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## Children and Childhood in Nigerian Histories

SAHEED ADERINTO, EDITOR

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; pp. 235, \$90.00 paper.

*Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories* is a new collection of historical essays focused on Nigerian children as modern subjects. This scholarly collaboration explores children's lives as they relate to the imperial state, legal reforms, social clubs, and changing labor norms. The research in this book also reflects how cultural transformations became evident through print materials and performance activities. The time frame analyzed spans from the mid-1920s to the 1980s. The significance of focusing on the colonial era illustrates how the British perceived children and developed policies based on those perceptions. Focusing on African children in a historical context is a new subfield and *Children and Childhood in Nigerian Histories* adds to this important work by offering insight into children's responses and their ability to cope with the changing political, economic, and cultural realities. The contributing authors propose new methods of historicizing the "modern" child as a way of highlighting their agency and ability to induce change rather than solely be victims of change.

The study of children as historical subjects is necessary to fully understand the complexities of social, cultural, economic, and political histories. Scholars, however, have only begun in the past few decades to consider "children" and "childhood" as formal categories of analysis. In 2004, Beverly Grier, a historian of Africa, pleaded with other Africanists to engage with the histories of children and childhood more aggressively. This selection of essays does just that. The innovative research and analyses presented in the eight chapters of this collection aim to answer some central questions about Nigerian children, which include: What positionality did children hold in the colonial era? As historical subjects, how have their lives and identities been altered over time? How does enumerating a child's age add to the understanding of the child's lived experience? And, finally, can we as historians concretize what it means to situate childhood in the context of modernity? To answer

these questions, the contributors explore the development of formal education, work, and global concerns about children, and the codification of laws concerned with both the protections and punishment of children.

Chapters 1, 3, and 4 focus on cultural representations of Nigerian history. In Chapter 1, Saheed Aderinto examines newspaper articles and suggests that elements of nation building can be found in editorials and advertisements that targeted children and their guardians. Aderinto notes that although companies marked Nigerian children as consumers, a limited number of Nigerian families, mainly educated Lagosians, could afford to buy such goods. In addition to articles and advertisements that addressed children, this chapter outlines how the government engaged Nigerian mothers by shaping new norms of “modern African motherhood.” Chapter 4 also offers an analysis of Nigerian newspapers, but the focus is on child kidnapping in Lagos. This chapter is unique in its exploration of the anxiety experienced by parents as newspapers increasingly covered child abductions. Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin use one case study to show how vulnerable children lost their freedom, to what extent kidnappers operated, and how the state responded to such crimes. This analysis is important because it shows the limitations of the colonial state to combat such activities. In Chapter 3, Uyilawa Usuanlele charts children’s masquerades in Benin City from the precolonial era to the 1980s. Children participated in masquerades because of colonial migration and to earn money. However, participation declined when other economic incentives developed for young people. This study reinforces the importance of cultural analyses that shed light on the political and economic consequences of colonialism.

In chapters 2 and 5, Simon Heap and Adam Paddock, respectively, examine the Boy Scout movement. Heap investigates Chris Jenks’s argument that institutions socialize children in a way that expands a uniform ideology by incorporating discipline, education, and modes of care to rehabilitate the child. While utilizing the history of the Boy Scouts and reforms homes in Lagos as an example, he describes how “delinquent” boys underwent “rehabilitation.” Heap challenges Jenks’s main argument and suggests that rather than rehabilitation, reform efforts socialized children to abide by specific ideologies that resulted in uniform behaviors. In Chapter 5, Adam Paddock argues that the Scouts and African social structures and philosophies overlapped in ways that enabled Nigerian acceptance of the Scouts. Paddock explains that even though the British implemented the Boy Scout movement as part of the “civilizing mission,” Scout followers employed the ideologies as Africanist nationalist sentiments grew. Using the Boy Scouts as an analytic tool helps the reader understand how social clubs socialized African youth for the purpose of controlling adolescent behaviors during colonialism as well as serving as a tool to dismantle the colonial state.

Chapters 6 and 8 examine two distinct issues with child labor and moneymaking activities in the colonial era that elicited legal action. In Chapter 6, Tokunbo Aderemi Ayoala explains how British mining companies incorporated child labor in response to labor shortages. Focusing on the Jos Plateau area, Ayoala delineates the reasons why Nigerian men, women, and children entered the work force between 1884 and 1950. Thus, the International Confederation of Trade Unions (part of a larger global humanitarian movement that focused on the well-being of children) evaluated Nigerian labor policies. As with other colonial policies of economic importance, the author rightly argues that legal action to stop or to prosecute those who employed children often proved futile. In Chapter 8, Abosede George takes a nuanced approach in her evaluation of Lagosian labor regulations. Using a social analytic frame, George connects the development of new socioeconomic and cultural categories with employment laws and the “developmentalist colonial state,” proving that the “African child” became a point of contestation for the British and Nigerians. Furthermore, by investigating traders (mainly boy and girl hawkers), the author offers an important critique of the various ways in which the colonial state defined, socialized, and penalized child workers.

Chapter 7 offers a new methodological approach for examining Nigerian autobiographies. Saheed Aderinto engages the autobiographical writings of thirty authors to understand how colonial childhood memories are reflected. Rather than argue that childhood memories are faulty and therefore cannot be trusted, Aderinto argues that childhood memories can be trusted more than “adult” memories precisely because they come from moments in life that are generally apolitical. An analysis of autobiographies is significant because they add to a broader chronological history that intersects with the colonial socioeconomic transformations.

This volume is a much-needed addition to Nigerian history and serves as an example of how histories of children and childhood can add to broader scholarship on Africa. It highlights Nigeria’s geography and illuminates three distinct regions—the north, the southwest, and the southeast. However, although several chapters focus on the southwest, the collection could have benefited by offering equal attention to the northern and southeastern regions of the country. Nevertheless, this collection helps the reader develop a deeper understanding of the various ways in which Nigerian children’s lives underwent change during the colonial era and beyond.

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