

Children's Voices of Migration: Historic and Contemporary Experiences
21 June 2023, 2:00 pm–5:00 pm (UK time)

Programme & Abstracts/Summaries:

14.00-14.05: **Welcome**

14.05-15.05: **Part 1 'Child Migration: Historical Experiences'**

"Origins and treatment of child slaves in the Arab-Muslim slave trade: light on an undefined genocide" *Dr Sylvain Mbohou, Department of History and Archeology, University of Dschang (Cameroon)/ University of Maranhão (Brazil)*

"Child Migrant Stories"
Dr Eithne Nightingale, Queen Mary University of London

'I do not want to go home, but go abroad, I have made my mind up a long time ago to do so.' Narratives from care records of emigration decisions made for children committed to state care in England and Wales in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century' *Dr Annie Skinner, Oxford Brookes University*

15.10-16.20: **Part 2 'Child Migration in a Global Context'**

'Exploring Migrant Childhoods: Spatial Experiences and Meaning-Making among Bengali Child Migrants in Kerala, India' *Madhuwanti Mitro, 3rd year Ph.D. student, Institute for Social And Economic Change, Bengaluru.*

'Intimacy and migration: transition to adulthood during forced displacement (Indonesia)' *Dr Danau Tanu, Waseda University and Professor Antje Missbach, Professor of Sociology (Migration & Mobility), Bielefeld University*

'Exploring the Sense of Home among Ukrainian and Belarusian Teenage Migrants. A case from Wrocław, Poland' *Joanna Wyrwa, Wrocław University of Life and Environmental Studies, Institute of Spatial and Social Geography.*

'All my friends are in my hometown' migrant children's experiences of migration and inclusion (China)' *Boyang Yin, PhD student, University of Sheffield*

16.30-17.30: **Part 3 'Child Migrant voices'**

'A refugee boy's story from Moria Refugee Camp, Greece' *Maryam Erika Ansari refugee youth worker and author.*

'Kindertransport from Austria to Belgium' *Professor Paul Weindling, Oxford Brookes University*

'Why do more not go?' Nineteenth-century emigrant boys and their letters 1850-1900' *Dr Gillian Lamb, University of Oxford.*

Abstracts:

PART 1:

“Origins and treatment of child slaves in the Arab-Muslim slave trade: light on an undefined genocide”

Dr Sylvain MBOHOU, Ph.D in History of International Relations, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of History and Archeology, University of Dschang (Cameroon)/ University of Maranhão (Brazil).

This study focuses on the origins and treatment of enslaved children in the Arab-Muslim slave trade (7th-20th centuries). For economic reasons and labor needs, tendentious interpretations of the Koran had allowed the organization of the slave trade towards the lands of Islam for thirteen centuries. If in this traffic, the men were captured for their labor force and the women as concubines and housewives, the children as for them knew a rather particular trajectory. So, what did children represent in the Arab-Muslim slave trade and what treatment was reserved for them? The objective here is to show that child slaves, although captured under the same conditions of violence as adults and considered more malleable than adults, underwent detribalization and depersonalization according to the will of the masters. This study is based not only on oral and iconographic sources but also on written and electronic data. Finally, the practice of castration to obtain eunuchs was the expression of an unheard-of marked violence that culminated in “veiled genocide”. This raises the question of reparations.

“Child Migrant Stories”

Dr Eithne Nightingale Queen Mary University of London

This talk, illustrated with film clips <https://childmigrantstories.com/films/>, draws on my PhD research into the experiences of children who migrated to East London between 1930 and the present day and from a further project *Child Migrants Welcome?* on experiences of child migrants across the UK and those who know or care for them. Through oral history interviews, visits to places of childhood significance and drawing activities the research participants shared memories of departure, arrival and settlement as well as reflections of the impact on their adult lives. From Orthodox Jewish children in Hackney who fled Hitler’s Europe in the 1930s to Syrian children arriving on the Isle of Bute in Scotland in 2017. These powerful stories have inspired a series of award-winning short films and learning resources <https://childmigrantstories.com/films/>, that have been co-produced with the interviewees drawing on their creative skills. I will explore the impact on both those who are featured in the films, the children of survivors of war and school children. I will also introduce my forthcoming book *Child Migrant Voices in Modern Britain: oral histories 1930s to the present day* to be published by Bloomsbury, December 2023 or January 2024.

‘I do not want to go home, but go abroad, I have made my mind up a long time ago to do so.’ Narratives from care records of emigration decisions made for children committed to state care in England and Wales in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century’ *Dr Annie Skinner, Oxford Brookes University*

This presentation focuses on how the practice of child emigration in England and Wales, from 1882 – 1899, impacted on children committed to state care and their families.

Legislation introduced to rescue children from the mid nineteenth-century eventually enabled and brought about direct action by surveillance of the family home, mostly in working-class families, with the power to remove children to state care in industrial schools until the age of 16.

Along with other philanthropic and state child care institutions, The Waifs and Strays Society, (WSS), a key provider of industrial schools in England and Wales, participated in child emigration programmes. The strong philosophical beliefs that children should be trained not to repeat parental behavior, alongside the view that moving away from dysfunctional, dangerous and destructive families would give a fresh start, underpinned the WSS motives for child emigration. Legal restraints for committed children ensured that they could not be emigrated without permission from the Secretary of State. Examination of the case notes of children committed to WSS care, explore how this emigration policy was put into practice demonstrating conflicts of interest between parent, child and agencies, against a backdrop of state encouraged child emigration policy.

PART 2:

‘Exploring Migrant Childhoods: Spatial Experiences and Meaning-Making among Bengali Child Migrants in Kerala, India’ *Madhuwanti Mitro, 3rd year Ph.D. student at Institute for Social And Economic Change, Bengaluru.*

This research delves into the experiences of Bengali child migrants in the Ernakulam district of Kerala, India, shedding light on their unique childhoods and the spatial dynamics that shape their lives. Through a relational, multi-site ethnographic approach, this study aims to understand how these children navigate their changing environments, interpret spatial ideologies, and construct meaning in their everyday lives. The research explores the lived experiences of migrant children, between the ages of 3 and 10. It seeks to challenge the prevailing narrative of vulnerability by recognizing the agency and active responses of these children to the structural constraints they face. By examining the intersection of migration, childhood, and spatiality, this study aims to provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that migrant children encounter, within the broader political economy framework of internal migration in India. The research questions revolve around the ways in which child migrants understand and attach meaning to their childhood experiences, the spatial dimensions of their lives within the contexts of home, school, neighbourhood, and how adults perceive the childhoods of migrant children. By exploring these aspects, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of migrant childhoods and their socio-spatial positioning. Through this research, we can gain valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of Bengali child migrants in Kerala, informing policy and practice to better support questions around their identities, belongingness, education, language, culture and well-being. Bio: I am a 3rd year Ph.D. Scholar specialising in Sociology of Education within the field of Development Studies at the Institute for Social & Economic Change in Bengaluru. With a background in Geography and a Masters in Development Studies, I have previously worked in health, nutrition, community development, early childhood care & education, and governance. Currently, my research focuses on exploring the childhood experiences of children from West Bengal who are part of migrant worker families in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. At the moment, I am in the data collection phase of my research, hence any feedback or suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

‘Intimacy and migration: transition to adulthood during forced displacement’ *Dr Danau Tanu, Waseda University and Professor Antje Missbach, Professor of Sociology (Migration & Mobility), Bielefeld University*

Over the last two decades, Indonesia has become a transit country for thousands of refugees, often for prolonged periods of time. Being stuck in transit, some young or underage male refugees—forge intimate relationships with Indonesian women and men, some of whom are substantially older than the refugees. It is often also overlooked that young refugees embark on their journeys at a particular time in their life course as they transition from childhood to adulthood. During their life in transit as refugees, normative markers of adulthood, such as work and marriage, becomes extremely difficult to access. Our contribution shows that such intimate encounters are often much more complex than a mere exchange of money and intimacy for economic survival, and better understood through the lens of “intimate labor.” Many young refugees take advantage of the sexual freedom they have gained away from their traditional family network and their foreign (“Eurasian”) appearance to forge extended intimate relationships with Indonesians, not only to alleviate their economic precariousness and afford a more consumerist lifestyle, but also to overcome the loneliness, and hopelessness that characterize their state of waiting in limbo. We argue while such intimate labor seemingly inverts the gender and socioeconomic patterns within these cross-cultural relationships, co-ethnic gender stereotyping becomes reinforced at the same time.

‘Exploring the Sense of Home among Ukrainian and Belarusian Teenage Migrants. A case from Wroclaw, Poland’ *Joanna Wyrwa, Wroclaw University of Life and Environmental Studies, Institute of Spatial and Social Geography.*

This study focuses on understanding how Ukrainian and Belarusian teenagers, who migrated to Wroclaw due to the war in Ukraine and geopolitical circumstances, perceive their sense of home in the cityscape. Specifically, we examine their experiences within the public realm and compare their needs and challenges with those of adult new city dwellers. The data for this investigation were collected through mind mapping, drawing upon Kevin Lynch's theory, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted with a multisensory approach among the mentioned groups. The main objective of our research is to gain insights into how teenagers with migrant experiences recognize and establish a sense of home in their new place of settlement, Wroclaw, Poland. Furthermore, we aim to explore whether this environment is perceived as safe or prone to violence and identify potential opportunities for improvement. We also recognize the transformative potential of reimagining and reshaping these spaces to create a more inclusive and empowering environment. Our study reveals a nuanced perspective that goes beyond the traditional understanding of home. We found that even within a short period of residency, teenagers develop a deep connection with spaces, but what important, with spaces that are intertwined with their social relationships. Notably, places of commerce, educational institutions, community centers, and the interesting connection with nature and green spaces emerge as the primary catalysts in cultivating a sense of home. Additionally, certain landmarks directly evoke memories of their home in the Wroclaw cityscape. These locations serve as initial focal points for fostering profound emotional and spatial attachments associated with the concept of home.

‘All my friends are in my hometown’ migrant children’s experiences of migration and inclusion’ *Boyang Yin, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield*

In the last decades, the deep-rooted economic rural/urban dichotomy in China has driven large-scale rural residents to migrate to urban areas in seek of better jobs and life opportunities, therefore most of their children have to migrate to the cities with their parents. In recent years, with the increasingly disproportionately distributed educational resources between rural and urban schools, compared with being the ‘by-products’, children are becoming the main driven force for millions of migrant families. Based on a 5-month ethnography in a primary school containing both migrant and non-migrant children in China, this qualitative research employed observation, interviews with parents, teachers, and children, and art-based method (children’s drawing) to explore children’s voices and

experiences of migration and inclusion. The research has found that although cities provided migrant children with better educational resources, which is also admitted by migrant children, migrant children are still struggling with re-structuring 'rural habitus' and accumulating 'urban habitus'. Furthermore, under the strict policies of anti-bullying, although schools seemed a friendly place to be, migrant children still think their 'true friends' are those in their hometown rather than in this school. Lastly, migrant children attached deep nostalgia to their hometown with an emphasis on the affection and importance of the natural environment for them rather than the resources in urban areas.

PART 3:

'A refugee boy's story from Moria Refugee Camp, Greece' *Maryam Erika Ansari refugee youth worker and author.*

This talk is centred on a story written by one of the young boys the presenter worked with in Moria camp when working as a Children's Mental Health Groups Coordinator after the camp burned down. The story, which was originally written in Farsi and then translated into English, is entirely written in Yaser's own words (who was 10 years old at the time). It talks about his journey from Iran, through Turkey, all the way to Greece and Moria camp and its being set ablaze. Yaser was experiencing symptoms of re-traumatisation and sleepwalking when he first came to us and he showed great resilience in overcoming these symptoms.

'Kindertransport from Austria to Belgium' *Professor Paul Weindling, Oxford Brookes University*

Centralising children's voices, this talk provides an overview of the efforts by children from Vienna to find a place on the Kindertransport

'Why do more not go?' Nineteenth-century emigrant boys and their letters 1850-1900' *Dr Gillian Lamb, University of Oxford.*

In 1857, twelve-year-old Robert Herod was convicted of theft for the third time and sentenced to four years in a residential reformatory school. Four years later, aged sixteen he left England for a new life in Canada. Fifty years later, having changed his name, he was a 'millionaire bridge contractor' in Portland, Oregon, reportedly 'well known throughout the Pacific Coast'. Robert was an early example of what would become a key plank of British social policy – the emigration of pauper and criminal, children throughout the world. He also exemplified a central narrative of the nineteenth century – the successful transformation of a poor working-class child into a prosperous member of society.

Over ten percent of the Canadian population is descended from a juvenile migrant like Robert. Yet, while there has been much research on the policy of migration, there has been very little on why child migrants chose to go overseas. What did they hope to gain?. Drawing on detailed life course analysis of 100 children and thousands of letters from juvenile migrants this paper centres children's experiences to examine why these children chose to leave Britain for a life abroad and asks what that tells us about nineteenth-century Britain.