

## — BOOK REVIEWS —

**Caitríona Ní Laoire, Fina Carpena-Méndez, Naomi Tyrrell, Allen White (2011). *Childhood and Migration in Europe. Portraits of Mobility, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Ireland*. Padstow, Cornwall, England: Ashgate, 212 pp.**

*Childhood and Migration in Europe. Portraits of Mobility, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Ireland* paints a nuanced picture of the world, experiences and everyday lives of migrant children and young people who migrated to Ireland during the Celtic Tiger era (from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s). The analyses show and explore the transnational lives of young migrants of different backgrounds and statuses, whose voices are usually not heard. In contrast to most other works on the subject, which tend to concentrate on the dominant adult-centric perspectives, consideration is given here instead to a child's viewpoint. The empirical grounding of this work stems from research with child participants.

Although the book was published in 2011, it may be inspirational for researchers today due to the current situation of migrants in Ireland and children-oriented methods presented in the research. The volume contains important and interesting material from the perspective of contemporary migration processes.

Different methods and techniques, such as ethnography, qualitative interviews, drawings, photo diaries, mapping, play and conversations were used to collect the accounts of 194 children and young people of various migratory backgrounds who participated in the research. The researchers visited children's homes in order to observe their surroundings. Under the methodological framework underlining children's agency, the child-respondents were considered active and competent participants. Thus the researchers spent a large amount of time with young people and built relationships based on trust. To ensure a wider perspective, the study also included interviews with some parents and, in the case of research

on migrants from Africa, workers of Direct Provision, which is a system of dealing with asylum seekers in Ireland. Observations were also done in schools, youth clubs, playgrounds and other places important for children and young migrants. The richness of the gathered material and the range of different methods adjusted to the age and needs of participants (children-centred methods) yielded a set of comprehensive conclusions.

The research, amounting to 194 accounts, was conducted in four strands by four different research teams and encompassed four distinct groups of migrants coming to Ireland: children and young people migrating from Africa; mobility from the 'New' Europe; flows from Latin America; and diaspora children who had 'returned' to Ireland. Across the seven chapters of the book the authors cover a wide range of issues connected to the migration of children's topics.

The first chapter is an introduction to the research approach to migration from a child's perspective and a summary of the main topics covered by *Childhood and Migration*. The authors briefly show recent data on childhood migration in Europe and prove that insufficient research has been conducted into the subject from a child's viewpoint. Generally, two main approaches for studying migrant children exist, reflecting a long-lasting debate on agency and structure in sociology. The children's vulnerability and passivity in the process are outlined and commented upon. Even though the tendency to present migrant children as dependent is dominant, research shows that children can also take an active role during migration. The authors are moving away from showing children as victims and passive followers, and avoid the trap of seeing children as being 'integrated' in a somewhat 'non-reflexive' or 'accidental' and 'smooth' manners. The aims of the book are listed, and mainly centred around an understanding of migrant children's lives and their surroundings from their own

perspective, which is an innovative and promising one. Despite the conditions in which the children live, their country of origin, and their parents' status and income, the most significant impact on their lives is bringing their own attitudes toward the surrounding world, sense of belonging and constructing their own identities.

The next chapter, *Migrant Childhoods in Ireland*, is dedicated to the particular context of migration to Ireland, and the history of migration, discourse and policy. Immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in contrast to emigration from Ireland, which notably has a long history. The processes of population inflows to Ireland started in the late 1990s as a result of the rapid economic expansion of this ethnically homogeneous country. The authors analyse in depth the public discourse about migrants, their integration, 'otherness' in the Irish society, as well as the changes in the Irish law concerning citizenship, asylum seeking and immigrants more broadly. Underlying these factors was the referendum in 2004, which changed the criterion for Irish citizenship from birth to blood rights and therefore had a direct impact on the migrants' situation. On page 27, the authors state: 'Migrants children/youth have tended to be viewed by policy-makers in terms of their <difference> and vulnerability, and as having different needs to Irish children/youth; indeed, often their very presence is viewed as a problematic itself'. From the very beginning, the authors emphasise the agency of children. The main line of argument is that the young members of all groups taken into consideration in the study have more complex identities and ways for developing their own strategies of belonging than is commonly assumed. These identities are not one-dimensional, solely inherited or unchanging, but constantly negotiated and constructed. It is argued that cultural differences and paradoxes cause tensions between children and their parents, extended family, peers, teachers and other important people in their lives. Additionally, the authors present interesting examples of this phenomenon and its consequences for their aspirations, desires and needs. The children underline their sense of separateness and not fitting in, both in the country of birth and in Ireland, which invariably centres on their feeling of being 'different'.

The following chapters deal with different groups of migrant children. Chapter 3, *Multiple Belongings: The Experiences of Children and Young People Migrating from Africa to Ireland*, is dedicated to African-Irish children (those who migrated from African countries, children born outside Africa to parents from African countries and children born to African parents specifically in Ireland). In most cases, they arrived as asylum seekers who lived in the Direct Provision Centre. There is no doubt that most representatives of this group have fewer opportunities than their peers from EU countries and Irish returnees, and that their status is significantly lower. Owing to the visible difference between them and their Irish peers, they are more often exposed to racialisation and actual acts of racism. The authors present many stories of black African children and young people as significant examples of 'absent present' in the discourse and debates. Even though these children live in Ireland, they do not participate in discussions that directly refer to them. This is why child-centred research in those communities is a valued contribution to the process of understanding their lives. It reveals 'the ways in which discourses of inclusion and exclusion organised around 'race' and ethnicity are deeply entrenched within structures of Irish society' (p. 46). An important part of these children's lives is the ongoing confrontation with their perception by the natives, who deem them 'Others'. At the same time most of the children were strongly connected with their extended family in their country of origin. The authors interpreted this as a reconstruction of their families within their new surroundings. The main conclusion was based on the multiple belongings of young African-Irish people.

*Children's Experiences of Family Migration in the 'New' Europe* is the title of the next chapter. The term 'New' Europe refers to new members of the EU. Conversely, the research looking at this group not only includes citizens of the EU member states, such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia, but also children from Georgia, Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine. This causes some doubts about the methodology used, as

respondents from CEE (Central and Eastern European) countries have different rights in Ireland. For example citizens of non-EU European countries are required to possess a work permit, which puts them in a totally different position to EU citizens. Parents of non-EU children have to struggle with different problems, and this has a direct influence on the children. In addition, the perception of EU passport-holders differs among the Irish. Even though the authors argue that the country of origin is not necessarily the crucial factor for children's agency, we cannot deny that this factor has an influence on children's legal rights, status and self-consciousness. Regardless of the authors' focus on EU members in this chapter, the reader is aware that non-EU members participated in the research, and their invisibility in the conclusions is conspicuous. It seems likely that, if the research had been conducted about these two groups separately, the conclusions might have been more complex and explanatory, offering more data about migrant children's sense of belonging. Exclusively showing the examples of EU migrants is insufficient and does not satisfy the reader's curiosity. It could be argued that with such a limited inclusion of non-EU migrant children's voices, their inclusion in the research might take away the focus, rather than contributing to the generally clear argumentation, which is well-contextualised for other groups.

Noteworthy is a commentary on the typology developed for Polish post-EU accession adult migrants in London, which entails migrant families being divided into metaphorical categories of 'storks', 'hamsters', 'searchers' and 'stayers' (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007) applied to the Irish context. This delineates the motivation, aspiration, and attitude towards the Ireland of migrants. The dominant motivation in this group was economic, which is underlined by both parents and children. However, better quality of life, wider employment prospects and fluency in English were also significant. In this group, as a foreground, children were underlining their original national identity within their experience in Ireland. The reader could get the impression that this was not foreseen by the authors: 'This is interesting to consider in the context of their migration in Ireland as European

citizens and supports the view that de-territorialisation does not necessarily equate with declining allegiance to a national identity' (p. 77).

Polish children are the most numerous group in this component of the research. According to the 2006 Census, they numbered 5 952, which was 5 per cent of all children living in Ireland and born outside of Ireland (p. 22). The number of Poles living in Ireland since then has increased significantly. The 2011 Census states that the number of Poles increased by 93.7 per cent between 2006 and 2011, from 63 276 to 122 585, making them the largest immigrant group ahead of UK nationals, with 112 259. Among them, the population aged 0–19 was 25 933. At that time there were 10 011 Polish children under four years old in Ireland – almost twice the number of all Polish children in 2006 in this country ([www.cso.ie/census](http://www.cso.ie/census)). This data shows the rising importance of Polish children in Irish society and the need for further research.

The feature that distinguishes Poles is a developed network of weekend schools supported by the Polish government. The majority of Polish children attend school at weekends in order to follow the educational system in Poland, as it is considered more difficult and demanding than the Irish one. Parents convince children to attend these classes, as they are afraid that if they were to return to Poland their children would have problems following the syllabus. The classes are taught in Polish. The authors emphasise that these children prefer to speak in their mother tongue and spend time with friends of the same nationality. Even though they do not stand out from the crowd, there are many examples of labelling shown. The chapter contains numerous interesting topics that might be developed in the future, including schooling, teachers' attitudes towards children, friendships, motivation and the effort that children have to make.

Chapter 5, *In and Out of Ireland: Latin American Migrant Families and their Children in Transnational Circulation*, is an interesting case study on migrant children from Latin America. The characteristic feature of this strand is the temporary nature of the migration and the frequent change in the destination/receiving country. Examples show that Ireland is usually not the first country to which the Latin Americans in the study

have migrated. In my opinion, this chapter is the least developed and does not fully explore the subject. Firstly, the quantitative data about migrant children from Latin America is missing. The general note that 5 per cent of children were born outside Ireland in other countries is not enough to get an idea about the scale of migration from Latin America, and thus does not give a clear picture of this phenomenon. Although it is a valid point that quantitative data is not crucial for qualitative research, it nevertheless supplies a specific context. For all other groups of migrant children this data is presented, thus the lack of it in this chapter is inconsistent. The author only states that Latin Americans in Ireland are an extremely socio-economically diverse group and represented in both the working and middle classes. The main line of categorisation is drawn in terms of a subdivision into two groups: those who are in Ireland to send remittances back home and those who do not (p. 106). Secondly, there is an absence of any description of the sample. Information is missing about the number of children and their parents participating in the research, their characteristics and the context. Based on the quotations, we might assume that the author focused on parents, which raises the question about the main concept of the research being child-centred. No methodology is presented in this chapter. The reader may suspect that this strand was similar to the other groups, though one cannot be sure. Thirdly, a relatively small number of examples are presented. On the plus side, those that are commented on are significant and show transnational migration projects of parents and their children. They underline the divided loyalties of children between their country of origin, Ireland and sometimes third countries of residence, and thereby uncover the formation of their identities.

An especially valuable contribution can be noted in the chapter *Children of the Diaspora: Coming Home to 'My Own Country'*, which is devoted to the situation of returning children. They are very often perceived as the same as the Irish, and not considered to be migrants. In the general discourse, children of the diaspora are seen as unproblematic, and research dedicated to them is limited. At the same time, the

authors effectively demonstrate that this narrow concept does not take into account the complexity and the wide spectrum of issues that 'home-comers' have to deal with. In contrast, the work done in this volume proves that they have similar difficulties with negotiating their identities as those found across other migrant groups.

The book closes with the chapter *Conclusions: Migrant Children's Multiple Belongings*, which consists of a summary of all the chapters and presentation of the main results. To conclude, *Childhood and Migration* shows different perspectives of migrant children based on their country of origin. On the one hand, abundant evidence is presented on how migrant children are excluded from Irish society, but on the other, the data explains the complex process of their agency and negotiating their belonging and adjusting to the place where they live.

The work exhaustively covers a range of subjects important for migrant children in their everyday lives, such as schooling, relationships with peers, teachers, parents, extended families, privileges (like language) and experience of 'otherness', global consumer culture, identities and strategies of adaptation into their new realities.

Extending the groups examined to include Asians (8 per cent of all child migrants in Ireland in 2007), the influx from Northern Ireland (7 per cent), and division into EU members and non-EU European countries could enrich the research by supplying new insights into strategies of negotiating identities by children.

The book's advantage is the selection of child-centred methods, which might be useful for scientists planning this kind of research. These methods are universal and can be used with any group of migrant children in any country.

*Childhood and Migration in Europe* is a complex analysis of the situation of child migrants in Ireland. Especially the process of developing a sense of belonging (or not-belonging) among children is explained interestingly. Importantly, the central crux of this issue remains the family: 'Local belongings can exist as a part of multiple and fluid networked and translocal belongings for migrant children/youth.

Their connections are not necessarily to single or dual nationalities, but to family members, de-territorialised social networks and multiple localities in different countries' (p. 162).

The individual approach to the research participants is the strongest element of this analysis, and means that the voices of migrant children in Ireland are heard.

## References

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**Leisy J. Abrego (2014). *Sacrificing Families. Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 250 pp.**

Leisy J. Abrego's book is a sociological study of Salvadoran labour migration to the United States, which focuses predominantly on life stories of migrant parents and their children who are left behind. By 2008, there were about 1 million Salvadoran immigrants in the USA. This makes Salvadorans one of the biggest immigrant groups in the USA.

The empirical material behind the findings presented in the book consists of 47 interviews with Salvadoran parents living in the USA and 80 accounts collected from children who remain in El Salvador. The research presented by Abrego in *Sacrificing Families. Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* gives readers insights into the complex situation of Salvadoran families divided by space as a result of international mobility.

*Sacrificing Families* foregrounds the voices of immigrants for whom labour migration offered the hope of better life chances for their children, and as

such it is a first-hand account of Salvadoran transnational families' lives.

The book consists of eight chapters. In the first part, the author introduces case studies of Salvadoran transnational families, describing their reasons for migration and the initial issues they faced as regards job opportunities and their expectations about work and life. The second part of the book focuses on problems resulting from the separation of family members, the consequences of migration and the complex situation of children left in El Salvador.

*Sacrificing Families* examines the individual and societal impacts of Salvadoran families' migration as it relates to various dimensions of family life. Abrego describes different types of transnational families from El Salvador to aid readers' understanding of the issue from a variety of angles. She shows the social diversity in El Salvador, which goes some way towards explaining why some parents decide to migrate to the USA and leave their children in the care of family or friends. The author's interview data and analyses reveal the struggles of those families.

Abrego presents individual experiences of separation, mostly long term. For some families, this difficult separation is at the same time their sole survival strategy. For others, it is a way of ensuring their children's future prospects. Abrego concurs with other researchers who observe that global inequalities put pressure on parents from developing nations to strive for a better life and result in decisions to engage in labour migration.

The striking presentations of Salvadoran children and their parents, covering not only their social situation but also the emotions hidden behind outward appearances, demonstrate strongly that Salvadoran immigration problems in the USA are about much more than mere statistics. Abrego underlines this at the start of her book: '(...) debates about immigration and globalisation are not just about numbers; they are about human beings' (p. xiii). Abrego's analysis of the emotions is helpful for identifying the various reasons that push Salvadoran parents to migrate.

Abrego shows that the situation of Salvadoran immigrants and their families does not always change after migration. Parents' dreams of a well-paid job are