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Transnational Migration and the Study of Children: An Introduction

Katy Gardner

At Heathrow, ten year old Tazneen is checking in to a Bangladesh Biman flight to Dhaka. This is not the first time she has travelled to Bangladesh to spend time with her relatives; as she waits with her family at the boarding gate she's trying to focus on the joys of seeing her many aunts and cousins rather than the memories of the spiders and pond where she's supposed to bathe. In Ghana, eleven year old Kwame talks about how he hopes to 'go abroad' when he's older. He's in school now, but as soon as his education is done, he's looking forward to life in the city, to its buildings and buzz and the work that so many of the people from his village have found there. Meanwhile in the Caribbean sixty year old Victoria narrates how, as a child, she lived with and worked for a richer woman on the island of Nevis. Neither the separation from her parents nor the domestic work she did are a cause of bitterness; rather, she considers herself lucky for the opportunity.

What is it like to grow up in a world in which geographic mobility over long distances is taken for granted, a part of everyday life, or in which the future is imagined as a different, faraway place? Indeed, what is it like to have a 'home' where close relatives live, but which one has never visited? Whilst the above ethnographic fragments are drawn from vastly different contexts and seem to represent disparate instances of global movement, by focussing on their subjects – children – we can learn a great deal, both about the nature of contemporary globalisation and, vitally, its effect on a much neglected group in the study of globalisation and transnational migration.

To this extent, the chapters that follow are offered as a contribution to a larger project, initiated by scholars such as Stephens (1994) Katz (2001; 2004), Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Parenhas (2005), Orellana et al, 2001; Holt and Holloway (2006), all of whom interrogate the ways in which global economies (and the often grotesque inequalities with which they are associated) are experienced by children. Today's children, like no other generation, are growing up in a world where communication technologies are faster and more complex than ever before, where even if they are unable to afford to buy global brands, from Pepsi-Cola to i-pods, they are probably aware of at least some of them, and where staying put for their entire lives in the same village, neighbourhood or country is by no means certain. As what Cindy Katz has termed 'vagabond capitalism' (2001) piles profits in some parts of the world and costs in others, children often pay heavy costs, through the loss of their principal carers to the other parts of the world in what Arlie Hochschild terms a 'care drain' (2003: 17; cf. Ehrenreich, 2003; Parenhas, 2005) or via its disastrous ecological effects, whether experienced in the slums of Accra, Manila or Mumbai, or inner city neighbourhoods in cities such as New York or London. In part, the papers in this volume are offered as a contribution to this larger project, for each provides an ethnographic example of the effects of global capitalism, and in particular the transnational movements with which it is associated, on the lives of children. To this extent, a simple question frames each of the papers that follow: *How is transnational migration experienced by children?*

An attempt to answer this question was the main objective of a recent research¹ carried out by Mand, Zeitlyn and Gardner, in two interlinked projects which focussed on transnational children in different locations in London and Bangladesh. This volume, in which some of our findings are included, is one result. Other research on transnational

¹ The project was funded by the U.K's Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of the Diaspora, Migration and Identities programme, to whom we are very grateful.

children is, so far, relatively thin on the ground. We greatly welcome the contributions made to the volume by Samantha Punch, Cati Coe and Karen Fo-Olwig and hope that the papers and discussions that follow will stimulate more research on what we feel is a neglected, though hugely important group.

The volume has another, equally important objective for scholars of migration, which will be explored in detail in this introductory chapter: Here, the question is: *What insights can the study of children throw upon processes of transnational movement?* As we shall see, the simple answer is ‘a great many’. One of the main reasons for this is that children perceive the world rather differently than grown ups. Indeed, whilst the subjects of most migration related research – adults – narrate their changing relationships with place and space in terms of what has already happened, children have their lives ahead of them. Their relationships to movement and place are thus either framed in the here and now or in a terrain rather harder for researchers to grasp: the future.

As the drivers of future change, a focus on children is vital to understanding how transnational links are made and transformed. As the papers show, this is not only because today’s children will soon be tomorrow’s adults (a perspective illustrated by Punch’s longitudinal study of Bolivian children and young adults in Argentina, this volume) but because rather than being ‘human becomings’ / adults in the making (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 763), they are active agents, inventing culture rather than merely learning it (Hirschfeld, 2002). As we shall see, focussing on transnational children rather than adults leads to new perspectives on a range of issues as well as decentring various conventional ethnocentric assumptions. For example, as Fog-Olwig’s paper shows, children’s happiness and well being is not necessarily dependent upon being cared for by their natal kin. Similarly, the distinctions between paid labour and family labour may be more blurred than previously supposed. Indeed, just as the study of women in the early feminist anthropology of the 1970s led to a radical critique of core premises within, for example, the study of kinship or political systems², so might the study of children lead to important new insights in the social sciences. As Coe argues, age can be as important a category of analysis as gender (this volume) Whilst here we are particularly concerned with theoretical perspectives surrounding transnational migration, and, by extension, the social meanings and practices of place and space, child centred research and theory is an important and emerging area of sociology, geography and social anthropology (see, for example, Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Hirschfeld, 2002; Fog-Olwig and Gullov, 2003).

Despite the undoubted importance of these new perspectives to date, there has been remarkably little research on transnational / diasporic children³. This contrasts with a growing body of work on independent child migrants, which tends to focus on issues of development and poverty⁴ (cf. Kwankye et al, 2007; Hashim, 2005; Iverson, 2002) plus a plethora of research on ‘second / third generation youth’ in multi-cultural or diasporic settings, which often focuses on issues of assimilation / integration (cf. Watson, 1977; Louie, 2006; Levitt and Waters, 2006; Portes and Zhou, M.1993 ; Portes and Rambaut, 2001). Within discussions of diasporic communities however, children are generally either overlooked, or lumped into wider questions concerning family or intergenerational relationships with scant consideration given to how the children themselves may have specific roles and perspectives⁵. Given that children are largely

1. See, for example, Reiter, ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women*

³ The distinctions between these terms will be discussed shortly.

⁴ See for example : http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/child_migration.html (accessed, 15/03/10)

⁵ For the purposes of this volume we define ‘children’ as people below the age of thirteen. Those older may legally be children, but are generally discussed as ‘youth’ within published work.

presented within dominant discourses of ‘transnational migration’ as playing a central role in processes of integration, either as cultural brokers, or as a problematic group stuck ‘between two cultures’, this neglect is all the more extraordinary (Fog Olwig, 2003: 217). Yet as this volume sets out to demonstrate, research on children is important not just because children are, in themselves, a largely ignored group, but also because, once efforts have been taken to see the world through their eyes, much might be learnt about the nature of cultural identity, human mobility and the complex and ever changing interconnections, exchanges and hierarchies that constitute the global order.

The remainder of this introductory chapter suggests key areas in which child centred research has led to new and / or more nuanced understandings of transnational processes. First, however, I shall set out a working definition of what is meant by the term ‘transnational child’, before outlining some premises concerning the nature of children and childhood. After this I shall discuss work which theorises children’s places and emplacement, which, I suggest, is of critical importance to any research focussing upon transnational children.

Transnational/Transglobal/ Diasporic : What’s the Difference and Does it Matter?

The children discussed in the chapters that follow are part of what we might term ‘transnational communities’ or ‘transnational families’⁶. By this, I mean that they and their families participate in social and economic networks which traverse national borders, linking places through a range of practices. These networks or links are a centrally important part of that community or family’s way of life, usually economically but also socially and culturally, although the ways in which the relationship between places is experienced may be viewed differently according to where one is positioned⁷. As the papers show, transnational children can live as part of settled communities with an established ‘homeland’ elsewhere, can move across borders for work, or be part of families and communities in which migration abroad is an established way of life; whilst some may migrate themselves, others may be left behind, according to circumstances.

Rather than conceptually dividing places of origin with places of settlement, a useful way of theorising transnational worlds is via the concept of ‘social fields’ (cf. Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004) an approach discussed by Zeitlyn in this volume, which suggests continuous rather than disconnected social spaces. One advantage of talking of social fields is that rather than geographical movement being the main focus of enquiry, attention is paid primarily to the relationships between people and places that configure the network. Focussing on relationships also returns our attention to power and hierarchy, as well as emotions and human agency. Combined with this, the empirically incorrect and unhelpful slippage of labelling largely sedentary people based at different points in the field ‘migrants’ (for example, the children discussed by Gardner and Mand and Zeitlyn are not migrants, nor indeed are the children interviewed by Coe in Ghana) is avoided.

People living as part of these fields, wherever they are positioned, might also be thought of as having acquired what Vertovec has termed a ‘transnational habitus’

⁶ Bryceson and Vuorela define transnational families in the following way: ‘... families that live some or most of the time separated from each other yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘family hood’, even across national borders.’ (2002: 3).

⁷ We do not intend to repeat the vast literature which defines and describes transnational migration here; key sources which summarise the debates include Kearney, 1995; Ong, 1999; Basch et al, 1994; Glick-Schiller et al, 1995; Vertovec, 2004;

(Vertovec 2009: 66-69). By his use of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (as unconscious, 'taken-for granted', culturally conditioned patterns of thought and behaviour) Vertovec captures the orientation of people for whom migration between two or more places and adaptation to different lifestyles in those places is an accepted aspect of normal life. How this is experienced, and the degree to which transnational migrants might be described as 'cosmopolitan' in their abilities to juggle different ways of being in different places depends on context⁸ as well as gender and generation. Here, a central question concerns the ways in which children inhabit the transnational habitus and the sense they make of moving between different cultural worlds. Whilst we do not suggest that such worlds are bounded, it would be equally misleading to give the impression that there is no disjuncture or difference between places. Indeed, children may struggle to negotiate their shifting cultural identities when they move locations across the transnational field.

Another way of thinking about transnational fields is by making the distinction between 'transnational practices' and 'transnational perspectives' (Louie, 2006: 366). Whilst the former refers to social actions such as visits, the sending of remittances, marriage⁹, religious rituals¹⁰, phone conversations, emails and texting¹¹ or other activities which actively make (or break) links between people and places, the latter refers to the ways in which these activities and the relationships and places which they form are thought about. These 'imaginings' are the subject of Cati Coe's paper, which argues that the ways in which children imagine and talk about migration and places will in turn frame the future shape of the movements that they make.

Whilst the term 'transnational habitus' implies a shared perception, the reality is often that transnational perspectives vary widely, both at different points in a transnational field, and according to gender, generation and of course personal disposition and background. Someone's perspective may also change over their life-time, (or, indeed, co-exist with other, contradictory perspectives). This comes across vividly when researching children, who rarely see matters in the same light as their parents. For example, whilst they may engage in the same transnational practice (such as, in the case of British Bangladeshi children, a visit to Bangladesh), they may fail to share their parents' enthusiasm for rekindling family relationships, or decide that rather than feeling 'more Bangladeshi', all the visit has done is remind them of just how British they really are (Mand and Gardner, this volume). As other work shows, children's orientation to the 'habitus' and the ways they think about different locations on the transnational field can depend upon a number of factors, including their relationships to their parents, their competence in different languages and the degree of visits they have paid to the 'homeland' (Louie, 2006).

By using the notion of 'transnational social fields' our discussion thus includes children who are positioned at various locations, and who are mobile in a variety of ways. Whilst the Bangladeshi children discussed by Mand and Zeitlyn are relatively sedentary, and based in the 'North', (in this case, different locations in London) only travelling every few years or less to visit their relatives in Bangladesh, the Bolivian children who Punch researched in the mid 1990s were highly mobile, travelling from their homes in Bolivia as part of long established economic and social networks to work in Argentina. For the Ghanaian children discussed by Coe, movement to destinations abroad is an accepted part of their life course, eagerly anticipated by most, but tempered by their educational needs. Meanwhile Fog-Olwig describes how in the Caribbean children are

⁸ Cf. Werbner, 1999, 2008

⁹ See, for example, Shaw and Charlsley 2006

¹⁰ See, for example, Gardner and Grillo, 2002

¹¹ See, for example, Baldassar, 2008

mobile in a variety of ways; this is due in part to how childhood, as well as places, are culturally constructed.

Some of the children discussed in this volume are moving primarily for economic reasons, and thus could also be described as 'labour migrants'; others move as part of families. In Caribbean transnational networks migration is intimately linked to global care chains, which problematise the analytic separation between movement for family and for work. Yet whilst feminists have been showing how labour relations exist within as well as outside households and families for many years¹², to date the literature on child migration has tended to separate 'independent child migrants' (Iverson, 2002) with children who migrate as part of families (Orellana et al, 2001;)¹³.

Precise categorisations are thus tricky, if not impossible. Whilst all the children discussed here might be described as 'transnational', the distinction between other terms, relationships and practices is blurred, even if the (so far, limited) literature on global children / child migrants has a tendency to focus on different issues and be associated with different scholarly fields. For example, work on children 'left behind', in which issues of emotional well being, care and parenting are central (Parenhas, 2005; Cheever, 2003), tends to be associated with anthropological approaches to kinship and gender, whilst work on those who leave for employment reasons tends to be located within development studies, focussing on livelihoods and poverty¹⁴. Meanwhile, research done on 'immigrant' children, or children of the 'second generation' in the North, tends to focus on issues of identity, racism and integration¹⁵.

If the term 'transnational' covers such a wide range of relationships, practices and perceptions, why use it? Whilst arguably in danger of being employed so loosely and widely as to become indistinguishable from other, overused terms such as 'diaspora', we believe it remains helpful, precisely because of the way that it draws attention away from the binaries of 'sending' and 'receiving' contexts, and towards relationships, linkages and flows. Whilst 'diaspora' refers to populations that are globally dispersed, with a 'homeland' often more imagined than a real place to be visited or engaged with, transnational fields tend to involve a smaller number of places, historically linked for several or more generations, though economic and social means. The scholarly analyses of transnational fields within which we locate this volume, thus tend to pay close attention to issues of power between places in both the North and South and to the interlinkages of local and global processes, or how the global is made meaningful within particular local contexts. In contrast, the academic literature on diaspora generally focuses on groups settled in urban areas of the 'North' rather than relationships between places, tending to concentrate on issues of cultural identity and cultural production¹⁶.

Having said this, the distinctions between terms – be they 'diaspora', 'transnational', or 'transglobal' (which focuses attention to a wider, global spread of relationships rather than between two or three countries) - is (literally) rather academic, and should not detain us for too long, or deflect attention from the more important questions of how children experience the global world order, and what studying them can tell us about it. The authors in this volume use a variety of terms, and we have not sought to change that. Let us turn to the children.

¹² See for example, Young, Wolkowitz, and McCullagh 1984

¹³ For example http://www.childmigration.net/Main_theme_home?selection=Migration_with_families (accessed 16/03/10)

¹⁴ See for example research funded by the Development Research Centre for Migration, Globalisation and Poverty at the University of Sussex : http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typeofmigration/child_migration.html (accessed 16/03/10)

¹⁵ For example, Levitt and Waters, 2006; Portes and Zhou, M.1993 ; Portes and Rambaut, 2001)

¹⁶ For example, Brah, 1996; Hear, 1998; Brubaker, 2005; Braziel and Mannur, 2005

Constructing Childhood and Children

The papers in this volume take as a given that childhood is not a universal condition in which children pass through a series of pre-defined 'stages', but a state of being that is constructed in different ways within particular cultural contexts and geographies of power (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Katz, 2001; 2005). This is hardly a new revelation: Philippe Aries' seminal text *Centuries of Childhood* was, after all, published back in 1962. Yet the assumption that children are largely the same wherever they live or whatever their class or ethnic identity still drives much international policy and pedagogic practice (Bloch et al, 2006; Holt and Holloway, 2006), as well as wider hegemonic discourses as to what childhood is, how children should behave and what parenting involves.

Within the context of 'transnational' or diasporic communities this may have particular implications for children who are framed in one way in one setting (for example, schools) and in other ways elsewhere (for example, home). In Fog-Olwig's discussion of the circulation of children and children's labour / family care in the Caribbean (this volume) she notes that children are 'more porous', being able to move between households and perform tasks in ways that adults can't without attracting social stigma. In contrast, in countries such as the U.K, children seem *less* porous and moveable than adults: the state has strict rules concerning when they go away (ie only in school holidays) and the movement of a child into a household other than that of their parents is closely regulated by the state. Having said this, we must beware of creating the impression that particular constructions of childhood have a fixed relationship to particular places or that they can reliably be mapped onto set cultural fields (Fog-Olwig, 2003: 4). This is not only because culture is neither fixed nor bounded by place and space (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) but also because, as part of transnational fields, the children discussed in each of the papers have particular relationships to place and space.

An important question that arises from understanding childhood as discursive rather than an empirical fact concerns how different conceptions of children and childhood inform perceptions of space and place, and, indeed, how these are carried over into theoretical formulations of transnational migration and the relationship between the local and global. As Holloway and Valentine have pointed out, as a discursive construction childhood is imbued with a special ideology which shapes our understanding of different environments, such as the street or the home (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 776). For example, if children are seen as inherently defenceless and in need of protection to the many dangers posed by the 'outside'¹⁷, this affects how homes and public spaces are imagined and created. For our purposes, this in turn affects transnational practices and perceptions. If, for example, children are seen as capable of paid work and / or physical autonomy from their parents, they are more likely to engage in independent global movements than if they are understood as deeply dependent upon the nuclear family for their care. Similarly, if childhood is supposed to take place largely in the safety of 'home', this will affect how notions of the 'homeland' are constructed.

Another important assumption made by the authors in this volume is that rather than seeing children as passive 'adults in the making' children are active cultural agents, with their own agendas and perspectives (Hirschfeld, 2002; Harris, 1998; Anderson, 1999). As Hirschfeld has argued, rather than children learning adult culture, it may be

¹⁷ The current British and North American understanding of children as in need of large amounts of protection by their carers is polemically critiqued by Frank Furedi (2001).

that culture is created, first and foremost, by children. This 'cultural work' not only involves the forging of distinct practices and beliefs, but in turn shapes the culture of the grown-ups, since: 'Children do not become who their elders are. Rather, the elders become what the child – or more specifically, what the architecture of the mind affords.' (Hirschfeld, 2002: 623). For the purposes of rethinking transnationalism, what this means is that research should pay close attention to the cultural work of children, for the meanings that they create now are likely to closely influence the future adult meanings given to practices, perceptions, place and space.

Children's Places, Emplacement and Location

Place is both a social position and a physical location (Olwig and Gullov, 2003). Children are therefore 'placed' both in terms of their location in space, and in terms of their positions in families, communities and wider society. Both tend to be closely controlled by adults: 'Places for children, in other words, are defined by adult moral values about a cherished past and a desirable future, clothed in commonsense notions about children's best interests.' (Olwig and Gullov, 2003: 3). As the papers in this volume show, assumptions about where children should be placed can be questioned by paying attention to transnational children. For example, as both Coe and Fog-Olwig's work clearly illustrates, the premise that children should stay in the natal home or be sedentary is based on ethnocentric assumptions about a universal child. Indeed, in both the Caribbean and Ghana, it is common for children to circulate between the households of kin and non-kin. Similarly, when Fog-Olwig's adult informants recall how they were brought up by people other than their parents, we are forced to reassess our assumptions about children's well being for what makes their memories either positive or negative is whether they were treated as a burden or an asset.

As they move between different domains, children may have greater or lesser control over how they're placed and may in turn participate in different forms of compliance, resistance or subversion. Within the family domain, for example, they may be placed in relatively rigid inter-generational or age hierarchies with their parents, grandparents and siblings, which they may accept or subvert, according to context. When they physically move into different locations however (school, perhaps, or when they're 'playing out') they are placed in different relationships, vis-à-vis each other and the wider community. Such processes of 'emplacement' depend not only on how childhood is constructed in each context but also upon gender, ethnic identity and social class. As they grow older, the spaces they inhabit and positions they occupy may increasingly be influenced by gender, which is in turn influenced by place, a point illustrated in Zeitlyn in his discussion of children's visits to the Bangladesh 'homeland' (this volume). For transnational children who are living in a place where they are part of an ethnic minority, they are also placed by wider society through various markers, all variable according to context, but mostly relying upon skin colour and / or clothing. This in turn changes when they move within the transnational field and 'difference' is suddenly thrown into relief.

Emplacement takes place on a global scale as well as within children's homes, schools and neighbourhoods. By paying attention to the effects that global economic and political forces have on children's lives, we see how they are 'emplaced' in global hierarchies, whether these are analysed in terms of socio-economic classes existing within particular locations or the inequalities that exist between places. The material impacts of these inequalities and the ways in which these are experienced by children who are both globally emplaced and live their lives in physical places are the focus of the work of Cindy Katz, whose work on children's places in Sudan and New York is significant in the

way it connects a focus on children's geographies and everyday lives with neo-Marxist analysis of the ways in which social reproduction – schools, hospitals, playgrounds and so on – has been radically altered by globalised capitalism, producing particular political ecologies in which children bear many of the costs. In some instances, states 'dodge' the costs of social reproduction, by not allowing labour migrants to settle, meaning that children have to stay behind (Meillassoux, 1981). In others, costs which were once borne by the state have been privatised or cut. As Katz writes: 'Environmental racism and environmental forms of imperialism have implications in common with the social relations that encourage production in one place, tapping a migrant workforce reproduced elsewhere' (2001: 714). These processes have ramifications on children both in terms of the 'care chains' described by Fog-Olwig in the Caribbean and the movements for work described by Coe in Ghana and Punch in Bolivia / Argentina. In Ghana and the Caribbean, for example, mothers frequently migrate abroad in order work as carers in more wealthy countries, leaving their children behind to be cared for by others.

Global capitalism also shapes the places where children live, turning our attention directly to the material conditions of their lives. In Sudan, a state sponsored agricultural 'development' project in Howa in the early 1970s had led to environmental devastation, livelihood insecurity and out-migration, whilst in New York, economic crises from the 1970s had led to a sharp deterioration of the urban environment and a 'marooning' of people in poor neighbourhoods, for whom: 'the displacement of received notions of progress is experienced viscerally and bitterly.' (Katz, 2004: 155)

In their discussion of place and emplacement amongst British Bangladeshi children, Gardner and Mand show how the urban environment in inner city London is experienced by their informants in largely negative ways: cramped living conditions, fear of gangs and crime and rubbish on the streets are just some examples. Yet as the paper also shows, whilst intensely physical children's experience of place is also *social*, for just as they are emplaced in global hierarchies so too are they emplaced in families and neighbourhoods, as daughters, sons, cousins, nephews and nieces and so on. London is therefore 'home' because that's where one's family live.

Centrally all the children discussed in this volume travel *between* places rather than simply being located in one place. By moving across geographical space they are thus *emplaced* in different political ecologies and social hierarchies, their mobility adding an extra layer of complexity to Katz's notion of critical topography. When British Bangladeshi children move from London to Sylhet their social status changes from being members of a deprived minority in the inner city, to wealthy and powerful 'returnees', attracting large numbers of visitors, gifts and attention. As this example shows, as actors in transnational fields where there is very real material inequality between locations, the children are clearly not emplaced in any one location; as they move between places, their relationship to the global order shifts, for the costs and gains of 'vagabond capitalism' are experienced differently in different locations.

Let us now turn to the main focus of this introduction: the ways in which the study of children can help us reconceptualise transnational migration. In what follows, I describe, in no particular order, how researching transnational children can help throw light on processes of global movement, networks and connections.

Transnationalism Reconsidered: Researching Children

1. Temporality: The Life Course, Gender and Generation

Focussing on children reminds us of the temporality of social life. The reason for this is quite simple: the physical fact that children grow and change so quickly, at least from an adult's perspective. A researcher working with a group of ten to eleven year olds might thus return after what, in the time scale of university life seem like only a few terms, to find that his or her research subjects have grown several inches, hit puberty and moved to secondary school, the perspectives and practices they carried out in their distantly remembered days of junior school, (which the researcher is still in the process of writing up) – particular games, say, or playground relationships – only recalled as something they did 'when they were young.'

The role of time in affecting change amongst children raises a number of important methodological issues. As Punch suggests in her paper, work with children lends itself to longitudinal approaches, so that these changes can be mapped and made sense of. In her fieldwork amongst Bolivian child migrants in Argentina, Punch returned after ten years to find her informants were sometimes married with their own small children; the research involved examining multiple perspectives, not just between places and generations, but with informants looking back from 'now' to 'then'. This longitudinal approach also revealed how families and individuals coped during particular historical moments: in this case, the economic crisis in Argentina in 2002. None of this would have been visible had the research only involved a 'snapshot' of a single time.

A focus on time and the way in which lives change over the course of time raises important questions concerning the life course, a topic which has received increasing attention within the migration literature¹⁸. As Levitt and Waters have pointed out, for instance, peoples' engagement with different locations in the transnational social field has a tendency to vary over their life course. For example, there is likely to be a higher degree of engagement with 'the homeland' amongst school or college pupils, which falls off in early adulthood due to the demands of work and young families, and increases again in later life, perhaps due to a renewed desire to rediscover one's 'roots' (Levitt and Waters, 2006; see also Louie, 2006). The ways that these changing engagements with place shift over the life course, are far from universal, for the life course is itself historically and culturally variable; it also depends from which locations in the transnational field movement is taking place. In Ghana, for example, children often delay migration in order that they can finish their education; their desire to see and experience new places is also linked to their emerging identities as young people and their need for adventure (Coe, this volume).

To understand the complex relationships between individual life courses and transnational migration, it is therefore as important to study children as it is to study anyone else. What is revealed is the way in which global processes work alongside gender and generation, both historically and culturally variable, as well as the vagaries of individual circumstance and personality to produce different forms of movement. We also see how global and local are shaped by mutually constituting practices, neither is analytically separable from the other (Massey, 1990). This is clearly illustrated by all the papers in this volume. Coe's informants in Ghana, for example, speak of how their need for education shapes decisions concerning when to migrate, whilst in Latin America, changing family relationships, including acquiring a girlfriend or boyfriend, influences movement to Argentina for employment purposes.

¹⁸ See for example, Gardner, 2009; Gardner, 2002; King et al, 2004; Catz and Monk, 1994

Gendered identities shift according to place, as well as over the life course. Again, a focus on children helps us understand the complex ways in which this takes place across transnational fields, for childhood is a time when gendered identities are learned, experimented with, and performed. These identities also change fast: in the space of a few years, months or even weeks, children may discover (or have foisted upon them) new gendered identities, moving from the role of 'child' in which clothing and activity remain relatively ungendered to 'young woman' or 'young man' where new forms of behaviour are required. Such shifts may take place as the result of transnational movement. Zeitlyn (this volume), for example, describes how ten year old Nasrin, who was open and friendly with him in London, radically changed her approach when he accompanied her family on a visit to Bangladesh. Here, her older girl cousins gave her a crash course in appropriate female decorum; she started to cover her head and refused to play football, despite it being one of her favourite games at home.

Work amongst children also reveals how the language of first, second or third 'generation', so often used to describe the descendants of migrants can be misleading. As Timera has pointed out, the concept of 'second generation' migration is in itself controversial, for by describing young people first and foremost as the descendants of immigrants, it racialises them (2002). Moreover, complex movements within the transnational field often means that generations can't be easily classified as 'second' or 'third'. In the British Bangladesh transnational field, for example, marriage has become the main way in which people are able to move from Bangladesh to Britain. This means that whilst one partner may have been born in the U.K, another has only arrived relatively recently. The children of these couples can thus cannot be said to be either 'second' or 'third' generation, but somewhere in between; language practices in the home are equally complex, with children often speaking Bengali with one parent and English with the other. As this example indicates, not only is the language of generation in danger of associating native born groups with the (albeit unintentionally) derogatory label of 'migrant'¹⁹, but it is also often associated with lineal models of integration, in which the 'first' generation are more orientated to the homeland, and the second more likely to assimilate into the 'host' society (if they're not too distracted by the uncomfortable fate of falling 'between two cultures')²⁰

2. *Transnational Perspectives*

Research with transnational children directs our attention to the future of transnational fields, rather than history and the social construction of memory. Indeed, insights into children's imaginings sheds new light on the cultural construction of place, identity and interconnectedness, which so far has been almost completely dominated in the literature by adult perspectives. Whilst much ink has been spilt over the 'myth of return', for example, and the role of nostalgia in creating an imagined homeland for those who first forged transnational links, very little has been written about the role of children's play, fantasy, and cultural work in creating what we might think of as a 'new generation' of imagined 'homelands' (if indeed, such a term is still appropriate, see discussion above). It is, however, these imaginings which in future years will help shape the form and intensity of transnational relationships; anyone interested in how these processes are created and changed over time neglects them at their peril. This is not just because children are active cultural agents but also because children's perspectives today will affect their practices in the future. If, on a visit to the 'homeland', for example, they

¹⁹ As Bryceson and Vuorela point out, the term 'migrant' tends to carry class connotations. Whilst elites are mobile, 'migrants' are assumed to be politically and economically deprived (2002: 7)

²⁰ Watson, 1979

feel a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to pursue their links with the place and people than if they feel alienated, or that they don't belong. Reality is often complex: feelings change over time and between places, and can be a mixture of the positive and the negative. As our research amongst British Bangladeshi children has shown, what children who have grown up in London feel on visits to the 'homeland' (or '*desb*') is strong ambivalence: the mosquitoes and mud were horrible, but their favourite auntie showered them with love and they got to run around outside all day (Gardner and Mand and Zeitlyn, this volume).

Such feelings and perceptions have a dynamic relationship with context. Louie, for example, has shown vividly how contextual differences amongst Chinese and Dominican young people in the United States affect their perceptions of the 'homeland', and hence their future engagements with the transnational field. Whilst the Chinese young people interviewed had distant relationships with their parents, had not mastered the Chinese language and had rarely, if ever, visited China, and therefore identified themselves strongly as American 'ethnics', their positions embedded in the U.S mainstream with little if any sense of a transnational identity (unlike their parents, who were very much orientated to 'back there'), the Dominicans had closer relationships with their parents, regularly visited Dominica and spoke Spanish fluently, meaning that they drew from both 'ethnic' and 'transnational' identities (Louie, 2006).

Perceptions of place and transnational connectedness are also influenced by the cultural contexts in which children have been brought up, which may in turn be generation specific, a point illustrated by Coe's discussion of Ghanaian children's imaginings of 'abroad', for whom modernity and wealth are contrasted strongly with being a child in 'the village'. In a quite different context Louie notes how American Chinese young people on visits to China often described their experiences in terms of tourism. Similar observations can be made of British Bangladeshi children, some of whom commented in interviews that Bangladesh had 'good beaches' or fun places to go, such as the amusement park 'Dreamland' which has been built close to Sylhet Town, to cater for the consumer desires of returnee families. In this instance, we see how British / 'Western' consumerism and constructions of childhood (as involving play and children as in need of entertainment) have in turn reconfigured place, via the construction of tourist sites such as Dreamland, unheard of twenty or even ten years ago. In turn, if today's children imagine the 'homeland' as a tourist site, then their transnational relationships are likely to be significantly different from their parents or grandparents, who may still think of it as 'home'. (Fog-Olwig, 1997)

Clearly, imaginations and imaginings are central to the future shape of transnational social fields. In some instances this may lead to certain places becoming sites for heritage tourism, very much 'over there' and conceptually different from 'home', but in others it may lead to the distinctions between places becoming increasingly blurred, especially if the children themselves do not make such distinctions, however much state boundaries or (adult) discourses of ethnic belonging insist on them. As one of the children declared in Gardner and Mand's research, when asked to say whether he was Bangladeshi or British: 'I am a human being' (this volume). As Karen Fog-Olwig points out: 'Children's place making involves the creation of different social sites of belonging connected with the various spheres of life that children encounter in their everyday lives.' (2003: 217). If children are straddling places and identities, their place making and perceptions will therefore be quite different from conventional models of 'integration' in which one's national place is separated from 'place of origin.' A fascinating example of this is the ways in which the British Bangladeshi children in Gardner and Mand's

research conflated Bengal and English words used to describe 'home' and 'away'²¹. As Gardner and Mand show (this volume), rather than making a binary distinction between the categories 'home' (*desh*) and 'away' (*bidesh*), in the way that their parents do, British born Bangladeshi children tend to conflate the terms, using English to talk about 'home' (which is London) and Bengali to talk about *desh* (which is Bangladesh). The children's discussion of the terms, and the fluidity with which they switch between and conflate them, points not only to the ways in which the transnational relationship has, for their generation, shifted into a single field, albeit with different locations, rather than simply a relationship between places that 'send' and 'receive', but also the inadequacy of binary terms such as 'home' and 'away', or, indeed, 'local' and 'global.' Here we have an interesting spin on Holloway and Valentine's contention that progressive understandings of place can overcome a discursive split between localised and global understandings of childhood (Holloway and Valentine, 2006: 765). Rather, research on children's categorisations calls into question the discursive split between the local and the global.

Whilst some children's imaginings involve the 'homeland' or ancestral site of belonging, for others they involve places to which they one day hope to migrate. As Coe's paper shows, would-be child migrants describe 'abroad' as urban and 'modern', places where the buildings are beautiful and the food foreign. To elicit these images, researchers may have to use a wider repertoire of research techniques than simply interviewing and participant observation. For example in a project amongst South African children, their imaginings and representations of migration were discovered via stories and pictures (Young and Ansell, 2006), whilst art work was a major component of the research described by Mand and Zeitlyn in this volume.

3. Transnational Practices

As the above implies, transnational perspectives are closely linked to transnational practices, for each informs the other. Research with children reveals not only their active work in creating, recreating and sometimes negating transnational links, thus changing the character of the transnational field, but also the ways in which children's practices can be distinct from those of adults. Obvious examples are internet communications, text messaging, social networking sites and so on, which children often master more skilfully than their parents and which in turn change the nature of transnational connections and communications²² (Holloway and Valentine, 2006).

In order to consider the ways in which children's practices transform or reproduce transnational social fields, an obvious starting point is the family, and the ways in which children actively build, or negate family relationships across transnational space. Bryceson and Vuorela have suggested that transnational families can be seen as 'imagined communities', which need to work at creating a sense of togetherness in order to be meaningful. Two major ways in which this is done are through what the authors term 'Frontiering' and 'Relativising.' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). 'Frontiering' involves: 'the ways and means transnational family members use to create familial space and network ties in terrains where affinal connections are relatively sparse.' (ibid: 11). In contexts where families are settling, which may involve negotiating new ways of being and habitus, for example, 'frontiering' involves making new links and spaces. Children are often central to this process. For example, in attending school, they may be the first

²¹ As the research showed, the title of the project, 'Home and Away: South Asian Children's Representations and Imaginings of Transnationalism' was itself misleading, suggesting a binary opposition between places that did not exist in reality.

²² For a more general discussion of the role of mobile phones and other new technologies in transnational social fields, see Horst and Miller 2006

members of the family to have direct contact with 'the mainstream', and may, in turn, have to negotiate between the different demands and expectations of family and school (Zeitlyn, 2010; Anderson, 1999; Scourfield et al, 2005). They may play a practical role as interpreters (Alexander et al, 2004), again acting as intermediaries between their family and 'the outside.' They may also introduce new relationships to the family, actively creating new networks either within one location, or across transnational social fields. The latter is shown in Fog-Olwig's paper (this volume), where children move between Caribbean islands and households, acting as 'spearheads' in the forging of new networks and links between places in a way that adults cannot, since children are more able to take on certain types of roles than adult. In a similar vein, Orellana et al show how immigrant children in California play active roles in migration for their families, including taking the lead, as in South Korean 'parachute' kids living in suburban Los Angeles (Orellana et al, 2001).

'Relativising' refers to the ways in which people establish, maintain or curtail relational ties with specific family members, or: 'modes of materialising the family as an imagined community with shared feelings and mutual obligations ... the selective formation of familial, emotional and material attachments on the basis of temporal, spatial and need related considerations.' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 14). The ways in which children form bonds with family members across transnational social space (or indeed, curtail these bonds) can be central to the processes of family relativising. For example, children may put much work into keeping up with certain relatives living elsewhere in the transnational social field and may think and talk about them as key people in their lives despite being separated by thousands of miles, a process described by authors such as Parenhas who have studied the lives of children 'left behind' by migrant parents (2005), but also by researchers working with children who live with their nuclear families in one place but who have extended kin in another (see Orellana et al, 2001). In other instances children can deny relatedness, a scenario described by Louie in her work with Chinese American young people, who showed little interest in their Chinese relatives and couldn't see much point in carrying out rituals for them (2006).

As this last example indicates, relativising is not simply a matter of perceiving familial closeness or distance, but also involves specific practices. Religious rituals, performed at different locations for members of the family, are a good example. Gift giving and letter writing are others. In this volume, for example, Punch describes how she carried letters from Bolivian parents to their migrant children in Argentina. XX

Feeding children, and their response to the food they are given, is another, every day example, of relativising. For example, whilst some British Bangladeshi children spoke of the care that their Bangladeshi relatives took over them ('she made me chips', says Faizul of his auntie), others recall how disgusting they found the food prepared for them by their family members in Bangladesh and how the experience had made them long to be at home in the U.K, an example, perhaps, of failed relativising.

Attention to children's roles and relationships in transnational families helps us understand the ways in which these families and their every day living arrangements are shaped by processes at different points in the transnational social field. For example, whilst the Caribbean families studied by Fog-Olwig are by their nature, fluid and dispersed over all locations within the Caribbean, the Bangladeshi families studied by Zeitlyn and Mand are arranged in very different constellations in the U.K and Bangladesh. In London, the limited space of tower block council housing, and economic conditions which structure household work in particular ways, mean that the majority of children live in nuclear families, often in cramped conditions; rather than 'playing out', their everyday lives revolve around school, extra curricular lessons such as Arabic classes,

and the T.V. In Bangladesh, family life is completely different: living on large compounds and surrounded by large numbers of relatives, children are free to roam around and play. During visits to Bangladesh the children are not only ‘relativising’, but learning about different ways to have relationships and be in a family.

Children are not, of course, simply members of families. Analysis of their transnational practices must therefore extend beyond their familial roles. As Punch, Fog-Olwig and Coe all show in this volume, children can act as independent spearheads in the creation of transnational links. In the Ghanaian and Bolivian examples, the prime motivation is economic. In the Caribbean case, the reasons are both *familial and* economic, for children move both as members of families and in order to work as part of ‘care chains’, in which people move around according to the changing needs of their relatives. As this example shows, the discursive separation between children migrating as family dependents and as independent labourers which exists in the literature can be misleading.

4. Transnational Feelings

Research on children points to a third area of transnationalism which, as yet, has attracted little scholarly attention: physical and emotional feelings. As Baldassar has pointed out, the emotions of ‘missing’ and ‘longing’ are integral features of transnational kinship work (Baldassar, 2008), yet so far there has been little research on emotionality. Similarly, whilst movement between places is inherently physical – experiences of taste, smell, physical pleasure or discomfort not to mention visual and aural stimuli are likely to feature large in anyone’s travel experiences – the physical aspects of movement and migration have barely been touched upon within the literature. By attempting to understand children’s experiences of movement, separation and ‘living between two worlds’, we suggest that such feelings may become more apparent than in research with some adults, who as part of their adult roles and identities may not express how they feel quite so readily²³, or, indeed, have a less immediate relationship with their physical bodies and environment. Indeed, whilst we need to problematise naturalised terms such as ‘children’ or ‘the environment’, we also need to recognise the inherently physical nature of children (whose bodies are not only changing fast, but are also, by definition, different from those of adults) and the physical environments in which they live (Stephens, 1994: 4).

Our research amongst British Bangladeshi children and their place-making, suggests that, first and foremost, their relationships to places are physical. (Gardner and Mand, this volume). Experiences of the heat, unwelcome insects, washing in village ponds and the physical joy of open spaces in which to play featured large in the children’s accounts of their trips to Bangladesh. These accounts are deeply physical and significantly different from accounts of adults, who are often reflecting on childhoods *in* Bangladesh, viewed through the gauze of nostalgia, ambivalence and sometimes regret. Amongst the Bangladeshi elders’ with whom I carried out research in the 1990s, for example²⁴, whilst migration experiences are often deeply etched on their bodies and their narratives of migration are also often narratives of sickness and anxiety, what is striking about the children’s accounts is the immediacy and strength of their feelings, the exclamations of disgust (‘urgh!’) or declarations of unadulterated joy at food (‘yummy!’), excitement at the prospect of the trip, or unembarrassed accounts of tears and upset on leaving behind beloved relatives or friends.

²³ This was not the case for Baldassar’s Italian informants, who would readily weep and express deep emotions in discussing their absent kin (2008)

²⁴ Gardner, 2002

The issue of separation from significant others leads us to a centrally important reason why feelings and emotions may take centre stage in research on transnational children, for separations over long distances and long periods of time may mean that their emotional and physical needs are not being met. Within the context of what Hochschild has termed: 'the importation of care and love from poor countries to rich ones' (2003: 17), the nurturing and love that women (or as Parenhas puts it, 'emotional work': 2005:127) would normally give their own children, is given to 'First World' children in their roles as nannies, housekeepers and so on (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). This may mean that the children left behind express emotions such as longing and grief, or feelings of abandonment. The Filipino children researched by Parenhas, for example, who held dear an idealised version of a nuclear family with a nurturing and physically intimate (who was of course physically present) at its heart, were by turns angry, disappointed and saddened by their mothers' absences, despite the provision of caring from other family members (Parrenas, 2005). In contrast, the Caribbean children described by Fog-Olwig seem to have no such expectations, and hence appear to be happy whoever is looking after them, just so long as they are being looked after.

Love is perhaps a fitting theme with which to end this section. Whilst we must beware of essentialisms for as anthropologists will tell us, emotions such as love are themselves cultural constructs worthy of interrogation, research with children reminds us that rather than economic transactions, political networks or cultural criss-crossings, (important though these are) it is human relationships that ultimately lie at the centre of transnational social fields, linking people and places. In our attempts to see transnationalism through children's eyes, one of the main lessons we learn is that the love that children tend to readily express for their relatives is what keeps those people and places bound together.

Summary of papers

The first papers in the volume, by Karen Fog-Olwig and Cati Coe, focus on children who live in contexts where mobility and migration abroad is a taken-for-granted aspect of life, and who themselves often move. This is in contrast to the papers by Katy Gardner, Kanwal Mand and Benjamin Zeitlyn, which discuss the perspectives and experiences of children living in settled transnational communities in which whilst visits to the 'homeland' take place, the children are generally based in one place.

In '*Growing up and Going Abroad: How Ghanaian Children Imagine Transnational Migration*', Coe argues that whilst gender has long been an accepted lens for the analysis of migration, attention to age and life-course position are equally rewarding. Framing her material with Katz's perspectives on 'vagabond capitalism', in which, as outlined in this introduction, migration regimes are a means by which states access labour without paying for its reproductive costs, Coe shows how within this global context where migrants are not able to settle in the 'host' country, (and the state therefore avoids paying for the costs of social reproduction) Ghana has a long history of international migration to a range of global locations. This involves different sorts of movement which, in turn, are linked to individual migrants' positions in the life course. Children are often left behind, sometimes in order to care for grandparents, for their education, or simply because due to restrictive immigration policies it is not feasible for their parents to take them. Most, however, plan to migrate once they are older. By describing how the children in her research imagined migration and 'abroad', Coe shows both the temporal dimensions of migration, as well as the role of the imagination in forging future forms of movement.

Whilst the Ghanaian children studied by Coe are not yet mobile, in '*The care chain, children's mobility and the Caribbean migration tradition*', Karen Fog-Olwig shows how in the

Caribbean children are often more mobile than adults, for they are more easily moved between households and social domains, and can mediate between different social fields, moving, for example, between the bush, school, home and the street in ways that adults cannot. Fog-Olwig uses her material to question assumptions that 'care chains' that leave children behind whilst parents (particularly mothers) migrate abroad are necessarily viewed as exploitative and oppressive by those who participate in them. Many families on the island of Nevis are involved in complex forms of migration, in which children are both moved between different households in order that they are cared for whilst their parents migrate, and can also act as spearheads of migration, moving to different islands to be part of related and non-related households. As the paper shows, moving for work and moving to a new family are often fused, for the children's labour takes place in their roles as household members. For those 'left behind', whether the experience is viewed in negative or positive terms often depends upon whether the children are treated as a burden, or as a resource, both in terms of the care they may give to other household members, and the remittances they receive from the absent parents.

Whilst both focussing upon children who are members of settled British-Bangladeshi transnational communities in London (Tower Hamlets and Islington), the papers by Mand and Gardner, and Zeitlyn, take different approaches, and analyse their material through different theoretical lenses. In *'Maintaining Transnational Social Fields: the role of visits to Bangladesh for British Bangladeshi children,'* Zeitlyn elaborates on Bourdieu's concepts of 'social fields' and 'habitus', arguing that different locations in Britain and Bangladesh can be understood as 'social fields' in which transnational children adopt different practices and are shaped in different ways. By focussing upon visits 'home', to Bangladesh, the paper shows how holidays spent in their parents or grandparents' home villages in rural Sylhet help socialise them into a particular British Bangladeshi 'habitus'. During these trips children's social roles and behaviour often changes considerably, but rather than simply adopting a 'Bangladeshi' habitus, the children are often highly ambivalent about the visit.

In *'My away is here: place, emplacement and mobility amongst British Bangladeshi children,'* like Cati Coe, Mand and Gardner discuss Cindy Katz's perspectives on social reproduction in which she argues that global capitalism has led to specific 'topographies' in which some groups of children are emplaced and marooned in deprived locations where social reproduction – health, education, the physical environment and so on - have been ravaged by neo-liberal development. Using the children's perspectives on their homes in London and in Bangladesh, the authors argue that any analysis of children's emplacement within global capitalism must consider their mobility as well as their emplacement in a single location. British Bangladeshi children experience radically different physical environments as well as different social statuses when they move transnationally. The paper also points to how children's experiences of places are highly physical, as well as social.

The final two papers in the volume examine methodological issues. In their paper *'Researching Transnational Childhoods,'* Zeitlyn and Mand point out how the study of transnational children mirrors many of the issues highlighted in earlier decades by critics of the anthropological 'field' as stable and bounded (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Just as anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz called upon researchers to focus upon 'routes, not roots' (1997), conducting multi-sited research and studying mobile, rather than sedentary ways of life, so too does the study of children necessitate new research methods, for children are, by definition, constantly growing and changing, and so too do they inhabit a range of worlds and realities. They thus cannot be meaningfully bounded

in a single site. Working with transnational children brings *both* forms of mobility together. In their projects, Zeitlyn and Mand worked in a variety of settings, each bringing particular issues and challenges: school classrooms and playgrounds, madrassas, homes in London and Bangladeshi homesteads were all research locations in which the researchers as well as the children were positioned and emplaced in different ways. The paper also interrogates the ideal and practice of 'child centred participatory research', showing how, in practice, some methods were more successful than others, and depended to a large extent on where they took place: in schools, children had little choice but to 'participate' in arts based methods, whilst in youth clubs they were free to wander off and do something else.

The challenges facing Samantha Punch in her research with transnational child migrants who move from Bolivia to Argentina in order to supplement fragile household livelihoods at home were somewhat different. In '*Studying transnational migration: an ethnographic approach*', Punch argues that longitudinal, as well as multi-sited ethnographic research is vital in order to capture the complexities of the children's lives, the 'shifting vulnerabilities' of child migrants and the various factors affecting their decisions to move. Like Zeitlyn and Mand, Punch had to go through gatekeepers to access her informants, but rather than school teachers and youth club workers, in Punch's case it was the relatives of the absent migrants who helped her track them down. Like Zeitlyn, who travelled from London to Bangladesh with a Bengali family, Punch travelled from Argentina to Bolivia with the mother of a child she had worked with ten years earlier. The journey bought important insights into the experiences of low income and low status transnational migrants. Punch had originally conducted her doctoral research with the children ten years earlier; by tracing them again, she was able to discern the relationship between mobility and the life course, showing how marriage, education, and the role of other household members had affected their transnational movements, as well as the impact of changes in the global economy.

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