

**Ní Laoire, Caitríona, Fina Carpena-Mendez, Naomi Tyrrell, and Allen White (eds.) 2011. *Childhood and Migration in Europe. Portraits of Mobility, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Ireland (Studies in Migration and Diaspora Series)*. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate. 197 pp. Hb.: £55.00. ISBN: 9781409401094.**

This book claims to provide a much needed focus in migration studies – children’s own perspectives on their lives on the move. On the backdrop of assumptions that migrant children are subjects of integration, require support in language acquisition and need protection, this is an extraordinarily enticing promise to anyone working with children’s migration research. The authors propose an analysis of how children exert their agency in racialised, ethnicised, gendered, and classed processes intersecting with their migrant status. They argue that children are required to be highly adaptable and consequently develop strategies for making sense of their place in the world, and are active cultural mediators and decision makers in families.

The book has seven chapters. The introductory chapter and a general portrayal of migrant childhood in Ireland (Chapter 2) stand out with an impressive literature analysis, taking into account authors’ disciplinary background, in human geography and anthropology. Second, portraits of childhood and migration are provided in four different groups: African/Irish, Central Eastern European, Latin American and Irish children in returning migrants’ group, followed by a synthesis of findings in the last chapter. Altogether, 194 children aged 3–18 participated in the study. Children were approached as competent research participants and methods included artwork, mapping, photography, play-and-talk, group interviews.

Broad secondary source and discourse analysis prove their strength in some parts of the book. For example, they allow presenting a strong case of how relatively low numbers of migrant children with African backgrounds are brought into public discourses on how migrant children became a milestone in negotiations of citizenship, nationality and reproductive practices of female asylum seekers in Ireland.

However, the depth of qualitative analysis varies in this book’s chapters. In my opinion, the qualitative analyses of Irish returning migrant children (Chapter 6) outshines those devoted to analysis of African/Irish and CEE children. The experiences of Irish return children are characterised by recounting quotes, better contextualised data on the relative invisibility of middle-class children, who are nevertheless subjected to multiple othering due to their migration experience and themselves form and claim their identity in different contexts. How children play with *difference* is well illustrated, e.g. in the following quote: ‘If I’m talking to an American person, I say I am Irish; if I’m talking to an Irish person, I’d probably say I’m American’ (Michelle, aged 11, quoted in p. 148.)

The fifth chapter on Latin American children in Ireland, in my judgment, was the best written in anthropological accounts. Fina Carpena-Mendez explains in nuances how the new configurations of doing family on the move come into existence, and presents a good discussion on how adolescents have learned acceptable ways of what to say and how to exercise agency in varied frames of references. Importantly, the author pays particular attention to interpreting silences, interruptions, and how children feel parents’ anxieties as

in the following emotional excerpt from a daughter-mother conversation: from the daughter: ‘Mom, let’s go back to Argentina or Toronto [...] I don’t like this place, I just have one friend; everything else is forgettable’; and mother, who later added to the researcher that ‘This is the first time in long time that Estrella [daughter] vomits her discontent’ (p. 117).

This book provides several noteworthy findings, both specific to the groups in the research and generally about migrant children in Ireland. The authors emphasise how children recognise and subvert processes of marginalization, and argue that agency and creativity emerge from the gaps in the control exercised over children lives by adults. Children perform and embody belonging by language code switching in different interactional spaces. Most importantly, it is well discussed how the material life is lived here and now by interpreting the meaning what children attach to the consumerism culture: music, fashion or watching popular sport events.

Several shortcomings should be mentioned. In my judgment, the research would have benefited if more attention had been paid to deeper analysis and more time spent with probably fewer participants; this could have yielded more valuable, deep trust-based qualitative data.

Short quotes from interviews with children contrast sharply with the dense analysis of existing scientific texts presented in the book. Methods are not sufficiently explicitly reflected; if the main focus was on meaning given to processes of, e.g. mapping and art work, I wanted to find it in the text. What exactly can researchers learn and how we can improve further research by applying these methods? The authors attempted to focus on other aspects of children lives apart from ethnicity, but migrancy and ethnicity-related themes remain dominant in the presented researchers’ conversations with children. In my reading, the texts often lack observational ‘glue’ to explain what has been seen and understood by a researcher and how can it be interpreted.

Ethical considerations are seriously taken into account, and the authors should be acknowledged for that. However, the blurred faces in photos left me perplexed. Are the faceless pictures the only way how we can ethically represent lively everydayness of children? The authors stress that children speak with enthusiasm about school, friends, weekend-time spaces, but I was unable to hear it in their own voices. For example, when reading about the spatial practices of children, I really desired to have richer descriptions that would ‘take me walking among those places’.

Moreover, the authors repeat themselves, and this left an impression that the book would have benefited from more careful editing. Having said that and despite its shortcomings, this book is a valuable source of literature analysis and original data obtained through a challenging work of adult researchers on migrant children experiences in Ireland. Simultaneously, it encourages to research more in detail how children work as agents of change in negotiating mobile identities and what wider implications it brings for social change on various scales.

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