'Chasing the Better Life': How Rural Ghanaian Students are Navigating Schooling, Indigeneity, and Aspirations.

Moses Mensah

ORCID: 0009-0008-2097-7800

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Department of Anthropology & Development Studies

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ABSTRACT

Africanist scholars and activists have been strongly advocating the decolonization of education on the continent since the independence era. In recent decades, they have increasingly employed the language of critical indigenous pedagogy and have become aligned with the International indigenous peoples' movement. However, their calls for the overhaul of Eurocentrism in the curriculum and for the mainstreaming of indigenous African epistemologies have been largely ignored by policymakers and electorates alike. Moreover, the comprehensive sweep of neo-liberalized schooling across the continent has created and entrenched aspirations of modern, urban, and non-farming lifestyles, especially among rural agriculturist students. Consequently, indigenous lifestyles being championed through the African decolonization agenda are often associated with 'poverty', and current forms of schooling represent the prime route towards 'prosperity.' My doctoral project discusses these global and local debates on decolonized schooling, indigenous livelihoods, and rural student aspirations by connecting the existing scholarship to ethnographic data from my field participation with a cohort of rural students from an agrarian community in Ghana's Krachi West district. Throughout the thesis, I highlight the ambivalences, contradictions, and complexities that emerge. My aim is to better understand how these students, while navigating indigenous subsistence practice side by side with schooling, are pursuing their imagined futures in the context of these (inter)national narratives. I also demonstrate how their ideas of identity, livelihoods, and life aspirations are shifting even as they engage with the school system. I develop the argument that rural students are uncompromising in their commitment to current forms of schooling because the educational structures that marginalize them also represent their most promising chances of escaping suffering. My work interrogates contemporary theory around the decolonization of schooling in Africa and

places rural students' aspirations towards a better life within discussions around what a decolonized curriculum should look like.

DECLARATION

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the award of a Doctor of Philosophy degree and has not been previously submitted anywhere else for the award of any other degree. All materials, ideas, and quotations from other sources that have been used have been duly acknowledged in the text.

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Finally, I thank my wife Lindsey, for re-arranging her entire life for the duration of my doctoral studies so that I could focus on my research, and Selorm my young son who allowed his father to be physically present but, in many ways, very absent.

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N

FARMLANDS

Kucha

Komba

Water Point1

Kabre

Government School

Chokosi

Private School

CH

Sangul

Water Point2

Market

Health Facility

LEGEND

+   Church of Pentecost

◉   Water Point

⚑   School

——   **Dambai to Krachi Road**

Playing Field

Ethnic Section

Boundary

Farmlands

Kache

Nana Ntegyi's House

0   200   400 Meters

Water Point3

Figure 3: Sketch Map of Bommoden Community

SECTION I:

INTRODUCTIONS

CHAPTER ONE: Colonized Classrooms in Post-Colonial Contexts

1.1: Introduction

> "We have taken the bold step of re-opening all our schools again, because of our fundamental conviction that education is the key to our future."

I listened and watched with the rest of the country as Ghana's President Akuffo-Addo spoke the words above on 7th January 2021 as part of the inaugural speech for his second term in office. At a time when the country's active coronavirus cases were rising alarmingly and new variants of the virus were beginning to spread, the President's 'bold' decision to reopen schools underscored the national resolve to maintain formal education as a top priority in nation-building. The statement reaffirmed to me how central education had become to most Ghanaians in their bid to create better futures for themselves and their dependents. Indeed, at least for less industrialized countries like Ghana, schooling has rapidly become a fiercely competitive entry point into the modern global economy (Levinson and Pollock 2011). It comes as no surprise then that attempts to 'indigenize' schooling through initiatives like the mainstreaming of local languages in curricula across the African continent have generally been met with public dissatisfaction (Anyidoho 2018; Zsiga, Boyer, and Kramer 2014; Agbozo and ResCue 2021). Such moves are often perceived as impeding formal education's promise to offer students better (trans-) national opportunities.

This resolve to prioritize schooling even in the midst of a global pandemic also undercuts the post-developmentalist assumption that people in the Majority World are being coerced to accept and maintain Euro-American institutions (Matthews 2017; Sachs 2010). Make no mistake, international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development continue to set the agenda for schooling in the Majority World by attaching

policy recommendations and targets to aid (Carnoy and Samoff 2016; Samoff 1993). Countries like Ghana must pursue benchmarks set by aid agencies if they are to participate in today's markets. This reality, however, must not be interpreted as a wholesale imposition of Euro-American ideas of development on peripheral countries. Western-styled schooling, along with the prosperity it promises, continues to hold a strong appeal for many local communities (Bronteng, Berson, and Berson 2019).

Right in the midst of the rapid universalization of neo-liberalized forms of education, critical post-colonial scholars continue to call for the demolition of knowledge hierarchies and for the integration of non-Eurocentric epistemologies in definitions of quality education (Smith 2012; Scantlebury, McKinley, and Jesson 2002; Emeagwali and Dei 2014). This critique of dominant knowledges isn't marginal to some global institutions; for example, the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (along with the attached Education for All program) calls for empowering marginalized knowledges and encourages more diverse forms of education (UNESCO 2018b). Yet no monitoring indicators or practical paths that guide member states towards greater inclusion of indigenous knowledges in schooling exist. This has resulted in an international narrative of 'participation' and 'inclusion' in education with very little implementation at the grassroot level. Aid-dependent governments, therefore, prioritize predetermined targets for teacher-student ratios, gender parity, and literacy to the neglect of local ways of knowing and being because the former benchmarks are the ones used to measure whether your education sector is 'developing.'

As is the case in much of the Global South, leading education-sector actors in Ghana have long attempted the juggling act of decolonization alongside modernization. Prominent nationalist leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Kofi Abrefa Busia sought to establish education systems that valorised African authenticity but also promoted modernization and

participation in global markets (Akyeampong 2010; Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah 2018). The post-colonial philosophy of education in the immediate aftermath of the Ghanaian independence movement imagined schooling that would "pass on the heritage of the past, cope with the present, and prepare for the future" (Busia, 1964/2023:96). Yet over six decades later, schooling has continued to centre distinctly Western forms of modernity and prioritised socio-economic advancement over local connections. (Stromquist and Monkman 2014; Quist 2001; 2003). Beyond this, the idea of a national Ghanaian identity has been employed to construct homogeneity rather than promote diversity and cultural authenticity (Sefa Dei 2005; Coe 2005; Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah 2018). And moves to mainstream indigenous content in the curriculum have often been emphatically rejected and met with widespread criticism (see Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019; Anyidoho 2018). Thus, any re-articulation of theory around decolonized schooling and pan-African education in a country like Ghana must contend with the grassroot demand for forms of schooling that serve as entry points into neo-liberal modernity.

My research investigates rural schooling experiences in the context of these national and international debates about decolonized education. The project is an ethnographic case study of high schoolers in Krachi West District (KWD), one of Ghana's most disadvantaged and underserved districts in terms of key development indicators (UNICEF et al. 2019). I collaborate particularly with agriculturist students to understand their perspectives on schooling, indigenous subsistence practice, and the pursuit of what they call 'a better life.' In fact, my ethnographic participation in their daily routines—not only sitting in some of their classes but also going along with them to their farms—became a prism through which I could interrogate the wider debates on what 'quality' education ought to look like. I went into the field expecting that young people would be aware of their marginalization and unequivocal

in their desire for an indigenized curriculum. I presumed that they had already linked their socio-economic marginalisation to the marginalisation of their ways of knowing and being and were somehow enthusiastically supporting efforts to recognise and integrate indigenous lifeways into formal curriculum. I have come to see my initial expectations as expressing colonial ideas from the bifurcated African state: where urban life is associated with 'modern Western elitism' and rurality epitomised 'authentic indigeneity' (Mamdani 2018:18). Clearly, this dualism was a fantasy in colonial times and remains a mirage today. Still, especially with rural-urban inequities sharper than ever, appetites for the modern-urban have become almost universalized.

During my participation with rural schooled youth, therefore, I encountered more ambivalence than fiery indignation. I now see how naïve my original assumptions were. As is the case in many other rural areas, I found that KWD students' navigation of the spaces between indigenous lifestyles and modernity revolved around a singular shared commitment to escape 'suffering' and live 'better lives.' Beyond this, especially because schools were closed for much of the duration of my fieldwork, I was given an insight into the extent to which life outside the rural classroom affects what happens within and vice versa. The coronavirus pandemic offered me an unfortunate but incisive opportunity to observe what schooling represents to rural students in Ghana. In fact, while many of their counterparts in urban centres enlisted private educators or followed the government's virtual learning programmes, the rural students I spent time with were frantically working on farms to raise money for their impending exams.

1.2: My Journey to this Doctoral Project

Although I have had to live for short periods in several countries in Africa, much of my secondary and tertiary education were in my country of birth and nationality: Ghana.

Ironically my schooling experience in my home country was constantly plagued with a lingering sense that I did not truly belong. I am ethnically Ewe, a group native to Ghana's Volta Region, but I have never been able to read or write in my local language with any degree of proficiency. Worse, I have always felt quite disconnected from the culture of my people. Both of my parents have been educated to the postgraduate level and English has always been the language of our home. I was born in Accra (Ghana's capital) and pursued my senior high school as well as my undergraduate studies in the city. I would, however, not describe myself as satisfactorily fluent in Ga (the language of the Ga-Adangme people residing in Ghana's Greater Accra Region) or Twi (the most widely spoken language in Ghana and the language of the most dominant ethnic group, the Asante people). I am tempted to blame my lack of fluency in Ghanaian local languages (and cultures) on the fact that much of my primary education was in Francophone West Africa, but when I remember that I am not a confident speaker of French either, I begin to worry that it was more of a problem with me than anything else. To be fair, in Senegal, I attended a British international boarding school where I was only exposed to French as a subject taught for about three periods every week. This meant that although I picked up what I felt at the time was a great French accent, I did not acquire much more than that.

During my Masters' thesis work on nineteenth century German missionary interactions with native communities in the Volta River basin, I became keenly interested in the colonial and Western influences that shaped Ghana's formal school system. At the same time, I had begun reading on the concept of 'indigeneity' and 'indigenous knowledge systems or traditions.' As I was gradually introduced to the fascinating knowledge practices that had been developed over millennia by native groups in the region now called Ghana, I became frustrated by the fact that the country's school system did not incorporate more indigenous

knowledges into the curriculum. Significant among the reasons for my frustration was the complicated puzzle of my own lack of culturally fluency. I felt that since a substantial part of my education had been in Ghana, the school system should have exposed me to indigenous knowledge in a more definitive way. Ghanaian local languages and cultures are taught as stand-alone subjects for one or two periods each week in basic schools, but that is akin to the expectation that Ghanaian students should be fluent in a foreign language and culture (like French, Italian, or German) after exposing them to that world for a few periods every week. After learning about the wealth of local knowledges in agriculture, philosophy, metallurgy, iconography, linguistics, mathematics, amongst others, I was incensed that indigenous knowledges were restricted to one class a week and were not made to at least stand side by side with Euro-American knowledge forms.

A doctoral research proposal that investigated some of these issues first began to form in my mind when I visited Krachi West District (KWD) in 2016. It was my first time crossing the Oti River, and as I stepped off the crowded ferry onto the western bank of the river, it seemed like I was in a different country. The Oti Region, where KWD is located, is often described as Ghana's breadbasket because most of the staples sold in markets across the country are cultivated there. On this first visit, however, I was quite surprised by the stark difference from Accra in living conditions. In fact, it was different from anything I had ever witnessed: most of the homes were wattle-and-daub structures with little or no toilet facilities; many of the communities were cut off from the country's national electricity and telecommunications infrastructures; and women and children were walking long distances to access potable water. I remember thinking to myself: "These communities would be perfect for the stereotypical images of 'Africa' that dominate Western media outlets, but they are far removed from my own experiences of the continent." Make no mistake, the poor living

conditions in KWD and the wider Oti Region are the result of systemic state neglect and not the inability of the long arm of Ghana's central government to do in these communities what it is so liberally doing elsewhere.

As we journeyed to Kete-Krachi, the district capital, I realized that much of what little infrastructure had been developed in that part of the country were because of initiatives by international NGOs like World Vision, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and the Korea International Cooperation Agency. The most fascinating thing for me, however, was that in every community we drove past, no matter how small it was, there was always a modest thatch shed with a blackboard. If NGOs or the government had not been able to build a school building in a community, or the block buildings were not sufficient to contain the number of students that the school served, there was always a makeshift shed to ensure that children had the opportunity to pursue a primary education. Most of the classrooms had few or no desks, and they doubled as resting places for livestock at night and during school holidays. It is not a strange sight in KWD to see pupils carrying chairs on their heads from home to school (or vice versa). In fact, some would either sit on small stools and write on their laps or sit on the floor and write on their stools. As we journeyed through, I kept asking myself; why is a region that is so central to the nation's food security so neglected? And why are these agriculturist students braving the odds to continue schooling even though the state through its school system has in many ways neglected them?

Up until this point, although I knew I wanted to study the education system in Ghana and the ways in which it marginalizes local ways of knowing and being, I was quite unsure of how to go about it. After that visit to Oti region and my interactions with students from several migrant communities in the region, I was convinced that I needed to spend more time with the people there and pursue answers to the questions on my mind. Looking back, I

imagine that although it was clear to me that I was very different to these rural students, I could also see some similarities we shared. For example, my background differs from theirs

Figure 4: KWD students carrying their seats from school.

in that I am from an upper middle-class home and have lived virtually all my life in cities; in fact, before going to the field, I had never spent a day on any farm. In the classrooms that I have studied in, I always sat on good student desks that were already provided; I have never studied on bare floor. Most of my teachers used whiteboard markers and not chalk. And, I have never had to share my learning space with goats. In my conversations with these students, however, I realized that like me they were navigating two different worlds. They were enthusiastically responding to the school system's demand for high levels of English language proficiency even though they could not read or write in their mother tongue. Moreover, like me they knew more about European concepts like citizenship than about their ancestry.

More than ever, this research has made my position as both an outsider and an insider very apparent to me. I am simultaneously the researcher and the researched, constantly

vacillating between my roles as 'inquirer and respondent' (Guba and Lincoln 2005:210). The study has marked the beginning of a journey in making sense of my educational journey especially in terms of the many influences that have shaped my views of the world and my varied expressions of the self. That is, I have come to better understand aspects of myself that previously existed as confusing frustrations, and in the course of this research, new selves have been created. This experience has positioned me as both an ethnographer dutifully presenting the voices of my interlocutors as well as an activist for more equitable schooling in the post-colonial world.

1.3: The Post-Colonial Problem of Colonized Classrooms

Ghana's schools today are the result of a series of interventions by several actors across time with varying perspectives on the nature, content, and purpose of schooling. Since the introduction of modern schooling, students have always had to navigate the interests of powerful education providers. Some of the earliest schools in this region, formerly known as the Gold Coast, were started in forts and castles built by European traders in the sixteenth century along the coastline. For example, in 1529, the Portuguese Governor of Elmina Castle was instructed by King John III to begin classes for select indigenes that would "provide reading, writing, and religious teaching" (Graham 1971/2013:1). These schools were started primarily to provide literacy education for two categories of elite youth: children of mixed parentage (usually born through affairs European men had with indigenous women) and the children of wealthy African merchants (Debrunner 1967; McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). When Catholic, Wesleyan, and Presbyterian missionaries began to venture further inland to gain access to rural communities, schooling became a means of propagating the gospel (Ahlijah 2015; Coe 2005). These mission schools were infamous for their discipline, and in some communities, unruly children were threatened to be sent to school as a form of

punishment (Mensah 2017; Graham 1971/2013). In the late nineteenth century, the British colonial administration recognized the potential of missionary-led schools to produce a literate working class of indigenous people who would help them consolidate their interests in the region (Adu Boahen 1975). Through the Education Ordinance of 1887, the British colonial government, which had assumed complete administrative oversight over the Gold Coast, integrated all mission schools into the territory's first centrally coordinated educational system (Aziabah 2018; McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). Thus, formal education in the region was established on firm colonial foundations that remained unchallenged until the independence era of the 1950s and 60s when nationalist cries for the emancipation of schools from British control became louder than could be ignored (Agyeman, Baku, and Gbadamosi 2000).

Ghana's first Prime Minister, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, charted a post-independence vision in which the country would lead an 'African Renaissance' through a school system that harnessed indigenous knowledge resources. On 5th March 1957, he outlined his vision for the country's education system before the Legislative Assembly:

> We must seek an African view to the problems of Africa. This does not mean that western techniques and methods are not applicable to Africa. It does mean, however, that in Ghana we must look at every problem from the African point of view. (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975:94)

Nkrumah's agenda for schooling was clear: through a uniquely tailored education system, Ghana would produce an inspired citizenry that would draw from the wells of cultural pride to contribute critically to national economic growth and lead a continental resurgence. This pan-Africanist version of decolonized schooling was not unique to Ghana. In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere championed a national education system that sought to produce graduates that were

no longer detached from their local communities and indigenous values but would passionately serve their home societies. Schooling was to partner with indigenous education systems by facilitating the transmission of communities' epistemes (Nyerere 1967). In Guinea Bissau, Amilcar Cabral and his government implemented education reforms that targeted the 'Africanization' of nationals, re-introducing them to knowledge forms that the colonial school system had long set aside (Borges 2019).

This African Renaissance project faltered as several post-colonial African states faced systemic problems. Authoritarianism, clientelist politics, and the neo-liberal de-regulation policies of international donor agencies all became strong barriers to decolonization on the continent (Mbembe 2001). In Ghana, Nkrumah's school system, as well as the reinvented forms created by subsequent governments between 1966 and 1987, eventually morphed into strategies to legitimize authoritarian rule and create a uniform national identity that endorsed the fledgling state (Coe 2005). By the early 1980s, schooling in Ghana had already become highly segregated between rich and poor, the rise of expensive private schools widened socio-economic gaps in education, and technical/vocational schools began to be reserved for students whom the system had branded as failures (Addae-Mensah 2000; Akyeampong 2010; Aziabah 2018).

Ghana's approach to formal education changed significantly in the 1980s during the military governance of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) which was led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings. The PNDC government introduced the 1987 education sector reforms which focused on radically providing universal access to schooling (Little 2010). To implement this ambitious project under Ghana's struggling economy and prevent a total 'collapse' of the education sector, the government turned to the World Bank and initiated a series of donor-driven programs. The implementation of these reforms

continued well into the 1990s during which time the PNDC military government eventually succumbed to calls from its international development partners to hand over power to a democratically elected government. Ghana's 4th republic began with the promulgation of the 1992 constitution on 7th January 1993. Rawlings retired from the military and contested for the presidency on the ticket of the newly formed National Democratic Congress (NDC). He won the presidential seat and his party secured most of the seats in parliament as well. This marked a change in the political climate within which education policy was being formulated and executed.

Three decades of Ghana's 4th republic have seen successive governments formed by the two most dominant political parties in the country, namely the NDC and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The period has also been marked by political debates over education-sector decisions. Rather than being fuelled by ideological differences, these disagreements seem to be motivated by partisan interests and voters' sensibilities (Akyeampong 2010; Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo 2016; Aziabah 2018). In both manifesto promises and executed policies, the NDC and the NPP have disagreed over the nature and content of the curriculum, the duration of secondary education, as well as whether secondary and tertiary students should be required to pay fees. Indeed, educators have expressed concern over the rate at which schooling has become politicized and the fact that sector projects seem to be executed to score political points and secure electoral votes without adequately assessing their impact on the quality of schooling in the country (Seshie 2019; George Oduro, interview with author, 06/03/20).

Ghana, therefore, features as an interesting case of the contestations of the local and the global in Majority World countries. Universal trends in schooling, themselves formed through unequal relations of power, are further shaped and transformed by powerful local

actors such that what rural students, for example, experience in the classroom is a complex configuration of varied interests. I argue, therefore, that critical studies are justified in their questioning of the commitment of globalized education initiatives, such as the 'Education for All' project, to producing inclusive, equitable, and decolonized classrooms (Addae-Mensah 2000; Casely-Hayford and Hartwell 2010; Casely-Hayford et al. 2013). This is because the evidence from cases like Ghana demonstrate that donor-driven universalized schooling often fails to deliver on its promise of prosperity, and rather becomes a breeding ground for clientelism, inequality, marginalization of vulnerable communities, and the systematic relegation of indigenous epistemologies (Abdulai and Hickey 2016). Post-colonial scholars contend that the knowledge systems that dominate formal schooling are centralized and hierarchical, reflecting deep-seated structures of power and control that de-territorialize marginalized students (Appadurai 1996). This fact is not restricted to basic schooling; it pervades all levels of knowledge production and dissemination in the academy. Raewyn Connell (2007) argues that modern social science, for instance, embeds 'Northern' viewpoints, perspectives, and problems and yet successfully presents itself as knowledge that is universal.

Contemporary scholarship around the Africanisation of school curricula fundamentally differs from the project of independence era Pan-Africanism in that it is committed to going beyond the shared experience of colonial exploitation to the valuing of social difference in the classroom (Dei, Karanja, and Erger 2022). While leading nationalist figures in the early and mid-twentieth century understood decoloniality as requiring the construction of radical pan-national/continental identities that would confront colonial structures, they often perceived ethnic difference as inimical to their nation-building agendas. They sought education systems that freed the consciousness of the colonized to imagine

themselves as distinct from the colonizer, but also encouraged the colonized to unite as a homogenized force in the push for self-determination. In recent decades, however, critical African pedagogists are re-imagining the decolonization of schooling on the continent as the fostering of inclusive classrooms where previously marginalized indigenous identities, knowledges, worldviews, and beliefs are given expression (Afful-Broni et al. 2021; Phasha, Mahlo, and Dei 2017). This deepening of the Africentric scholarship is strongly allied with the international Indigenous peoples' movement and their activism around the recognition of non-Eurocentric lifeways. Some critical studies on African schooling have even explored the prospects of African school systems integrating indigenous knowledges in their curriculum (see for example Corsiglia and Snively 2001; Emeagwali and Dei 2014; Odora Hoppers 2002; Hountondji 1997). Unfortunately, very little has been done by education policy actors in developing integrated curricula.

The following paragraphs briefly introduce pre-tertiary education sector agencies in Ghana by outlining their core objectives. I use their published resources to reflect on the extent to which they envision themselves as decolonizing structures, as well as the dominant concepts that drive contemporary schooling in Ghana. My analysis is that not only have they failed to mainstream indigenous learning in the school curriculum, but they have also shifted from the pan-Africanist foundations of the independence era. Before examining Ghana's change in direction with regards to formal education, however, it is worth highlighting the continued commitment of the African Union to an 'African Renaissance.'

1.4: Ghana's Education Sector and the African Renaissance

Although Ghana's current education sector is void of much of the pan-Africanist rhetoric of the independence era, the African Union still emphasises the centring of African values in schooling. Ghana's role as a torch bearer of decolonization and radical education reforms

towards Africentric schooling was unchallenged in the independence era. As the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to obtain freedom from colonial rule, the rest of the continent naturally looked to Ghana as a shining example of emancipation. Beyond this, the pioneering leadership of Ghanaian independence-era statesmen like Kwame Nkrumah, J.B. Danquah, and Kofi Abrefa Busia, as well as the vociferous calls for decolonized schooling by globally esteemed figures like Efua Sutherland and James Kwegyir Aggrey quickly placed Ghana on the global scene as a country at the very front of the fight against coloniality; leading the fight against colonial domination and the intellectual structures that supported it (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo 2016; Adu-Gyamfi and Anderson 2021). Schooling in post-independence Ghana, however, has been criticised as maintaining colonial-era traditions and simply 'mimicking' Euro-American trends (Diop 2013). Ironically, the dream of an African Renaissance is maintained in principle by continental associations like the African Union, but states like Ghana who championed Africentric schooling in the past have long snuffed out their torches.

The pan-Africanist vision of leaders and thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and W.E.B. Du Bois indeed lives on, primarily in broad declarations by continental bodies. For example, on 26th May 2013, member states of the African Union signed a 'Solemn Declaration' to re-commit themselves to the vision of Pan-Africanism and "accelerate the African Renaissance" through all national policies and initiatives. Amongst other things, the Declaration called on member states to:

> Promote and harmonize the teaching of African history, values and Pan Africanism in all our schools and educational institutions as part of advancing our African Identity and Renaissance. (African Union Commission 2013:2)

The Commission's masterplan, released two years later and dubbed 'Agenda 2063', aimed at providing targets for member states in the hope that they would make concrete efforts to pursue the vision. Agenda 2063 is laid out as 7 Aspirations covering various areas of key concern including socio-economic growth, regional integration, and peaceful democratic governance. Aspiration 5 envisions "an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics", and highlights the transformation of schooling as one of its primary goals:

> Pan-African ideals will be fully embedded in all school curricula and Pan-African cultural assets (heritage, folklore, languages, film, music, theatre, literature, festivals, religions and spirituality) will be enhanced…. African languages will be the basis for administration and integration. African values of family, community, hard work, merit, mutual respect and social cohesion will be firmly entrenched. (African Union Commission 2015:7)

Sadly, although Ghana's 'Long-term National Development Plan' and 'Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030),' released in 2017 and 2018 respectively, mention the AU's Agenda 2063 as 'underpinning' education sector plans, both documents are conspicuously silent on the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledges and values in school curricula (MoE 2018:9; NDPC 2017:9).

In fact, a cursory look at the country's education sector agencies' articulation of their respective core mandates hints at a systemic relegation of issues of decoloniality and Africentrism. To demonstrate, I briefly outline the work of three state institutions that are arguably at the very forefront of Ghana's basic/pre-tertiary education policy: the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Drawing on resources they have published during the current political

administration (2016-2024), I argue that official language around schooling reflects a posture that is quite detached from the pan-Africanist ambitions of the independence era. What is immediately evident from their own assessment of their roles in the sector is the recurring emphases on 'individuality', 'skilled labour', 'national socioeconomic development', and 'global citizenship' as the highly sought-after end products of 'quality education.'

First, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for education sector policy planning and monitoring. Originally established under the Civil Service Law 327 and the PNDC Law 1993, the ministry has the mandate to contribute to national development by providing relevant education to all Ghanaians (MoE, 2020). Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (2015-2030) explains why the ministry exists:

> To provide relevant education, with an emphasis on science, information, communication, and technology, to equip individuals for self-actualisation and peaceful coexistence, as well as skills for the workplace for national development (MoE 2018:14).

To meet the needs of the country's expanding labour market, the MoE seeks to promote the enhancement of the skills and capacities of Ghana's human resource through the formulation and implementation of basic, secondary, tertiary, and non-formal education initiatives. Another interesting statement that perhaps encapsulates the government's approach to schooling can be found on the ministry's website under its 'mission' section: "Education is the ultimate game changer and opens many doors of opportunity and promise. It is the meal ticket out of deprivation and underdevelopment" (MoE 2020b).

Second, the Ghana Education Service (GES) is a government agency that exists under the MoE as its primary arm for the implementation of pre-tertiary educational policies. GES was set up in 1974 by the National Redemption Council to "ensure that all Ghanaian children

of school-going age irrespective of tribe, gender, disability, religious and political affiliations are provided with good quality formal education" (GES, 2020). The agency's core objectives include promoting inclusive and equitable access to education, providing life skills training to all school children, improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools across the country, and enhancing the management of education service delivery. GES partners with several international development organizations in the implementation of its initiatives including the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). UNESCO's Ghana National Commission, for example, is located on the same compound as MoE and GES and works closely with these government agencies in improving education delivery. UNESCO's representatives in the country insist, however, that their work doesn't extend beyond advising on policy decisions (Riche-Mike Wellington, interview with author on 19/02/20).

Third, an independent body known as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) was formed in 2008 under the Education Act 778 as a reconstituted version of the Curriculum Research and Development Division of GES. In 2020, as part of a move to re-structure agencies working in the country's education sector, the Council's operation and function was re-articulated in the Education Bodies Regulatory Act (Act 1023, 2020). Under the former constitutional instrument, the Council's membership was representative of various professional associations, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, and state educational institutions. Currently, however, NaCCA's governing council comprises 38 members; 8 of these represent various state education agencies on the Council's governing board while the rest function on the Council's 8 sub-committees, namely the Curriculum Development, Assessment, Finance, Auditing, and Monitoring and

Evaluation committees. The council's primary objective is to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the pre-tertiary level by developing relevant academic content and curriculum. When I checked the Council's mission statement in 2020 before the passing of the Education Bodies Regulatory Act, it stated that NaCCA sought to pursue 'accelerated national development' by providing curricular direction that "…instill[ed] in young Ghanaians a heightened sense of cultural identity and nationalism" (NaCCA, 2020). By the following year the wording for their mission had slightly changed:

> To develop a curriculum that ensures Ghana's children are lifelong learners with a heightened sense of national identity and global citizenship. (NaCCA 2021b)

I was immediately curious, of course, as to how and why 'cultural identity' was made to give way to 'national identity', and 'nationalism' was replaced with 'global citizenship'. In their new pre-tertiary curriculum, NaCCA elaborates on their understanding of 'national/cultural identity' and 'global citizenship', as well as the role that the new curriculum plays in 'instilling' these. In fact, 'Cultural identity and global citizenship' is the label given to one of 6 targeted core competencies in the new curriculum:

> This competency involves developing learners to put country and service foremost through an understanding of what it means to be active citizens. This is done by inculcating in learners a strong sense of social and economic awareness. Learners make use of the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes acquired to contribute effectively towards the socioeconomic development of the country and on the global stage. Learners build skills to critically identify and analyze cultural and global trends that enable them to contribute to the global community. (NaCCA 2021a)

Thus, even where cultural identity is alluded to in the core business of an education-sector agency in Ghana, the focus is certainly not on decoloniality or mainstreaming difference.

Rather, the emphasis continues to be placed on socio-economic development, labour skills and competencies, and on (global/national) citizenship.

Taken together, it is evident that Ghana's education sector is currently set up not as a torchbearer of an African Renaissance or a vanguard of decolonized indigenous epistemes, but as a participant in the global modernization project. Policy and structures around schooling in the country are aggressively pursuing neo-liberal ideals such as individualism, socio-economic growth, and achieving a competitive advantage through the cultivation of key labour skills and competencies. Moreover, 'quality education' is imagined in terms of meeting universalized labour standards and the extent to which graduates can contribute to national socio-economic development and the global knowledge economy. Consequently, the calls to decolonize the curriculum by centring indigenous knowledges and cultural difference has been systemically relegated, and the pan-Africanist project of rallying around core African ideals finds itself very low on the state's list of priorities. In following chapters (especially Chapters Three, Four & Five) I explore these issues further and demonstrate how the government's education-sector policy direction is in many ways a strong reflection of wider public sentiment around the purpose of formal education.

1.5: The Aim of the Study

Critical studies of schooling have probed several aspects of modern schooling including its purpose and structure (Freire 1970; Illich 1971; Apple 1982; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Giroux 1997; Hallinan 2006; Macrine, McLaren, and Hill 2010; Blum 2016), its knowledge politics and curriculum content (Scantlebury, McKinley, and Jesson 2002; Connell 2007; Smith 2012; Green, Roberts, and Brennan 2021), its credentials and output (Dore 1976; Collins 1979; Willis 1980; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2008), its universalization (Anderson-Levitt 2006b; Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Levinson and Pollock 2011; Stromquist and

Monkman 2014; Baker 2014), as well as its glaring contradictions (Drèze and Sen 2013; Deuchar 2014; Ahearn and Bumochir 2016; Dyson 2019). Regarding scholarship around schooling on the African continent, much work has aimed at exposing the enduring coloniality of knowledge in education systems (see for example Brock-Utne 2002; Asante 2007; Adebisi 2016; Phasha, Mahlo, and Dei 2017), and offering ideas towards alternative forms of education (Emeagwali and Dei 2014; Dei, Karanja, and Erger 2022; Abidogun and Falola 2020; Afful-Broni et al. 2021). Africanist educators have aligned themselves with global movements towards social justice, such as the right to (inclusive) education, and used these as platforms to call for the recognition of African indigenous knowledges in schooling (Adebisi 2016; Walton 2018). Several studies have advised on curriculum reform (Afful-Broni et al. 2021; Dei and McDermott 2019; Shizha 2014; Emeagwali 2003; Yeboah 2023), as well as the use of vernacular languages in the classroom (wa Thiong'o 1986; Zsiga, Tlale Boyer, and Kramer 2014; Kamwangamalu 2010; Manyike and Lemmer 2014). Some efforts have also been made to establish guidelines around indigenous research methodologies (Keane, Khupe, and Seehawer 2017; Khupe and Keane 2017; Chilisa 2020). In fact, these are simply a limited selection of texts engaging the vibrant scholarly discussions on the decolonization, Africanization, and indigenization of education in Africa. My study joins Africanist anthropological scholarship in examining rural experiences of schooling as a frontier of indigenous engagement with (inter)national trends in education (see for example Grindal 1972; Stambach 2000; Coe 2005; Serpell 2010). In particular, I seek to contribute to these discussions by employing contemporary rural ethnographic data on student aspirations to examine their shifting ideas around issues of identity, livelihoods or subsistence practice, and a better life.

In this project, I interrogate two global discourses on education. The more popular and universalized narrative views schooling as the 'ultimate game-changing' pathway to neo-liberal modernity, the second is less popular and approaches schooling as a tool to be re-purposed for decolonization. That is, although formal education has been widely accepted as a core feature of (and catalyst towards) sustainable development (Sen 2001; UNESCO 2018b; Skinner et al. 2016); it is also being re-imagined by some as a powerful platform for the valuing of indigenous lifeways (see for example Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019; Abidogun and Falola 2020). These discourses are not necessarily contradictory, nor do they exist as opposites, but in practice one is often emphasized over the other. By discussing life aspirations with rural students even as they routinely navigate indigenous subsistence practice side by side with schooling, I explore how those the formal education system is purported to serve approach these discourses in their pursuit of a 'better life'. My work outlines some of the realities of rural student life to reflect upon the scholarship on the purpose of schooling, as well as the gap between theory and grassroot experiences. I focus on junior high students and not on all levels of the Ghanaian school system because Junior High Schools, unlike more advanced stages in the educational journey, are present in some of the most remote parts of Ghana. Also, students at this level have a sufficient degree of maturity to discuss the core issues this project is interested in. I should add that my thesis in no way intends to develop a suggested curriculum for Ghanaian schools. Further, despite the data presented here on indigenous knowledge and student ideas of indigeneity and modernity, I do not aim to document cultural knowledge as a way of safeguarding it.

My 'field site' is a large 'diasporic' Bikpakpaam settlement formed over the past century in the country's Krachi West district. The Bikpakpaam are often referred to with their popular exonym, Konkomba, which is used to designate both the people group and their

language. In this thesis, however, I primarily address them as they refer to themselves; the Bikpakpaam. The Krachi West district, which became my home for the better part of 2020, is one of the most under-served districts in Ghana. My time there was also during the country's response to the global coronavirus pandemic. The communities I frequented are engaged in smallholder agriculture cultivating a number of crops. Much of their lives, however, revolve around their production of West African yams. In general, the Bikpakpaam are a people known to regularly employ mobility as a strategy to preserve their lifeways and livelihoods when facing 'external shocks' such as inter/intra-ethnic conflict, changing climactic conditions, and the threat of domination (Assefa 2001; Tsikata and Seini 2004; Kachim 2018). While international and national assessments have failed to account for the poor state of schooling in Krachi West district, I speculate that social factors that shape learning experiences and help explain the published figures of 'poor' student performance have been ignored. I devote much of Chapters Two and Four to more extensive discussions on the background to the study area.

In summary, this research reflects on debates around the character, content, and purpose of schooling across the African continent generally and in Ghana specifically. My work sits in conversation with prominent actors pushing for a universalized and neo-liberalized version of 'the school', as well as the rapidly growing bloc of scholar-activists calling for greater recognition of indigenous epistemologies in the classroom. My discussion of the prominent issues also draws on rural experiences of schooling and examines students' undaunted engagements with national and global systems that have historically marginalized and failed them. I ask the underlying question: How are rural Ghanaian students pursuing their imagined futures? Supporting this primary question, the following secondary research questions are also considered.

- To what extent does rural schooling in Ghana reflect global education trends?

- How do rural students negotiate indigenous lifestyles and livelihoods alongside Ghana's school system in their pursuit of their life aspirations?

- In what ways are rural student ideas of livelihood, identity, and a better life shifting as they engage the school system?

1.6: Significance of the Study

In terms of its contribution to scholarship, this project sits within inter-disciplinary debates on the nature and practice of education in the Global South. It joins anthropological and sociological conversations on the decolonization of schooling (Smith 2012; Walton 2018; Maldonado-Torres 2009; Said 1978; Connell 2007; Hountondji 2002), indigenous knowledges and philosophies in the curriculum (Battiste 1998; Tuck and Yang 2012; Dei 2011; 2015; Emeagwali and Dei 2014; Green, Roberts, and Brennan 2021; Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019), and the convergence-divergence debate on the extent to which localized schooling reflects global trends (Anderson-Levitt 2006; Stambach 2000; Serpell 2010; Meyer and Ramirez 2000; Schriewer 2003; Kamens, Meyer, and Benavot 1996). The study also provides an ethnographically grounded perspective that is applicable in many less industrialized contexts. In this project, I highlight the often neglected factor of student agency as pupils navigate structures and systems of power inherent in education-sector development (Shilling 1992; Reed-Danahay 2005; Giddens 1984). This approach helps me contribute to the discussions of critical development theorists and scholars of critical indigenous pedagogy.

On a more practical level, I highlight widely accepted assumptions on rural schooling, such as the publicized view that universalized schooling correlates to prosperity for the rural poor and show how these assumptions are being disproved by data from the grassroots. Studies increasingly show, rather, that the school helps to create aspirations among

marginalized young people even though they are unlikely to succeed in achieving them no matter the sacrifices they make (see for example Macpherson, Robertson, and Walford 2014; Srivastava and Noronha 2016; Gilbertson 2017; Ansell et al. 2020; Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021; Froerer, Ansell, and Huijsmans 2022; Finnan 2022). My research interrogates education-sector policy by national and international actors that flaunts formal education as a 'silver bullet' and the answer to all rural problems (Carnoy and Samoff 2016; Odora Hoppers 2009). I follow the Ghanaian state as it vacillates between concentrating on learners' local ways of knowing and being and focusing on preparing students to become 'modern' citizens, adequately equipped to compete in global knowledge markets. Further, I make policy suggestions on the content and structure of schooling based on ethnographic data from those who are most affected by these education-sector decisions.

On a methodological level, the research employs deeply qualitative techniques in an area of enquiry that has largely been dominated by quantitative approaches. Scholarship on international development and schooling, as well as education-sector policy formulation and implementation processes, are heavily based on statistical analyses. While quantitative studies provide invaluable contributions to our understanding of school systems all over the world, they are unable to supply inputs on aspects of schooling that are not easily reduced to numbers, such as in the area of student aspirations. This research directly addresses the deficit in scholarship and policy that has arisen because of how lived experiences have been systematically ignored.

1.7: Overview of the Thesis

The research presented here is divided into three sections with a total of eight chapters. This first section (Chapters One and Two) serves as an introduction to the entire thesis. Chapter Two complements this one by offering a detailed discussion on the methodology of the study,

especially outlining my critical constructivist approach to the work and the ethnographic techniques I employed on the field. I also provide some vital background information to the study area and briefly describe my experiences living in remote communities of Ghana at the height of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Section II (Chapters Three and Four) considers the issues around indigeneity and indigenous knowledge in schooling. In Chapter Three, I consider the institution of schooling at the international, regional, and national levels. The chapter explores key issues in education-sector policy and implementation by examining the tensions between global trends and their local expressions. In Chapter Four, I discuss the link between indigeneity as a level of identification and as a category of knowing that is crucial to the agenda of decolonizing schooling. I briefly outline indigeneity as a politico-legal concept in international discourses, as well as a theoretical frame employed by African scholars in recent decades as part of their calls for decolonization. The second half of the chapter presents a historical overview of the Bikpakpaam and how they embody the marginalizing scourge of colonization. As part of this chapter, I discuss in greater detail some of the ideas African (and some non-African) scholars have put forward on what decolonized schooling should look like.

While Section II reflects on wider global questions around indigeneity, decolonization and schooling, Section III (Chapters Five, Six, and Seven) focuses on rural youth and their pursuit of schooling as a pathway to the 'better life.' In Chapter Five, I use raging public debates in Ghana and many African countries around the place of local languages in schooling to represent the schism between the worlds of school and home, as well as between the public and the scholarship. I demonstrate how my participants in their negotiation of indigenous and school identities as routine aspects of everyday living both enact and defy the arguments of Africanist scholars. Chapter Six explores participants' views

on the value of education and its promise of a 'better life' away from the 'suffering' of agricultural lifestyles. Chapter Seven dives into Bikpakpaam agricultural practice and how it functions not only as a means of living but also as a way of life. Here, I employ a gendered lens in analysing how distinctions between young men and women's roles in crop farming shape their respective attitudes and aspirations.

The final chapter (Eight) ties the entire thesis together. I discuss the major themes of imagined futures, identity, and livelihoods, within the frame of decolonized schooling. I conclude the thesis by summarizing its contributions and reflect on the persistent question: Will a decolonized curriculum as theorized by contemporary Africanist scholars guarantee the better life that rural African students seek, and will it help them escape the uncertainty and the low social status attached to *being* indigenous?

CHAPTER TWO: Methodology and Context of the Study

2.1: Introduction

This doctoral project is fundamentally an ethnographic case study that explores social fields and knowledge creation from predominantly critical and social constructivist positions. Analyses are grounded in medium-term participation in the lives of interlocutors in one district of Ghana. However, because the issues I investigate are also reflected on the national and global levels, I often shift between the micro, meso, and macro. The coronavirus pandemic also radically influenced the nature of my study and compelled me to lean heavily on the anthropological tradition of iterative research. That is, my data, analysis, and theory were constantly informing each other and responding to the issues of the day. In this chapter I outline my research design for the project and narrate how the global pandemic impacted the fieldwork.

2.2: Research Paradigm

In this thesis, I investigate issues such as power, knowledge, identity, and success from the perspective that social worlds and realities are created collectively. True to the social constructivist tradition, I approach people's experiences, the ways in which they make sense of those experiences, and the choices they make as fundamentally shaped through their relations with others. Social constructionists insist that many things in human societies are produced through people's interactions with each other, and that these things should not be approached as natural or inevitable (Detel 2015:228). This applies to several widely held beliefs, 'facts', and worldviews that rest on the assumption that all reality exists independently of human beings and can be approached with God-like objectivity. Constructionists argue that a deeper interrogation will often show that these aspects of life as well as our understanding of them exist through the meanings we attach to them, and those

meanings are often created through social interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1990; Magoon 1977; Waller, Farquharson, and Dempsey 2016). Consequently, I view the school not simply as an institution for formal education and the preparing of skilled citizens, but more as a scape that shapes and is shaped by social relationships and discourses. Students, also, are the subjects of a myriad of social expectations created through local, national, and global discourses on what constitutes the 'ideal citizen.' In addition, I approach social expectations themselves, such as ideas around success, as socially constructed and subject to these dominant discourses. The meanings my participants attach to things like naming, crop farming, and employment in government service are created through their interactions with each other, community members, and role models who are perceived to be successfully enjoying 'the better life.'

As a critical researcher, I consider much of the work produced by the academy and much of the discourses around schooling as fundamentally mediated through power relations (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). I see issues of class and inequality as embedded in logics that regulate the education sector and many of the actors who are complicit in this system as quite oblivious to the inequality they perpetuate. I believe that most of the greatest victims of this system, even when they are aware of their subordinate status, have accepted that position as 'natural and inevitable' (Carspecken 1996). Most education studies focus on access to and/or the 'quality' of schooling without considering how the classroom bolsters existing power relations. This research examines schooling in Ghana from a perspective that recognizes the link between knowledge transfer in the classroom and existing power relations that are unequal and marginalizing. I do not attempt to present 'value-neutral' research but make very clear my opinions about many of the issues I encountered on the field and discuss in the thesis. Understandably, this critical stance seems to position the study as challenging

the positivist studies that dominate education-sector policy. I do not, however, discount the important role of these types of contributions to our understanding of schooling in developing economies. In fact, I selectively draw on these studies to better analyse student experiences in rural Ghana.

The theoretical approaches I employ in this thesis fit quite neatly into the 'critical-social constructivist' paradigm from which the study is carried out. The post-developmentalist critique, for example, views the international development project as an imposition of Euro-American standards on the rest of the world (Escobar 2012; Pieterse 2010; Esteva, Babones, and Babcicky 2013). 'Development' has become an amoeba-like buzzword, a shape-shifting concept that has come to mean many things including 'modernization', 'neo-liberalization', and 'economic growth.' But its unilinear paths to prosperity make very little room for non-Eurocentric ways of life (Sachs, 1992/2010). Beyond this, I also draw on a post-colonial/decolonizing/Pan-Africanist lens to critically examine enduring colonial structures that directly contradict the vision of a continental resurgence emerging from the power of shared experiences of exploitation and marginalization (Fanon 1963; wa Thiong'o 1986; Mbembe 2001). In addition, the perspectives of critical (indigenous) pedagogists challenge dominant approaches to education and call for the recognition of alternative epistemologies in global understandings of 'acceptable knowledge' (Khudu-Petersen and Chilisa 2018; Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019; Abidogun and Falola 2020). While I embrace these critiques of the way schooling embeds inequity, I also highlight the gap between such scholarly evaluations and the perspectives of ordinary rural students. Are students even articulating an awareness of the oppression existing in modern schooling? If so, do they seek a radical restructuring of Ghana's education

system such that local knowledges and lifeways take centre stage in their learning, or are they simply striving for a seat at the table and dreaming of modernity's version of 'the better life'?

Although my work was not designed as a participatory action research (PAR), I have adopted many practices that have aligned the study to that scholarly movement (Foley and Valenzuela 2005). I was introduced to Paulo Freire early in my doctoral journey and this transformed me from simply an observer of schooling in disadvantaged regions of Ghana to an 'engaged cultural broker'. As part of fieldwork, I taught in schools, funded a rehabilitation project for a classroom block, supported (and continue to support) several students in their education, and held numerous discussions with teachers, community leaders, and government officials about how to make schooling more relevant to the young people I was working with.

2.3: The Research Site (Krachi West District and Bommoden)

The Krachi West District (KWD) is one of eight administrative districts in Ghana's Oti Region. This region was formerly an area that was part of the Volta Region until it was set apart through a referendum in December 2018. The district is a peninsula on the Volta-Oti River with the Ahafo region's Bono East to the district's west, the Krachi East district to the east, and the Krachi Nchumuru district to the North (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). Savannah grassland dominates the landscape, with drought resistant trees such as the African shea and the locust bean (*dawadawa*) trees providing shade during the dry seasons. These hot periods are usually between November and March, while the April to October period is marked with sporadic torrential rains and is thus termed the wet season.

KWD is a multi-ethnic district, home to several migrant groups such as Ewe, Kabre, Fulani, and Bikpakpaam communities, as well as the Krachi people themselves who are autochthonous to the area. The Krachis speak the 'Kaakye' dialect and are ruled by the

'Krachiwura' who is a paramount with jurisdiction over the Krachi East, Nkwanta, and Nchumuru districts. The Krachi paramountcy is in Kete-Krachi which also happens to be the capital of KWD. Agriculture is the primary subsistence practice and it is dominated by the cultivation of yam, groundnuts, soya beans, cassava, maize, sorghum and rice. Ewe maritime groups living along the coast of the Volta-Oti River, such as the Battor communities, engage in fishing activities and often barter trade with farmers inland, exchanging fish for some of their crops. The Fulani are pastoral farmers herding cattle. Relations between the Fulani and crop farmers are strained because their herdsmen often lead large heads of cattle through farms without regard for the crops they destroy. During my time on the field, however, I discovered that several crop farmers have invested in cattle and have hired Fulani men to be their personal herdsmen. The Bikpakpaam community is the largest migrant population in the district and have acquired for themselves a reputation for being the most hardworking and skilled crop farmers in the region.

Bommoden is a small Bikpakpaam-dominated town on the highway to Kete-krachi that became my home for much of the ten months I lived in KWD. Although I visited and worked in several communities during my time on the field, Bommoden was unique because it was evidently a nucleus for Bikpakpaam activities in the region. It was home to their largest population with the most diverse clan backgrounds I witnessed within a single community. Additionally, it was one of the few communities that had been integrated into the national electricity grid, and also benefitted from vehicular traffic on the Kete-krachi highway. The small town has a population of about 2000, all of whom have settled in patterns that reflect not only their ethnic identity but also, for the Bikpakpaam, clan affiliation. Apart from the Kabres, Chokossis, and a handful of Ewes, all the other inhabitants of Bommoden are Bikpakpaam migrant farmers living in Kucha, Komba, Sanguul, and Kache clan sections.

For example, when entering the town from the North, you would meet houses from the Kucha clan to your left and the Kabre on your right. After about a brisk twenty-minute walk to the southern margins of the community, you would find that only members of the Kache clan live in that part of Bommoden. In recent times, Bikpakpaam from the Chabɔb clan living in a hamlet to the southeast of Bommoden, about two kilometres from the Kete-krachi highway, have started moving to the roadside community in the hope of taking advantage of the highway traffic. The closest farmlands are at least another twenty minutes' walk from the main community, but some community members trek for close to an hour before reaching their farms.

2.4: Research Methods

After reading scores of studies on schooling that centre virtually every other voice, I was determined to make the experiences and perspectives of the students my primary focus. It seems clear to me that current knowledge and scholarship that informs education-sector policy largely relegates to the margins the life experiences of students. Ironically, the voices that are the very subject of studies on education are the ones that are fundamentally ignored. This recognition has influenced my research design and motivated the choice to structure the project as an ethnographic case study. Unfortunately, with the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic, I was unable to conduct as much face-to-face research as I originally planned. Also, because schools were closed for most of my time on the field, I was compelled to focus on life outside the classroom.

I prioritized the lived experiences of final year Junior High School (JHS) students and used the perspectives of parents, other community members, teachers, and education officials as a necessary contextual background. This level of the education journey was of interest to me for several reasons. Many rural students who drop out of school exit before completion

of their basic education (S. A. Yeboah and Daniel 2019). Those who reach the final year of junior high school have had to make great sacrifices; for many agriculturist students, simply stepping into the classroom in the morning comes with a cost. Apart from these reasons, basic schools (many of which include a junior high section) are the most physically accessible level of education in Ghana, and within 'walking distance' of most rural young people. But adopting final year Junior High School (Year 8) students as primary participants was seemed like a risky decision for at least two reasons. First, I assumed that they would be in their early teens and was unsure how they would fare discussing these complex issues. My fears, however, proved futile as the mean age of the focus class was about 17, with some students well into their 20s. Second, that stage of schooling usually comes with a high demand on the time of students, and I feared that I simply would not have much contact time with them. Students' time constraints are because of the stressful nature of their preparations for impending exams. Also, most Junior High learners in Ghana are shipped off to boarding school for Senior High School (SHS) shortly after writing the Basic Education Certification Exam (BECE). However, the coronavirus pandemic and the shifts in the school calendar ensured that I had sufficient time with them and left the field even before they departed for their respective senior high schools.

I employ a case study approach as part of my attempt to offer a localized and subjective perspective to a field that is rich in 'objective' generalizations. In my experience on the field, schooling is shaped by historical, cultural, and economic factors that in many ways can only be observed at the grassroot level. Although I examine themes that apply beyond Bommoden and Krachi West District, I intentionally foreground my study within one community while drawing on experiences and scholarship from other contexts to explore the extent to which the themes discussed are unique to the local or akin to the global. In fact, part

of the reason I find the case of migrant Konkomba communities fascinating is the fact that so many 'macro' issues are visible at that infinitesimal 'micro' level: coloniality, mobility, indigeneity, rurality, modernity, amongst other -tys.

To effectively study the institution of schooling and the ways in which it intertwines with youth lifeways, I recognized the need to adopt an eclectic approach to data collection. Eclecticism in educational research is vital because the school is an institution that shapes virtually all aspects of social life and always seems to be never far away from the front burner of local, national, and global discussions. In this thesis, I draw from data collected through ethnographic interviews, participant observation, photography, archival searches, press releases, as well as published scholarship. In the proceeding paragraphs, I discuss briefly details on my use of interviews and participation as my primary sources of data, as well as the field research assistants that assisted me throughout my time in Bommoden.

2.4.1: Ethnographic Interviews

Field data for this thesis was collected primarily through engaged ethnographic interviews and observation during a period of twelve months of fieldwork between February 2020 and January 2021. This ethnographic participation was primarily with 28 students in their final year of JHS at Bommoden. With only nine boys in the class, the ratio of girls to boys was more than three is to one. Although Ghana has made significant strides towards achieving gender parity in education since the 1992 education reforms (Afoakwah, Deng, and Onur 2023; World Economic Forum 2022), the large number of girls in this cohort of students is a deviation from the norm. Several factors could account for this, including the implementation of tailored girl-child programs by NGOs in the district over the past decade, and changes in parental attitudes towards supporting girls in their schooling (see Chapter Seven, section 7.6).

Apart from their gender, I collected other biographical details about respondents which generated insights I discuss later in the thesis. Some of these points of interest were around issues like dates of birth, the communities' students resided in, and their current levels of schooling. For example, several of the students confessed that they did not know their date of birth but were glad to furnish me with their 'school age', which was the official date of birth they gave for all school-related documents, and which was a few years younger than their actual age. In Chapter Five, I offer a more detailed discussion on the significance of the school age. Most of the students were living in the Bommoden community but a few trekked in from smaller neighbouring communities including Beposo, Kpoloo, Bakon, Sanguul, and Chakacha. In my data, I labelled responses from this 2020 graduating class of JHS students as 'JHS2020'. I also spoke to 18 former students of the Bommoden public school, many of whom have moved on to SHS. These previous graduating classes are identified with the tags 'JHS2016', 'JHS2017', 'JHS2018', and 'JHS2019'. JHS students from the only private school in the community have been tagged 'JHSPrivate.'

Respondents		No.
Students	Alumni	18
	JHSPrivate	4
	JHS2020	28
Teachers		7
Parents		10
Community		5
Education-sector officials		5
Total		**77**

Figure 5: Breakdown of Interview Respondents

In the JHS2020 class that constituted the core of my participation, there were a handful of students with Kabre, Chakossi, Ewe, and Krachi cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The lived experiences and perspectives of these students are included in most parts of the study, except for Chapter Seven where I specifically analyze Bikpakpaam agricultural practice. Throughout my discussion, however, I often focus on how social, political, historical, and geographical factors interact with issues of Bikpakpaam indigeneity, as well as how the field of schooling reconfigures these intersections. This is because the communities in which I conducted my ethnographic studies were predominantly Bikpakpaam. Also, as I explain in Chapter Four, the Bikpakpaam offer a unique case of cultural transformation partly facilitated by the introduction of European-style schooling. This notwithstanding, the views and experiences of non-Bikpakpaam students are included in discussions on student aspirations, vernacular language-use in schooling, gender inequality, amongst others.

I faced some barriers in engaging the students, especially in the initial weeks of the study. As I am an Ewe man who is University-educated and urban, these barriers were cultural, gendered, linguistic, and economic. I noticed early in my ethnographic fieldwork that the students were quite shy around me and that the girls preferred to giggle instead of responding to my questions during interviews. With the assistance of my research assistants, one of whom was a fluent Likpakpaanl speaker, I conducted and audio recorded most of my interviews on the field in the languages my participants were comfortable using; this was usually Likpakpaanl or Twi. I then transcribed the interviews and translated them into the English language, leaving only key terms and phrases in the original vernaculars. As is evident throughout this monograph, I chose to record all Likpakpaanl responses in the Chabɔb orthography even though most of the Bikpakpaam-speaking respondents were

speakers of other dialects. This was because although there are several Likpakpaanl dialects, Chabɔb orthography is the most widely used among the Bikpakpaam.

The strategy of holding discussions in small groups instead of employing personal interviews proved very effective as the groups of three to five students always had one or two people whose confidence usually rubbed off on the others. I prepared a set of questions to ask but was always flexible enough to follow up on interesting issues that emerged from their responses. To understand their aspirations, expectations, and motivation in schooling, I asked several questions that were rephrased when necessary, including 'Why do you go to school and what makes you continue schooling?'; 'Five to ten years from now, where do you expect to be and what do you expect to be doing?'; 'If you could become like anybody, both within and outside the community, who do you wish to be like?'. Ultimately, the barriers never completely disappeared, but relationships based on mutual trust and respect developed over the course of my time living in the Krachi West district. I have strived to maintain many of these connections long after leaving the field.

Apart from my semi-structured conversations with students, I employed ethnographic interviewing in sampling the perspectives of education-sector officials, teachers, and parents. I engaged five officials working in education-sector positions, seven teachers who taught in the Bommoden public JHS, ten parents of JHS2020 students, as well as five other community members. I conducted interviews with a total of seventy-eight participants, not including several individuals I engaged informally within and without the communities in which I worked.

2.4.2: Participation & Visual Ethnography

Direct involvement in many community activities was a key part of the research design. I was keen to be as close as possible to the daily routines of community members, especially

the students. Part of this meant that I was involved in mundane aspects of community life such as trips to boreholes with gallons and head pans, motorbike rides to market centres, and visits to the riverside to observe fishing and rice farming. I played football matches and sat on local benches under shady trees after long days of work. I was always searching for opportunities to experience events that directly and indirectly shaped schooling for the JHS2020 students. I worked with several of them on their farms and sat through the few classes organized for them ahead of their exams. I taught a few classes of my own, and even studied with them as they prepared for the exams. I learnt early that the most insightful comments about what it meant to be a member of the community, or a rural student, or a farmer were often revealed outside of an interview when my recorder was not running, and my field notebook was tucked away. Much of my thinking for this research, therefore, has been influenced by minor details I picked up in unscripted conversations and during 'routine' participation.

The decision to go into the field with a professional DSLR camera that had multiple zoom lenses turned out to be an expensive but very astute choice. Most of the people in the community loved to be on camera and often posed for shots or asked to see photos that had been taken. Employing visual techniques such as photography on the field meant that I could capture experiences in ways that other media could not adequately document. It also gave me the opportunity to go over the activities of each day and reflect on issues that I did not notice at that home visit, or during that lunch break, or at that remote community that some students had to trek from.

2.5: Research Assistants

My time on the field was effective principally because I was fortunate to make a few friends in the community who agreed to help with my project and in time became excellent research

assistants. The research team comprised Confidence Ntegyi, Samuel Buabeng-Mensah, Cyrus Nyamenlewoke, and me. Confidence became my local guide for the duration of my stay in the community. He is the son of Bommoden's chief, Nana Ntegyi, and completed the town's public school in 2013 and Krachi Senior High School in 2016. For several years, he had been attempting to better his SHS final exam grades for a chance at tertiary education. At the time of writing, he has been admitted into a university and continues to pursue his dream of becoming a government-employed teacher. Back in 2020, however, before I arrived at Bommoden, he had moved to Kete-krachi to work with a micro-finance company. We became friends on one of his weekend visits and he soon moved back home to assist me with the research. Confidence's command of the Likpakpaanl language, intimate knowledge of the community, and schooling experiences made him an invaluable member of the research team.

Samuel and Cyrus are tertiary graduates from the University of Mines and Technology and the University of Energy Resources respectively. Samuel's degree is in Geomatic Surveying and Cyrus' in Petrochemical Engineering. They were both teachers at the Bommoden JHS as part of their mandatory one-year national service. After hearing about my project, they expressed interest in being part of it and I was thrilled to assist them as they crossed the 'academic carpet' from the natural sciences to the social sciences. Apart from helping with interviews and transcriptions, they knew well the members of the final year class as well as their parents. Their assistance greatly maximized the limited time we had for in-person data collection. Also, Samuel developed the district and community maps I needed, and Cyrus turned out to be a skilled photographer.

2.6: Qualitative Analysis Approach and the Iterative Process

I have been using computer assisted data analysis software since my undergraduate studies and considered it only natural to do much of my analysis through NVivo. All my interviews were translated and transcribed into English, typed up as Microsoft Word documents, and coded into NVivo. Press clippings, field notes, and visual data were all digitized and organized into folders that mapped onto the NVivo themes (or nodes) I had created. I kept a document for each major theme I was investigating and developed my analytical notes throughout the course of fieldwork. The chapters in this thesis represent my engagement with a cross-section of thematic areas. For example, in Chapter Six, I discuss my findings from five different thematic areas including student aspirations, student motivation, and student role-models.

During the field and post-field periods, I was compelled to maintain an iterative approach that involved a constant interplay between data collection, data analysis, and engagement with other scholarship. Analyses of my findings, therefore, was never constrained to a section of my research but began while I was on the field collecting data and has continued throughout the writing process. This continuous loop where the analysis process is a constant interaction with 'new' data and theory is a feature of much qualitative research and certainly not unique to my project (Creswell and Poth 2018; Marshall and Rossman 2016). Ethnographic studies, however, are famously difficult to compartmentalize as far as distinguishing between data gathering and the data analysis is concerned. Moreover, the coronavirus pandemic, and the restrictions it placed on how research was conducted, also contributed significantly to the blur between the field and the armchair.

2.7: The Coronavirus Pandemic and the Research

Apart from severely shortening my time on the field for effective data collection, the coronavirus pandemic restricted my research in a number of ways. As part of Ghana's efforts to combat the virus, all mass gatherings of any kind were strictly prohibited. This meant that several Bikpakpaam ceremonies that involve community gatherings, such as cultural dances and final funeral rites, were not held throughout my time on the field. Also, because schools were closed within a few days of my arriving in Bommoden and stayed closed throughout my time there (except for final year students a few weeks before their exams), the opportunities to observe social life within the context of the school were extremely limited. My study therefore has had to approach schooling from outside the classroom rather than from within. In addition to this, several teachers moved out of Bommoden to be closer to their families during the time schools were closed. I never met some of the teachers throughout my time on the field and was unable to gain their perspectives on the themes of the project. In the proceeding paragraphs, I offer an overview of my 12 months in Ghana for fieldwork weaving my research story that year around the emergence of covid-19 as a global pandemic.

I arrived in Ghana's capital after an exhausting flight from Melbourne in January 2020. Although Australia would record its first coronavirus case within days of my departure, the country's concern was primarily focused on the bushfires of summer 2019/2020. I stayed in Accra with family for about two months, surviving the heat with many cold showers and constantly drenched face towels. That period was also spent doing some much-needed research into Ghana's education system as well as its dominant policy actors. I conducted expert interviews with five people involved in education-sector policy and was fortunate to

participate in a stakeholder meeting hosted by the nation's Ministry of Education on a new curriculum that was about to be rolled out in pre-tertiary schools across the country.

The events surrounding my arrival in Bommoden were precursors to much of what lay ahead. What was supposed to be a ten-hour drive turned into a two-day journey. I went along with an old friend who had done his national service in that district and wanted to visit a few people there. We left Accra for Kete-krachi on twelfth March, a day after WHO declared the coronavirus as a global pandemic. It also happened to be the very day Ghana recorded its first covid case. Later that month the President placed the Greater Accra Region on lockdown, and no one was permitted to travel outside Accra. We boarded a morning bus that turned out to be hopelessly faulty and required some fixing after every 30 minutes of travel. By the time we arrived at the eastern bank of the Oti River, it was about ten o'clock at night and the ferry had long closed for the day. With no adequate guest houses in the area, we endured a sleepless night at the riverbank. After crossing the next morning, it turned out that our bus could go no further, and the only option would be to squeeze into a rickety car with four other travellers for the one-hour drive to Bommoden. We rolled into the roadside community with the old sedan's trunk threatening to give up on our luggage. My single mattress was strapped to the roof of the car. A soft snow-white pillow had also been tied on before we left the riverbank. I later found out that I would be deprived of that comfort as the pillow had fallen off during the drive to my new home. It was a Friday and since we arrived during one of the school breaks, our welcome party turned out to be what felt like all of the world's most wide-eyed basic students.

My companion's contacts in the community had graciously secured a fairly new building that I would be renting for my stay. We would later joke many times that for Bommoden's standards, my residence was close to a five-star hotel. It was an L-shaped mud

building with aluminium roofing. The mud had been ingeniously concealed with cement plastering on the walls and the floors. The building, which was also home to three nurses, had five rooms and each room had its own porch. With government employees held in the highest regard, those of us living in that house quickly became part of the crème de la crème of the community. Another reason I was privileged to have lived my field months in that building was because it was one of the very few that had its own toilet facility. Almost the entire community, easily numbering more than 2,000, shared the school's toilet. Without going into details, it may be helpful to note here that none of the toilet facilities (including ours and the school's) housed a water closet but employed a 'different' technology.

Living in that building benefitted me greatly as an ethnographer. First, it was located within the Kabre quarter of Bommoden which presented me several opportunities to compare Kabre lifeways with what I observed among the Bikpakpaam. Second, it afforded me a lot of privacy when I needed to concentrate on analysis and writing because it was positioned on the very margin of the community and there was no other house beyond us, only savannah bush. Third, it quickly became a nucleus for all government employees in the community because we often hosted the other teachers and nurses. The many hangouts with them gave me a fascinating insight into their perspectives of local worldviews and what it meant to be an educated urbanite, sent off to work in the rural areas. Finally, there was a tree behind our building that you could climb and get access to mobile network when you absolutely needed to make an urgent call or connect to mobile internet.

After a first round of intensive interviewing in March and April, I received a directive from my university prohibiting all face-to-face research activity because of fears around what had become at this time, a deadly global pandemic. Consequently, between May and August of 2020, I strengthened relationships in the community but could not conduct any formal

collection of primary data. I was of course displeased by this because Ghana's covid regulations did not prohibit research and many of my colleagues from local tertiary institutions were able to continue their projects with little restriction. Moreover, the Krachi West District recorded very few cases (less than twenty) throughout 2020 and there were no known Covid-19 cases in Bommoden throughout my time there. At first the community members were convinced that the virus was somehow made up. After the sad deaths several prominent Ghanaians, they took the view that only the wealthy upper class could be infected; somehow the poor had developed an immunity that the rich just did not have. By the end of my fieldwork, when Ghana's most populous cities started recording cases in the several hundred daily, they decided that the virus was an urban plague and if it ever ventured into the rural areas, all farming folk would simply flee and live on their farms.

In September 2020, after laboured email exchanges, the relentless efforts of my supervisor, and a second University-sanctioned risk assessment of the pandemic in Ghana, I was permitted to resume in-person research. Thankfully, around that same time, final year JHS and SHS students were instructed by the President to return to school for two weeks before their Basic Education Certificate Exams in the third week of September. In Bommoden, the teachers were quickly helping the JHS2020 cohort in their last-minute preparations for the exams. I spent that period of the year doing as much participation as I could helping students in their studies, on their farms, and visiting their parents at home.

So, with no green light to collect primary data for several months, extremely limited internet access, and strict restrictions on domestic travel, I was compelled to settle for research that was not as rich as I had hoped. I lived for twelve months on the field and intended that much of that time would be used for intensive ethnographic research, but only three months were spent participating and interviewing my participants in Krachi West

district. Also, my adjustments to the thesis research design meant that the ethnographic data did not have as much depth as I initially anticipated. One of the main impacts of this on the quality of my work is that even though my study revolves around schooling, very little of the data captures what happens in the rural classroom. I was, however, compelled to develop innovative ways of making my time on the field productive. Apart from building valuable relationships with the government employees I was living with; I adjusted my research design to focus on aspects of life I could feasibly observe. I also learned to treasure the minutes of internet access I was afforded every week and downloaded as many electronic secondary sources I could lay hands on. When the restrictions were lifted, I conducted as many interviews as possible within the short period I had. I also adopted a more longitudinal approach to field work by building connections with students who travelled to the city after completing school. Through phone interviews with them, I gleaned additional pieces of the rural schooling picture long after I had left the field.

SECTION II:

SCHOOLING, INDIGENEITY, AND

DECOLONIZATION

CHAPTER THREE: Global Schooling Trends and Local Mediating Actors

3.1: Introduction

The idea that universal schooling is the prime path to prosperity has become entrenched among international development actors (Dore 1976; Krishnaratne, White, and Carpenter 2013; Skinner et al. 2016). Initial arguments for European-style schooling revolved around the idea that formal education would help modernize non-industrialized states by producing skilled labour for the global economy (Stambach and Ngwane 2011; Attick 2017). Anthropologists and sociologists have also been concerned about how rapidly national authorities in non-industrialized countries have signed on to the schooling-as-development promise (Ferguson 2002; 2006; Guilherme and Picoli 2019), and the extent to which global networks set the agenda for national education systems especially in the Majority World (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). In what has come to be known as the convergence-divergence debate, scholars disagree over whether schooling worldwide has truly crystallized into a one-size-fits all model. Some argue that the gospel of 'Education for All' has not only been well preached, it has been so well received that it has spawned into a globalized monoculture of schooling where standards of what constitutes quality education are determined by the Euro-American World (Meyer and Ramirez 2000; Chabbott and Ramirez 2006). Conversely, others contend that although formal schooling and its promise of prosperity has indeed been universalized, the forms of education practiced in different contexts differ significantly even as local actors transform the global agenda to fit their unique needs (K. Anderson-Levitt 2006b).

Just as comparative education scholars debate the extent to which schooling experiences differ across the globe, critical education theorists battle over the extent of education reform is required for schooling to be considered decolonized. Critics of the

international narrative of development through 'Western-style' schooling can be broadly categorized into two groups. One segment of the scholarship advocates for Indigenous education through a radical decolonization of schooling in the Global South. Post-developmentalists, alternative education theorists, critical educationists, and indigenous activists have categorically rejected the 'Education for All' agenda. Early alternative and critical education theorists, like Paulo Freire (1970), labelled modern schooling as an 'oppressive' 'banking' approach to learning that reduces students to passive recipients of knowledge. These scholars advanced locally relevant approaches to education that were non-formal, non-hierarchical, and participatory. For post-developmentalists, the message that universalized education is *the* path to prosperity is sourced from a concept of development that imposes Euro-American definitions of a 'better life' on others (Escobar 2012a; Sachs 2010; Ziai 2017). They remain dissatisfied with the privileging of knowledge developed in Western centres of learning as well as the fact that school curricula in much of the Majority World does not sufficiently reflect the rich diversity of local contexts and modes of cultural transmission (Janzen 2008; Shiva 1997; Skinner et al. 2016). With the relatively recent breakthroughs of the international indigenous peoples' movement, there is an increasing lobby for indigenous communities to freely develop educational curricula that preserve and pass on indigenous knowledges (Green, Roberts, and Brennan 2021). For indigenous activists in settler colonies, decolonized education must prioritize the self-determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples as well as recognize their unique relationship with the land. Any other position may represent some other form of social justice in education but certainly does not constitute decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012).

There is a second category of scholarship that is also critical of the universalized narrative of schooling-as-development but adopts a less radical and more reform-oriented approach to current schooling experiences. Educationists with a more Bourdieusian view of formal education acknowledge systemic inequality in school systems worldwide and recognize that the school is a key institution for the reproduction of class differences (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; 1990). Instead of completely rejecting current schooling, however, they propose reforms to educational structures and curricula. Studies advocating greater equity and inclusion in schooling especially in the Majority World are concerned about marginalized knowledges and ethnicities (Scantlebury, McKinley, and Jesson 2002). Their focus is not on the rights of specific groups to political autonomy, but rather on how ethnic minorities can be assisted to participate in the development project on their own terms, that is, with their languages and local knowledges incorporated into learning experiences (Emeagwali and Dei 2014; Odora Hoppers 2009).

This chapter surveys and critiques studies on contemporary schooling in Ghana and much of the Majority World. I discuss some of the dominant global debates on formal education and its role in the pursuit of 'the better life' by demonstrating how these global issues are negotiated by local actors. Each section of the chapter, therefore, is structured around the framework of global versus local tensions, and how these two spheres of education-sector praxis are constantly informing each other. To begin, I employ the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire to sketch out two principal theoretical approaches to the decolonization of schooling. I dwell on Bourdieusian theory and how it represents reform without revolution, and the need to level the playing field by extending school access to the dominated. A Freirean view of critical pedagogy, on the other hand, relies strictly on localised and contextually appropriate learning. In the following section, I give

a broad background of schooling worldwide and in Ghana and then focus on three issues that have marked schooling in Ghana and other African countries, namely, clientelism, classism, and the relegation of social difference in favour of homogenised national identities. Next, I outline the academic discussions that have come to be known as the convergence-divergence debate. The three final sections thereafter draw on aspects of this question of whether schooling is moving towards a monolithic global model by examining the international narrative of schooling as prosperity, reflecting on the changing role of the state in its provision of schooling, and exploring an illustration from Ghana where the local categorically rejects the global.

3.2: Bourdieu versus Freire: Two Approaches to the Decolonization of Schooling

Critical education scholars occupy a broad spectrum in their approaches to the decolonization of schooling. In this thesis, I draw principally on Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire as fountainheads of critical education theory that can be used to generally categorize these diverse approaches. Pierre Bourdieu acknowledged the inequities of formal education and examined the ways in which the unified structure of schooling ranks people and produces some with cultural and social capital. His analyses also highlighted the presence of domination inherent in schooling and demonstrated how the marginalized imbibe the attributes of the dominant through access to formal education. Paulo Freire, on the other hand, represents a more radical approach where current models of formal education are to be set aside, and an autonomous structure that frees the creativity of the oppressed is established.

In *Symbolic Violence: Conversations with Bourdieu,* Michael Burawoy (2019) compares the work of Pierre Bourdieu on education with Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Burawoy highlights the fact that while both agree that the school is a site where privileged classes, knowledges and identities dominate all others, their views on how

to approach the problem significantly differ. Freire adopts a libertarian approach to education that criticises globalized models of schooling. He argues that in contemporary classrooms, the predominant 'banking' approach to learning transforms the student into a passive recipient of knowledge. In this universalized model, the teacher occupies the role of a solitary reservoir of all the knowledge that is necessary for the pupils. Unlike Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) who advocate what they call 'rational pedagogy,' suggesting that the inherent domination schooling be tempered by extending access to education, Freire calls for a 'Third World revolution' where critical pedagogy is employed as a tool to liberate the masses. Freire views current models of schooling as producing a state of 'internal oppression' in the minds of dominated groups. In his opinion, the oppressed are continually experiencing internal turmoil as the 'consciousness of the oppressor' internalized through schooling is at war with their true selves (Freire, 1970:48). Critical pedagogy then, is a pathway that uses informal, problem-solving, dialogue-based education to deactivate the oppressor within the schooled masses and liberates their true selves. Freire sees no way in which domination can be undone through the expansion of current form of schooling; he advocates for the decolonization of schooling through a radical rethinking of what education is and should be.

Paulo Freire (1970) advocated for education that engages learners as constituent parts of the world they inhabit and not separate from it. Current schooling prepares students to function in a world that serves the purposes of the dominant, and the success of the teaching-learning process is assessed by the extent to which students can demonstrate they have acquired knowledge and aptitudes that will make them competitive in global markets.

The teacher's task is to organise a process which already occurs spontaneously, to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. And since people 'receive' the world as passive entities, education

should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better 'fit' for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. (Freire 1970/2005:76)

Current schooling, therefore, assumes that the rural student's environmental and social context is abstract, static, and irrelevant in the education process. It perceives the pupil as an object that must be equipped to serve the purposes of the world schooling represents. Problem-posing education, on the other hand, recognizes the learner's reality as dynamic and in the process of transformation because it is constantly being re-created.

Freire's education-sector revolution acknowledges students as historical beings that can 'take on' life. He highlights learners' capability to draw from the past to enrich the present and the future. Banking education sets aside the knowledge and worldview of the student, but a problem-posing education recognizes and values the fact that learners and their communities "through their action upon the world, create the realm of culture and history" (2005:100). This approach to education critically engages with indigenous knowledges because it demonstrates the human capacity for creativity, innovation, and transformation. In the words of Freire:

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed… Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. (2005:73, 81)

Learners' local epistemologies have been developed and passed on over several generations. These heritage resources evidence innovation, dynamism, creativity, and problem-solving capacities that pre-date the institution of the school.

I will now dwell on the relevance of Bourdieu's work to the agenda of decolonizing African classrooms. I first briefly outline Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'capital'. I then demonstrate from two studies how a Bourdieusian approach to the decolonization of schooling has been employed on the continent. In my view, Bourdieu's analysis of schooling largely aligns with the Africanist agenda because it 'unmasks' the exclusionary nature of the school system without advocating for dominant knowledge forms to be completely removed from the curriculum.

Pierre Bourdieu's work shows that schooling does not only transfer to learners knowledge and skills, but also inculcates in them what he terms a secondary 'habitus.' Bourdieu (1977) proposed that 'habitus' is a set of in-grained dispositions towards the world that shapes one's choices and invariably charts the course of one's life. Habitus, he argued, is created during a person's childhood through enculturation. Here, they are informally 'trained' by their families to perceive and respond in particular ways to the world. This initial or 'primary' habitus acquired from home is the vehicle through which cultural norms associated with social groups are maintained in society; each generation passes on to the next an internalized disposition that reproduces that social group's ways of life. Together with colleague Jean-Claude Passeron, Bourdieu (1990) argued that educational systems perpetuate social hierarchies by inculcating a 'secondary' habitus that in fact privileges the dominant social class. Schooling eliminates students from 'dominated' social classes at greater rates than those from 'dominant' classes. He called these privileged students the 'inheritors' and

explained that the school is in fact an institution that simply reproduces hierarchies of power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979).

In their work, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that the effects of social privilege on educational outcomes become more and more pronounced as students progress through the various stages of schooling. At each level, the education system selects even fewer candidates for 'higher learning' based on specific attributes that advantage the upper classes. In this way, 'the School' uses its 'technical function' of producing 'skilled individuals' for modern economies to mask its 'social function' of reproducing class differences (1990:165-167). Bourdieu and Passeron explain the correlation between academic performance and social class background through the concept of 'cultural capital.' Bourdieu (1986) links 'cultural capital' to class especially in schooling, and uses the concept as something that is primarily inherited as part of one's upbringing. Cultural capital can either be enduring aspects of personality cultivated through training (such as linguistic competency and school-career aspirations), actual cultural objects (such as artwork, books, technology etc.), or it can manifest as an institutionalized mark of social status (such as titles of nobility and educational qualifications). Whatever form it takes, cultural capital can be transferred from one generation to another, and it can be invested or converted into other forms of capital. Educational achievement, therefore, cannot be attributed to intelligence or individual effort but rather the 'cultural capital' afforded by one's social origins (Reed-Danahay, 2005). In many ways, schooling exists to safeguard the stability of class differences across time by offering a site where cultural capital can be validated and used to distinguish between the dominant and the dominated.

Several Africanist educators have found Bourdieu's theoretical framework helpful in analysing schooling experiences and the systemic issues of the education sector. For example,

Mark Hunter (2015) presents evidence from post-apartheid South Africa to show how mass education fails to reduce class inequalities but rather 'unevenly structures opportunities.' Drawing on Bourdieu's views on cultural capital and its symbolic dimensions in schooling, Hunter shows how South African parents move their children to schools that will train them to speak with a 'white' English accent or become members of influential social networks. The prestige and legitimacy automatically conferred on one's education because of the school attended highlight the fact that in many cases on the continent, the non-academic dimensions of schooling are becoming more valued than the academic outcomes. It is also symptomatic of the chronic devaluation of qualifications because a graduate's school performance and credentials are no longer sufficient to guarantee employment opportunities. Worse, the more parents compete to get their children into prestigious schools, the wider the gaps between rural and urban schools become. Not only are rural schools unable to compete with the superior resources of their urban counterparts, but they are also incapable of providing students with the same degree of cultural and symbolic capital.

These exclusionary dynamics are also evident in Mozambican school reforms. Here we see that attempts to decolonize education fail if stakeholders (whether parents, teachers, students, policymakers, amongst others) remain committed to seeking the cultural capital derived from colonial forms of knowledge and ways of being. In an ethnographic assessment of emergent teacher micro-politics from reforms of Mozambique's school system, Michela Alderuccio (2016) illustrates how attempts at decolonizing schooling in Africa still struggle with the systemic coloniality of knowledge and identity inherent in the classroom. Mozambique's state-sponsored school reforms in 2004 sought to do away with a curriculum and school system that did not reflect the 'cultural, historical, and social diversity of the country.' Alderuccio (2016:16-17) records that state documents explaining the rationale for a

new curriculum emphasized the need to 'preserve national unity and Mozambican culture.' The government sought to use the institution of schooling to articulate a homogenous national identity in the context of significant multiculturalism and multilingualism. The new curriculum revoked a 75-year-long ban on the use of local languages in schools and allowed for the integration of 16 select Mozambican languages to be taught alongside Portuguese. The introduction of local languages in schooling was to 'maintain contact with Mozambican culture' and to facilitate the 'transmission of cultural values' (2016:17). Apart from the integration of local languages, the curriculum reforms encouraged the school and the community to develop local content that will be taught for 20% of classroom time. However, in her study of teaching practice a decade after the introduction of the new education policy, Alderuccio found that teachers continue to employ rigid learning strategies that privilege the Portuguese language as well as other Euro-American content. The author echoes Bourdieu's (1989) analysis of the ways in which systemic structures of inequality are masked and rendered invisible. Consequently, a school system that overtly claimed to value local dialects implicitly privileges Portuguese as 'the most important symbolic cultural capital.' The study highlighted the fact that teachers, parents, and community members were at odds with the 'innovations' of the new curriculum and largely maintained their perspectives on the need to prioritize dominant languages and knowledges.

Burawoy suggests that unlike Freire, Bourdieu did not explicitly oppose colonization and felt that the benefits Western civilisation should be offered to all. Many Africans, despite acknowledging that current schooling relegates indigenous ways of knowing and being, remain committed to pursuing the Western modernity offered through the school system because it represents a popular route out of poverty and suffering. In Bourdieu's view, the role of schooling in reproducing inequality is inescapable, and the only remedy to this is

found in making education accessible to the dominated in a way that enables them to embody the attitudes and privileges of the dominant class (2019:104). Some scholar-activists have dismissed this approach to schooling, as well as other ways through which post-colonial populations have actively embraced the promise of development, as evidence of the 'colonisation of the mind'(wa Thiong'o 1986; Nandy 1997; Sachs 1992/2010). Others, however, explain that the post-colonial world's desire for authenticity is entangled with a yearning to escape poverty, access good healthcare, and enjoy a life that is often associated with Westernization (Matthews 2017; Dost and Froerer 2021; Finnan 2022). They cannot radically reject schooling as Freire suggests because it has been popularized as *the* path to a 'better' life.

3.3: Mass schooling, nationalism, and politicking in Ghana

Mass schooling itself is a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged in early nineteenth century Europe and quickly became global only about 160 years ago. Its rise coincided with industrialisation, urbanisation, and Westphalian nationalism (Anderson 2016; Gellner 1983). Current versions of formal education, therefore, were long preceded by other forms of cultural transmission developed among indigenous societies all over the world. While these localized forms focused on the transfer of oral tradition, cosmology, religious beliefs, cultural values, and subsistence skills, schooling in Western and Northern Europe prioritized developing compliant citizens for national industrialization projects (Pecout 2010). Through expansionist colonial policies of states like Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Spain, and Portugal, mass schooling was diffused and replicated in their colonies throughout the world and rapidly overshadowed native forms of enculturation (Baker 2012). As a result, formal education has shifted from being a preserve of a select few within the aristocratic

class, to become a universal necessity and even a fundamental human right in less than two centuries (UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative 2019; Dyer et al. 2022; Adebisi 2016).

In Ghana, the earliest formal schooling can be traced back to the 'castle schools' of European colonists in the 1500s. It is believed that Portuguese Catholic priests started the first classes in Elmina castle after a directive from Portugal's King John III in 1529 (Graham 1971/2013). These schools were set up for select native children, namely, those of 'mixed parentage', those related to community chiefs, and the children of wealthy local merchants. Graham points to evidence from the 1740s showing how some wealthy natives, including the Ashanti paramount, were keen to send their children to these Castle schools and even pay for their tuition because of the prestige attached to a European-style education (2013:10). This trend of schooling privileged African children at merchant trading posts continued for the next three hundred years with subsequent Dutch, Danish, and British merchants striving to instil Christian values in pupils, help them build proficiency in a European language, and 'considerably enlighten their minds' such that they would adopt a European worldview (Graham 2013:5-6). The merchant companies also falsely assumed that educating the sons of chiefs meant that, in time, these students would be enstooled in the place of their fathers and would assist the European merchants in their trading interests. However, the Akan societies that these forts and castles traded with are matrilineal, and inheritance is passed not to the son of the chief but to the son of the chief's sister. Their efforts, however, helped to create a small class of natives who used Western education as a status symbol and distanced themselves from traditional ways of life.

Access to schooling was significantly expanded beyond coastal trading communities and their local elites with the coming of European missionaries to the region. By the second half of the 1800s, Basel, Bremen, and Wesleyan missionaries began establishing schools

further inland (Aboagye 2021:371). Graham (2013:100) reports that by 1881 there were 139 known schools: 84 were run by Wesleyan/Methodist missionaries, 47 by Basel missionaries, 4 by the Bremen mission, 1 by Roman Catholic missionaries, and 3 by the British colonial government. By the close of the century, Basel missionary schools alone numbered 154 with an enrolment of almost five thousand students. Indeed, the mission schools seem to have been better resourced for education than the colonial government. For example, the Wesleyan mission in 1844 received more money for their work than the total revenue of the colonial government for that year (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). By 1917, however, all Basel and Bremen missionaries were sacked from the Gold Coast and the Trans-Volta Togoland because of British suspicion of their German roots (Olivier and Wodon, 2014). Their mission stations, churches, and schools were handed over to Scottish missionaries who in turn transferred leadership to the local congregations.

In Chapter 1, I outlined how the British colonial administration integrated all mission schools into a centralized formal education system through the Education Ordinance of 1887. I also briefly discussed how, at independence, Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, charted his vision of an African Renaissance through reformed schooling. Unfortunately, instead of sustained policy centred on the development of a truly decolonized school system, military takeovers and poor government transitions led to a 'ping-pong' approach to education-sector decisions. In fact, beginning from Kwame Nkrumah's Accelerated Development Plan launched in 1951 through to the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) education reforms in 1987, there have been five different overhauls of Ghana's school system. Most of these sector changes were initiated by successive regimes that seized power through military coups. Despite the unbroken chain of democratic political transitions that the country has enjoyed following the promulgation of Ghana's 1992 constitution,

idiosyncratic changes to the school system have continued, with virtually every governing political party introducing major adjustments to the national education structure.

One policy area in which the 'ping-pong' trend can be clearly seen is on the duration of senior high schooling. In 1987, the leader of the PNDC regime, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, set up a committee chaired by Evans Anfom to review the education system. One key proposal of the committee was that pre-tertiary education be reduced from seventeen years to twelve years. Basic education, therefore, would comprise six years of primary schooling and three years of Junior Secondary School. Senior Secondary School was to be three years. In 1993, Rawlings became the first President of Ghana's 4th republic on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and ensured that these reforms were duly implemented. In 2000, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won the Presidential seat and wasted no time in setting up an education review committee (the Anamuah-Mensah committee). The recommendations of the committee were rolled out through the *National Education Reform* initiated in 2007 and the Education Act of 2008 (Act 778) before the NPP government left office. At the level of basic education, the reforms introduced included a review of curricula content, a reduction of subjects, and the introduction of a compulsory two years of kindergarten (Aziabah 2018, 7:34–35; MoE, 2018). Junior Secondary Schools and Senior Secondary Schools were all renamed as Junior High Schools (JHS) and Senior High Schools (SHS). Also, the duration of SHS was extended from three years to four years. Upon regaining power in the 2008 Presidential elections, however, the NDC government passed an Education Reform Bill in October 2010 that reversed the NPP four-year policy for SHS back to three years (Aziabah 2018; Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo 2016). The changes made by the NPP government on the duration of Ghana's basic schooling, however, have largely remained unchanged.   Basic education in Ghana, therefore, comprises two years of

kindergarten, six years of lower primary education, and three years of Junior High School (upper primary education).

This constantly changing and highly politicised landscape is marked by education-sector changes that are not motivated by political ideology alone, or by supra-national impositions from global actors. Rather, many practical issues in Ghanaian schooling are shaped by a complex configuration of factors: global and local, idiosyncratic and democratic, clientelist and classist. I discuss several of these factors in greater depth below. Africanist scholars calling for the decolonization of schooling, therefore, are faced with a politicised field with multiple (and often competing) interests at play. They argue that a decolonized education system ought to simultaneously challenge post/colonial discourses in schooling, as well as prioritize the recovery of indigenous knowledge resources. It must also develop within the learner 'a critical consciousness of one's self' and of the effects of coloniality (Dei, Karanja, and Erger 2022:121). But such an agenda requires collaboration between all the stakeholders of schooling within post-colonial states even with the complex web of interests that comprise the education sector. In the discussion below, I outline examples from Ghana and other parts of Africa that show how the interests of these local stakeholders often contribute to clientelism, classism, and inequality.

3.3.1: African Schooling and Clientelism

Global education trends, such as the push for universal primary and secondary schooling, are often locally transformed by the political elite to suit their electoral ambitions rather than to serve the needs of the citizenry. State actors in Ghana and in other African countries have been found to often function within a clientelist logic where resources for improving formal education delivery are distributed for the purpose of securing and maintaining political power

and not to support 'inclusive development' or 'reduce inequality' as they suggest in their rhetoric (Abdulai and Hickey 2016).

Throughout the history of Ghana's 4th republic, education-sector policy has been largely constructed as part of the manifesto promises of the ruling political party or through the 'special' commissions they set up to review the country's education system (Gunu 2019). The plans of the cabinet of the day are usually automatically endorsed by the legislature since it is invariably constituted by a majority of members who have themselves pledged allegiance to the ruling party. The result is a school system that is constantly being (re)structured to suit whichever political figure is in power, and a classroom that has been set up to reflect a 'ping pong' political climate rather than the needs of those it is supposed to serve. Ghana's education sector over the past four decades has been marked by partisan and clientelist politics in the formulation and implementation of education policy. Despite the commendable efforts of successive governments to develop some sort of structure for sound education planning and implementation, the classroom persists as a platform for politicking.

This reality has significantly undermined the form and quality of education delivery as is evident in recent state-sponsored initiatives. Abigail Zita Seshie (2019:135–48), for example, examines the perspectives of education-sector bureaucrats, schoolteachers, and parents on school policy in Ghana. The study indicates that government education programs rolled out in recent times to reduce parents' out-of-pocket costs and improve education delivery in public schools have instead generated stakeholder frustration with the school system. Responses demonstrated a growing view that pedagogy is being used as a political tool at the expense of education quality. Seshie argues that the manner in which policies such as the Capitation Grant Scheme (2005), the School Feeding Program (2005), the Free Uniforms Program (2009), as well as the more recent Free SHS policy (2017) are being

implemented have increased parents' non-fee costs, decimated the local funds schools have previously used for their day-to-day running, and ultimately promoted a climate where districts that supported the ruling party during the elections are more readily 'rewarded' with state support. Coalition governments, as part of manifesto promises, usually tag these programs as 'free', but when the programs are rolled out it becomes clear that for large sections of the population there are hidden costs.

Several education experts have publicly expressed their misgivings about education-sector freebies. In a private interview, one academic described the gap between research and policy in this way:

> My analysis is that governments introduce policies for political convenience, not for social development convenience and because of that, the implementation plan is compromised… [they] index reforms to their lifespan but not to national development interests. If you conduct research and the research finding doesn't fit the expectation of the party in power, you are not used. So, it draws a gap between research and policy… [For example,] if the Ministry of Education has a research agenda, it will look out for academics within the universities who think like them and so the research is conducted alright but the interpretation [is skewed]. These are the challenges that we have…we do not have research that informs policy through the lens of research. [personal communication with Prof. George Oduro, 06/03/2020]

The Free SHS policy, for example, which extends universal fee-free schooling to all public second cycle institutions, has received sustained media criticism from several key national figures (*Myjoyonline,* 17 Mar 2022; 28 Mar 2022; 16 Dec 2021; *GraphicOnline,* 12 Dec 2021). The initiative was, however, lauded by some. The President and his education minister were both awarded honorary doctorates from two Ghanaian Universities for the flagship

policy (Asiedu-Addo 31 May 2021; Agbey 27 May 2021). The Free SHS promise dramatically swung voters in favour of Nana Akuffo-Addo in the 2016 presidential elections and secured for him an unprecedented victory over the incumbent government. So, despite the country's failing economy and over-bloated public expenditure, the coalition has refused to roll back the program and has advised critics to leave policymaking to politicians (Dapatem and Nunoo, 27 May 2022; Fugu, 13 Dec 2021; Cromwell, 24 Mar 2022; Schandorf, 20 Jan 2022; *GraphicOnline,* 12 Dec 2021).

Nana Akuffo-Addo's NPP is however not alone in using the classroom as a space for politicking. In the months preceding Ghana's 2016 general elections, the incumbent NDC government, led by John Dramani Mahama, hurriedly begun constructing 216 new senior high schools (*Myjoyonline,* 12 Oct 2015). This ambitious infrastructural push was simply a move to counter the NPP's promise to make second-cycle education free, and the voting public chose fee-free schooling over more school facilities. Once Akuffo-Addo's NPP took the helm, most of the school-building projects initiated by the previous government were abandoned, awaiting a resurrection when power is 'ping ponged' back to the NDC (Cromwell, 21 Oct 2021).

This pattern of implementing education-sector programs in a way that serves the interests of the political class has been noted ion other countries across the continent. Hickey and Hossain (2019:64) explain that in implementing international education guidelines, governments of developing countries tend to target expansion over quality because it is easier to control and it secures more electoral votes. Commenting on schooling in Rwanda, Timothy Williams (2017) argues that post-genocide education policy idiosyncratically prioritized certain aspects of the sector to the detriment of others. The governing party shifted the language of instruction from French to English without input from Rwandans. They also

prioritized school enrolments and classroom construction while ignoring things like teacher training and capacity building. In his view, the approach of the political elite to education decisions did not only ignore the views of local stakeholders, it also suggested that only a few top government officials knew what was best for the sector. Williams explains that their actions left educators, students, parents, and other local stakeholders 'scrambling.' A neo-liberalized framework for schooling can easily mask agendas of clientelism, classism, and racism among ruling government officials and their execution of education-sector decisions.

Evidence from across the African continent indicates that certain ethnic groups and districts benefit from state-sponsored education initiatives more than others. In Burundi, Emily Dunlop (2021) shows how certain sections of the populace continue to hold grievances against the state because education policy was historically used as a means to exclude Hutus and reinforce Tutsi dominance. Similarly, Kramon and Posner (2016) discuss the strong correlation between state distribution of education-related resources and ethnic identification in Kenya. They argue that even after the country's transition to multiparty democracy, ethnic favouritism is evident in the education sector and the benefiting ethnic groups are invariably related to leading figures in the governing party. Jia Li (2018) confirms this assessment, adding that inequities in access to education inputs and outputs is observable even when the analysis is done based on geographical location. That is, districts dominated by the ethnicities closely related to key government officials benefit from education resources more than other districts. Simson and Green (2020) dispute some of the generalizations from these studies arguing that education sector trends do not demonstrate 'patterns of ethnic favouritism' as unambiguously as they suggest. In their view, both of the studies by Kramon and Posner (2016) and Li (2018) ignore the increasing convergence across ethnic groups in their access to schooling opportunities. Simson and Green (2020) concede, however, that although

education inequity cannot be conclusively attributed to ethnic favouritism by leading political figures, there is clearly a gap between dominant ethnic groups (such as the Kikuyu and Kalenjin populations) and minority pastoral groups (like the Maasai and the Turkan) as far as education delivery is concerned and this should be addressed.

3.3.2: African Schooling, Ethnic Identification and Classism

Apart from empowering the political class, current neo-liberalized approaches to schooling have been criticised as complicating issues of identity and class because of the way they create dichotomies between the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor, as well as the 'traditional' and the 'modern.' Universalized schooling has arguably been among the greatest factors producing inequities and social gaps worldwide. Research in Africa seems to confirm the view that factors such as high levels of educational attainment, urbanity, wealth, along with other indicators of socio-economic development have a strong negative correlation with indigenous/ethnic identification (see for example Bossuroy 2006; 2011; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Robinson 2014). Modern schooling, along with the neo-liberal lifestyle it promises, is linked to reducing levels of connectedness to one's ethnic group (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

In other words, the more rural, poor, and unschooled a person is, the more likely they are to self-identify as ethnic or indigenous and vice versa. In fact, current evidence suggests that in many African states, cultural identification increases primarily in situations of political competition and conflict but decreases in other areas such as in labour industry and education (Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010). The substitution of mother-tongues for European languages, and local knowledge skills for globalized proficiencies that make the individual 'market-ready', are some of the ways in which schooling weakens a person's ties with their cultural background while simultaneously integrating them into the global knowledge

economy. Worse, for many people, this process is not a trade-off but simply a loss of competency in both the local and the global. Moreover, when coupled with how the colonial partitioning of the continent produced extremely culturally diverse states with several ethno-linguistic groups divided by national borders, the school becomes a powerful tool to assist the state in transferring the citizen's commitment from their ethnic group to the nation-state. This is of course in line with classic modernization theory where factors such as urbanism, greater access to formal education, and modern sector employment engender greater levels of allegiance to the nation-state rather than to one's ethnic background (Robinson 2014:711). These studies largely reflect the Ghanaian case and help to explain why increased school enrolments and impressive strides in meeting 'Education for All' targets have rather exacerbated class differences.

Stuart Hall (2017:80-124) argues that globalization is the single most powerful force 'fracturing' and 'dislocating' cultural identities. He observes that in recent times, a person's ethnicity, observed in their connectedness to a shared place, customs, language, beliefs etc., 'constantly slides' from its grounded position in one unique '*ethnos*', to a state of 'homeless' and 'transcultural' identity. One of Hall's (1992) interesting contributions is the view that 'blackness' is not immutable and unchanging but rather a hybrid identity that is constantly being redefined through a multiplicity of influences. Carolyn Mckinney (2007) builds on this idea by exploring how black South African students who attend 'white schools', speak a prestigious variety of English usually associated with rich sub/urban white South Africans and are therefore branded as 'coconuts.' These students are accused by their peers of acting white even though they are clearly black. The label is stretched to include blacks who opt to speak in English rather than their local language or who are not sufficiently proficient in their local language. When rural black students, shaped by static notions of cultural identity,

castigate their peers who attend sub/urban schools because they perceive changes in language and other signifiers of authenticity as disconnection from one's 'original' identity, they ironically affirm the fluidity of cultural identity and the powerful role of modern schooling in redefining it. In Ghana, rural-urban education-sector gaps largely created through inter/national mass school enrolment programs seem to confirm the assumption that wealthy highly educated Ghanaians are unlikely to have strong ties to ethnic/indigenous identity but the poor and 'non-schooled' are more likely to be 'connected to their roots.'

Studies show that Ghanaian students' feel schooling in the country, especially beyond the basic level, is unparalleled in the ways in which it highlights class. In their view, cultural diversity and difference in schooling have been made platforms where powerful stakeholders affirm issues of class and engender privilege (Konadu-Agyemang and Shabaya 2005; Casely-Hayford et al. 2013). Steep incidental fees and corruption make it such that only the privileged have guaranteed access to the best of public post-primary schools. However, George Dei and Alireza Asgharzadeh (2005) complicate these assumptions about the intersections between social class, ethnic identification, and educational attainment by demonstrating that patrons of the school system also negotiate its promise of upward social mobility by drawing from their ethnic resources. In their study, Dei and Asgharzadeh present data on how students use ethnicity as a way of navigating the complexities of Ghanaian schooling (2005:230-237). Students from minority groups, such as those in Northern disadvantaged regions, form strong student cliques and associations to assist each other. They also quickly identify teachers and lecturers who hail from their ethnicities and establish strategic partnerships with them. Indeed, the methods employed by students from marginalized ethnic backgrounds are used to even greater effect by students from dominant cultural groups. For example, dominant languages like the Akan language which is spoken

by the Ashanti, are used in informal conversations and often deployed as part of formal academic discourse in ways that can only be described as exclusionary. In Ghana, class is not simply sourced from wealth and family status, but also from one's ethnic background.

3.3.3: African Schooling and Homogenised National Identities

Generally, state authorities across Africa since the independence era have not shared the same understanding of indigenized and decolonized education as contemporary critical Africanist educators because, to them, concentrating on ethnic difference and diverse indigenous knowledges threatens their nation-building agendas. In fact, African governments throughout the post-colonial period have relied on constructing 'sameness' among their population to legitimize themselves and their projects (Hodgson 2011; Coe 2005; Dei 2004; 2005). As a close partner of nationalist regimes particularly in Latin America and Africa, Paulo Freire insisted that the creation of national identities was pivotal to the success of the decolonial agenda and represented in many ways the key objective of revolutionized education (Streck, Redin, and Zitkoski 2019). For him, 'conscientization' occurs when the oppressed are awakened to how their identification (whether ethnic, religious, gender, etc.) is being manipulated for the purposes of their systemic exclusion. The shared (e.g. national/regional) identity that emerges as the oppressed and conscientized recognize their social location and unite to subvert their marginalization should be the goal of a decolonized education system (Gadotti 2019).

The intentional construction of a homogenized national identity is of course nothing new. Eugen Weber (1976) for example, argued that within less than 50 years (1870-1914), France as we now know it was created through centralized initiatives, such as transportation projects, conscription into military service, and formal education. These initiatives targeted the assimilation and transformation of peripheral villages into a modern nation-state (Boswell

2009). Weber, for instance, argued that the modernization process in France was identical to processes of colonization in the colonies, and schooling played a key role in both. He explained that through schooling, the French government inculcated among rural-dwelling agriculturists patriotism, national values, as well as a preferred language (1976:493; Ford 2009).

Post-colonial administrations in Africa have ironically imitated the methods of their former European colonial masters in building nation-states. In her exploration of national identification and modernization on the African continent, Amanda Robinson (2014) observes that Africa, contrary to dissenting voices, is still treading the paths laid out by colonial powers by largely following the script of classic modernization theory. She argues that the European idea of modern industrializing nation-states emerged concurrently with mass schooling. Formal education was used by centralized authorities to build citizens whose primary commitment was to a unified national identity and not their ethnic backgrounds. One way in which African homogenization projects have differed from their European counterparts, however, is in the way national unity has been founded on citizens' shared experiences of subjugation at the hands of colonial powers. This was the primary rallying call for various independence movements across the continent, as well as for post-independence national development agendas in the latter part of the 20th century (S. Diop 2012). The relatively recent rise of exclusive indigenous and minority rights, therefore, presents a counter-narrative of 'difference' that does not only threaten peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence, but also the very legitimacy of the state apparatus and its initiatives (Dei 2005). Marginalized ethnicities seeking recognition, as well as rights to land and natural resources, are viewed as a threat to post-colonial administrations whose strategy for mobilizing the

support of the masses for neo-liberal modernization is heavily reliant on a unified people who are all equally and 'uniformly' indigenous.

Arguably the greatest motivation for colonial and post-colonial governments employing schooling for their nation-building interests is the ease with which national education systems can be manipulated. The classroom is a site where knowledge is easily controlled, and where students can be recruited and trained to serve an agenda, whether that agenda involves assisting an exploitative colonial project or it requires being skilled 'economic entrepreneurs' for Western-styled development (Coe 2005; Dei 2004; 2005). In fact, As Scantlebury, McKinley, and Jesson (2002) argue, knowledge transmission in the classroom is never neutral but rather embeds 'the values, standards, and expectations' of those who are able to control it. They contend also that the school is a place where identity is formed. As students are introduced to what counts as acceptable knowledge and what does not, they internalize the ideals that are embedded in the curriculum and are trained to think, behave, and speak as they are expected. Moreover, universal formal education has also become crucial to legitimising state authorities and cultivating in the citizenry a sense of 'shared' nationhood. In Ghana, for example, successive governments since independence have attempted to 'Africanize' the school curriculum by incorporating local performing arts in the schooling experience (Quist 2001; Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo 2016; Adu-Gyamfi and Anderson 2021). These initiatives have succeeded in promoting a monolithic perception of 'Ghanaian identity.' As students throughout the country learn bits and pieces of music, choreographs, and festivals from diverse ethnic groups, they are given the impression that schooling helps you share in Ghana's 'national culture' (Coe 2005). Further, the school curriculum has been superficially 'indigenized' through the melting of ethnic differences into one cultural pot without addressing the systemic coloniality of knowledge still present in

Ghanaian schooling. Euro-American pedagogical methods and content still dominate the curriculum, the English language is still the *de jure* medium of instruction and is usurping local dialects as 'the language of the home'[1], and advancement through the school system is determined by one's performance in increasingly competitive standardised tests.

3.4: Is Schooling Converging or Diverging: Re-visiting the Comparative Education Debate

Schooling has so significantly transformed contemporary life that scholars of comparative education are rethinking the nature of the relationship between the school and society. David Baker (2014) argues that the 'education revolution' is described by those who study it as a quiet revolution because the school's impact on virtually all facets of society can be easily overlooked. In the past, schooling was viewed as an institution that reflects and reproduces society by constantly adapting to serve modern needs. For example, human capital theory as a conventional approach within comparative education perceives education as primarily for the purpose of imparting and improving skills such that individuals will be made more effective in their work roles (Bonal, Fontdevila, and Zancajo 2023). But formal education is increasingly having a 'knock-off' effect on other institutions and is shaping their very nature as well as how they function within society. Thus, education is no longer simply about preparing the workforce, it is also redefining how work itself is conceptualised, and setting the standards that regulate it.

Within the past five decades, education researchers are shifting towards what they term 'neo-institutional approaches' that consider schooling as a 'culture-constructing'

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[1] The use of local languages by students in Ghanaian secondary schools is very restricted (Quist, 2001:312; Anyidohu and Kropp Dakubu 2008; Dako and Quarcoo 2017; Anyidoho 2018; Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019).

institution (Baker 2014:13). Sociological neo-institutionalism is a theory that views social institutions not only as performing structured roles within society but also as a key part of the ways in which cultural meanings are produced (Meyer and Jepperson 2000). Institutions 'produce' culture by influencing the everyday decisions, emotions, actions, and thoughts of social actors (Baker 2014:11). In the sphere of education, world culture theory or educational isomorphism adopts the neo-institutionalist approach in conceptualizing schools as culture-constructing institutions not only at the local/national levels but more importantly on the global scale.

World culture theorists argue that the universalization of formal education has created dominant models of schooling that largely reflect Euro-American ideals (Carney, Rappleye, and Silova 2012; Meyer and Ramirez 2000). They point to a global convergence of educational policy, standards, curricula, pedagogical practices, as well as a worldwide society that shares values created through the formal education system. Worldwide schooling trends are characterized by features such as centralized and hierarchized school systems, graded classes organized according to age groups, 'whole-class-lecture' pedagogical methods, emphasis on content mastery and recall, as well as periodic assessments of student learning through standardized tests (Anderson-Levitt 2006:5-7; Meyer and Ramirez 2000:125; Jansen, 1995). Moreover, many countries are making mass primary and secondary education compulsory (Ramirez and Ventresca 1992), school instruction is increasingly being offered in dominant European languages such as English, French, and Spanish (Stambach 2006; Reed-Danahay 2006; Rizvi and Lingard 2010), and core secondary curriculum often includes subjects such as mathematics, citizenship education, and the study of foreign languages (Kamens, Meyer, and Benavot 1996).

This isomorphic stance in comparative education research has been criticised on several levels creating what some have termed 'the convergence-divergence' debate. The approach assumes the smooth diffusion of Euro-American values and ignores the reality of local pushbacks against universalized policy (Stromquist 2015). World culture theorists also tend to heavily rely on quantitative data from OECD countries, and in so doing, inadvertently legitimize the dominance of neo-liberal Western ideals in education globally (Carney, Rappleye, and Silova 2012:367-8). Some world culture theorists have been criticised as overlooking the coercive role of colonialism and imperialism in creating a globalized model of education, thus ignoring the inequality deeply embedded in education systems worldwide (Takayama 2015). That is, they substitute the forest for the trees by focusing on common practices that are marking schools worldwide, they end up ignoring structural issues in schooling, such as its promise to 'drive development' through industrialisation, the modernist approach of producing skilled human labour for the development project, and the whole idea of a 'global knowledge economy.' Educational isomorphism inadvertently perpetuates the centring of Western modernity while maintaining non-Western ways of knowing and being at the fringes.

Anthropologists of education acknowledge that several aspects of education reform in most countries are generally quite uniform, but they also contend that there are many areas of divergence that world culture theorists ignore (Anderson-Levitt 2006a; Stromquist and Monkman 2014). They point out marked disagreements between education policies of international agencies such as USAID, UNESCO, and the World Bank. They also cite within-country disparities in education practice even in states that are widely considered as 'vanguards' of modern schooling such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom (Anderson-Levitt and Alimasi, 2001). Moreover, ethnographies of education conducted in

countries that are 'importers' of globalized modes of schooling show that educators in these countries often resist, transform, and 'indigenize' these foreign versions of education in complex ways (Hannerz 1992; 1996; Robbins 2001; Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021; Oakeshott 2021). Consequently, schooling experiences across the world must be approached as diverse and unique. Although commonality in how schooling is conceptualized and practiced all over the world is undeniable, the ethnographic record demonstrates that actors such as students, teachers, parents and national educators are engaging and reworking globalized monolithic models in diverse ways (Anderson-Levitt, 2006:18-19).

The convergence-divergence debate has reached an impasse where both sides of the divide are rigidly positioned on theoretical, methodological, and spatial polarities. Static binaries have emerged that centre discussions on comparative education along quantitative/qualitative, structure/agency, and global/local lines (Silova and Rappleye 2015). Despite this, there is some agreement among studies of divergence around the existence of universalized forms of schooling, as well as a global infrastructure that has emerged in recent decades regulating the policy and practice of education. At the same time, world culture theorists concede that local actors are central to how international policy is transformed. Although events on the macro, meso, and micro levels are linked, there is a degree of independence that produces unique expressions of the globalized form. In other words, proponents of educational convergence "document global phenomena while their opponents content themselves with analysing their local variations" (Carney, Rappleye, and Silova 2012:367). The globalized patterns that govern contemporary schooling necessitate a rethink of approaches to the idea of a decolonized classroom. 'Western' education is now global, and for many communities In the Majority World, 'the school' is no longer a foreign imposition (Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021).

3.5: International Development Actors and Schooling as the 'Silver Bullet'

The narrative of schooling as the 'game-changer' or 'silver bullet' to end poverty and suffering worldwide remains the primary driver for its rapid universalization. Countless students and their families across the Global South are making incredible sacrifices to access the hope of prosperity offered through schooling (Froerer, Ansell, and Huijsmans 2022; Finnan 2022). A large section of the international development community have championed this narrative of schooling as the prime route to economic prosperity through a resolute human capital approach to development aid (Bonal, Fontdevila, and Zancajo 2023). Increasingly, however, grassroot studies from the Global South are demonstrating that the bullet of schooling on its own is incapable of slaying monsters such as youth unemployment, class and gender inequality, and poverty (see for example Dore 1976; Honwana 2012; Ansell et al. 2020; Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021; Sumberg et al. 2021; Ngutuku 2022). Worse, in many contexts around the world, mass schooling actually exacerbates some social problems (Deuchar 2014; Dyson 2019).

Foundational to the narrative of schooling as the key to a prosperous future is the human capital theory. This approach rests on the premise that all human beings are a form of capital whose value and productivity increases when they and the states in which they reside invest in them (Hill 2010). National governments, therefore, have inundated popular discourse with the idea that 'good' citizens must develop skills and competencies such as literacy and numeracy, proficiency in information and communication technologies, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in order to increase the overall quality of their lives and contribute meaningfully to national development (Zipin et al. 2015). One key problem of the human capital approach is that it assumes that increasing rates of education and training will automatically correlate to increased employment opportunities, incomes,

and general quality of life. But sociologists and anthropologists studying education have been showing for decades that more credentials do not necessarily mean more jobs, they rather create a society where graduates are competing for ever fewer jobs (Dore 1976; Collins 1979; Blum 2016; Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021).

The Bretton Woods institutions, namely, the IMF and the World Bank have played a unique role in centering human capital approaches in national education systems in the Majority World. These institutions have largely set the pace for education-sector initiatives in many industrializing countries since the 1980s (Samoff 1993; Carnoy and Samoff 2016). The World Bank's (2018) World Development Report, titled *Learning to Realize Education's Promise,* captures its ideas around how schooling transforms lives. The report primarily highlights the fact that in much of the Majority World, although there is great access to schooling, there is very little learning occurring in classrooms. It explains that schooling refers to the hours spent in the classroom, but learning is the outcome of that exercise. The document argues that in spite of the challenges facing national school systems globally, formal education promotes economic growth by building a nation's human capital, enhancing their productivity, and increasing their incomes. More than this, formal education safeguards personal and collective freedoms. The authors explain that schooling improves individuals' agency and enables them to make better life choices. This is supported with evidence showing that more years in school helps to make people 'less likely to smoke, drink in excess, be overweight, or use illegal drugs' (2018:40). Other studies are also presented demonstrating that schooling lowers crime rates and reduces teenage pregnancy among girls. The publication goes on to explain the collective and societal benefits of formal education by highlighting data from 30 developing countries. The data is graphed to show how more schooling increases one's commitment to democracy and makes a person more politically

active. Apart from this, the report mentions that more schooling means more trust, tolerance, and accountability in society.

As the World Bank's report demonstrates, schooling has become accepted by the global development community as a force that not only enhances a nation's economic productivity, but that also radically increases a person's overall quality of life. This extension in the prosperity equation (mass schooling equals economic growth which in turn equals better lives) has gained great traction in the past three decades. Amartya Sen, for example, approaches formal education as a social good with intrinsic value by distinguishing between his human capability theory and human capital theory (Dyson 2019:67). Sen (2001) argues that social opportunities such as universal schooling and good health care are 'constituent components' of development because they empower the individual to live better. Formal education is necessary for effective participation in political activities. It reduces infant mortality and birth rates. For women especially, it enables economic independence and enhances their 'decisional power' within the family. And properly harnessed, it even transcends these individual-level benefits and fosters wider community change (Drèze and Sen 2013). For Sen, the capability approach to development initiatives like schooling, though closely related to human capital theory, must be recognised as distinct:

> At the risk of over-simplification, it can be said that the literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities. The perspective of human capability focuses, on the other hand, on the ability - the substantive freedom - of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have. The two perspectives cannot but be related, since both are concerned with the role of human beings, and in particular with the actual abilities that they achieve and acquire. But the yardstick of assessment concentrates on

different achievements…. The benefits of education, thus, exceed its role as human capital in commodity production. [2001:293,4]

Sen argues that human capability theory is an integrated approach to socio-economic development. Macro-economic growth alone cannot be what is used to measure a nation's development. Perspectives of progress must also consider individuals' potentials, and not just their production; it must provide the environment for their self-actualization and personal achievement, not simply train them to add value to the national economy.

Not surprisingly, critical educators from several parts of the Majority World have argued that neo-liberal approaches to schooling, especially the human capital perspective, at the very least contribute to poor living conditions in many societies as much as they facilitate prosperity and economic opportunities. Publications maintaining the 'silver bullet' narrative like *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* have been heavily criticized as myopic in their understanding of learning. Steven Klees and his colleagues (2019), for example, point out that such reports often spend more time highlighting the deplorable state of education in the Global South than seeking to understand the case-specific socio-cultural factors that define and shape 'learning' in communities across the world. They employ the *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* report as a representation of how the neoliberal ideology masks global power structures that constantly measure the rest of the world by Euro-American standards. This is indeed a familiar criticism of openly neoliberal international institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and the OECD (Ferguson 2006; Davies and Bansel 2007), but also of the global neo-liberal reform that is perceived to have compromised the purpose, structure, and substance of schooling worldwide (Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996).

Approaches that recommend current models of schooling as a one-size-fits-all solution are inattentive to issues of inequality worldwide in their advocacy for expansion.

Mounting critical studies of the macro-economic problems and the poor quality of life in the Majority World emphasise that current schooling is accompanied by contradictions, hidden costs, and negative outcomes that do not feature in narratives of schooling as prosperity. Apart from classic education theorists who have flagged the role of the school in reproducing class differences and inequality (see for example Apple 1982; Illich 1971; Dore 1976; Freire 1970; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), several studies continue to highlight specific ways in which schooling itself contributes to poor living conditions. In Ghana, for example, stakeholders from disadvantaged backgrounds have complained that fee-free education has been more expensive than when fees were charged because of the rising non-fee costs of schooling (Seshie 2019; S. A. Yeboah and Daniel 2019; Yeboah-Obeng 2016; Akaguri 2014).

Ghana's 1992 constitution, through the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program, ensured the expansion of access to basic education and made basic formal education a legal right of every Ghanaian citizen. The program aimed at achieving universal primary education by the year 2005. FCUBE also sought to address deficiencies in the country's education system not only by encouraging enrolment at the basic school level but also through investment in school infrastructure, teacher training and incentivizing schemes, curriculum reform, management reform, and community participation (Little 2010). Although the goal of universal access to primary education was not achieved by the 2005 deadline, the number of schools increased by 50% from 12,997 in 1980 to 18,374 in 2000 and enrolment rates improved by a little over 10% between 1988 and 2001 (Akyeampong 2007). The World Bank was the principal donor for this US$ 500 million project and it assessed the FCUBE program as a success, stating that enrolment shortfalls from the 1970s had been reversed and 'over 90 percent of Ghanaians aged 15 and above had attended school compared to 75 percent 20 years earlier' (The World Bank 2004:31). Kwame Akyeampong

(2009) observes that the FCUBE program failed to make a significant impact among the poorest (rural) households. In disadvantaged (especially northern) areas of the country, schooling continues to be marked by overage students, absentee teachers, high drop-out rates, and late attendance to classes because many students must work before coming to school.

In fact, some commentators have noted that fee-free schooling in Ghana, instead of promoting equity in the school system, has rather exacerbated educational, class, and geographical disparities in the country. Jerome Djangmah (2011), for example, uses students' examination results from both the basic and second cycle levels to show that marked differences exist between fee-free versus fee-paying students. This reality is symptomatic of increasingly deepening disparities in education delivery, quality, and outcomes between the rural and the urban, the poor and the rich, the marginalized and the dominant. Djangmah argues that the gap in 'meaningful access' to schooling reflects socio-economic chasms in the country. This is because elite (public) senior high schools in the country are filled with high achieving and usually sub/urban students from fee-paying basic schools, while the elite tertiary institutions also end up admitting students from these elite secondary schools. Consequently, the FCUBE program in its current form has aggravated classism in the school system reinforcing the reality that those who are progressing to high levels of educational attainment are middle- and upper-class urbanites and not the rural poor. The FCUBE program, along with similar interventions like the capitation grant scheme (2005), the free school uniforms program (2009), and the free senior high school policy (2017) discussed above, exemplifies how many donor driven education-sector initiatives have moved bodies into classrooms across the country but have failed to address systemic inequities (2011:15-17).

The universal-schooling-as-prosperity narrative has been questioned beyond Ghana. In several West African countries, young men are 'managing' the uncertainty of post-primary

education by dropping out of school and becoming footballers and 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Esson 2013; 2015). Through her work in northern India, Jane Dyson (2019) has demonstrated that schooling has deepened patriarchy. Young women engaging the school system in this region are compelled to combine their education with farming, consign themselves to non-STEM fields, accept an acute form of educated unemployment, and experience increasingly limited marriage opportunities the further they climb up the educational ladder. Although most young people associate schooling with upward social mobility and the achievement of career aspirations, they often express resentment about the fact that success within schooling and after graduation has more to do with one's gender, ethnicity, class, and social networks than with academic performance (Deuchar 2014).

3.6: The State, a Changing Social Contract, and the Privatisation of Schooling.

Despite the evidence that strongly suggests that mass schooling (especially in its current globalized form where human capital production is its goal) is not the cure-all for humanity's problems, national governments are having to meet the high demand for modern schooling. The gospel of schooling-as-development has not only been well preached but well received by electorates worldwide, and with national governments widely regarded as the legitimate providers and/or regulators of schooling, their populations are demanding from them globally competitive schooling. The role of state-level actors in providing formal education can be rationalized through the concept of the 'social contract'; this fact is related to the point established above about how mass schooling emerged with the rise of the Westphalian state system (Patience 2022). But the nature of the social contract has dramatically changed in the post-modern era with neo-liberal capitalism permeating all social relationships (Dale and Robertson 2009). And, changes in the role of the state, in our understanding of the social

contract, and in the nature of citizenship have meant that the way formal education is imagined has also changed.

Schooling is shifting its focus from the local to the global. Traditionally, the principle of the social contract requires that citizens surrender aspects of their personal autonomy as well as some of their commitment to ethnic identity in exchange for the state's guarantee of individual and collective 'progress.' This means that the provision of formal education is often perceived as a public good and one of the core responsibilities of the national government. But the confluence of key (post-)modern processes including globalisation, rapid industrialization, the internationalisation of neo-liberal democratic ideals, and the profit-making market-oriented focus of global capitalism has created a condition where states are now tasked with developing school systems that prepare students to be 'competitive global citizens.' This shift explains much of the current discourse on schooling at the national level, as well as the increased commitment of developing countries to meet international education targets. Access to the global economy is now predicated on the extent to which your human capital resources satisfy international (or, more specifically, Euro-American) requirements. Because national governments in the Majority World have so owned the shared vision of a fully 'schooled society', an education system that prepares citizens to be globally competitive has become the priority of many of their state leaders (Guilherme and Picoli 2019; S. J. Ball, Junemann, and Santori 2017). Consequently, whether in education-sector planning or in education delivery, national authorities are keen to work closely with certain key non-state actors, namely, with institutions setting the pace for global capitalism like the World Bank and the IMF, with the development agencies of many OECD countries like USAID, UKAID, DANIDA, and AUSAID, but also with private profit-making education providers who represent the role of the free market in the education sector. Thus, especially

for the Majority World, separating the interests of state and non-state actors can seem almost impossible.

Additionally, one of the primary means through which governments in the Global South have largely aligned their societies to national and international development goals is through what Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah (2018) term 'education *for* (global) citizenship.' That is, schooling becomes a curated experience where young people are trained to embody (inter)national ideals such as capitalism, neo-liberal democracy, globalization, and modernity. In Chapter One, I discussed the Ghanaian case, and demonstrated how the independence-era vision for education morphed into the globalized neo-liberal form within three decades, and this shift can be clearly seen in the way citizenship is conceptualized in the various imaginings of education-sector agencies' core business, as well as in school curricula across time. I will return to the issue of global citizenship in the next chapter. For now, however, I focus on the relationship between schooling, changes in states' approach to the social contract, and non-state actors' involvement in the education sector.

The changing role of the state in guaranteeing universal access to 'quality' education has meant a general increase in non-governmental providers of schooling, but it has also contributed to the deepening of inequality. In the Global South especially, there has been a proliferation of low-fee private schools alongside state-funded fee-free public schooling programs; these have neither removed barriers to the poorest households accessing schooling nor helped to increase the overall quality of education delivery (Srivastava 2010; Akaguri 2014). So why does there continue to be rapidly increasing privatisation in a period where (inter)national policy is aggressively pursuing 'Education for All' and safeguarding access to schooling as a fundamental human right? Stephen Ball (1998) and Prachi Srivastava (2010) offer that the worldwide push to align schooling towards the development of human capital

and the economic interests of the state, as well as the neo-liberal idea that a market-oriented approach will magically raise the standards of formal education are key to understanding the seeming paradox.

Evidence from across the Majority World shows that the privatisation of schooling as part of the wider neo-liberal shift in the sector has not increased the quality of learning, it has rather deepened inequality. Through research conducted in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, Benjamin Alcott and Pauline Rose (2016) demonstrate that private schooling does not necessarily improve learning amongst disadvantaged communities, nor does it reduce the learning gap between the poor and the rich. Luke Akaguri (2014) records that in many rural communities in Ghana, more than ten percent of total household incomes are used to pay for school-related expenses; this is true for both fee-free government schools and low-fee private schools. In India, poor households were found to be paying astronomical fees after being enrolled in 'funded' private school places. The country's Right to Education (RTE) Act passed in 2009 compels private schools to ensure that at least twenty-five percent of their places are available for free to children from disadvantaged households. This scheme is part of India's commitment to offering free elementary education to all children irrespective of their backgrounds. At the level of implementation, however, poor children offered 'free' admission to private schools have been found to be paying exorbitant amounts to access schooling, second only to full-fee paying students in expensive private schools (Srivastava and Noronha 2016). Caroline Dyer and her colleagues (2022) analyse the RTE Act and the way it exemplifies contemporary changes to the nature of the Social Contract. They argue that the Indian state through the RTE Act creates the impression that the education of young people is a level playing field with all stakeholders (including parents and teachers) sharing a similar interest, and therefore each must assume some level of responsibility for 'proper'

education delivery. In fact, the Act uses the idea of a mutually beneficial social contract to hide persistent structures of exclusion, inequality, and domination.

Another way of viewing the conundrum is from a Foucauldian perspective. The school has become an extension of governmentality and a site where knowledge, along with its production and transmission, is controlled for the development of human capital that will directly benefit the goals of the state (Lemke 2019; Peters 2009). But at the same time, formal education has become a global multi-billion dollar business and a key site of neo-liberal and capitalist development policies (Hill 2010). In the years following independence, for example, as African governments turned to institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, the classroom began to reflect the direction of national economic policy (Akyeampong 2010; Aziabah 2018). The World Bank ensured that school systems of developing countries focused on mass-producing lower-level skilled labour for the global market (Hill 2010; Leher and Accioly 2016). Using certain strategic 'mobilizing frames', these international financial institutions have successfully championed the privatization and monetization of schooling experiences across Africa (Srivastava and Walford 2007; Srivastava 2010). In the past three decades especially, African schools are increasingly producing the quintessential '*Homo economicus*'; students who are truly individualistic, self-oriented, and rational economic entrepreneurs and yet committed to a nation-building project that transcends cultural and ethnic differences (Guilherme and Picoli 2019; Ochwa-Echel 2013). Current (inter)national education policy has cast schooling as a necessary social good that must be extended to all at the highest possible level of quality. And yet this responsibility has been delegated to intra- and inter-national non-state actors while expecting that the most marginalized will be miraculously served.

3.7: When the Local Rejects the Global

In the three previous sections, I have discussed the convergence of schooling worldwide and how this has been driven by the promise of prosperity, as well as by the melding of the local and the global through changes in the role of the state. In this section, however, I demonstrate from Ghana how the local maintains its divergence by rejecting certain international trends based on indigenous/cultural values. Key to this illustration is the idea that social values are socially determined. In this instance I draw on some of what I have already briefly mentioned above on faith-based organisations (FBOs) and how they have always been extremely influential in shaping the nation's formal education (Graham 1971:56). They have also played a significant role in defining what constitutes the nation's cultural values such that, although both the Ghanaian state and its population have unequivocally committed to the international agenda of schooling, powerful faith-based voices are able to determine the extent to which the global is implemented in the nation's classrooms. I discuss below the introduction of UNESCO's Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) program in Ghana's basic school curricula as a prime example of how global trends are transformed by religious education-sector stakeholders.

The Ghanaian government's announcement of its intentions to incorporate into elementary schooling a sex education component that aligned with UNESCO's international guidelines rapidly brought to the fore of public debate the issue of curriculum content and the extent to which Ghana should kowtow to global pacesetters in education-sector decisions. The CSE is a curriculum-based approach to sexuality education "that aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to develop positive views of their sexuality, in the context of their emotional and social development" (UNFPA, 2014:6). It has been widely hailed as an effective way of helping

adolescents in realizing their reproductive rights and managing their reproductive health (Keogh et al. 2018; Moore et al. 2022). The program has become a popular aspect of international aid and is often associated with Western donor interventions in the developing world (Roodsaz 2018). In some other sub-Saharan African countries as well, attempts to introduce CSE into school-curricula were met with 'moral panics' and 'raging public controversy' (Moore et al. 2022).

In Ghana, not only were strong doubts over the suitability of UNESCO's guidelines raised by religious stakeholders in the media, but several of them also threatened to depose any administration that insisted to push the initiative through. Historically, FBO's administrative dominance and freedom in determining what was taught in their schools has been greatly curtailed in the country. For example, by 1950, missionary schools represented 97% of school enrolment. Within 70 years, however, faith-inspired schools accounted for less than 10% of total student enrolment in Ghana (Olivier and Wodon, 2014). One way to explain this perceived shift is to consider the fact that as Ghana prepared for independence, many Africanist elites began to debate whether faith-inspired schools should be allowed to provide education at all. Some argued that many missionaries were complicit with colonial oppression and would focus on proselytization rather than education. Others insisted that mission schools were invaluable and cited their role in educating African nationalists and leaders (Berman, 1974; Wyllie, 1976). After independence, Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, through his Accelerated Development Plan for Education and the Education Act of 1961, took over most mission schools and began to pay the salaries of teachers in both public and faith-inspired schools. Although religious education was encouraged in all schools, the Act stated that no student could be refused admission based on religion. Despite the collaboration between the government and the various missions, by the 1970s and 80s the

dominance of mission schools in Ghana's school system waned even as the state increased its focus on achieving universal primary basic education.

A cursory observation of the country's school system across time would suggest that religious education in public schools has also been sharply contested. In 1987 for example, the Rawlings-led PNDC completely removed religious education from the curriculum. In 1994, it was reintroduced by the National Education Review Committee. In 2007, it was again removed by the NPP government, then reinstated as a non-examinable subject after protests from the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Church. In spite of these historical developments, schooling at all levels continues to be strongly imbued with faith-inspired values. Schools in the country, public and private, organize weekly religious services for interested students. Analyses of schooling in Ghana, therefore, must not underestimate the significant role that religious voices play in influencing school-related policy.

Even now, the state's provision of basic and secondary education across the country is carried out in partnership with religious institutions. Although Ghana is a secular state and all public schools are mandated to promote religious pluralism, there exists an entrenched 'hidden curriculum' that reinforces faith-based values and normalises religious praxis in exclusionary ways (Addai-Mununkum 2017). With Ghana among the most religious countries in the world, faith-based organisations are naturally very highly respected in Ghanaian social life (Pew Research Center 2018), and with only 1.1% of Ghanaian residents identifying themselves as non-religious (GSS, 2021:58), it is not hard to imagine the extent of influence religious leaders exert over election outcomes. Clearly, despite the transfer of most mission schools to the British colonial administration, and subsequently to the Ghanaian state at independence, FBOs involved in schooling in some way certainly did not lose their

prominent voice in decision-making. This reality became especially evident in the debate over the inclusion of the UNESCO-mandated CSE program in basic schooling.

In fact, overwhelming public dissatisfaction with the proposed CSE compelled policymakers to stall the initiative (*Daily Graphic*, 7 Oct 2019). At a stakeholder forum organized in January 2020 by the Ministry of Education (MoE), opportunity was given to concerned CSOs, FBOs, as well as members of the public to air their views on reproductive health education in Ghana. A high table of top education officials was set up to receive the views of national stakeholders. The 'front men' included the Minister of Education, the Director-General of Ghana Education Service (GES), and the Executive Secretary of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA). Despite the short notice of only one week, as well as Accra's fierce Friday morning traffic, the large conference hall was almost full by 9:30am. There were representatives from various FBOs and CSOs including the Federation of Muslims Council, the Christian Council of Ghana, the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, and the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition. There were also several individuals present who only described themselves as 'concerned parents.' I sat near the front, journal and pen in hand, documenting the exchanges.

In the three hours that followed, most of the presentations from groups and individuals repeatedly argued that the proposed CSE program was unsuited to 'Ghana's cultural and religious context.' Some called for a comprehensive review of the initiative that would ensure that what was to be taught in the classroom would reflect local values. Some of the parties present offered to collaborate and develop a 'contextually appropriate' sexuality education document that could be integrated into the school curriculum. A few FBOs, however, insisted that sexuality education is not the mandate of the public-school system and

should be reserved for families, local communities, and religious institutions. One religious leader hinted that they would mobilize the citizenry to vote out the ruling government if the implementation of the initiative was not discontinued; this threat has been echoed by other FBOs (*Citi Newsroom*, 4 Oct 2019).

As the day's proceedings were ending, two impassioned women appealed on behalf of the forgotten voices. One introduced herself as a twenty-four-year-old tertiary graduate. She was almost in tears as she narrated her experience as a teacher in a rural community and how one girl had been sexually abused but was unable to confide in anyone. She added:

> We need to deal with gender-based and sexual violence among school children. Yes, [the program] should be contextually appropriate but let us get on board.

The other woman simply described herself as a concerned parent and teacher:

> Have we involved the children themselves in the decision-making? What are their views? I'm in the classroom, and each and every day you see children with issues. Some are being raped and they cannot talk about it…. I wish that GES would also give a platform where we will engage the youth and children to air their concerns so that we can take informed decisions. Yes, we are talking about our culture, but our culture does not even permit us to talk about sex. [31/01/2020]

These final contributions underscored the ways in which cultural and religious values are often used in many parts of Africa as a smokescreen to relegate the views of children and adolescents in issues such as sexuality education. Adolescents view current forms of sexuality education in school curricula as inauthentic and disconnected from their real-life experiences (Aham-Chiabuotu and Aja 2017). Although there is also no cultural provision in African contexts for "The Talk" between parents and their children, studies show that students turn to their mothers and not the classroom for clarity when it comes to issues of

sexuality (Biddlecom, Awusabo-Asare, and Bankole 2009). Young people are quite vocal about the deficiencies in sexuality education but the general approach to implementing CSE policy is still 'fear-based' (Keogh et al. 2018).

The national discussion sparked by the proposed CSE initiative highlights some important lessons. First, it is evident that the education policy ecosystem in Ghana includes an electorate that exerts a strong 'counterinfluence' on state policymakers even as they pursue international goals and targets. Hence, public and civil society engagement with (inter)national education policy must be further explored as key to our understanding of how global agendas are transformed locally. As has been noted elsewhere, a high level of political support and the existence of strong civil society organizations promoting CSE is crucial to any level of successful implementation (Panchaud et al. 2019). And second, education policy is far from 'objective' and value neutral (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Value judgements of international bodies bleed into their policy suggestions for member-states. Locally, the 'non-expert' public often participate in and transform policy discourses based on context-specific cultural and religious interests. Moreover, powerful faith-based voices in countries like Ghana play key roles in determining and articulating which kind of policy is socially acceptable and that which is not. More studies on the roles of leading religious voices in policy feedback is needed if we are to better understand public engagement with education policy in countries like Ghana. On some issues, such as the fee-free SHS program discussed above, the political will of the state is enforced in spite of the displeasure of the masses. The proposed CSE policy, however, offers an instructive example of a globally touted education-sector decision that is categorically rejected by local publics.

3.8: Conclusion

In Ghana, it is impossible to conceive of education policy as a neat case of top-down impositions of global targets on local classrooms. Rather, national discourses of knowledge and pedagogy showcase highly vocal actors that occupy a pivotal role in determining how international policy guidelines are appropriated locally. These voices play a key role in defining what constitutes relevant education for the Ghanaian child. In this chapter, I have reflected on universalized education trends, as well as the roles of key players in determining how global education trends are interpreted and appropriated locally. The state and the political class have been conventionally viewed as able to set the agenda for formal education unchallenged because of their role as the providers and protectors of schooling. However, the fierce contestations over education in Ghana over the past decade or so have demonstrated that the voices of faith-based organizations and the voting public are also significant in how 'relevant education' for the Ghanaian child is defined and carried out. The religious lobby no longer controls the lion's share of the education sector. They, however, draw on the fact that the current formal school system was founded on their efforts in colonial times, as well as on 200 years of shaping the 'Ghanaian consciousness' by ensuring that faith is valued in virtually every aspect of national life. In many ways, religion and culture have become synonymous, and initiatives that are signalled by faith-based voices as under-cutting religious values are immediately interpreted by the voting public as an attack on the very core of ethnic heritage.

CHAPTER FOUR: Indigeneity and the Decolonization of Schooling

4.1: Introduction

Africanist scholars over the last few decades have deepened the discourse around 'Africentric education' by emphasizing the need for centring African indigenous philosophies in school curricula (see for example . That is, the agenda of decolonizing education has pushed for the integration of African languages, content, values, assessment, etc. into the fabric of national education systems across the continent. Beyond this, African indigenous pedagogists have aligned themselves with the global movement of Indigenous peoples and scholar-activists, head-lined by groups in settler-colonial contexts like Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Werner 2023). But 'indigenousness' and 'decolonization' have varied meanings for different communities, and approaches to these concepts in the settler and post-colonial worlds can sometimes seem divergent (Adefarakan 2011). Furthermore, contrary to the calls of the Africentric scholarship, local African communities are actively opting for forms of schooling that privilege Eurocentric content. This chapter explores these tensions.

As I outlined in my first two chapters, the decision to live for several months in a disadvantaged rural region of Ghana was pivotal to establishing the extent to which grassroot actors were echoing the Africanist call for decolonized schooling. Did students' ideas of quality education, as well as the futures they imagined would emerge out of being schooled include the mainstreaming of indigenous ways of knowing and being? I expected that the rural response to this question would confirm certain romantic ideas I still held about the rural-dweller, authentic and untouched by the scourge of modernity.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the dissonance between the calls of indigenous pedagogists and African electorates like the Ghanaian public can be partly explained by the varied meanings and understandings that are attached to the mainstreaming of indigeneity.

Although most Ghanaians in principle self-identify as indigenous, the terminology of indigeneity and indigenous knowledge is still vague. In fact, terms like 'native', 'traditional', and 'Ghanaian' are more entrenched in Ghanaian popular discourse than the idea of the 'African indigenous.' The Bikpakpaam, however, represent a unique case of self-identification as Ghanaian indigenes. Across centuries, the Bikpakpaam were marginalised in their indigenous homelands and cast as "violent strangers" when they migrated to other, more fertile, areas of Ghana. Through bloody conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s, they have sought to affirm and defend their visibility as indigenous people. Education has played a critical role in both their marginalisation and strategies used to re-affirm their position.

4.2: Indigeneity in Ghanaian Popular Discourse

In a recent conversation with my father over the phone, I posed a question that I had often asked Ghanaians in my network throughout this doctoral project: "Do you consider yourself as an indigenous person?" His response was strong and emphatic, as if I had somehow questioned his authenticity: "Of course I am indigenous! Our forefathers have only ever lived and moved across this continent. We may not remember much about the different places we have settled, but we know that Africa has been our only home." I then asked him which term is used when referring to indigeneity in our mother-tongue. His reply followed a brief pause and was a little less assertive: "I can't think of any one word we use…I'm not sure there is a word for that." Some of the Ghanaians I asked were momentarily baffled by my use of the word 'indigenous', not because they had never heard of that English term, but because there are several other more 'concrete' terms in popular usage; words like 'native', 'local', 'rural', 'home-grown', 'ethnic', 'cultural', 'traditional', and 'Ghanaian'. In fact, when I used the keyword 'indigenous' to conduct searches on online Ghanaian news platforms, it was often this 'family' of words that surfaced in press releases, demonstrating how the Ghanaian public

approaches the concept of indigeneity. For example, in an article about a Ghanaian NGO "training indigenous women on equality and ownership", the author repeatedly references the participants of the workshops as 'rural women', signifying that the author and the NGO equated indigeneity with rurality (Peprah, 19 Jul 2023).

Further, in a visit by a delegation from the country's National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to the Traditional Council of the Ga people of Accra, the Commission's Chairperson, Kathleen Addy, made this statement:

> Wherever we find ourselves, there is a traditional authority. We live in a democracy, we all recognise that, but we also know that across the country all our cultures, all our practices value [and] respect tradition …. So, it is important wherever we find ourselves as Ghanaians that we respect the culture of the indigenous people. (quoted in Commey, 2 Oct 2023)

In this statement, tradition, culture, and indigeneity are used in relation to each other as part of Kathleen Addy's appeal for the values of groups in specific locales to be respected by all. In Ghanaian popular discourse, indigeneity is often cast as 'tradition', because it has been transferred across several generations, and because it represents that which pre-dates colonization. But it is also approached as 'cultural' because each ethno-linguistic group portrays a distinct social system of beliefs, values and practices. In addition, Addy infers in her statement, particularly with her repeated use of words like 'we', 'our', and 'all', that *being* Ghanaian usually implies that you belong to one such tradition, culture or indigenous group. Beyond this, the excerpt also seems to suggest that although there are several indigenous groups in the country, each resides in (and exercises some authority over) a particular geographic locale. And the freedom of all to live and move across Ghana must be tempered

with respect for 'the indigenous people' of each area because this ethic is foundational to all 'Ghanaians.'

In another example from local press releases, we see how virtually anything that is associated with Ghanaian ethnic groups and qualifies as 'tradition' is often labelled as indigenous. The Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church of Ghana declared one Sunday service as an 'Indigenous Day', and the presiding Bishop, Rt Rev Prof. Joseph M.Y. Edusa-Eyison, gave this reading of how and why indigeneity should be celebrated:

> Tradition comes out with what we say, what we wear, and what we eat and that is what we are doing today…. Just look at the colourful things like our indigenous wear and delicious food, and we want the youth to pick them up so that when we are dead and gone, they will also continue just as we are continuing what our forebears left us. (quoted in Allotey, 26 Sep 2023)

Here, local languages, dress, and meals are all described as 'traditional' and 'indigenous' irrespective of the ethnic group with which they are associated. In several other articles, I saw Ghanaian flora and fauna, therapeutic practices, start-up companies, music stars, and festivals all described as indigenous. These aspects of cultural life are also often encouraged as a means of maintaining ties to previous generations.

In my own experience, the language around indigeneity only became significant to me as a level of self-identification during my graduate education. I was familiar with the English word but had not associated it with my identity. As I briefly explained in Chapter One, learning about indigeneity and indigenous knowledge traditions brought me to a place of appreciation and pride for being African, Ghanaian, and Ewe. But it also created in me an indignation for the system that had produced in me the devaluing of my cultural identity until I had been 'conscientized' and my mentality had been 'Africanized' (Freire 1970; 2020; wa

Thiong'o 1986). As I reflect on my pre-tertiary education, I realize that the Ghanaian curriculum created in me a schooled subject whose primary locus of identification was in my being a Ghanaian citizen, and not in being African or Ewe. It also significantly contributed to my perception of all things Western as more valuable than anything associated with my culture and heritage. Throughout my basic and secondary education, even 'cultural' topics like marriage, festivals, chieftaincy were taught in a manner that ensured that students would accept a homogenized national identity and 'good' citizenship as the solution to all problems. The format usually comprised selecting examples of the topic of discussion from a few dominant ethnic groups in the country to demonstrate the remarkable diversity of Ghana. The teacher would then proceed to outline key state laws and important principles that transcended the different practices of cultural groups.

A number of publications have examined how the teaching of citizenship education in Ghana has exemplified the country's negotiation of Western/neo-liberal versus indigenous/decolonial agendas through schooling and the ways in which post-colonial curricula content and pedagogy have shaped Ghanaians' self-identification across time. In their sweeping overview, Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah (2018) identify Kwame Nkrumah's early post-independence influence as well as later 'liberalizing' agendas of INGOs from the 1980s onwards as two pivotal phases that have determined Ghana's approach to citizenship education. Nkrumah used the country's school system to promote a fierce loyalty to the nation-state as transcending ethnic difference (Coe 2005; Sefa Dei 2005). And within five decades of his overthrow, Ghanaian schooling increasingly centred the production of elites who were trained to be urban, competitive, and Western (Quist 2001; Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah 2018).

I will illustrate here the deliberate strategies of Kwame Nkrumah to construct national identity through schooling and the arts in the early independence period. Trevor Wiggins' (2005:78) published conversation with J.H. Nketia, the esteemed Ghanaian scholar, musician, and Pan-Africanist, offers an insight into how, Kwame Nkrumah, approached the issue of a national identity, as well as Nketia's role in that project:

> Post-colonial Ghana under Nkrumah was one of the first countries to try to find an identity spanning its heritage and engagement with global economics. Nketia was one of those selected to develop a national cultural identity; a project that is arguably ongoing.

Wiggins goes on to explain how the Nkrumah administration, through the expertise of figures like Nketia, laid strong foundations for a 'pan-Ghanaian' identity using the most revered personality in many traditional communities: the chief. By projecting the ceremonial aspects of traditional authority, namely the institution's associated music, appellations, and dress, he unified the country around their shared respect for indigenous leaders and cultural symbolism. He comprehensively incorporated this construct of 'Ghanaian culture and identity' into the young nation's daily life through several platforms including the school curriculum and all state ceremonies. Over time, many Ghanaians have become more comfortable identifying as simply Ghanaian, very much bearing some form of ethnic identity, but fully aware of how 'unglamorous' particular ethnic categories are in the Ghanaian imaginary. This historical fact could also account for the blurriness that accompanies attempts to define indigeneity in Ghana (and much of the continent), as well as the complexities in its use as an identity marker (Werner 2023). People in Ghana have been trained to describe themselves as 'native' and 'Ghanaian', thus positioning themselves in relation to their former colonial masters or to other countries that also bear respective national identities.

While constructed national identities have become dominant, and the terminology around indigeneity remains vague amongst African populations like the Ghanaian public, the concept of indigeneity has gained ascendancy on the global scene in recent times. In the subsequent discussion, I trace the growth of the Indigenous peoples' movement as a global political force led by indigenous peoples from CANZUS states; a movement with which African indigenous pedagogists have recently become aligned. I later highlight the ways in which the idea of the 'African Indigenous' is deployed in unique ways as part of the agenda to decolonize schooling on the continent.

4.3: The Birth of a Global Category

The efforts of Indigenous peoples and scholar-activists from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States were pivotal in kickstarting what has now become a global indigenous peoples' movement. In many ways, the internationalisation of Indigenous peoples' rights was born out of the frustrations that indigenous communities like the Māori of New Zealand and the Iroquois of North America were facing in their negotiations with their respective national governments (Smith 1999/2021). Several decades before the founding of the UN and its Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), Iroquois Chief Deskaheh and Māori religious leader Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana visited the League of Nations' Geneva headquarters in 1923 and 1925 respectively to appeal for their people's rights to land (Anaya 2004; United Nations 2014). Although their requests to speak at the assembly were denied, their actions paved the way for organisations like the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, founded by Canada's National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) in 1974, and the International Indian Treaty Council, founded through the efforts of the American Indian Movement (AIM), to become some of the first multi-national bodies seeking representation for Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations.

Another significant result of the lobby of indigenous peoples and scholar-activists from settler colonies is the international recognition of the category 'indigenous.' In 1957, the adoption of 'The Convention of Indigenous Peoples' by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) meant that, in spite of the sustained controversy over the use of the term 'Indigenous peoples', the label was internationally recognized even if national governments refused to relate to them as distinct peoples with the right to self-determination (Smith 1999/2021:131). In the wake of the growing influence of the Indigenous peoples' movement on international politics, the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities chaired by Special Rapporteur José Martínez Cobo, commissioned the voluminous Cobo report in 1972. This report contains what has since become the most cited attempt at a comprehensive definition of indigenous peoples:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with preinvasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present nondominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. (1987:29, note 379)

Currently, the UN's official position is that there is no all-encompassing definition of indigeneity, especially with the remarkable diversity of Indigenous peoples worldwide (United Nations 2016). The UNPFII (2006), however, lists certain characteristics that mark groups it recognises as indigenous:

- Self-identification as indigenous peoples at individual and community levels,

- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies,

- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources,

- Distinct social, economic or political systems,

- Distinct language, culture and beliefs,

- Form non-dominant groups of society, and a

- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

Naturally, Indigenous Peoples prefer to be designated by their specific ethnonyms because of their unique histories and present-day realities, but the current generic language used by the Permanent Forum has been widely accepted (Nash 2019). Despite the enduring politics around how indigeneity is socially enacted especially in the distribution of state resources, it remains established amongst the communities themselves as a collective marker of connectedness to place, to kin relationships that stretch back to pre-colonial times, and to a shared experience of *being* the non-dominant Other (Carlson 2016). Incidentally, the fruitless academic exercise of wrestling over contested terms and debating the theoretical (in)consistency of 'indigeneity' has not been found to be relevant or of interest to these communities who fully understand their identity and experiences of longstanding oppression.

Especially in the period leading up to the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the concept of Indigeneity and Indigenous peoples was hotly contested and debated. This occurred not only in media narratives but also in the scholarship, especially in anthropological circles[2]. Arguments against the use of the category have mainly

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[2] see for example the Return of the Native Debate in *Current Anthropology* and *Social Anthropology* in the early 2000s.

revolved around the recognition of Indigenous communities as distinct peoples with unique rights to land, resources, knowledges, and cultural difference based on their first occupancy of specific geographic regions. Indigenous peoples and scholar-activists have consistently demonstrated that their advocacy work does not stem from universally accepted definitions of what it means to be indigenous, but is a concerted effort to present at a global level the plight of millions of people worldwide who have been abused, dispossessed, decimated, and exploited in unacceptable ways; the movement is not an academic exercise for its own sake but a call towards recognition and repatriation. It is the culmination of communities' struggles at local, national, and regional levels for several centuries. Therefore, the practical and political utility of the category more than compensates for any 'theoretical inconsistencies' that arise from a lack of uniformity as far as the varied experiences of coloniality and exploitation are concerned.

In Africa, the pushback has stemmed from the fact that most people who reside on the continent or maintain ancestral links to it self-identify as indigenous. Dorothy Hodgson (2011:25-27), for instance, notes how, while presenting research in Tanzania on the Maasai, was forcefully and repeatedly told, "We are all indigenous!" Without a doubt, African ethnic groups are indigenous to the continent considering relations with European colonialists and experiences of domination in the colonial and even post-colonial periods. It has, however, also been argued that there exists a category of Indigenous peoples on the continent whose indigeneity transcends simply being African (ACHPR and IWGIA 2005). Groups whose culture and subsistence patterns differ significantly from their neighbours, and who have historically been marginalized not only by European settlers but also by their fellow Africans based on their reluctance to engage with the Western industrialization project, must be offered unique recognition under the global political label of 'Indigenous peoples.'

Additionally, the category remains a problematic politico-legal concept for state actors and policymakers. The stance of many national authorities has been rooted in the fear that once indigenous communities are recognized as 'peoples', or bounded ethno-nationalist groups, it will lead to attempts to (re)claim their legal right to self-determination and statehood (Hodgson 2011:55-61). African governments have been suspicious of a concept that could potentially undermine the authority and control of existing state systems (Coe 2005; 2020). Finally, the deep ethno-historical tensions and attitudes that exist between cultural groups on an incredibly diverse and multi-ethnic continent is also key to why 'indigenousness' is so contested (Ndahinda 2011).

This notwithstanding, it is evident that Indigenous peoples, especially from the CANZUS states, were central to the international recognition of the category as well as the formulation of a declaration to safeguard the rights of Indigenous peoples. Despite sustained opposition, the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was successfully passed. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), originally set up in 1982 and later established as the UNPFII in 2000 by the UN's Economic and Social Council, existed to promote, protect, and monitor the rights of Indigenous peoples worldwide. In 1993, the WGIP produced and forwarded to the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities a draft of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite resistance from the governments of CANZUS states who were the only ones to vote against its passing, the Declaration was finally adopted on 13th September 2007 by the UN's General Assembly. At that time, it was hoped that the Declaration would potentially serve as a precursor to a legally binding Convention (Oldham and Frank 2008). As the years have passed, however, it seems evident that its primary contribution has been to galvanize international advocacy around indigenous issues and

consolidate the tireless efforts of indigenous NGOs and their transnational networks towards the protection of Indigenous peoples' rights (Moreton-Robinson 2015:175).

4.4: The 'Expansion' of the Category

In recent decades African scholars advocating for a decolonization of schooling in the region have adopted the terminology of indigeneity and are encouraging education-sector policymakers to incorporate 'indigenous epistemologies' in their curricula. There are several Indigenous groups, such as the Batwa of Uganda, the Khoi/San of southern Africa, and the Tuareg of North Africa, who are officially recognised and listed by the UN as part of the global struggle for indigenous rights. In fact, some estimates claim that about 14.2 million of Africa's 1.2 billion people self-identify as endangered Indigenous peoples (United Nations 2016). This doctoral project, however, joins the Africanist scholarship in their use of the concept in an 'expanded' or 'multi-layered' sense, albeit in complete solidarity with the international Indigenous peoples' movement (Dei 2011; Adefarakan 2015).

While critical post-colonial pedagogists have championed equity in schooling and the inclusion of local knowledge forms in the education system, indigenous voices in settler colonies have never ceased to demand autonomy. For example, Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang (2012) show how the concept of decolonization for indigenous peoples in settler colonies must be distinguished from other calls for social justice, including the way in which decolonization is deployed in post-colonial contexts. They argue that decolonization from the perspective of indigenous peoples in settler colonies must rest on an 'ethic of incommensurability' and a recognition that reconciliation between natives and settlers is not what decolonization is fundamentally about. Frequently, the term 'decolonisation', especially when used in reference to education, is deployed metaphorically such that the settler is not 'unsettled', and native voices remain peripheral. 'Decolonization' used figuratively simply

does not demand the repatriation of indigenous lands and entitlements but rather seeks to create a situation where settler futures are safeguarded. The authors explain that this has become a strategy that alleviates feelings of guilt while nullifying the need to change the status quo. Similarly, social justice education, whether practiced as critical pedagogy, curriculum studies, or the re-evaluation of educational institutions, calls for social transformation through changes in the school system but does not necessarily include the decolonization of education experiences. They contend that these forms of social justice offer pathways to settler innocence without requiring the surrender of settler control over lands and lifeways (Tuck and Yang 2019).

Beyond the varied regional differences in experiences of (de)colonisation, approaches to 'indigenousness' can also sometimes differ. Settler-colonial definitions of who is indigenous and who is not can sometimes overshadow alternate understandings of indigeneity (Adefarakan 2011). Gloria Emeagwali and George Sefa Dei (2014) argue that despite the myriad ways in which colonialism, globalization, and neo-liberalism have altered African societies, their indigenousness is unquestionable and rural communities in the region continue to hold on to their relationships with the land as well as land-based knowledges. They insist that because a people's indigeneity cannot be simply eroded through encounters with foreign groups, there remains relevant indigenous knowledge forms among African societies that must be considered in any discussion on what form education should take among these communities. The African case for the decolonization of schooling, therefore, rests on the need to address systemic inequities in formal education by reorienting it to focus on precolonial Africentric epistemologies.

Africanist studies advocating decolonized schooling use indigeneity as a level of political identification that is shaped through the colonizer-colonized relationship but is not

defined by it. For George Dei (2017:101), there are varied experiences of coloniality but this 'difference' should not constitute the margins for defining 'indigenousness', but rather a resource to rally around and draw from in the shared war against marginalization. He explains:

> Indigeneity is a claim to identity, history, politics, culture, and a rootedness in a place. It is about a socio-political consciousness of being as a knowing subject. It is also about an existence outside the purview of colonial encounter and the colonizing relations as over-determining of one's existence…. to claim and reclaim [one's] Indigenousness or an Indigenous identity is a political and decolonizing undertaking. The values, worldviews, and epistemes that govern such Indigenous existence and how we come to know and understand our communities, are appropriately termed "Indigenous knowing/knowledge. [Dei 2011:3]

Affirming African indigeneity, therefore, is a decolonial project of resistance (George J.Sefa Dei 2020). It is a consolidated move to reclaim the uniqueness of African peoples' ontologies and epistemologies, and to challenge their subaltern condition in the global economy of knowledges, all in close partnership with the international Indigenous peoples' movement and their century-long political advocacy. The issues of decolonized schooling and indigenous identity often occur side by side because coloniality created the native subject and employed the school as a means through which indigenous peoples would be made to mirror the imperial master (Mamdani 2018; 2020). The history of universalized schooling and the ways in which it rode on the wheels of colonial expansionism are betrayed by the continued privileging of Euro-American knowledge forms, standards, and values worldwide.

In the following paragraphs, I outline two distinct aspects of the Afrocentric scholarship's conception of African indigeneity. I mention these briefly because they firmly align with my understanding and use of the concept in this project.

4.4.1: African Indigeneity as connectedness to Land

As I have already alluded to above, a strong claim to geographical territory is indispensable to most conceptions of indigeneity, and Indigenous peoples' sense of connectedness to specific places through ancestral ties is well documented (see for example Nadasdy 2002; Robins 2003; Chapin, Lamb, and Threlkeld 2005; Short 2007; Zenker 2011; Campbell and Hunt 2013; Cotula et al. 2017; Wilson et al. 2018; Bhatt 2020; United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples 2021). Many of these studies, however, assume that all Indigenous communities are either resident on their ancestral lands or, if they have been displaced, are actively seeking that these territories be restored to them. However, Africanist scholarship advocating for the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledges emphasize 'indigenousness' as embodied and defined in terms of *relationship to* Land and not necessarily *residence upon* it. Elizabeth Temitope Adefarakan (2015) writes about this in her reflections on the indigeneity of diasporan Yorubas and the issue of their connectedness to geographical territory:

> Being attuned to how imperialism and colonialism affect various Indigenous peoples differently also allows for a multifaceted conception of Indigenous identities that anchors but does not lock them onto their ancestral land or territories….I conceive of the notion or sensation of being locked in as a position that precludes movement much in the same way certain definitions of Indigeneity have precluded the experiences of those who are Indigenous but have different, non-residential, or more transnational relationships and experiences with their ancestral lands precisely because their

experiences with/in colonialism and imperialism have been different….Understanding that such relationships are highly complicated and differ for African peoples across time and space opens up the possibilities for developing more nuanced analyses of the multiple yet distinct ways that Indigenous peoples are positioned in relationship to their ancestral lands, and how colonialism and imperialism have figure(d) in changing these relationships. (pp. 23-24)

Africanist scholars calling for the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledge in schooling largely imagine African indigeneity as inclusive of but not limited to aboriginality, autochthony, or recognized claims to ancestral territory (Dei 2011:25). This approach suits my doctoral study on the Bikpakpaam well because it allows for displaced, dispossessed, diasporic, and dispersed African communities, whether living on or off the continent, to be heard in discussions around decolonization and indigeneity.

4.4.2: African Indigeneity as Unique Philosophies of Being and Knowing

Africanist conceptions of Indigeneity also highlight that the ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies of Indigenous communities on the continent are distinct and often divergent to dominant Eurocentric ones. At the core of the differences in knowing and being is the binding principle of relationality (Chilisa 2020; Shizha 2014; George J. Sefa Dei 2011). The example of Southern/East Africa's *Ubuntu* (from the South African Zulu language) or *Unhu* (from the Zimbabwean Shona language) is often used as an example of the deeply ingrained principle of '*being-ness with others*' and the primacy of communalism that is found across the continent (Shizha 2014; 2017; Sharra 2009). But relationality is not only seen in peoples' connectedness to each another, in fact one's personhood includes your ties to inanimate totems, to the non-living and the metaphysical world, to animals, and to the Earth (Chilisa 2020).

Because African indigenous knowledges are embedded in communal relationships, the transfer of these epistemes are also through inter-generational community ties. Julius 'Mwalimu' Nyerere, who served as Tanzania's premier after her independence for more than 20 years, criticised current schooling as fundamentally different from African indigenous education because of how it taught young people to disregard both the previous generation and the knowledges they are custodians of. In his paper "*Education for Self-Reliance*", Nyerere comments on the warped views of local lifestyles instilled by the school system in this way:

> At present our pupils learn to despise even their own parents because they are old-fashioned and ignorant; there is nothing in our existing educational system which suggests to the pupil that he can learn important things about farming from his elders. The result is that he absorbs beliefs about witchcraft before he goes to school but does not learn the properties of local grasses; he absorbs the taboos from his family but does not learn the methods of making nutritious traditional foods. And from school he acquires knowledge unrelated to agricultural life. He gets the worst of both systems!
>
> (1967:392)

In Nyerere's view, the enduring challenge of inheriting a colonial school system was that it failed to pursue the primary purpose of education, namely, passing on from one generation to the next, the wisdom, knowledge, and values of society such that young people can be prepared to be 'active' participants of their communities. Schooling in Tanzania and other parts of Africa predominantly introduced students to a world vastly different to their own and robbed them of competency in both.

4.5: Decolonized Schooling as Indigenous Education

So, why is the re-claiming of African indigeneity and the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledges central to the scholarship's call for decolonized schooling? Current versions of formal education in countries like Ghana constitute 'banking' education because they have created school subjects that have been made to believe that their difference is unhealthy for nation-building. The locus of their identity has been made to be grounded in neo-liberal definitions of citizenship and not in their cultural heritage. George Sefa Dei explains the link between education and the reclaiming of African Indigeneity:

> For a fact, our African Indigeneity is always in question. Our claims to land and soil are always suspect and even our histories of Euro-colonialism are repeatedly contested and discounted. We are continually confronted with epistemic humiliation. The questioning of, and skepticism toward, the "African Indigenous" has not been by non-Africans alone. There are many of us African learners schooled and steeped in Euro-centrism and colonial education who still doubt the value of our knowledge systems and ask if these knowledges are of any use in addressing contemporary new age [science and technology] change and advancements. (Dei 2020; pp. xi)

Contemporary schooling on the continent does not only privilege Euro-American knowledges, it creates in learners the impression that African indigenous knowledges have no place in schooling. The agenda to decolonize schooling, therefore, must aim to re-centre and re-claim indigenous African knowledges. It must also cultivate in the African learner a pride in *being* indigenous to Africa.

Before their varied experiences of colonisation, local communities across the continent were educating each young generation through indigenous pedagogical methods. The learner's classroom was their own natural and social environment, their teachers were

the senior members of the community, and the purpose of education was becoming a knowledgeable adult committed to the collective good. Elders and parents were responsible for the transmission of cultural knowledges on areas such as the stewardship of the environment, connection to Land, respect, mutual interdependence, and social justice (Dei, Karanja, and Erger 2022:105). Beyond this, the learner's educational journey included training in indigenous subsistence strategies. Each generation of young people were encouraged to become productive adults by acquiring the necessary skills to cater for the needs of their families and wider community. To be educated meant to be equipped for a lifetime of productive work; there was no such thing as graduate unemployment.

The fact that school curricula and pedagogical methods are still being validated and monitored by foreign actors is evidence of the inherent coloniality in African school systems. Edward Shizha (2014) argues that even where there is school reform on the continent, it is often the result of external influence. The author echoes Freirean critical theory when he contends that decolonized education is 'student-centred' and focuses on drawing from the cultural backgrounds of learners. The greatest challenge of this agenda, in Shizha's view, is the way in which one brand of western modernity has dominated formal schooling and has redefined local values, aspirations, as well as what counts as valid knowledge such that any mention of indigenous alternatives is met with suspicious apprehension. Shizha (2014) insists that a critical pedagogical approach to education challenges the now widely held assumption that the competitive individualism of the neo-liberal global economy evident in classrooms across the continent will create the most ideal societies and meet the needs of all Africans. He prescribes that instead of the current models of pedagogy being practiced on the continent, teachers should be encouraged to employ indigenous techniques such as narrative storytelling,

oral traditions that transmit traditional ecological knowledge, practical hands-on community projects, as well as collaborative and group learning strategies.

Shizha (2014) laments the fact that students in Africa are not taught in their mother-tongues and emphasizes the crucial role of local languages in a decolonized school system. Using published data from several countries on the continent including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana, he argues that schooling in the language of teachers and students has too many psychosocial benefits to be ignored. But the lobby pushing for mother-tongue education in Africa is not only tasked with moving the mountains of coloniality inherent in the continent's national school systems, they must also part the seas of an African public that is clamouring for the prestige of a European-language education over the 'cultural pride' of native languages. I will discuss this more extensively in the next chapter (Five). In the following section, however, I explore the case of the Bikpakpaam, the indigenous people group I lived amongst during my field studies. I narrate select ways in which they complicate how indigenousness is widely understood.

4.6: The Bikpakpaam: Marginalized Indigenous Peoples or 'Violent Strangers'?

The Bikpakpaam, known widely as the Konkomba, are one of the agrarian ethnic groups inhabiting the Volta-Oti River flood plain, a region which straddles present-day Ghana and Togo. The Volta River is fed by the Black, Red, and White Volta headwaters, all of which are sourced further north in Burkina Faso. But the Oti River is a tributary that originates from Benin and joins the Volta River in Ghana. The aboriginal 'Voltaic' societies of this region, including the Sissala, Bimoba, Bassari, Kusasi, Grumah, and the Bikpakpaam, have shared the Volta-Oti River basin for longer than anyone else. Politically, these autochthonous groups are described as 'stateless' or 'acephalous' because they have no centralized head and exist as independent clans within their communities. They also share similar African religious

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beliefs especially regarding the veneration of an 'Earth deity' that controls the land and is served through earth shrines and priests (Zimoń 2003).

Among these Voltaic societies, the Bikpakpaam are of particular interest because over the past century, they have often divided public opinion in Ghana. They have also been found to be at the centre of the bloodiest conflicts in the country's recent history. Their lands are bordered by the Dagomba to the west, the Mamprusi and Chakossi to the north, the Kabre to the east, and the Bassari to the south. Some historians have speculated that the Bikpakpaam derived their common English designation (Konkomba) from their Dagomba neighbours who refer to them in Dagbani as the '*Kpunkpamba*' (Kachim 2018; Tait 1964). After centuries of mispronunciation, both during and after the colonial era, the English term 'Konkomba' has come to refer to both the ethnic group and their language. They, however, refer to themselves as the '*Bikpakpaam',* their language as '*Likpakpaanl'*, and their ancestral lands as '*Kikpakpaaŋ*' (Kachim 2018).

Their political marginalization dates back to pre-colonial times when their more powerful neighbours compelled them to vacate their settlements, and move to what they consider presently as their 'homeland' (Kachim 2018). Even in colonial and post-colonial times, their marginalization has been expanded and entrenched. Bikpakpaam claims to territory, autonomy, and socio-economic development have been the subject of major inter-ethnic struggles. Since Ghana's independence period, Bikpakpaam communities have turned to formal education, agricultural acumen, migration, and armed conflict, as tools to evade domination and negotiate their disadvantage.

Most anthropological studies of the Bikpakpaam focused on communities residing in Kikpakpaaŋ, their 'new' homeland, and not on migrant farming populations living in the diaspora (see for example Tait 1964 and Dawson 2000). Consequently, these ethnographic

accounts document Bikpakpaam traditions and culture history, often comparing them to the centralised chiefdoms that flank them. Reading these accounts, however, I noticed that the deep spiritual connections to Land are mirrored by the communities I visited even though they can be described as living 'off' territory. The earliest known ethnographic studies were by Jean-Claude Froelich, a colonial anthropologist who worked in West African colonies including Cameroon and the French Togoland. He was commissioned to study the Bikpakpaam and supplemented his records from oral sources with those collected by H.A. Blair. His first notes were translated from French and used extensively in David Tait's work in the 1950s. Tait was contracted by the British colonial administration to study the Bikpakpaam because their acephalous political organization did not align very well with the British system of indirect rule. Moreover, Kikpakpaaŋ territory covered an area that included both British and French claims, making the region that much more difficult to govern. Tait lived among Bikpakpaam settlements from September 1950 to January 1952 and subsequently embarked on short term trips annually between 1952 and 1955. David Tait's work among the Bikpakpaam was published posthumously by Jack Goody after his untimely death in a motor accident in April 1956. In the aftermath of the Konkomba-Nanumba war of 1994, Allan Dawson (2000) also conducted ethnographic studies among the Bikpakpaam to understand the cultural and historical factors that shaped their role in the conflict.

These ethnographic accounts closely documented the local lifeways of the Bikpakpaam and how their cultural beliefs and practices should be distinguished from other ethnic communities in northern Ghana. Their work focused on the intricacies of lineage structures, marriage practices, domestic configurations, ritual institutions, funerary practices, amongst others. Without explicitly engaging with debates around the concept, these studies routinely refer to the Bikpakpaam as indigenous and offer ethnographic and historical data

that conform to global criteria around indigeneity. However, in reading their work, my interest was most piqued by their analyses of Bikpakpaam ideas around territoriality and autochthony as well as how this ultimately played a key role in their attempts at challenging their marginal status in Ghanaian society.

In his records, Tait referred to the Bikpakpaam 'clan' as their largest unit of political organization and the 'district' as the territorial section occupied by one or more lineages (or descent groups). Each clan also exists in a unique relationship to the land they inhabit through their earth shrine. Spiritual and political leadership of the clan is embodied in the *Utindaan* (Earth priest) and the *Uninkpel* (elder) respectively. I also noted Tait's estimate that the southwards Bikpakpaam migration to areas like Krachi must have occurred no more than 15 years before his interactions with those residing in Kikpakpaaŋ, placing the founding of the first Bikpakpaam settlements in Krachi to the mid-1930s. His work mentions several clans I had the privilege of living amongst in Krachi West district including the 'Kutsha' (Kucha), the 'Tshabob' (Chabɔb), and the 'Saangul' (Sanguul) clans. Tait also expressed a keen desire he was ultimately never able to fulfill: to study diasporic Bikpakpaam with a view to observe how the dynamic of migration would stimulate social change and shape their inter/intra ethnic relations (Tait 1964:30-1).

The role of earth shrines in Konkomba cosmology was the focus of Henryk Zimoń's fieldwork in the 1980s and 90s. Zimoń (2003) details the beliefs and practices associated with Bikpakpaam cosmology and explains how they relate to Land as a female deity, *Kitiŋ*, who partners with the sky deity, *Uwummbɔr,* to preserve and nourish the earth. *Kitiŋ* also manifests through other earth spirits to protect their clans (see also Froelich 1963). They worship and communicate with these ancestral spirits through the Earth shrines; usually revered baobabs, groves, or other such naturally occurring features (Dawson 2009). Earth

shrines express the sacred connection between clan members and the area in which they reside and farm. Zimoń (2003:432) argues that after the Bikpakpaam were forced off their land by the Dagomba in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they moved further east to Kikpakpaaŋ. Permanent clan settlements in this new homeland are marked with Earth shrines. From observations of clan members visiting from areas like Krachi and Salaga to make offerings at Kikpakpaaŋ earth shrines, Zimoń guesses that Konkomba migrant settlements in diasporic regions are unlikely to have earth shrines.

Arguably, Bikpakpaam conception of their claim to land and territory is most clearly seen in their participation in some of Ghana's most gruesome conflicts. They sought to re-negotiate their political status and autonomy in the country through several bloody struggles, the most extended of which were in 1981 and 1994 respectively. The Bikpakpaam wanted to re-assert their claims to unique ethnic identity, political autonomy, and a sense of belonging in the independent Ghanaian state by challenging centralized neighbours who had forced them to the fringes. Instead, these encounters have exacerbated the prejudicial view of the Bikpakpaam as 'ungrateful settlers' and 'violent strangers' (Dawson 2000). Their actions have popularized in the Ghanaian imaginary the idea of the Bikpakpaam as a mobile band of unsophisticated, poorly educated, violent tribesmen—the very anti-thesis of the peace-loving Ghanaian. Dawson argues that transformations in the second half of the 20th century united a group of autonomous clans and helped to reinforce their shared commitment to land. This, in his view, explains their resolve in resisting those who attempted to question their claims to autochthony and rights to territory.

In more recent work, Dawson (2009; 2017) argues that the dominant idea that nationhood is somehow linked with geographical territory, exemplified especially through the boundaries imposed by colonial and post-colonial administrations, in many ways

conflicts with conceptions of territoriality expressed by acephalous pioneer groups like the Bikpakpaam. He explains that their idea of territory as 'flexible', 'constantly changing', and embodied in 'earth shrines' captures the essence of the group's relationship to the Land and accommodates their mobile lifestyles. Dawson emphasizes that Bikpakpaam ritual veneration of an earth deity and the passion for intensive agriculture is central to their understanding of identity. Consequently, for the Bikpakpaam person, 'our land' is neither an abstract idea of sovereign state territory nor a region under the control of a paramount in whom centralised power over that jurisdiction is located. Rather, 'our land' is a reference to an area to which there is a deep spiritual connection through shrines, clan lineages, and farmlands.

In the proceeding paragraphs I flesh out five aspects of Bikpakpaam history and lifeways that outline their efforts at challenging their marginalisation. Interestingly, these historical accounts demonstrate how the Bikpakpaam simultaneously reaffirm and resist dominant categorisations of indigenousness. One theme, however, is evident; the Bikpakpaam have consistently struggled to be included and recognized as having legitimate claims to land.

4.6.1: Making home on the Fringes

In the 15th century, the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba, and Gonja peoples entered the region as Sudanic horse-riding warriors. Historian Cliff Maasole (2006) draws from early Arabic scripts, colonial records, and oral tradition to distinguish between the non-centralised natives of Northern Ghana and these monocephalous newcomers. They established what Maasole (2006:95) describes as 'loose confederacies' of semi-autonomous chiefdoms who pledged their allegiance to powerful paramounts. The Dagbon 'kingdom' is ruled by the '*Ya Na*' who is based at Yendi; the Mamprugu kingdom by the '*Nayiri*' based in Nalerigu; the Nanun

kingdom by the *'Bimbilla-Na'* based in Bimbilla; and the Gonja kingdom by the '*Yagbunwura'* based in Damongo. These paramounts ruled as kings believed to possess spiritual powers and, unlike their sub-chiefs, could not be 'de-skinned'[3] once installed.

With more advanced weaponry, superior military strategies, and fearsome horses, the centralised newcomers intimidated the region's autochthones into surrender. Groups like the Bikpakpaam offered little resistance and were soon forced to move eastwards and southwards, into the margins of the region. Beyond this, Bikpakpaam villages were regularly raided by the Dagombas, Mamprusi, and Gonja who were paying annual debts of up to 2000 slaves to the Asante kingdom further south. This practice of raiding reduced significantly after the British invasion of the Asante and the capture of Kumasi (the capital of the Asante kingdom) in 1874 (Kachim 2018). The Bikpakpaam, however, continued to pay tribute especially to the Dagomba in different forms including game animals from their hunts, fish caught from the Volta-Oti River, crops from every harvest, as well as farm labour (Maasole 2006:108).

The Bikpakpaam have been living on the margins since the arrival of their centralised neighbours, but they have consistently challenged discourses that resign them to a subordinate status and deny their land rights. The choice of the Oti River plain as an 'alternative' homeland was not only because it was excellent for cultivating staples. The marshy terrain, especially during the rainy season, discouraged the incursions of Dagomba horseback raiders. The Oti River also served as a natural boundary separating British 'territory' on the West from German (and later French) Togoland. Evidently, the Bikpakpaam

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[3] In Ghana, and many parts of Africa, chiefs are said to be 'enstooled' when installed into office because many ethnic groups use a seat known as the 'chieftaincy stool' to symbolize the authority of the traditional ruler. The Dagbon and Gonja kingdoms, however, refer to their paramount's seat as a 'skin' and the process of installation as 'enskinning'.

settled on the fringes to escape assimilation and domination from both local and foreign aggressors (Kachim 2018:5; Maasole, 2006:81; Talton, 2010:17).

4.6.2: Schooled Youth Associations & Struggles for Political Representation

In the late 1940s, a small-group of Western-educated Bikpakpaam leaders advocated ethnic political consciousness and mobilized the fractured band of feuding clans to challenge their subordinate status. Their meetings, originally held at Yendi Primary School, begun as study sessions to rehearse their local language and cultural practices, but quickly turned into a formal platform for discussing how they could promote the welfare of their people and be catalysts of an ethnic resurgence (Talton 2010:114-123). These student-led meetings were pivotal in de-emphasizing 'subclan identities', while galvanizing Bikpakpaam youth around a shared ideal of belonging as well as a strong unease about their minority status. Some of the first generation of schooled Konkomba youth included Yao Wumbei, Nakoja Namuel, and Daniel Neina Jobor. In 1951, Yao Wumbei was dispatched by the colonial administration to open the Saboba Primary School, the first primary school in Kikpakpaaŋ. Nakoja Namuel and Daniel Neina Jobor joined him three years later as teachers. Together, they toured the hamlets and villages in the district to recruit more Bikpakpaam students. These teachers begun to hold meetings which spawned into a civic organization they named the Konkomba Improvement Association (KIA). The KIA also became the parent organization for the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA), an ethnic lobby that was central to Bikpakpaam politics on the national scene in the 1980s and 90s. The goal of KIA was three-fold; to promote ethnic unity by putting an end to feuds amongst sub-clans, facilitate a change in marriage practices, and promote Western education.

Like many of the other ethnic groups of Northern Ghana, the Bikpakpaam were initially sceptical of European-style schooling. Prior to the efforts of the KIA, Konkomba

clans were hesitant to allow their boys to go to school and education of girls was completely off the table. Schooling was viewed as a colonial tool to transform the soil-loving native boy into a docile European servant. Drawing from archival records, Talton recounts the experience of Mr. J.A. Kaleem, the Yendi Native Authority Primary School head teacher in 1945. After pressure from the colonial administration to be more aggressive in his recruitment, Mr. Kaleem invited a group of Bikpakpaam elders (*bininkpiib*) for a tour of the school's facilities in the hope that he could convince them to allow their children to attend the school. After the tour, one elder spoke on behalf of the group:

> We admit that the school is a good place, a home of wisdom where people can be taught how to think and act like 'white people'…. We are inclined to think that such a soft life will weaken the strong blood of our children, and they will become soft like women…. we believe in hard work, with streaming brows of sweat, nothing passive. Perhaps if our children are brought up in a way which is not befitting to our tribe and heritage, they will in the end, shirk to labour and moreover will be dissatisfied and uncontented with their home-lives, and will wander about seeking easy-lives abroad, in foreign countries and towns. And how can we account for this before our grandfathers, when we die to meet them in the underworld (p. 113).

However, in response to the groundwork of the KIA and the Assemblies of God mission in the mid-1950s[4], the attitude of the Bikpakpaam to Western education radically changed. They became one of the first ethnic groups in the Northern Territory to embrace mass schooling; this shift was directly linked to a desire to contest their subjugated political

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[4] Assemblies of God missionaries from the US established a clinic in Saboba and encouraged Konkomba children to go to school and become teachers and nurses. Their goal was to ensure that the mission was fully operated by indigenes within the shortest possible time.

position (Talton 2010:114). By the time of Ghana's independence in 1957 and Kwame Nkrumah's installation as the nation's first Prime Minister, the KIA had successfully worked with traditional leaders to develop a unified front as part of their intentions to contest their political marginalization.

4.6.3: Farming and Territoriality

The acephalous and non-centralized form of political organization that traditionally characterizes the Bikpakpaam has contributed to numerous contentions over land. Since colonial times, territoriality in the sub-region, especially in Northern Ghana, has been determined by the presence and influence of chiefs and paramounts. As Dawson (2017:167) explains, societies in Ghana without representation on the national house of chiefs will find it virtually impossible to clearly 'define where their ethnic territory exists'. With the Bikpakpaam historically resisting centralized political authority, their claims to ancestral lands have been repeatedly challenged. Although there is much ethnographic and archaeological evidence that supports the view that they are autochthonous to regions of northern Ghana now occupied by their Mole-Dagbani neighbours[5] (Talton 2010; Kachim 2019), they have been historically marginalized and treated as recent visitors and itinerant farmers claiming rights to land that they ought not to claim (Kachim 2018). For instance, throughout the 1930s, the Dagomba chiefdom (backed by the British colonial administration) demanded that the Bikpakpaam recognize the authority of their paramounts, exacted various forms of taxes, and raided Konkomba communities with abandon (Dawson 2017:170-171; Kachim 2018:84-96).

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[5] Primarily the Gonja, Dagomba, Nanumba, and Mamprusi chiefdoms.

Despite the largely unresolved questions about Bikpakpaam claims to ancestral territory, arable land remains central to their ontology. For many West African societies generally, and the northern ethnicities of Ghana more specifically (Manoukian 1951), the earth is a vital symbol of spirituality, fertility, and identity (Dawson 2000; 2009). For the Bikpakpaam, Allan Dawson describes connection to arable land in this way:

> For the Konkomba, life revolves around the earth and its cultivation. Consequently, Konkomba religious life on the physical plane is focused on the earth to the exclusion of almost all else. (2000:86)

Bikpakpaam veneration of the earth is expressed in their spiritual beliefs, social life, and subsistence as intertwined aspects of their ontology. That is, Bikpakpaam worldview is grounded in the centrality of Land, and this is expressed in several aspects of their culture. For example, Zimoń (2003:423) mentions that adultery, incest, or any other sexual misdemeanour among them on 'uncultivated land' defiles the Earth, invokes the wrath of the gods, and leads to the infertility of the earth as well as the ceasing of rains. Guilty parties must be punished with flogging and animal sacrifices made by the Earth priest before the gods will be appeased and the consequences of the abomination reversed.

Froelich (1963:150) and Tait (1964) explain that Bikpakpaam political organization is linked to their reverence for the land. Perhaps the most influential individual in their society is the *Utindaan* or Earth priest, also known as the Earth-chief. This is a man in each clan whose lineage can be traced directly to the first inhabitant or 'owner' of the land. The Earth priest 'communes' with the Earth 'goddess' *Kitiŋ* and all other spiritual forces (all of whom are believed to reside in the ground) through the Earth shrine which is also believed to be a spirit; the *Litingbanl*. The Earth shrine houses the spiritual essence of the clan and is the strongest symbol of territoriality and claims to land (Dawson 2017). Some clans have two

major lineages and therefore two main leaders. While the earth priest descends from one line, the second lineage produces a second leader known as the *Uninkpel,* who is the 'clan elder' or the 'head of the clan'. The clan elder is said to be a descendant of the man who accompanied and assisted the first owner of the land. The Earth priest functions as the religious, political, and practical leader for the community and their duties are summarized by Zimoń in this way;

> The power and the ritual functions of the Earth priest follow from the fact of his being a descendant of the first inhabitant of a given territory and from the acceptance of the Earth spirit. The Earth priest is obliged to make offerings to the Earth spirit in order to secure the latter's favour and blessing for all the members of the community. He is also responsible for the performance of rituals connected with the sowing and the harvest, when he asks the Earth for rain and good crops and when he offers thanks for yields and prosperity…. In the segmentary society of the Konkomba there is no place for [a more formal] institution of political leadership. The elders make all the decisions and the Earth priest together with the head of the major lineage…enjoy the greatest authority among them. (2003:424-425)

The ethnographic evidence therefore demonstrates that the Bikpakpaam have a strong spiritual and practical attachment to territory. In fact, land and place is evidently central to Konkomba ontology and analyses of varied aspects of their lifeways will invariably reflect this attachment. In chapter seven I return to Konkomba connectedness to arable land and demonstrate from my fieldwork among migrant communities how this spiritual relationship is replicated and perpetuated even in regions that cannot be considered as part of their ancestral territory or 'homeland.'

4.6.4: Agriculture-led Migration as Strategy

Scholarship on indigenous peoples often emphasizes their connection to place and their claims to territory. The Bikpakpaam are a people whose identity has been forged through marginalization, and consequently migration has become a core characteristic of being Bikpakpaam. In the past, both in colonial and post-colonial times, their 'lack' of territory and centralized political leadership required that they adopt agriculture-led migration as a strategy to access the fertile lands and escape the control of their powerful neighbours. Today, migration remains a strategy even for a section of schooled youth who seek opportunities afforded by working the land. These young people use income generated from the sale of their agricultural labour or of crops like yam to access educational and economic capital that may not have been available to them back at home. The Konkomba of Krachi express a deep attachment to land, not only as a bounded geographical territory, but as a spiritual essence from which all other aspects of life emanate.

The Bikpakpaam have long been documented as agrarians whose high mobility and interactions with neighbours has been greatly determined by the extent of their access to arable land (Tait 1961/2018; Dawson 2000; Maasole 2006). On one hand, their movement has deepened their marginalization because they continue to be visitors living off the beneficence of various hosts wherever they have settled. On the other hand, however, it has been argued that their pursuit of lands for intensive agriculture has shaped their identity and has been key to their strategy of defying the control of the state as well as dominant ethnic groups in the Oti River basin (Kachim 2018). Bikpakpaam migration has contributed to their emergence as a formidable ethnonationalist bloc in Ghana by creating the opportunity for these skilled cultivators, widely stereotyped as 'backward', 'unsophisticated', and 'violence-

prone' (Dawson 2017), to exchange agricultural acumen for economic, educational, and political capital in contemporary Ghana.

Labour migration towards greener economic pastures is a common phenomenon worldwide. What differentiates the kind of movement observed in Ghana and many other areas of sub-Saharan Africa is that beyond the typical rural-urban migration, there is increasing flow of agriculturists from one rural area to another in search of more arable lands (Van der Geest, Vrieling, and Dietz 2010; Kuuire et al. 2016). This kind of migration, though quite under-researched, has been found to involve farmers who are escaping harsh environments as well as economic hardship for more fertile areas where they can settle permanently (Baada, Baruah, and Luginaah 2021). Bikpakpaam migrant communities in Krachi and other parts of the Oti River basin were formed as individuals who had come from more northern parts of the country, began to invite family and clan members to join them to farm on the land of their hospitable Krachi hosts. As the agricultural migrants of Bommoden increased and competition for land became fierce, some second and third generation migrants began to move to other areas, especially Ewe-speaking towns further south in search of better opportunities to farm. In many instances, these migrants become 'itinerant farmers' helping locals in their farms. Kuuire et al. (2016:484) in their work identify these casual hired laborers as 'by-day boys' who move in farming bands that range from two to ten members; they are often considered an 'underclass' even in the rural communities in which they work.

Although some studies show that agriculture-led migration is a key characteristic of Bikpakpaam lifeways (Kachim 2018; 2019), few have traced the origins and development of said mobility. The dominant narrative in the literature on their movement begins with how they were dis-possessed from their ancestral homelands in what is now Nanumba, Gonja and Dagomba territory. These powerful chiefdoms claim to have conquered them even though

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the ethnographic and archaeological records show a situation which was more of a gradual eastwards and southwards Konkomba movement away from their neighbours (Talton 2010; Kachim 2019). During the colonial governance of the British, the territorial dominance of centralized states was reinforced and chief-less societies like the Bikpakpaam were further marginalized as the colonial administration adopted a system of indirect rule which only recognized ethnic groups with chiefs and paramounts. In post-colonial Ghana, the Bikpakpaam have been constitutionally excluded on the basis that they have no representation on the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs.

Kachim (2018:204) challenges the view that intimates that Bikpakpaam marginality and characteristic mobility was imposed by their centralised northern neighbours and by state authorities, colonial and post-colonial. He argues rather that their mobility, usually involving settlement on the peripheries of organized chiefdoms, was a strategy to preserve their autonomy until the late 1950s. They progressively abandoned this way of life in later years as regional socio-political and economic conditions as well as rapidly diminishing access to land in Ghana necessitated that they resort to more permanent settlements and contend for their rights to territory.

The worsening ecological situation in northern Ghana (C. S. Maasole 2006; Talton 2010), and the growing populations of the Dagomba with attendant attempts to increase control over the Bikpakpaam, led to the southwards migration of many. Several migrant settlements appeared in the area that is now Ghana's Oti Region (Kachim 2018:83-111). Their movement invariably consigned them to a lower class of 'migrants' and 'strangers' among their hosts and reinforced the now nationwide stereotype of Konkombas as itinerant farmers. Despite this, Konkomba agricultural dominance in more recent times through their production of food staples has contributed to an ethnic resurgence. According to Kachim,

from the 1960s onwards, Konkombas in Krachi were using their newly acquired wealth from yam farming to obtain chieftaincy titles and negotiate with their indigenous hosts for greater autonomy and rights to land (2018:209).

Agriculture-led migration is still a favoured strategy of the Bikpakpaam, albeit not as a mass ethnic exodus with a view of evading the control of state and regional actors. Several young people I met while on the field are still moving in search of agricultural opportunities that hold the keys to greater financial security, educational advancement, and eventually upward social mobility. Again, their current position as a migrant 'underclass' is being endured as a temporary sacrifice with a view to access future social and economic benefits that may otherwise not have been available to them in their original homes.

4.6.5: Armed Conflict

Especially from the second half of the 20th century onwards, the Bikpakpaam actively challenged their marginalized position through cultural changes and political action. In 1981 and 1994, this assertion of power culminated in full-blown armed conflict with some of their centralised neighbours (i.e. the Nanumba, Dagomba, and Gonja). At the centre of these inter-ethnic disagreements was the Bikpakpaam desire for autonomy, recognition, and political representation at the highest levels. For the Nanumba, Gonja, or Dagomba, the fear of losing their de jure control over territory was sufficient motivation. Sadly, several bloody clashes have occurred between the Bikpakpaam and these chiefly societies over the past 40 years or so, but I will briefly summarize the events leading up to the two key periods of struggle that claimed the most lives.

The creation of the first Bikpakpaam-led administrative district by the new Ghanaian state was an important moment in the ethnic group's struggle for political autonomy and recognition. In 1963, Kwame Nkrumah, who had become president in 1960,

carved out the Saboba district and appointed a Bikpakpaam-dominated local council to oversee development in this new district. By 1966, however, Nkrumah was overthrown by the National Liberation Council (NLC) and the Saboba district was merged with Zabzugu district. With a population of at least 30,000, Saboba was twice the size of Zabzugu and the Bikpakpaam outnumbered Dagombas in both towns. Despite this, 9 Dagombas were appointed to sit on the joint local council and only 2 appointees represented the Bikpakpaam of these two areas. Worse, the headquarters of the joint district was set up in Zabzugu and not Saboba though by this time Saboba had 17 primary schools, a secondary school, a police station, and other government offices, while Zabzugu had none of this infrastructure. The Bikpakpaam were furious and begun to petition the central government for more equal representation. These appeals were, however, never really heeded right into Ghana's 2nd Republic when Kofi Busia was elected as president.

In 1971, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Ghana's then Prime Minister, introduced the Chieftaincy Act (Act 370) which created the National (and Regional) House of Chiefs. This instrument only recognized societies with chiefs and empowered paramount chiefs to be the only means through which 'new chiefs' could be installed and recognized. In 1979, Hilla Limann was elected as Ghana's 3rd President. He introduced land reforms that transferred lands in the Northern Territory to recognized chiefs. Through this act, land that had been occupied by chief-less societies like the Bikpakpaam legally became part of the territory of the neighbouring chief. Consequently, Dagbon's Ya Na assumed control over Kikpakpaaŋ and the entire Oti plain. Talton (2010:132) speculates that this moment in Northern politics, in addition to the worsening soil erosion which had caused some migration since the 1920s, became one of the primary reasons for the mass exodus of the

Bikpakpaam further south to areas like Kpandai, Salaga, and Kete-krachi (now Krachi West District).

In 1979, the Bimbilla branch of the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) pushed back against the longstanding requirement to have their marital cases settled by the Nanumba traditional leader (the Bimbilla Naa). They installed one of their leaders, Ali Kamshegu, as their preferred arbiter in marital disputes. He was the President of the KOYA Bimbilla branch and worked at the Bimbilla High Court (Wienia 2009:56-7).The Bimbilla Naa saw this as a direct affront to his authority and had Ali Kamshegu removed from Bimbilla town. When KOYA responded to this by sending the issue to the Bimbilla High Court invoking their rights to free settlement, members of the Nanumba Youth Association (NAYA) removed all Bikpakpaam youth along with their families from the town. The next day, the Bikpakpaam in Kpassa, a town they dominated and a little over fifty kilometres southeast of Bimbilla, chased out all Nanumbas from the town killing a few of them including chiefs appointed by the Bimbilla Naa. On 21st April 1981, Mamadu Dasana, the son of the Bimbilla Naa, was involved in a brawl with Ali Kamshegu's son, Abukari. Abukari stabbed Mamadu with a knife and although the latter survived, this act initiated about three months of ethnic killings between Nanumbas and the Bikpakpaam in the district. Conservative estimates put the casualties at about 2000, with at least 50,000 people displaced (Wienia, 2009:63). The Bikpakpaam ruthlessly sacked several Nanumba-dominated communities and burnt them to the ground. They surrounded Bimbilla itself but were stopped by a military detachment from Tamale, the regional capital. On 11th July 1981, President Hilla Limann, who along with the Northern Regional minister had been severely criticised for their handling of the tensions, arrived in Bimbilla to 'broker' peace between the two groups. Because the Bimbilla Naa himself had died of natural causes during the conflict, Limann had Mamadu Dasana, who

had been installed as the Bimbilla regent, and Nana Nandi, a prominent Bikpakpaam chief from Krachi, shake hands and promise an end to the bloodshed.

In June 1993, KOYA submitted a petition to the National House of Chiefs for their chief in Saboba (the defacto seat of Kikpakpaaŋ) to be given paramount status. They were instructed to forward the request to the Dagomba paramount or Ya Naa. On receiving the petition in October, Weinia (2009:71) reports that the Ya Naa rejected the request and, in a statement, labelled the Bikpakpaam as "acephalous, nomadic and Togolese." Incidentally the Nanumba Traditional Council was incensed when they were informed about KOYA's petition and relations between the Bikpakpaam, on one hand, and the Nanumba and Dagomba, on the other, became extremely tense. In January 1994, a Nanumba schoolboy killed his Ukpakpaan colleague near Nakpayili (a Bikpakpaam-dominated town about ten kilometres south of Bimbilla). The victim's father then proceeded to kill the Nanumba boy. In February, after a Nanumba man and a Bikpakpaam man quarrelled over a rare and ritually significant guinea fowl at Nakpayili market, the Bikpakpaam man's son traced the Nanumba man to his farm the next day and killed him along with three of his relatives. By the close of February 1994, Nanumbas, Dagombas, and Gonjas had individually declared war on the Bikpakpaam (Brukum 2000:117-8; Weinia, 2009:72). The conflict spread rapidly across northern Ghana claiming at least 2,400 lives and displacing over 150,000 people. The groups only agreed to a ceasefire on 9th June 1994 after the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team was formed and commissioned to negotiate reconciliation between the parties.

4.7: Discussion and Conclusion

In many ways, Ghana's Bikpakpaam represent an indigenous bloc who have gone to excessive lengths to safeguard their autonomy and contest their exclusion. Like many Ghanaian groups, they rarely use the label 'indigenous' (whether in English or in their local

language) and do not attend the meetings of the UN Permanent Forum. But they share many characteristics with other groups in the global indigenous peoples' movement. They self-identify as a people who are pre-colonial, marginalized, culturally different, and embodying a unique relationship with the land upon which they live. Historically, their youth have proven to be passionate about their cultural group and committed to challenging their exclusion. For Africanist scholars calling for the decolonization of schooling, contemporary Bikpakpaam youth should not be subjected to a form of education where the language of instruction is strictly English with no provision for Likpakpaanl, and where math is primarily taught as preparation for careers such as engineering and medicine and not as a crucial part of the intensive yam farming, they have engaged in for centuries.

The Bikpakpaam, together with their acephalous neighbours, have been in Ghana's northern region longer than anyone else and maintain a strong case for territorial autochthony. They have been historically disadvantaged across pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence periods. And they have maintained their cultural heritage and distinct worldview even in diasporic communities. Their relationship with the Land allows them to 'make home' even in locales that fall within the 'territories' of other groups. This is because they exhibit a spiritual connection to the Land not simply as a specific claim to a defined territory but rather as a flexible relationship that accommodates their mobile lifestyles. Also, their youth are not passive recipients of Western-styled schooling but are rather actively embracing the neo-liberal promise of formal education in droves. And many of those churned out through the school system have led the way in unifying Bikpakpaam communities across the sub-region. In the closing stages of the 20th century, this process of political consciousness took a violent emancipatory edge that resulted in bloody conflicts with their centralised neighbours. But violence is not the only way they have challenged the idea of the docile

native; they have also demonstrated economic dominance through the control of food production in Ghana.

Perhaps in imagining viable forms of decolonized schooling that centre the indigenous epistemologies of local populations across the African continent, our understanding of indigeneity needs to expand to include communities whose experiences of coloniality has complicated their places of residence. The inability of Bikpakpaam to reside upon ancestral territory has not diminished their relational attachment to the Land, as well as the fact that this attachment forms a core part of their personhood. As Mahmood Mamdani (2020:328) explains, settler colonial structures birthed the idea of the 'native' and defined the territory assigned to them as part of a wider strategy of indirect rule. In fact, many ethnic communities in Africa were not living as 'territorialized groups' in pre-colonial times, but colonial administrations theorized them as 'products of geography.' He writes:

> To recognize this is to deepen our understanding of the political challenge at independence. It is to acknowledge that the political effect of colonialism was not limited to the loss of external independence…. More importantly colonial governance drew borders inside the colony. These boundaries separated races and created homelands for ethnic groups, turning them into administratively demarcated tribes. (2020:327)

This process also politicized indigeneity and seduced centralized societies that were well-suited to the colonial project into assuming positions of dominance in relation to their non-centralized neighbours. Colonization entrenched skewed power relations between ethnic groups and fixed some societies as perpetual minorities. As I have demonstrated through the case of the Bikpakpaam, the inter-ethnic conflict rife across the African continent throughout the post-independence era can often be traced to these predatory colonial roots.

SECTION III:

ASPIRATIONS

CHAPTER FIVE: 'Looking with both eyes': Navigating Plural Selves through Language, Naming, and Urbanity.

5.1: Introduction

A few months into my fieldwork, I was sitting on a bench with Silas, one of my student participants. Since he was part of the 2020 cohort of final year students, he was frantically preparing for the BECE examinations. I asked how on earth he and his colleagues were combining their exhausting indigenous subsistence activities alongside their studies for the impending papers. Many of them were having to put in longer hours doing farm work because they needed to raise extra money to cover for the costs of the one-week exam period. He paused and then replied with a familiar proverb, one shared by several ethnic groups in Ghana: "It's like looking down the mouth of a bottle but having to do it with both eyes!" By this statement, he was admitting that they were compelled to hold both 'worlds' of school and local lifestyles in tension, and that they went through seasons where you simply needed to choose which 'eye' required your undivided focus and energy.

Scholars and ordinary people sometimes describe lived experiences like that of Silas as moving between "two worlds". These 'worlds' are defined through dualisms: tradition versus modernity, subsistence versus market economies, rural versus urban life, and (importantly for this chapter) Indigenous languages versus English. The two sides of these binaries are rarely seen as equally desirable, and education promises to be a ladder between the two worlds. I have named this reality Silas describes 'the two-worlds conundrum' because it presents a complex dilemma for stakeholders in the education sector. However, exploring the tensions of straddling both worlds has become fundamental to my understanding of rural students' ambivalent accounts on modernity and indigeneity. But this dualism is not only reflected in rural grassroot experiences but also in the accounts of many

Africanist scholars, albeit with differing results. In making sense of this conundrum, I have found Pierre Bourdieu's ideas interesting to think with. In this chapter, I use Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence and power, as well as the divided habitus and other scholars' extensions of these ideas, to flesh out my arguments around Krachi students' negotiation of selves through language, naming, and their participation in urban hustle economies.

Pierre Bourdieu postulated that students whose primary 'home' habitus did not match their secondary 'school' habitus would be subject to internal conflict (Bourdieu 1989; 2008; Sayer 2005). As I will demonstrate, this perspective is very much in accord with the bulk of early African (post-) colonial experience. The wider argument of this thesis, however, is that in contemporary times students' disjointed worlds do not necessarily point to a state of internal turmoil or conflict, rather, the rise of this duality is evidence of their active participation in the project of modernization, and their commitment to schooling as the prime pathway to prosperity. Taken differently, if we are to employ the term 'internal disjuncture' as the presence of separate, fractured, or multiple selves, and 'internal conflict' as the psychological turmoil resulting from the contradiction between those selves, the research participants I engaged offer an example of people who consciously enact the former but not the latter; they are evidence of multiple but unified selves. Further, these participants are emblematic of a wider contemporary ethnoscape of schooled rural (and some urban) youth in Africa who intentionally navigate these plural identities because it is their best chance of creating a better life for themselves and their families (Appadurai 1990; Leavy and Hossain 2014; Sumberg et al. 2014).

So, when Silas speaks of looking into a bottle with both eyes, he hints at constantly having to alternate between plural worlds and selves, but he also highlights his focus on 'one bottle': a unified conception of a future better self for whom the sacrifice of holding a lifestyle

of gruelling crop farming alongside schooling is perceived to be worth the effort. My field experience, therefore, demonstrated that many rural students are actively constructing individualized, aspirational, and modern school selves as additional layers of personhood that exist concurrently with the habitus they acquire from home. This process, however, does not produce splintered personalities, but rather is anchored on a unified conception of a better life. In this chapter I first critically interrogate the manner in which languages are viewed and discuss the insights into how these students negotiate their selves and worlds. Nowhere is the 'two worlds' ideology more visible than in debates around language in school, which is usually framed as a zero-sum game and a choice between local and global meanings. But as we will see, the research from many parts of the world shows this is not true. However, the dualisms of local/global, rural/urban, and home/school clearly frame current debates and help make sense of students' lived experiences. In addition to the issue of language, I explore other means through which rural students construct 'school selves' and manage plural identities, specifically through the actions of assigning themselves English names, as well as moving out of Krachi West district to participate in the urban 'hustle economy.'

5.2: Bourdieu's Divided Habitus and Africanist Experiences of Schooling

The gap between the worlds of home and school, which I will soon discuss, does not only feature in African (post)colonial schooling; it manifests also in European class divides. In the Chapter Three, I briefly outlined Pierre Bourdieu's work around schooling as a social institution that reproduces class inequality. I also introduced habitus and capital as key concepts used extensively throughout his scholarship. In thinking about the construction of 'school selves' among students in rural Ghana, perhaps it is helpful to reflect on the issue of ambivalence in the lived experience of Bourdieu himself. In his *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*

(2004/2008), Bourdieu recounts his upbringing in a small village in Southwestern France as the son of parents who never completed their schooling, and the grandson of a sharecropper. Though he spent his childhood in the rural area, he was afforded the opportunity to attend the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris, was trained in philosophy, and rose through the ranks of French academia to become the Chair of Sociology at the Collège de France. But schooling always made Bourdieu conscious of his 'otherness' and reminded him that his home accent, dressing, and ways of thinking were different to what was expected from someone in the elite school system (Reed-Danahay 2004:91-92). Bourdieu's self-analysis pointed to an internal division between his humble background and his academic status creating what he termed 'habitus clivé' (a cleft/divided habitus). In his book, *The Algerians*, Bourdieu eloquently describes this divided habitus in the experience of young Algerian men:

> This man, cast between two worlds and rejected by both, lives a sort of double inner life, is a prey to frustration and inner conflict, with the result that he is constantly being tempted to adopt either an attitude of uneasy overidentification or one of rebellious negativism (1962:144).

Habitus clivé occurs when there is a 'mismatch' between a person's primary habitus and the habitus created through engagement with a new social field. Bourdieu argues that the resulting condition of the person is one of constant psychological and existential distress.

Arguably, Bourdieu's greatest contribution to the development of habitus as a concept is in theorizing it as embodying the dialectical structure-agency relationship. The concept did not actually originate with Bourdieu but in Aristotle's idea of *hexis*. It was then translated into Latin as *habitus* by Thomas Aquinas, and used by various sociologists throughout the 20th century including Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Edmund Husserl (Hadas 2022). But about Bourdieu's habitus Loïc Wacquant (2016:65) writes:

In his hands, habitus is a *mediating construct* that helps us revoke the common-sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality', that is, the ways in which the sociosymbolic structures of society become deposited inside persons in the form of lasting *dispositions*, or trained capacities and patterned propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways, which in turn guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu.

Bourdieu proposed "a constant interaction between structure and agency where both reside in the habitus forming and reforming in constant internal negotiation" (Stahl 2020:70). A person's set of dispositions, therefore, are shaped by the social world, but they also contribute to constructing that world through the individual's everyday decisions; so, "habitus helps to determine [that which] transforms it" (Bourdieu 2000:122).

Wacquant (2016) also offers a few clarifications around Bourdieu's understanding of habitus. First, it is multi-layered and dynamic such that one's experiences and influences across different social environments (including the field of schooling) successively 'graft' onto each other as 'layers of disposition' that in turn determines a person's choices and actions at any given time. Second, habitus is often not coherent or unified. For many people, their layers of disposition are integrated and work well together, but others can find that they are internally 'divided', 'splintered', and 'unstable'. For example, in an ethnography of working-class students who were rapidly advancing through the French education system and attempting to adopt the dispositions of the elite, Bourdieu notes that they were experiencing painful fragmentation; they felt simultaneously isolated from their original working-class community as well as the upper class they were struggling to be a part of (Bourdieu 1996). Third, the concept is not only helpful in analysing social situations in which

there is cohesion but also for situations of crisis and change. Individuals and groups can be so disconnected from their social milieu that they resort to resistance and demand structural transformation. Finally, habitus does not unilaterally generate action but is 'triggered' by the worlds and fields within which it functions.

In a manner that vividly exemplifies Bourdieu's concept of a divided habitus, several Africanist scholars lament their own experiences of being schooled in a language, knowledge system, value-system, and worldview that is radically different from the world of their ancestral home. As part of his seminal paper, "Does the Negroe Need Separate Schools?", W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) argued that the form of education that black Americans were subjected to was completely devoid of their background, history, and accomplishments. In his polemic, Du Bois even called out some of the most prestigious educational institutions in the United States:

I speak from experience, because I came to Atlanta University to teach history in 1897, without the slightest idea from my Harvard tuition, that Negroes ever had any history! (1935:335)

In his view, this systemic exclusion of African Americans rested on the false belief that the black race had nothing worth imparting through mainstream schooling.

Beyond the experience of Africa's heritage being marginalized in the classroom, other Africanists point to their schooling as a traumatic journey in which the world of school gradually swallowed up their concept of home and their sense of belonging. They argue that universalized forms of schooling are producing in African students a coerced construction of new selves and worlds that are detached from their indigenous upbringing. Ghana's former Prime Minister, Prof. Kofi Abrefa Busia, opened his book *Purposeful Education for Africa* in this way:

At the end of my first year at secondary school…I went home to Wenchi for the Christmas vacation. I had not been home for four years and on that visit, I became painfully aware of my isolation. I understood our community far less than the boys of my own age who had never been to school. I felt I did not belong to it as much as they did. It was a traumatic experience…. Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe, and less and less about my own society. (Busia 1964/2023:7)

In the wake of the African independence movements of the mid-twentieth century, several post-colonial governments sought to address this problem of African children schooled in European lifeways. Unfortunately, over the decades that followed, schooling continued to detach learners from their ancestry.

Ladislaus Semali's (1999/2011) account of growing up in a Chagga community on Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro paints a vivid picture of colonized classrooms in post-colonial times. Semali's account also underscores the centrality of mother-tongue use in formal education. That is, the 'traumatic experience' being disconnected from one's culture and planted in a new world is often marked by a switch in languages. Semali speaks of home as represented in night-time storytelling, witty proverbs, colourful singing, and valuable life lessons, all imparted through the rich Kichagga language. When he was introduced to formal education, however, it meant switching between worlds:

Then, I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture…. My struggle began at a very early age constantly trying to find parallels in my culture with what was being taught in the classroom…. We read stories and sung songs about having tea in an English garden, taking a ride on the train, sailing in the open seas, and walking the

streets of town. These were, unfortunately, stories far removed from our life experiences. As expected, we memorized them even though they were meaningless…. Kichagga was not to be spoken at any time and if caught speaking it we were severely punished. [pp. 9]

Semali argues that the underlying ideologies of the school curriculum necessitate that a Chagga child must learn two parallel sets of worldviews, epistemologies, and 'consciousnesses' (2011:12-13).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986/2011:11-12) also recounts childhood memories of being part of a large peasant family as well as a wider Bantu community in Kenya. He remembers using Gĩkũyũ at home, in the fields, and around the fireside, especially when listening to or re-telling stories that emphasized values such as co-operation, wit, courage, kindness, and concern for others. Soon after starting school, however, he discovered that speaking Gĩkũyũ in that environment would result in some form of corporal punishment. Worse, fellow indigenous students were the ones turned into 'witch-hunters' to single out those flouting the English-only policy. Conversely, one's aptitude in English was heavily rewarded with prizes, applause, and rapid advancement up the formal education ladder.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has since adopted a defiant anti-imperialist stance against the dominance of European languages in African schooling and literature. He defends the use of Gĩkũyũ in much of his writing in this way:

Berlin of 1884[6] was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The

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[6] The Berlin Conference of 1884-5 was held to legitimize and regulate colonial interests on the African continent. Although 14 countries were represented, Great Britain, Germany, France,

physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom…. In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation [and] language was the means of the spiritual subjugation. (1986:9)

In this statement he highlights the undeniable relationship between coloniality and language use in African schooling. He also presents the substitution of local languages for European ones as a form of 'psychological', 'spiritual', and in Bourdieusian terms, 'symbolic' violence. As part of his work, Thiong'o argues that language is a vehicle of culture; it encapsulates the values, history, and intimate secrets of a community. More than this, culture and language are so linked that even as culture creates language, language in turn creates culture. For Thiong'o, the way in which African schooling replaces powerful local symbols, concepts, names, and characters (such as those passed on through inter-generational storytelling) with European ones "[takes] us further and further from our*selves* to other *selves*, [and] from our *world* to other *worlds*" (1986:12; emphasis added).

When Africanist scholars like Ladislaus Semali and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o highlight their experiences of linguistic domination as epitomizing the continued coloniality of African schooling, they serve as powerful illustrations of Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on language as symbolic power and violence. In the book *Language as Symbolic Power,* Bourdieu (1991) argues that language is not only a means of communicating ideas but also a medium of exercising power. People use language not only to be understood but also to ensure that they and their culture is valued, respected, and deferred to. They create perspectives and beliefs

Portugal, and Belgium emerged as maintaining formal control over territories on the continent. The Berlin Conference was pivotal in European powers' scramble for Africa and, for many historians, has come to represent the single most defining moment in the wholesale partitioning of the continent for colonial purposes (Albert Adu Boahen 1987; Chamberlain 2013).

of the world that become dominant and compel others to act in particular ways (Goke-Pariola 1993; Kramsch 2020). Further, the power of language can be described as symbolic because it is subtle, and users are often not conscious of its effects. In the words of Bourdieu:

> Symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it (1991:164).

Language often presents itself as natural, but it is society that gives it meaning. It is rendered legitimate or 'official' through social structures of power (Kramsch 2020). Although certain social groups whose interests are served by a particular language are the ones who usually initiate the process of legitimizing that language, the entire process itself is far from unilateral, and the 'dominated' groups are not passive (Bourdieu 1991:23). Often, those who are most adversely affected by the dominance of a language are those who are actively participating in its oppressive use.

A country's school system is a crucial way through which the power of language becomes institutionalised. When, through schooling, certain languages are deliberately selected over others, a hierarchization of languages is created and linguistic domination begins to characterize the school system (Zsiga, Tlale Boyer, and Kramer 2014; Kiramba 2018). Bourdieu describes the relations of domination between languages and within interpersonal relationships as 'symbolic violence'. Here, the domination being experienced is subtle, concealed, and accepted. Those subject to this form of 'linguistic violence' find themselves complicit in a system that relegates their mother-tongues in favour of 'promising' global languages. Across the African continent, national school curricula have aided in the hegemony of European languages like English, French, and Portuguese, and electorates have internalized a shared belief that these languages are fundamentally more valuable than their

own (Goke-Pariola 1993:224). This condition has meant that, even though many African countries are multi-lingual, education-sector lawmakers, bureaucrats, teachers, parents, and students are all very reluctant to embrace multilingual classrooms that mainstream indigenous languages (Kiramba 2014; 2018). Consequently, African students continue to prioritize proficiency in languages like English even if it means sacrificing competence in their own mother-tongues.

Clearly, Bourdieu's ideas around how the school's prioritising of certain language forms has detached learners from their indigenous selves articulates well the critical perspectives of the Africanist scholarship. For them, language-use in schooling should not only be approached as a tool for preparing students to communicate effectively in a globalizing world, but also as an issue of being and identity. They bemoan the generational loss of languages and cultural knowledge among many African indigenous communities and see this as a direct result of the privileging of colonial languages in school systems across the continent. The decolonial agenda, therefore, labours at deconstructing the 'ontological and epistemological domination' inherent in school curricula by centring local languages along with their associated lifeways (Dei and McDermott 2019; Dei, Karanja, and Erger 2022:66). But an enduring problem for activists like Ngũgĩ, Semali, and others is the complicity of African publics in the neo-liberal education agenda which, amongst other things, promises to make students proficient in a European language and bring them closer to their goal of a better life. Indigenous peoples acquire skills to function in their local societies as part of their enculturation. But the 're-education' of the school system offers them skills and literacy in a competitive global language so that they can access the better life of a capitalist world.

In the next section, I offer ethnographic evidence on how education-sector stakeholders, parents and students especially, are opting for the sole use of English in

schooling. For them, English is not a language of oppression or domination but one that embodies their highest aspirations. They demonstrate the construction of 'school selves' but they do not talk about those selves as existing in conflict with their 'indigenous selves.' Indeed, Europeanised schooling takes the African pupil to 'other selves' and 'other worlds', but has it really created the painful psychological division that both Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Bourdieu allude to?

5.3: Linguistic Subjects

As part of my participation with Bikpakpaam students in KWD, I sought to understand their perspectives of local language use in schooling. My objectives were three-fold: to gauge the Likpakpaanl literacy levels of my participants, to understand how they viewed the language, and to ascertain whether they wanted an increase in local language use in the classroom. I asked questions like: "Do you speak, read, and/or write in Likpakpaanl?" and "What language would you prefer that your teachers explain the subject material in?" Most of the students I engaged were fluent Likpakpaanl speakers but were very limited in their reading and writing of the language.

A few of them recalled the running of the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) program in their communities between 2017 and 2018. This program was developed to build

local language literacy as a bridge to the sole use of English in mainstream schools. Plan International Ghana had partnered with the Government of Ghana to run the project in rural

Figure 6: CBE Certificate of Completion

communities across Northern Ghana primarily targeting out-of-school children ages 8-16 (Plan International Ghana 2020). It is important to note that in Bommoden some of those who participated in the program were already in school but joined because they wanted to be literate in Likpakpaanl. Later in this chapter, I will explore in greater detail the founding initiative that inspired projects like Plan Ghana's mother-tongue literacy work among communities in Ghana's northern areas.

In my discussions with my participants, I noted the full range of attitudes to teaching and learning in the local language, but I also noticed that all of them were committed to the

idea that schooling would make their lives better. Some students quickly embraced the possibility of more Likpakpaanl use in the classroom:

> Our lessons are in English but when we don't understand anything they explain further in Twi or Likpakpaanl to us. It is rather unfortunate that we only have one teacher who can explain things to us [in our language]. [Faith, JHS2020]

> For me, there was a social studies teacher who explained the lessons in our local dialect and that is when I understood perfectly. In fact, he is the reason some of us became serious with school. [Dominic, JHS2017]

Participants like Dominic and Faith demonstrated the value of local languages as stepping stones to unfamiliar 'worlds.' Yet, out of 29 students in the JHS2020 cohort, only Jonas could fluently read and write in Likpakpaanl. His elder brother, a senior high school graduate, had been recruited and trained to help in running the Plan Ghana CBE program. Jonas seized the opportunity to join the classes and quickly picked up the Likpakpaanl script. Statements like that of Faith and Dominic indicate that local language use is essential to their understanding of lesson content; this sentiment was reiterated by all the students I interviewed and points to the fact that several rural classrooms in Ghana simply do not understand much of what is taught in school (Casely-Hayford et al. 2013). Dominic insisted that the explanations of a Likpakpaanl teacher did not only help him understand the lessons but was also "the reason some of [them] became serious with school."

Yet only one of the seven teachers assigned to the Junior High School classrooms in Bommoden could speak the Bikpakpaam language, the rest were compelled to rely on Twi in explaining lesson content. Twi is Ghana's most dominant and most widely spoken local language. In fact, many view it as the country's unofficial lingua franca. In more southern metropolitan areas like Kumasi and Accra, proficiency in the Twi language is valued in ways

that Likpakpaanl is simply not. Bommoden itself is a largely Bikpakpaam community situated in the traditional area of the Krachi people, a traditional area that has become home to several other ethnic groups. So, these students acquire some competence in the Twi language as a natural consequence of growing up in a migrant community because they understand that effective inter-ethnic relations will require some use of a common language like Twi. So, in the classes I participated in, I witnessed them using the Twi language multiple times to explain concepts the students were simply not able to understand in the English language.

It was no surprise, therefore, that some of my Bikpakpaam interlocutors preferred the use of Twi in the classroom and opposed the thought of lessons delivered in their mother-tongue. Alberta, for example, was adamant that the mainstreaming of Likpakpaanl would be a hindrance to her aspirations of urbanity.

No. Likpakpaanl will not take you anywhere! When you get to Accra [the capital] and you speak it, no one will understand you. [Alberta, JHS2020]

Like many of the young people I engaged, Alberta aspired towards urban living and Likpakpaanl did not represent a language that would facilitate life beyond rural Bikpakpaam communities like Bommoden. She supported the use of Twi in the classroom because it would build her proficiency in the language and allow her to seamlessly integrate into life in the major urban centers.

Beyond the view that Likpakpaanl is not an asset in multi-cultural and metropolitan contexts, it is evident that students do not think it offers the kind of white-collar opportunities that the English language does. For example, one final year student was frank in her ranking of her mother-tongue against the English language:

I will not like it if the teachers teach us in Likpakpaanl because I want to learn how to

speak in English fluently and I don't want any other languages to [affect] my

concentration. [Matilda, JHS2020]

For Matilda, English was her priority and every other language, including her mother-tongue

was an unwanted distraction. Matilda's statement is representative of how many post-colonial

populations approach debates about local language use in schooling. In Ghana, commitment

to one's local language, culture, and identity to the detriment of one's fluency in the English

language, is often associated with illiteracy, rurality, poverty, and to a large extent,

'backwardness.' Parents, guardians, and students, therefore, are often compelled to negotiate

between the importance of cultivating ethnic identity resources on one hand, and the pressure

to prepare for the global knowledge market on the other. Again, those calling for decolonized

schooling are not simply contending with systemic coloniality worked into structures of

schooling, but also with the ways in which the idea of a 'better life' has been accepted by the

public as constituting a neoliberal modernity accessible only through participation in

universalized models of schooling (Shizha 2014).

The fact that Ghanaians are pursuing neoliberal modernities through schooling but at

some level express cultural pride and a commitment to indigenous identity may seem like a

gaping contradiction, but this is part of the crux of this thesis. It is shape-shifting coloniality

lurking in the shadows of globalized neo-liberal market logics that has redefined what counts

as 'relevant education' (Dale and Robertson 2009). It is exploitation wearing the subtle mask

of 'competitive advantage' that has complicated the decision of education-sector stakeholders

concerning the kind of classrooms that should mark African schooling, such that many

increasingly understand this decision as requiring some kind of trade-off between promoting

ethnic identity by encouraging the use of mother-tongues, and access to 'better opportunities' created by the sole use of English in school.

Beyond the vacillation of parents and students, the Ghanaian state also operates in a dualistic ambivalence between global competitiveness and cultural authenticity. Education-sector agencies shuffle between existing to enhance the "capacities of Ghana's human resource…for national development" and "instilling in young Ghanaians a heightened sense of cultural identity" (NaCCA 2020; MoE 2018). In Chapter 1, I briefly discussed the shift in education-sector policy from an Afrocentric vision of education during the independence era to the current brand of universalized schooling that targets producing competitive global citizens. This ambivalence is starkly evident in the formulation and implementation of language-in-education programs. Policymakers demonstrate a keen understanding of the importance of including local languages in students' schooling journeys but are checked by the constant awareness that both their voting public and the wider global economy will judge the quality of Ghanaian schooling, amongst other things, by the English literacy levels of learners.

5.4: Ghana's Language Policy & the Response of the Public

Widely held ideas about the 'superiority' of European languages, coupled with the false assumption that early introduction of English language schooling makes Ghanaian students proficient in English, have hampered efforts of policy makers to introduce local language education into the school system. Over five decades, governments have failed to implement policies on vernacular language education, partially because any move away from English has been unpopular. From 1974 to 2002, children were educated in their local languages until P3 (Year 3) and from P4 they would switch to learning in English. As part of that

curriculum, a Ghanaian language[7] was taught as a standalone subject for about two periods each week at the JHS and SHS levels (equivalent to Australia's Years 7-10 & 11-12). After the elections in 2000, the newly elected government introduced an English-only policy between 2002-2007 that prohibited both students and teachers from using local languages. Policymakers justified this directive by claiming that it would improve the literacy and proficiency of students in the English language. Ghanaian language remained a compulsory standalone subject in JHS and was taught as an optional elective in some senior high schools. After a national education assessment in 2007 demonstrated that only 26% of students in P6 were literate in English, the government u-turned and commissioned work to begin on a curriculum reform that would revert to the use of local languages in the early grades (GoG 2008). The National Literacy Program (NALAP) was rolled out nationwide between 2009-2010 as 'an early-exit bilingual program' that combined a local language with English until P4 before switching to English as the sole MOI. In terms of policy, this program is what currently prevails, however, in practice most schools use only English (A. Anyidoho 2018). That is, teachers predominantly use English to deliver their lessons, and the few that are proficient in the vernacular of the area employ the local language to explain concepts that students are struggling to understand. But before discussing NALAP further and assessing its effectiveness after more than a decade of implementation, it is necessary to understand the public-private partnership program that was arguably the greatest inspiration for NALAP. While the School for Life program considered the broader life context of students and structured learning accordingly, the NALAP program sought to achieve its results without overhauling the Eurocentric modes of schooling the country had inherited.

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[7] some schools gave their students the option of choosing between 2 or 3 local languages.

Private-sector initiatives like the School for Life program running in Ghana's northern regions as well as Plan Ghana's CBE initiative have proven to be more successful in mainstreaming local languages in schooling than programs run by the government. The School for Life's (SfL) Complementary Basic Education (CBE) program is a public-private collaboration to offer tailored schooling opportunities among disadvantaged communities in Ghana. According to Casely-Hayford and Hartwell (2010), SfL itself was born in the early 1990s out of ethnographic studies in some rural areas by the Ghana-Danish Friendship Association. The studies found that it was essential to adjust the school day to accommodate children who needed to go to the farm in the morning to support the economic and nutritional needs of their families. Also, schooling needed to be context-specific and the socio-cultural realities of communities ought to be integrated into the school curriculum.

In 1995, with funding from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), SfL was launched as a tailor-made functional literacy program for rural communities in northern Ghana. The initiative was a nine-month cycle of afternoon classes for children between the ages of 8-14 offered in their respective mother tongues. The objective of these classes was to support the children to join the formal education system by helping them build basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills. Although the training program focused primarily on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, participants who were mainstreamed into the public school system reported that the program helped them develop other competencies such as effective learning strategies, teamwork and collaboration skills, as well as personal confidence and self-efficacy (Akyeampong et al. 2018). SfL started as a pilot scheme in two districts with a total of 100 classes, 50 in each district. By the end of its 2nd phase (1998-2003), SfL was running in 8 districts and serving about 40,000 children. The 3rd phase (2003-2008) added two more districts and 8000 more children. 65% of the

children were being mainstreamed into the formal (government) school system after graduating from SfL. In 2007, the MoE included the SfL strategy in its Education Strategic Plan (ESP) as one approach to addressing the enrolment deficit and bridging the urban-rural gap (Akyeampong, 2009). SfL partnered with the government of Ghana and christened the literacy initiative as the 'Complementary Basic Education' (CBE) program. Currently, SfL has reached 350,000 out-of-school children with over 3,600 facilitators trained and 90% of the learners successfully transitioning into public schooling (www.Schoolforlifegh.org, 2017).

SfL's CBE program has been touted as more effective than other local language-in-education initiatives because it offers students a curriculum that is relevant to their everyday lives (Arkorful 2014). The children learn in small classes (relative to the classes in the formal school system), the hours are adjusted to suit the needs of the community, and the lessons target literacy, numeracy, and life skills through mother-tongue instruction. A key reason why students keep coming to the CBE classes is because the program is not viewed by them as 'going to school', but as a much-needed break from their daily routines of subsistence activities and house-hold chores (Arkorful 2014:73).

NALAP, on the other hand, can be best described as a nationwide bilingual education program that employs local languages at the earliest school grades in a bid to improve English language literacy. It is the successor to similar projects like the Assistance to Teacher Education Project (ASTEP) and the 'Breakthrough to Literacy, Bridge to English' (BTL/BTE) program funded by USAID (Rosekrans, Sherris, and Chatry-Komarek 2012). NALAP aims to gradually usher pupils into English-only schooling by beginning with 90% use of a local language in kindergarten 1. English is then progressively introduced as an additional MOI over students' first 5 years of schooling until it is a 50:50 split in Primary 3.

By Primary 4 lessons are to be carried out solely in the English language (Ansah and Agyeman 2015). After successfully piloting the scheme in Ghana's Ga-West and Mfantseman districts, the Ministry of Education launched it nationwide (Darvas and Balwanz 2014). Within a few years of its implementation, however, the challenges of NALAP were evident. First, NALAP recognizes only 11 out of the 81 local languages in Ghana (Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019). For example, the Likpakpaanl and Krachi languages are not part of the program. Second, surveys conducted among teachers both before and immediately after NALAP was officially launched showed that less than a third of them were fully literate in one of the recognized local languages, and that, many times, a teachers' capacity to facilitate lessons in a community's local language was not taken into account when they were posted to their stations (Seidu, Ayoke, and Tamanja 2008; Leherr 2009). Linked to this, only a small proportion of teachers were trained in bilingual pedagogy (Bronteng, Berson, and Berson 2019). Third, there was inadequate provision of teaching and learning materials in the local languages (Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019). Finally, most urban public schools simply ignored the entire program, and since the policymakers themselves were still on the fence about the need for mother-tongue education, the urban disregard for the policy went unchecked (Anyidoho 2018). NALAP arguably sought to extend the successes of SfL's CBE program nationwide but 12 years after its introduction, it is evident that there is still much to be desired.

Despite the apparent obstacles the implementation of NALAP has faced, a far greater problem has been the overwhelming public rejection of the bilingual education policy. Urban parents in particular have demonstrated a strong aversion to the use of local language-in-education policies in Ghana (Anyidohu and Kropp Dakubu 2008; Anyidoho 2018). The sustained criticism of the program by the voting public has exacerbated the problems of an

initiative that has been crippled from the start. Bronteng, Berson, and Berson (2019) reflect on the public backlash directed towards the 2012-2016 political administration in the aftermath of announcements by the then Minister of Education stating that the government was committed to not only rejuvenating the NALAP initiative, but also making steps towards extending the use of local languages as the primary MOI beyond the early childhood level. The Minister's statements attracted a spate of responses by the Ghanaian populace expressing 'intense negative feelings' about the proposed move through various social media platforms, Op-ed articles, and traditional media outlets. NALAP has remained as poorly implemented as ever, and the intentions of the 2012-2016 coalition to extend education in the mother-tongue beyond the earliest grades was decisively scrapped.

Like many of their counterparts in the sub-region and beyond, the Ghanaian public has consistently demonstrated a strong preference for an English-only education (Bronteng, Berson, and Berson 2019:319-20). In fact, studies show a gradual but sustained 'language shift' in Ghanaian homes that privileges English over native dialects (Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019; Anyidohu and Kropp Dakubu 2008). A key variable mentioned in the literature as having a positive correlation with English-language preference is the level of education of parents. In other words, the longer a parent has advanced through the Ghanaian school system, the more likely they are to insist not only on the use of English at home, but also on an earlier exposure to the language in school. With increasing levels of education in the Ghanaian populace, there is even greater emphasis on the use of English at school and at home. But this does not mean that the less educated are significantly more supportive of local language use in school. In fact, during a study by Sarah Kabay and colleagues, one parent expressed in broken English why the language should be the sole MOI in school: "In our time I do make rough English, so they would be laughing at me … [when] you hear someone speaking

correct English, you [know] he is a bit smarter" (Kabay, Wolf, and Yoshikawa 2017:50). In the next section, I flip this widely held narrative on its head and demonstrate from current research that robust first language and multi-lingual education is in fact a non-zero sum game and not a gamble or a trade-off.

5.5: Scholarship on Multi/bi-lingual Education

Local language literacy programs like School for Life's CBE prove that mother-tongue proficiency can be deployed in a way that is greatly beneficial to pupils' subsequent schooling journeys. There is now consensus amongst most comparative education researchers and scholars from cognate disciplines that bi/multi-lingual education and the mainstreaming of vernacular languages right from the earliest stages of schooling improves learners' language skills more than unilingual education (J. Ball and Smith 2021). In fact, the period 2022-2032 has been declared by UNESCO as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL); this is just one of the many ways the global agency has demonstrated a commitment to promoting indigenous languages and multilingualism for several decades now. In 1951, a meeting was held in Paris to deliberate over how local languages could be incorporated into schooling (UNESCO 1953). It was the view of the 'specialists' from that meeting, and that of UNESCO since, that "education is best carried on through the mother tongue of the pupil" (ibid, 6). Despite the agency's efforts to make the mother tongue the primary language of instruction (LOI) in early childhood and basic education, schooling in dominant international languages is still the norm in many parts of the world. Education-sector policy around multilingualism and the use of indigenous languages in schooling in many parts of Africa, for example, has been fraught with ambiguity. A crucial factor causing reluctance in implementing local language use in the earliest grades of schooling has been the pervasive

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idea that this would negatively affect English language proficiency and limit students'
opportunities in an increasingly globalized world.

Generally, literacy and language proficiency has become pivotal in our understanding
of whether or not students are learning in school (Global Education Monitoring Report 2015;
2018). However, it is often falsely assumed that single-focused early exposure to languages
like English or French in school is the solution to literacy problems, and this has had
disastrous consequences on both pupils' learning in the classroom and their connection to
ethnic identity (Trudell 2010; Trudell and Adger 2014). Students, in fact, learn better when
they are taught in their local languages, and the use of foreign languages right from the
earliest stages of schooling can be a major obstacle in a child's educational development
(Reilly et al. 2022). Lydiah Kiramba (2014), for example, ironically demonstrates from rural
Kenyan classrooms that a crucial part of some endemic problems associated with schooling
in Africa such as rote learning, student disinterest in lessons, as well as late proficiency in
both L1 and L2, is the insistence on the use of English as the primary medium of instruction
(MOI) from the earliest grades.

Beyond this, languages-in-schooling policies across the continent often reinforce
issues of powerlessness and cultural injustice in unmistakable ways. Nkonko
Kamwangamalu (2010) demonstrates that in Africa, languages are employed as currency by
their speakers based on the economic opportunities they offer. Colonial languages like
English, French, and Portuguese that promise openings to global markets are therefore
treasured in various aspects of social life (including educational), while indigenous languages
associated with minority groups have become endangered heritage resources. In South Africa,
for example, the English language in pre/colonial periods was viewed by natives as a form
of domination, categorized as 'they-code', and kept at odds with the familiar 'mother-tongues'

of the home (Kamwangamalu 2007). In 1953, however, after the apartheid government introduced language-in-school policy that would further reinforce segregation and scale back the teaching of English in black schools while promoting the use of Afrikaans (which is essentially creolized Dutch), the Black population heavily resisted the move. The Soweto riots of June 1976, organized in response to the implementation of the 1953 Bantu Education Act, demonstrated a shift in how indigenous South Africans viewed English. It was no longer just the colonizer's language but had also become the language of power; unrivalled in its capacity to create opportunities for its speakers. Ideologically, it had morphed from an imposed 'they-code' to an aspirational 'we-code.' In fact, Kamwangamalu (2007:272-3) records that the stain of exploitative colonialism which should have heavily shrouded the English language was rather placed on Afrikaans because although both represented a history of oppression and injustice, the former had been accepted or 'nativized' by South African indigenes because it was much more economically attractive than the latter. Even after apartheid officially ended in 1994 and several local languages were made official state languages, English has remained the lingua franca and the language of dominance. Apart from the mass exodus of black students to white-majority schools for a chance to learn 'refined English', educational institutions in the country right up to the tertiary level reported an annual decline of up to 50% in the numbers of students that enrolled in subjects taught solely in African languages (Kamwangamalu 2007:272).

The preference for English or another colonial language is well-attested throughout the postcolonial world. Less well documented are programs that have effectively shifted attitudes about vernacular languages and demonstrated to ordinary people that studying an indigenous language can help them learn other languages, including languages of national or global power. One such program is the Kulu Language Institute of the Solomon Islands, a

highly linguistically diverse island nation in the western Pacific. Debra McDougall and Alpheaus Zobule (2021) document how for several decades Solomon Islanders have perceived formal schooling and English literacy as the only pathways to success. When Alpheaus Zobule pioneered the teaching and learning of reading and writing in the Kubokota and Luqa languages through the Kulu Language Institute, his students were mocked for studying languages that would provide no opportunities for upward social mobility. Now, a little over twenty years later, local attitudes towards vernacular languages have shifted and hundreds of students participate in their workshops each year. Locals are eager to acquire literacy skills in English as well as in their local languages. They are motivated by the deepened understanding of their own languages, as well as how the analytical skills from the program help them to better comprehend the English language. Local language revitalisation initiatives like School for Life and the Kulu Language Institute have demonstrated that 'school' and 'home' knowledges as well as the worlds within which they exist need not stand in contradiction with each other but can be fields that students are equipped to navigate in pursuit of their aspirations. A necessary pre-requisite, however, is the dismantling of knowledge hierarchies and the levelling of the linguistic plane such that learners can celebrate their unique ways of knowing and being, while drawing on diverse skills to freely move across epistemological boundaries.

In highly multi-lingual societies like Ghana, the issue of incorporating local languages in schooling is especially difficult because language is strongly associated with other factors like ethnic identity, social status, and cultural capital. Languages are 'ranked' according to the opportunities they create for their speakers. As Zsiga, Boyer, and Kramer (2014) point out, in such societies languages exist in cultural layers, very often occupying a position in a three-tier hierarchy. For many rural people, their first language is at the base of

an inverted pyramid. Their mother-tongue encapsulates their ethnic identity but occupies an inferior position in relation to others. It is excluded from many aspects of the wider society including schooling
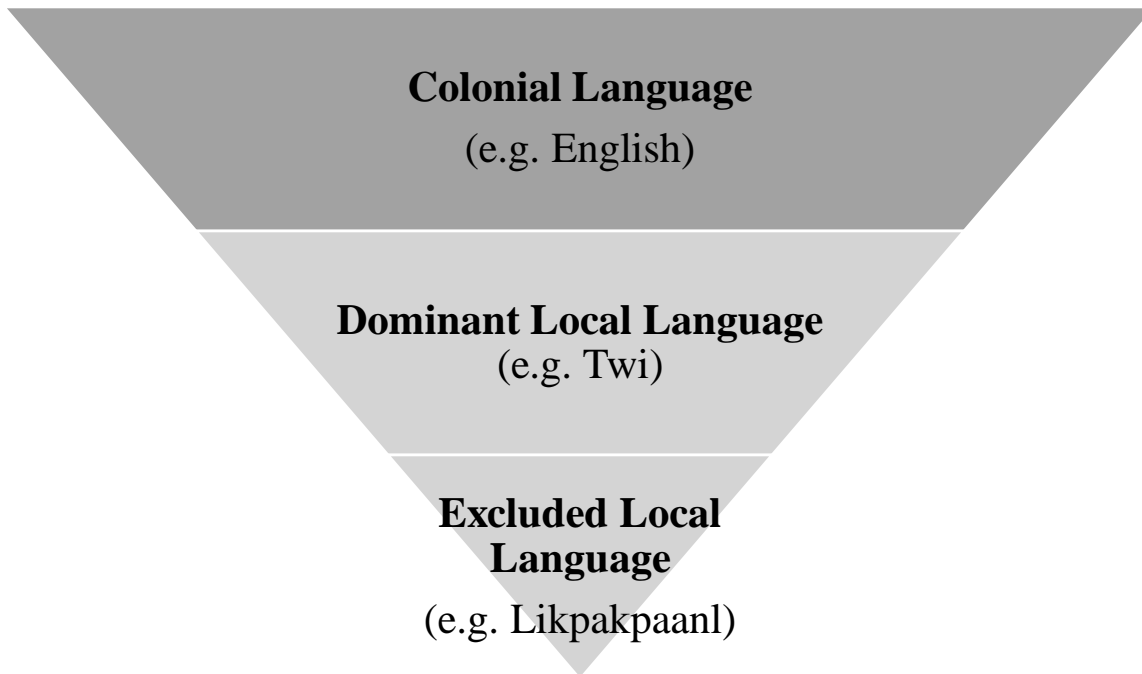
Figure 7: *Ranking of languages in multi-lingual post-colonial societies.*

and is sometimes used by so few people that it can easily become an endangered language. In Ghana, both the Likpakpaanl and Krachi languages would easily be described as 'bottom-tier' languages.

The second (intermediate) tier belongs to the most dominant local language(s); it is so widely spoken that it dictates the nature of everyday inter-ethnic interactions. It is also usually the language associated with a powerful ethnic class, and post-colonial states who make efforts at mainstreaming their local languages in the school system often select these dominant vernaculars. Asante Twi is the most hegemonic local language in Ghana and there have been several discussions around officially naming it as the country's lingua franca. First/top-tier languages are often colonial languages (such as English, French, and

Portuguese). These languages are prestigious, have speakers across the globe, facilitate inter/trans-national opportunities, and the quality or global competitiveness of one's schooling is often measured by one's fluency in these languages. In Ghana, proficiency in English is routinely employed as the prime mark of one's level of education, class, and even wealth. It is no surprise, therefore, that speakers of Dagara in Northern Ghana were against using their language in school as an LOI. Beyogle (2014:6-7) records that several educated Dagara claimed that they mix their local language with English even when speaking with other native Dagara to "show their superiority."

5.6: Bommoden Students and the Construction of School Selves

The preference for dominant European languages over local mother-tongues is certainly a significant way in which African societies are demonstrating a keen desire for a part in the global modernization project. But ethnographic data from my participants strongly suggests that this inclination towards the 'modern West' extends far beyond the sphere of language. Several conversations with young people from Bommoden point to the active and agential construction of modern school(ed) selves that are positioned to access the quality of life offered through government employment and urbanity. These selves are created and maintained through several decisive actions such as choosing English personal names, adopting new dates of birth, prioritizing fluency in the English language, and importantly, the search for urban hustle opportunities. In the examples I offer here, I focus primarily on how some of these actions often culminate in a move to urban centres to participate in the hustle economy. I draw on this concept of 'urban hustle economies' to refer to youth informal labour patterns observed in many African cities, but also in several other parts of the world (Thieme 2018; Mhazo and Thebe 2021; Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021). I

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noticed these actions early in my field participation when interviewees were signing consent forms and providing some basic information about themselves. When I asked for their ages and dates of birth, I often received the response: "Would you like my school age or my actual age?" I also noticed, for example, that out of the 29 JHS2020 cohort of students, only 4 of them included their Likpakpaanl names, but 5 (all girls) included middle names that were typical Asante Twi names. So, although it had not been on my list of interview questions, I found myself asking participants: "You wrote an English/Twi name on the consent form and not a Likpakpaanl name. Why?"

To illustrate, I offer the example of Ebenezer Langme, a member of the 2018 graduating class of Bommoden JHS. I asked him about the name and the date of birth he had provided on his consent form. He explained:

When I went to the school, I saw that everyone was using English names. We were using schoolbooks to pick names and I chose 'Ebenezer.' After you choose your name, you write it down in the attendance register and after some time it follows you to the house. The name actually comes from school to the house…. I have picked out names for at least 10 children in Beposo.

His father had named him *Nlasoon*, which translates in English to 'peace of mind', but most people in the community know him as Ebenezer. When I mentioned the English names of four of Ebenezer's friends and asked him if he could remember their Likpakpaanl names. He paused and replied: "I have forgotten…only their parents call them by those names now."

Ebenezer also confessed that like many of his colleagues, he did not know his actual date of birth. He had written out 22nd November 2001, but his guess was that he was born between 1997 and 1998, making him 3 or 4 years older than the date he usually gave for school records. I discovered that there were multiple reasons for this practice of adopting a

'school age.' First, a significant number did not know their actual dates of birth. Second, many of them started school late and were some years behind the grade they were expected to be in; there was a hint of shame about being 'too' old for their grade. Third, I was informed that community members advised their children to 'knock off' a few years from their actual age because if they secured government employment, those extra years would help them stay on the state's payroll for longer before being pensioned. Ebenezer moved to the city to hustle as soon as he completed his Senior High School exams. I will be telling more of his story in Chapter Eight.

I engaged several young people from Bommoden with similar accounts as Ebenezer, each with a unique insight into rural students' aspirations. I have briefly provided three other examples here.

Meshach got his unique English name from his uncle Charles. He was named *Nsanbefen* at birth by his maternal grandmother. His name translates in English to 'feeling shy of them.' The name was given to him because his grandmother wanted it remembered that she only allowed her daughter to be given in marriage to Meshach's father because she was 'shy' of his family. Not surprisingly, by the time I met Meshach in Bommoden, only his mother and grandmother still called him Nsanbefen. In fact, after a few years of primary school teachers struggling to mention his Likpakpaanl name, and his colleagues picking what seemed like all the great English names, he decided to ask Charles for an English name. Charles was not too far ahead of him in years, but he was one of the few young men in the family who was literate. After a few weeks, Charles heard a biblical story from his church about three Hebrew boys who had survived the fires of King Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. He rushed home excitedly and awarded his nephew the name Meshach.

Sadly, Meshach's father died a year before he was scheduled to write his Basic Education Certificate Exams (BECE). Already used to providing his own needs throughout his schooling, Meshach decided to leave Bommoden for Peki, an influential town in Ghana's Volta Region. Charles had moved there about a year earlier and was attending the Peki Senior High School. They both combined schooling with vigorous farm work, cultivating yam, peanuts, and maize on their own tract of land, but making most of their living working as labourers on other people's farms. Meshach's BECE results were excellent, and he gained admission to Accra Academy, a prestigious all-boys senior high school in the capital. When we first met in 2020, Meshach told me that he wanted to be a teacher. In a recent conversation over the phone, his aspirations seemed to largely remain the same, but it was clear that the journey to government employment was much more arduous than he had anticipated. Meshach had completed his senior high school studies, was awaiting the WASSCE results, and had moved permanently to Accra to hustle. He was sharing kiosk accommodation with Ebenezer and working as a shop assistant. Despite being underpaid, it allowed him to continue living in the city while he waited for his career dreams to become reality.

Eden was named *Bitukmi* by his late father when he was born. When I asked what the name meant, he made it clear that he had no idea about its meaning or the story behind it, especially since the name had fallen into complete disuse after his father's passing. He chose Eden for himself in school and had learned to fend for himself for most of his schooling. His mother had separated from his father when they were young. And as the middle child of three, he was the only one residing in Bommoden when we met. His elder brother left for Accra to hustle after his father died, and his younger sister followed not long after to work as a help in someone's home. With some support from his brother, along with the income from his own farm, Eden persevered and completed Bommoden JHS with the 2020 cohort. But his BECE

results were poor, and he could not get admission to any of his preferred schools. Eden was admitted to the Visual Arts program at Biakoye SHS, one of the 216 community schools former President John Dramani Mahama hurriedly constructed as part of his re-election campaign. In our most recent conversation, he was on the cusp of writing the WASSCE, and he explained to me how he had been surviving the past three years of senior high school. A security guard in the school had graciously allowed him to farm on a parcel of land he owned, and the yams he had been cultivating had provided for his feeding and upkeep throughout his senior high education. When I asked if he intended to farm after his schooling, he was emphatic in his response: "No! There is no money in farming." Eden remains committed to becoming a soldier in the Ghana Armed Forces, but for now he tells me that after writing his final paper, he will set off for one of two gold-mining locations in Ghana's Ashanti Region, either the country's second largest city, Kumasi, or Obuasi, another large urban centre. In one of these areas, he plans to hustle doing small-scale gold mining until his career aspirations become reality.

The dreams of urban life are not limited to the young men in my study, several young women also expressed similar aspirations. Paulina, for instance, chose an English name for herself, although at birth her father named her Njibiche, which literally translates as 'I eat with them.' Only her father and a few of her uncles still refer to her by that name. From her understanding, the name Njibiche arose out of her father's frustrations from caring for and investing in family members who never returned the favour. Paulina represented a child who he believed would bring him great benefit. Paulina first wrote the BECE with the 2020 cohort but after she discovered how poor her results were, she enrolled at a private school in Kpandai, a large town in Northern Ghana, and re-wrote the exams in 2021. Her results this time were significantly better, and she gained admission to the Kpandai Senior High School before

seeking a transfer to Techiman SHS, a better-known school in an even bigger town. When I last checked in on her, she lamented that she had originally wanted to study a more practical program that would equip her with skills to work after senior high school, her parents, however, on the advice of her elder brother, insisted that she study General Arts with the electives Economics, History, Christian Religious Studies, and Government. Although her parents were separated, both continued to support her financially throughout her schooling and they were unwilling to bear the costs that a more practice-oriented program would incur. During vacations Paulina farms with her parents and sometimes moves to Atebubu, a large town in Ghana's Bono East Region, to be a labourer on 'city farms' harvesting beans and maize. In 2020, Paulina told me she dreams of becoming a nurse. When I asked recently about her plans after senior high school, her health sector dreams for the most part are intact, but she feels a need to go to Kumasi and hustle in the short to medium term. She does not know what type of work she will get there but she knows that like so many before her she will find something to do.

5.7: Discussion and Conclusion

Post-independence African governments have vacillated between the seemingly competing agendas of prioritizing citizens' loyalty to the nascent neo-liberal democratic state with its ambitions to 'modernize', and promoting citizens' commitment to their respective ethnic heritages including commitment to local languages, subsistence practices, and philosophies. This post-colonial experience has been termed a 'bicultural' condition (Nketia 1970; 2016; Wiggins 2005), or even a 'duality of citizenship' (Mamdani 2018; Arnot, Casely-Hayford, and Yeboah 2018). But the tensions between the pull to industrialize, and the push to

indigenize have been reflected in education-sector policies around language and experienced by young people for several decades.

School selves that stand in contrast to other forms of a student's identification continue to be created through young people's commitment to the classroom. In many ways, this is simply part of the ways in which modern processes such as globalization, mass communication, rural-urban migration, etc. are contributing to shifts in how people identify themselves (Appadurai 1990:18; Wiggins 2005). In my participation with rural students in Ghana's Krachi West, it was clear that they were actively pursuing aspirational, individualistic, and 'modern' selves that could only be accessed through schooling. They demonstrate their agency and participation in the secondary habitus construction process through actions such as prioritizing proficiency in dominant languages like English and Twi over their mother-tongue, choosing English and Twi names, assigning themselves a school age/date of birth, moving to urban areas, and opting for careers that represent life detached from crop farming.

But it was also evident from my field experience that both young men and women were actively maintaining connections to their indigenous worlds. In fact, apart from the efforts they were investing in subsistence practice, I witnessed how communality and *being-ness* through relationships served as a crucial dimension of students' enactment of indigeneity. Whereas the school system is set up to encourage them to view themselves as individuals seeking a competitive advantage over their colleagues, students from these close-knit indigenous communities demonstrate a parallel approach to personhood that emphasizes communal relationships. Students within these ethnic sub-groupings constantly affirm their indigenous identity through their use of distinct Likpakpaanl dialects, through shared value system(s), through ritual and ceremonial practice, through communal/partnership-based

farming activities, and through clan-based youth groups. I will be discussing this further in Chapters Six and Seven.

In understanding the dualism of home and school selves among my participants, perhaps Miklós Hadas' (2022) notion of plural rather than a divided habitus describes their lived experiences more accurately. Hadas' paternal relatives were from rural Hungary and not highly schooled, but his mother belonged to the bourgeois class of Budapest. He writes:

> The main point is that I identified with both milieus without any problems: When I stayed in the village during school holidays (not less than two or three months a year), I adapted perfectly to the local environment…. I even mastered the village dialect, although my local friends told me not to speak like that because it didn't suit me. In the autumn, I was back in the city again, attending piano lessons and training sessions reliably, chatting good-naturedly with my mother's friends who came to our house every week (2022:6).

In Hadas' experience, the city was home and school breaks afforded the development of a rural self. The experiences of the young people I encountered in Krachi West district, though occurring in the opposite direction, represent a similar process in the construction of selves. In both instances, a plural habitus did not mean segmented or multiple selves existing separately but rather selves that were symbiotic and mutualistic. When Ebenezer says your new English name "follows you from the school to the house", he means that the lines between school and home in some senses are blurred. For many of them, indigenous lifeways and subsistence practice were not in themselves problematic, but it was the wider system of exploitation and how it equated rurality with poverty and suffering that they were escaping. Many students had been farming and schooling throughout their educational journeys, and some even intended to keep farming after attaining a 'respectable' government job.

The students I interacted with in the rural communities of Krachi demonstrated that their aspirations and decisions to construct neo-liberal selves were motivated by patterns they observed in places like the school. Evidently the widespread culture of selecting English names amongst school kids, as well as the advice of community members to use a 'school age' for civil service purposes, have become structures that shape the behaviours of successive generations of schooled youth. However, I noticed that the certificates given to students who had participated in the Complementary Basic Education program only had their local names; this is likely due to the emphasis on the use of the local language. Alternatively, it could be because those who enrolled in that program had not yet encountered the English-naming patterns of the formal school system and naturally chose to use the names they had been given at home. I also noticed that many of the students I interviewed were using Akan (not Likpakpaanl) names as 'middle' names. The Twi language expressed its dominance as an 'intermediate' language even in the choice of local names students opted for; but even then, some students chose to include Twi names and others did not. Although virtually everyone who enrolled in school invariably begun to construct a school self, the dynamics of how they went about that construction demonstrated an agential dimension that is worth highlighting.

Much post-colonial Africanist scholarship presents the lifeways of African societies and the values of modern schooling as 'worlds' in conflict with each other; diametrically opposed forces producing fractured identities in young learners. This is indeed the experience of many students and a valid assessment of the chasm that is created by contemporary schooling. However, for large sections of the Majority World, the school is also increasingly being accepted as part of their everyday lives. That is, the classroom has become inextricably interwoven with local lifeways and schooling has become "embedded in, [and] not external

to, culture" (Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021:309). Schooling promises an escape from aspects of life often associated with indigenous living, namely, rurality, poverty, and illiteracy. Again, although I observed a multi-layered or even 'divergent' habitus, an internal conflict causing psychological distress was not readily evident in their understanding of a 'school/neo-liberal self' and a 'home/indigenous self.' Students were (and continue to be) fully complicit in the symbolic power that is enacted through schooling. As far as I could observe, for most of them, English names and Likpakpaanl names, school ages and actual ages, aspirations towards civil service jobs and local subsistence lifestyles, and Christian beliefs and indigenous beliefs, were all dualisms that could co-exist without producing 'painful fragmentation' because they chose to focus on a singular imagined future that was worth any sacrifice.

CHAPTER SIX: Suffering as Motivation: Rural Students and their Sacrifices for Better Futures

6.1: Introduction

It was a Friday afternoon and the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) were only a week away. I picked up Oscar Nlipa Chakacha, a final year JHS student, and we headed for his community which was about 5km west of Bommoden. Usually, it took Oscar about an hour and 45 minutes to get to school by foot from his community, but with my jungle motorbike we cut the trip down to about 25 minutes. With some difficulty, we passed through sandy footpaths and overgrown farmlands, crossed a small river, and tried our best to climb a rocky incline. But after falling over, we decided we were close enough to walk the rest of the way.

Chakacha is a very small community named after Oscar's grandfather. There were about six wattle and daub compound houses as well as a few silos and animal pens. Goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, and dogs seemed everywhere. I sat down with Oscar under one of the trees in the middle of his community and took it all in. What I admired most was the fact that he, along with two others from neighbouring villages, Lydia from Bakon and Agnes from Sangul, had been making these long trips by foot every weekday since they started schooling. I had only made the trip once and yet, even with the luxury of a motorbike, I was visibly exhausted.

As I talked with Oscar, his father Mr. Mbeeya Chakacha, and his younger brother Solomon, I realized that Oscar is the eldest of eight children but was the only one attending school at Bommoden. Solomon and five of Oscar's siblings were schooling even further away in Borae. They had to live there during weekdays in rented accommodation and would

return to Chakacha on some weekends but not all. One of Oscar's sisters was also schooling at Dambai, the regional capital.

In addition to yam (the most important and prestigious crop in the region), Mbeeya was farming several crops including beans, maize, millet, rice, and groundnuts. He worked hard to farm this intensively without the labor of any of his children during the week. Also, he was paying a lot of money to make sure Oscar and his siblings could have the best form of schooling available.

Mbeeya represented for me one of the few parents willing to invest heavily into the schooling of their wards. Several of Oscar's school mates were not so fortunate; they did not have fathers who were willing to provide textbooks, school uniforms, and other school-related needs. All the Bommoden students with whom I was engaging, however, were making considerable sacrifices to be schooled. Some, like Oscar, Lydia, and Agnes, walked long distances on school days, most of the time on an empty stomach. Others invested hours into farming alongside schooling to pay for the essentials of formal education. I was keen to understand the factors that motivated their continued commitment to being schooled and why they were prepared to make such sacrifices.

Much of the research around student motivation to engage in schooling is by cognitive psychologists working in the field of education. Such articulations of motivation theory, however, are inadequate in explaining why students in Krachi West district continue to access schooling. These models are grounded in conceptions of the self as a rational agent whose choice of whether to engage schooling and aspire towards white-collar careers is based on belief in one's ability, and the possibilities of future success (Frye 2012). Anthropological studies into student motivation, however, focus on how learners' responses to the school system are largely shaped by the social milieu in which they find themselves. Ethnographies

of schooling also demonstrate how the school functions as a platform for the construction of students' imagined futures. For the Bikpakpaam students of Krachi West, schooling represents a route leading away from crop farming and the challenging lifestyle associated with it. Thus, the motivation to be schooled and their aspirations of white-collar careers are largely shaped through factors that transcend the self, including shared ideas of suffering versus the better life (Zipin et al. 2015). I buttress this argument by demonstrating how studies from other contexts show that the more schooled a person from a rural agrarian community is, the more reluctant they are to return to farming after finishing school (Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere 2012; Sumberg et al. 2012; 2014; Brown 2022).

6.2: Social Cognitive Theory and Motivation in Schooling

Although anthropologists of education have only recently began to study issues of motivation in schooling, cognitive psychologists have been intensively researching motivation for at least a century (Weiner 1990; Wentzel and Wigfield 2009). In general terms, motivation theorists study why human beings are 'moved' to act in particular ways. Some scholars understand motivation as a person's 'investment' of resources such as time, energy, and money in a particular activity (Maehr and Meyer 1997). Here, the issue is not whether a person is motivated or not but rather the direction (Atkinson and Feather 1966), intensity (Maehr and Meyer 1997), persistence (Hughes, Sullivan, and Mosley 1985), quality (Ames and Ames 1984), and the outcomes (Pintrich et al. 1993) of the person's commitments. In the field of education, motivation has become central to most studies of schooling with motivation theorists considering things like students' interest in academic activities, the kinds of choices they make and why they make them, their continued persistence in schoolwork, and the degree of effort they expend to perform school-related duties (Wigfield et al. 2019).

Much of twentieth century education scholarship has approached human beings as machines whose motivation could be reduced to needs and drives. Ryan (2019) explains that research in this period sidelined internal psychological processes in the complexities of human behaviour and concentrated on an individual's 'outputs' as best explained by the 'inputs' from their (natural) environment. Towards the turn of the century however, social cognitive theory began to dominate much of motivation research. Albert Bandura's (1986) seminal work on social cognitive theory emphasized human agency and the capabilities that enable individuals to assume control over their actions and, by extension, the outcomes of those actions. Therefore, although human beings recursively influence and are influenced by their environments, their motivation is a core characteristic of the self and cannot be reduced to deterministic inputs and outputs. Individuals and groups largely control their thoughts, feelings, actions, as well as the outcomes of these (Schunk 2012; Schunk and Usher 2019).

Increasingly therefore, psychologists studying motivation in schooling are developing theories rooted in the concept of a 'self' that is shaped by and is actively shaping its social environment. In the following discussion, I briefly introduce two theories that have dominated debates on motivation in school contexts, namely, the self-efficacy and the expectancy-value theories. I highlight these here because of the insights they offer in thinking about motivation among rural students in Ghana.

6.2.1: Self-Efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura's extensive work (see for example Bandura 1977; 1986; 1993; 1995; 1997) on the construct of self-efficacy has spawned into a powerful explanatory framework used by researchers in many fields including education, career, sports, and health. In education, self-efficacy has been shown to be a strong influence on students' academic choices, interests,

persistence, and achievements (Schunk and Pajares 2009). Defining his concept, Bandura writes:

> Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being…. Whatever other factors may serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one can make a difference by one's actions (2010:1)

A student's personal efficacy refers to their perception of themselves in terms of their capabilities for learning and academic performance (Bandura 1997). In their overview of the theory, Schunk and Pajares (2009) explain that efficacious students exhibit a recursive relationship with their social environment: they create conducive environments for learning and achievement but also receive feedback from parents, peers, and teachers to boost their self-confidence.

There is still much work to be done in understanding the complexities of how individuals' self-efficacy is intertwined with their social environment (Schunk and Pajares 2009). For example, do different people develop efficaciousness differently as they receive feedback from those around them? And if there are differences in the degrees to which they respond to inputs from social persuasion, what are the implications for parenting and teaching? Another criticism levelled against self-efficacy theorists is that most of the research has been done only with populations in the United States (Schunk and Usher 2019). Little work has been done with students from other cultures. More research needs to be conducted with diverse contexts to explore the ways in which cultural differences outside the classroom affects students' self-efficacy and motivation within.

6.2.2: Expectancy-Value Theory

The expectancy-value theoretical tradition links achievement-performance with constructs that measure individuals' expectancy and task-value beliefs. In Wigfield, Tonks, and Klauda's (2009) survey of research on the theory, they note that Kurt Lewin and Edward Chace Tolman were the first psychologists to broach the subject of expectancy and value. Lewin (1938) explained that the value of an activity was what influenced its importance to the individual, and Tolman (1932) discussed how expectancies for success affects human functioning in various areas of life. Expectancies are our beliefs for the future (Roese and Sherman 2007), while value refers to the motivational force that makes an individual attracted to or repulsed by an object or an activity (Higgins 2007). John W. Atkinson (1957; 1964), who truly popularized the twin concepts, defined expectancy as an individuals' expected probability for success on a given task and the incentive value as how attractive success at that activity was to the individual. Atkinson argued for an inverse relationship between incentive value and one's probability for success such that the most valued activities are those that people consider to be most difficult to do.

Jacquelynne Eccles and her colleagues have developed a model that shows that expectancy and value are constructs that are strongly affected by psychological, social, and cultural influences (see for example Eccles and Wigfield 1995; Wigfield, Rosenzweig, and Eccles 2017). In their work, the researchers explain that the motivation of children are shaped by a myriad of social and cultural factors including the beliefs and behaviours of parents, peers and teachers, the children's achievement experiences, as well as the cultural context within which they find themselves (Jacobs et al. 2002). Wigfield, Tonks, and Klauda (2009) counsel that more work needs to be done to understand how children value and de-value specific school-related activities and how cultural variables affect their perceptions. Thus,

studies in the field are increasingly acknowledging the central role social influences play in motivating students (Wentzel and Ramani 2016), as well as the fact that learning is itself 'an inherently social activity' (Wigfield et al. 2019). Students' relationships and social interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and role-models strongly influence the what, why, and how of students' learning (Juvonen and Knifsend 2016; O'Donnell 2006; Ladd, Herald-Brown, and Kochel 2009; Grolnick, Friendly, and Bellas 2009; Wentzel 1997; 2009).

6.3: Anthropological Theory Around Student Aspirations

While cognitive psychologists study the value of education and student motivation for schooling by testing the relationships between variables like students' expected futures, the incentive value of school subjects, parental involvement in the educational journey, and academic performance, anthropologists have been concerned with how these 'variables' are shaped by the social milieu within which schooling occurs. As discussed in Chapter Three, schooling is firmly 'entwined' with society: it is simultaneously an institution radically transforming culture, while also being shaped by the worlds within which it functions. Arguably the most powerful force driving this mutualistic relationship is people's aspirations and 'visions of the future' (Stambach 2017:13). Ethnographies of schooling often look at education more broadly and focus on analysing its role as a platform where student futures are negotiated. For example, Amy Stambach and Kathleen Hall (2017:2) echo Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) conception of schooling as a "social field on which the future is imagined," and explore questions like; "How do people see education as framing their fields of possibilities?" And "How do they imagine and project their hopes and aspirations through education onto a future that does not yet exist?"

The authors also connect ethnographic studies on schooling with scholarship around the mirage of modernity. Young people across the majority world continue to defy the odds

to remain in classrooms, all for a piece of the prosperity pie that schooling promises. But, especially for the rural poor, their expectations of salaried employment and the upward social mobility promised are often never fulfilled; worse, what they have learned in the classroom turns out to be disconnected from their everyday lives and unable to equip them with productive subsistence skills. In fact, I argue below that current schooling in rural contexts actually 'de-skills' and 'de-motivates' learners from the agricultural activities their communities are engaged in. Consequently, instead of formal education creating a level playing field on which all students can pursue their aspirations irrespective of their backgrounds, it has continued to deepen the chasm between the rich and the poor.

Indeed, students' social contexts go a long way to determine the very nature of their aspirations. Students often 'adjust' their aspirations in response to family considerations and other social realities (Brown 2022:64; Roder 2017:40). Even in the classroom, their ideas of success as well as the strategies to achieve it are all socially constructed. Based on fieldwork in Hyderabad, India, Amanda Gilbertson (2017) demonstrates how success (both academic and career-related) is understood and negotiated through the platform of schooling in different ways; this is especially evident when class is factored into the equation. She also highlights how students she engaged felt compelled to aspire towards careers that were better than those of their parents. Gilbertson's work positions a school predominantly serving upper middle-class students alongside another school where parents of students are low income, working class, and not highly schooled. She explains that while wealthy students target 'standing out from the crowd' by developing soft skills like communication in fluent English and innovative problem-solving, working-class students tend to resort to rote learning of past examination questions in the hope that examination success will translate into employability.

In Kenya's Siaya County, many students form their future aspirations and are motivated to be in the classroom because of lived experiences of poverty and suffering. Elizabeth Ngutuku (2022) reports that several children she encountered in schools during field research had eaten nothing for breakfast but were driven to go through the school system to land good future jobs that would provide 'future breakfasts.' For many students in the region, poverty and food insecurity had become part of their daily experience. In addition, HIV/AIDS and family deaths created a situation where several students were compelled to pay much of their school fees themselves. And the meagre income from their farm yields could barely pay for these costs of schooling. They, however, endured these conditions with 'happy faces' believing that their sacrifices to be schooled would be compensated with stable incomes and better lives in the future. Unfortunately, the author records that many of these imagined futures never materialized.

Among Bhutanese students, an office job in the civil service is the pinnacle of success. But the rush for a secular education has also resulted in dwindling numbers of available government positions. Dolma Roder (2017:38) reports that while students described work in the civil service as 'clean', respectable, and prestigious, they viewed their farm work as dirty manual labour. She also points to the hierarchization of government work that places teaching as the least desirable form of employment, and STEM jobs like engineering and medicine at the top of students' dream list. Interestingly, her participants were rarely able to identify careers outside the civil service; for many of them, respectable jobs were limited to government employment. This aspect of the research highlights the inseparable relationship between students' capacity to imagine and their post-study aspirations.

The concept of social navigation offers a helpful tool in thinking about how young people negotiate the platform of schooling to achieve their life aspirations. Although others

have employed the idea of navigation in the past, Henrik Vigh's (2006; 2009; 2010) use of the concept in understanding the agency of youth mobilised for conflicts in Guinea Bissau uniquely demonstrates that young people often function as actors negotiating change within constantly changing social landscapes. He emphasizes the influential role of socio-economic decline and uncertainty in motivating young people to become involved in political and ethnic conflicts. Reducing resources lead to constrictions in 'economies of affection' and support networks. That is, families begin to ration their support to their members, and young men are often the first to lose out on this support. Moreover, many of these youths have completed school but are left unemployed, disillusioned with the promises of modernity, and 'locked' out of responsible adulthood. Amidst all this uncertainty, they respond to the strong social expectation for them to become men and begin to take care of their own families by dynamically navigating the limited field of possibilities. Vigh explains social navigation from the perspective of his interlocutors who employ the creolized term 'dubriagem':

> In a Guinean context *dubriagem* designates the act of making the most of a situation and making things work to one's advantage…. Thus *dubria*, the active form of the verb, encompasses both the immediate assessment of the dangers and possibilities of one's present position as well as the ability to envision, plot and actualise an advantageous movement from the present into an imagined future. In other words, it encompasses, both immediate survival and the drawing of trajectories into the imagined future. (2010:150)

Young men succumbed to being mobilised for war because after assessing the limited possibilities, the risks involved, the promise of daily upkeep in the present, and the possibility of a big payday in the future, being part of the militia represented for them the best option at becoming responsible adults.

For many young people on the continent, becoming a member of a militant group is not quite how they are coping with their bleak economic options. That notwithstanding, the need to navigate limited opportunities is a reality that the overwhelming majority face. Like their counterparts in Guinea Bissau, schooling promises a better life but ultimately fails to deliver. Their education did not equip them with adequate entrepreneurial skills to survive in a severely constricted labour market, and their families are expecting a return on the investment of their schooling. The Mozambican anthropologist Alcinda Honwana (2012) reports from her fieldwork among schooled youth that their aspirations towards 'respectable employment' was motivated by the sense of dignity placed in being able to cater for the needs of one's family. So, a person's social status and position in their community was measured in whether they have a white-collar job and are providing for their families. This desire to be 'responsible men and women' was a recurrent theme in Mozambique, Senegal, Tunisia, and South Africa. Upward social mobility and a 'better life' were among the most important aspirations young people were seeking, and they see schooling as able to deliver respectable long-term employment which in turn would help them fulfil their ultimate dreams.

As part of thinking through the experiences of these young people, Honwana employs the concept of 'waithood.' She writes:

> Youths find themselves in waithood—perpetually waiting to enter adulthood. They are consigned to a liminal space in which they are neither dependent children nor autonomous adults. (Honwana, 2012:23)

In precolonial African societies, there were traditional paths to adulthood with firm transitional markers such as puberty rights, starting your own subsistence practice, leaving home, and getting married. In contemporary times, however, schooling has become the principal agent for socialization and for marking a young person's journey towards adulthood.

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But with economic decline and youth unemployment, the expected goal of the school journey is rapidly becoming more of a mirage than a certainty, and adulthood continues to elude many young people.

6.4: Students' Perspectives on Parental Involvement in Schooling and Escaping 'Suffering'

For many children in many contexts all over the world, parental involvement is crucial to their engagement with formal education (Reynolds 1992; K. Robinson and Harris 2014; Meier and Lemmer 2015). Many elementary students are not only sent to school by a parent but are also encouraged to do their homework and learn for impending tests by parents. In many rural contexts like Bommoden, however, children are motivated by their parents to engage schooling in an entirely different way. Their parents' hard toil on the land serves as a kind of 'negative object lesson;' an example of a life they hope to avoid. Children themselves are often determined to go to school, sometimes against the wishes of their parents. Even after they begin schooling, parents tend to interrupt their school week whenever more hands are needed on the family farm. In conversation with an SHS graduate who was born and raised in Bommoden but had since moved to another part of the country, I learnt how he and many others from the community begun their elementary schooling.

> Here, no one really encourages you to start school, but no one will deliberately
>
> hinder you either. To start school, you just wear your home clothes as a child and
>
> walk to the school; when you get there, they will add your name to the register
>
> **(Ishmael, JHS2016)**

I learned that interruptions in one's schooling was commonplace; this was especially true for boys because they are required to finish allotted work on family farms either before, during, or after the school day. Many students in these disadvantaged areas do not benefit from the

parental support that many studies cite as crucial in motivating students to take school seriously. My interactions with the students showed that for the overwhelming majority, no one was at home ensuring that they were punctual to class and that they return at the end of the school day to review what was learnt. Students generally lamented the lack of parental involvement in their academic journeys; they described how they felt caught up in a constant conflict between making time for school-related activities as well as the subsistence demands of their families. The lack of parental involvement in students' schooling and the persistent interruptions due to farm assignments are key factors in understanding why many of the students are overage, perform poorly in tests, and are often at risk of dropping out of school (Lewin 2009; Yeboah and Daniel 2019).

Ernest, Jacob, and Ebenezer successfully completed the community public school and were enrolled in senior high schools outside the district during my time on the field. I asked them about their memories of parental involvement in their schooling from the earliest stages.

My father would sometimes go to the school to seek permission for me so I can work with him on the farm for two to three days before I return to school. **(Ernest, JHS2017)**

For me, [my parents] were praying that they [school authorities] would say 'today no school' so that they can take me to the farm. **(Jacob, JHS2017)**

From the beginning I didn't know why I was going to school. My parents took me to school, but the same parents took me from school to farm. My father would often take me to the farm and by the time I come back to school, my mates had moved forward, and I would be left behind. **(Ebenezer, JHS2018)**

In reflecting on issues of children's participation in schooling across sub-Saharan Africa, Keith Lewin (2009:155-156) offers a helpful framework developed by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions, and Expansion. Using data from 44 countries, Lewin maps out seven zones of children excluded from schooling. Children who have no access to school are categorized as zone 0 while zone 1 refers to those with access and yet do not enrol; primary school dropouts fall in zone 2; overage students, irregular attendees, and low performers, jointly labelled as the 'silently excluded', occupy zone 3; primary school leavers who never make it to Senior High school are in zone 4; zone 5 children are dropouts from Senior High school; and lastly, zone 6 refers to overage students, irregular attendees, and low performers at the Senior High level.

Quite early in my ethnographic fieldwork, I realized that almost all the Junior High School students I was interacting with were the 'silently excluded' of zone 3 who were highly at risk of becoming dropouts (zone 2) or graduates who never make it to Senior High (zone 4). Lewin (2009:168) explains that children from rich homes are six times more likely to reach the final year of primary school (Grade 9) than children from poor households, and urban students are four times more likely to do the same than their counterparts from rural areas. In his view, the issues of regular attendance as well as school entry, progression, and completion at the appropriate ages are extremely complex. He argues that there are evidently social factors that educational planners and policymakers do not often consider, and these go beyond simplistic gross enrolment rates.

Yeboah and Daniel (2019) explore the issue of 'silently excluded' students in rural Ghana by examining parents' perspectives of formal education. In their ethnographic case study of a rural community in Ghana's Eastern region, they show that parents' limited engagement with the schooling of their children is an 'economic strategy' to counter the

precarity of academic excellence and the low probability of securing white-collar employment after school, both of which are acute problems in Ghana's disadvantaged areas. Although parents demonstrated that they were aware of schooling's promise of future prosperity, they also expressed concern over the familiar pattern of poor academic performance, lack of school progression, and subsequent inability to enter the white-collar workforce. These concerns motivated their decision to encourage wards to regularly take a day or two off school each week to develop subsistence skills for life beyond the classroom and to contribute towards family income.

The authors argue that despite the well marketed international narrative that free compulsory schooling in both rural and urban areas will ensure prosperity and development for all, so far, schooling has failed to lift the rural poor out of poverty. Worse, education programs have not included indigenous thinking and skills in the curriculum in ways that ensure that those unable to progress beyond the primary level are able to live productive lives and contribute meaningfully to family incomes as a direct result of what they learned in school. In the classroom, non-indigenous knowledge is transferred from teacher to (often passive) student; schooling does not prioritize relevant skills for the rural dweller whose chances of progressing to the highest levels of formal education and obtaining employment in an air-conditioned office are already slim. Parents therefore 'hedge their bets' and adopt 'parallel' indigenous education strategies where learning occurs through participation (Nsamenang 2004), and economic skills are acquired through subsistence activities such as agriculture or fishing. For many parents living in disadvantaged regions, requiring their children to lose out on one or two days of schooling each week is a sacrifice worth making to ensure that when primary school ends, they can help provide for their families irrespective of whether the school system rewards their time spent in the classroom or not.

Although many guardians in the study area were quite disengaged from the formal education of their children, I observed a resilient attitude to schooling among students that was rooted in their perceptions of parents' lives. Students' imagined futures were largely framed around compelling accounts of how they did not want to relive parents' experiences. The school offered a pathway out of suffering, which was a reality that students felt their parents were forced to endure because they were never adequately schooled. I sat down with several small groups of current and former students from the school and asked them what motivated their persistence in schooling.

> I can see how my parents are suffering as they are farming, so I don't also want to end up being in the same shoes as my parents and I know that going to school is the only way that can help me have a better life. **(Silas, JHS2020)**

> I want to become a great person in future. My parents are farming and there are a lot of challenges they face, and I don't want to be like my parents. **(Philip, JHS2020)**

> I don't want to suffer as my parents are suffering. **(Patience, JHS2020)**

> My mother told me [that] the reason she is suffering today is because in their days, school wasn't readily available to them, so [once] I have gotten the opportunity to be in school, I want to make the most of this opportunity so that I don't end up suffering like the others. **(Matilda, JHS2020)**

> There are a lot of factors [that motivate my school-going] but I will talk about the most [outstanding] one of them all. It has to do with my father. He has been telling me about how he couldn't continue his education…. Now when I compare my father's classmates who continued their education to my father, there is a vast

difference. This is my greatest motivation; I don't want what happened to my father to happen to me. (**Abraham, JHS2017**)

My father has been telling me about his vision in life which he couldn't achieve because he did not go to school. I want to make sure I don't repeat the same cycle of things. (**Dominic, JHS2017**)

My father looked after his younger brother and he is now a teacher and yet my father still goes to his younger brother to work for him and ask him for help. He says that his situation is not appropriate, so he will make sure that his eldest son goes to school. (**Ebenezer, JHS2018**)

Several of my participants in their statements above allude to a parent reflecting on their 'situation' and encouraging them to escape their lot in life by investing in schooling. In this seeming contradiction, many of these parents support in principle the formal education of their dependents because they acknowledge its potential to offer a more comfortable life, but in practice fathers especially appear detached from their children's schooling; often being described as actively seeking to take students away from the classroom to the farms. As highlighted in Yeboah and Daniel's (2019) explanation above, the fact that parents voluntarily allow their children to remain in the classroom for most of the school-week while they bear the brunt of the family's nutritional needs is evidence of their active support for their schooling.

The 'suffering' of parents, mentioned repeatedly by the students, motivates them to stay engaged in the classroom. Suffering here refers to the back-breaking labour that characterizes agriculturists in many rural areas of Ghana. For these students, it also embodies the great uncertainty in the financial outlook of their parents. Farming in communities like

Bommoden has always been an unpredictable endeavour, with recurring fears and uncertainties about the success of the agricultural year. These fears range from the inadequacy of seasonal rains to the threat of neighbouring farmers using 'juju' to destroy one's harvests. Leavy and Hossain (2014) analyse interviews from 1500 young people in 10 low-and-middle-income countries including Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia. They postulate that formal education correlates with mass rejection of farming:

> A generation has grown to adulthood which, in some of the less developed locations in particular, has for the first time had the means to compare a future as a farmer (often viewing farming as a way of life rather than as a job, and 'farmer' as an identity as opposed to a job title) with other possibilities. Many of these young people speak movingly about the sorrow they feel witnessing their small farmer parents' often desperately hard struggles to earn a living. (2014:9)

In their view, young people in many farming communities have access to education to a degree that their parents did not, and this 'generational gap' has created higher expectations in terms of choice of careers.

The negative views of farming lifestyles are a recurring reality observed in contexts across the sub-region. In Tanzania, Asha Juma (2007) argues that lack of proper facilities and structures in rural areas has contributed to young people branding agricultural work as 'dirty' and socially demeaning. In South Africa, Andrienetta Kritzinger (2002) engages 32 daughters of farm workers (ages 15-17) in focus group discussions exploring their views about farming and their expectations for the future. The girls generally reject farm life citing the hard work, low wages, low status ascribed to farmers, jealousy, gossip, the lack of privacy, as well as social isolation and boredom as factors that repel them from pursuing the occupation of their parents. In Ethiopia, Tadele and Gella (2012) discuss the prospects of farming as a livelihood

with elderly farmers and young people (ages 16-25). The authors explain that respondents perceived farming as a 'demanding' and 'degrading' occupation:

> Within the context of negative attitudes of family and society about agriculture, informal work in urban areas is preferred by young people who have attended school even if it is [as] low-paying and back-breaking as agriculture. Going back to agriculture after failing the national school-leaving exams is seen as a defeat.
> (2012:41)

The Ethiopian case closely mirrors what I experienced in my study amongst young people from Krachi West district. As I discussed in Chapter Five, hustle opportunities in urban centres are preferred to continuing rural farming after finishing school. Somehow, current schooling emphasizes student futures that revolve around urbanity and non-farm careers.

However, in discussions around the school's role in shaping attitudes towards farming lifestyles, the gendered nature of students' motivations towards schooling and the non-farm careers that formal education purports to offer, as well as the different kinds of barriers that boys and girls face in accessing 'the neoliberal promise' can easily be obscured. Whilst Kritzinger's (2002) study in South Africa outlined above can be interpreted by some as meaning that girls seek urban, non-farm pathways for similar reasons as boys, other studies show that gender factors into these decisions in complex ways. In some African societies, such as among the Maasai pastoralists in Tanzania (Raymond 2021), girl-child education has been a long held taboo, and despite recent shifts in the attitudes of mothers, most fathers represent the biggest obstacles to girls accessing schooling. For young women in these societies, schooling represents a unique opportunity to break free from generational patriarchy. Other studies from different parts of the world, however, show that schooling often deepens patriarchy in complex ways. For example, scholars in India and Pakistan argue

that contemporary classrooms restrict young women to particular career aspirations, and reinforce hegemonic definitions of ideal 'womanhood' (Dyson 2019; Durrani and Halai 2020). As part of my discussion in Chapter Seven, I explore some of these themes in relation to the data from Krachi West district and demonstrate how the processes of aspiration and motivation forming in schooling are different for the boys and girls I engaged on the field respectively. In the next section, however, I build on this discussion around the 'push factors' encouraging rural youth to abandon agriculture, by exploring the careers 'pulling' them into schooling and urban living. I also continue reflecting on the gendered distinctions in student motivation by examining my participants' aspirations around civil service careers.

6.5: Government Employment and 'the Better Life'

Young people in Bommoden express living a 'good' or 'better' life as the ultimate antithesis to the kind of life they are familiar with. To them, the success associated with government employment is a more than worthy escape from the suffering of parents who farm for a living. While nurses and teachers work in 'comfortable environments' performing tasks that require minimal physical exertion, their farming parents spend more than half their lives in the sun labouring over crops that demand telling degrees of energy and toil. For virtually all the students I have been interacting with, their drive to continue engaging in schooling is inextricably interwoven with their aspirations of 'a good or better life.' As I talk with each of them, it is evident that a good life means government employment (preferably one with a uniform), stable income streams, and work in an office safe from the heat, toil, and sweat of the burning sun. These ostensibly modest aspirations take meaning from the students contrasting their desired futures with the lived realities of their parents. As part of the next chapter (Seven), I will account for the older generation's willingness to move into these regions to endure the 'back-breaking' labour associated with intensive yam farming. The

move towards this kind of subsistence agriculture was driven by the promise of an attractive yam-based cash crop economy that would guarantee earnings that their previous focus on cultivating grain crops had not delivered. For the younger generation, however, schooling represents lifestyles that do not rely on incomes from the 'inconveniences' of crop agriculture. Schooling represents a better life than what they have witnessed from their parents.

Faith, Clement, and Abigail were final year students at the public school. I asked them why they remained committed to formal education despite the challenges they were facing to be schooled.

Growing up in this community, I realized that some people here are rich while others are poor. When I enquired, I was told that those who are rich are those who went to school and are working for the government. I decided that if those who attended school are well to do then I will take my schooling seriously so that I can become a nurse in future and live a good life. (**Faith, JHS2020**)

I am schooling because I want to become somebody in the future. I want to work in an office and without school it isn't possible. (**Clement, JHS2020**)

I followed my mother one day to the district hospital; there I saw some ladies wearing uniforms at the hospital. I asked my mother, 'Who are these people?' She told me that they were nurses and asked me, 'Why? Do you want to be like them?' I replied 'Yes.' She told me that if I truly desire to be like them, I will have to be serious with my schooling and study hard. If I do this, one day I shall also work at the hospital. (**Abigail, JHS2020**)

Consequently, for almost every student I engage, their role-models are the government workers they see working both within and without the community, nurses, teachers, police officers, military personnel, and fire wardens.

> [My role-model] is called Bernice Nkayi and she is a nurse by profession. When she comes here, we can all see the difference between her and us. She only goes to the farm when she feels like it and she now looks more beautiful than all of us. (**Linda, JHSPrivate**)

> I want to be like 'Doctor Bawea' because I was sick and was at the hospital and I saw the dressing of all the workers, and I like them and the coolness of the environment. (**Celestine, JHSPrivate**)

> [My role-model is] Vida; she is a nurse. I like the work she does, and her uniform is very nice. (**Angelina, JHSPrivate**)

Other reasons that help explain why students perceive government employment as representing 'the good life' are the social status and stable incomes attached to state-sponsored roles. Teachers, nurses, and all government workers in these rural areas are revered over and above all other forms of occupation.

> I don't want to be a farmer because I see some people chopping [spending or enjoying] government's money so me too, I want to chop some of the government's money. (**Eden, JHS2020**)

> My role model is a brother to Mr. Abalo and he is a military officer. We all saw them when they were going to school and thought they were joking but today he is a 'big man'. (**Razak, JHS2020**)

My role model is a soldier who hails from a nearby community (Kpoloo). He has been able to help a lot of the young men from his community gain access into the military and he has built a magnificent mansion in that little village. I want to become like him so that I can also transform my community. (**Dominic, JHS2017**)

Interacting with the students, I realized that young men and women had different visions of how they would integrate government work with agriculture. When talking about their imagined futures, few girls who hoped for government employment could see themselves returning to life in Bommoden. They cited several reasons for their lack of interest in a return home which in some ways mirror the perceptions of young women in Kritzinger's (2002) South African study. Their reasons include the danger of witchcraft attacks because of community members who envy their good fortune; the fact that people in Bommoden are bound to respect them less than people in communities where they would be visitors; and the likelihood of constant requests for financial favours by community members, incessant requests that would place them in uncomfortable positions. In contrast, many of the boys expressed a desire to combine salaried employment with farming and possibly return to live in Bommoden after schooling. They spoke repeatedly about returning to help develop the community and support their families. The gendered difference in position regarding a return to the community and some form of farming after securing government employment is likely to be related to the strong patriarchal system that tends to ascribe greater responsibility to boys to support their families than girls. Moreover, as I will discuss in the next chapter, boys express themselves as being more tied to the land than girls do.

Once again, it is evident that this rejection of agriculture-sector jobs and the pursuit of state employment is not peculiar to students in Krachi. Lorenceau, Rim, and Savitki (2021)

present data from ten African countries that shows that young people (ages15-29) prioritize public sector positions and find agriculture-sector jobs unattractive. Using findings from an ILO report, the authors also contend that the demand for state-sponsored jobs far exceeds the positions available. While 375 million young people are expected to join the workforce by 2030 and over seventy percent of these express a desire for state jobs, the public sector only accounts for twelve percent of hiring. Also, although the agricultural sector accounts for almost forty percent of employment, most young people are reluctant to take up such jobs. The authors explain that the large gap between the aspirations of youth in sub-Saharan Africa and the realities of the job market is bound to exacerbate unemployment in the sub-region and could even cause social unrest if not addressed.

A dominant narrative in the literature on economic growth in SSA suggests that since the regions poorest are rural agriculturists, more efforts by individual states to revitalize the agricultural sector is necessary for sustainable poverty alleviation (Sumberg et al. 2014; Christiaensen, Demery, and Kuhl 2011; Collier and Dercon 2014). This narrative recognizes the discussion above on youth disinterest in farming as the most important obstacle national governments must surmount if they are to see agriculture become an engine for sustainable economic growth. Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere (2012) argue that youth 'rejection' of agricultural jobs is more complicated than much scholarship suggests. In their qualitative case study of young people (ages 16-26) in twelve cocoa farming communities in Ghana's Ashanti, Western, and Eastern regions, the authors identified three categories of imagined futures. Some young people aspired to have farming as a primary occupation as farm owners, another category perceived farming as a means of capital accumulation towards occupations that were not tied to the soil, and a third category aspired towards formal employment as their primary occupation with no direct engagement with farming.

The authors contend that, generally, aspirations towards careers in farming diminished with young people who expressed high expectations in schooling. The more schooled a young person was, the more they preferred formal employment to jobs tied to the soil. Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere (2012) also explain that many schooled youths sought formal employment as a means of upward social mobility. They were not rejecting agriculture per se but rather the low social status attached to it. Like their counterparts in Bommoden, many of the schooled youth in these rural areas would readily combine salaried employment with farming.

> If there was any area in which the young people in our sample were unrealistic, it was perhaps in the undue weight they placed on education as almost guaranteeing an occupation away from farming and, preferably, away from the rural sites of cocoa farming…. other studies have found that young people reject agriculture not only for economic reasons but for social reasons such as status and prestige. The idea that status is important to young people helps to solve the seeming paradox of youth with aspirations for formal work stating a possible interest in farming. (Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere 2012:28)

Generally, formal education seems to correlate with youth aspirations towards formal employment. Whereas promising local agro-economies should be benefiting from the talents and skills of a schooled younger generation, the disturbing reality is that 'the brightest and the best' are not interested in agricultural careers (Leavy and Hossain 2014; Brown 2022). The demeaned social status of farmers that pervades much of the continent makes the sector only attractive to young people who the school system has rejected or who have had to fall back on their farms after failing to secure a state-sponsored position in an office.

Why, then, does current schooling continue to move rural youth to pursue non-farm careers in cities when such sectors are no longer able to provide positions for the masses? Nicola Ansell and colleagues (2020), based on ethnographic data from Lesotho, Laos, and India, argue that there are twin developments worldwide that must be held together to begin answering that question. The first is a global trend where many rural populations in the Majority World are now peripheral to the goals of global capitalism; a kind of surplus to the needs of sectors that are modernizing. Next, there is a parallel trend of universal education where young people, even in rural agrarian economies, are being trained to be valuable human capital for the global knowledge economy, and neo-liberal subjects with 'raised aspirations' (Bonal, Fontdevila, and Zancajo 2023). Whilst in the past the demand of global capitalism meant that virtually every graduate was guaranteed a job, in contemporary times there are not enough well-paying productive roles for everyone, and many rural youth who lack the social capital to land the few available jobs become surplus to requirements (Sumberg et al. 2021). But worked into the philosophy and mechanics of current schooling is its role as a magic well; the classroom has been marketed as that which makes students' imaginations of the future a reality. Formal education for the past two centuries has promised upward social mobility and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, it is no longer able to deliver on its promises (Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). Ansell et al. (2020) recommend that (inter)national education-sector policymakers reverse the narrative that schooling is the answer to all problems, and students in rural areas especially should be equipped to transform their communities.

6.6: 'I will want them to be in school and I be alone in the farm': Reconciling Parents'

Accounts

About a month after Silas (JHS2020) finished writing the BECE, I met up with him on a mild Friday afternoon while he was working on his farm. He was growing sugarcane, okra, cassava, pineapple, and rice—all crammed onto a small parcel of land that also boasted 700 yam mounds. After listening to his complaints about how small his farm was in comparison with those of his school mates, we set out for his father's farm which doubled as the family farm. His father was an elderly man who looked to be in his late seventies. He was lean and visibly slow but could be regularly found working on his vast yam farm. Silas was the youngest of his three sons but was also the only one in Bommoden helping with the farm work. Silas' mother was also in the farm that day and we all sat down on the ground under one of the trees. As our discussion progressed, I asked how important Silas' schooling was to them as parents. His father spoke up:

> There is something better in school that I want my children to get and for that I will
> want them to be in school and I be alone in the farm. I don't want them to [become]
> like me and so I am willing to do everything within my strength to take care of them.
> To me, [when] someone is educated, everything about the person's life changes because
> the person can read and write. Also, farming is based on the weather; when it rains
> there is profit and when it doesn't there is loss and therefore it is not a better way of life
> for my children. One thing I like about education is that when you are old [on pension]
> the government still pays you, but in farming when you are old you cannot farm again.

After living for some time in the community, I learnt to interpret these words a little differently from when I heard them the first time. As an able-bodied young man, the support for schooling Silas could expect from his father was that he would be able to learn for most

school days and not be dragged out of his classroom to be farm labour. Many of the young women I interacted with were supported financially by their parents, especially mothers, but sons were expected to demonstrate their masculinity and ability to feed a home by providing for themselves. Like many parents of Bommoden students, Silas' father acknowledged that schooling was a means towards upward social mobility and financial security which their generation was unable to access. In practice, however, I realized that parents only made financial contributions towards the education of their daughters since they knew they had no 'real farms' to generate income from. They were more reluctant to provide for their sons. This reality was commonplace because parents felt boys had the farming acumen to work hard and provide for their own schooling. Interacting with Silas for example, I discovered that he often worked on other peoples' farms as hired labour (sometimes during school hours) to raise the necessary funds for his school-related needs, including the fees the school charged each student for BECE registration, transportation to exam venues, accommodation, and feeding. So, even as parents like Silas' father passionately talked about their commitment to their dependents' schooling and the sacrifices they were willing to make to ensure they acquired formal education, I interpreted these sacrifices primarily as their readiness to lose out on farm labour for several hours of each school day rather than active monetary support.

Although parents in these contexts endorse formal education and encourage their children to pursue the opportunities that will earn them white-collar employment, they are compelled to mitigate the delay and precarity of schooling by maintaining investments on their farms. Put differently, they hedge their bets by encouraging their dependents to continue investing in family and personal farms alongside their pursuit of white-collar careers. As Leavy and Hossain (2014) note, parents in disadvantaged contexts like these see their efforts

as investments into the future of their children and as a pension policy for themselves in their old age:

> Parents also had expectations that investments in their children's schooling should be recouped in material and social status terms, sometimes with an explicit claim on their children's support in old age. These expectations were in general shared with their children. (2014:19)

Moreover, parents' own low level of formal education makes it almost impossible to adequately follow up on their children's learning and performance. Their dual strategy means that their children are released to go to school during most days but will have to use time meant for out-of-school learning to help with work on the farm. It also means that boys especially will have to cater for much of their own school-related needs as the meagre family income cannot be used for such purposes. This is strikingly similar to Henrik Vigh (2010) observations about shrinking 'economies of affection.' Bikpakpaam young people are compelled to navigate farming alongside schooling because the loss of family farm labour and crop yields as a result of their schooling means no more family support is available to help with the costs of children's schooling.

6.7: Concluding Remarks

Much education-sector planning and policy today is framed around easily quantifiable variables such as gross enrolment rates, performance in standardized tests, gender parity index, teacher-student ratio, amongst others. Increasingly also, the contributions of cognitive psychologists are being factored into curriculum development and teacher training programs. These however, only account for a part of the story of schooling in non-urban regions. Deep social structures that shape student aspirations, motivation, performance, and progression have been largely ignored.

Recent anthropological studies are bringing to light the fact that the form of schooling that is being promoted across the world is acutely problematic for many local communities. In this study of rural communities in Ghana's Krachi West district, it is evident that many children are highly motivated to engage formal education. Their commitment is reflected in impressive sacrifices to provide for their school-related needs and move long distances for a seat in the classroom. They express a deep desire to escape the suffering of their parents and become "big (wo)men" living "better lives" through the social status and secure income that government employment affords. And yet, even as they attempt to balance family expectations with personal aspirations, they join the statistics of rural classrooms that are characterized by overage students, poor performances in standardized tests, and school dropouts. Studies by cognitive and educational psychologists fail to account for contexts like these where highly motivated individuals seem to be able to move themselves to the classroom but are unable to produce performances that mark efficacious students.

The 'silent excluded' children of this study area are engaging a school curriculum that fails to equip them with skills that will make them productive individuals who are able to contribute meaningfully to family incomes in the likely event that they are unable to advance academically and obtain employment in white-collar professions. Instead, schooling reinforces labels that demean local subsistence strategies and encourages students to pursue the promises of modernity (Ferguson 2002). As Anyidoho, Leavy, and Asenso-Okyere (2012:28) note, "[formal] education mediates the content of aspirations", such that the more schooled a young person from a farming background is, the more they imagine futures that are off the soil and in a government office.

The international narrative that calls on governments in African states to focus on the agricultural sector as a sustainable engine for economic growth and prosperity is itself heavily

under-cut by a masked parallel narrative that states that quality formal education will lead to urban living and non-farm careers. Somehow, the prosperity and better life that schooling is purported to offer is interpreted as life away from demeaning livelihoods like crop farming. By delivering this universalized form of schooling, national governments, along with their international counterparts, have created a social field that devalues that which it should empower and promises that which it cannot fulfill.

CHAPTER SEVEN: 'Farming is part of life': Bikpakpaam Youth and Shifting

Livelihoods

7.1: Introduction

It was 6am on a heavily overcast Thursday morning but the weather did not reflect my mood. I was excited setting out from the small mudbrick building that had been my home for two months. The day brought with it my first opportunity to participate in work on a local farm. I headed for Nangmakura, the south-eastern edge of Bommoden where the Kache clan had settled; this is also where Nana Ntegyi, the chief of the community resides. This section of the community had been named after 'Nangma', a man Nana described as his 'elder brother' and the Bikpakpaam farmer alleged to have been the first to move into the region. It is on Nana's family farm that I was destined to have my first taste of Bikpakpaam agriculture, but a few minutes into my walk, just as I reached the school playing field, I saw young men from the Kucha clan sitting on a large bench under their mango tree. It was an odd sight because youth from the Kucha clan are arguably the most hardworking farmers in the community. On *non-kupor*[8] mornings like this one, it is extremely rare to see them sitting at home. Later that day I found out that a clan member had passed away the previous night and they were observing three days of mourning. In the past, after such an event, no one in the entire community and even in neighbouring villages would go to their farms for at least a week. Now, only the bereaved clan stays off its farms and even with that, some individuals will almost certainly flout the rule and pick up their farm tools by the second or third days.

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[8] *Kupor* days are local rest days adhered to by most of the ethnic communities in Krachi West District. They fall on every seventh day and signal the end of the week.

From afar, the young men, many of whom I knew quite well, shouted their morning greetings, and asked for where I was headed. To my shock the entire group burst into raucous laughter after I explained that I was off to work on a farm. I stopped walking and quickly realized why I had suddenly become comic relief so early in the morning. Truthfully, even a toddler in this community would not mistake me for a farmer. Apart from the fact that it seemed impossible that I would be able to do any meaningful work on one of their farms, my attire for work was far from adequate as far as they were concerned. 'Working gear', as it is known in Ghanaian parlance, is usually a set of old clothes, discoloured from use and unfit to be worn on any other occasion. For farmers here, working gear was usually a tattered long-sleeve shirt and a pair of torn trousers; both were bound to be brown from all the sweat and soil of farm work. I, on the other hand, was dressed in a pair of quite fashionable khaki trousers and a navy-blue t-shirt. I also had on my Nike sneakers and a baseball cap. Virtually everything I was wearing was from an Australian mall. In my defence, they were the most faded set of clothes I could find. My water bottle was slung over one shoulder and the bag with my camera and other recording equipment was over the other. I realized then that I looked more like a tourist than a farmer.

I shrugged off their jeers and walked on briskly to Nangmakura. I was to join Nana's sons Confidence, Hosea, and Saviour as well as Confidence's childhood friend, Ishmael, for farm work that day. Apparently, several of the other farmers in this clan were getting ready to set off for communal farming on one of their farms. These farming groups constituted of at least one male from each family. Nana had asked Adams, his fourth son, to stand in for his family. The trip to the Ntegyi farms ordinarily would not take more than 25 minutes of brisk walking but on this day, we used about double that time. Hosea and Saviour picked up their pace and went ahead but Confidence and Ishmael stayed to answer my questions. They gave

a quickfire introduction to yam farming in Krachi touching on several topics including soil types and how to know where to farm which crop, identifying different varieties of the yam crop, harvesting yams, and cultivating yam sets for the next farming season. We arrived at a portion of land Nana had given Confidence to farm groundnuts and worked for about 4 hours. I joined as we cleared the tall weeds with machetes, then burned dead vegetation on the land. We also formed ridges for planting the groundnuts. There were three short breaks: the first was spent chasing away a young Fulani herdsman and his herd of marauding cows; the second and third breaks were spent sitting around a small fire eating roasted yams and chatting about their plans for the future.

As we trudged through the narrow farm paths leading back to town, I mulled over the lessons I had picked up on my first day. I quickly concluded that farming in these communities permeates virtually every aspect of local life precisely because it represents their primary means of livelihood. I was particularly interested in the perspectives of the large number of young people who were combining farming with schooling in some shape or form. Their parents and forebears had moved into these regions for the primary purpose of intensive agriculture. For the elderly, success in crop farming seemed to be the standard by which one's work ethic, wealth, influence, and even spirituality was measured. Was it the same for the schooled generation, or did they simply approach farming as income that can be managed and exchanged in their pursuit of upward social mobility?

This chapter details the indigenous agricultural labour of my participants and demonstrates the cultural role arable land plays in the Bikpakpaam communities of KWD. My purpose is to demonstrate how shifts in attitudes towards agricultural subsistence activities among the young, schooled generation are in many ways a response to the poverty and disempowerment that invariably comes attached to crop farming livelihoods in the region.

In Chapter Four, as part of my discussion on indigeneity in the African context, I discussed the Bikpakpaam's spiritual connection to land as central to their cosmology and ontology. I drew primarily from previous ethnographic work done by anthropologists like David Tait, Allan Dawson, and Henryk Zimoń. In this chapter, I build on this by demonstrating how subsistence farming, the all-pervasive expression of Bikpakpaam relationship with the land, shapes various aspects of everyday life. This detailed ethnographic description of crop farming helps to expand on my overall argument that subsistence agriculture, especially the cultivation of the yam crop, structures most aspects of life in this part of Ghana. I illustrate this by highlighting cultural practice around death, marriage, and gender, in each case showing how the Bikpakpaam valorisation of crop farming is woven into diverse aspects of cultural life. But there are ongoing shifts in attitudes towards crop farming and this is particularly evident among the schooled youth with whom much of my time on the field was spent. Agrarian rural-rural migration patterns that in the past gave rise to these very Bikpakpaam communities of KWD are giving way to movements towards non-farm hustle opportunities in urban areas.

7.2: Farming without Food and Gendered Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa

I argued in my previous chapter (Chapter Six) that young people from rural agriculturist backgrounds in Ghana and across the African continent are opting for non-farm white collar careers. In my field research, rural farming was repeatedly labelled as 'suffering' and formal employment especially in urban areas was the dream they aspired towards. James Sumberg and his colleagues (2021:629-30) argue that youth rural out-migration is not a new phenomenon; push and pull factors may change but the issue of younger generations moving and opting for different subsistence lifestyles has always marked agrarian societies. In this section, I discuss two theoretical and analytical considerations that offer a more nuanced

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account of why young people are disillusioned with rural agriculture and why they prefer instead the non-farm hustle of urban centres. Contrary to some dominant perspectives, I argue that they are not rejecting agricultural lifestyles as much as they are rejecting poverty and hunger, as well as the social restrictions associated with crop farming. In my discussion, I highlight the issue of gender disempowerment in many African agrarian societies.

Perhaps the most significant factor in understanding the reality of the out-migration of rural schooled youth is the enduring fact that Ghana's biggest food producers are often themselves some of the most food insecure. This fact is however often missed in global rankings. By 2013 Ghana had already met 2015 international targets for reducing hunger, and currently sits as one of the few African countries consistently reducing hunger annually (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr 2015; Concern Worldwide & Welthungerhilfe 2023). Within the country, however, large regional and gender disparities have meant that hunger and poverty still persist as complex problems (The Economist Group 2022). More than five percent of Ghana's population are food insecure, and up to two million people, many of them small-holder agriculturists residing in the country's northern regions, are living on the brink (Fonjong and Gyapong 2021). Moreover, a myriad of structural and systemic challenges such as poor road networks, lack of adequate storage facilities, land tenure issues, and perhaps most frustratingly, poor returns on produce, are maintaining the problem of Ghana's agricultural sector with little hope of providing a promising source of livelihood in the near future (Kuuire et al. 2016; Mohammed et al. 2021).

The problem of 'hungry farmers' is not only a Ghanaian problem but one that is shared by most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Although the agricultural sector contributes more than twenty-five percent of the GDP in SSA, rural farmers dominating the sector are among the most food insecure in the world (Jayne, Chamberlin, and Benfica 2018).

This reality was initiated through colonial administrative systems that prioritized large-scale extraction of raw food resources without recognition of indigenous sustainable practices. As Bjornlund, Bjornlund, and Van Rooyen (2022:845) argue, "Africa is the only region in the world where increased export production caused a decline in per capita food production." Widespread food insecurity and poverty was deepened through poor agricultural sector decisions by post-independence governments, crippling IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies in the 1980s, and an unequal global economic system that keeps African countries in under-development (Scoones 2015; Kuuire et al. 2016; Fonjong and Gyapong 2021). Young people are exiting the sector because crop farming has left their parents hungry and poor (Atiglo et al. 2022).

A second helpful approach to the problem of an agrarian society whose next generation is opting for non-farming jobs is to consider crop farming as a livelihood whose sustainability influences the attitudes of the next generation. The sustainable livelihoods approach views Bikpakpaam crop farming as both an income-generating activity and also a pivot around which culture is structured. In my view the sustainable livelihood framework is certainly a helpful way of understanding the unfortunate paradox of food insecure food producers and the resulting challenge of the mass out-migration of schooled youth. In their seminal paper, Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway described sustainable livelihoods in this way:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation (1991:6).

Just as secure livelihoods lead to poverty reduction, social shifts such as fundamental adaptations in a society's lifeways and mass migration are often the results of livelihood failure (Ellis and Freeman 2004; Scoones 2015; Kuuire et al. 2016). When a society's predominant livelihood, in the face of 'stress and shocks' be it environmental, economic, or political, becomes incapable of providing a certain quality of life, its 'next generation' begin to seek alternative means of living no matter how intrinsic that livelihood is to their culture.

Assessing rural livelihoods, such as crop farming among the Bikpakpaam as well as why their young people are opting for urban living, also requires looking at the ways in which their livelihood intersects with broader aspects of life such as identity, gender, and even religious beliefs. In the words of Anthony Bebbington (1999:2022), "people's assets are not merely means through which they make a living; they also give meaning to the person's world." Small-holder agricultural realities are significantly shaped by broader historical, political, economic, and social patterns and vice versa (Scoones 2015; Carr 2015). To understand young people's ambivalent attitudes towards agriculture in KWD, it is essential to consider aspects of social life that extend beyond the farm and yet are impacted by it. In this chapter, one of the key areas I focus on is how Bikpakpaam farming intersects with issues of gender. In the discussion below, I outline in broad strokes some ethnographic findings around agriculture and gender on the continent.

Cultural distinctions between women and men as far as agriculture is concerned is an established phenomenon in many societies across SSA. In spite of the variance across the region when factors such as ethnicity, social class, and age are considered, scholarship generally acknowledges that agriculture is a significantly gendered activity with men usually focused on cash crops while women concern themselves with subsistence crops and the

nutrition needs of the average smallholder household (Fonjong and Gyapong 2021; Kennedy and Peters 1992). Women farmers have been shown in the literature to be less productive in comparison to their male counterparts due to a higher level of land tenure insecurity (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2010), and limited access to agricultural opportunities (Benería 1992; Kevane and Gray 1999).

Qualitative studies in the region report that the agricultural productivity gap between men and women, in many instances, is a product of patrilineal inheritance systems and customary practices that often keep rural African women limited to the 'subsistence, domestic, informal, and volunteer sectors' (Benería 1992). In a study of farming communities in eastern Senegal for example, Grigsby (2004) shows how land tenure systems in patriarchal societies can restrict women to the fringes of agricultural productivity. Women's rights to land are limited and can only be accessed through a father or a husband. In the two rural communities Grigsby researches, he discovers that women are denied access to prime lands because they farm the 'little crops', that is tomatoes, eggplant, okra and other vegetables (Grigsby 2004:213-214).

Gendered agricultural institutions are not only seen in crop farming societies but also among pastoralists. In his study of the Basotho pastoral farmers of Lesotho, James Ferguson (1994:135-166) challenges dominant assumptions of development experts by showing how the Basotho rural economy is governed by cultural ideas of power, cash, and gender and not necessarily wider capitalist forces. In this paper, Ferguson shows how the Basotho distinguish between 'women's animals' and men's animals. He explains that animals that are traditionally known as men's animals, namely 'grazing' livestock such as cows, goats, and sheep, are the primary measures of wealth in Basotho society (p. 150). Men who seek to limit the access of their wives to cash in the home convert their money into cows because custom prohibits

women from rearing and selling grazing livestock. Women are restricted to tending pigs and fowl, and income accrued from these activities is what they can keep to spend on their own needs.

And yet, even in such restricted patriarchal societies, there are shifts in attitudes that are worth noting. In Colin Hoag's (2018) more recent work, he provides a more nuanced perspective to Ferguson's study by demonstrating that in spite of the ways in which the latter's research offered insights into the impact of Basotho cultural norms on the local economy, there were certain complexities about how sheep and goats (ovicaprines) were treated differently from cows (bovines) that Ferguson did not acknowledge. First, although cows could be described as 'reticent or recalcitrant' livestock that resisted commodification, the 'smaller livestock' were more easily sold. Though Basotho ontologies view cattle as more of a cultural pride than just economic goods, sheep and goats constituted a more 'pliable' commodity that the pastoralists were willing to exchange for cash (Hoag 2018:726-727). Second, Hoag explains that although women are generally prohibited from accessing 'men's livestock', they are more able to influence men to sell sheep and goats than cows. In fact, more and more women were being permitted to sell sheep and goats themselves because their husbands, living and working in South Africa, would instruct their chiefs to allow their wives to sell sheep and goats 'as they saw fit' (p.732); clearly, women increasingly had access to what was culturally labelled as men's animals.

While acknowledging the gendered distinctions that exist in many agricultural societies, Cheryl Doss (2002), argues that current practice in many African households does not correlate well with what has been commonly accepted by local communities and development experts alike. Differentiating between men's crops and women's crops, for example, facilitates policy and planning because assistance for a particular gender of farmers

would simply target the crop associated with that gender group. Doss uses data from Ghana to show how crops in the sub-region cannot be empirically classified as either men's crops or women's crops since only a few crops are only grown by men and no crops are exclusive to women. Doss explains that although there are gendered patterns of cropping, these cannot be simplified into specific crops that are farmed by either men or women (p. 1988).

Doss (2002) also argues that the claim that men are cash-croppers while women grow subsistence crops is not exactly tenable. Although more men grow crops for sale than women, there are many women who are into cash cropping and gender is only one of the multiple factors that influence farmers' choices of what to grow and sell. In Ghana, ecological zones and the person heading the household go a long way to determine which crops are grown and not necessarily the gender of the farmer. In the savannah zone for instance, where Krachi West district and much of the Oti region is located, women grow the staples of maize, rice, sorghum, and/or yams but are not likely to be farm-owners or household heads. Many women working on farms that grow these staples are either hired laborers working on rice farms, or are farming on plots owned by their husbands and are thus not categorized as farmers by most surveys because they are not landholders. Among the migrant Konkomba of the Krachi region, the yam crop is the preserve of men, whether it is farmed as a cash crop or as a staple to contribute to the nutritional needs of the household. This means that unlike in other parts of the country, women's farming is not even recognized as important to the food security of the home. Their subsistence activities are peripheral income streams that are tolerated as necessary to help them cater for their own needs but resigns them to an economically and socially disempowered position in the community.

7.3: The Origins of Bikpakpaam Farming in KWD and the Rise of the Yam Crop

Crop agriculture has always been the primary livelihood of the Bikpakpaam, a pivot around which everything else is structured. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the Bikpakpaam are also incredibly mobile and often move in order to safeguard their way of life. In fact, the migrant communities of KWD in which I lived were formed out of this culture of moving to less cultivated areas to take advantage of arable lands and practice cash cropping. Current youth are continuing this pattern of movement; while many of my interlocutors spoke of pursuing the promise of non-farm employment in urban areas, their parents and other earlier migrants recalled the move to KWD as a lure towards more productive farmland for the purposes of cash cropping.

I opened this chapter by recounting my experience of farming with Nana Ntegyi's family. I secured audience with him and heard his story early in my stay on the field. We sat in his compound one afternoon under the shade of mango trees. He was a soft-spoken and down-to-earth man who looked a little older than his age. I discovered that he was in his late sixties even though he could not provide me with a date of birth. His large family of three wives and 11 children ensured that our chat abounded with interruptions. When I asked Nana about how he came to settle in KWD, he explained that he had been born when their clan had already moved into the region and that they were the first of the Bikpakpaam to move into Krachi:

Before us there was no known Konkomba person on the whole of Krachi land. My clan was the first on Krachi soil yet today there are Konkombas all over the place. We are basically farmers and we farm yam, maize, groundnut, millet….We remained here because the soil is very suitable for our type of farm work…. We still have family

members [in Saboba] so we go for funerals and they also come when a family member here passes on. [Nana Ntegyi, 2020]

I asked him about how their clan came to be the first to move to Krachi. He shared how his now late elder brother, Nangma, was the one who initiated the migration from their home in Saboba for permanent settlement in Krachi. After a few trips working on farms as hired labour, Nangma was able to convince a section of their clan to make the move to KWD. Bommoden was the area assigned to them by the Krachi people for their farming and developed its name because it was far from Kete-Krachi, the district capital. Reaching their assigned farmlands required a long trek through the bush with the ever-present threat of dangerous animals. But the lands were so fertile that Akan traders and merchants from Kumasi who visited their farms would often say, "sɛ wo **bɔ mmɔden** duru ho a, wo bɛ nya deɛ wopɛ biara." This can be loosely translated as, "If you struggle to make the trip, you will get whatever you want (in reference to the good yams they were cultivating). The Akan term 'bɔ mmɔden', meaning 'try hard or struggle' eventually stuck and became the name of the community.

Ethnographic studies from the 1950s largely confirm Nana's account. David Tait recorded that worsening climactic conditions further north in Saboba and its environs, as well as the seasonal labour migration of young Bikpakpaam men were the catalysts that launched Bikpakpaam communities in Krachi:

with the exhaustion of that land[9], many Konkomba are settling down the Kulpene valley, around Salaga, south of the Volta around Yeji, and in northern Krachi. Konkomba do not lightly move from their native districts. The separation of kinsmen

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[9] This region (along the northern banks of the Volta-Oti River) had become Bikpakpaam 'homeland' after the Dagomba displaced them from Yendi, but as soil fertility declined there was mass out-migration from this area, especially from communities in and around Saboba.

is a source of deep grief both to those who go and to those who stay behind. (1964: 124)

Tait also hints at the relationship between protecting agrarian livelihoods and moving to areas like Krachi when he cites an oft-repeated prayer among the homeland Bikpakpaam in their customary libations:

I want the corn to grow; I want the rain to fall; I want food to eat. Those people who went off to Krachi, I want them to come home to their houses. (1964: 229)

As land fertility declined in the north, and young men went off to southern areas like Krachi between mid-November and early January to work on yam farms for a lucrative wage, the pull to move permanently to these regions became inescapable. Consequently, several Bikpakpaam communities in and around Saboba became severely depopulated.

The shift to the south was not only a geographical one—the kind of crop farming the Bikpakpaam practiced also changed. In the homeland region, they practiced a much 'purer' form of subsistence agriculture where their farms were largely cultivated to satisfy their nutritional needs; the focus was on grain crops such as sorghum, rice, and maize. Tait describes their diet in this way:

Their main crop and preferred food is guinea corn (sorghum) which is eaten with meat or fish stews seasoned with red pepper and herbs or, in a meagre season, with herb stews alone. Yams I take to be a comparatively recent introduction and they are certainly not as well liked as are the grain foods. (1964:14)

The migrant communities, however, were practicing intense cash cropping of yams even though at that time the tuber crop was not yet central to their diet. Their focus was on supplying yams to the southern market centres of Kumasi and Accra. Again, Tait gives a snapshot of the movement of itinerant Bikpakpaam farmers in the final quarter of each year:

As the rains decline in September, the hunger rice crop ripens and is harvested by mid-November. Once this harvest is gathered in, many young men go off to Krachi to work on the yam farms, where they can earn up to £10 in four to six weeks' work. The yams from this area are traded to the larger centres of population such as Accra and Kumasi. Before they return in mid-December the sorghum harvest is brought in by the women and by the men who remain behind (1964:17)

Krachi Bikpakpaam communities were founded to farm cash crops, specifically yams, but the homeland communities were farming primarily to cater for their food needs. While Tait described sorghum as the main crop of the homeland Bikpakpaam as late as the 1950s, Nana Ntegyi in current times places yams at the top of the migrant community's crop list. In different ways, therefore, arable land and agriculture are pivotal to the lifeways of the Bikpakpaam. But as young people's changing perspectives of crop farming led to a large out-migration from Saboba in the past, so the young, schooled generation's disillusionment with the declining prospects of yam farming in KWD is prompting a mass move towards the urban promise. Whereas earlier Bikpakpaam moved to find better farmland, many young people seek to move away from rural livelihoods altogether.

7.4: Bikpakpaam Yam Farming: An Overview

Yams (*Dioscorea spp.*) are an important staple in many West African countries. In fact, the region accounts for over 90% of yam production in the world (Nweke 2016). The tuber crop can be boiled, roasted, or fried and is served after it is pounded, mashed, or sliced. The Bikpakpaam farming year quite literally revolves around the cultivation of the yam crop. Farming activities are not simply part of their survival strategy but a pivot around which everything else finds its place.

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Between November each year and January of the following year, yam farmers in Krachi prepare the land for cultivation. Because they practice a form of shifting cultivation, each farming season requires work on land that has either been left unused for a couple of years at least or was previously used to cultivate nitrogen-fixing legumes such as groundnut and soybean. The farmers clear the vegetation on the land by weeding and burning; this process in Likpakpaanl is known as '*tinimoor*'. After this, they raise mounds (*likpatayɔkl*) for the planting of yam sets. The period for raising yam mounds is where the most hardworking and versatile farmers are determined. Many young farmers I spent time with often joked that this period is also the time they eat the most food because 'their rib cages and stomachs expand' even as they exert themselves on the farm. Yam mounds are raised using the hoe to gather soil in the shape of large cones. The mounds are arranged in straight lines for easy counting and harvesting. Virtually all farmers raise mounds with the help of others either through the clan communal labour system, or by enlisting a few friends to help them on their farms, or by contracting farm labour to raise the mounds for a fee. One of the students for example explained to me that he often worked with two other friends. The standing agreement between them was that the number of yam mounds you were able to raise for your friend was the exact number he was required to raise for you.

Next is '*linubul*', the planting of yam sets. Yam sets are simply immature yams that are cut up and replanted to produce more yams. Some farmers begin planting as soon as they finish raising their yam mounds in January, others wait for the short rains of March. Those who plant early will be able to harvest as early as July, but late planters harvest around September. Planting is also done with the hoe by pulling back the topmost soil of the mound, creating a hole where the yam set is placed, covering the hole with some weeds to keep the sets cool and protected from the heat, and adding more soil to keep the covering of weeds in

place. The covering of yam sets with vegetation is an indigenous form of mulching. From my observation, the hardest working farmers could raise about 300 yam mounds in one workday and could plant yam sets in at least 500 yam mounds within the same amount of time. Farmers who preferred to wait until March before planting usually used the period between January and March to work on preparing their groundnut, maize, or rice farms. Also, weeds are controlled after planting by spraying weedicides on the farm. Farmers try to strictly limit this to only once each farming season because the chemicals have a way of affecting the taste of the yams and can eventually cause more harm than good. The older farmers boast of a time when they farmed without the help of chemicals.

After the yam sets are planted, the next stage is known as staking or '*tisiir*' in Likpakpaanl. Because the yam crop is a creeping plant, yam shoots are assisted to grow by using wooden stakes planted near the yam mounds. If there are trees on the farm, the shoots tend to grow and wrap around the branches of the trees, but Bikpakpaam farmers often cut down trees on their farms because in their words, "yam does not like too much shade." For early planters, staking is done in March when shoots begin to appear, but late planters may begin at the end of April.

After staking is done, farmers perform at least two rounds of weeding between March (April ending for late planters), when the yam shoots begin to appear, to July (or September for late planters), when harvesting starts. In my time on the field, I noticed that the Konkomba felt it was disgraceful and a mark of laziness for an able-bodied man to stay off his farm on a non-kupor day. Even if there was no work to do on the farm, the average man would still go to the farm, remove a few weeds, harvest some yams from the previous season for the family, and return to the community. That said, while yam farmers wait for harvest, there is

often some work to do on the other crops. So, one might say that the farmers are never busy about nothing; there is always some work to do on the farm.

By July, the yams planted in January are ready for harvesting (*linugbiil*). Farmers usually insist on doing all their harvesting themselves and prohibit women from removing yam tubers from the mounds. The men claim women do not know how to harvest the yams properly and will end up ruining their months of hard work. My analysis is that the restriction on who is 'qualified' to harvest yams is a prime means through which men in Bikpakpaam communities exercise control over the subsistence economy and food provision in the home; I discuss this in more detail later. Harvesting is done by using a machete or a hoe to dig into the mounds and sever the yam tubers from the roots. The roots must be covered again with the soil and kept intact as they will produce yam sets for the next farming season. In a very good harvest, each mound can yield two or three healthy tubers of yam on average, but yields are dependent on the particular variety of the yam crop being cultivated. Farmers in this region are predominantly small-holder farmers. This means that their production is limited and a large proportion of their farm yields are reserved for home consumption. However, they harvest and sell the largest and tastiest yam variants within two weeks of harvesting. During my time on the field, the retail price for yams in these communities was about GH₵ 7 for a set of 3 healthy-looking yams but prices increase when it is not in season as yams become increasingly scarce. Most farmers plant several different variants of yam because the tastiest yam variants (such as the *puna* yam as it is referred to locally) must be eaten within
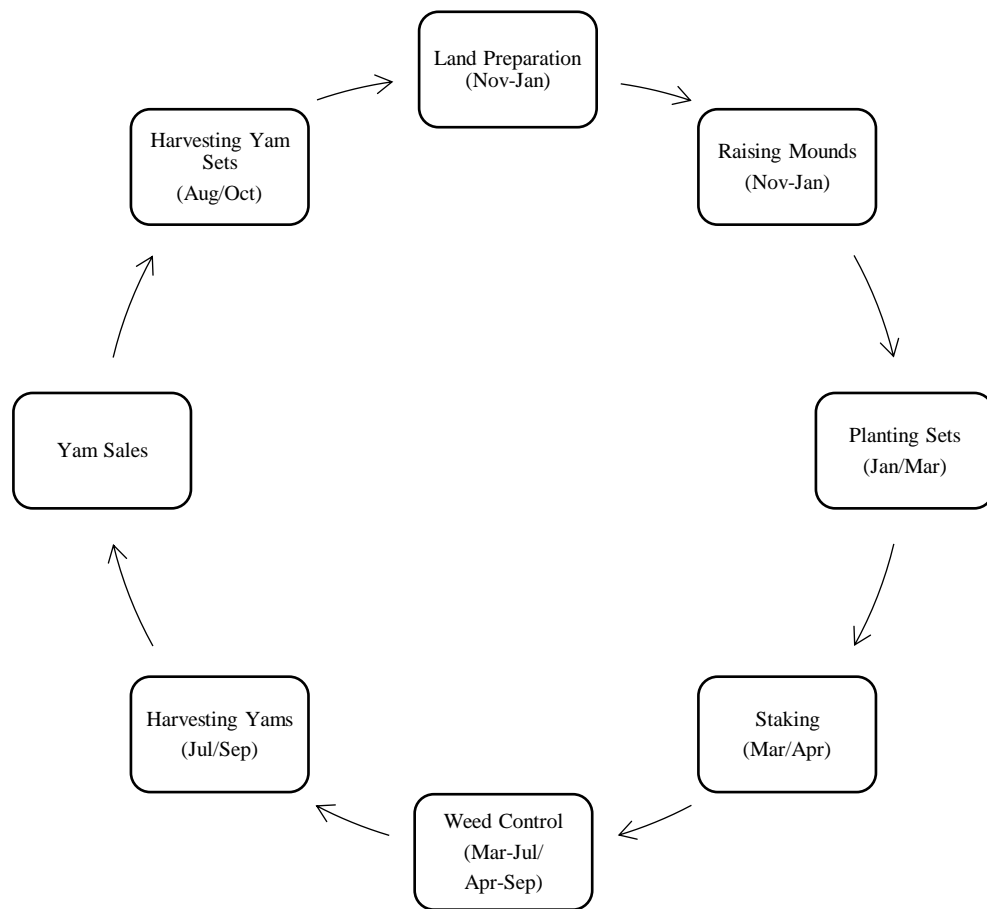
Figure 8*: Overview of Bikpakpaam Yam Farming Calendar*

two months while the less tasty variants are still good for eating six months or more after they have been harvested.

The final stage of the yam farming season is the harvesting of the yam sets or the second harvest; in Likpakpaanl this is referred to as *nnigbin.* Right after the main harvest of the yam tubers, farmers weed the farm; this will be the fifth round of weeding since the start of the yam cultivation process. They weed at this time to ensure that the yam roots get the best of nutrients that the land has to offer and hopefully multiply well so that the farmer can get a lot of yam sets for the next farming season.

7.5: The Centrality of Arable Land Demonstrated in Cultural Practice

The symbolism and spiritual significance of land and its cultivation is at the heart of Bikpakpaam ethnic identity, knowledge practices, and many other aspects of societal life. This cultural fact is quite evident whether in their most important social ceremonies or in their history of conflict and movement. So, although yam farming as a subsistence activity often does not generate the desired financial returns, Bikpakpaam land-use holds a significance that extends beyond the money they get from sales. Among the Bikpakpaam, land and its cultivation is core to one's identity and young men who are combining schooling with farming are expressing a crucial aspect of personhood. Their farms represent their commitment to hard work, their gender, their spirituality, and their preparedness for the responsibilities of married life. They attend school to attain the prestige of modern living, but they tend to their farms to maintain their connection to ethnic identity and community. In the following paragraphs, I narrate some of my knowledge and experiences of Bikpakpaam cultural rites that underscored the significance of arable land in the cosmology and ontology of my participants. My observation is that critical lifecycle rituals were tied up with agricultural activity on the land.

The Bikpakpaam usually observe two types of funeral rites or '*ibua*' for the deceased. In my time in the field, I participated in three funeral ceremonies that were described as preliminaries to much grander celebrations that would be organized in honour of the departed. These preliminary or 'first' funerals are completed within a week of a death in the community. The passing is first announced through messengers who will be sent with the news to neighbouring clans as well as communities connected in some way to the deceased. For communities more than a short motorbike trip away, the information is passed on through a mobile phone call. After the announcements are made, sympathizers usually visit the

bereaved family that same day and spend the night mourning with them. Traditional drums are played throughout the night. In the morning, the deceased is buried. As part of this 'first' funeral, a soothsayer is invited to determine through spiritual means the actual cause of death. Also, throughout this initial period of mourning, which normally lasts a few days and not more than one week, members of the clan of the deceased abstain from all intensive farming activities out of respect for the dead.

During my year-long stay on the field I did not witness the grand 'second' funeral because the President had banned all funeral ceremonies that involved hosting crowds of more than 25 persons as part of the measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. I was informed, however, that the various clans usually waited for a few members to pass on before organizing these massive funeral ceremonies. Consequently, these 'second' funerals could be several years after the actual death of the deceased and were observed for multiple departed clan members. The *Kinachoŋ,* a war dance shared by all Bikpakpaam communities, is usually choreographed at these large funeral ceremonies as a final cultural rite to symbolise the fact that the departed will never again join the community for war. One other funeral rite that caught my attention and expresses the centrality of land and agriculture among the Konkomba is known as *Ntikpiinu.* This rite assumes that the deceased will be frequenting their farm for food and the farm will therefore have to be maintained by a close relative on behalf of the dead. During the second funeral ceremony, this close relative who has been farming on the land of the deceased will leave a portion of unharvested yam mounds or any other crop being farmed on the land and any member of the community can come and freely remove yam tubers, ears of maize, or harvest any other crop for themselves. After this, rituals are performed on the farm, and rights to the land are fully transferred to the close relative who has been farming for the deceased. The significance of *Ntikpiinu* is rooted in the fact

that although for a period the departed was given access to food from their farm, with the performance of this final rite any property they owned while alive has been shared, their close relative has assumed full 'ownership' of their farms, and they no longer have access to property among the living. *Ntikpiinu* also demonstrates how in Bikpakpaam consciousness, arable land represents the highest (and therefore the sum) of one's claim to property on earth.

A second aspect of culture that underscores the crucial place of land and agriculture among the Bikpakpaam can be witnessed in their marriage practice (*Tichel*). I did not witness a 'wedding ceremony' of any sort during my time on the field; these are not really part of Bikpakpaam cultural practice (Tait 1964:162). There are however, practices that lead up to women moving into matrimonial homes. One important duty that must be performed by the groom as part of the marriage process is known as *Lichokuul.* This is the practice where the groom is expected to raise yam mounds for his father-in-law; in cases where the bride's father is deceased, the groom works for her uncle or brother. *Lichokuul* is usually a demanding task as the raising of yam mounds is the most difficult aspect of yam farming. Because of this, grooms usually pay communal farming groups to help them do this work or rely on their colleagues in clan youth collectives that have been set up partly for this very reason.

Another practice associated with Bikpakpaam marriages is a farming duty the groom is obligated to perform for his new wife, a practice termed *Nborkpawiin.* It is assumed that after the bride is wedded, she comes into her matrimonial home 'empty-handed', as she has left all belongings she may have had in her father's house. Her new husband is therefore required to set aside a sizeable parcel of land (about 2 acres) and cultivate a groundnut farm for her. All proceeds from this farm goes to her and she is to continue farming groundnut annually on this farm as a means of income to help her cater for her personal needs. *Nborkpawiin* is a vitally important practice for the financial wellbeing of Bikpakpaam

women because husbands are not culturally obligated or even expected to provide for the needs of their wives throughout married life. Even though most women help their husbands in one way or another on their yam farms, the men usually do not share the profits of yam sales with their wives; their domestic responsibility ends when they provide a roof to live under and the basic staples needed for meals. Some Bikpakpaam men do not provide the school-related expenses of their children; it is assumed that the woman is to take care of all the needs of the children when they are young. One young man explained it this way as he shared with me bitter memories of his father's lack of involvement in his schooling:

> Among us, we believe that small children are for the woman, and they only belong to the father when they are older. When you are old and you bring something home, your father should be the first to see it before anyone else otherwise you have disrespected him. Some very few [fathers] are good but if you are not lucky and you are born to some you will suffer. (**Meshach, JHS2019**)

For the Bikpakpaam woman, your commitment to make the most use of arable land handed over to you after marriage is crucial for your survival, for that is one of the very few means through which you can generate the necessary financial resources to take care of yourself and your children.

7.6: Farming and Gender: The Fringes of the Fringes

Farming among the Bikpakpaam of KWD is an incredibly gendered activity. But perhaps more than in many other parts of rural Ghana, agricultural productivity is used to simultaneously define and reinforce gender roles and hierarchies. Some of the resolute responses I received about pursuing non-farm employment and moving to the city to hustle were from young women. In Chapter 5 I highlighted the views of people like Paulina, Matilda, and Alberta all of whom expressed a strong desire to leave the rural restrictions of KWD

behind. Again, in Chapter 6, I included quotes from young women like Linda, Faith, and Abigail all of whom aspired towards non-farm careers. In my time on the field, it was my observation that although women farm and in many ways are involved in agricultural activity just as much as men, their farm work is not recognized the way men's work is and their role in the home is kept at the fringes. In a manner that echoes the patterns of the African agrarian societies I discussed earlier in this chapter, women in Bommoden and other Bikpakpaam communities of KWD are kept from the main cash cropping activity of the region and are maintained in an economically disadvantaged position. If many rural farmers in Ghana are on the fringes, then women in KWD occupy the fringes of the fringes.

Women in this region face peculiar challenges in their bid to create better futures for themselves and their children. Patience was among Bommoden JHS's graduating class of 2020. Her grades in the BECE were poor but after re-writing the exams the following year she passed and was able to pursue an Arts program at Kpandai Senior High School. Her mother is the only one who helps with her school expenses and during vacations, Patience helps in her mother's farm. Patience wants a career in one of Ghana's security services but also recognizes that farming is not something she can easily abandon. When I last checked in on her, I asked if farming was part of her plans after school:

Farming involves a lot of hard labour, and I don't enjoy it. If there is an opportunity to go to the city I will go but if that does not come I will stay and help my mother.... Farming is part of life so I cannot stop farming. (**Patience, JHS2020**)

Patience's mother is one of many women working within severe social restrictions to create a better future for her daughter. In Bommoden women cater for themselves and their children through 'women's crops' like maize, groundnuts, and rice. Although their agricultural acumen did not seem to be accorded much recognition, I often observed women heavily

involved in crop farming. But yam farming by a woman is strictly forbidden. The region is known for yam farming and wholesalers move to KWD to purchase yams for Kumasi and Accra so the demand for other produce pales in comparison. In this way, women's earnings from farm work are always meagre.

I asked my male participants about why the idea of women farming yam was such a cultural taboo. Meshach narrated his memories of his father's attitude in this area:

We Konkombas don't allow women to harvest yam…. My mother was farming water yams but she had to stop because my father felt it was an insult…. They can harm a woman who is farming yam because farming yam is a man's honour; it is their pride. For those who use *juju,* when a woman enters your farm while in her period, it will ruin your harvest. There is a Konkomba house near the Kabre [quarter], that man has a daughter who he has taught how to raise yam mounds; she helps him because he does not have mature sons. But he does not allow her to have her own yam farm because everyone in the community will be talking about him. **(Meshach, JHS2019)**

From this response, the designation of the yam crop as 'a man's crop' is not because of any physical limitation that women possess, it is rather an attempt to protect male 'pride'. In fact, even though all able-bodied women I interacted with were regularly engaged in farming crops such as groundnuts, maize, soya bean, and rice, they were still not perceived to be 'real' farmers. Real farm work, reserved for the men, included tasks such as the clearing of bushes that take over farmlands after every farming season, raising yam mounds, planting the yam sets, and regularly weeding around the mounds until harvest time. It seemed evident that in a patriarchal society such as this one, with the yam crop established as the region's primary cash produce, yam farming was accepted as an activity reserved for men in order to maintain them in their position of economic dominance.

As a result of the expectation that women support their own children in spite of their obvious economic disadvantage, young girls must often work as hired labour to supplement their mothers' contributions towards their schooling. I learned this in a group interview with a cross-section of the Bommoden female students. After weeks of trying to meet up with some of them, the opportunity finally presented itself on a 'kupor' market day as. Part of the reason I had found it so difficult to meet them as a group was because they were working throughout the covid-19 school break. In Bommoden Fridays are market days and women buy things they want for their homes and barter trade. It just so happened that the rotation of the weekly rest (or kupor) day fell on a Friday and gave me a unique opportunity to meet with them. We sat in a circle on wooden benches and chatted about their schooling and how they were spending their time whilst schools were closed. One of the questions I asked them was how they obtain the items they need for school like stationary, uniforms, and 'hidden fees':

Mary (JHS2019): I paid all my [school] expenses myself by going to 'Bator' (the lakeside). I barter trade for fish and come and sell for money. We also go and work on someone's rice farm to be paid.

Faith (JHS2020): When I need any of those items, I always tell my mother, sometimes she may have the money, but I have to cry before she gives it to me.

Paulina (JHS2020): I pay for them [school items], but my parents pay sometimes. Parents do more of the paying than I do. I work on people's farms for income. I have social studies and science textbooks, but other pamphlets were given to me by people.

Linda (JHSPrivate): If my parents don't have money to pay for me, then I will go and labour to get the money. We go to lakeside to plant rice and groundnut. We burn and sell charcoal, sometimes…we go fishing.

The 'lakeside' or 'Bator' is a reference to communities that are along the Oti River where fishing and rice farming are lucrative activities. Mary, Paulina, and Linda all mention that they work as hired labour on people's farms along the river. I discovered that when the school term was ongoing, many of the girls would usually spend their weekends farming rice and exchanging yams for fish at these communities as a way of earning an income. With a daily wage of about GH₵10, they were only able to make double of that amount every weekend when school was in session. During the COVID-19 school break however, almost all of them would make the forty-minute hike to these waterfront communities daily; they would leave at the crack of dawn and return late in the evening. When I asked about what they had made so far, their faces beamed with pride as each shared with me how much money they had been able to save up within just a month of work. In the midst of the cultural restrictions placed upon them, these young women were surmounting different kinds of obstacles and largely self-funding their studies.

Of course, gender distinctions were not limited to farming, they were also seen in the domestic arena. What I found interesting about young men's views on the gendered nature of domestic tasks was how once again crop farming was used to define roles in the home. In Bommoden, women were usually the ones occupied with domestic tasks like cooking, child-minding, and fetching water from one of the three boreholes in the community. When I asked some male students why they do not usually perform domestic tasks like cooking and fetching of water, the idea seemed ludicrous. How could they, after a hard day of sweat and toil, doing work that the women could not do, return from the farm and be expected to cook, sweep, or carry basins of water? The very thought of it was preposterous. Seeking to better understand their point of view, I decided to play the advocate. I argued that the women were also doing farm work and enduring the heat of the sun right along with them. They insisted

that the farm work women did could not be compared to what they as men were doing and that the 'women's' crops (i.e. groundnut, maize, soy bean, rice, etc.) demanded farm visits only at particular periods in the year whereas the labour associated with yam farming (a man's crop) required daily trips to the farm virtually all year round. They felt they had quashed my case when they explained that it was rare if not impossible to find a woman who was farming yams, however it was commonplace to see men not only farming yams, but also helping women with their groundnut and maize farms or even farming those women's crops themselves. It was clear to them that work at home should be left for women because the brunt of the work done at the farm was primarily born by men.

Indeed, the control that men, both young and old, exert over land-use in Konkomba societies largely echoes the agricultural gender gaps observed across sub-Saharan Africa. This case study from Krachi however, underscores the fact that the gendered nature of farming in patriarchal societies such as these is not the result of some lack of agricultural skill, or the desire of women to resign themselves to 'women's crops' while men pursue cash cropping. Rather, gender gaps among the Bikpakpaam show how women's lack of access to land, to privileged agricultural knowledge, and to 'masculinized' crops is used to maintain men's control of the local economy and food provision in the home. Women in Bommoden farm rice, sorghum, beans, and maize, but so do men. And women who have defied cultural norms at some point in time have farmed yam and demonstrated that they have the skills to do so. But as grazing livestock is the pride of Basotho men, so yam farming is the pride of Bikpakpaam men. And for the young woman, whose primary means of economic empowerment is traditionally the parcel of arable land that will only be made available to her through marriage, succumbing to the pride of a Bikpakpaam man is often a less expensive price to pay than progressing through a school system that you simply cannot afford.

7.7: Summary

In this chapter I have argued that although arable land and crop agriculture have always been central to Bikpakpaam lifeways, there have also been cultural shifts. Migrants who moved from 'the homeland' to Krach West district in the first half of the twentieth century initiated a shift from pure subsistence cultivation of grains to cash cropping of yams. Currently, KWD is witnessing a significant out-migration of its schooled youth and many of my Bikpakpaam interlocutors are aspiring towards non-farm careers in urban areas. This shift prompts new questions around the future of agrarian societies whose cultural life revolves around agriculture, and for whom crop farming is not simply a means of living but also that which gives meaning to several aspects of community life. This reality also has implications for development-sector traditions that view rural livelihoods in regions like SSA as 'the way to go.' I present two key considerations that are crucial in the debate over rural schooled youth rejecting rural livelihoods. First, I argue that they are not rejecting agriculture per se but the poverty and low social status that accompanies it. Second, because livelihoods intersect with so many other aspects of life, scholars must look critically at how rural farming is shaped by external forces and vice versa.

On the issue of how small-holder agriculture is shaped by broader social, political, and economic patterns, I illustrate with the Bikpakpaam of KWD by touching on cultural practices around death and marriage. My primary focus, however, is on the issue of gender. In my discussion I outline the ways in which the Bikpakpaam men reinforce women's economic disempowerment by sidelining them from yam cash cropping, refusing to recognise their agricultural labour and contributions to the food security of the home, and often leaving the costs of children's schooling on women's meagre incomes. The reality of women's relegation to the fringes of the fringes has been documented in agrarian societies

across the continent. Despite these restrictions, however, I demonstrate how both young and

adult women are surmounting obstacles to create better futures for themselves.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.1: Introduction

Ebenezer served as the school prefect for Bommoden's 2018 cohort of Junior High School students. Upon completion, he gained admission to Bueman Senior High School where he studied for three years as a General Arts student with Economics, Government, Geography, and Christian Religious Studies as his elective subjects. When I met him in Bommoden, he was in his second year at Bueman. I took a close interest in him after he gave a surprising response to my question about where he saw himself in ten years: "I want to be an economist and later become the President of Ghana." After writing and passing the West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE), he moved to the capital and, in the space of about eight months, had held four different jobs. He first worked as a busboy in a busy restaurant. Next, he became a warehouse worker for a mineral water production company. After that, he relocated to Aburi, a town just outside Greater Accra's north-eastern boundaries. Here he worked as a farm hand for about two months in large scale vegetable cultivation. When I phoned Ebenezer late in 2023, he was back in the city centre working for a company that produces and distributes fried finger foods.

Naturally, Ebenezer's stint as a vegetable farmer piqued my interest and I asked why he had been willing to farm in an urban context but had refused to return to his farms at home in Krachi. He gave me this reply:

> You have heard a lot of us say that there is no money in farming, but when you travel you discover that city farming is better than village farming. Every year my father and others would raise between 3000-6000 yam mounds. Some people's yam mounds cover about six acres of land. My father never earned anything close to GH₵1000. When I

was doing the city vegetable farming, I was paid GH₵1000 every month; I left because

the owner wanted to reduce my wages to GH₵800.

He then proceeded to narrate something he had experienced earlier in the year. On his first attempt to purchase a 'small' tuber of yam in the city, he discovered it had been priced at GH₵20. He was outraged. You could purchase three much larger tubers in Krachi West for half that price. He explained that these experiences convinced him that doing such hard work of farming in the village would only result in being 'cheated.' This is why he had chosen to remain in the city, even if it meant doing a job like farming. As I prepared to end the phone conversation, I asked him if he had any questions for me. He paused and asked: "If I am working hard in the city and making good money, do I still need to continue schooling and be struggling for a government job?" The question caught me off guard and I simply could not think of a cogent response to give him. Ebenezer was twenty-something years old, and his schooling had not yet showed any signs of fulfilling its promise. But who was I to tell him that continuing his schooling would do very little in guaranteeing that he would achieve his dream of becoming President. I mumbled something about the importance of pensions and paid sick leave, then quickly said goodbye and dropped the call.

My focus throughout the course of this research project has been to establish a closer understanding of rural students' shifting ideas around identity, livelihoods, and life aspirations. I have also been interested in how discourses on the global, national, and local levels are mediating how these ideas are shaped. Participating with these students even as they routinely navigate indigenous subsistence lifestyles alongside their schooling has been the primary means through which I have examined the complexities associated with *being* a Ghanaian youth living in an acutely disadvantaged region. Of course, the progression of my thinking has required dipping in and out of the theoretical debates swirling amongst the

scholarly communities of (pan)Africanists, anthropologists and sociologists of education, critical/alternative developmentalists, as well as critical indigenous pedagogists. In this chapter I bring the threads of scholarship and field participation together as I consider the primary question of this thesis: How are rural Ghanaian students pursuing their imagined futures? I give an overview of the main narrative of this study. Next, I reflect directly on the research questions, before discussing the implications of my findings for further research, policy, and development practice. But first, I reflect back on the moment of my 'conscientization' even as I sum up in this chapter on how my thinking has progressed over the course of this doctoral project.

8.2: The Story of my 'Conscientization'

As part of Chapter One, I narrated the story of my schooling and my journey to this doctoral project. I mentioned that during my graduate studies, I became interested in issues around indigenous knowledges and the decolonization of schooling. I however purposely skipped over my 'awakening', or 'conscientization' in Freirean terms, so that I could use it in this final chapter to reflexively introduce the development of my thinking over the course of this project, and to account for my difficulties in responding to Ebenezer's question. My entire education right up to the undergraduate level prepared me to be a competitive candidate for salaried employment, and for living the modernist urban dream. But my perspective radically changed during a semester-long Masters subject run by the late Prof. James Anquandah.

Prof. Anquandah was then very close to eighty years old. He was a small, frail, and wiry old man whose eyes somehow always danced with passion when he was teaching. Our classes were held in his large office and all six of us students would huddle around his small wooden desk. He was an Africanist scholar who sought to awaken us to how coloniality had characterized Africans and their indigenous knowledge resources as constituting the exotic

Other. His argument, however, was that this characterization ought to be reclaimed through Africans' self-determined articulation of their connection to the continent and their rich knowledge resources.

So, for three hours every week he led us through an unending list of Africentric publications, his own handwritten notes, as well as old photographs and maps. These sessions were scheduled as graduate lectures, but they were anything but that. He facilitated the sessions using his personal experiences and engagements with the themes we discussed. We were so engrossed with his knowledge and his dancing eyes that it was always a futile attempt to take notes. He introduced us to naturalistic Yoruba bronze sculptures from Ile Ife, Koma terracotta figurines from northern Ghana dated to the sixth century CE, face masks from the Asante empire made of pure gold and raided by British forces in 1874, the textile weaving traditions of Mande groups in the Sahara, and to ethno-medical practices of the Ga-Dangme and Nzema peoples, amongst many others. As each session ended, it was always clear there was so much more he wanted to share.

Towards the end of the semester, I remember that I suddenly realized that as African peoples we were so much more than we had been told we were. I also remember repeatedly blurting out in one session: "How come we were not told about this earlier in our schooling?" Prof. Anquandah would simply look at me, smile, then completely ignore the question. Looking back, I think he wanted to leave that to us to figure out. I have spent my post-graduate journey trying to answer that question, and after examining the complexities surrounding why African classrooms remain colonized so long after our political independence, I realise that there is no easy answer to this question or to Ebenezer's. Since taking that subject, I have been committed to the decolonization of schooling because I recognize the power of the classroom to awaken the consciousness of learners. But I find

myself still studying towards even better salaried jobs. I still wear clothes from Australian malls and have not returned to any farm since leaving the field. Perhaps answering Ebenezer's question was difficult for me because it was never my place to answer. Ebenezer's right to education should mean that the rich ways of knowing and being that characterize his context should be presented side by side with other ways of knowing and being so that he can be equipped to navigate the spaces between the different epistemes for himself.

8.3: The Story of this Thesis

Amidst the diverse bodies of literature I have drawn from in this study, one main narrative has remained constant: the African Renaissance project must create space in discussions around decolonizing classrooms for the aspirations of the most marginalized young people. Africanist advocacy for decolonized schooling lives on in the efforts of many scholar-activists, as well as in the African Union's Agenda 2063. But in a manner that seems contrary to these efforts, schooled youth across the continent, especially those in rural areas, are increasingly dreaming of modernist, urban, and non-farm lifestyles. The schooled youth of migrant Bikpakpaam communities in Krachi West district are no exception. They are inadvertently championing a mass cultural shift through their movement away from rural farming lifestyles. I argue, however, that they are not rejecting the indigenous lifeways that Africanists are advocating a return to. Rather, they are rejecting the poverty, suffering, low incomes, and limited social mobility that has always been attached to their rural lives. Therefore, the theorizing of decolonized or indigenized education on the continent must seriously consider the imagined futures of these marginalized students.

8.3.1: The Africanist Vision of Decolonized Schooling

In the pre-colonial era, African communities shared a common understanding of personhood that was grounded in their relationships to lands on the continent and to each other. But as colonization became entrenched through events like the 1884-5 Berlin Conference, European powers helped create and prioritize levels of identification that centred around boundaries, borders, and binaries (Mamdani 2020; Mbembe 2001). Colonial schooling helped to create in learners a self that was elitist, in pursuit of all things European, and divorced from or opposed to their indigenous ways of living and being. Freire's response to this dualism, or to the two-worlds conundrum, was to abolish the elitist self and help learners to construct their identities and aspirations around their local worlds. (Pan-)Africanist scholars and leaders were inspired by Freire and continued their calls for decolonization in all facets of life in African societies. In classrooms, they sought a decolonization that would lead learners to 'conscientization' and a 're-Africanized mentality' (Freire 1970; wa Thiong'o 1986; George J. Sefa Dei 2020; Borges 2019). Even though this agenda of an 'African Renaissance' has waned in national education policy, it still lives on through the Africanist scholarship and the broad declarations of the African Union. Critical education scholars on the continent are still calling for education-sector reform where schooling is modelled along the goals of indigenous education from African pre-colonial societies. Young people should again be enculturated and accepted as responsible members of their societies through education systems that approach knowledge as emerging from being, and the classroom as an extension of the wider community (Shizha 2014).

Paulo Freire, himself a passionate pan-Africanist who partnered with nationalist independence leaders on the continent, believed that schooling should help inculcate in learners a desire to contribute positively to their communities, and not on simply enriching

the self. His idea of a 'problem-posing education' challenged students to critically appraise their worlds and engage with the problems around them. He offered a model that sought to be contextually relevant and produce students that are committed to the 'better-ing' of their communities and not just serving individual interests, or even the goals of the wider global economy. Schooling, as a mediator of leaners' aspirations, ought to facilitate the 'emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality' such that students are equipped to 'decode' the problems in their worlds and develop creative solutions to make things better (Freire 1970:81).

Tanzania was the first African country Paulo Freire visited, and some of these ideas greatly influenced Julius Nyerere's policies in the newly independent country. Nyerere (1967) envisioned a Tanzanian education system that would prioritize rural economies and cultivate successive generations that valorised indigenous lifestyles:

> It is therefore the villages which must be made into places where people live a good life; it is in the rural areas that people must be able to find their material well-being and their satisfactions…. This means that the educational system of Tanzania must emphasize cooperative endeavour, not individual advancement. (1967:387)

In Nyerere's view, the school should help learners construct imagined futures that centred around living out the 'better life' in their home communities. He also denounced the dominant model of schooling and the ways in which it 'divorces participants from the society it is supposed to prepare them for' (1967:390; Wabike 2015). Nyerere argued that it produces graduates who are intent on staying away from farming and are more interested in 'earning a respectable salary' than in serving their communities.

Another Africanist independence-era leader Paulo Freire was strongly aligned with was Guinea Bissau's Amilcar Cabral. Freire and Cabral's use of the 'de-Africanization' and

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're-Africanization' of mentality illustrates how Pan-Africanists right from the independence-era perceived schooling as a prime platform for decolonization. Freire and Cabral diagnosed Bissau's education system inherited from the Portuguese colonial administration as set up to 'de-Africanize' indigenes (Freire 1978/2020:8). In Freire's view, it was exclusionary, 'divorced from reality', and selective. While the majority were rejected and branded as failures, a select few were accepted and promoted by the school system, stripped of their cultural authenticity, and made to take on a 'bicultural' elitism that he simply described as 'strange' (Freire 2020:109). Cabral's vision for the country's education system as they emerged from colonial rule aimed at 're-Africanizing the mentality' of those trained through colonial schooling (Borges 2019).

Contemporary Africanist scholars have taken the call for the decolonization of schooling even further by emphasizing the mainstreaming of difference in the classroom. Some independence-era leaders cast Pan-Africanism as a homogenous national or continental identity where different indigenous ways of knowing and being were relegated (Coe 2005; Wiggins 2005). Current scholarship, however, respectfully engages with difference (be it linguistic, religious, philosophical, and socio-economic, amongst others) across the continent, even as they also re-affirm widely shared ideals. By aligning the African Renaissance project with the goals of the international Indigenous peoples' movement, contemporary Africanist scholars have conceptualized decolonized schooling not only as the mainstreaming of the collective ideals of Pan-Africanism, but also the valuing of individual African indigenous knowledges within their respective contexts (Dei 2005; Shizha 2014; Adebisi 2016; Khudu-Petersen and Chilisa 2018; Chilisa 2020). Indeed, one of the key demonstrations that the project of decolonizing African schooling lives on beyond the independence era is the fact

that the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledges in school curricula is firmly enshrined in the African Union's Agenda 2063.

8.3.2: Local Schooled Youth Responding to a Global Promise

African youth are seemingly opting for future versions of themselves that step away from 'Pan-Africanist ideals' and have chosen instead to pursue 'modern neo-liberal ideals.' Young people's aspirations even as they engage current school systems across Africa are increasingly being shaped towards 'modern', urban, and non-agricultural lifestyles because these constitute their 'vision' of a better life. This reality transcends borders, socio-economic class, and even type of schooling (e.g. public versus private). My thesis, however, demonstrates that this radical shift in lifestyle aspirations is acutely evident amongst rural schooled youth precisely because in many of these largely agrarian communities the changes occurred within a single generation, and the primary differentiating factor between the young people and their parents is in the experience of schooling (Sumberg et al. 2012; 2014). In addition, the way these young people have constructed their aspirational selves seems in direct contradiction to Pan-Africanist conceptions of decolonized students and societies and indigenized education.

Formal education as the prime route to prosperity and 'the modern life' has been echoed by international development actors and national governments alike. During my field studies, schooling was described to me as a 'change agent', 'gamechanger', 'meal ticket', 'key', 'silver bullet', and 'an only hope', amongst others. Undergirding this narrative is the basic message of current schooling as a social good that must be offered to all people as a fundamental human right (UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative 2019). The benefits of schooling have been theorised and popularized from a predominantly human capital approach that views it as the way in which individuals are equipped to contribute more

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effectively to individual, national, and global economic goals (Hill 2010; Bonal, Fontdevila, and Zancajo 2023). Critical scholars of education, however, point out that this narrative ignores how schooling fails to deliver on its promise in many parts of the Majority world, and rather contributes to unemployment, poverty, inequality, acute rural-urban migration, and the general disillusionment of young people (Ahearn and Bumochir 2016; Hicks, McDougall, and Oakeshott 2021).

My thesis, in many ways, is an account of how the young people in Krachi West district, a rural and deprived area of Ghana, are making significant sacrifices to obtain the promise of schooling. It is the story of how a young generation of crop farmers are navigating what they describe as 'suffering' in order to escape difficult agricultural lifestyles and assume future versions of themselves that they term 'the better life.' Students like these make impressive sacrifices to remain in the classroom because of the fundamental belief that schooling will offer a better life for themselves and their families; a life that is not 'chained' to the soil. These convictions are not unique to the research participants of this doctoral project. (Dost and Froerer 2021; Froerer, Ansell, and Huijsmans 2022). Other studies that have engaged rural students in sub-Saharan Africa argue that the back-breaking toil, crippling uncertainty, and the low social status associated with crop and animal farming continues to motivate large numbers of young people to opt for schooling pathways that increase their chances of landing white-collar careers (Leavy and Hossain, 2014; Honwana, 2012). Thus, formal education increasingly correlates to aspirations and livelihoods that escape farming. Paulo Freire describes the pressures and difficulties my interlocutors are escaping as 'limit-situations.' This approach seems to romanticize the rural Majority World along with all the conditions that negatively affect people's overall quality of life. He, however, argues that contemporary schooling 'preaches in the desert' by completely ignoring the contexts of

students. Worse, it often presents communities' limit-situations as evidence of backwardness and a lack of innovation. Freire, on the other hand, insists that limit-situations are opportunities for students to showcase their critical thinking.

Yet, one key paradox of my study is that although rural youth from agrarian societies are escaping the difficulties associated with crop farming (whether these are described as 'sufferings' or 'limit-situations'), they are not abandoning crop farming itself. Among many of the students I engaged, escaping the low social status, poverty, and general uncertainty attached to smallholder agriculture did not mean they were completely omitting farming from their lives. Several boys (and a few girls) would tell me they did not aspire to *be* farmers because "there is no money in farming!" But in the next breath they could not imagine having to purchase food staples like yam from others and claimed that they intended to maintain some degree of agricultural activity even after securing white-collar jobs. For Patience, "farming is part of life" and she "cannot stop farming." Some, like Ebenezer, refuse to farm and be 'cheated' but are quick to differentiate between 'city farming' and 'village farming' based on the returns of the labour. At a community level, I even discovered that they perceived any able-bodied male, such as myself, who was not engaged in some type of faming to be either lazy or something less than a man.

There are several studies on the continent around young people's aspirations that I found helpful in understanding this paradox. One such study is Henrik Vigh's (2010) work among young people in war torn Guinea Bissau. I refer here to Vigh's understanding of the concept '*dubriagem*', the Guinean creole term for social navigation that makes the most of your present circumstances in order to create the best possible future for yourself. Dubriagem can be seen in the ways in which Bikpakpaam young people in KWD are seeking to escape the lifestyle associated with subsistence farming and yet are vigorously engaging in crop

farming alongside schooling. My interlocutors were navigating schooling and farming side-by-side, and fully intended to continue doing so even after gaining government employment, as a way of managing the very real economic uncertainty in a country like Ghana. Moreover, their constant navigation between farm and school was the only means by which they could maintain a sense of indigenous personhood while investing in the promise of 'modern' lifestyles. Agriculture is not only a means of living, but also a way of life. For young men, especially, it encapsulates several proofs of participation in cultural praxis including hard work, responsible adulthood, masculinity, and sensitivity to the metaphysical world. So, the young people I spent time with invest in schooling as a pathway to the respectability and upward social mobility of formal employment, but they also maintain local subsistence lifestyles to preserve their cultural identities.

8.3.3: Bikpakpaam Youth Spearheading a Cultural Shift

But even as young people navigate the spaces between their aspirations of modern living and their indigenous authenticity, they are inadvertently initiating a cultural shift that is very similar to one in the past. The Bikpakpaam themselves represent a unique example of a cultural group that is both reifying and defying established categories of indigeneity. They share several attributes with indigenous societies all over the world, but they also differ in many ways. Like most communities on the African continent, the Bikpakpaam self-identify as indigenous to Africa and in many ways satisfy the core attributes of members of the international Indigenous people's movement. They are a pre-colonial society that, from all the evidence available, are autochthonous to the northern parts of the territory now known as Ghana (Talton 2010; Kachim 2019). Yet, either through forced displacement or voluntary migration in search of fertile lands, most Bikpakpaam do not live on their ancestral territories. Rather, through ritually significant markers like earth shrines and clan farms, they maintain

a spiritual relationship to the Land. Not as geographical territory to which they hold constitutional claim but as a spiritual essence that structures many aspects of their lives (Dawson 2009; Kachim 2018). Thus, the Bikpakpaam join a unique section of dispossessed, displaced, and diasporic peoples whose identification as Indigenous is maintained through their *relationship* to land and not their *residence* upon it (T. E. Adefarakan 2015; George J. Sefa Dei 2011).

Beyond their relationship to the Land, the Bikpakpaam blur categories through the ways they navigate the margins of Ghanaian society. They have been systematically excluded by colonial and post-colonial governments because they are a non-centralised and acephalous people who do not traditionally have chiefs through whom indirect rule can be easily effected (Talton 2010). Even the name 'Konkomba', by which the Bikpakpaam are widely known, and their attitudes towards that designation hint at their approach to marginalisation. Despite referring to themselves as 'the Bikpakpaam' in their intra-ethnic relations, they have accepted to be designated as 'the Konkomba' by others right from colonial times even though the label is most likely a corruption of how their oppressive Nanumba neighbours previously referred to them (Tait 1964). Again, when their centralised and militarily superior neighbours entered the region, the Bikpakpaam moved out of their ancestral lands and occupied the plains of the Oti River, a region strategically located on the fringes of both the British colonial administration in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and the German colonial administration in Togoland (Kachim 2018). The marshy terrain of the region also served to discourage the incursions and raids of their horse-riding neighbours (Maasole 2006; 2012). Particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, the Bikpakpaam were galvanised through a section of their youth to contest their exclusion by embracing schooling, adapting certain cultural practices, as well as migrating to fertile areas across Ghana's middle and northern belts to

dominate yam crop farming in the country (Talton 2016). In the 1980s and early 1990s, when their claims to arable lands at both their ancestral territories and in some regions they had moved into were challenged by the Nanumba, Dagomba, and Gonja (all of whom are centralised chiefdoms), the Bikpakpaam responded violently and engaged in a series of bloody conflicts with these groups. Since the clashes of this period, the Bikpakpaam have been cast in Ghanaian society as 'violent strangers' (Dawson 2000; 2017). Indeed, like so many indigenous groups worldwide, the Bikpakpaam have been relegated to the margins, but they have also historically navigated this exclusion through strategies such as migration, schooling, agricultural acumen, and full blown inter-ethnic aggression (Kachim 2018).

But the political consciousness of the Bikpakpaam and the cultural shifts towards greater inclusion did not end with the turn of the century. I argue in my thesis that change is still ongoing, and this can be seen vividly among migrant Bikpakpaam communities such as those in Krachi West district, particularly among their schooled youth. I build on previous ethnographic and historical studies to demonstrate that once again the youth are at the heart of cultural shifts and mass movements; one key difference is that whereas in the past Bikpakpaam youth moved to other fertile rural areas to dominate the agricultural sector, now schooled youth are moving to urban areas in search of non-farm careers even if it means, in the insightful words of Paulina, they will have to "find something to do" in the hustle economies of Accra and Kumasi.

Young women especially, despite being very active in various types of crop farming, are compelled to aspire towards careers away from the soil because within Bikpakpaam society they are excluded from farming yams, the primary cash crop and the one most symbolically important. They are farmers who are not recognized by their own community as 'real farmers' and for several generations have been placed on the fringes of the fringes.

For many of the young women I interacted with, indigenous lifestyles often stand in sharp contrast to 'modern' careers leading out of schooling. From their accounts, local lifestyles do not offer pleasant future prospects, and to pursue schooling and salaried employment represent desires that community life simply does not offer. With young women, the future exists as a choice. That is, the pursuit of schooling and salaried employment will likely mean leaving the local community and the life it represents. To stay will mean being resigned to the disempowerment associated with marriage and the domestic arena in rural life. This, in my view, is why mothers like Patience's mum are actively investing in the education of their daughters beyond what they may be willing to do for sons. They acknowledge that the modernist promise of the classroom could prove to be a mirage, so they hedge their bets and encourage their daughters to join them in farming rice, peanuts, maize, millet, and everything that is not yam even as they continue to pursue their schooling. This notwithstanding, a hope unfulfilled is better than no hope at all, and the mirage of schooling may well offer more than a marriage of convenience.

However, during my participation with them, I observed both young men and women deliberately constructing aspirational school selves as part of their pursuit of a better life. All my interlocutors demonstrated through several key processes that they were actively developing personas for urban, government, non-farm employment. First, they prioritized their proficiency in English and Twi, the most dominant vernacular, over Likpakpaanl, their mother-tongue. Second, they replaced their Likpakpaanl personal names with English and in a few cases Akan/Twi names. Third, they designated for themselves new dates of birth that ensured that official records listed them as younger than their actual age. I discovered that they felt this act was necessary because they want to work in the civil service for as long as possible before being pensioned. Finally, they would leave rural Krachi to hustle in more

urban areas as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Where Africanist scholars describe their encounters with modern schooling as creating a conflicting duality of 'habituses', the Bikpakpaam youth I engaged insisted that the selves of home and school were not oppositional because each represented a way of looking towards a singular future. Silas likened it to looking into a bottle with both eyes because even though the indigenous self and the schooled self were separate eyes, they were both being used to look into one bottle of their imagined future self.

8.4: How are Rural Ghanaian Students Pursuing their Imagined Futures?

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the aim of this thesis and posed the core question of the study: How are rural Ghanaian students pursuing their imagined futures? I stated three other questions I believed would help in addressing the research problem. The first was, to what extent does rural schooling in Ghana reflect global education trends? In chapter three, I tackled this by reflecting on the institution of schooling, specifically its rise as a universal pathway to prosperity as well as the ways in which it has been employed in nation-building. Using the example of the fee-free SHS policy in Ghana's 2016 presidential elections, I argued that although global trends such as universal access to primary and secondary schooling have marked the formal education sector, powerful local actors often determine how these developments are appropriated at the grassroots level. This reality was also evident in the case of the proposed Comprehensive Sexuality Education component of the new pre-tertiary curriculum. Faith-based voices led the way to determine that the UN's global program did not align with local values and needed to be completely re-formulated. Again, in Chapter Five, while discussing the Ghanaian public's attitude towards mother-tongue use in schooling, the selective appropriation of global trends could be clearly seen. The universally held view that dominant European languages, especially English, open upward social mobility doors

that vernaculars simply cannot have been internalized by the Ghanaian electorate over the parallel narrative of multi/bi-lingual education as beneficial to the development of the child, no matter how well proven the latter view is. These case studies lend credence to the belief that education-sector projects among Majority World communities are not simply impositions of Euro-American models but also the result of strong networks linking the local and the global, mediated by a myriad of factors including powerful political actors and voting publics with strong appetites for 'elusive modernities.'

A second question was raised in the introduction on how rural students negotiate their indigenous subsistence practices alongside schooling even as they pursue their career aspirations. In chapter 6, the psychological literature around motivation in schooling was contrasted with ethnographic data to show that my research participants represented a class of students whose primary drive to engage the school system revolved around their commitment to escape lifestyles they described as 'suffering', and to live out urbanized government-employed future versions of themselves which they repeatedly labelled 'the better life'. This commitment to pursue the modernist promise that schooling offers despite the significant sacrifices involved has been highlighted by other studies as well (see for example Dost and Froerer 2021; Froerer, Ansell, and Huijsmans 2022; Finnan 2022). Further, I demonstrated how, unlike much of the education research that is used to inform sector policy, anthropological studies such as this doctoral project explore how variables like student performance and student aspirations are shaped by the social milieu within which learners find themselves. Therefore, education outcomes in rural agrarian societies like Bommoden in Krachi West district must be assessed with the understanding that smallholder agriculture occupies a central role in the lives of students. The school curriculum must be structured in

response to this reality. Education initiatives like School for Life's Complementary Basic Education program have been successful precisely because of this awareness on their part.

Beyond offering an insight into the lived experiences of my rural interlocutors, the study explored the mechanics of how they navigate the worlds of indigenous subsistence and schooling side by side. Here, my work draws on Pierre Bourdieu and Paulo Freire in understanding the impact of colonized classrooms on the personhood of students. I show how several Africentric scholars echo the views of these critical educators, especially with regards to how schooling detaches learners from the world of upbringing. Bourdieu contends that the school privileges dominant classes, knowledges, and attitudes by imparting a secondary habitus that bears traits of the dominant. This means that advancement through the school system and ultimately success in attaining the African learner's aspirations is predicated on their ability to detach themselves from their primary habitus of 'domination' and acquiring the aptitudes of the dominant. Freire argues that the universalized model of schooling views students as separate from the worlds they identify with and trains them to be productive citizens of a neo-liberal modernity constructed through colonialism and capitalism. Freire's theory of problem-posing education (or education as freedom) proposes that students' cosmology and ontology must be central to their educational journey; they should not be disconnected from their realities but recognized as one with them. For Freire, Bourdieu, and Africanist scholars, contemporary schooling produces in the learner a 'traumatic' state of internal division and conflict, oppression, and psychological distress. As I have outlined above, the rural students of Krachi West district acknowledge a plurality of selves as part of their encounter with schooling but insist on the promise of a modernist future as a unifying factor.

What then do the lived experiences of these rural students mean for Freirean and even Bourdieusian conceptions of decolonized education? Clearly, although these young people experience some degree of disjuncture between their primary/indigenous/home and secondary/modern/school selves, these do not exist in a binaristic relationship that is creating internal turmoil. Rather, like Ebenezer suggests, school 'flows' into home and vice versa. Student agency is a critical part of this symbiosis, because even as school structures necessitate that these young people assume new identities to participate in neo-liberal modernity, they demonstrate their cooperation with the identity-construction process by actively engaging a system that will invariably fail to deliver the futures that many of them imagine. To put it differently, my interlocutors prove their experience of two separate worlds is not traumatic by willingly participating in the process of constructing the neo-liberal self of the school. They also show commitment to maintaining indigenous subsistence lifestyles alongside careers that emerge from schooling.

Despite their insistence that schooling was not traumatic, I witnessed that their complex position of having to simultaneously negotiate home and school as competing worlds sadly meant the loss of competency in both. Many of my participants had poor local language skills; some could not write out their own indigenous names. Several of them failed their Basic Education Certification Exams (BECE); some took out another year or two in a different location to re-sit those exams, but others gave up continuing their educational journeys. Schooling also meant that there was limited time to invest in one's farm; they were not only suffering in their farms to keep accessing schooling, but many of them also sacrificed larger farms and better yields to be in school. In fact, I often heard members of the elderly generation boast that their yams were tastier because they

worked harder on their crop and did not have to use as many types of agrochemicals as current farmers were using.

The third and final question I raised as I began my study queried the ways rural students' ideas of livelihood, identity, and a better life are shifting as they engage the school system. In Chapters Four and Seven, I demonstrated that cultural shifts among the Bikpakpaam in the past and in contemporary times in many ways have been spearheaded by the youth. Culture is dynamic and communities are constantly changing in response to social, environmental, and political transformations occurring. A livelihoods approach to cultural shifts postulates that because communities' livelihoods often also give meaning to many aspects of their lives, radical cultural shifts such as mass youth migrations are likely to indicate livelihood failure (Scoones 2015; Ellis and Freeman 2004; Bebbington 1999). As I have stated above, Bikpakpaam youth reflect the views of James Sumberg et al. (2021) in that, like many other young people in Africa, they leave their rural homes in search of non-farm careers not because they are rejecting agriculture but because they are rejecting the poverty, demeaning social position, and uncertainty associated with smallholder agriculture. Indeed, wider (inter)national structures are at least partly to blame for the unattractiveness of the agricultural sector (Leavy and Hossain 2014). Development actors, both local and global, claim that the agricultural sector is a crucial engine to drive the economic growth and industrialization of African countries, but continue to advocate schooling at the grassroots that is disconnected from the lifeways of rural learners. As David Baker (2014) argues, at the very least, schooling shapes society as much as society shapes schooling. My analysis in this thesis is that Bikpakpaam youth in Krachi are opting for non-agricultural livelihoods because even as they are witnessing the failure of smallholder agriculture to offer them better lives, to be schooled means to be proficient in English even if it means not knowing how to write

your local name, to work in an air-conditioned office away from the soil, and to live in the city and not the village.

Central to young people's evaluation of crop farming livelihoods as unsustainable are 'the sufferings of parents.' I was overwhelmed by the responses of participants to the question: Why do you go to school? By far the most repeated response revolved around learners' parents as a kind of negative object lesson. The Bikpakpaam community in Krachi West district is a migrant community that moved into the region less than one hundred years ago. This means that my participants are only second (or at most third) generation immigrants into the area. It also means that their parents and grandparents moved from further north in search of the prosperity that the farming of the yam crop promised. Even among the Bikpakpaam, cultural shifts are not new and young people today are simply continuing the exodus for better lives that their parents and grandparents begun. While the former generation moved to other rural areas in search of fertile lands, the current generation is moving to urban areas in search of careers away from the soil.

8.5: Implications for Theory, Policy, and Development Practice

One theme that marked several of my participants' responses revolved around their uncertainty about the instrumental value of mainstreaming indigenous ways of living and knowing. When I raised the possibility of their mother-tongue incorporated into teaching and learning, Alberta insisted: "Likpakpaanl will not take you anywhere!" And when I asked young men if they would be ready to focus on careers in agriculture, they repeatedly lamented: "There is no money in farming!" In my view, these students' ideas about indigenous lifeways as unable to offer attractive trans-local opportunities, increased incomes, and upward social mobility presents a challenge for all stakeholders in the field of education, especially scholars, policymakers, and educators. Put differently, key actors in formal

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education delivery who are contemplating the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledges in schooling must wrestle with the query: Will a decolonized curriculum contribute to ensuring that rural African students escape suffering and live better lives? Ebenezer's question at the end of the phone call narrated above suggests that rural students are driven by this same consideration even when they are sitting in colonized classroom. They ask themselves, will more schooling guarantee a better life than what is available to me now? Even though this doctoral study does not claim to have solved this riddle, it offers some helpful frames through which we can approach the issue.

First, it is evident that because of the varied expressions and experiences of colonization and indigeneity, Africanist scholar-activists working towards decolonized curricula will be better served drawing from multiple theoretical approaches to the decolonization of schooling than being narrow-minded. For example, an eclectic approach that acknowledges differences and commonalities in critical education theory could draw from both Bourdieusian and Freirean approaches to decolonized schooling. Bringing Bourdieu's analysis of the ways in which formal education reproduces domination into conversation with Freire's models for problem-solving education can offer important insights for the agenda of decolonizing schooling. In theorizing indigenized education systems that are rooted in African authenticity but also contribute concretely to improving the quality of life among the most marginalized, Africanist scholars will have to rally together and put forward ideas that incorporate diverse perspectives.

Related to this, I have noted from my study that even though theorists often employ frameworks that feature conceptual polarities (such as structure versus agency) in helping us understand social phenomena, lived experiences are rarely a neat case of this or that. Many of the dichotomies explored in this research have proven to be reflected in policy and practice

as complex tensions mediated by actors who themselves are shaped by structures that transcend them. The global and the local, the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, as well as the schooled self and the indigenous self have all been demonstrated as operating not in dualistic binaries but in interplays that are contextually situated and constantly shifting with the perspectives of the actors that navigate them. One example of my own experience of this was in the interplay between the real and the romanticised. Even as I held onto what I felt were practical views about the contradictions of a capitalist urban existence and entered the field with romantic notions of authentic village life, my participants were also viewing their rural reality as harsh suffering and imagined modern urban futures as the ideal. My mundane was their mirage, and their suffering was my surreal.

In addition to adopting an eclectic approach and moving beyond static theoretical binaries, decolonized models of schooling that meet the needs of rural youth must directly address the 'limit-situations' they face as part of their daily routines. Freire argues that current schooling encourages learners to passively 'receive' their world of oppression because such compliance suits the 'oppressors' who have constructed that world and benefit from a school system that prepares learners to 'fit' into it. Bourdieu agrees with this and argues that formal education does not exist to empower the dominated in any way but to maintain across time the distinctions between them and 'the inheritors.' The School's response to the socioeconomic problems of the community is to offer the individual a path to join the educated elite by transferring to them the attitudes of the privileged. The African Renaissance project must advance beyond broad declarations to mainstream difference and begin to structure education such that the classroom draws from the creativity and innovation embedded in indigenous knowledge resources and apply these directly to the student's daily challenges. Indigenized learning will become valuable to those it serves when it relates

directly to their lived experience by reaching beyond the classroom to address the limiting structures of their everyday life.

To this end, there cannot truly be decolonized schooling without concrete steps to address the systemic coloniality in the society within which the school functions. For example, a decolonized curriculum cannot perpetuate the narrative that rural agricultural economies are Africa's route out of food insecurity and poverty while the young Bikpakpaam yam farmer who labours all year round to produce his crop earns for each tuber a very small fraction of what the wealthy Kumasi yam merchant and the Accra retailer earn as profits. African policymakers must be held accountable to ensure that infrastructure is equitably provided across the board. If learners are to be encouraged to view their 'villages' as 'places to live out the good life', educators and policymakers must acknowledge the extremely challenging circumstances that many rural students face daily. Maintaining local subsistence lifestyles means living in impoverishment, and the lack of adequate state structures to support agriculturists, for example, will inevitably mean that they will seek routes away from their communities. The rural student with no electricity in his community and whose sole concept of a computer is from a teacher's chalk drawing on a blackboard cannot sit the same examinations as his urban counterparts and yet be told that schooling is decolonized. Beyond this, more research and policy must be directed at shifting social value structures such that a schooled youth who opts for a career in farming is no longer considered by his peers and the wider society as a failure.

But structural change must not be restricted to the sphere of policymaking and political administration, decolonized schooling must stimulate indigenous communities to rethink predatory cultural values. Just as Bikpakpaam youth in the 1940s initiated their own platforms for indigenous cultural transmission right in the colonial classrooms of Yendi

Primary School and kickstarted a cultural shift across Bikpakpaam communities in Ghana's northern regions, truly decolonized schooling should also be able to positively influence contemporary indigenous societies and their lifeways. Bikpakpaam women continue to be excluded from the rural agro economies within which they labour; they have lived for centuries on the fringes of the fringes. Classrooms serving Bikpakpaam communities must be so embedded in their cultural life that they become fields to critically engage indigenous beliefs and practices. Moreover, if powerful faith-based voices in Ghana led the way in rejecting UNESCO's globally acclaimed sexuality education program on the basis of their own articulations of cultural values, and yet those same voices remained silent on other universal trends in schooling, then the agency of local populations must be recognised as crucial in defining the ideals and priorities that constitute indigenous value systems.

Finally, a pivotal dimension of developing decolonized school systems that aligns with the aspirations of rural students involves classrooms that are structured such that they bring indigenous knowledges into conversation with non-indigenous knowledges. For example, mainstreaming students' mother-tongues in schooling should not mean that English is automatically abolished. Rather, the aim of decolonized classrooms should be the destruction of knowledge hierarchies. J.H. Kwabena Nketia (1970; 2016), the esteemed Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, argued that current schooling in Africa compels students to develop a 'bicultural' approach to life. He explains that the unpleasant reality of coloniality in Africa's past and present could tempt some to adopt a posture that is 'locked up' within one worldview. His own approach to this challenge has been to draw from both worlds as rich experiences with which to face life, constantly maintaining side by side both the Western and indigenous worlds (Wiggins 2005). In this doctoral study, I have sought to demonstrate, from initiatives like the School for Life's Complementary Basic Education program and the

Kulu Language Institute in the Solomon Islands, that diverse knowledges effectively brought

together can powerfully complement each other.

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