

## **Home and Away : South Asian Children's Representations and Experiences of Transnationalism**

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### **PROJECT SUMMARY**

This project seeks to explore the experiences of belonging, place and diaspora of South Asian children in East London, many of whose families retain close transnational links with their places of origin. Whilst the majority of children are likely to be Bangladeshi, the project will be open to all children whose families originate from the Indian sub-continent. A key element will be how these children (aged 8-13 years old) experience and represent 'transnational lives', whether this involves travel to 'the homeland', or being part of families and communities in which people constantly move. The research will pose important questions concerning the formation of cultural identity that move beyond models of 'between two cultures', or 'hybridity'. We also aim to gather new insights into the relationship between migration and the life course. The project will involve close collaboration with local community and arts groups and provide forums for children's voices to be heard. The findings will be of importance to scholars of migration, educationalists, policy makers and the general public through publications, exhibitions and a project website.

The research will be distinctive in three central ways:

(1) *Children are largely ignored in existing theories and accounts of diaspora.* South Asian populations in the U.K are characterised by high numbers of children, but whilst there has been a growing body of work on 'South Asian youth' virtually no research has been carried out on school children, particularly the pre-teens (exceptions are James 1974; Jackson & Nesbit 1993 & 1995). Yet South Asian children born in Britain, many of whom are taken on or receive regular visitors from the 'homeland', are likely to have a significantly different perspectives than adults on questions of belonging, cultural identity and place. They are in transition, yet beyond popular (and often misguided) assumptions of being 'between two cultures', we know little about their perspectives.

(2) *It will contribute to the development of new theories of migration.* The relationship between migration and the life course is an area of growing interest in migration research. By understanding migration in terms of the life

cycle of individuals and their families, we can better appreciate decisions which contribute to movement and settlement, as well as how identities change over time and space. So far, work carried out in this area has largely involved older people (Gardner, 2002). By focusing on children, we will be examining these processes from the opposite end of the spectrum, aiming to theorise the ways in which transnational migration is both reproduced and changed through children's imaginings, cultural practices and forms of representation.

*(3) We will develop innovative participatory research methodologies and forms of dissemination.* Working with local schools and community groups, we intend for the children to produce stories, diaries and visual representations of their experiences of 'home and away'. To do this, we are planning a series of arts, story telling and writing workshops. A central output will be a book based on children's visual, oral and scribal representations, an exhibition of art and photography, which will be held at the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, and a website produced in collaboration with the children. The outputs would be of interest to teachers, practitioners and parents, as well as the general public.