

# **African Identity? Mother and Daughter between the Currents in Colonial West Africa**

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## **Abstract**

This article explores early tendencies of West African cultural (proto-)nationalism through the vantage point of the mother-daughter relationship between Adelaide and Gladys Casely-Hayford. Their family dynamics and generational frictions, as disclosed in their letters, memoirs, articles and poems, besides being personal testimonies of causing each other pain and mutual disappointment, provide insights into political, mental and social developments of 1920-1940 West African-British interaction. Both women, actively engaged in girl's education, had differing outlooks on their "Africanness", on the importance and content of education and on the role of women in society. Mainly drawing on Adelaide's biographical material and Gladys' poems, this article compares and contrasts their respective attitudes and dispositions to reveal the tendencies that influenced them.

## **Introduction**

Adelaide Smith Casely-Hayford (1868-1960, abbreviated as *ACH*) and her daughter Gladys May Casely-Hayford (1904-1950, abbreviated as *GCH*) had a difficult relationship. Although they worked together on a common goal – the education of African girls in a Freetown vocational school, led by *ACH* between 1923 and 1940 – there was a lot of friction between them. Analyzing latent hostility within a family might seem a topic for sociologists or psychologists, and certainly there is salient material for both in the letters, poems, memoirs and newspaper articles that the two women left as sources

for us to investigate. However, the failing mother-daughter connection can as well be analyzed against the backdrop of its historical context, thus allotting a generational conflict to the larger framework of colonialism encountering early cultural nationalism. Ruth Thandekile Mvusi, who reviewed ACH's biography, states that "the tensions between mother and daughter are symbolic of the social changes resulting from imperialism: new social classes with accompanying new cultural values and cosmological world views; new notions of 'education' to accommodate the changing social order; new notions of physical beauty and human worth; and new notions of gender roles." (Mvusi 1993: 143f.)

This paper considers the Casely-Hayfords' family dynamics, and their differing ideas about "Africanness" and education, as a means to provide a key to the social context and the belief systems they adhered to, as well as to the political situation of their time.

### **African Identity**

The very closest family relations turned out to be the most difficult ties to maintain for ACH. Her troubled connection to her daughter seems to be anticipated in the brittle relationship to her husband. A family friend, U.S. social worker Anna Melissa Graves argues that "the up-bringing of Mr. and Mrs. Casely-Hayford<sup>1</sup> had been very different" (Graves 1943: 32), so that naturally, because of uncongenial mindset, this marriage would have been doomed to fail (legal separation agreement in 1914).

Said husband, and father of Gladys, is Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (1866-1930), born into a prominent Fanti and Anglicized coastal elite family. He had received his secondary education in Cape Town and Freetown,

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<sup>1</sup> There is no consent whether to hyphenate the last name or not. J.E. Casely Hayford declared in his will that his son Archie and his offspring "shall bear the name of 'Casely' immediately before the surname 'Hayford'" – without a hyphen – (Cromwell 1986: 206), but as there never was such a statement concerning his wife or his daughter I follow the practice of Yema Lucilda Hunter who hyphenates the name of both Adelaide and Gladys Casely-Hayford, thus indicating a different status/lineage. NB: Deviations of that rule are made to reproduce exact quotations. Graves, for example, hyphenates all, and Cromwell none of the family members.

worked as a school principal in Accra, and edited the influential nationalist journal *The Gold Coast Leader* before he studied law in Cambridge. Widowed, and with a son, he married Adelaide Smith in 1903 in England (Cromwell 1986: 64). His career and achievements, although outstanding and inaccessible for most of his compatriots, were nevertheless a commonplace scheme within the colonial elite, as education was regarded as key to society, and families often sent their children overseas for studies. A member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council, Hayford was involved in politics as a lawyer, journalist, and writer. He founded the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society as well as the National Congress of West Africa, thus "played a crucial role in mediating between the colonial and native populations of West Africa" (Goyal 2010: 109).

Monocausal as it may seem, Graves' theory picks up an interesting line of thought: How do the different strands of society, when assembled within one family unit, affect the same, and how do the family members deal with their different identities? Based in Freetown, the ethnically diverse 'Creoles'<sup>2</sup> were closely tied to other educated elites along the West African coast. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the members of those Anglicized colonial elites were partly the offspring of European traders, American slave masters, or colonial officials, and partly of emancipated (and mission-educated) slaves from different regions of Africa. They had in common a strong affinity for English language and education as part of a broader cultural repertoire, and some were engaged in palm oil, cocoa, or caoutchouc trade. A considerable number of them led a cosmopolitan life within an international network that enabled mobility especially through the shared colonial language. Creole or Euro-African elite communities were to be found in many coastal towns, for instance in Nigeria, Benin, Liberia and the Gold Coast, and the members

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<sup>2</sup> I use the terms *Euro-African* and *Creole* interchangeably, the latter defined by Cromwell: "...the term Creole implies a cultural mixture of Settler, English and African and the acceptance of a public life style, at least, which is represented by England and things English ... changes in the attitudes of the English toward the Creoles or the search for a true African identity on the part of the Creoles does not alter the basic importance of the English life style to Sierra Leone society and the environment in which Mrs. Casely Hayford lived for most of her life" (Cromwell 1986: 5) – and even though not all West African urban elites described themselves as *Creole* (Gocking 1999: 8) their societies' attitudes were similar enough to apply the term for the purpose of this paper.

signaled, exchanged and asserted their cosmopolitanness e.g. through trade, by educating their children overseas, by traveling for jobs and marriages, and via print media. Projects like philharmonic societies, literary circles, polo clubs, and ladies' social improvement organizations flourished within the educated communities since the late 1880s. This club culture served both to reassert "their right to trade by demonstrating their proficiency in the display of European culture" (Newell 2002: 31) and brought them closer to colonial administrators by providing socializing events that set them apart from the rural or 'savage native'.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their moral principles were mostly Victorian-Christian, and they believed in the promotion of civilization and westernization as associated value systems (Cromwell 1986: 4ff.). The prevailing English common law often enabled the members of the Creole elite to lead a life completely detached from local customs and traditions (Gocking 1999: 9). At the turn of the century and in the decades after it, however, scientific racism altered colonial thinking and barred official jobs for the educated, so that the elite had to deal with loss in status, power, and wealth all the while negotiating their Anglo-African identity and pro-British beliefs. The intermediate position the elite occupied then became starkly problematic: there was only being 'Native', or being 'European' at that period – "a clash of irreconcilable races" – a vantage point that left no middle ground, no shadings between black and white. Such a neither-nor status also threatened their previously flexible identities that had enabled Euro-Africans to play roles as British agents and as African leaders at the same time (Zachernuk 2009: 75ff.).

Adelaide Smith, having been brought up in England, was no exception to that rule. Her convictions, her demeanor, her social life showed all traits of a Europeanized elite woman: a strictly English-speaking, etiquette-adhering upper-class member (Hunter 2008: 1).

Contrary to the Sierra Leonean Creoles, the members of the Gold Coast urban elite never achieved such a degree of separation from their village-bound relatives. Gocking stresses that "traditional culture maintained a

powerful influence” on the Euro-Africans, even though the coastal population's majority was non-English speaking and illiterate (Gocking 1999: 9). In a way, the urban Gold Coasters' aspirations towards English education and culture turned out more hybrid than those of their Sierra Leonean counterparts, as, for example, the Gold Coast adherence to matrilineal inheritance laws and customary marriage shows (Gocking 1999: 9, Newell 2002: 7). In fact, even J.E Casely-Hayford seems to have had one or several 'country marriage' wives besides 'Christian marriage' Adelaide (Cromwell 1986: 89).

Yet, national-cultural environment cannot solely explain ACH's situation, because her original family did not place her into Freetown society to begin with. The Smith family migrated to England when Adelaide was a small child, so her life experience greatly differed from that of her African peers. She expresses her thankfulness for the many years spent in England, Jersey and Germany, and acknowledges the opportunities that this European education granted her, however, she is also troubled by them, as she feels deprived of a proper sense of belonging (Cromwell 1986: 53). Indeed, Adelaide shows little or no familiarization with 'native' life, and never adapted during her Gold Coast years, whereas her husband “was African in sympathies and interests, and clung to many African customs.” (Graves 1943: 33) J.E. Casely Hayford believed that Africa's precolonial past was still available as an inspiration, tapping its vigor and energy as a source for identification (Goyal 2010: 115), while Adelaide was more inclined to take a Victorian-Christian view on things African. The revealed dichotomy in family identity may have been one of the factors that prohibited a stable connection for the couple, as it might for instance have been fostering misunderstandings, or undermining the partner relationship with mismatching expectations and obligations. Probably it provided conflicting priorities for daughter Gladys, as well. The cosmopolitan European Atlantic and the African continental world were coexisting, mingling and struggling with each other whenever they met, and the members of this family especially had to negotiate their respective positions within the different networks.

Gladys encountered those two different worlds from early on: While her mother suffers from malaria, three-months old Gladys is being carried on the back by some female caretaker, “and it seems to soothe her wonderfully”, albeit ACH is by no means content with this style of childcare were it not for her own ill health (Cromwell 1986: 71). What the mother grudgingly acknowledges, is embraced by the child and already seems to preordain future possibilities: a not-so-decent upbringing, an 'African personality', a different life.

Language adaption and adoption is another telling aspect. ACH was – unlike her daughter – unable to even communicate with non-English speakers. While Gladys spoke and understood Fante in her childhood (Hunter 2008: 15), and later published poems in Krio language (Hunter 1983: 105ff.), her mother expresses how their stay in the Gold Coast hinterland caused her difficulties: “This was a bleak, barren time in Tarkwa . . . worst of all, there was no companionship whatsoever. . . . I was entirely surrounded by illiterate peasants who spoke a different language altogether.” (Cromwell 1986: 85) So, even though there are people in the surrounding area, they are not seen as suitable company. Adelaide is not ready to engage, linguistically and physically, with the Gold Coast population and leads an isolated life – while her husband conceives language studies as a necessity to grasp the “inmost essence of a culture” (Goyal 2010: 111). But culture that is worth speaking of, ACH sees none in this environment; very much contrary again to J.E. Casely Hayford, who even when he “flaunts his own command of the [English] language, and indeed of the colonial culture it represents”, in his novel *Ethopia Unbound* states the “superiority of native African languages over English” (Goyal 2010: 112).

Because *language* is generally interlinked with lifestyle, upbringing and cultural heritage, it becomes obvious that in addition to the language barrier, ACH is also inhibited by conceit: she regards the local people as inferior, not suitable for a woman of her class. Education and wealth being the keys to elite society, she feels that she should not mingle with people

who lack both. Barbara Bair allocates much of ACH's problems in this attitude which she considers part of the "forces that kept her from full 'sisterhood' – . . . her own failure to identify with peasant and working-class African women" (Bair 1994: 139).

Her daughter Gladys, instead, openly fraternized with ordinary people and did not distinguish between rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Gladys had a different understanding of 'being African'. For her, it was a natural attitude, a state of being that filtered through everything she did, and not something artificial. ACH, contrary to that, merely selected points like clothing or certain activities that occurred her to be important African traditions, and aimed at improving them by adding a European finish. Her 'patriotism' comprised selling African art and wearing African garments for her fund-raising activities in the United States as "picturesque native costumes" (Casely-Hayford 1954a: 57), as well as seeking to "[b]e representative of the best of African life" (Casely-Hayford 1954c: 789). Thus, it was in the U.S. context that she discovered a pathway to her African heritage. She makes clear, however, that she finds African dress "eminently unsuitable for practical purposes" so that wearing it becomes restricted to leisure time (Okonkwo 1981: 47). On another occasion she states that donning African attire would help to "install into us some form of racial pride and would help us to foster a national spirit." (Okonkwo 1981: 44) Albeit fragmentary, ACH nevertheless strives to assert her 'African personality'. She becomes passionate about promoting this to others, and tries to persuade other women to follow her example on several occasions, even schedules "Africa Days" for her school, dedicated to folklore.

Gladys, however, picked up different ideas, for example through intermittent contact with her father on the Gold Coast. J.E. Casely Hayford convened the National Congress of British West Africa in 1919 which, even though displaying loyalty to the British crown, demanded political reforms (most importantly elected representation) and promoted political solidarity between nationals and intellectuals of the area (cf. Enweremadu 2012/2: 44). As a lawyer and representative he was dedicated to a political agenda of

African self-determination, land ownership and public recognition. Gladys may have found appeal in these currents that were to shape future developments: discussions about representation and participation of both men and women, as well as expression of pan-africanist ideas. Certain similarities between cultural nationalist philosophy and GCH's behavior become apparent, as Gladys identifies herself with so-called ordinary or working people and thus hints at her own understanding of democracy. Thereby it becomes apparent that the politicized population (which in her father's times was certainly limited to educated gentlemen) is increasing at that time and no longer accepts restrictions of rigid class categorization (cf. Jones 1976: 58). Gendered categorization, on the other hand, seems to have stayed very much in place for decades to come, as Nkrumah commends several "sincere and dedicated men" who contributed to independence (Nkrumah 1976: 161) – neither was there much possibility for women to engage in political affairs, nor did they get their share of recognition if they tried to, all of which contributed to a rather biased gender balance.

ACH's class-consciousness comes to the fore when she comments on her daughter's marriage: the man was, as she writes to her friend in 1936, "of very humble circumstances, indifferent education and no status whatsoever" (Graves 1943: 80) – in her opinion, the upper classes should stay among themselves (Hunter 2008: 59). But Gladys did not care about class issues in the same way as her mother did. She engaged with her African heritage much more than her mother or other European-educated members of society did and have deemed appropriate. Being regarded with suspicion by other elite women, she pursued her ideals and expressed them in her poetry and plays. Hunter points out that "a deep longing to be true to her patriotic vision of Africa and to identify with black people in general lay at the heart of much of her so-called eccentricity" (2008: 154). Gladys, contrary to her mother, "enjoyed associating with ordinary African people, choosing to endure the discomforts of traveling steerage on the coastal vessels even when she had enough money for a second-class cabin, trawling through markets herself, something probably unheard of among women of her social status in those days" (Hunter 2008: 155).



In doing so, she may have consternated her contemporaries, yet conformed to post-independence philosophy as expressed by Kwame Nkrumah years later who encouraged the “so-called educated members of the Party” to “Go to the people[,] Live among them[,] Learn from them[,] Love them[,] Serve them[,] Plan with them[,] Start with what they know[,] Build on what they have.” (Nkrumah 1976: 164) Thus engaged with “the humble masses” (ibid.), the activists would build bridges across social barriers by explaining the party's aims, grasping the reality and thereby securing the support of “the common people” (ibid.). Gladys did not take a notably socialist stance towards the people she portrayed in her poems, yet her subjects were of unmistakably lower class background: a single mother of seven, a street food vendor selling rice pap, some clay house builders (Hunter 2008: 268f., 272, 274f.). However, it seems that even more than being class conscious, Gladys was inspired by her subjects' Africanness and their, as Hunter dubs it, “Black experience” (ibid.: 197). Throughout many of her poems, her interest in color of skin, traditional clothing, and African beauty objects becomes apparent, as much as she allocates meaning to an ethnic past, and specific towns and places. Thus she may be seen as an early proponent of pan-Africanist ideas, and an advocate of developing cultural nationalism. Her mother, however, rather tried to limit Gladys' commitment, as their fitful collaboration in the Girls' Vocational school project shows.

### **Colonial Schooling and the Girls' Vocational School**

From the 1920s on, with her own daughter being away in a British boarding school, ACH was eager to launch a better education for Sierra Leone girls. A closer look at the colonial setting and geography reveals the context in which the school project evolved.

The Colony of Sierra Leone itself comprised two parts: a peninsula with several urban areas, and the Protectorate, a vast “hinterland” with considerably less exposure to Western ideas, education and infrastructure. Some fifty percent of the peninsula's population consisted of Creoles with a wide social strata, whereas the Protectorate largely held its original

populace – people of Temne, Mende and Sherbro heritage (cf. Jones 2013: 98 ff.). Like in all British colonies, schooling was mainly provided by mission societies and Christian Churches – Anglican, Wesleyan, and United Brethren Church, Methodist Episcopal, Roman Catholics, and Seventh Day Adventists – they all owned and ran one or several schools in Freetown. Courses ranged from elementary levels to elaborated Western standards, on secondary level including Latin, Greek, French, Bible/catechism, English literature, history and composition, music, manual training etc. Five Muslim educational institutions existed as well, teaching 368 pupils in English, Arabic, arithmetic, geography, hygiene, drawing and handwork. Those Madrasas, however, are not dwelled on in detail by the more mission-focused reports, especially so since their work “seemed to be much more that of rote religion than instruction” (Jones 2013: 113). In 1920, there was one government-run school also, with about 240 pupils. The 1922 study of the African Education Commission laments the generally low percentage of school attendance: 9,000 out of 13,000 children from the peninsula, and no more than 9,000 of nearly 300,000 children in the Protectorate are enrolled pupils at the time of the survey – in institutions mainly providing elementary education, as there are only seven secondary schools and one college in Sierra Leone (cf. Jones 2013: 108).

The report also mentions an organization of Freetown women that has sent two representatives “to appeal to America for funds” for the founding of an industrial school geared to the needs of African girls (120), the representatives certainly being ACH and her niece Kathleen Easmond who were lecturing and learning during their travel to the United States between 1920 and 1922. Through personal involvement and personal contacts ACH managed to assemble the means and knowledge for opening an own school, however, she tellingly remained within what La Ray Denzer calls “the female ghetto of women's organizations and political auxiliaries” (1992: 218) – she never entered the mainstream of national political life like some of her contemporaries did. She published newspaper articles and spoke in public but did not participate in national legislature, thus being faithful to her ideas about separate spheres for women and men.

While ACH does appreciate the religious and academic work of the mission schools, she finds that “the practical, useful arts of life were being neglected. Very little was being done to qualify the girls for the responsibilities of motherhood, the care of children, the comfort of the husband, and the duties of the home” (Casely-Hayford 1926: 449).

ACH's educational suggestions resonate with ideas of the 'cult of True Womanhood' and mirror her elite upbringing and mindset. Girls trained to provide a quiet home in a spiritually pure and physically clean environment for the family are not inclined to be hoe-wielding farmers or loudly bargaining marketers, a baby tied to their back by a calico wraparound. Female virtue needs to be cultivated in the protected environment of the private home, and can only from there extend into the public sphere. Thus, ACH focuses on middle to upper class girls from the peninsula as possible students for her school, as the Protectorate girls were, according to her knowledge (and along the line of colonial perception) on quite a different level of civilization and development anyway (cf. Cromwell 1986: 221). Her derogatory view on 'the natives' was by and large shared by colonial officials, missionaries, traders, and of course, parts of the Euro-African community. Scientists hotly discussed the “teachability of Africans” in the context of evolutionist thinking that supported indirect rule and the educational policy that went along with it throughout the 1930s (Sivonen 1995: 145f.).

Gender issues entered the public discourse within the mid-1920s, when the colonial administration pondered how girls and women should be treated in terms of education. Women, it was clear, needed to be trained not for independent careers but in order to become enlightened, exemplary family mothers. A woman's great economic and social importance derived from the central role she had as buyer and preparer of food and the cultural values she would pass on in her family. Uncertainties arose whether too much education would not, besides providing “intelligent company” for a husband, estrange the women from “the kitchen side of life” (Sivonen 1995: 152). However, by 1925 several missions had called for improvement of

female education, committees and commissions had commented on the subject, and finally the Advisory Committee on Native Education produced an official policy memorandum (Advisory Committee 1925: 51f.), yet how to come to terms with it in practice remained unclear despite several activities of Advisory Committee and Education Departments (Sivonen 1995: 155).

Anyway, there were not only gender dimensions to be considered, but 'race' became more of an issue since the first decades of the twentieth century, too. A shift in thinking took place, so that the members of the educated coastal elites were no longer regarded as "the epitome of colonial modernity, proof of the success of colonization, but rather somewhat embarrassing mimics of Englishness" (Goyal 2010: 117). The challenges brought to the Euro-Africans by colonial administrators were not only discouraging in terms of economic position but also by the different angle that was now taken on education. Adherence to the British educational schedules no longer granted clerical positions in administration or secured posts in trading or mining companies. From the mid-1920s, colonial priorities changed, as this recommending memorandum by His Majesty's Stationary Office proclaims: "Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life", and furthermore, "[i]t must include the raising up of capable, trustworthy, public-spirited leaders of the people, belonging to their own race." (Advisory Committee 1925: 45) 'Tribes', 'peoples', 'native traditions', 'indigenous law' and 'traditional leaders' became staple in the discussions about who had a say 'in Africa', all the while of course supervised and regulated by economic considerations and moral convictions of imperialism. The impetus of the elites towards accommodation and acculturation petered out, so for them, new ways of expressing a sense of self, and embracing an African identity, were needed. It is in this context that ACH founds her vocational school especially for girls, opening in October 1923. She elaborates, along the lines of the new zeitgeist: "We needed an education that was more adapted to our requirements, which, while assimilating all that was good in European education, would help us to maintain our natural heritage of African

individuality, and to become the best type of African we could be.” (Casely-Hayford 1926: 450)

Constantly negotiating between her rather European convictions and her indigenous status in Sierra Leone she visualizes “homes which combined European order, method, and cleanliness with the beauty of native basket furniture, art work, and draperies” (Casely-Hayford 1926: 450). Her program aims at a concept “to educate and enlighten the African child without taking him too far way [sic!] from his native environment” (Okonkwo 1981: 46), however, the girls she was seeking for her school would already have had a basic European standard training. In the beginning she is confident that her ideas will be embraced by parents, but is soon disillusioned about societies' low motivation to sustain her project. Consternated about the degree of opposition she faces in Freetown – both in society and in the Education Department – she publicly expresses her annoyance (Casely-Hayford 1926: 451).

Besides an unclear societal status of the trained ladies – should economic self-sufficiency be promoted for educated women, or was that more an issue for washerwomen and marketers? – the African subjects that her school offered may also have been a hindrance for its large-scale success. The dichotomy of 'noble savages' and 'corrupted civilized', now promoted by Western scientists longing to counteract industrialization and its adverse effects on the (European) people, was employed by the Education Department, but did not effect the deep-rooted belief in Western education of the coastal elites. Whereas the British officials prescribed 'African traditions' and 'tribal skills' as “safeguards” against the “injurious contact with civilization” (Advisory Committee 1925: 47), Western education was still seen by parents as a means to assure a diverse and stable economic basis (Zachernuk 2009: 82). Scheduling basket-weaving and folk-songs may therefore have pleased the local Board of Education but it did not reach out to most Creole parents' anxieties and the perceived needs of their children. Adelaide Casely-Hayford's school, albeit hosting 100 pupils in 1934, did not receive Government assistance apart from a yearly block grant of 50£ – a

fact that she rather blames on racism, not on her school concept (Graves 1943: 77).

The vocational school evolves in collaboration with Kathleen Easmond, ACH's niece and fellow member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Initially, ACH sets the agenda and works independently from 1923, but soon requires her daughter to act as a stand-in when her own health limits her energy for teaching. To do so, she calls GCH back from the Gold Coast where she then lives with her father. She interrupts Gladys's literary work (and too much of paternal influence, one might suppose) there because she has a "serious breakdown" after a white teacher left the school and withdrew several pupils in the process (Casely-Hayford 1954b: 239). The mother's matters require to have priority over the daughter's, who has to be at her disposition whenever necessary. During ACH's long sick leave and another fund-raising journey to the U.S., the school is left to the charge of a former colleague, and Gladys assists in providing instruction for the pupils. This teaching experience, however, proves to be so exhausting for Gladys that she resigns after a few months and returns to the Gold Coast (Hunter 2008: 35). The Management Committee closes down the school while ACH is still across the Atlantic.

In 1927, the school is re-opened with a new administration concept, and GCH comes back to Freetown, as well. She taps her musical and literary talents to ameliorate the school routines by composing a school hymn and songs that help the children memorize various contents ranging from geography to biology lessons. Her main responsibility becomes African folklore, and she is creatively teaching this subject in forms of narratives and musical play performances (Hunter 2008: 43ff.). She also writes poems that bespeak her intense commitment to the pupils and their personalities. However, she still lacks the formal qualifications to be a teacher, and her mother urges her to complete her training in Drawing, Drama, or Creative Writing as to assure an economically independent, self-reliant future. Gladys complies and in 1929 voyages to England in order to later carry on towards the United States, to study at Columbia University – an

opportunity of scholarship there is provided by her mother's U.S. contacts. Traveling and obtaining visa though require time and money she doesn't have, so her plans fail and Gladys joins a troupe touring through Northern Europe. ACH's disgust is palpable in her letters. She acknowledges that her daughter gains in life experience but is angry about her wasting time "with absolutely no tangible results" (Graves 1943: 41). Finally, Gladys agrees with her mother who envisaged at least a diploma from Oxford's Ruskin College to enable her finding a teaching position later, but feels pressured to do so against her will, and her studies abruptly end in 1932 due to health problems. "I absolutely refuse to be down-hearted or depressed", contrasts ACH her own attitude to that of her daughter, "because I think it is gross disloyalty on my part, as I have so very much for which to be thankful" (Graves 70). She seems to have read GCH's nervous breakdown and depression as disloyalty, as disobeying her mother's rules and likings, moreover, as a refusal of her 'filial duty'. Gradually recovering, Gladys starts writing journalistic pieces and also resumes teaching again in 1932, albeit at a slower pace than before, and under close surveillance of her mother, because "it made her so . . . irritable" (Graves 1943: 78). By 1934, Gladys teaches nature studies, craft work, book reviews and music lessons. But she complains about the general situation: "Everyone is now doing double work on half pay, and we are all getting a little more cynical, more selfish and more overworked." (Graves 1943: 108) This shows that she considers herself as essential part of the *we*, the school's staff, and that she is willing to highly integrate her talents and her dedication into her mother's project, despite adverse conditions.

It was still, all input by Gladys and the other teachers notwithstanding, to be regarded as ACH's own project. Thus it is difficult to gauge what impact Gladys's teaching methods had on the overall schooling situation, or if she made a difference compared to the established structures. She may have wanted to address the views of the younger generation, to appeal to the needs of the African youths in a different way than her elderly mother. Another young teacher at the school, U.S.-citizen Elizabeth Torrey, enunciates her troubles about this matter in the following observation:

“Mrs. Casely-Hayford had made the school the expression of her individuality and there was no possibility of anyone else expressing theirs, except to a very limited degree.” (Graves 1943: 57)

ACH, close to 70 years old, reigns the curriculum until the school finally closes down in 1940, having benefited to its' pupils lives and contributed to a general enlargement of the curricula's scope of several other Sierra Leone girls' schools. ACH proudly ponders her achievements: “Larger opportunities for employment and service, and a greater vision of usefulness for the girlhood of Freetown” (Casely-Hayford 1954b: 239).

Nevertheless, teaching at her mother's school was not all Gladys did: she was a writer. Some of her poems explicitly deal with the relationship between her and her mother, like the one titled “Jealous” from 1926 (Hunter 2008: 63f.), wherein Gladys reveals her admiration for ACH, but also expresses other feelings that come to the fore: She compares their respective age, their appearance, their relationship to men and other issues, foregrounding the contrasts between them. Gladys uses two strong similes that encourage some close reading. Firstly, she brings out that she is seeing herself “like some unplucked fruit” – the *some* indicating that there are so many others, that picking her would be a completely arbitrary act; thus, her uniqueness and her talents become random and barren. The *unplucked fruit* transports connotations concerning herself as 'underripe', 'not palatable', or 'not interesting': a green and hard fruit with sour or even bitter taste, which is not yet ready to be noticed by hungry children. Secondly, and contrasting to this, she terms her mother “a cameo” – which is an engraved relief image on a piece of jewelery, and resonates with adjectives like 'precious', 'special', and 'established'.

In addition to these personal dimensions, the poem also invites a different reading. One might construe these verses in the way that Mvusi proposed: as speaker's utterances showing the symptoms of the changing world order, the shift from old to new here embodied by Adelaide and Gladys Casely-Hayford. *Old world* figures twice in the short piece of poetry, the repetition drawing attention to the words. “Set in an old world frame” is the cameo –



valuable, cherished – and “old world courtesy” is expressing Mother's education and upbringing. While the privileged old world's mindset was still in place in the 1920s, still trying to impose itself on the younger ones, it was no longer intact and did not remain unquestioned. Elite culture was not as purposeful as it used to be in the 1880s, and colonized people now strove after self-determination. Gladys through the lyrical speaker becomes witness and spokesperson of a whole generation and expresses their search for own heart, mind and self-expression in this most personal form. Her plays and shows have been in great demand in the 1940s (Hunter 2008: 43f.), an indication for her ability to have a finger on the pulse of time, for recognizing what people think about and using this material creatively as a musician and dramatist. She seems to have gained enough to build a small house in Wilberforce, and published a collection of her poems in 1948, which further enhanced her popularity (Hunter 2008: 144).

## **Conclusion**

Investigating proto-nationalism through the vantage point of the mother-daughter connection allows insights both into very intimate situations and the public spheres surrounding those scenes spatio-temporally and mentally. Focusing on their life stories shows the limited outreach that these women had or perceived to have in a time of waning imperialism, but also how they both enforced creative leeway for their own projects. The Vocational Girls' School, in operation for nearly twenty years, achieved to impact on girls' education in general, as other girls' schools found its stimuli incentive and assimilated them. While it followed in large parts the mindset of colonial education policies it was strongly influenced by ACH's personality, as well. Gladys taught at the school and worked with the children in a different way than her mother did. However, the projects that seemed to be closer to her heart were her musical productions and poems, which add a rare female voice to early West African cultural nationalism.

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