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Home and away: experiences and representations of transnational South-Asian children

End of year report for 2008

1. One of the first research projects to focus on transnational / diasporic children, therefore helping **fill an empirical gap**.

There's a growing body of work on children and migration (for example, Cork conference, April 08) but much of this focuses on independent child migrants, or children as asylum seekers / refugees. Other work focuses on youth or teenagers, but doesn't consider children under 13 years old.

The work that exists tends to conceptualise children as dependents of adults in transnational families, rather than as active agents who're themselves are creating and changing transnational links. This project investigates what growing up transnational means to the children involved in the project, as well as how they're changing the nature of transnational practices and links (eg, children tend to talk about Bangladesh as consumers of tourist sites and goods; they also stress important of family relationships and love and affection in creating and recreating transnational communities.)

2. Innovative, arts based methods have been used in the research. Whilst participatory research methods are well established in some fields (especially action orientated development or community research), to date only a few researchers investigating issues of diasporic or transnational identities have worked with these methods. Examples are : art workshops, creation of a mural with graffiti artist, story writing, diaries, photography, as well as more conventional methods – interviewing and participant observation.

The art work linked to our exhibition at Museum of Childhood.

Through using these methods, can contribute to emerging discussions on efficacy of participatory research with children.

3. By researching children's roles in, and perspectives of, transnational migration, we aim to help develop new ways of understanding the dynamics of transnationalism, plus how links between places change over time. For example, we've found that the children in the project don't distinguish clearly between home (desh) and away (bidesh) like their parents and grandparents do, but use the Bengali and English terms for home and away in different contexts so that 'home' in English is London, but whilst Sylhet is 'away', whilst in Bengali London becomes 'bidesh' (foreign country) whilst Sylhet is the 'desh'.

Other findings that we're currently analysing:

- The role of consumption in creating and maintaining transnational links
- The ways in which relationships and practices are not so much transnational as transglobal ... role of global Islam and learning Arabic key to this
- The role of love and affection in maintaining and creating closeness across geographical space
- Rethinking conventional language : eg 'second generation'.
- Developing theories of place and emplacement and their impact on children's lives within global economies

Progress of the Research

The collection of empirical data is now largely complete: we have finished all the art workshops with the children, and completed nearly 60 interviews. We have also completed the participant observation in two schools in East London.

Our exhibition is due to open this week (10th January)

We are currently writing up our findings, with a variety of publications planned.

In addition, we have secured an agreement with the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies to edit a special edition on Transnational Childhoods

Contribution to the Programme

The project has contributed to the programme in the following ways:

1. By engaging with children's perspectives the project has provided fresh theoretical insights into the nature of transnational migration. In particular, our work shows how the dynamics of transnational migration shift between generations, as well as the cultural work that children do in creating and unsettling transnational relationships and meanings.
2. The project has provided innovative methods in transnational research by using arts based participatory methodologies to work with children.
3. The project has reached a larger audience, via the exhibition of children's work at the Museum of Childhood and engagement with schools, children and their parents, as well as local artists. We are hoping that the Asian media will cover the exhibition, thereby engaging a large audience in Britain and beyond.
4. The project has focussed on children, a group hitherto largely ignored in diasporic / transnational research
5. Our dissemination plans will ensure that the research will reach various scholarly audiences, including those in anthropology, migration studies and childhood studies.

Academic workshops / conferences attended:

- Key note lecture on transnational children at International Migration and Ethnic Relations, University of Stockholm. Stockholm. (January 2008)
- *Some thoughts on the experiences and Representations of Bangladeshi children in transnational families'* Plenary presentation at Encounters and Intersections: Religion, Diaspora and Ethnicities Conference (AHRC), University of Oxford (July 2008).
- *Home and Away: Experiences and Representations of Bangladeshi children in transnational families*, presented at the Emerging Perspectives on Children in Migratory Circumstances (The Working Group on Childhood Migration), Philadelphia (June 2008).
- *Reflections on an ongoing research project with Bangladeshi children in transnational Families*, presented at the Brick Lane Circle (seminars on Bangladeshis abroad), London. (March 2008)
- *Home making across Tanzania, Britain and Indian Punjab: gender, generation and the life course'*, presented at the International Gender Studies Centre, University of Oxford. (April 2008)
- *Researching South Asian children in transnational families: How when, where?* presented at Children and Migration: Identities, Mobilities and belonging(s) International conference University of Cork, Ireland (April 2008). Also keynote lecture on Children, Migration and Emplacement.
- *Home and Away: South Asian children's representations and experiences of transnationalism*, presented at International Migration and Ethnic Relations, University of Stockholm. Stockholm. (January 2008).