting from "free writing" (Sunstein & Strater, 2007) to focused notes. I was confronted with the practicality of being reflexive, the need to be candid about my own prejudices, feelings, impressions of staff and youngsters, as well as what I saw or observed, while noting the taken for grantedness of everyday practice, compelling happenings, surprises and concerns. I also endeavoured, difficult though it was, to attribute distinct voices to various respondents while I sought to distinguish my reflections from these respective voices. Sometimes, the same term was used to connote different meanings for instance the insider term corner (Chapter 4), thus requiring that the distinctions between the various terms be noted.

I organized electronic notes in such a way as to facilitate analysis and employed a double entry note-taking which indicated a distinction between what was observed and my own reflections. Open codes in the form of words and phrases that represented various sections of notes were written in a margin next to the notes. By virtue of being open, such codes were not based on pre-established categories, and I sought to generate from my data as many codes as possible without consideration at this stage to relevance to any disciplinary or theoretical framework. Further, I identified common, recurring, contrasting,

and distinct and compelling themes that arose from these codes. Based on this exercise, I identified areas that required further probing and clarification.

The themes that emerged were numerous and varied. A difficult part of the research process was to make a choice of themes to focus on. While software such as the Atlas Ti offers the advantage of comprehensively searching voluminous data and arranging numerous codes, the analytical stage of the research was not merely about grouping common themes nor aggregation of data. In fact, I was virtually my own software because even when I had developed coded themes, the process of reflection required that I go back to read entire notes over and over again, noting contextual meanings and how youngsters and officers constructed various meanings diversely. For instance, merely dwelling on literal meaning of a term like ‘corner’ and grouping the various uses of this term on face value meanings could be misleading. While computer aided programmes can be useful, their use may suggest that the methods and data are separate entities. Yet, mine is an interpretative research process which dwells not only on constructed and contextual meanings but is also laced with my own epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

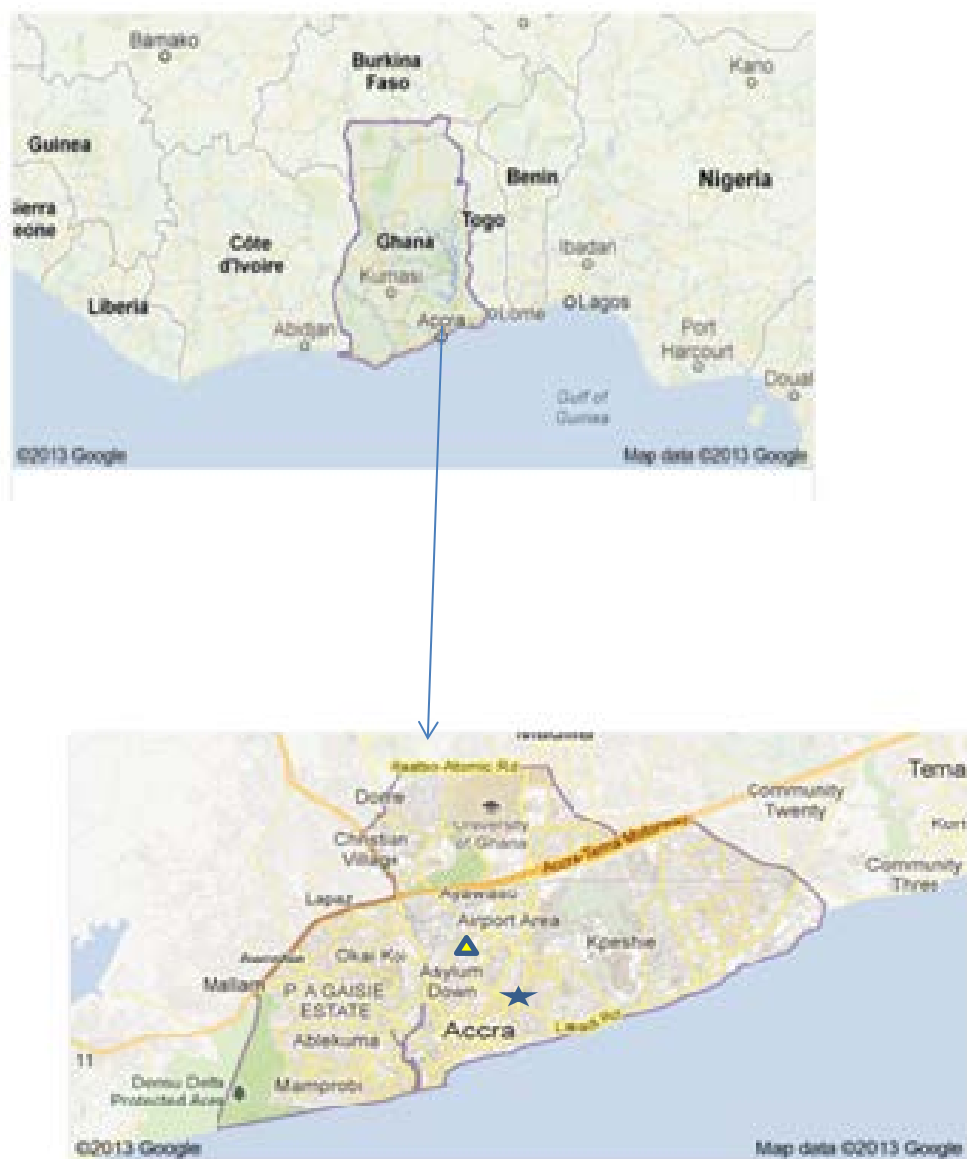
Being mindful of the context within which meanings are constructed, I tried to do some selection and prioritization, noting both frequently and non-frequently occurring codes, looking out for commonalities, links, parallels, and contrasts out of which I constituted themes. Stemming from these themes, I developed analytical ideas. This process spanned the entire research process and was not limited only to the final writing stage of the PhD manuscript. It was an “ongoing critical and creative research process” (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007:159) that required that I regularly step in and out of my notes, identifying various viewpoints while distinguishing these from my own observations, my subjective feelings and impressions. Similarly, I stepped in and out of my field work, taking two short breaks of one month during the field work period. These breaks offered a defined space for review and reflection on my field notes but they also provided an emotional rest from the sad and despondent stories and from a structured and monitored environment.

Thus the analysis of field notes was not merely finding what that data contains but a process of creating what is there by constantly thinking of the import of previously recorded events and meanings (Emerson et al., 1995). After the period of field work, on the basis of these meanings and analytical ideas, I began to compose my ethnographic

texts; this time making a gradual transition from the field to considering the disciplinary embeddedness of my research and re-visiting the relevant theories that helped me to make sense of my ethnographic data. Having composed various texts and having reviewed my write-up repeatedly, I drafted an outline for this thesis.

In sum, the pathway for this research study has been predominantly inductive given that I have sought to derive interpretative frameworks from ethnographic field data rather than deduce at the onset a theory that explains certain phenomena in correctional centres. This ethnographic data is therefore not pure but laced with meanings underpinned by my own assumptions and theoretical perspectives. It is quite a distortion to refer to theory being discovered (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) as though data were pure and distinct from theory, since the researcher's prior analytic commitments are built into field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). I consider the entire process of my field work and data analysis as reflexive; method and data are not separate entities but reflexively interconnected and interdependent (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

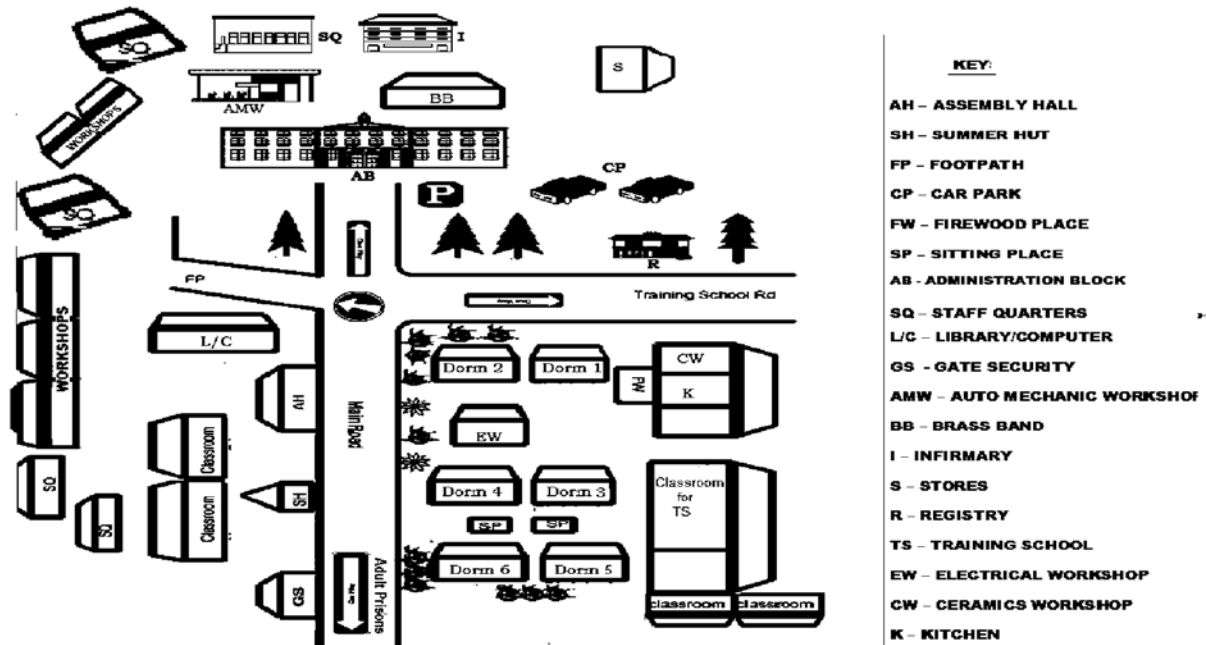
Annex 2: Maps of Ghana and Greater Accra showing research sites



Senior Correctional Centre      ▲  
 Junior Correctional Centre      ★

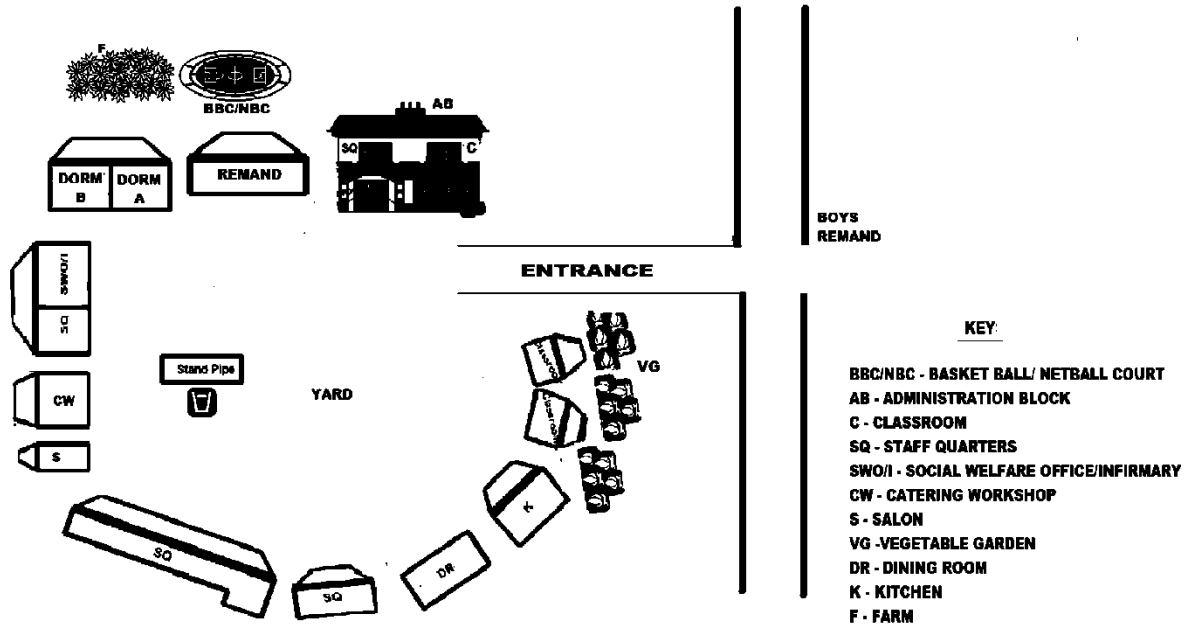
# Annex 3: Ground map of research sites

SCC





# JCC



#### Annex 4: Pictures



Administration Block, SCC



Administration block, JCC



Carpentry workshop, SCC



Dorm and hall, JCC



Dorms, SCC



Male youngster demonstrating a gymnastic ritual

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> A substantial portion of this section and some sections that follow constitute a chapter contributed to the first ever comprehensive book on children's rights in Ghana authored by various professionals, see Ayete-Nyampong, L. (2011).

<sup>ii</sup> According to 2010 UNICEF statistics, out of an approximate total population of 24 million in Ghana, 10,977 (45%) or nearly 11 million constitute children under the age of 18. The adolescent population (aged 10-19) of Ghana comprises approximately 5 million or 22% of total Ghana population.

<sup>iii</sup> Some of these policies include the formulation in 1992 of a ten-year National Program of Action based on the World Declaration on the Rights of the Child to Survival, Protection, Development and Participation; Draft Street Children in Ghana Policy Framework, 1995; The launch of a Free, Compulsory and Universal Basic Education in 1996; Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy, 2000; Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2004; National Gender and Children Policy, 2004; ILO-IPEC Timebound Program in 2004, which sets time frames for progress on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Ghana; the establishment of a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in 2003 the institution of a School Feeding programme in 2004; the institution of an educational decentralization and management and Capitation Grant scheme in 2005, resulting in school fees being abolished at the basic level of education in public schools and, a Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) in 2008 and a National Youth Employment Programme in the same year. The majority of these programmes constitute forms of social protection and improvement in Ghana.

<sup>iv</sup> These include the establishment of the Ghana National Commission on Children in 1979, to coordinate the activities of child-related agencies, the GNCC assumed the status of a department within the Ministry of Women and Children in 2001; the establishment in 1993, pursuant to ACT 456 of the 1992 republican Constitution, of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice to protect and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizenry including that of children

<sup>v</sup> There were 984 of such child and family related cases lodged with the CHRAJ in year 1998. In 1999, this number shot to 2941 and then to 3749 in 2001. The period between 2003 and 2005 saw an increase in child related cases from 4959 in 2003 to 6118 in 2004, representing a percentage increase of 23.4 %; and then to 8722 in 2005. Generally complaints relating to human rights issues filed with the offices of the Commission have constituted to the highest number of cases over the years relative to other categories such as Administrative Justice and Corruption related cases.

<sup>vi</sup> Discussions with officers during one of the training sessions.

<sup>vii</sup> A *trokosi* slave is a child who atones for the sin of a relative by serving in a shrine all her life.

<sup>viii</sup> The heads of institutions were keen about who would be involved in the research; whether or not this was an additional formal monitoring exercise and how often I would visit as well as implications of my visit.

<sup>ix</sup> In Africa where the penal systems were largely inherited from the colonial powers, the Institutional and legislative framework as well as the infrastructure remains largely unaltered. According to Sarkins (2008:23), incarceration was employed as a means of "maintaining colonial control over the occupied territories" resulting in a "subclass of humans who were available as cheap labour ... who lived in inhumane conditions, even for minor offences".

<sup>x</sup> The Ghana Prison System. Source: The Library of Congress Country Studies, CIA World Fact book.

<sup>xi</sup> Interviews held with the assistant headmaster of the present institution in January and February 2009 reveal a sharp contrast with the earlier institution manned by the Salvation Army Church. The erstwhile institution boasted of well-equipped workshops with school buildings that covered a vast expanse of land. Juveniles on account of the educational provision offered them at the time were always in high demand and even while in detention they engaged in paid employment and their monies kept for them in savings accounts. On completion, re-integration into society did not pose much challenge to them as there was a high demand for their skills on the labor market. The current institution utilizes the same premises as the erstwhile one except that it has only one building allocated to the Junior Correctional Centre as a dormitory; remaining buildings are for the predominant use of the vocational and technical institution (some juvenile offenders do benefit from vocational and technical instruction).

<sup>xii</sup> Such as the preparation of Social Enquiry Reports; these are detailed reports prepared by a social worker based on investigations conducted with respect to the family, school and general environment in which the juvenile and young offender resides and other factors that must have influenced the committal of crime. See the Juvenile Justice Act, section 24.

<sup>xiii</sup> The Criminal Code (Amendment Act 554 of 1998) raises the age of criminal responsibility from age 7 to age 12.

<sup>xiv</sup> The legal protection that the Juvenile Justice Act offers juvenile and young offenders between ages 12 to 21 is of little relevance to young female offenders who are beyond the age of 18 years. Whereas young offenders beyond the age of 18 can be admitted to the SCC, not so with girls as there exists no SCC for girls. The implication is that girls could be finding themselves in prison at earlier ages than boys (or disappearing elsewhere) which possibly explains the very low committal rates at the JCC.

<sup>xv</sup> The youth is defined to be people between 15 and 24 years of age. See UN World Report on Youth, 2007.

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Adolescents, according to UN definition are people aged 10-19; Young people are those aged 10-24. According to the African Youth Charter of the African Union, the youth are persons aged 15-35 years.

Ghana has no definite definition for youth though; Ghana's National Youth Policy of 2008 defines Youth as aged 15-35 years.

<sup>xvi</sup> School registers and administrative processes require frequent information on age. Guardians as well as pupils and students are obliged regularly to provide such information even in the absence of a birth certificate.

<sup>xvii</sup> Dr. Andrew Jefferson has also done some ethnographic work in Liberia and Sierra Leone. There are other few upcoming doctoral studies identified, such as a proposed research looking at 'street children's' experiences of juvenile justice practices in Kenya by a doctoral student.

<sup>xviii</sup> Tomas Max Martin is currently concluding an ethnographic research project on human rights reform in Ugandan prisons.

<sup>xix</sup> See also the UN Convention Against Torture.

<sup>xx</sup> See Detention Monitoring Guide by the Association for the Prevention of Torture.

<sup>xxi</sup> The Legal Resource Centre in Ghana confirms that one area that has received little attention in Ghana's efforts towards increased protection of and respect for human rights has been the condition of our prisons and the situation of our prisoners.

<sup>xxii</sup> In Africa, discussions and writings pertaining to prisons are bound to dominant discourses about the prison as characterized by poor standards of confinement or as a disciplinary site warranting various interventions. The publication by Sarkins (2008) is the first of its kind that provides a comparative approach on prisons in Africa. Yet, this study does not go beyond standardizing Africa prisons as characterized by large remand populations, over-crowdedness and poor conditions. While large remand and prison populations do play a functional role as they buttress the necessity of instituting intervention measures for such populations, researchers such as Jewkes (2006) and Rhodes (2004; 2009) at a recent prison ethnography conference from 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2012, Milton Keynes in London and other researchers such as Gigengack (2006), have cautioned about the rhetoric of numbers and the tendency of such numbers to camouflage actual situations.

There is also a gradually growing research interest which is anthropologically and ethnographically grounded (See Wacquant 2001, 2002 & Rhodes 2004, 2009), that seeks to question the linkage between the rise in prison populations and crime trends and raise critical issues concerning political, economic and socio-cultural justifications for prison expansion. Some researchers attribute the population boom in prisons to reasons such as criminalization of poverty where the poor tend to languish in prisons. While economic benefits derive from expansion of prisons; such expansion sometimes occurs at the expense of the many poor who are imprisoned for minor offences.

Generally, establishing an accurate crime picture in Ghana is difficult as crime reports which draw predominantly from the police sometimes show discrepancies and distortions possibly due to factors such as inadequate resources, low police–citizenry ratio, cultural beliefs and practices which result in cases being settled out of court and sometimes resulting in such cases not always included in official data. See Appiahene-Gyamfi (2002) on *Analysis of the broad crime trends and patterns in Ghana*. Child offenders who are incarcerated in Africa constitute a small proportion of overall prison populations in Africa, with child prison populations ranging from 0.5 to 2.5 percent. Statistics on child prisoners are significantly under reported due to the inadequate and inaccurate birth registration documentation coupled with the fact that, child offenders tend to inflate their ages. Most statistics on child offenders in detention derive from children imprisoned in adult prisons; there is hardly any information on child offenders in police detention centres and remand homes.

Notwithstanding the prison population bulge in Africa, crime rates have not shown a proportionate increase. In fact in Ghana, crime rates are reportedly on the decline, while other statistics also depict a fluctuating trend (Review of the First Five-Year Strategic/National Policing Plan, 2006-2010), of the Ghana Police Service which was completed in 2005, and finally approved by the Police Council in August, 2007, establishing that the increase in prison populations is not necessarily an indication that crime rates are on the ascendancy.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The conference which was held from 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 brought together members of Global Prisons Research Network (GPRN) for the third time following the inauguration of the network in December 2009 and a panel presentation at the British Society of Criminology's Conference in July 2010. The workshop was hosted by Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), Amsterdam.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The idea that resistance is inscribed into power has attracted some critique from authors such as Mills (2003) who are of the view that if resistance is 'written in' to power then the agency of individuals who resist may seem to be diminished. See Mills 2003:40.

<sup>xxv</sup> In terms of how they keep their time and adhere to routines of bathing, eating, sleeping, educational and religious instruction and workshops.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In year 2001, the average daily lock up for the SCC was 126; in 2002 it increased to 132 and then decreased to 79 and 72 in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The average daily lock-up rose to 108,118 and 122 in years 2007, 2008 and 2009 respectively. In an interview (SCC, July 26, 2010) with an Officer in Charge who had newly assumed post, he quoted the lock-up on the day of interview as 131, with one escape occurrence, commenting that the population of male youngsters had

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seen an increase over recent years. The lock-up number however decreased in 2011, thereby maintaining a general fluctuating trend.

I consulted official documents such as bio data of youngsters and also social enquiry reports at a later stage of my period when I had acquired certain level of acquaintance with the detention setting, staff, youngsters and procedures of work. This arrangement kept me from basing my interactions with youngsters on preconceived ideas stemming from such official documents.

Official records at the boys' institution were consulted in March 2010 based on available data covering 146 boys from January 2006 to March 2009 (SCC, March 2010). Youngsters were aged between 12 and 21 years. Approximately seven out of ten boys were aged between 16 and 17 years. Offences for which youngsters are committed to correctional centers include robbery, defilement, assault, unlawful entry, threat of death among other offences. The majority of boys (86%) had attained some level of basic education. Stealing constitutes the common offence committed by 51% of youngsters, followed by defilement which involves 24% of boys. See Section 101 of Ghana's Criminal Offences Act 29 for the definition of defilement. Parents of 45% of youngsters are divorced. 34% of youngsters had one of their parents deceased, parents of 12% of youngsters are married; the records of 30% gave no indication about marital status of parents. Fathers of 14% of youngsters are civil servants in the formal sector while the remaining are self-employed in the non-formal sector with majority being farmers. The records of 25.34% gave no indication of the employment status of fathers. Mothers of 3% of youngsters are civil servants in the formal sector. The remaining are self-employed in the non-formal sector; majority (75%) is traders. The records of 12% of boys gave no indication of the employment status of mothers. Families of most inmates (73.8%) profess to be Christian; while 16.3%<sup>xxvi</sup> are reportedly adherents of the Islamic faith.

At the JCC, official records of female youngsters in committal over the past years (2005-2009) were unavailable reportedly due to poor record keeping and documentation. In an interview with the head and assistant (JCC, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2010), it was noted that no proper records were available at the time that the head and the assistant assumed duty. An average of eight girls was in committal during the period of field work. Their ages ranged from 12-17, with majority being between 15 and 16. Approximately, five out of eight (62.5%) girls according to official records had formal education at least to the basic level. Offences committed run the gamut from stealing, abetment to commit crime through loitering to offering services of a prostitute; majority of girls (50%) were committed on charges of stealing. The parents of most girls (85.5%) had divorced. 62.5% of girls, according to records had formal education at least to the basic level; 37.5% had no formal education beyond primary level. Official records at the JCC lacked details on parental occupation.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Total number of staff (subordinate and superior) at the SCC is 212. This number is exclusive of prison support staff that numbers 30. The total number of subordinate staff is 202, comprising 95.3% of total staff, whereas superior staff are only 10, constituting 4.71%. Out of 10 superior staff, only two are female. The JCC has a total of 31 staff, 4 male and 27 female. These officers serve other centres such as a remand centre for boys, a shelter for girls who have suffered various forms of abuse and also a vocational training institute.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The physical environment for female youngsters at the JCC is more open relative to the SCC; the former resembled a school and not a prison. However, the social atmosphere at the JCC was rather constraining (Chapters 2&5).

<sup>xxix</sup> This is besides the numerous spontaneous conversational interviews and observations held daily.

<sup>xxx</sup> The assembly also doubles as a dining hall and a classroom but which at the time of interviews, did not host any activity.

<sup>xxxi</sup> These documents provided information on the background history of youngsters over the past three years as recorded by social workers and other state officials for administrative purposes.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The high escape rate at the girl's institution (Chapter 5.1) frequently evokes stringent institutional measures which in turn invites backlashes from female youngsters in the form of frowns, verbal aggression and rude behavior. Methodologically, this social atmosphere made it difficult to obtain in-depth interviews and narratives from female youngsters. Consequently, only very few girls provided account of their pre committal experiences.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> I had, prior to these interactions, observed Kwesi during school lessons, meal times and while participating in various activities; and also during a focus group discussion.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Basic Education in Ghana comprises six years Primary education and three years Junior High School Education after which one proceeds to the Senior High School.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Grace's father was one of very few parents I managed to speak with.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Kasapa* is a Telephone company in Ghana.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Discussions in this chapter seek to establish difference and diversity and not generalization. Even If the latter was considered, one cannot draw any inferences as the cases under consideration are few.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> A favorite local dish made of rice and beans.

<sup>xxxix</sup> A senior officer of the social welfare department commented that committal is usually considered a last resort when all other alternatives to committal – most of which seek the involvement of the parent or relation to provide some support to the child in the community- are exhausted.

<sup>xl</sup> According to the Act, a court that deals with a juvenile offender may: discharge the offender conditionally or unconditionally; discharge the offender after the juvenile has given an undertaking; release the offender on probation;

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commit the offender to the care of a relative or other fit person; order the offender to pay a fine, damages, or costs; order the parent, guardian or close relative of the offender to pay a fine, damages or costs; order the parent, guardian or close relative of the offender to give security for the good behaviour of the offender. The ability of the juvenile offender, parent, guardian or close relative to pay the fine, damages or costs shall be taken into consideration by the court before the order is made. See the Juvenile Justice Act, Section 29: 1&2.

<sup>xli</sup> Right from age five, children are considered to be able to reason and responsibilities are expected of them. See Twum Danso (2009).

<sup>xlii</sup> Christian 68.8% (Pentecostal/Charismatic 24.1%, Protestant 18.6%, Catholic 15.1%, other 11%), Muslim 15.9%, traditional 8.5%, other 0.7%, none 6.1%. These figures are based on the 2000 population census. At the time of compiling this information, the official results of the 2010 population census had not been released yet though provisional results by the Ghana Statistical Service indicate an increase from approximately 19.0 million to 24.2 million in total population.

<sup>xliii</sup> Youngsters sometimes refer to robbery acts as operations.

<sup>xliv</sup> These are spiritualists usually associated with the Islamic faith by Ghanaians.

<sup>xlvi</sup> The topic of spirituality is visited later in brief discussions regarding youngsters' motivations for spirituality while in detention.

<sup>xlv</sup> The offstage transcript of the dominant, like its counterpart among subordinates, consists in those gestures and words that contradict or confirm what appears in public. Scott (1990) explains public transcript as an action that is openly avowed to the other party in a power relationship, and hidden transcript as a complete record of what is said, that which includes non-speech acts, gestures and expressions.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Official records at the boys' institution were consulted in March 2010 based on available data covering 146 boys from January 2006 to March 2009 (SCC, March 2010). Youngsters were aged between 12 and 21 years. Approximately seven out of ten boys were aged between 16 and 17 years. Offences for which youngsters are committed to correctional centers include robbery, defilement, assault, unlawful entry, threat of death among other offences. The majority of boys (86%) had attained some level of basic education. Stealing constitutes the common offence committed by 51% of youngsters, followed by defilement which involves 24% of boys. Parents of 45% of youngsters are divorced. 34% of youngsters had one of their parents deceased, parents of 12% of youngsters are married; the records of 30% gave no indication about marital status of parents. Fathers of 14% of youngsters are civil servants in the formal sector while the remaining is self-employed in the non-formal sector with majority being farmers. The records of 25% gave no indication of the employment status of fathers. Mothers of 3% of youngsters are civil servants in the formal sector. The remaining are self-employed in the non-formal sector; majority (75%) is traders. The records of 12% of boys gave no indication of the employment status of mothers. Families of most inmates (74%) profess to be Christian; while 16%<sup>xlviii</sup> are reportedly adherents of the Islamic faith.

An average of eight girls was in committal during the period of field work. Their ages ranged from 12-17, with majority being between ages 15 and 16. Approximately, five out of eight girls according to official records had formal education, at least, to the basic level. Offences committed run the gamut from stealing, abetment to commit crime through loitering to offering services of a prostitute; majority of girls (50%) were committed on charges of stealing. The parents of most girls (85.5%) had divorced. 63% of girls, according to records had formal education at least to the basic level. 38% had no formal education beyond primary level. Official records at the JCC lacked details on parental occupation.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Ghanaian hand-woven baskets are of numerous varieties, the connotation here is a hand woven container that can never hold water because of its many big spaces.

<sup>xlix</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012, Joy News reported, "Prison Inmates write BECE: Fourteen inmates from the Borstal Institute in Accra are among 32,605 pupils currently sitting this year's Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in the Greater Accra Region..."

<sup>l</sup> CHRAJ's prisons monitoring reports have also documented some instances when police officers use their own money to feed suspects as there is usually no State provision for suspects.

<sup>li</sup> See US State Report, Ghana.

Remand homes house youngsters whose cases are on trial before court.

<sup>lii</sup> It is the direct responsibility for police officers to ensure that children and youngsters are conveyed to court regularly, but this is not the case. Police usually attribute this inability to inadequacy of resources, for instance, non-availability of a vehicle to convey juvenile offenders to court.

<sup>liii</sup> Scott (1990:2) explains public as an action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and transcript as a complete record of what is said, that which includes non-speech acts, gestures and expressions.

<sup>liv</sup> The offstage transcript of elites is like its counterpart among subordinates and consists in those gestures and words that contradict or confirm what appears in public (Scott 1990:10).

<sup>lv</sup> As a matter of policy, all staff at the JCC are female. At the SCC, most dorm wardens are female.

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<sup>lvi</sup> Olivier de Sardan (2008) discusses the everyday operations of African states, what he terms real governance or practical norms as against the ideal, that is one that functions in conformity with professional norms.

<sup>lvii</sup> Sometimes occupants of dorm six can suffer demotion when they do not comply with institutional rules, and in which case, such inmates may not necessarily be occupants of dormitory six prior to discharge.

<sup>lviii</sup> These leaders were previously elected by inmates but this is no longer the case. Staff is of the view that it is better to appoint captains.

<sup>lix</sup> Sanitary facilities are cleaned regularly and yet this pervasive smell is unavoidable given that an average of twenty inmates share one lavatory and bathroom.

<sup>lx</sup> At the JCC, official records of female youngsters in committal over the past years (2005-2009) were unavailable reportedly due to poor record keeping and documentation. In an interview with the head and assistant (JCC, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2010), they said that no proper records were available at the time they assumed duty. I however managed to extract twenty-two old cases from 2005-2009 from which the escape information of girls was obtained. According to these records, 12 out of 22 girls absconded while six girls completed their period of committal. No records exist for the escape history of four girls.

<sup>lxi</sup> During the course of the field work, an older youngster who was admitted with her baby shared some concerns about plans to have her baby adopted. This was the period that monitors had visited from the CHRAJ and so the case was referred to the CHRAJ.

<sup>lxii</sup> Though these centres were established pursuant to the passage of the Juvenile Justice Act, the Act is silent on what correction actually entails and rather makes reference to the function of detention (see section 39, Juvenile Justice Act 653 of 2003). By conceiving of youngsters as disruptive, correctional centres are mostly preoccupied with enforcing the objective of control and discipline (rather than correction) thereby promoting compliance and conformity to detention rules and rituals and ensuring that youngsters do not escape (see chapters 3&5).

<sup>lxiii</sup> In Ghana, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is responsible for several examinations. The main ones are the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for Junior High Schools and the Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE) for Senior High Schools. The WASSCE was adopted to replace the SSCE in 2006.

<sup>lxiv</sup> All tertiary graduates are obliged to do a national service for a year before they can enter formal employments.

<sup>lxv</sup> Sometimes about a third of an entire class is made to kneel down as a form of punishment.

<sup>lxvi</sup> This is a biblical verse and so is 'spare the rod and spoil the child'. Such adages are not restricted to correctional centres only but often used in other spheres such as the home and school, where corporal punishment is administered.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Padre hour is a military term, according to the chaplain, for a church service.

<sup>lxviii</sup> Idol or fetish worship is a form of Ghanaian traditional worship. Idols are images or inanimate things believed to be inhabited by spirits and who represent certain divinities. These idols are kept in a sacred place or a shrine and are worshipped by households or whole communities. Often there is a priest, usually known as a fetish priest, who performs rituals on behalf of households or communities.

<sup>lxix</sup> Other forms of child labour often labeled as child work do exist in familial settings such the engagement of children in farms or in petty trading to supplement the income of family. Also see Kielland, A. and T. Maurizia (2006).

<sup>lxx</sup> Over the years CHRAJ had built collaborative relationships with detaining authorities, in particular the Ghana Prisons Service.

## Summary

This research was motivated by the need to close the gap between normative conceptualizations of human rights and assumptions about ‘bad’ children. I have witnessed and described the everyday lives and experiences of child detainees so as to find out how they make meaning of their world. This PhD thesis is the product of extensive ethnographic research in two confinement sites for children in conflict with the law in Ghana. It turns the gaze away from the dominant domestic, regional and international discourse on African prisons and detentions institutions. Such discourse focuses on prisons in Africa as old colonial warehouses characterised by appalling conditions such as overpopulation, poor ventilation, incarceration of juvenile offenders in adult prisons, and overstay of remand prisoners. The novelty of this study lies in its moving away from a legalistic approach to engage in an empirical study of prison life, contributing an ethnographic approach to children in detention centres in Africa and the Global South that is almost non-existent.

The study evokes a perspective of detention life characteristic of Goffman’s total institutions (Goffman 1968). By focusing on detention practice, the thesis conceives prisons from the inside-out and depicts the entanglement of social processes of everyday detention life with the governance of correctional centres. The outcome of this ethnographic research suggests that the everyday formal and informal lives of youngsters and staff in total institutions are beset with entanglements, ambiguities, and paradoxes that blur the boundaries between these actors. This research contributes a unique empirical approach to the body of knowledge on children, young people and detainees in the fields of sociology, law, human rights, and criminal justice.

The introduction to this thesis outlines the motivation that underpins the conduct of this research, discusses the scholarly work undertaken in the field, and gives the research questions that I have sought to answer.

Chapter 2 is a collection of narratives of eight young offenders discussed in contrast with the views of Ghanaian literature on the growing up experiences of children. The youngsters’ narratives - which they never seem to have had the opportunity to tell - depict children who are differentiated on their accounts of rejection and their varied capacities to act in difficult situations. Stories are dotted with diversified experiences of unwantedness, coupled with encounters of rampant mobility within diverse social settings. However, these



narratives also depict pleasant phases characterized by peer associations, friendships and careers. Discussions in Chapter 2 reveal a clear gap between literature portrayals and youngsters' views. For instance, where there are instances of deprivation the literature lays the blame of rejection and neglect at the doorsteps of the children. Further, while youngsters' frequent movements are so important and crucial to their livelihoods and survival, these movements are not adequately represented in the literature. Youngsters treasure their peer associations as they draw on them to meet survival needs, both material and non-material.

Generally, youngsters' narratives are at variance with views expressed by West African essentialist literature; narratives evince diversity and heterogeneity as against the singular notion of "the Ghanaian child". Pre-detention life is not characterized by a singular, unitary or monolithic power. Youngsters as social actors are actively involved in structuring their everyday life which is characterised by differentiated realities in terms of neglect, punishment, mobility and spirituality. Youngsters' narratives also demonstrate various forms of resistance to an overpowering family structure thereby establishing the variedness of power and resistance and also that power is not confined to the sovereign.

In Chapter 3, I outline the institutional routines, rules and disciplinary procedures of detention centres. Conceptually, formal detention centres such as police cells and correctional centres exemplify total institutions in keeping with Goffman's (1968) characterization of total institutions. Correctional institutions with their attendant procedures and rituals such as supervision, parades, counting and marching are depicted by Goffman as a "forcing house" (Goffman 1968: 22) which acts on youngsters and changes them. Generally, the structuredness of confinement settings is conditional to their functioning, as the procedures of detention institutions arrogate a certain form of concreteness suggesting their exercise of power over youngsters. This gives an on-stage appearance that all is well and that such institutions function effectively to produce compliant inmates and also staff. The structuredness of correctional institutions also ensures security of staff by ascertaining employability. When youngsters do not respond to institutional provisions such as health, food and education, the general functioning of staff and the institution is threatened.

Chapter 3 also discusses the prominent role that the hidden transcript (Scott 1990) and off-stage social life of correctional institutions play in terms of ensuring compliance with the rules of these institutions. Whereas correctional centres with their attendant rules and disciplinary procedures act as a forcing house so as to promote conformity with

institutional norms, ensuring compliance is difficult. Youngsters in fact impose a disciplinary procedure on state offices by being non-compliant. They wield weapons that render the forcing hand of official and institutional power weak and defective, as evidenced in off-stage admissions by staff. The forcing hand of the total institution is limited, defective and characterized by practices of ambiguity. Further, youngsters are not always relegated permanently to the fringes of a total institution; they are also enlisted to govern and by so doing mortify other inmates.

A further challenge to the logic of these institutions is the observance of human rights which the management regards as an impediment to the enforcement of a disciplinary order. Officers however device ways of circumventing this clash between the normative principles of human rights and what actually pertains in practice.

Chapter 4 discusses the social underlife of youngsters which is hidden from the public eye, and yet is well patronized not only by youngsters but also by staff. Underlife, according to Goffman (1968) is to an institution what an underworld is to a city. This underlife cannot be equated to an inmate culture as it is not confined solely to the world of inmates nor does it constitute a singular culture of inmates characterized by a common inmate code. Moreover, this social life is not distinct from the formal processes of total institutions.

The social underlife that thrives in correctional centres is shared by inmates and partly by state (police and prison) officials. I have documented various aspects of the informal economy that thrives in police cells and within the bounded walls of correctional institutions. In the underlife of correctional institutions, aspects of social relations are revealed that are characterized by rituals, hierarchy, development of peer links, the creation of privacy and spiritual meanings. The chapter also documents practices of patronage relationships among inmate and staff.

In the same way that the ambiguities of official care and power are contributive to the appearance of an effective functioning institution (Chapter 3) the underlife is also vital to the everyday life of inmates as well as officers. Not only do youngsters demonstrate the capacity to process social experience and devise ways of coping under difficult situations of confinement, staff and inmates mutually depend on each other as they access material and non-material resources.

Chapter 5 centres on the paradoxes that characterize escapes and detention life. Escapes evoke confinement and also an increase in totalistic measures. Yet, by virtue of being structured along bureaucratic arrangements, totalistic power and order, correctional centres also invite escapes. In my narration of three cases, I discuss various mechanisms by which confinement life invites escapes and vice versa. These cases which unfold through multiple narrations are replete with various forms of everyday as well as structural violence. They illustrate the intricacies that characterize escape occurrences such as violent acts, revenge, intimidation, and sometimes emotional outbursts. Also evident is the enmeshment of private and official spheres of detention life which sometimes comes with repercussions that challenge the logic of a total institution seeking to maintain a marked boundary between the private and the official.

The ethnographic evidence presented in Chapter 5 demonstrates that the occurrence of escapes in correctional centres cannot be reduced to prevention and punishment of the youngsters who escape. Such reduction glosses over the complexities of confinement practice characterized by violence, collusions and entangled relationships between staff and inmates.

Chapter 6 dwells on two key provisions – educational and religious – that correctional centres employ with the intention to promote correction. Educational and religious activities perform the key function of bringing about change and correction in youngsters, an objective that correctional centres seek to fulfil through the regular conduct of educational and religious activities and counselling sessions. I dwell on the various educational provisions such as formal, non-formal and vocational instructions. The case of William, an inmate teacher, illustrates youngsters' interest in the pursuance of non-formal education. Also, youngsters' interest and participation in institutional religious services is discussed while outlining their own efforts to draw on their own differentiated forms of spirituality without staff initiative or staff involvement. Youngsters' forms of spirituality constitute a sense of pride and a power contest for them. Their spirituality accords legitimacy to their accusations and defences, but they also provide a cover up or a way to conceal certain acts.

Chapter 6 finally discusses ways in which the development concepts of sidetracking and appropriation (Olivier de Sardan 2008) are employed to pursue one's own goals. Appropriation is usually the end sought by development operations in their dealing with their target, and sidetracking is a way by which target groups 'appropriate' a project.

Sidetracking is manifest in the everyday life of correctional centres, even though the process of appropriation does not involve the diversion of a material resource such as credit granted by a development project. Both staff and youngsters appear to engage in institutional activities that seek to perform a key function in bringing about change and correction. Yet, in the process of pursuing this end, the objective is sidetracked to meet their own interests. Contrary to what is portrayed in development literature, in correctional centres both youngsters and staff exhibit sidetracking and appropriation in their entangled relationships. Diverting from institutional goals however presents a paradox. Whereas the process of sidetracking assumes certain forms that run counter to institutional norms, staff do not oppose such appropriated forms given that these forms are beneficial to them.

Youngsters sometimes employ sidetracking to steer conversations in directions that favour them. They do so by remaining silent, providing mechanical responses, resorting to tale-telling or exhibiting open resistance. While sidetracking can entail some form of resistance, it should not be equated with resistance as the aim is not to radically oppose institutional objectives. Youngsters and staff are usually set on the path to pursue institutional objectives but in the process divert from them. Consequently, actions and interventions must draw on these everyday practices rather than regarding them as negative or detrimental to the intervention or development process.

In sum, this ethnographic research raises crucial issues about the entanglements, paradoxes, and ambiguities of power and official relationships that characterise the everyday detention lives of youngsters and staff in total institutions. The permeability of boundaries within correctional centres as well as between the institutions and the world 'out there' should trigger the concern of those involved, including policy makers, that actions and interventions ought to take the practical and local contexts of young detainees as a starting point for institutional development and the improvement of their human rights.

## Samenvatting

De beweegreden voor dit onderzoek was de noodzaak om de tegenstelling the overbruggen tussen normatieve begripsvorming over mensenrechten en aannames over kinderen. Hiervoor was het nodig om dichterbij de kinderen in jeugdgevangenissen te komen. Ik heb hun dagelijks leven daar meegemaakt en de ervaringen van de jonge gedetineerden beschreven om te weten te komen hoe zij betekenis geven aan hun wereld.

Deze dissertatie is het product van extensief etnografisch onderzoek in twee instellingen in Ghana voor kinderen die in conflict gekomen zijn met de wet. Ik kijk niet naar de dominante Ghanese, regionale en internationale vertogen over Afrikaanse gevangenissen en huizen van bewaring. Dergelijke vertogen zien gevangenissen in Afrika louter als koloniale pakhuizen, gekenmerkt door erbarmelijke omstandigheden zoals overbevolking, slechte ventilatie, opsluiting van jeugdige overtreeders in gevangenissen voor volwassenen en langdurige detentie van mensen in voorarrest.

Dit onderzoek is vernieuwend, omdat het een empirisch onderzoek voorstaat van het gevangenisleven in plaats van een legalistische benadering; zo'n etnografische benadering van kinderen in jeugdgevangenissen bestaat nauwelijks in Afrika en de 'global South'. De studie roept een beeld op dat kenmerkend is voor wat Goffman (1968) een "totale institutie" noemde. Door de aandacht te richten op de praktijk van gevangenhouding bekijk ik jeugdgevangenissen van binnenuit en ontdekte ik hoe sociale processen in de dagelijkse omgeving van het leven in zo'n instelling is verwickeld met de manier waarop strafcentra worden bestuurd en geleid.

De uitkomsten van dit etnografisch onderzoek laten zien dat formele en informele contacten in de dagelijkse omgang tussen jongeren en staf in totale instellingen vol verwikkelingen, ambiguiteiten en paradoxen zijn die de grenzen doen vervagen tussen de actoren. Zo draagt deze studie uniek empirisch materiaal aan over de kennis van kinderen en jonge gedetineerden op het gebied van de sociologie, het (straf)recht en de mensenrechten.

De dissertatie is als volgt opgebouwd:

In de Inleiding beschrijf ik mijn motivatie voor het doen van dit onderzoek, bespreek ik wetenschappelijk werk op dit gebied en formuleer ik de onderzoeksvragen die ik wil beantwoorden.

Hoofdstuk 2 is een verzameling narratieven van acht jonge overtredders die worden gecontrasteerd met beelden uit de sterk normatieve Ghanese literatuur over de opvoeding en het opgroeien van kinderen. Hun verhalen – die zij klaarblijkelijk nooit hebben kunnen vertellen – laten een verscheiden beeld zien van verstoting en de verschillende capaciteiten van kinderen om moeilijke situaties het hoofd te bieden. De verhalen staan vol met ervaringen van ongewenst zijn, ‘te veel’ zijn en bijgevolg een voortdurend in beweging en mobiel zijn in diverse sociale omgevingen.

Toch laten deze narratieven ook plezierige momenten zien die worden gekenmerkt door saamhorigheid tussen lotgenoten, vriendschappen en carrières. In dit hoofdstuk bespreek ik het duidelijke gat tussen de literatuur en de visie van de jongeren zelf. Zo legt de literatuur bijvoorbeeld de schuld voor hun afwijzing en verwaarlozing bij de kinderen zelf. Een ander voorbeeld is het grote belang dat kinderen hechten aan mobiliteit, het zich vaak kunnen verplaatsen, wat cruciaal is voor hun manier van leven en overlevingskans – terwijl zulke mobiliteit helemaal niet wordt behandeld in de literatuur. Jongeren hechte grote er waarde aan deel uit te maken van groepjes lotgenoten waarop zij een beroep kunnen doen om te overleven, zowel in materiële als in niet-materiële zin. Al met al komen er uit de verhalen een grote diversiteit en heterogeniteit naar voren die niet stroken met het simplistische beeld van ‘het Ghanese kind’ in de West Afrikaanse essentialistische literatuur. Hun leven voordat ze opgepakt werden wordt gekenmerkt door een enkele, eenvormige of monolithische vorm van macht. De jongeren vertonen weerstand tegen een dominante familiestructuur en zijn als sociale actoren zelf bezig hun alledaagse leven te structureren in termen van verwaarlozing, straf, mobiliteit en spiritualiteit.

In hoofdstuk 3 zet ik de institutionele routine, regels en disciplinaire maatregelen van de jeugdgevangenissen uiteen. Conceptueel zijn plaatsen als politiecellen en strafinstellingen toale instituties in lijn met de typologie door Goffman (1968). Jeugdgevangenissen met hun bijbehorende procedures en rituelen, zoals supervisie, parades, het eeuwige tellen en marcheren worden door Goffmann (1968:22) gezien als elementen van een “forcing house” dat op jongeren inwerkt en hen verandert. In het algemeen is de gestructureerdheid van hun

opsluiting voorwaardelijk voor hun functioneren, doordat de instellingen zich in hun procedures een zekere vorm van concreetheid aanmeten die suggereert dat ze macht hebben over de jonge gedetineerden. Dit genereert een ‘on-stage’ voorstelling dat alles in orde is en dat de instellingen effectief zijn in het produceren van gehoorzame gedetineerden en staf. De gestructureerdheid van jeugdgevangenissen verschaft bovendien de staf de zekerheid van een baan. Wanneer de jonge gedetineerden zich niet willen inlaten met voorzieningen voor gezondheid, voedsel en onderwijs, dan kan dat bedreigend zijn voor het algehele functioneren van staf en instelling.

Hoofdstuk 3 bespreekt ook de voorname rol die Scott’s (1990) “hidden transcript” en het sociale leven achter de schermen in de instellingen spelen in de verzekering dat men zich houdt aan de regels ervan. Ook al opereren jeugdgevangenissen met hun regels en disciplinaire procedures als “forcing house”, het is moeilijk om te zorgen dat staf en gevangenen zich er ook aan houden. De jongeren passen technieken toe die de macht van de beheerders verzwakken en onvolkomen maken, wat door stafleden privé wel wordt toegegeven. De machtige hand van de instelling is beperkt door ambiguïteit, terwijl sommige gevangenen zelfs een taak krijgen in het beheer van de instelling en zodoende zelf ook andere gevangenen kunnen tuchtigen. Een andere uitdaging aan de logica van een totale institutie is de handhaving van mensenrechten, wat door de bestuurders en beheerders van de instelling wordt gezien als een belemmering van de mogelijkheid een disciplinaire orde op te leggen. Zij verzinnen echter manieren om de botsing te omzeilen tussen de normatieve mensenrechten principes en de praktijk.

In hoofdstuk 4 bespreek ik het “social underlife” ofwel het sociale leven van de jongeren in detentie dat zich onttrekt aan het oog van het publiek, maar dat wordt gestuurd door zowel de jongeren als de staf. De “underlife” is volgens Goffman (1968) voor een inrichting wat de onderwereld is voor een stad. Het is niet gelijk aan een gevangenen cultuur, aangezien het niet uitsluitend de gedetineerden omvat, en evenmin een gemeenschappelijke culturele code inhoudt van de gedetineerden. Bovendien is dit sociale leven niet altijd gescheiden van de formele processen in de instelling.

De sociale “underlife” is sterk aanwezig onder gedetineerden in jeugdgevangenissen, maar deels ook onder politie en gevangenisstaf. Zo heb ik verschillende voorbeelden van informele economische uitwisseling genoteerd tussen politie en gevangenen in politiecellen en binnen de ommuurde ruimten van de gevangenis. In het “underlife” gelden sociale relaties gekenmerkt door rituelen, hiërarchie, de vorming van vriendschapsbanden tussen

lotgenoten, het creëren van privacy en spirituele betekenisgeving. Ook komen er patronage verhoudingen voor tussen staf en gedetineerden, waarbij beiden voordeel genieten.

Zoals de schijn van officiële zorg en macht het beeld ondersteunt van een effectief functionerend instituut (Hoofdstuk 3), is de “underlife” van vitale betekenis voor het dagelijks leven van de gedetineerden zowel als de staf. Beiden zijn wederzijds van elkaar afhankelijk in het zich verzekeren van toegang tot materiële en niet-materiële goederen.

Hoofdstuk 5 draait om de paradox van ontvluchting en het leven in de jeugdgevangenis. Ontvluchting lokt nieuwe opsluiting uit en verscherping van de totalistische maatregelen. Interessant genoeg leiden juist de bureaucratische structuur, totalistische macht en orde van de jeugdgevangenschappen tot vluchtgedrag. Ik doe verslag van drie gevallen van verschillende mechanismen waarbij opsluiting leidt tot ontvluchten en vice versa. De drie verhalen staan boordevol vormen van alledaags en structureel geweld en zij illustreren de ingewikkelde toestanden rond een ontvluchting, zoals gewelddadigheid, wraak, intimidatie en soms emotionele uitbarstingen van de jongeren, maar ook van de staf. Het is duidelijk dat de vermenging van privé en officiële sferen van het leven in de instelling soms repercussies heeft op de logica van een “totale institutie” die poogt een duidelijke grens te bewaken tussen de privé en officiële sferen. De etnografische feiten in Hoofdstuk 5 laten zien dat het vóórkomen van ontvluchtingen uit jeugdgevangenschappen niet kan worden gereduceerd tot het simpleweg voorkómen ervan en het straffen van de weglopers. Dit zou de complexiteit over het hoofd zien van de praktijk van de jeugdgevangenis die wordt gekenmerkt door geweld, belangenverstrengeling en verwikkeling van relaties tussen staf en gedetineerden.

Hoofdstuk 6 richt de aandacht op twee centrale voorzieningen – onderwijs en religie – die de jeugdgevangenis hanteert met de bedoeling de jongeren ‘op te voeden’. Onderwijs en religieuze activiteiten en counselling zittingen hebben tot doel gedragsverandering bij de jongeren teweeg te brengen. Er is formeel en niet-formeel onderwijs en er zijn technische trainingen. Het voorbeeld van William, een gedetineerde onderwijzer, toont de belangstelling van de jongens voor niet-formeel onderwijs. Ook bespreek ik de belangstelling voor en deelname in religieuze activiteiten van de jongeren, waarbij zij toelichten hoe zij steun zoeken in hun eigen vormen van spirituele beleving, buiten het initiatief van de staf en zonder hun betrokkenheid daarbij. Zij zijn trots op hun eigen spiritualiteit en bieden tegen elkaar op. Hun spirituele ervaringen verschaffen legitimiteit aan hun beschuldigingen en verdediging, maar kunnen ook als dekmantel worden gebruikt voor bepaalde acties.



In Hoofdstuk 6 bespreek ik ook hoe ontwikkelingsconcepten van Olivier de Sardan (2008) zoals “sidetracking” of het op een ander spoor zetten en “appropriation” of het zich toe-eigenen van een project, worden toegepast in de omgeving van de jeugdgevangenis. Beide hebben met elkaar te maken; sidetracking gebeurt in het dagelijks leven in de instelling wanneer staf of gedetineerden zich een bepaalde actie naar hun hand willen zetten en eigen maken. Ook al gaat het hier niet om materiële projectgoederen zoals krediet, het is duidelijk dat zowel staf als gedetineerden de gevraagde gedragsverandering en disciplineren pogen te leiden langs de banen van hun eigen (niet-materiële) interesse. Een ander verschil met de ontwikkelingsliteratuur is dat stafleden en jongeren in deze processen verwickeld zijn via hun onderlinge relaties. Hier doet zich een interessante paradox voor: hoewel de staf zich zou moeten verzetten tegen vormen van sidetracking die tegen de totalistische structuur van de instelling ingaan, doen zij dit niet wanneer de uitkomst hun eigen belang dient.

Jongeren vertonen tactieken van het gesprek op een ander spoor brengen door te zwijgen bij ondervraging of mechanische antwoorden te geven, door verhaaltjes op te hangen of openlijk weerstand te tonen. Toch is deze weerstand niet hetzelfde als verzet bieden tegen de institutionele doelstellingen. Jongeren en staf ondersteunen meestal die doelstellingen, maar in de dagelijkse praktijk wijken ze er nogal eens van af. Dat betekent, dat die acties niet op voorhand als negatief of schadelijk voor het proces van verbetering gezien moeten worden.

Dit etnografisch onderzoek heeft enkele cruciale punten behandeld over de onderlinge verwevenheid, paradoxen en ambiguïteiten van macht in de sociale relaties tussen staf en jonge gedetineerden in jeugdgevangenissen als “totale instituties”. De poreusheid van de muren binnen de instelling zowel als van de muren naar de buitenwereld moeten tot zorg zijn van al degenen – ook beleidsmakers - die betrokken zijn met de institutionele ontwikkeling van jeugdgevangenissen en de verbetering van de mensenrechten van de jonge gedetineerden.

## About the author

Lilian Ayete-Nyampong, born in 1966, hails from Larteh, Akuapem in the Eastern region of Ghana. She began her career as a trained teacher in 1985 and having undertaken further undergraduate studies in 1991, she taught at the senior high school level for an additional two years. In 1996, Lilian attained a Master degree in Educational studies in Aberdeen, Scotland. For her Master's dissertation, she focused on Gender Roles in African families temporarily resident in Aberdeen.

From 2000, Lilian took up employment with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice in Accra, Ghana. In 2005 she assumed the position of Deputy Director, Public Education with responsibility for human rights education, human rights research, monitoring and the promotion of collaborative efforts with human rights civil society organizations. She also has represented the Commission at various local, regional and international fora where she presented papers relating to the Commission's educational and monitoring function. Prior to commencing her PhD studies in 2008, Lilian had, in the capacity of Deputy Director, oversight of the Public Education department of the Commission.

In 2008 Lilian embarked on a PhD project at Wageningen University and undertook an empirical study on detention life. She engaged in two years of ethnographic field work in Ghana from September 2009 to September 2011 in two confinement sites in Ghana for children in conflict with the law.

After her PhD research she will return to Accra, Ghana. She can be reached at [layete14@yahoo.com](mailto:layete14@yahoo.com)



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Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)

Completed Training and Supervision Plan

| Name of the course   | Department/<br>Institute     | Year      | ECTS<br>(=28 hrs) |
|--|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| <b>I. General</b>  |                              |           |                   |
| CERES orientation programme  | CERES, Utrecht               | 2009      | 5                 |
| CERES presentation tutorials   | CERES, Utrecht               | 2009      | 5.5               |
| <b>II. Research Methods and Techniques and Domain Specific Theories</b>                      |                              |           |                   |
| Methods, Techniques and Data Analysis for Field research (RDS 33306)                         | WUR                          | 2009      | 4                 |
| Social Learning in Nature- Society Relations: Politics & Creative Methods in Action Research | ARALIG, NRML Research School | 2009      | 4                 |
| A Practical course on Methodology of Fieldwork   | CERES, Utrecht               | 2009      | 2                 |
| Qualitative data analysis for development research   | CERES, Utrecht               | 2009      | 1                 |
| <b>III. Academic Skills</b>  |                              |           |                   |
| Education and Competence in Developing Societies (ECS 51806)                                 | WUR                          | 2008      | 6                 |
| Communication and Persuasion (COM 32806)   | WUR                          | 2008      | 6                 |
| Techniques for writing and presenting a scientific paper                                     | WGS                          | 2009      | 1.2               |
| End Note-Introduction and Advanced   | WGS                          | 2009      | 0.6               |
| <b>IV. Presentations of research results</b>   |                              |           |                   |
| Research seminars and presentation on PhD proposal   | WUR                          | 2008-2009 | 1.2               |

|   |                         |      |   |
|---|-------------------------|------|---|
| 'Inside Poor Prisons: An ethnography of correctional centres for juvenile and young offenders'                  | RCT, Copenhagen         | 2009 | 1 |
| 'Respecting the voices and experiences of children in conflict with the law'                                    | VU, Amsterdam           | 2010 | 1 |
| 'Juvenile and young offenders in Ghana muddling their way through uncertainties of everyday life in detention'  | GPRN Seminar, Amsterdam | 2012 | 1 |
| 'Mmofra bonne sukuu!' Notes on the 'underlife' of Ghana's Correctional Centers for juvenile and young offenders | CERES Summer School     | 2012 | 1 |

#### **V. Other**

|                           |     |           |   |
|---------------------------|-----|-----------|---|
| Writing research proposal | RDS | 2008-2009 | 3 |
|---------------------------|-----|-----------|---|

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|              |  |  |      |
|--------------|--|--|------|
| <b>TOTAL</b> |  |  | 43.5 |
|--------------|--|--|------|

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