

‘The NGOs are breaking down our system’

Vulnerable children, NGOs, and the proliferation of orphanages in Ghana



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Front page: ‘Orphan’ boys of House of Hope – in official Ghanaian shirts – playing football against the ‘town’ boys. (Photo: Afra Galama)

PREFACE

When I was still a little girl, I was already caught by images of African children and the accompanying messages that I, as someone from a western country, could do something to make a difference in the lives of these ‘poor children’. For years I dreamed of one day going to Africa to ‘help’ the children there. This never happened and over the last years I realised it might not actually be as simple as I had imagined it to be; just to go to Africa and ‘help’. What could I actually do there? When, this year, I had to come up with a theme and location for my master research, I grabbed the opportunity to learn more about orphanages, orphans and vulnerable children and the involvement of western NGOs and volunteers. I ended up doing fieldwork in Ghana for three months, which has been a truly challenging but wonderful experience.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported me and has been of importance during my research and the writing of my thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my informants. A special thank you goes to the children of SWODC, VIAK Orphanage, Hohoe Christian Orphans’ Home, House of Hope, Eugemot Orphanage and Drifting Angels’ Orphanage. Thank you for sharing your lives with me and making my research a lot of fun. I would also like to thank the ‘mothers’ and other staff members of the orphanages for their great hospitality and willingness to cooperate with my research.

A huge thank you goes to my host parents, Mr. and Mrs. Akordor. Papa and Norde, thank you for letting me be part of your family and caring for me so well. Richard, thank you for everything you have arranged for me. Without your help, my research would have been much more difficult. Thank you Kehno, for all the times you have driven me safely and listened to my worries and excitements. Eileadh Swan, thank you for your ideas and letting me share in your contacts. Crispino, thank you for being a great ambassador of Ghana and for everything you arranged for me. Thanks also to all volunteers I met in Ghana, for being great company, sharing your views with me and inviting me to your get-togethers.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Jean Kommers and my fellow students for their encouragements and useful feedback on my work. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor Marijke Steegstra. Thank you for your guidance before, during and after my fieldwork period and for your constructive feedback during the writing of my thesis.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is a Thursday afternoon around 3.30pm when volunteers Joe, Hannah, Lucy and Lucy arrive at the SWODC (Save Widows and Orphans Development Centre). They settle into the plastic chairs that are placed for them in the shade of the trees in front of the orphanage. They are chatting with each other, while waiting for the children to come back from school or their homes. When after half an hour the children still haven't arrived, the volunteers start discussing whether to stay on or not. They would like to go to the internet cafe in town. Just when they are about to leave, Bernice – the 'mother' of the orphanage – tells them there will be some children coming. Soon after, Rosemary, one of the children, arrives. She sits down in one of the chairs. The volunteers greet her, but do not really pay attention to her after that. A few moments later Francisca joins too. The volunteers continue to discuss whether to leave or not. They feel it is a bit pointless to stay with only two children around. Meanwhile, some more children are arriving back from school. The volunteers decide to stay. They take a packet of colourful balloons and some colour felts out from their bags. They start blowing up the balloons and draw faces on them. They give them out to the children and also let the children draw on the balloons. Soon many more children who are living around the orphanage arrive. The children seem to enjoy it a lot. They play around with the balloons and try to collect as many as they can. When all the balloons have been given out, the volunteers ask me to take some pictures of them with the children and the balloons. After that they leave, one-and-a-half hours after they arrived, back to town, to the internet cafe (field notes, March 4, 2010).

Mama Bernice has many children under her care. Most of them live with foster families; others are at boarding school. Only seven children are actually living at SWODC. When there are volunteers around, Mama Bernice makes sure that at least some of the children who are fostered out come to the orphanage after school to play with the volunteers. Other children who live around the orphanage are always welcome to come and play too. Joe, Hannah, Lucy and Lucy are on a volunteer programme of the British NGO (nongovernmental organisation) Madventurer. According to their programme, they should be at the orphanage every afternoon on weekdays to teach the children and play with them (Madventurer 2010). However, the children living at SWODC often do not have time to play as they are busy doing chores most afternoons. The volunteers therefore have decided to come only two afternoons a week because they feel there is not much for them to do at the orphanage.

Madventurer is one of many western NGOs sending volunteers to work temporarily at orphanages in Ghana. On their websites, the NGOs emphasise the terrible living conditions of Ghanaian orphans and promote voluntary care work as a perfect way to get involved and help improve those conditions (Projects Abroad 2009, Volunteer Abroad 2009, Cosmic Volunteers 2009, Global Volunteer Projects 2009). For example, the organisation Volunteer Abroad states the following:

Many children and Ghanaian youth grow up in the streets and live a life of extreme poverty. Some of these kids get lucky and get the attention of orphanages. This gives them a place where they get love, care and the opportunity to interact with volunteers who have the potential to shape up their future (Volunteer Abroad 2009).

However, the NGOs do not give any insight into what Ghanaians actually think of their efforts, nor do they describe how volunteers can really accomplish 'shaping the orphans' future'. The case described in the above raises a few questions: Why do many Ghanaian children actually end up in orphanages? How did these orphanages come into being and how do they maintain themselves? What is the role of NGOs in the relation between volunteers and the orphanages and the expectations they have of each other? How do Ghanaians create opportunities out of the volunteers' interest in Ghanaian orphans and orphanages?

It has been argued that Africa is the most advantageous place for effective care of orphans or vulnerable children because of the combination of familial and communal care rather than institutional care (Lund and Agyei-Mensah 2008, 94). However, the number of orphanages has increased from ten in 1996 to more than 140 in 2009, only eight of them being licensed. A recent report of children's rights organisation Save the Children shows that 4,500 children are officially recorded as living in institutional care in Ghana (Csáky 2009, 3). Up to 90% of those children have one or both parents alive (4). These statements and the example at the beginning of this chapter lead me to my main question. If orphans and vulnerable children are usually cared for in families and most children living in orphanages still have parents, then why has there been such a proliferation of orphanages in Ghana over the last fifteen years?

The focus of this thesis will be the position of orphans, vulnerable children and orphanages in Ghana in relation to the 'help' they receive from western volunteers and NGOs. This position is often viewed differently by NGOs, volunteers, and their 'host'

communities. My main argument will be that the western aid 'industry' (Crewe and Harrison 1998, 15) has played a major role in the proliferation of orphanages in Ghana. Ghanaians – adults and children – involved in orphanages in the Volta Region are active agents in this process of receiving aid from NGOs and western volunteers. They should not be seen as powerless victims of poverty or other difficult circumstances.

DEVELOPING THE POWERLESS?

Orphans and orphanages have been the focus of NGOs and others involved in the development aid 'industry'. Over the last years, much has been written about orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC). An orphan is defined as a child who has lost either one or both parents (Skinner et al. 2006, 624). A vulnerable child is seen as someone who has little or no access to basic needs or rights (623). Remarkably, almost all of the studies about orphans and vulnerable children are related to AIDS. Some studies argue that it is becoming more difficult to absorb orphans in the extended family because of the large number of young adults dying of AIDS in some African countries (Drew et al. 1998, 10). They reckon institutional care is becoming more important and NGOs should develop appropriate interventions to support families and take care of these children (Madhavan 2004, 1443). Others argue that the gap left behind by aunts and uncles is filled by grandparents and more distant family members (Foster 2000, 57). These studies mostly talk about the present situation in Southern African countries. Only 160,000 of an estimate of 1,100,000 orphans in Ghana in 2007 were orphaned by AIDS (UNICEF). Therefore, instead of focussing only on AIDS as the cause of an increase in institutional care, it is important to look at the phenomenon in the light of a bigger development discourse.

In recent years, critics of the development discourse have questioned the idea of the 'developed West' as the inspirational ideal for the 'poor Third World' (Abram 1998, 1). Many anthropologists of development are concerned with imbalances of power between parties involved in 'development' (3). They recognise the colonising effects of development discourses (4). Arturo Escobar argues:

Third world reality is inscribed with precision and persistence by the discourses and practices of economists, planners, nutritionists, demographers and the like, making it

difficult for people to define their own interest in their own terms – in many cases actually disabling them from doing so (Escobar 1995, 214).

The notion of development is so explicit for the practitioners that the possibility of aid-receivers refusing development is not taken into account at all (Abram 1998, 13). In order to understand the phenomenon of the increasing number of orphanages, and why Ghanaians do somehow seem to embrace this type of development aid, it is important to look at the strategies and opinions of the people who form the targets of western aid.

One of the ways in which western NGOs try to help Ghanaian orphanages is by sending volunteers to work there temporarily. To find out what Ghanaians think about and expect from the western volunteers, it is important to look at the relationship between them as 'hosts' and 'guests', as it is formulated in studies of tourism. It is widely argued that there is a power asymmetry between hosts and visitors (Mowforth and Munt 2008, 260). Tourism has even been seen as a form of imperialism (Nash 1989, 38). However, some recent studies point out that local people have too often been imagined as powerless victims in encounters with tourists. They argue that people themselves develop strategies to use the tourist's interest in their culture for their own benefit. In many cases the 'host' society has a good deal of control over tourism development, which enables local people to turn potential 'impacts' of tourism on local cultures creatively into economic and cultural opportunities (Dahles and Van Meijl 2000, 54). In this same manner, Ghanaians also use the interests of NGOs and western volunteers in orphans to create opportunities for themselves.

Sarah Pink, who has done anthropological research in the West-African country Guinea Bissau, argues in line with this that local people develop their own strategies based on their experiences of white foreigners and their understandings of the opportunities these people may offer them (1998, 10). Representation plays a central role in the development of these strategies. The way NGOs represent Ghanaians and in particular Ghanaian orphans may influence westerners' perceptions of them. But at the same time local people also evaluate the volunteers and other westerners in their country and use them to make generalisations about white people and to find out how they can be used to advance their careers (cf. 11).

Not only the adults involved in the orphanages, but also the children use their relationships with western volunteers in this way. Ethnographic work which attempts to

grasp the children's point of view is extremely rare (Van der Geest 1996, 339). It was only in the 1990s that an anthropology of childhood was established and anthropologists started paying more attention to children. However, anthropological studies that focus on children often see them as powerless victims of problems like poverty (Schwartzman 2001, 1). Instead of looking at the children in the orphanages as victims, I want to focus on their agency in creating opportunities for themselves, especially in their interaction with western volunteers.

The term 'volunteer tourism' refers to tourists who volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment (Wearing 2001, 1). So far, academic research has focused primarily on the effects of volunteer tourism and the profiles and motivations of the volunteers (Guttentag 2009, 549). Volunteer tourism is often seen to promote a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between the host and guest. It is described as offering an opportunity for sustainable 'alternative' travel that is more rewarding and meaningful than other holidays and focuses on the humane and self-developmental experiences that participants can gain and the assistance that can be given to communities (McIntosh and Zahra 2007, 543). However, Daniel Guttentag's recent study highlights some potential negative effects of volunteer tourism, for example a neglect of desires of local people, a promotion of dependency and a reinforcement of conceptualisations of the 'other' (2009, 537).

According to Kate Simpson (2004) the notion of the 'third world' is highly important in the popularity of volunteer programmes. She argues that the very legitimacy of such programmes is rooted in a concept of a 'third world', where there is 'need', and where young Europeans have the ability, and right, to meet this need. The dominant representations of destination countries offered by many NGOs are based on simple dualisms and stereotyped concepts of the 'other'. Homogenous descriptions of groups of people and cultures are relied on to produce evocative and recognisable images (682). In literature and publicity about volunteer tourists, there are multiple references to the 'usefulness' of the volunteers, and how they will be 'needed' by the communities in which they work. However, whatever 'needs' participants will meet is never spelt out (686). According to Eileadh Swan (n.d.) – who has done research in Ho, the same city in which I have conducted my research – volunteers are often perceived by the host community as

potential vehicles for a better life in the West. She describes how this frustrated volunteers, as they had come to 'help' but did not want to be treated like 'walking wallets'. It is thus important to look at the different expectations Ghanaians and volunteers have of each other.

Instead of focusing on western volunteers and NGOs alone, I will try to reflect the perspectives of local people – including children – on the proliferation of orphanages in Ghana. It is my theoretical goal to give the Ghanaians involved in orphanages a voice in a development discourse that seems to be dominated by NGOs. As I mentioned before, I argue that the western aid 'industry' plays a major role in the proliferation of orphanages in Ghana. However, Ghanaians should not be seen as powerless victims but rather as active agents in this process of receiving aid from NGOs and western volunteers.

HO IN THE VOLTA REGION

In the morning of my second day in Ho, I decide to take a walk to the centre of town, to get to know the place in which I will be spending the next three months a bit better. As soon as I walk out the gate of the walls that surround the house of my host family, people notice me and start calling out: '*Yevu* (white person)! How are you? Where are you going? Back in time!' After walking on a dirt road for a few minutes I reach one of the main paved streets. There are many little shops on both sides of the road and even more women and children carrying goods on their heads to sell. Shared taxis seem to be the main means of transport; they easily outnumber the amount of privately owned cars driving around. My host father has told me today is a market day, which means people from all over the region and beyond come to sell and buy goods at the market. Even on this relatively busy day, Ho seems like a quiet, clean and well-organised city, compared to the busy traffic and the enormosity of Ghana's capital Accra (field notes, February 1, 2010).

To study the position of orphans and orphanages in the Ghanaian context, I have conducted field research in the Volta Region of Ghana in February, March and April 2010. The Volta Region is one of Ghana's ten administrative regions. It borders Lake Volta to the west, Togo to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The region's population in 2000 was 1,635,421 people. The age structure of the population indicates that the Volta Region has a young population; over forty percent is under fourteen years old (Ghana Government).

During my three-month field research I was based in Ho, the capital and largest city

of the Volta Region. Additionally, I have carried out part of my research in Hohoe, the second largest city of the region. In 2002 the populations of the Ho Municipal District and the Hohoe District were estimated at 233,135 and 152,627 inhabitants (Statoids). Compared to other districts in the region, Ho and Hohoe have good facilities. School enrolment is higher than the national average and hospitals are situated in both cities. In addition to the hospitals, Ho and Hohoe have traditional healing facilities and clinics. Though, in most homes in the Volta Region, pipe borne water and flush toilets are absent. Currently, electricity is more widely being made available to both urban and rural households (Ghana Districts).

Although the region is ethnically diverse, the main ethnic groups are the Ewe (68.5%), Guan (9.2%), Akan (8.5%) and Gurma (6.5%). Most of my informants belong to the Ewe ethnic group. The total Ewe population today is approaching two million people and they are concentrated demographically in south-eastern Ghana, south-western Benin, and southern Togo. Ewe people are generally highly educated and are the dominant group in politics, administration, and civil service in both Togo, Benin, and Ghana (Olson 1996, 172). The Ewe originally practised traditional religion. However, over a century and a half ago, with the arrival of Christian missionaries in the region, many have converted to Christianity (Ghana Districts). This does not mean traditional religion has disappeared, nowadays it exists alongside Christianity. Furthermore, the Ewe are a patrilineal society. This means their descent groups are made up of all persons who are descended, through the male line only, from a common ancestor (Nukunya 2003, 19). What this means for the upbringing of children will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ho and Hohoe, like many other towns and villages throughout Ghana, have in recent years become host to a constantly growing number of mainly white European and American volunteers, who pay thousands of pounds or dollars to British and American NGOs for the opportunity to 'help' Africans (Swan n.d.). In their free time, the volunteers enjoy the facilities Ho offers. They are often found at the enormous Vodafone internet café in town or at the Freedom Hotel where they can take a swim in the swimming pool, get drinks and western food. At times, they go to the post office to receive packages sent to them by their friends and family members back home. At night they often have meetings and go for drinks at relatively up-market bars like the White House, Peedes and Talk of the Town.

FIELDWORK IN THE VOLTA REGION

According to a list of the Department of Social Welfare in Ho, there are twenty orphanages in the Volta Region. I have visited six of them; SWODC, VIAK Orphanage and Drifting Angels' Orphanage in the Ho Municipal District and Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, House of Hope and Eugemot Orphanage in the Hohoe District. All of them, except one – which is situated in Ho itself –, are situated in smaller towns or rural areas around the cities of Ho and Hohoe. I have observed, and participated, in the daily lives of children at the different orphanages. Through Eileadh Swan, a Scottish anthropologist who has done research in the Volta Region, I established contact with Richard, the assistant director of Blue-Med Africa, a Ghanaian NGO involved in 'using [western] volunteers as a tool in national development in Ghana' (Blue-Med Africa 2010). In exchange for a fee I paid to his NGO, Richard arranged a host family for me in Ho, introduced me to SWODC and Drifting Angels' Orphanage and arranged a taxi driver who could take me to those orphanages. He also arranged a one-week stay for me with a host family in Hohoe, where project coordinator Isaac introduced me to Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, House of Hope and Eugemot Orphanage. To VIAK Orphanage in Ho I was introduced by my host father, Mr. Akordor.

The first orphanage I visited was SWODC. Richard and my host father, who are both on the board for SWODC, took me there and introduced me to Mama Bernice. She agreed that I could come to the orphanage in the afternoons after school to interact with the children. During the three months I spent in Ho, I visited SWODC nearly every afternoon on weekdays. I also stayed over at the orphanage for a total of twelve days. I visited the other orphanages only a few times, ranging from two to about seven visits. When I visited an orphanage for the first time, I would first talk to a staff member or person in charge, most of the times the 'mother' of the orphanage, to ask permission to carry out my research there.

At the orphanages, I mainly used (participant) observation, informal conversations and semi-structured interviews to collect data. I tried to get close to the children at the orphanages and tried making them feel comfortable enough with my presence so that I could observe and record information about their lives (cf. Bernard 2006, 342). During my visits I observed the activities of the children and the way they interacted with each other, their caregivers and western volunteers. Through many informal conversations and around ten semi-structured interviews with the children I tried to get to know more about the way

they experienced living at the orphanage, their personal backgrounds and their views on and expectations of the volunteers. VIAK Orphanage, Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home and Eugemot Orphanage have a school connected to their orphanage. In all three schools I have observed and was occasionally asked to participate as a teacher in the classrooms. In turn, I asked the oldest children of those schools to write an essay or story for me about their own lives in order to get a better idea of their life worlds. I collected about thirty essays in total.

I have concentrated not only on the children in the orphanages. I have tried to grasp different views by also having informal conversations and doing semi-structured interviews with the 'mothers', other staff members and western volunteers working at the orphanages. Outside the orphanages I have talked to many different people about orphanages and the care for orphans in Ghana. Among them are family members of children living in SWODC, a Social Welfare officer, people who are fostering or have fostered children and someone who has also done research on child care in the Volta Region.

Another way of collecting data has been through written sources that were not explicitly referring to the subject of my research, but nevertheless contain useful information for it. At one of the orphanages I visited, I got access to a folder containing the children's profiles with their personal and family details. At another orphanage, I was shown a book that was written by one of the boys living at the orphanage, containing his life-history. Besides that, I studied and analysed the websites of NGOs sending western volunteers to the orphanages, of the orphanages themselves and weblogs of volunteers.

During my visits to the orphanages, I felt I was very much seen and treated as a volunteer. My age, behaviour, cultural background and especially my skin colour seemed to make me almost indistinguishable from the volunteers. The only clear difference between us were the many questions I asked the children, 'mothers' and staff members at the orphanages. In some ways, being seen and treated as a volunteer was an advantage, as I experienced myself what is expected of the volunteers and how the children interact with them. Because we have much in common, I could gain understanding of the views, ideas and frustrations of the volunteers quite easily. In other ways, the commonalities with the volunteers also restricted my research. I was often expected to behave like a volunteer and do the things they do. For example, at SWODC I was expected to play with the children who come there in the afternoons, like the volunteers often do. This made it difficult to get

access to the children actually living at SWODC, who did not often join in the playing as they were busy cooking and doing other chores most afternoons.

To become closer to the children living in the orphanage, I decided to stay over at SWODC for a while. This definitely helped in getting to know the children better and observing how they interact with the volunteers, but it continued to be difficult to participate in their activities. They seemed to find it very strange when I asked to help them with their chores. Rather, they tried to do everything for me, like they did for the volunteers. It also turned out to be difficult to do interviews with the children. They were often busy with their chores and did not seem very interested in answering questions about their lives at the orphanage and their personal backgrounds. When I did get to do interviews with them, the children answered very shortly – probably partly due to their sometimes limited knowledge of English – and in a socially acceptable way. I got quite confused about the seemingly complicated family ties of the children at times. I found it difficult to figure out the distinction between kin and non-kin relations. Furthermore, it was difficult to get access to the family members of the children, as the children often had little contact with them and the people working at the orphanage did not seem eager to establish contact between me and the family members.

The next chapter of this thesis will focus on the backgrounds of orphans and vulnerable children in the Volta Region and the ways they are cared for in Ewe society. In the third chapter I will describe the backgrounds of the orphanages I have visited and the daily lives of the children living there. The final ethnographic chapter will be about the involvement of NGOs and western volunteers in the orphanages. Finally, in the conclusion, I will provide an answer to my main question and relate the results of my research to ongoing debates on this topic.

CHAPTER 2: CARING FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Gideon has been excited for days. Finally the moment is there, we are going to visit his parents today. He has put on his finest clothes, the ones he normally only wears when he goes to church on Sunday. Gideon's parents are farmers and live in the rural areas around Sokode, where SWODC – the orphanage Gideon lives in – is situated. Mama Bernice advised me to do the visit today, since today is a market day in Ho, which means there should be more cars going to the villages. We walk to the roadside to pick a car. A few hours later, after waiting for a long time, a taxi ride through a beautiful green and hilly landscape, more waiting, and a motorbike ride over rough dirt roads, we reach Gideon's family house. Someone appears from under the thatched roof in front of some clay houses. It is Gideon's 19-year old brother, Gershon. He introduces me to their mother. After Gideon's mother has greeted me, she also greets Gideon and talks to him in Ewe for a little while. Their father is not around today, he has gone to a funeral. After some small talk Gideon, Gershon, their mother and I leave for the farm. We pass some other small houses. This is where Gideon's grandmother, his father's mother, and auntie, his father's sister, live. We walk on through the green fields for about ten to fifteen minutes before we reach Gideon's father's farm – some fields where he mainly grows cassava, okra and maize. Gershon and his mother cut some of the okra and put it in the bowl that Gideon is carrying. When the bowl is full we go back to the house where we settle under the thatched roof. In the next couple of hours we eat, talk some more and just relax until the hottest part of the day has passed. Before we leave, Gideon packs the three coconuts, a bag with okra and some other bags with vegetables that his mother has given us to take to SWODC. Gershon accompanies us to the roadside – about a twenty minute walk – and waits with us until we get a taxi to take us back to the orphanage (field notes, March 9, 2010).

According to my host father, Mr. Akordor, Ewe children normally grow up with their parents. It is only when a family lives in a village in which they do not have sufficient access to education or other resources, that they will send their children to the city to live with relatives or friends. These relatives can be family members of either the mother or father. Sometimes they are not related at all. The parents might still pay for the school fees of the child and occasionally send food to the family that is now caring for their child.

Gideon (13 years old) has been living at SWODC for only a few months now. Before that, he was living on the farm with his parents and going to school in a village nearby.

Gershon told me Gideon lives at SWODC now because Mama Bernice wanted him to stay with her. She needed a boy in the house and wanted to take care of him. Mama Bernice told me a different story about Gideon's background. During my first interview with her, she mentioned that the parents of all the children under her care have died, with the exception of the parents of her grandchildren Eyram and Eyako. Later on, she told me the following about Gideon:

Gideon is not an orphan. He has a father and a mother. They are needy, very, very needy. So the father came and pleaded with me if I can accept him in for them. [...] They brought him just about two months now. [...] His parents were here only once. Once he came, when he was sick, the mother was passing by. So I called her and said Gideon is not feeling fine. So she just came and said hello and then she is passing somewhere. She left. They know they have given him to me. They don't want to interfere. [...] He will stay as long as he can stay. I want him to have his education, so that I can see to him further. [...] Things have been difficult. So the father came and pleaded with me if I can accept him in. [...] That is how he came.

Gideon's mother told me that it is no problem that Gideon is staying at SWODC. She does not miss him. Gideon will not come back to live with his parents. He will stay in the orphanage through primary school, Junior Secondary School, Senior Secondary School and he might even go to University. Or if he wants to be there and work, he can work. Mama Bernice is responsible for him now.

The example of Gideon shows that not all children living at the orphanages are orphans and that it can be very difficult to discover the reasons why some children ended up in an orphanage. In this chapter I will focus on the backgrounds of orphans and vulnerable children in the Volta Region and the ways they are ideally cared for in Ewe society. I will start with a description of the ideal situation in which the extended family cares for orphans and vulnerable children. Then I will describe some reasons as to why this ideal situation is often not pursued and many children end up in orphanages. After that, I will elaborate on the involvement of family members in the orphanages.

THE IDEAL SITUATION

During an interview Mr. Akordor showed me a big framed picture of his family. The picture was taken a few years ago, during the annual Yam Festival in Ho when all his children came

down for a visit and stayed in the house together. Mr. and Mrs. Akordor are sitting in front. The – mostly grown-up – children are standing behind them; their son, their four daughters, the husband of their eldest daughter, the three sons of his elder brother and a niece that was staying with them during the holidays. While looking at the picture, Mr. Akordor told me about his family:

My elder brother was very close to the family. So when he died, the firstborn of the three [sons] was just in the first [year] in the secondary school and then the last two were in the primary school. So because of that good relationship between me and the brother, my brother, I decided to take them on. Though, at that time, I also had about four children of mine, who were with me. So I had to bring them down to the house over here to stay with me. Nobody told me. I just called the family together and then told them that I want to be responsible for them. Because I saw their future, that if I am not able to take care of them, they may become liabilities instead of assets to the family. [...] They still have their mother. [...] Traditionally, those days, the moment you inherit the children, then you have to inherit their mother and marry her. That was the tradition in the past. But when I took them on, I told the mother that she can stay with us in the family house so that the children will be with me or that she can go back to the family, to her family. So we just gave her part of my brothers' gratuity and she decided to go home. So the kids decided to be with me over here. So they got integrated with my children, because they are of almost the same age group. So they got well integrated into the family. [...] Nobody except my sisters, except my relatives, nobody knew that they were not my children. Even in the school in which I was teaching, they all believed that they were my children, you see. Because they all called me Papa, you see. So to outsiders they are all my children. Even those [neighbours] who were staying over here, they all believed that they were my children. There was no discrimination at all.

This story closely resembles the ideal situation in Ewe society as it was outlined to me by Peter Agbodza in an interview. He holds a PhD in Africa Studies, and has done research in the Volta Region focusing on child care. He is Ewe and knows a lot about the Ewe family system. According to him, in ideal Ewe culture, orphaned children are fostered by family members. They are not supposed to leave the family. It is the responsibility of the whole community, and particularly the extended family, to look after the children and to ensure their survival. The father's lineage is the owner of the child. The child belongs to the father. He is supposed to ensure the daily provision of needs, especially shelter. The father should also provide money for housekeeping and he is the one paying the child's school fees. When the father

dies, his family or lineage will gather. They are supposed to take care of the child. It is their responsibility. His family or lineage will identify someone who can look after the child or they will look after the child together. They will look for another father. For example, a child may live with his father's brother. He will be seen as the new father of the child. That is what the ideal situation would be like, if there would be enough food for everyone and if the family's economical situation would be good enough to take care of the child. Only because of economical reasons or if the family wants a child to be trained in a certain trade a child may leave the family.

Even though Mr. Akordor's story seems to resemble this ideal situation, raising his brother's children was not always easy:

You see, initially we had some problems. Initially, because they were going to the family house and coming over here. Anytime they went over there, they polluted their [own] minds against my wife. They were giving us certain trouble. But I played a trick on them. You see, what I did was... The middle one between the first and the second is called Peter. So he became so much interested in my eldest sister. So anytime at all he went over there, he was polluting the mind, so when he came over here, what is it. So sometimes, when they finished eating and we asked them to help with something, they said no, so they were doing all those things. So one day, I called the family and told them that nobody in the family told me to bring all of them to this place. But I decided. Now, I want that boy to stay in the family house. So the other two, the elderly and the smaller one... no, they didn't like it. But I told them. So when he was there, I was just going to give them money to look after him. When he was there, he was in the class a year ahead of the first one. But after the year, after the exam, he failed and was to repeat the class. But there was no control. He'd wake up and then decide to go to town. He would not study, you know. He was in that mess and he failed. And then he was in the same class with this one [the younger brother]. So the elder brother and then the younger brother one morning came to me and they were pleading for him. So I went and brought him down here again. And everything stopped.

His story shows that there may have been jealousy and rivalry among his family members, but in the end Mr. Akordor maintained his authority. This still confirms the ideal story.

Realising the importance of the extended family in the care for children in Ewe culture made me wonder why so many children end up in orphanages. Mama Bernice told me that even though relatives are supposed to take care of children when their parents have

died, they often do not take that responsibility. They make promises, but often do not fulfil them. What Mr. Akordor did, does not happen that often, according to Mama Bernice, especially not in the last years:

As I was telling you in Ghana, I will say, I know of Volta, Volta Region. When your relatives die, or your parents die, don't expect anybody to help you. If you are lucky and the person is a God-fearing person, like your parents, Mr. Akordor and his wife. They did a lot that I have been telling people about. The kids will be... Some of them become street children. They don't attend school. They become thieves, rooks in town. They don't get anybody to take up their lives. That made me see the plight of these children, so I have taken up this job. Do you get me? I have the heart feeling, the feeling for them. So I have taken up this job.

As Mama Bernice pointed out, the ideal situation often does not apply. There are many children who are – for a variety of reasons – not being cared for by family members. In the next section I will focus on the stories of those children.

WAYS TO THE ORPHANAGES

I have talked to many different people about the reasons why children are taken to orphanages. Most of them stressed the importance of the extended family in the care for orphans and vulnerable children, but then went on explaining why the family is often not looking after those children.

According to Mr. Akordor, the extended family system is breaking down. People are focussing more on their nuclear family. Nowadays it is more difficult to feed a big family, because people have to buy the food instead of growing it themselves. Mary, a woman in her thirties who also lived with my host family, agreed on this. She also stated that the Ewe are gradually moving from the extended family system towards a system focused on the nuclear family. Extended family members are not prepared to look after a child anymore after its parents die. In the first place, this is caused by a lack of money. People are struggling to get enough money to feed their own children. Women only cook for their own children nowadays, where they used to cook for the whole family. In the second place, so people say, there is a lack of trust and love. People do not trust each other anymore in the way they used to. That is why they are afraid to eat each other's food.

As was said by Simon, a teacher at a primary school close to my house, the extended family will only take a child to an orphanage out of necessity, when they feel they are for any reason – for example because of a lack of money – not capable of caring for the child. However, later on, he went as far as saying some people might take their children to an orphanage as an easy way out of parental responsibility. When I asked Lindy, an Australian lady and administrator of Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, about the reasons children are taken to 'her' orphanage, she stressed a lack of money as the most important reason:

Well, mostly it is because of poverty. So even if they are a full orphan, most children have extended family. But that extended family, like it would be a grandmother, in many cases a grandmother, she cannot afford to feed them, because the women in this society have no means of earning money. And without a welfare system, there is simply no money. They struggle to feed themselves and might have a little plot of land, you know, where they grow food, but other than that, there is no income. So they cannot afford to feed their children. There's also... it's very complex, but it being such a patriarchal society that it's common for men to impregnate their girlfriends and then walk away. And they may well be married with children, so the girlfriend is left with a child that she has no means of supporting. And it's very difficult to enforce the father to support that child. So the children end up here. We have several of those cases, so a single mother family. And often they go on to have more children, because their only means of feeding themselves is to tie themselves to a man. So I think until women get an education here that will be difficult to change. Until they have some form of education, they have no access to earning enough money to feed themselves and children. So they are reliant on men and that is definitely a problem. And I don't see that changing anytime soon, because of the socio-economic third world way that it is here. Then, I would say, poverty, really... There's many reasons for the children to be here, but the main reason behind all of them, really, is poverty. So whether they're full orphans, part-orphans or have both parents. Always, when you go right back to it, it's because of poverty. We have children that have come from the street, but they had a grandmother, but she wasn't feeding them. So they were on the street trying to get money to buy themselves food. Some children... mostly they're put here through the Department of Social Welfare by family members or guardians who can't afford to look after them.

Lindy, coming from Australia, apparently has a particular view on 'poor women' in Ghana. She seemed to think of them as quite powerless and unable to work and support their children. Conversely, I have seen many women working as teachers in schools or selling goods at the market to earn money. Though, even if women are working, it might still be

difficult for them to support their children, as Lindy suggested, because in Ewe society men are supposed to pay for their children's school fees and other expenses. Furthermore, Lindy is part of a Christian orphanage or NGO promoting monogamy, while polygamy used to be very common in Ghana. Even if a man has not married the mother of his child, he can still acknowledge the child as his and lend financial support to the mother. But as Lindy argued, of course this does not always happen.

The children themselves told me similar stories about their own backgrounds, even though of course they all have their own unique stories. They often mentioned the death of one or both of their parents as the main reason for being taken to the orphanage. Some of them told me their family members simply cannot look after them or their parents already have too many children. Occasionally, there are spiritual reasons involved. An 11-year old girl living at Eugemot Orphanage wrote in an essay I asked her to write about her own life:

Many people insult me that I am a witch. So many people don't like me and many people hit me. Because of this I always cry a lot. [Though] I am not worried at all because I know God is there.

At Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home I saw a little girl walking around with a big burn on her head. Lindy told me about her terrible background and the way she has improved since she came to live in the orphanage:

This little girl here, she came to us last October and she had been starved by her grandparents who believed she was a witch. And she was locked in a cave and she was living... she was in her own filth, vomit, everything. She could hardly walk. She weighed nine kilos. She's got a big burn on her head. Now, you see her now. When she came here, she couldn't lift her head off the chest. The chin was on her chest, she couldn't even lift it up. And now she runs around with the children. She's exactly the same. I actually don't tell anybody that story anymore, because it's not relevant. Because then they'll look at her with eyes like she should be pitied, and there's no need. She didn't speak English or Ewe and now she speaks both. She mixes them both up. She doesn't realise it's two different languages. But yeah, you know, she's healthy, she's in class. So, you know, she's doing really, really well.

This story reflects the 'success' of the orphanage. When the little girl first came to the orphanage she was close to dying, now, a few months later, she plays and runs around with the other children.

At Eugemot Orphanage I gained access to a folder containing the profiles of all forty-one children living there. The profiles state whether their parents are still alive or not. Eleven of the children have lost both parents; fifteen of them have lost their mother and still have a father; twelve children have lost their father and still have a mother and two children have lost their father and the whereabouts of their mother are unknown. In addition, each profile contains a short description of 'the reason for being present at Eugemot'. Most of them state that one of the parents died and the remaining parent or other family members simply cannot take care of the child. Some descriptions say the remaining parent is 'mentally disturbed'. One description states the following: 'The mother intended to sell Joseph to a shrine for sacrificial purposes but an unknown relative stopped her and brought Joseph to Eugemot. Mother's whereabouts are unknown, she is believed to be dead.'

House of Hope has even published their children's profiles on their website (House of Hope Ghana). Under the heading 'meet the kids of House of Hope Ghana', the pictures of most of the children are shown. When you click on one of their smiling faces, you can view their profile. It states their name, year of birth, sex, community of location, district, region, category (orphan or vulnerable child), medical / family background and biography. The children's different stories are described in detail, like the following biography of one of the boys:

The mother suffers from mental retardation. [...] The mother earns a meagre living cleaning the community restroom and cannot adequately support Bernard. The unwed father has abandoned his responsibility to the child and only returns to take advantage of Bernard's mother. She has been impregnated for a second time and has given birth to Bernard's sister Agatha. Bernard has been accepted into the House of Hope because of the fragile home situation and the family's inability to provide for his nutritional and developmental needs (House of Hope Ghana).

One of the boys living in House of Hope has even written a book about his own life. In the book he describes how he does not remember his parents as they died when he was still young. After his father's death, he moved in with his grandfather, who also died soon after

that. He then moved to his grandmother's house where he was not treated well. He left her house and started working for several people to be able to buy some food. After a while he got the attention of House of Hope, where he is happily staying now (Konda Bless n.d.): another example of the orphanages' 'success story'.

In short, the most common reasons why children end up in orphanages in the Volta Region are the death or absence of one or both parents, a lack of finances, spiritual reasons or mental illness in one or both parents. In addition, the breaking down of the extended family system is mentioned as a factor to why uncles, aunts or grandparents might take a child to an orphanage.

FAMILY'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ORPHANAGES

Once family members have taken a child to an orphanage, they do not seem to want to get too much involved into their life anymore. As Mama Bernice told me: 'Nobody comes and visits them. I am surprised. [...] They [the family members] have forgotten about them.' Mama Lizzie (House of Hope) also said the family members only come to visit once a while. Lindy told me it is the same for the children at Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home:

Some [children] have regular contact, like every couple of weeks the mother might pop in or a sister or a brother. Others don't ever have any contact. And then others, it might, you know, be once every six months. [...] I would say mostly the children have family, but most of them don't have visits from their family.

According to teacher Simon, family members that have sent a child to an orphanage feel the responsibility to care for the child is no longer theirs. The responsibility is now entirely upon the orphanage. Therefore the family members usually do not supply any financial assistance to the children, nor do they visit them regularly. If they visit, they recognise the responsibility they have and might feel they need to provide more for their children.

In addition to that, it is sometimes simply not possible for family members to get too much involved because the orphanage's policy puts a restriction on the amount of visits they can pay to the children. At Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, relatives are only allowed to come and visit on Sundays. At Eugemot Orphanage, family members are only allowed to visit

the children thrice a year. Drifting Angels' Orphanage also has such a policy, which was explained to me a little further by Mama Elise Doh:

The relatives come to visit, but we don't allow them to come frequently. If they come too often, the children will get a different education from them. When their grandmother visits, she will tell them different things from what we tell the children. The children will cry when the family members leave again. That's why we only allow them to come once every two months.

When family members do come to visit the children, the visits are generally 'low-key'. Ernest, Ivy's uncle, lives almost across the road from SWODC, where Ivy lives. Even though he sees her almost every day, he does not want to get too much involved in her life:

[When I see her] I say hello. I don't want to draw her to me. You know, at times it's good to stay away from your parents, to experience what it tastes like or it feels like to be in the world. So even though she is over there [across the road], I think she came here only once or twice. [...] She doesn't come here. And then also, when I go there, I only say hello to her. Because most of the times she is busy. I don't want to engage her, converse with her, so that I take her away from the chores that she is supposed to be doing. So I only go and then say hello. At times I just bypass and wave her, yes. But I see her almost every day. You know, she comes to church every Saturday. We attend church at the same place.

Ernest seemed to have found a balance between checking up on his niece regularly, while not interfering in her life too much and leaving the responsibility for her care with the orphanage. Lindy told me what it is like when family members do come to visit the children at Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home:

Well, the children are always happy to see them. And mostly they come and sit in here [under a thatched roof outside the orphanage]. And the children sit with them and have a chat. They don't stay very long, maybe half an hour. If it's brothers and sisters, they might go and swing on the swings and chat with them. But they mostly just sit with them for a little bit and have a chat. Sometimes they bring food and that goes to the kitchen, because it has to be shared with all the children. Yeah, it's just a very, I would say a low-key visit when they come. I really, mostly, the children, they're always happy to see them, but they always accept when they go. We had one, our youngest girl, who is only two. And her family came and they hadn't been

[at the orphanage before]. They live in Togo now. And they'd come across and they came to visit like quite a group of them and when they left she was upset. And she, you know, it took her a few hours to settle down again and then she was fine the next day. But that has probably been the only one that has been upset by the family going. They seem to live here quite happily. I think, given the chance to go back and live with their family, they all would, but would want to come here to school. They're very happy with their friends and, you know, they're treated well. They're well fed. They've got everything that they need. So I think they're very comfortable here, but you learn that it's no different wherever you go in the world, family is the most important. So I think that, you know. I think in a perfect world, they'd be supported in their family. But because there's no welfare system or anyone to keep an eye on that then how do you do that. You know, you can't just go handing money out and you've got no way of knowing how it's spent or if the child is actually getting what it's supposed to. So here we can care for them. They've all got health cards. So, you know, they're looked after medically. We know what the quality of their schooling is because we're doing it. You have much more control and you know exactly where the money is going. But then, I do think though that family... the perfect situation is that they'd be with their family.

Lindy's statement about the children not being upset after their family leaves, whilst family members can visit every Sunday, is in contradiction with what Mama Elise Doh said about children at Drifting Angels' Orphanage where family members are only allowed to visit once every two months. Though, it has remained difficult to get to know the underlying reasons for this difference. Lindy's last comment is in line with the perfect picture that exists in Ewe culture; that ideally, orphans and vulnerable children would be cared for by family members.

In sum, in this chapter it has become clear that there are many children who do not fit into this ideal situation and end up in orphanages. Some of my informants argued this is because the extended family system is breaking down and people are focussing more on their nuclear family, others emphasised poverty as a main reason – among other reasons. Once the children have been taken to an orphanage, family members often feel the responsibility for the children is no longer theirs. They do not want to interfere too much in their lives anymore and do not visit the children regularly. In order to learn more about the situation in the orphanages themselves, I will take a closer look at those orphanages in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: A PROLIFERATION OF ORPHANAGES

To get an idea of why there has been such a proliferation of orphanages in Ghana over the last years, it is essential to look at how these orphanages came into being. In this chapter I will elaborate on the history and backgrounds of orphanages in Ghana and particularly of the ones I have visited. After that I will describe the daily lives of the children living in the orphanages. Furthermore, I will discuss the importance of money from 'outside' for the orphanages and the role of Social Welfare in the orphanages.

In the previous chapter I have described how there are many children living in the orphanages who still have one or both parents. However, the definition of an orphanage given by the Ghanaian Department of Social Welfare states that solely children without parents should be living in an orphanage:

An orphanage is a home for children who are orphans. It aims at providing care for children deprived of normal home life. Such institutional care is designed to give deprived children parental care and affection by substitute mothers (Social Welfare n.d., 3).

According to Social Welfare the first orphanages in Ghana came into being many years ago with the arrival of the European missionaries. Although informal, missionary activity in caring for abandoned, orphaned and infirmed children was apparent where cultural inhibitions forbade certain categories of children from being raised in the traditional family (1)¹. Social Welfare implicitly mentions western influences as leading to a need for orphanages:

Urbanisation and modernisation of Ghana in the wake of the construction of the Akosombo dam, the Tema harbour and expansion of the Railways in the 1950s, though economically desirable, resulted in the growth of communities of men, women and children with little in common. There was no social cohesion, nor any sense of neighbourliness. Many men left their wives and children behind and contracted casual relations with women they found there. At Tema, where ships came with pleasure-seeking seamen of many nationalities, many vices were introduced from other ports. Children were born out of such casual relationships.

¹ Unfortunately the Department of Social Welfare does not state which categories of children were excluded from being raised in the traditional family.

The absence of care for such orphans, abandoned and deprived children further underpinned the need for orphanages (Social Welfare n.d., 1-2).

The first officially recognised orphanage was started by an NGO in Accra in 1953. It received professional guidance from the Department of Social Welfare. Since then, many orphanages, both private and government owned, have sprung up in various regions of Ghana. Currently the Department of Social Welfare operates three homes at Accra, Kumasi and Tamale. They also give financial assistance to another two orphanages. Apart from these five homes – none of them situated in the Volta Region – all other orphanages in Ghana are not legally designated as approved institutions and are practicing illegally. The Department is aware of an unknown number of NGOs operating as residential homes for children in need of care and protection but which have not been legally licensed to do so (2-4). These orphanages are usually not being restricted by the government. However, Social Welfare has started to assess these ‘NGOs’ more carefully and has closed down some that were functioning very poorly.

In the recent past, there has been an enormous growth of NGOs operating as orphanages in Ghana. The six orphanages I have visited all fit into this category. Apart from VIAK Orphanage, they have all been established within the last ten years. Victoria Kugbe – Mama VIAK – started in the 1960s in Ho with a vocational centre in which she taught girls sewing. Some of the girls she taught carried babies on their backs. Mama VIAK started with those kids and established VIAK day care. Eighteen years ago she opened the orphanage and the school attached to it. There are twenty children under Mama VIAK’s care at the moment, some of whom have been fostered out.

Mama Bernice of SWODC lost her husband in an accident in 1994 in which she became injured too. She has two sons, who are now 30 and 23 years old. After her husband’s death, his brothers were supposed to take care of the children. At the funeral, one of his brothers promised to take care of the youngest child. He never fulfilled his promise, nor did any of the other family members take up the responsibility to look after the children, so Bernice had to take care of them by herself. That is how she got a heart for orphans, she explained, which led her to open SWODC in 2000. Around twenty-five children came to live in the home at that time. The orphanage was based in a big building in Ho. Just over a year ago they were forced to leave that location, because the landlady went to sell

the place. They are now based in Sokode Gbogame, in a much smaller building. As a result of this, only seven children are still living with Mama Bernice in SWODC. She has placed five children to live with her mother. Some children are placed in communities around Ho, with other family members of Mama Bernice, others are attending boarding school.

House of Hope in Kledzo, close to Hohoe, was started by Beth, a lady from America. Mama Lizzie told me that when Beth visited Ghana, she saw a lot of children in need of care, which made her decide to start the orphanage with her church. When the building was finished in 2006, she asked Mama Lizzie, who she got to know through the Baptist church in Ghana, to take care of the children. Currently, there are twenty-nine children living at the orphanage. In addition, many children living close to the orphanage often come to play.

Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home was established in 2003 by Nicholas Abibu Koku Victus to 'help the underprivileged children of the Volta Region in Ghana, particularly those residing in the Hohoe District'. According to their website, they 'have identified over 6000 neglected orphans and children in the Hohoe District' (Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home). At first, most of the children were in foster homes and the orphanage consisted of a simple home. Three years ago, some Americans came to adopt a child. They saw the situation and wanted to help. They went back to America to raise money. When they returned with the money, two years ago, the current building was built. There are now forty children living at the orphanage and another nineteen living with foster families. They all go to the school that is attached to the orphanage, along with other children from the community.

Eugemot Orphanage in Ve-Kolenu, a few kilometres outside Hohoe, was founded by Madam Eugenia Kahu Motogbe and opened its doors in 2004. On the website it is described how Mama Eugenia used to care for many children, especially the needy, in her small home in Accra. Her desire to help children who are not privileged to have parental care led to the idea of establishing an orphanage. 'It was a divine call from God.' Eugemot Orphanage was therefore opened and has as its main focus, 'the rendering of selfless social service to humanity and mankind, specifically orphans and needy children' (Eugemot Orphanage). The orphanage is currently home to forty-six children and also has a school joined to it.

Drifting Angels' Orphanage was founded by Mama Elise Doh in 2002 and registered officially in 2006. According to their website, the home was set up to 'bring hope to the hopeless, hungry and poor children' (Drifting Angels' Orphanage). They are taking care of over 140 children, divided into a couple of groups. There are thirty-two children living at the

location I have visited, in the rural areas around Tsito, about half an hour driving from Ho. The other children are in two buildings in Tsito. The orphanage does not have a school, but is planning for one. They already have the land and have started the foundations, but there is not enough money to continue. The children that have finished primary school have gone to several boarding schools.

The histories of the orphanages above show the increase of orphanages is indeed a recent phenomenon, at least in the Volta Region. The homes all emphasise the needs of some children and their ability to care for those children. To get a more complete picture of the orphanages I will now look at the lives of the children living there.

LIFE AT THE ORPHANAGES

The buildings of all six orphanages I have visited are much bigger and nicer than the houses around it. This difference is especially apparent for the three orphanages around Hohoe and Drifting Angels' Orphanage. These orphanages are all situated in poorer areas and really stand out with their big concrete buildings and relatively many facilities. They have dormitories in which the children sleep in bunk beds, a television on which the children can watch movies, a proper kitchen, bathrooms, some of them have a dining hall and most of them have a football court.

The children at the orphanages seem to do the same things as other Ghanaian children. Patience, a fifteen year old girl living at SWODC, described her daily schedule to me:

After we wake up, we have to sweep, we make sure everything is in order, we clean the place where the food is prepared, we bath and go to school. Sometimes when Mama has money, she will give it to us to take to school, but not all the time. [...] [After school] we don't really do anything. When we get back we cook, eat supper, bath and in the evening we learn, before we go to bed.

At VIAK Orphanage, I did a small interview with three five year old girls: Judith, Juliana and Juliet. Their teacher translated the following about what they said about their daily routines:

When they wake up they wash their face. Because they are very young, they can't do any household chores. And they will bath them before they go to school. [...] They

say whenever they close from school they remove their uniform and then after removing the uniform, whenever there is food, then they will eat. After that, they have their small siesta to rest. [...] They say whenever they finish sleeping, they will wake up and eat again. [...] Then they will learn their thoughts, that they taught them in school. [...] On Sunday they will prepare and go to church. [...] Saturdays, they are in the house and bath and relax.

Going by my observations and other interviews with children, most of the children in the orphanages – and also in families – seem to have a similar routine to these girls.

The ‘mothers’ and other staff members at the orphanages try to let the children lead normal lives and often emphasise they are like a big family. The children most of the times call their caregiver Mama and the other children brothers and sisters. The children are supposed to look out for each other, help each other with their chores and play together. The biggest difference with a ‘normal’ life might be the western volunteers that come into the orphanage regularly and the gifts they bring with them – things that other Ghanaian children often do not easily have access to. For example, at House of Hope the boys had official Ghanaian football shirts and at SWODC there were many story books around. The volunteers form one of the linkages of the children and staff members to the western world. Since the orphanages do not get any funding from the Ghanaian government, they are mainly reliant on funding from ‘outside’, from western countries. In the next section of this chapter, I will outline the money aspect of the orphanages.

GETTING MONEY

The orphanages maintain different strategies to get funding in order to be able to look after the children under their care. As I have mentioned before, most of the orphanages have a website on which they promote themselves and ask for donations. An example from the website of Hohoe Christian Orphans’ Home:

The orphanage is a not for profit organisation which relies on donations from kind hearted individuals, groups and corporations around the world. 100% of the money the orphanage receives in donations goes directly to feed, shelter and educate the children. [...] By becoming a regular donor you will be helping to fund our work in one of the most important ways. By giving regularly, we are able to count on your

ongoing support and make better plans for the future. Even if you are only donating a small amount, being a regular donor really helps (Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home).

To show people where the money goes, the orphanages often present their current and upcoming projects on their websites. Most of the orphanages are working on better facilities for their children. House of Hope, Drifting Angels' Orphanage and Eugemot Orphanage would like to build a new school. The last two have already bought the land and started the foundations for the school buildings, but have run out of money and are waiting for new funds. Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home has already got a school building, but wants to build some new class rooms. Having a school can also be a way of earning a little money, as in most cases apart from the children living at the orphanage, community children are also attending the school and are paying school fees.

In addition, Drifting Angels' Orphanage, Eugemot Orphanage and Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home are promoting a child sponsoring programme on their website. The first two only describe the programme briefly. It does not become clear whether the money goes to a particular child or to the orphanage in general. On the website of Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, a detailed description of their sponsorship programme is found:

This will raise monies that will benefit the orphanage and the individual child. Two levels of sponsorship are offered. **Full Sponsorship: \$US75/month** covers full board and education for the child, or **Part Sponsorship: \$US38/month** will cover education costs, day students can also be sponsored at this level. A portion (70%) of the money will go to the general running costs and a portion (30%) allocated to the specific child. This money will be used for things like sporting equipment, further education, vocational training etc. It is envisaged that once 20 children have been sponsored and the orphanage has a regular income, the split will become 60/40 thus increasing the amount apportioned to each sponsored child.

The sponsor will choose a sex and age category, we will then select a child and send a photo and short biography, quarterly updates including photos will be sent via email. It will also be possible to visit the child at the orphanage, however, the child will only be able to leave the premises in a group outing. [...] **Unlike other sponsorship programmes every cent of every dollar of your sponsorship money will benefit the children, there are no administration charges** (Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home).

Lindy, the orphanage's administrator, explained that the sponsorship programme is of great importance for the orphanage as it generates a regular income. She told me they currently

have twenty children sponsored, but are hoping to get all children sponsored, as that would just about cover their outgoings. At the moment, their income is completed by donations, mainly from past volunteers.

The orphanages do not only use their websites to solicit funds. The western volunteers that come to work or stay at the orphanages are often expected to raise funds and send money to the orphanage after they have returned to their own countries. As Patricia, one of the children living at SWODC told me, many volunteers make promises in that direction, but they do not often keep them. However, there are volunteers that do send money and raise funds. Mama Bernice told me about an American girl she calls sister Alicia. She first came to the orphanage as a volunteer about four years ago. Since then Alicia has been visiting every year, bringing clothes and toys with her for the children and raising funds in between. On her weblog she writes of her goal to get enough money to enrol twenty-one children into boarding school and her fundraising efforts to reach that goal (My Ghana Experience).

Remarkably, the orphanages often do not receive any money from the western NGOs that are sending the volunteers to work at the orphanages. This is remarkable, in my view, because the volunteers pay large amounts of money to the NGOs in order to be able to work in the orphanages. For example, Projects Abroad (USA) charges US\$2,895 for one month, Madventurer charges £1045 (around US\$1500) for four weeks and Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS, USA) even charges between US\$3,142 and US\$3,378 for just three weeks. On the website of CCS it is stated that their programme fee includes personal volunteer placement, cultural and learning activities, lodging at a CCS home-base, all meals and bottled water, in-country ground transportation, experienced and professional full-time staff, pre-departure materials and support, all local and incoming international calls, a 24-hour emergency hotline and comprehensive travel medical insurance (Cross-Cultural Solutions). However, there is no mention of which percentage of the money goes to which expense. According to the staff members of the orphanages I have visited, the orphanages do not receive any money from the NGOs. Only when the volunteers are also staying at the orphanages, they will receive some money towards the food they have to provide for the volunteers.

CCS even prohibits their volunteers to donate money to the orphanage they work at, even after they go home. Lindy told me the following about it:

They [CCS] don't want the project to be reliant on the volunteers to exist. They don't want the volunteers to donate money, because then their idea is if we [the orphanages or other projects] didn't have that money, then how would we manage? Well, in Ghana, an orphanage relies totally on donations. There's no other way of existing. [...] I don't think it's relevant for certain situations, but they have a blanket policy. I personally think that they should contribute as an organisation, not as individuals. Because without us they wouldn't have the volunteers. And it is supposed to be a non-profit organisation, but it is a big business.

She went on saying that the policy is not enforceable. Many volunteers wanted to help and raise money, send funds, stay in touch and send school supplies and different things. Besides donations from individuals, orphanages might also receive money from groups like churches or local NGOs.

The way the orphanages – and NGOs even more – seem to grab every opportunity to get money does not always account for sympathy. Mr. Akordor is especially frustrated about the way Africans are sometimes portrayed in their efforts:

At a certain time, about fifteen, roughly, just recently, fifteen, ten years ago, people established NGOs. [...] They name themselves as orphanages and then they ask for funding from outside. That they have an orphanage that is taking care of orphans, so people send money from outside to them. Not that they use their own personal money, but people will send money from outside. You know what is done over there in churches. I was in one church in Holland once, when they appealed. By then, I was very much annoyed, I nearly spoke. You see, they brought some stupid pictures to show the people that these people, they stay in a hut, they don't have any kitchen, they don't have this and this, they are suffering. You know, some people come, some of our people, the blacks, you know, the Africans will take some pictures over here and then send it over there. They show this in the church that this is how all the people live over there, so they should contribute money in the church and give to them. And there is these small kids even contributing money. I mean, it's a curse. So they send some of these pictures to those places to portray that we are poor. We are not poor. [...] You see, people go there to portray us as if we live in trees. You see, as if we don't have homes to stay in. [...] That was what brought about these NGOs. That was how NGOs started over here. Do you get me? Some say they are establishing NGOs to cater for the widows, some say they will start an NGO to cater for AIDS people, some say they started this thing to cater for... I mean, these are the concepts, so that they can draw money from outside. You see the problem. [...]

So when at the moment, people get to know this, the children they can cater for, they send them there. When the NGOs were not there, they were looking after the orphans in the families. But then the moment they hear of these NGOs, they start sending their kids over there. Even some, because they are poor, out of their own laziness, they couldn't look after their children, they send them to foster homes. They don't understand the foster home concept. [...] It's a foster home! The orphanages are to be foster homes, you see, surrogates. When your parents die and there is nobody over there, when your father died, your mother died and then you are from a poor home and nobody wants you, because the mother who brought forth the child was a mad person or died in an accident, they couldn't trace the parents. Those are the people who were sent to [orphanages] those days. [...]

So people are now starting NGOs and they say they are orphanages. Anyway, I'm forced to tell you these things, because that is what is happening now. You know, they solicit money from outside that they have an NGO. It's not part of our culture. For me, I would never allow any member of our family to go to any place called orphanage. It's a disgrace. Don't you see it's a disgrace? It casts a dent on the family, you see. [...] So you have your children over there and then you take your child from your own home, you go and put the child somewhere else, for what? I mean, it's not part of our culture. I think you're understanding me. So this orphanage concept was brought in by some people, because they want to solicit for funds from outside. They write a project, that we have this number of children, we are catering for them, this and this and this, so give us this thing.

Mr. Akordor argued that because money is coming from 'outside' to the orphanages, people start NGOs and orphanages and children are sent there more easily. According to him, it is not part of their culture to leave the responsibility of looking after ones children to an orphanage. He also said NGOs intentionally draw a negative picture of 'Africa' and 'Africans' to raise money. The efforts the orphanages take to get money raises questions about their intentions. Social Welfare officer also Mr. Adjin speculated about this:

Sometimes we wonder why people want to open an orphanage. They go on to the net to advertise and look for support. We reckon if you do not have resources, you cannot take care of the children. We suspect that some people open orphanages for personal gain. Some of them gain by volunteers coming to them. They receive funding for them.

In my view, it seems the western NGOs sending the volunteers gain much more – financially – than the orphanages themselves. The NGOs receive the fees from the volunteers, which

they usually do not share with the orphanages. Moreover, I did not see many signs of personal wealth of the 'mothers' or staff members of the orphanages when I visited them. When Social Welfare has serious doubts about an orphanage and especially about the way the children are treated there, it has the power to close the orphanage down. In the next section of this chapter I will elaborate more on the role of Social Welfare with regard to the orphanages.

SOCIAL WELFARE

The involvement of the Department of Social Welfare in the orphanages seems paradoxical. On the one hand, as I mentioned before, Social Welfare does not recognise the orphanages I have visited as official orphanages. On the other hand, the Department does assess those orphanages and sends children to them.

Mr. Adjin, a probation supervisor of the Department of Social Welfare in the Ho district, explained to me how the procedure of establishing an orphanage works. Before opening an orphanage, people are supposed to pass through Social Welfare. However, there are many NGOs that open orphanages without doing that. Many orphanages are operating under an NGO certificate that Social Welfare has issued to them. This means they are legal NGOs but do not have permission from the government to operate as orphanages. Their NGO certificate has to be renewed every year. This is a way of monitoring the NGO-run orphanages. All orphanages in the Volta Region are NGO institutions. Once they start dealing with children, Social Welfare consents in trying to bring them up to standard. The Department recognises the child's welfare as paramount. Even when the orphanages are illegal, they still assess them and try to help. Lately, Social Welfare has closed some of the orphanages down, because they were operating under very bad conditions, as I mentioned earlier.

Before the enforcement of the Children's Act in Ghana in 1998, there were no rules about opening orphanages. Through the Act, the Department of Social Welfare received the authorisation to assess orphanages. To obtain a license, the orphanages need to meet all requirements stated in the Guidelines for the Operation of Orphanages in Ghana (Department of Social Welfare n.d., 7-15). Sometimes it can be difficult for an orphanage to meet the standards. Social Welfare then gives them some time to get things sorted. Some of

the requirements are very specific. For example, each child should have a bed, a plastic covered mattress, two sheets, a toothbrush, school uniform, five sets of clothes, a towel, a sponge, soap, mosquito net (on bed), mosquito net (on window), access to school or training, access to secure outside play area, access to toys and reading books, shoes, slippers, three balanced meals a day, fruit at least once a day, school textbooks and materials. Furthermore, every orphanage should have an infirmary room/building, infirmary furnishings, first aid, routine medicines, a full time nurse and a visiting doctor. These are only a few of the guidelines.

According to Lindy, the standards are too high:

I think it's outrageous to expect that in a third world country. They're first world standards. I mean, I read it and thought, this is just simply... because it's done by UNICEF and they're probably sitting in Europe in an office somewhere, writing out these guidelines for a third world country with no welfare system and no support for their orphanages. [...] And they are now starting to enforce these things. There has been a new policy brought out and they are trying to close orphanages down.

Even though most orphanages are not able to meet these requirements and Social Welfare is threatening to close them down, the Department still sends children to those places. According to Mr. Adjin, the police often discover abandoned children. They are first taken to the hospital for examination. After that the children pass through Social Welfare. They will assess the matter and see whether parents are capable of caring for their children. Some parents are able to look after the children, but irresponsible. The Department tries to find out what is wrong. Sometimes they may take the parents to court. When the parents cannot look after the child, they try to place it within the family. According to Mr. Adjin, most likely someone in the family is able to support the child. However, as I mentioned before, in many situations family members do not take that responsibility and often parents or other family members come to an orphanage to bring the child there. Lindy described what happens in such situations:

What happens is, many of them [the family members of a child] turn up here. Like just turn up and say 'we can't feed our child.' And we then send them to the Department of Social Welfare. By law, they must come through the Department of Social Welfare. You cannot take a child in without it going through the Department of

Social Welfare. So it's illegal. And you will be charged with child trafficking. You have to be very careful not to do that. It has been done in the past. But certainly now with them cracking down on it, we have to have the paperwork; we have to have the photo of the child, we have to have a photo of the person who has handed the child over and this is all on a form that is filled in at the Department of Social Welfare. So and then, by law, the Department of Social Welfare is supposed to get a court order before placing the child in the orphanage. That is difficult, because the Department of Social Welfare doesn't have any money, so they can't pay the court fee. So in our case, we paid the court fee, so the Department of Social Welfare could get us that court order. Because we didn't want to have any problems with the government wanting to close down the orphanage. So we wanted to make sure everything was done as they wanted in their guidelines.

In this fragment, Lindy described another paradox. While a child has to go through the Department of Social Welfare before it is allowed into the orphanage, Social Welfare itself does not have money to pay for the court order that is needed. They emphasise the need for re-integration, but do not have the power to enforce it. This underpins the power of the NGOs involved. By Social Welfare, the orphanage as institution is seen as the last resort:

No child should stay in a home longer than is absolutely necessary. Children who have relations must spend not more than five years in the home, but must go back to their relations, to get re-integrated into their family and community. The staff of the home should assist the child to become re-united with his/her parents/guardians/families.

If the family or community has problems in caring for the child, they should be assisted to do so without removing the child from the family/community. For example, the extended family of an orphan should be assisted to send the orphan to the local school, pay the school fees, school uniforms etc. [...]

Children should not be consigned to an orphanage or a home for their entire lives. The family is the best place for a child. If that family is broken by death or separation or whatever cause, a substitute arrangement close to a family should be found. Therefore, children should not live in institutions for over five years at the most. Therefore, the reintegration of the child to the family or fostering, fit person care or adoption should be part of every home's programme (Department of Social Welfare n.d., 15-17).

In reality, the policy that children should be taken care of in their own family or community or at least be taken back to them within several years, is not carried out by the orphanages.

Some of the orphanages do have an adoption programme. However, up till now, only westerners have adopted children from the orphanages I have visited. Lindy explained why the policy of sending children back to their families is difficult to achieve and described how she sees the future of the children at Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home:

Because it [Hohoe and its surroundings] is such a poor area, their policy of sending all the children back to their own homes, it's just not viable. The families cannot support the children. So I think they've had to reconsider that blanket policy of children to go home. [...] The government rules are that they must leave [the orphanage] when they're sixteen. But [...] our philosophy is that we care for them until they can earn a meaningful wage. So that we support them in their further educational vocational training, until they earn money that they can support themselves. And so maybe when they're sixteen, they will go, either if they have family, go back and we support them in their family and then they go to secondary school. If it was secondary school we'd probably try and, if they were sponsored, trying to arrange for them to be boarders and then have a home situation where they could go to in the holidays. [...] We haven't had any children get to that age yet, so it's not really been something that we've seen how it's going to work. But that's our plan, that the children are cared for right up until they can earn money, and not just a pittance, like up to have a meaningful income.

In contradiction to the government policy, most the orphanages I visited do not plan to send the children back to their families after a few years. They plan to support them until they can support themselves.

In sum, this chapter described the backgrounds of the orphanages, the daily lives of the children there, the ways the orphanages try to survive financially and what rules they are bound to. It showed how western influences have played an important role in the increase of orphanages in Ghana over the last years. Still, 'the West' is of great importance for the orphanages as they depend almost solely on funds from western countries. They are creative and use a variety of strategies to get money for their children. The orphanages usually manage to receive enough money to sustain themselves. However, the western NGOs involved in sending volunteers to the orphanages seem to be the real 'winners'. They earn big amounts of money by demanding enormous fees from volunteers who are participating in their programmes. While the NGOs need the orphanages in order to be able to send

volunteers there, the orphanages hardly receive money from them. The western NGOs are so powerful that they are able to keep this policy up without consequences.

Social Welfare, however, seems to have less power to enforce their policy of re-integrating children into their families or communities. The involvement of Social Welfare in the orphanages is paradoxical; the orphanages are assessed by Social Welfare, but not legally recognised as orphanages. Despite this last fact, children usually do pass through Social Welfare before they end up in one of the orphanages. Once the children live there, their lives seem quite similar to those of other Ghanaian children. The biggest difference might be the relatively nice buildings they live in and the many western volunteers visiting them. In the next chapter I will focus on the involvement of these volunteers in the orphanages.

CHAPTER 4: 'I EXPECTED LIVING CONDITIONS TO BE WORSE'

Western NGOs usually portray the volunteer programmes they offer as challenging and rewarding. They refer to the 'usefulness' of the volunteers, and how they will be 'needed' by the communities in which they work (Simpson 2004, 686). For example, Madventurer describes its programme at SWODC as follows:

During the morning the kids will go to the nearby school for lessons before going to the centre in the afternoon. You can take this opportunity to go with them and get involved in some teaching, or stay in the centre and prepare games and activities for the afternoon. [...] You will need endless energy and enthusiasm, as you take on the roles of carer, friend, storyteller, English teacher, games organiser and homework helper to name but a few! Whether you are organising a finger painting session for a group of 5yr olds, or helping one of [the] teenagers with their English grammar, you can be sure that each day will be demanding, but ultimately rewarding (Madventurer).

In reality, participating volunteers often experience this differently. The description above makes it sound the volunteers will be busy every afternoon doing all kinds of activities with the children. While actually – as already shown in the introduction of this thesis – the children do not always turn up at SWODC after school and the volunteers often feel quite useless. Once they have seen the situation at the orphanage, they tend to focus more on the teaching aspect of their programme than on the orphanage part of it. However, they do not teach at the school the SWODC children attend, as Madventurer depicts.

This is an example of the discrepancies between what the NGOs promise and what the real situation looks like. In this chapter I will elaborate on the role of NGOs in the relation between volunteers and orphanages and the ways Ghanaians try to make use of the volunteers' interest in the orphans and orphanages. I will first describe the expectations Ewe people have of the volunteers and the expectations the volunteers have of their volunteer programmes. Furthermore, I will outline views of Ghanaians on the volunteers and vice versa. In the last section of this chapter, I will describe the relationship of the children at the

orphanages and their caregivers with the volunteers and the way they interact with each other.

MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

When volunteers decide to go on a programme to volunteer in Ghana and work or stay in an orphanage, they are bound to have some thoughts on what they will do there and how they will be able to help the children. On the other hand, their 'hosts' also have expectations of what the volunteers come to do and how they should behave. As I have mentioned before, most of the times I felt like people did not make a distinction between me and the western volunteers. They seemed to see me as one of them and treated me like that too, which means I have also experienced what kind of expectations Ghanaians have of volunteers.

For example, on my second day at SWODC, I sat in the shade under the trees with some of the children who are fostered out and come to play at the orphanage in the afternoons, when Roseline started asking me for things: 'Can you bring us colour pencils, pens or sweets?' Francisca also asked for pens, while Roseline's twin sister Rosemary emphasised their need for notebooks. When in turn, I asked the girls about volunteers that they had met, they told me the volunteers always give them drinks, sweets and many other things. They also expected me to give them things. They told me I should not give everything right away, but should leave something to give at the end of my stay. That is what the volunteers normally do, according to them. Indeed, a few days later it is the last day of the British Madventurer volunteers Urooj and Mahjabeen and they come to the orphanage with a basket full of fruits and other foods and sweets for the children.

At many different afternoons, when we would be spending time together and with the other children, Rosemary would express her expectations of me. Sometimes she would do this implicitly, mentioning she needed something but not straight forward telling me I should be the one to arrange that for her. During a small interview I did with her, Rosemary told me she and the other children needed things for school, like notebooks and mathematics sets. They needed someone to buy it for them. On another occasion, she mentioned she would like to go to a boarding school next year, but that it would not be possible for her as it is expensive and she is poor. She would need a 'friend' [white person] to pay it for her, like some of her Ghanaian friends have. Other times, Rosemary would

explicitly ask me to buy her things. One afternoon she came to SWODC barefooted, explaining her slippers got 'spoiled'. She told me I should buy her new ones. Later on she changed her mind and asked me to buy her new shoes instead of slippers. Rosemary did not only have material expectations, but also expected me to play with her and the other children. One afternoon she told me she felt I did not really care about her and the other children as I had not really been playing and chatting with them the afternoon before.

Mama Bernice had similar expectations of the volunteers, but focused more on a long-term relationship:

I am expecting that if they can help us, advocate us when they go back and get us some funding, we will love it. [...] Money can do a lot of things. Do you get me? When we get money we can pay our rent, we can pay for power, water etcetera, a lot. When they need something for school, we can get it with money. Their school fees, everything you can get from money. Do you get me? So if they go, you know, most of these children are students. Lots of you are students. Do you get me? So I don't expect you to... you can't do much. But when you go back, you can tell people about us, maybe those who can help us, little, little. They make some contribution, send to us. It will help us, to do something with or what do you say?

Mama Bernice makes an effort to stay in touch with the volunteers in order to stimulate them to collect and send money. While I was there, she often wrote letters to past volunteers which she asked me to give to Richard, who would email them to the volunteers and then return their replies. At different occasions Mama Bernice also asked me to raise funds or ask my friends and family members back home to donate money to the orphanage. During an interview she said the following:

For these kids to survive, to live and also grow like you and live well. Ok. So I will suggest you to write your friends, tell them, your parents, your other peoples, to write them. If they send you something small small, you add it and you can buy something for it. You can buy a land or we get something little... We can buy a land and start something, do you get me? We don't expect one person to do it all. As I was telling you, the lady who will be coming. She is not a friend, she is my sister, the American girl. They paid for this house for me.

Mama Bernice often referred to her 'sister from America' as an example of how past volunteers can help making a difference. Apart from financial support, Mama Bernice expected me and the volunteers to play with the children, to help them with their homework and occasionally teach them. Staff members at other orphanages voiced similar expectations.

Whereas Ghanaians tended to focus on long-term relationships and donations in their expectations, the volunteers paid more attention to the time they spent with the children, just generally giving them attention and playing with them. Lucy, one of the Madventurer volunteers, described her expectations as follows:

I thought I would just play with them, like we brought loads of things like jigsaws, face paints, bubbles, things to sort of like do with them and books and stuff. So I thought we'd just play. I didn't, I was worried... I didn't want to be like changing nappies and cleaning up after them or anything like that, but I didn't think that as a volunteer you would have to do that anyway really. I just thought it would be about talking to them, playing with them, that kind of thing.

These expectations are in accordance with the way her programme is described by Madventurer. When I asked Lucy how she expected to be able to help the children, she continued:

Just like being someone to show them that you care for them. Like even little things like in the school even though it is not the orphanage that you know, the kindergarten, just giving the kids some attention, giving them hugs, praising them when they do things right. Because over here they don't... You know, sometimes you think... you get the impression they don't get that much one-on-one attention at all and sometimes you think they don't get that much praise and you know like love in that sense. So I just thought being here to show them a bit of love, especially since they are like orphans as well. They don't really have families to care for them that way. And then also, the things that we have brought, you know, bringing new toys and new games just like makes their... you know, mixes it up a little bit. It gives them something new to play with for a few weeks, something new to do.

Lucy's description hints her compassion for the children, which is something that is probably (partly) enforced by the information that is given by NGOs about the poor living conditions of orphans as I have described in the previous chapters. By giving the children attention and

love she hoped to make a difference in their lives. Most of the volunteers seemed to have expectations like this. Then when they actually arrived at the orphanages, things often turn out to be a little different, as Lucy's friend Hannah described:

I thought there would be more orphans and that we would be interacting with them more, like playing with them, maybe making arts and crafts, doing games and stuff, which we have been doing when there are orphans here. But obviously because they have all got homes, it is obviously hard to disrupt their lives with their new families and yeah... I just don't see them as much as I thought we would.

Hannah expressed how the presence of the volunteers at the orphanage was not always really needed. Several times when I came to SWODC in the afternoon, the volunteers just sat in a circle in the garden, mainly talking to each other. Sometimes the children simply would not come. Ivo, a Dutch Projects Abroad volunteer who was staying at SWODC, also admitted not spending as much time with the children as he had expected he would:

I would have expected we'd be more at home [SWODC] with the children. You know, just with the children, like that. I also would have thought we'd just give out our things here [Rob and Ivo took a suitcase full of things like t-shirts, pens and footballs that they had been given by family members and friends to hand out to the children]. But now we actually just play football with the children. Also things we like ourselves, you know. But not really... yeah, sometimes we do some extra teaching in the garden and stuff. But we really like all that. But yeah, I would have thought we'd be here, at home, more often. Now I think... I don't really like it here in the garden with the children. Because yeah, they are... Well, you notice they are kind of spoilt in a way, you know. Look, if you go on an outreach, children are still happy [to see you]. But here, if you tell Bernice, well, I have donated a football to that school, well, then [she responds] 'you should be thinking about us too.' Whereas I think, well, I've already given out a lot here. I mean, those first few footballs, they've just been wrecked here.

Ivo got a little frustrated about the different expectations sometimes. Like most of the other volunteers, he taught at a school during the day – as part of his volunteer programme. Often when he came home to the orphanage, he was quite tired and did not feel like playing with the children for too long. Though many afternoons, I witnessed Rob – Ivo's friend – and Ivo play football with the boys in front of the orphanage. They also had a very caring attitude

towards the children. When one of the children would get injured playing, they would get out their first-aid kits and treat the child's wounds and when Patience – one of the girls at SWODC – suffered from severe malaria, Ivo even offered to take her to hospital.

As I stated before, the volunteers generally want to help the orphanages by spending time with the children and having fun with them, while the Ewe people feel they would be helped more by money donations. In my opinion, the NGOs sending the volunteers play a major role in the enforcement of these misunderstandings through their homogenous descriptions of the volunteer programmes and the simplified images of Ghanaian orphanages they present. The difference in expectations sometimes raises frustrations both with the volunteers and Ewe people. In the next section of this chapter I will elaborate on the views of Ghanaians towards the volunteers and vice versa.

VOLUNTEERING IN REALITY

When I asked the children about the volunteers they often responded they like everything about them. They could not think of anything they did not like about the white people that come to play with them and bring them things. 'Mothers' or staff members were most of the times very positive about the volunteers too. I suspect they might not have wanted to tell me about the negative aspects of the volunteers' coming, out of fear to damage their relationship with them. Mr. Akordor, who is more of an outsider, entrusted me his critical thoughts about the volunteers:

You see, the volunteers who come to the orphanages, they are not doing anything. They are not doing any work. You see, when they come... One, they are expected to stay there and then help do the washing for the orphans, do the cooking, do the teaching, you see. But they bring in the wrong type of volunteers to the orphanages. How do you stay in the orphanage and you are going to teach in the village? You are not there to help the orphanage. You should come to the orphanage. The only thing is, you know, probably the man handling the orphanage over there hasn't got helping hands, so you sweep the place, you scrub the place, you wash the beddings and their clothing, because those small kids can't wash their things very neatly. You teach them, you help cook for them, you stay with them, you educate them, you let them learn about your country, let them know about the future, you let them know that they are self-reliant, they can be on their own, they can do this, they can do that. You know, you stay with them and you teach them. That is it. [...] If you say you are

coming over here to an orphanage to work over there, to help, then that is the work you have to do as a volunteer. You see, that is the work you have to do. Not that you wake up and you take bread and you say you are going to teach. No, that is not the work. You are not here to teach, you are there to work in the orphanage. You see, that is it. You see, it is true, when you are working over there and you discover the difficulties, when you go home, then you can say, ah, the orphanage in which I worked, the type of food they give them is not good. So let us collect something small and buy some food stuff and send it to them or let us collect something and then buy drugs and send to them. Let us collect something and then buy better beds, you know, you buy better beds and mattresses for them or you buy clothing for them. Do you get me? So that after a certain time you come there again to see whether the things you are sending, it is being used well. Is that not it? Yes, that is what I feel that should be done, you see. You are working in the orphanage, you just come to eat over there and then you go away. They are not helping in any way at all, you see. Then in the night, you go drinking about and you know, I mean, you are not here to do any work.

Mr. Akordor clearly outlined the misunderstandings and problems that can arise between the NGOs, western volunteers and local people. According to him the volunteers just come to Ghana to enjoy and not to do any work. This seems a little over-simplified, but I think there is some truth in it, as the volunteers tend to meet up every evening to have drinks together at one of the bars in town and travel around the country in the weekends, often taking an extra day off from their placements. The NGOs play a major role in the misunderstandings that arise as they often portray a distorted picture of the volunteering work. Furthermore, volunteers do not receive training before they come to Ghana or when they first arrive. During their time in Ghana, most volunteers do have weekly scheduled meetings with local staff members of the NGOs in which they can talk about difficulties they encounter.

Mr. Akordor further emphasised the financial aspect. As I have mentioned before, volunteers are often expected – by the Ghanaians – to donate money to the orphanage or raise funds after they have returned to their home country. Most of them do not actually do that, but while they are still in Ghana, make it seem they will. According to Patricia, a girl living at SWODC, the volunteers make promises, but when they go back, they do not do anything and the children do not hear from them again. Bless, the assistant administrator of Eugemot Orphanage said the following about this:

Really, most of them, when they come, they promise. They will take all our contacts, they take everything about us and they promise that when they go, we will be hearing from them. But in fact, when they go, that's the end. Most of them, you don't even hear. At least at the end of the day the only thing we'll see is they only send the pictures, some of the pictures that they take here. [...] So that's what at times happens.

As this story shows, receiving volunteers sometimes leads to disappointments. Mr. Akordor brought forward the following solution for this:

They [the orphanages] should say that they need this type of volunteers who will come and help do service in the orphanage. Is that the type of people who help and come and do service? And the type of services are to help wash, to help teach the children over there, to socialise, so that they will bring them up, to nurture them, to help in the cooking, in all these things, in the household chores. So if somebody comes and says, for me, I want to go and teach, then nonsense, pack and go. That is it [laughing]. You see, people come here, they don't know why they are here.

Social Welfare officer Mr. Adjin came up with another solution. He reckoned his department should regulate the volunteers. At present, they do not know anything about the volunteers or about their backgrounds. The volunteers could be abusing the children without anyone knowing about it. According to Mr. Adjin, the western volunteers should pass through Social Welfare before going to the orphanages. This would also help to prevent NGOs from misusing the volunteers as some of them are now making money at the volunteers' expense.

As I have mentioned earlier, NGOs often present a simplified and distorted image of the orphans' situations in order to attract volunteers. For example, Ivo explained the living conditions of the children are a lot better than he had expected:

Well, I expected the living conditions here to be worse. We were just talking about those things we wanted to give out, but yeah, in fact they don't really need it here. Because they have, well, just normal clothes and stuff like that. They can pretty much buy what they want. They even have a Playstation and that. Well, I wouldn't have expected that here. I think it's quite luxurious. And the children are living quite good lives here. They do have to work here, after school hours, but yeah, they still have time for their homework and they help each other all the time, so I think, yeah... They don't really have much else to do in a day anyway. That might sound strange, but yeah, it's a lot better than I'd expected. Of course there's no Dutch standard

here, but it's a lot better. That's quite... Yes, because there are just many differences, if you look at the schools here and other children who are still living with their parents, they are living in conditions that are a lot worse, so I think it's better that they have come here.

As Ivo pointed out, the children are not quite living under the 'terrible circumstances' as is often described by the NGOs. Despite this, Ivo and most of the other volunteers are very positive about the children in the orphanages. Mads, a Danish Projects Abroad volunteer working at Hohoe Christian Orphans' Home, described his relationship with the children at 'his' orphanage as follows:

It's extremely good, like I've gotten so close to the children. It's gonna be the hardest part when leaving, because you... like especially like the kids in my class. [...] You can see the smaller boys, they kind of look up to me and some admire you. And there's also the children who don't like interact that much with you, but like when I go to work I usually see a lot of people, they're always like waving at me, shouting my name and so I think I got a really good relationship to the children. And I think that's also because of the amount of the time I've been [spending]. Instead of going home at twelve [which is what most other volunteers at the orphanage do], like I've been [there for] the whole school day and I'm like playing [football] with them in the breaks. [...] They're so lovely, the kids. And they're like always asking if they can help me, if they can carry my bag or get me water or something. They're very good kids.

Like Mads, most of the volunteers I have spoken to told me they would miss the children very much. Most of them would like to come back to 'their' orphanage one day, stay in touch, send things over or try to raise money. Some of them honestly told me they would probably be caught in busy life again back home and might in reality not really stay in touch. In the next section of this chapter I will describe the relations and interactions between the volunteers and Ewe people more closely.

VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR SERVANTS?

At around 5.30pm, most of the children that have come to play for the afternoon leave back to their own homes. Normally, I also leave around this time, but today I stay as I have decided to stay over at SWODC for a couple of days. Mama Bernice

welcomed my idea with enthusiasm and told me I could stay in the room with Emma, a British Projects Abroad volunteer. Ivy, Patience, Gideon and Patricia [the four oldest children at SWODC] are busy preparing *fufu* for dinner. When they are nearly finished, Emma returns from Ho. Mama Bernice asks her and me if we want to have our dinner. We follow Ivy to our room, who serves us the food. There is a little dining table in her room, with some tomato sauce, tea, coffee, sugar, Milo, jam, milk powder and a vacuum flask containing hot water on it. Emma tells me she always eats in her room by herself. The children always serve her the food. After she finishes eating she will put the plates, bowls and leftovers on the table in the living room. The children will take it away from there and wash everything. Tonight, we are having *fufu* with light soup, a Ghanaian dish. The volunteers have mostly been eating potato chips or rice with stew, but together with Bernice they have decided to try different Ghanaian dishes for the coming week. Emma does not really like the *fufu* and cannot finish it all, but she says she hardly ever finishes all the food they give her. When we are nearly finished eating, Rob and Ivo come in. Their dinner has been served in their room [opposite ours] too. Since they fell sick in the first week of their stay, they have been reluctant to try Ghanaian food. Now Ivo is keen to try it, while Rob rather sticks to the western food. They both try the *fufu*, but only eat a little as they do not like it. After they have put their plates back on the table in the living room, Ivy and Patience comment on them eating so little. They are playing around a bit, but do seem disappointed that the guys have not eaten the food it has taken them so long to prepare. Mama Bernice calls them outside and confronts them with the fact they have eaten so little. She asks them whether they want some rice or something else instead. Rob responds they still had some bread and biscuits in their room which he has eaten. The plan was to give them Ghanaian food for the whole week, but Rob says he does not want to try the *banku* that is planned for the next night. Ivo is still keen on trying it, but only wants a tiny little bit of it. Bernice says the children will also prepare rice for them to eat (field notes, February 18, 2010).

This incident illustrates the relation between the children and the western volunteers staying at SWODC. The children treat the volunteers as guests that they have to keep happy and take good care of. They almost seem to adore the volunteers. Some of the volunteers told me they were very overwhelmed when they met the children for the first time and they all came running up to them. At first, the volunteers seem quite uncomfortable with the unequal relation between themselves and the children and sometimes try to change it, but they tend to get used to it quickly. Ivo elaborated on this:

I would have thought that we'd need to do a lot more ourselves. Because yeah, they [the children] even wash our clothes. But yeah, they do that for Emma too, for everyone actually. They actually find it very strange when you want to do everything yourself. They cook the food for you too. Well, that is something I did expect, that the food would be arranged for us and there would be water in the fridge. But I did think I would have to wash my own clothes and make my own bed and clean the room and sweep and that, but the children do that too. But it is very strange when you do it yourself. For example, once we didn't have chilled water sachets. Well, I then bought chilled water sachets for everyone, because everyone here was quite thirsty. Well, they found it very strange, you know, that you yourself do something for once. It actually attacks their hospitality a bit if you do too much, while you would actually like to. [...] You just have to tell them when you want your sheets washed. Well yeah, Bernice will say 'I will do it' and then sends Ivy for it and she does it, you know. And then you thank her, but yeah. Look, on the one hand, I would like to do it myself, on the other hand I know, yeah, they won't allow it anyway. They will say, yeah, why do you want to do that yourself, have you gone crazy? I mean, Ivy will do it for you. Well yeah, fine. So yeah, we do not actually have to do much here. We only need to... When we get our clothes [after they have been washed], we only need to fold them and put them on the bed, but yeah, that's all.

It seems like Ivo tried to justify the fact the children do everything possible to make the volunteers feel at ease. They are very much treated like guests. Not only the children living at the orphanages treat the volunteers in this way, but also the 'mothers', others staff members and NGO leaders. Every time I spent a couple of hours at the school attached to VIAK Orphanage, Mama VIAK would call me during the breaks and give me a packet of biscuits and a soft drink, something that is really seen as a treat. Bless, the assistant administrator of Eugemot Orphanage, described the relation with the volunteers as follows:

When they [the volunteers] come here, we always receive them as if this is their home. We always give them a warm reception to feel that this is their home. So we allow them to do all that they want to do. We don't force them. We want them to feel happy all the time and feel ok.

Trying to keep the volunteers happy is a good investment in the future. If they are pleased with their stay or 'experience', they might return to help or, even better, send money. An occasion at House of Hope further illustrates the unequal relation between volunteers and

the children and their caregivers at the orphanages. During my second visit to House of Hope I sat with some of the orphan girls who were preparing food when suddenly a taxi arrived:

A Ghanaian man and two white ladies get out. Mama Lizzie tells me to come and meet them. She has never seen the white ladies before. The man is a leader from CCS. The ladies introduce themselves immediately; the girl is called Ella and is sixteen years old, the other lady, her mother, is called Hope. They tell me they will only stay in Ghana for ten days; one week of volunteering and three days of travelling. They ask me whether the children here speak English. Etonam and Esther – two girls living at House of Hope – are standing beside me. Immediately after they have introduced themselves, Hope asks whether she can take their picture. They agree happily. Hope shows them the picture after she has taken it. Mama Lizzie calls all the children and tells them to introduce themselves. They walk by Ella and Hope, shake their hands and say their names. They then continue playing. Mama Lizzie shows Ella and Hope around the orphanage. When they finish the tour, they tell Mama Lizzie they have brought some pictures from home – Philadelphia – and would like to show them to the children, if the children would like to see them. Hope asks whether some photos can be taken of this, because she would like to have something to take home and show. Some children gather around Ella and Hope, who are sitting on two plastic chairs. They show their pictures in quite a childish way. 'This is snow. Have you ever seen that?' 'This is a special vehicle that is used in the snow.' 'See, some women wear hats in America' 'This is the crowd at a basketball game. See, many people are watching.' They have also brought pictures of their very luxurious looking house and of their family members. Other pictures show their travels. 'This is Paris. It is in France. Have you ever heard of that place?' 'This is New York. It is a very big city. Have you ever heard about it? These buildings are called sky scrapers, because they are so tall, they touch the sky.' After Hope and Ella have finished showing their pictures, George takes them back to the taxi and they leave again (field notes, March 28, 2010).

By showing pictures of their many family members, their wealth and travels, Hope and Ella showed the children almost everything they do not have or cannot get access to. This reinforces the unequal relation that exists between them.

Mother Hope took daughter Ella during her Easter break on a trip to Ghana to experience Africa and help out as a volunteer. Hope was very focused on getting many pictures of everything she and her daughter experienced and asked me to take pictures of them with the children, in order to have something to show back home. Taking many pictures in order to show family and friends back home about their volunteer work is

something I noticed almost all volunteers did. At SWODC, the Madventurer volunteers would often take pictures of each other with the children. They then spent hours in the internet cafe in town trying to upload their photos so their friends and family could view them. After the return to their home country, some of the volunteers send pictures they have taken during their stay back to the orphanage. Mama Bernice has many photo albums full of such pictures. Most of them show smiling children and one or more volunteers. I saw some pictures of the time SWODC was still based in Ho and housed many children. On the pictures the children all wear new school uniforms, shoes and backpacks and hold an extra set of uniforms. The volunteers that have bought the uniforms for them are standing at the back.

To conclude, this chapter has shown there is a discrepancy between the expectations, views and attitudes of Ewe people and western volunteers. As Eileadh Swan (n.d.) mentions, some volunteers become disillusioned and angered when it turns out there is not much volunteering work for them to do. She continues that both the volunteers and local people often feel that volunteers are not responding to the real needs of the community. Volunteers – usually being seen as people with a lot of money – are expected to donate money to the orphanages, while they are not prepared to spend even more money besides their high programme fee. They have mainly come to the orphanages to give attention to the children. Feeling the pressure of financial expectations often makes them promise they will send money once they return, but in reality they rarely keep that promise.

I argue the discrepancy between expectations, views and attitudes of Ghanaians and western volunteers is largely enforced by western NGOs. Most volunteers had expected the living conditions of the children to be worse than they actually are. They might feel a little deceived by their NGO, since that NGO provided them with very simplified and stereotyped images of Ghanaian orphans (cf. Simpson 2004, 682). They portray the Ghanaian orphans as being desperately in need of help from volunteers. In reality, the children at the orphanages almost seem to help the volunteers more than vice versa. However, this 'serving attitude' of the children – and adults – should be seen in the light of Ghanaian hospitality and the expectation that one day their hospitality will be rewarded.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this thesis, I presented the question: Why has there been such a proliferation of orphanages in Ghana over the last fifteen years? Throughout the different chapters of this thesis, it has become clear that the interest of western NGOs and volunteers in Ghanaian orphans has been of great importance in the recent increase in orphanages. The money from 'outside' that is made available through this interest has greatly stimulated the establishment and sustenance of orphanages in Ghana and at the same time has influenced the phrasing of the reasons why children are taken to these homes.

In chapter two I have discussed why many Ghanaian children end up in orphanages. The ideal situation in Ewe culture would be that orphans and vulnerable children are cared for by (extended) family members. According to Lund and Agyei-Mensah (2008), this familial care combined with communal care rather than institutional care seems to give African societies good opportunities for the effective care of orphans and vulnerable children (94). For a variety of reasons this ideal is often not pursued, which leads to many Ghanaian children being taken to orphanages. Whereas in different studies the many adults dying of AIDS are said to be the main reason for children to be orphaned and in need of institutional care (Madhavan 2004, 1443), this was never mentioned by any of my informants, neither stated in any of the orphans' profiles. My informants named poverty, the death of one or both parents, the lack of responsibility of family members and the breakdown of the extended family system as some of the main reasons why children are taken to orphanages. Some of my informants connected this last issue to a stronger focus nowadays on the nuclear family.

In chapter three, I have elaborated on the establishment and upholding of the orphanages. The first orphanages in Ghana were established by European missionaries, many years ago. But only in the past few years there has been an enormous growth in the number of orphanages in Ghana, which operate as NGOs. Most of the orphanages that I included in my research have been established by Ghanaians who claimed they saw the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children in their region. Some however were founded by westerners. Since the orphanages I visited do not receive funding from the Ghanaian government, they are all reliant on donations from western individuals, NGOs or other

institutions to continue to exist. The orphanages make use of several strategies in order to get money. They might have links with a church in a western country, stimulate (past) volunteers to raise funds and collect money to send to the orphanage or have sponsorship programmes through which individuals can sponsor a child for a certain amount of money to be given to the orphanage every month.

In chapter four, I have outlined the involvement of western NGOs and volunteers in the orphanages. On their websites orphanages and western NGOs promote themselves. The representations they make are based on simple dualisms and stereotyped concepts of the 'other', mainly the orphans. The NGOs and orphanages describe the conditions of the orphans homogenously as terrible to produce evocative and recognisable images. They emphasise the 'usefulness' of volunteers and how they will be 'needed' in the Ghanaian communities. However, the 'needs' the volunteers will meet are often not explicated. This enforces misunderstandings between the volunteers and local people once the volunteers have arrived in Ghana. There turn out to be different expectations on both sides. Whereas the volunteers are mainly prepared to give their time in playing with the children or teaching them, the 'mothers' and children at the orphanages rather would receive their financial assistance. They need to make efforts and build up relationships with the volunteers as – in most cases – they do not receive money from the NGOs sending the volunteers. This is remarkable as the NGOs need the orphanages to be able to place volunteers there. They ask enormous amounts of money for their programmes, while they mainly just form the first link between the volunteers and the orphanages. Thus, sending volunteers to the orphanages seems to be quite profitable for the NGOs.

The insights above make this study both socially and scientifically relevant. For NGOs involved in orphanages and sending western volunteers to work there, it is useful to know what the people they are trying to help actually think of their efforts and what their ideas about orphanages and orphan care are. However, it is questionable whether the NGOs will really take an interest and truly want to learn about the views of the Ghanaians. In addition, with this study I have tried to make a contribution to a broader discussion on the agency of local people in development and the credibility of NGOs.

In this thesis, I have given an idea of why there has been such a proliferation of orphanages in Ghana over the last fifteen years. Instead of indicating AIDS as the main reason for a growing 'need' of institutional care, as is common in studies about southern

African countries (Drew et al. 1998, Madhavan 2004), I argue that the western aid 'industry' has played a major role in the recent increase of orphanages in Ghana. The form of development aid – sending western volunteers to the orphanages – western NGOs provide has colonising effects (cf. Abram 1998, 4). Like Simone Abram, I have noticed a power imbalance between the givers and the receivers of the aid (3). The orphanages are almost completely dependent on funds from western countries. Furthermore, the volunteers are supposed to come to the orphanages to help out and care for the children, while in reality the children serve the volunteers in many ways.

However, this does not mean the children and staff members of the orphanages are to be seen as powerless victims in the development discourse. Their main links with the western world are formed by their contacts with the volunteers coming to the orphanages. The orphanages try to create opportunities out of those contacts. Sarah Pink argues that local people develop their own strategies based on their experiences of white foreigners – in this case western volunteers – and their understandings of the opportunities these people may offer them (1998, 10). They try to use the volunteers' interest in the orphanages for their own benefit. By treating them as kings and queens and by building up relationships with volunteers, the children and staff members of the orphanages take a chance at receiving gifts and donations from them. They succeed in this often enough to sustain themselves. However, as I have shown, the western aid 'industry' or NGOs seem to profit most and therefore seem to enforce the proliferation of orphanages in Ghana.

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