

**Transnational Childhoods:
The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration**

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The case of Elian González (the five-year-old Cuban boy who was found floating in the Atlantic Ocean in November 1999 after a boat carrying him, his mother, and other migrants to the U.S. collapsed en route) sparked national attention to the movement of children across national borders, and to their various positions as “dependents” in families, members of the social and legal age category, and as political actors with their own needs, rights, and desires. Elian’s case was unusual in many regards, not least in the way in which his “alien” presence was embraced and celebrated by much of the U.S. public, at least for the first few months of his stay. More often, immigrant children are presented, or perceived, as problems. Statistics about their numbers are seemingly used to startle audiences - for example, through reports on the number of children who speak a language other than English at home (in California in the mid 1990s, this was a third of all school children) (Cornelius 1995). The situations of immigrant children and families in California have also been highlighted, and politicized, by two state initiatives, Proposition 187 (passed in 1994 and later voided in the courts), which would have denied social and educational services to children without legal residency status, and Proposition 227 (passed in 1998), which ended bilingual education in public schools (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995; Orellana, Ek and Hernández 1999).

Most research on children and “the new immigration” focuses on trajectories within U.S. society, including contexts of reception and modes of incorporation; patterns of assimilation and biculturalism; and the health, educational attainment, and prospects for mobility of individuals and groups (e.g. García Coll and Magnusen 1997; Ogbu 1989; Portés and Zhou 1991; Rumbaut 1996; Zhou 1997). This work attends to children either as individuals, or as a social group; but it does little to illuminate the participation of

children in transmigration or the processes through which particular *childhoods* are constructed - in this case, in and through the immigration experience.

Drawing upon insights from the sociology and anthropology of childhoods (e.g., James and Prout 1997; Jenks 1996; Stephens 1995; Zelizer 1981, we aim to bring these social processes into view. This line of theorizing and empirical research grew out of Philippe Aries' (1962) observation that childhood is not a "natural" phase of life or a given of biological age, but is socially constructed; and out of efforts to include the experiences and actions of children in the study of society (Thorne 1987). Age divisions, like those of gender and "race," vary in organization and meaning; in different cultural and historical contexts, there may be different assumptions about the needs, capacities, and appropriate activities of, for example, five or ten-year-old children (to use the age-grading terminology of contemporary Western cultures). Child-rearing practices and beliefs also vary widely, as does the organization of caregiving and disciplining.

In this article we draw upon data from a range of cultural and transnational contexts to explore how beliefs about children and childhoods enter into and influence processes of migration. We also examine ways in which children's presence, and their active participation, help shape the dynamics of moving, staying, returning, and connecting across national borders. Feminists have reworked classical models of "the lone male migrant who sends for his wife and children" by bringing women into the center of research on immigration (Hirsch; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; 1995; 1999; Kibria 1993; Pedraza 1991; Tienda and Booth 1991). Our work takes that project a step further by highlighting structures of age and the participation of children in ongoing processes of migration. We also aim to contribute to burgeoning explorations of "transnational social fields" – a useful term introduced by Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994) for "multi-stranded social relations" that link places of origin and of settlement. These relations have generally been studied in terms of economic, labor, and political transactions (Mahler 1998). But they also involve the sustaining of family ties, processes of giving and receiving care, and the raising of children.

As various ethnographers (e.g. Georges 1992; Guarnizo 1997; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Mahler 1999; Rouse 1991) have demonstrated, for some groups, transnational

practices have become a habitual part of life. At the same time, the borders of nation-states are real, and they exert social, emotional, and financial costs on those who cross them (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Many migrants end up staying in the U.S. But even when immigrant families settle – when their *bodies* stay put - the ideas, images, beliefs, artifacts, family dynamics, and emotions that inflect experiences of “growing up” may have transnational dimensions.

A full exploration of the multiple facets of transnational childhoods is beyond the scope of this paper, though we hope our analyses may spur additional research on this topic. Here, we focus on children’s bodily movements across national borders, and on the ways children help families to stay connected across those borders. Although we aim to bring children’s perspectives, interests, and actions into view, our foregrounding of their migration patterns leads us to highlight adults’ words and actions, because adults have considerable say over how and when their children migrate. We also discuss the sometimes creative ways in which children assert their opinions and influence adults’ decisions. We consider how children enter into parents’ decisions to stay, to settle, or to return to their countries of origin, and how their presence helps to construct transnational social fields.

“California Childhoods:” Methods of Inquiry

Our focus on transnational social practices is one strand of a larger ethnographic study of childhoods in two urban areas of California that differ in social class and ethnic composition and in histories of immigration. When we first embarked on this study, we assumed that the project would focus on social processes that took shape within proscribed communities or neighborhoods. We chose areas with high concentrations of immigrants because we wanted to explore the effects of rapid demographic change on children’s lives, as well as variations in cultural practices and children’s lived realities. We began by mapping the contexts of children’s daily lives, across lines of class and ethnicity, and by tracing the construction of varied childhood experiences. In the course of this mapping, however, we came to see that the organization and meanings of immigrant childhoods often extend across national borders. For example, in an after-school program in one of our field sites, where we asked children to draw maps of places

where they spend time, eleven-year-old Guayo drew his “casa” and nearby Los Angeles sites, Guatemala (where he was born and has lived on and off), and four other places in the U.S. where his relatives have moved seeking jobs (See Figure 1). In the same site, more than half of the students in the first grade classroom where we regularly observed told us that they have siblings living in their home country. Most of these children had made at least one trip to visit family members back home; a few visited every year.

In another of our field sites, a third-grade “sheltered English” classroom in an Oakland public school, the teacher asked the students to draw themselves as a growing tree, with “roots” reaching to things that give their lives meaning. Several students drew roots to people and places quite far from Oakland. For example, Arwa, a nine-year-old girl who was born in Oakland and whose parents came from Yemen, drew herself connected to a row of neighborhood places. At the end of that urban landscape she sketched an apartment building labeled “Yemen” (Figure 2). In a classroom essay, Arwa wrote: “Yemen is kind of fun but when you get on a plane it’s really scary.” As these examples illustrate, children are not only present, but also participate in processes of migration, and their experiences of childhood are inflected with transnational images.

Our research on childhoods in California began in 1995 in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles, an area with a high concentration of migrants from Mexico and Central America; a small number of Korean immigrants also reside in this area, which borders on “Koreatown.” This community is the central focus for our analysis of transnational practices because most of the residents have recently migrated from their home countries and are actively considering the option of returning; thus transnational circuits are continuously being reconstructed and negotiated. To foreground this case we draw on more than three years of fieldwork by Marjorie Orellana and several research assistants as well as ten prior years of involvement in the Pico Union community as a teacher and an activist. Fieldwork included participation in classrooms and on the playground of a large elementary school, in homes, after-school programs, the public library, and other child-related sites. Orellana facilitated three focus groups with parents that explored families’ histories and experiences of migration, and parents’ views of their children’s daily lives. (These were conducted entirely in Spanish; they were videotaped and transcribed.) All of the

participants in one of the focus groups had children both here and in their countries of origin. The research team also conducted fourteen focus groups with fifth grade students in which we asked about their daily lives as well as their views of their countries of origin. In order to more fully grasp children's perspectives we invited them to draw and write about their lives, and we gave some of them disposable cameras to take pictures in California, as well as on trips to their home countries (Orellana 1999). All of these data illuminate our analyses of children's participation in family migration projects.

In the course of this fieldwork with Central American and Mexican families, we came to see the value of adding a comparative dimension to the study of childhoods in this geographical area. Anna Chee joined our team and began observing in the classrooms of Korean students (in 1999 these students represented less than 2% of the school population, down from 10% in 1990) and in after-school and tutoring programs that serve this immigrant population. After we identified transnational practices as a key area of interest, Chee pursued an opportunity to gather data and learn from Korean "parachute kids" – children who live or board in homes in the U.S. (in this case, in a Los Angeles suburb) while their parents stay in Korea. She conducted in-depth interviews with four of these children, a mother, a father, caretakers, and other relatives in 1997 and again in 1999. We include this case because its dramatic nature helps to challenge traditional frameworks for thinking about children; it is a useful case to think with about children's participation in immigration processes.

In 1996 we began gathering data in our second site, an ethnically diverse, mixed-income area of Oakland. One of the immigrant groups in this area is an extended family network from Yemen. Barrie Thorne got to know these families, interviewing two mothers, one of them several times, and three children of different ages. She and other fieldworkers also observed and had many casual conversations with the Yemeni children in school and out-of-school settings. We use this as our third contrastive case because the transnational circuit between Yemen and the Bay Area is unusually well established, and the social class dimensions of the Yemen and Korean cases offer important points of comparison with low-income immigrants in Pico Union.

This collaborative research on childhoods in California has been undertaken by researchers from a range of national, ethnic, social class, and language backgrounds, and of diverse ages - all of which has helped us to bridge the complex worlds that come together, at least physically, in these urban areas. We came to focus on transnational issues through the inductive processes of qualitative research, and we have generated insights by using multiple sources of data. The theme percolated over several years, during which we continued the iterative process of data gathering, analyses, ruminations, readings, and consultations with colleagues.

Children and Transnational Social Practices: Three Empirical Cases

The transnational social fields that focus our analysis of children and migration are grounded in real social relations, not in an abstract metaphysical space (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). They are geographically diverse, bridging between California and Mexico, Central America, Korea and Yemen. The people who move in each social field have different patterns of income, employment, and property ownership; configurations of citizenship; and cultural practices. Each of these orbits of back-and-forth migration is internally differentiated, including individuals and families from varying class backgrounds and with differing degrees and types of attachment to places of origin; we do not intend to contribute to stereotypes about any group. The cases – and our explorations of them – are not directly parallel, but taken together and examined comparatively, they provide material for generating insight into processes of age and migration. (Social processes, after all, do not come neatly packaged in matched cases that vary on single variables.) After describing these empirical cases, we will turn to more analytic terrain, examining children as a distinctive and also internally diversified category of social actors, and varied ways in which their presence and participation enter into processes of migration and the constitution and uses of transnational social fields.

(1) Migrants in Los Angeles with Close Ties to Mexico and Central America

Central American and Mexican immigrants in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles come from diverse backgrounds in terms of educational experiences, hometown origins,

and cultural identification. Once in Pico Union, most of the adults go through a racialized process of proletarianization (Rouse 1992), finding employment in low-wage jobs with other “Latinos” or “Hispanics” in the garment industry and in restaurants, or as day-laborers, janitors, gardeners or paid domestic workers. Others, especially women, create their own employment niches in the independent sector by selling food and other items within the community (Chinchilla and Hamilton 1992). These migrants have come to the U.S. to earn money, some of which they send to relatives back home. Many of the immigrants who live in Pico Union are undocumented, or are in the process of securing documentation, a legal status that places them at risk and limits their options. Both men and women have high rates of employment, although much is in the informal sector, with high rates of job instability. Virtually all of the children in schools in Pico Union qualify for free or reduced lunch according to federal income guidelines.

Recently immigrated families in Pico Union sustain close ties with primary and extended family members still living in Central America or Mexico, and there is considerable movement and communication back and forth. Economic and political contingencies, citizenship status, patterns of dependence and responsibilities for caregiving all enter into configurations of movement between Pico Union and places of origin. Migrants are often lured by stories told by their family members about both immediate resources – employment, with wages paid in dollars – and long term possibilities for education and economic advancement, in contrast with the lack of possibilities, and dangers, seen back home. Conditions in the U.S. generally turn out to be much more difficult than anticipated, however, and multiple families often share small apartments in the Pico Union area, with frequent changes in household composition, in order to manage the high cost of living in Los Angeles.

(2) “Parachute kids” Who Have Migrated from Korea to Attend School in the U.S.

During the early 1990s, Asian families with economic means (in part because of a boom in their home countries’ economies) began to send children to the U.S. to attend school with the hope of eventually gaining admission to U.S. colleges or universities. The migration of “parachute kids,” as they are called in the media, is also part of a long-term transnational strategy for economic advancement. These families hope to use the

knowledge and networks their children acquire abroad as entree into the country and as part of an entrepreneurial strategy for widening their economic fields of operation (Ong 1999). In the case of South Korean “parachute kids” this strategy also allows parents and children to avoid the intensified competition for slots in top Korean universities that resulted from the development of a new middle class and the opening of educational achievement as a dominant source of upward mobility (Cho 1996). Enrolling children and adolescents in U.S. schools, with the hope of eventually getting U.S. college degrees, channels aspirations into an alternative mobility track here or back in Korea.

In 1997 a former employee of the Korean Ministry of Education estimated that 7,000 “early international students” (a name used by some officials for this group) were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Southern California. The students enter the U.S. on student visas or on visitor visas that they later try to change to student visas. In the highest profile cases, written about in the popular press, “parachute children” may receive considerable amounts of spending money from their families, as well as homes to live in and maids to supervise (Hamilton 1993; Zhou 1998). In most cases, however, including the situations of the four Korean “parachute kids” in our study, the children live with relatives or board with Korean American families living in suburbs reputed to have good public schools. Parents – usually the mothers - may help to monitor their U.S.-based children by visiting regularly or dividing time between the two countries. Shifting out of the tightly tracked South Korean educational system makes it difficult to return, and, as we will later detail, after the Korean economy collapsed in 1997, the four children we have followed, and their families, were in a state of crisis.

(3) Yemeni Families Who Live in Oakland and Sustain Active Ties “Back Home”

Migration from Yemen to the U.S. began in the 1960s when impoverished conditions led as many as a fourth of adult men to seek employment in other Middle Eastern countries, and eventually in places further away (Swanson 1988). Following a sojourning pattern that involved sending regular remittances to their families back in Yemen, the men who sought work in the U.S. clustered in two niches: industrial jobs in Detroit and migrant farm work in the west. After 1975, when prices rose in Yemen and it became more difficult to acquire land and property there, more of the itinerant workers

settled in the U.S. and other family members joined them. Some went into business, mostly through the labor-intensive work of running small grocery stores or newsstands.

The grandfather of one of the two extended Yemeni families living in our Oakland fieldsite followed this pattern. Mr. Assad came to California in the 1960s to pick grapes as a migrant worker. He saved money and purchased a small grocery store near Fresno; later he moved to the East Bay and purchased small business properties. He sent remittances to his wife and child in Yemen, and eventually bought property there as well. His wife and son moved to Oakland in the early 1970's; and three more sons were born here. In contrast with the migrants in our study who came from Mexico and Central America, Yemeni women have not been active participants in the labor force (although some do hold jobs) and they have never, according to Mrs. Assad, taken the lead in migration.

In 1997, when we got to know them, Mrs. Assad, the sons, their wives (two of them sisters from Yemen; the other two, also sisters, from another Yemeni family in the Bay Area), and the children lived in four units of a family-owned apartment building. The senior Mr. Assad was then living in Yemen, where he had a second wife and young children. Over the next two years he twice returned to Oakland with the children for several months. The children attended elementary school with their half-aunts and uncles and then returned to Yemen. The Assad family maneuvers in a well-established transnational social field, with citizenship rights, property, ongoing economic activities, thick kinship ties, and, as we will later detail, family practices that link their daily life in Oakland with relationships and activities in Yemen.

Bringing Children into Analytic Focus

A comparison of these three cases highlights variation in the structure and dynamics of transnational social fields. Social class figures centrally in patterns of movement; lower-income families are more at the mercy of economic crises, while affluent families have latitude to create long-term strategies, as the Yemeni families have done. Vicissitudes of the global economy have rippled through the fortunes of each of these groups, most dramatically (as we will describe) in the case of the “parachute kids.” Economic opportunities in the U.S. and in varied places of origin - for men, for women, for those with

varying skills - also configure patterns of migration. So too do issues of citizenship, since family members with or without U.S. citizenship, including children, have different horizons of risk and opportunity.ⁱ Political changes, such as the passage of proposition 187 in the U.S. and patterns of war and peace in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and southern Mexico also affect patterns of movement. Geographical distance influence the ease and cost of travel, but may, at this point in history, be of lesser importance than these other considerations in shaping patterns of contact.

These structural dimensions help situate the specific transnational childhoods that we will now bring into fuller view. These cases are useful to think with because they make children visible not only as contingencies, but also as participants in processes of migration and transnationalism. They also highlight varied conceptions of the needs and capacities of children of different ages and genders. Children are defined and positioned by laws (e.g., regarding citizenship, child labor, parental obligation, requirements about school attendance, and eligibility for government programs) that vary from one country to another. Children are also positioned, with much variation by age and by cultural framing, as legal, economic, and emotional dependents in need of adult care, labor, and economic provisioning. As they grow older, children become more capable of caring for themselves and contributing to the labor that sustains the daily life of families (e.g., caring for younger siblings, the sick, the elderly; doing housework; engaging in paid work). But this move to self-sufficiency and capacities for labor is perceived and organized in a range of ways, which may be contested. Finally, children are positioned as a special category of people whom parents and other adults actively seek to “raise” and “develop” toward desired endpoints.

A moving dialectic of child and adult agency is bound up in processes of growing up and of raising a child - paired terms that allude to a mix of daily, cyclical time and the sweep of cumulative time entailed in the passage from child to adult. Growing up / raising up is a guided but open-ended and highly contingent process, involving conflicts of will and desire and struggles over autonomy and control (Thorne 2000). Children ages five to seventeen, who are the focus of our research, maneuver in an in-between zone, still dependent and in need of adult protection and active care (although to varying and

contested degrees), but also increasingly capable of independent action. Children's negotiation of autonomy may take particular twists when adult-child relations are situated within transnational social fields. All of these facets of child/adult relations - the legal positioning of children and of parents; patterns of economic dependence and divisions of labor by age and gender; beliefs and practices entailed in bringing up children and (from the child's perspective) growing up -- enter into the complex dynamics of family migration.

Children and Patterns of Migration

How does the presence of children enter into decisions by individuals and families to migrate? To stay, to "settle," or to return? Much of the literature on patterns of migration is framed by an emphasis on material realities - households, resources, divisions of labor, the use of migration as a way of escaping economic hardship and seeking new opportunities (e.g., Arzipe 1982; Harbinson 1981). This literature treats children, in effect, as luggage, as in phrases like "the immigrant sent for his wife and children." Feminist scholars have helped women move to active conceptual presence in studies of migration. But children continue to be portrayed as burdens weighing down otherwise mobile adults. This image, of course, contains a good deal of truth, especially with respect to the demands posed by the care of small children. Bringing up children requires adult labor, although just what kind is believed to be needed, or actually provided, varies by culture, social class, and place. Marxist and socialist-feminist theories of reproductive labor highlight the range of tasks involved in caring for and raising children, as understood from adult perspectives (Laslett and Brenner 1989). More recent conceptualizations of "caring work" (e.g., Ruddick 1998) add relational nuance and emotions to the study of reproductive labor, as do notions like "the work of developing the child" (Walkerdine 1984). To bring children more fully into knowledge, it is important to examine not only the organization of reproductive labor and relations of care, but also the perspectives and actions of children themselves (James and Prout 1997; Thorne 1993) and the ways in which they grow up and change over time, sometimes contributing to family divisions of labor and relations of care, as well as expressing their own wishes with regard to moving or staying.

Chain Migration, in which Children May Be “Left Behind”

“Stage” or “chain” migration is a common pattern for Mexican and Central American families in central Los Angeles, and for the Yemeni families in Oakland. One or more adults migrate first and gradually send for, or receive, other family members. Although both experiences may be described as chains, there are differences in the Yemeni and Mexican/Central American patterns. In Mexican and Central American families, children are often the last link in the chain, following their parents who migrate either together or separately. In the Yemeni families, oldest sons sometimes follow their fathers, with mothers and young children coming together at a later point; the Yemeni families we talked with said they knew of no children who stayed behind when both parents migrated. (Mothers participate only peripherally in paid labor, and are symbolically located in patriarchally defined family space.) In both cases, the spacing of links in the chain depends largely on financial resources, but resources vary dramatically across the two cases. Families in Pico Union may take many years to reunite their families; the process was much more consolidated for the Assad family in Oakland.

Central American and Mexican families with young children often make arrangements for children to stay with relatives in the home country. They do this in order to avoid the uncertainties of life during the transition, and to protect children from the dangers they could encounter en route, traveling by land and crossing the U.S. border without legal documents. (Yemeni families, on the other hand, have little choice but to secure airline tickets and visas in order to enter the U.S.) Whether or when children are “sent for” depends on different factors: money to pay for the journey; the needs and circumstances of family members here and at home; the expressed desires of the children themselves; and parents’ views of what is safe, appropriate, possible, or good for children of different ages and genders.

Alma Martínez, the mother of a seven-year-old boy living in Guatemala, and a six-year-old girl living in Los Angeles, carefully weighed her wish to be reunited with her son against her sense of what was best for him. In a focus group, she explained that she didn’t want to bring her son here because he was accustomed to freedom of movement in the countryside at home. If he came to Los Angeles, it would be “to be shut up inside

with me, nothing more. He might get sick, or not be able to stand being here.”ⁱⁱ She compared the situations of her two children:

He enjoys a little of what she doesn't have here. And she has a little more of what he can't have over there. The ones that are over there don't have material things, but they have freedom. My son has his grandparents, his cousins, his uncles and aunts and all. And my daughter here is alone, closed up in an apartment filled with toys. Even if she has a closet overflowing with toys, she's stuck inside.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sra. Martínez and the other mothers who talked together in a focus group in Los Angeles held on to the hope that, although children may pay for their futures with the loss of childhood freedom, they had more opportunities here than did children who remained back home. Wilma Díaz, on the other hand, said her fifteen year-old daughter wanted to join her here, and she wanted to bring her from El Salvador, because a girl that age has to “watch herself” - or be watched - and she worried that she was not there to do the watching. But the girl's age and gender might also make her more vulnerable to dangers in the journey north. Sra. Díaz knew what was involved and did not want her daughter to suffer in making the trip.

When possible, Central American and Mexican parents arrange for young children to make the journey in the company of other kin. Sometimes, however, no one is available to accompany the child. Nelson Ornelas told of how his nephews had been captured by border patrols and sent back to Guatemala. They were six and eight years old at the time, and had been traveling with a group of adults, none of whom were directly responsible for them. Sra. Martínez told of a five-year-old boy she knew who had recently come from El Salvador by plane. It took five days for “coyotes” to pass this boy through Texas and into Los Angeles (for a fee of \$3000), but the dangers of crossing by land were avoided. Questions about how and when to send for children sparked animated discussion among participants in the focus groups. The decisions these families had to make contrast sharply with those of middle class, non-immigrant families in Oakland who worried about the right age to allow their children to walk a few blocks alone to their friends' homes to play.

In their talk about bringing children here (or in the Central American and Mexican case, sometimes leaving them behind), parents frame children both as in need of adult labor and care, and as “persons being developed.” They are concerned about children’s health, well-being, and futures, and they make decisions about what is best in relation to both short-term opportunities and long-term hopes and dreams. Parents navigate, of course, within the constraints of available resources - resources that vary dramatically across the two cases. Parents who had “left children behind” worried about them - that they would not be well fed, clothed, or cared for; that they would feel abandoned or unloved; or that something terrible would happen to them while out of parental reach. But working here and sending money home was the only way these parents could provide for their children and offer possibilities for their futures. Elsa Fuentes explained: “It’s just something we have to do now. Even if we don’t want to. Nobody wants to leave their kids.” Sra. Martínez talked frankly about the terrible costs:

Look, something happens. Beyond the fact that they stop loving you, and all, let me also tell you that what also happens is that you lose your love for them. Because, look, I tell you that I love this girl (her daughter in Los Angeles) a lot, and I won’t be separated from her. Because the other one, I did leave. And with time, you start losing your children’s love, and also losing your love as a mother.

“Leaving children behind” frames children as dependents. Their care depends on the willingness of kin to provide for them and on the financial resources that families are able to send back. Because Central American and Mexican families generally operate with a notion of family that includes extended relatives, “other mothers’ children” (Dill, 1994) may not be seen as a burden. Children contribute to the households in which they live - helping with cooking, cleaning, and the care of younger children and often with labor outside the home, for example, in household street-vending projects. Their patterns of participation are gendered, with more girls than boys doing domestic work and sibling care. These children are simultaneously deployed in family labor systems *and* positioned as dependents requiring care. They may represent a boon to their households when their parents are able to send money to their caregivers back home. However, the extended

family may also feel pressed financially, and come to see extra children as a burden. Sr. Ornelas described his own youth in Guatemala, between the ages of 8 and 15, after his mother went to Los Angeles to seek work in the garment industry, and he was “passed around” from one older sibling or aunt to another. He contributed to each household in different ways (cutting and selling firewood; scraping pans in a local bakery in exchange for scraps of bread; helping local fishermen in exchange for a few fish), but he felt like he was an extra mouth to feed. Sra. Martínez told of the strains inherent in the economic and emotional transnational interdependence she had with her mother-in-law:

Sometimes, like right now it has been four months since we’ve sent a penny to my mother-in-law. And it’s a little difficult. Because my mother-in-law gets really mad. She tells me, ‘You left me with a grandson, not a son.’ She says, ‘Remember to at least send the money.’

When families in Pico Union send regular remittances back home to provide for their children or other relatives - one of the most important sources of “foreign aid” for their home nations as well as of sustenance for individual families (de la Garza and Orozco, 1998; Mahler, 1998) - they have fewer resources to invest in “getting ahead” in the U.S. The welfare of children born here may be pitted against the welfare of those back home. To buy non-essential items –such as books, toys, meals at McDonalds, or other things their children ask for - means less money to send home. Parents expressed frustration that their children here didn’t appreciate what their children back home would never have, and they thought about “sending kids back” to give them another perspective on life.

Children Taking the Lead in Migration

During times of war, children have sometimes left their countries unaccompanied by adults (Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbock 1988). Rumbaut (1994) describes the “Peter Pan” phenomena in which 15,000 Cuban children arrived in the United States between the years of 1959 and 1962. In Los Angeles and Oakland, there are children of war from Vietnam, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and southern Mexico. These

situations jar a view of children solely as dependents, and force recognition of the ways in which geopolitical forces shape the contexts in which children grow up.ⁱⁱⁱ

The migration of “parachute kids” from South Korea also challenges mainstream U.S. notions of what children can and should do on their own at particular ages. These children have taken the lead in a process that may eventually lead to the chain migration of other family members. Parents made the arrangements for their children to live and study in the U.S., and the children continue to depend on their families’ abilities to pay the costs of their stay in the U.S. The migration is framed by the goal of “developing” the children toward an adult destination valued by their families: college graduation and a professional career. From another vantage point, “parachute” children serve as deployable resources for their families’ future positioning in a reordered global economic sphere. Children labor as students, not for their immediate household sustenance, but to advance their families’ social and economic mobility.

Some Korean “parachute children” live in boarding homes rather than on their own. When first interviewed, Tae and Daniel Hoon were boarders with Mr. and Mrs. Park in suburban Los Angeles. Tae was seventeen and attending a public high school; he migrated to southern California when he was fourteen years old. Daniel, who was in seventh grade in a public middle school, migrated when he was ten years old and in the fourth grade. The Parks, who came to the U.S. from South Korea in the early 70’s, took in boarders (connected through the Korean church they attended) to boost the family income; they received \$1,000 a month for each child. In an interview, however, Mrs. Park framed her talk about the children from the perspective of a surrogate parent, expressing concern for their health, educational progress, and emotional lives:

We have to be parents for Daniel and Tae. We make ‘Kim Bob’ (Korean sushi) and take them to the park. I used to wake up two, three times a night to check if Daniel is covered up. Daniel used to ask me to turn off the light in his bedroom every night...I have to provide good home-cooked meals every day. Mr. Park has to give them rides each time. We are doing our utmost, but we won't be able to relax until they get into a college or move back to Korea.

Other “early international students” live with relatives in the U.S. Cindy and Bill, cousins who were each seventeen years old when first interviewed, came to the U.S. from South Korea in 1990 when they were nine and moved in with their paternal aunt, cousins, and grandmother, who had migrated earlier to a suburb of Los Angeles. The Choys did not receive money for providing a home for Cindy and Bill, an imbalance of reciprocity that affected the children’s relationship with their aunt. The aunt, Mrs. Choy, observed that Cindy “does not say anything around the house. She has always done what I asked her to do. She never says, ‘I don’t want to or I can’t.’ I believe this is due to the fact that she is not living with her own family.” Cindy said that she rarely goes out of the room that she shares with her grandmother: “I always stay in here.”

Asked how the parents, back in Korea, felt about this arrangement, Mrs. Choy replied that her mother calls her sons (fathers of the ‘parachuting’ cousins) a few times a month. “Cindy’s mother always says, ‘I’m sorry, I have no words.’ When she talks to Cindy, she asks about her school grades and says, ‘listen to your grandmother and your aunt, help them.’” Mrs. Choy said that her younger brother (Bill’s dad) avoids her altogether. Thus these migrant children left one type of labor, entailed in the demands of competitive schools at home (Cho 1996), for other types of labor: doing well enough in U.S. schools to justify their parents’ financial sacrifice; and, to lessen the burden their presence posed to other relatives, helping out with household labor, and restraining the expression of their emotions. [Ong (1999) notes that young Hong Kong immigrants, similarly sent to the United States to establish a base for their families, also do the work of establishing “symbolic capital” for their families by accumulating and displaying credentials, goods, and social trappings, including those marked in their own bodies, for example by working out and dressing in particular ways.]

Shifting economic trends pose another type of risk. After the 1997 economic crisis in South Korea some parents could no longer send money to their children in the U.S., leaving them feeling stranded between the two countries. According to an article in the Korea Central Daily (Kim et al 1998), the Korean Ministry of Education estimated that of the 35,000 elementary and secondary school age children who had left Korea since 1977, about half would return by the middle of 1998 due to the economic crisis.

The four “parachute kids” in our study expressed anguish when they were re-interviewed in 1999. Daniel’s parents declared bankruptcy at the end of 1997 and had to drastically reduce the amount of money they could provide him and his two older sisters, who were also “parachuting” in the U.S. in another location. At one point, U.S. immigration agents found out that the children were attending public schools on F-1 student visas. The oldest sister was allowed to finish her last semester of high school, and the mother found a private school, with a hefty tuition, which was willing to enroll Daniel and the other sister in the middle of the year. Daniel wanted to stay in the U.S. where he experienced more freedom (a somewhat different construction of freedom than discussed by Pico Union families) and where he had a better chance of getting into a good college, but did not know if his father would be able to pay the tuition. Daniel had heard of other “parachute kids” who returned to Korea and found themselves in trouble in school both academically and socially, and he anticipated that “they will say that I have an accent, that I cannot speak Korean properly; they will beat me up just for those reasons.” At the same time, Daniel noted that immigrant kids and parents looked down on “parachute children:” “Because we live without our parents’ supervision, they think we are doing something bad. They do not want their children to play with us.” Daniel’s position of feeling caught between two nations, educational systems, and ways of growing up, conveys one of the risks of transnational childhoods - that one will end up feeling marginal in both places.

“Sending Kids Back”

Migration patterns have never been uni-directional. In the early twentieth century, there was more back-and-forth movement by immigrants from Europe than is generally realized, although mostly by single men (Daniels 1990). Rouse (1992) notes that Mexican migration, especially before the 1960s, was mostly temporary and circular. Stack and Cromartie (1992) describe the back-and-forth movement of African American children between kin living in the north and in the south. Basch, Shiller and Blanc (1994) also describe children moving between the U.S. and their home country as part of their families’ processes of “building transnational social fields,” and Soto’s (1987) studies of “child fostering” include cases of children who returned to the Caribbean after spending time in

the States. This circular movement is sometimes set in motion by the deployment of children to help relatives “back home,” it may also be a strategy for reshaping a developmental trajectory that, in the view of adults, is going “off track” (Menjívar under review; Matthei and Smith 1998). Whatever the specific reason, children’s movement between countries helps maintain a “historical and cultural continuity between the migrants and the communities that send them forth” (Soto 1987:131). Without the presence and active participation of children, some transnational networks would not be sustained.

In our fieldwork in both Pico Union and Oakland, we have found that Central American, Mexican, and Yemeni parents keep open the possibility of “sending their children back home” in order to avoid problems, especially during the years of adolescence. In a focus group discussion, Ivan Macías, who immigrated to Los Angeles from an indigenous community in southern Mexico with his two sons (in high school at the time of the discussion) and a daughter (in third grade), explained:

On television we see that so many things happen in the schools, and that the kids are forced to join gangs or take drugs, and so sometimes it makes us a little fearful about that and we want to go back to Mexico, so they can study there, from secondary school on.

The threat of being “sent back” is sometimes held over children who show signs of getting into trouble. Jorge Sánchez, the father of a second grade girl in Pico Union and of four older children in Mexico, said he was considering sending his daughter to Mexico because her teachers complained about her behavior at school. He also felt that Anita didn’t appreciate all that she had here, compared with the hardships of life in Mexico. Anita understood that she was going back to Mexico if she wasn’t “good.” Whether or not a threat is carried through is influenced by the gravity of the problem, the resources available for sending children back, the willingness of family back home to receive them, and of family here to let them go; children’s protestations also may weigh in. In fact, our fieldwork in Pico Union suggests that relatively few of these threats are acted upon; but the possibility of invoking “transnational disciplining” serves as an important strategy for parents to control children’s behavior.

The Yemeni families in our study have more economic and political stability, and their well-developed transnational social sphere makes this form of disciplining a more practiced option than it is for migrants from Central America and Mexico, in part because children can be more readily retrieved after they have been “straightened out.” As Afrah Assad explained, “It’s back-and-forth all the time now; you buy a ticket and visit the other family, then come back. It’s no different than going on a trip to the shopping mall.” She noted that when their children were small, she and her husband took them back to live and attend school in Yemen for a year and a half. Since everyone there is poor, the children came to “appreciate it here” in the U.S. She sees the teen years as an especially risky time, when children sometimes drift from Yemeni and Islamic traditions. If a daughter goes astray, especially if she shows interest in boys, she may be hastened into an arranged marriage with someone from Yemen or the Bay area Yemeni community, or pulled out of school to do home study. (This was the case for Mrs. Assad’s thirteen-year old daughter, after boys showed an interest in “touching her.”) If a boy gets involved with girlfriends, alcohol, drugs, or “abusing the family,” the family sends him back to Yemen; according to Mrs. Assad, home schooling was not an option for boys because “if you tell them to do it, they won’t finish it. They have to be in school.”

The parents of Mrs. Assad’s fourteen-year-old nephew pulled him out of an Oakland middle school because he was “hyper and out of control and wanted to smoke.” They sent him back to Yemen, where he was working for and getting “straightened out” by his grandfather (he was not legally required to attend school in Yemen). Mrs. Assad described a pattern: “They go home, we let them stay a year or more, they come back different people. They have less there; people are hungry and poor. They change their mind and decide they’re going to be good.” In another interview, she elaborated, “When they went back home they got in touch with what we’re talking about. It’s like you tell a story about back home, but they don’t know the place. But if they go there, then they appreciate it.” Mrs. Assad did not want to deny her children material goods or other opportunities, but she wanted them to

appreciate their privileges and to remain loyal to the family and its religious and cultural traditions. Using “back there” as a reference point helped her frame this child-rearing strategy. This seems not unlike the historical reference point used by non-immigrant parents (“when I was young, we had to...”); but it may be more effective because children can actually experience the differences that adults name. Geographical distances can be crossed in ways that temporal ones cannot.

The child-rearing strategies described by Mrs. Assad and her children mix the schooling and labor of children - boys helping out in the liquor store in Oakland or working on the farm back in Yemen; girls starting to do housework and childcare at young ages - with a discourse of “developing the child” guided by Islamic and Yemeni traditions. A firmly established transnational social sphere facilitated these parenting goals, and Mrs. Assad was determined that these ties would continue in the next generation:” We have a saying, ‘your country is your first mother. You can’t stay away from your mother, your country, or your family back home.’” It also helped families to keep their own priorities clear – as Mrs. Assad said, “We go back and forth to keep life straight;” and, presumably, to try to keep it straight for their children.

Ironically, some adolescents are “sent back” when they fall into trouble, but not by their families, and not for the purpose of correcting their developmental pathways. When teen gang members are arrested for criminal activities, they are easily deported back to their home countries. Wallace (2000) notes official estimates of 20,000 full-fledged gang members in San Salvador, many of whom got their start in gang activity as immigrants to Los Angeles. These gangs can be understood as youth-established transnational social fields.

Falling into trouble is not the only reason children of migrants may return, or be sent back, to their parents’ countries of origin. We have heard increasing reports from Mexican and Central American families who contemplate sending their children back home for schooling or other opportunities. All of these parents say they came to the U.S. to seek educational opportunities for their children. But changes in the political climate threaten the futures they sought for their children. These parents are actively considering

the option of returning, or sending their children back while they remain here to work. Ronaldo Padillas, a college-educated Salvadoran who left his war-torn country in the 1980s and came to Los Angeles where his two children were born, commented:

It is so worrisome that they want to take school away from people who aren't residents here, under Proposition 187. So you have to look at options... You think that if it looks really hard for kids to get an education here - because we struggle not for us, but for our children - then, what can you do? You have to go to where you can keep on studying.

However, children who have been schooled in Los Angeles, where the school district seeks to move children into all-English instruction as quickly as possible, may have great difficulty returning to study in their home countries. (Before Proposition 227 was implemented, teachers aimed to move children into "all English" by fourth grade; in the post-227 era most children receive less than one year of home language support.) The loss of their home language (or its lack of development for academic tasks) (Wong Fillmore, 1991) may be an important factor that keeps children here, while children who are more fully bilingual have more transnational options.

Changes in U.S. social policies, such as the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, also enter into decisions to send children back to the home country. In 1998, Eva Morales, the mother of a first grade girl in Pico Union who received AFDC for her three U.S.-born children, said that she was planning to send the children back to Mexico to be cared for by their aunt. The only employment Sra. Morales could find was as a live-in domestic worker. "Reverse migration" patterns, in which children with U.S. citizenship are being sent back to be schooled in Mexico, counter the image of undocumented immigrants "taking advantage" of U.S. schools. U.S. immigration and social service policies, such as Proposition 187 in California, create a climate that may transfer more of the costs of reproductive labor abroad, effectively increasing the exploitation of wage workers here (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995).

Staying Connected

How do family members who are physically separated for long periods of time stay connected? How does the movement of artifacts (letters, emails, videos, photographs, gifts) across national borders help to sustain transnational social fields? The practices involved in “doing family” - staying in touch, taking care of one another, exercising authority, meeting obligations, sharing the raising of children - are crucial for building and maintaining the transnational social fields we have described. Embodied contact, made possible by travel back and forth, is important for the sustaining of relationships, but regular contact is often impossible for economic and legal reasons. Families may have no physical contact for a decade or more while those in the U.S. work toward securing papers for their reunification. As Dill (1994) notes, families of color in the U.S. have historically had to struggle to “do family” in the face of divisive forces like slavery, immigration policies, or economic and political conditions.

Members of families who are separated by large distances stay in touch through various means of communication. This includes the traditional form: handwritten letters (see Sienuš [1992] - for a collection of letters written between Mexican and Central Americans and their families back home; see Guerra [1999] for a discussion of transnational literacy practices). These are sometimes sent through regular mail, but increasingly Central American and Mexican families use special delivery services established by other immigrants. Since families feel compelled to send money with letters, communication may falter if there is no money to spare. Immigrants feel that folks back home won't understand if they tell them they don't have money to send. As a parent who participated in a family literacy project in Pico Union wrote: “People over there still think that people come here to make money. If you go and tell them that's not so, they say that you're selfish” (¡Aquí Vivimos! Book Project 1993: 43). The immigration process shifts real or perceived relationships of power among family members, and the shift may strain family relations.

Families also communicate by telephone, despite the cost of international calls. The “parachute kids,” Cindy and Bill, spoke with their parents by phone fairly regularly after they first came to the U.S., but less and less often as time passed. The cost of the

calls was a problem, as well as the absence of things to say as daily life here and back in Korea increasingly diverged. Bill said that when his mother phoned: "...we don't talk. She gives the phone to my brother. He doesn't say anything. I don't say anything. I don't think we have nothing to say." Zhou (1998) describes "parachute kids" from Taiwan who also experienced estrangement from parents.

Families who are economically pressed have difficult decisions to make: communicating by phone allows for much more personal, real-time contact than do other means of communication, but paying for these calls means there is less money to send back home. Sra. Díaz said that she calls her daughter once a month, but sometimes the bill runs to \$40 or \$60. Sra. Martínez noted that she has to monitor her daughter's use of the telephone at home. This six-year-old had memorized her brother's phone number in Guatemala, and "and if I'm not careful, she calls and calls."

Modern technology allows for new forms of international contact. Those with access to the internet have a low-cost means of communication, albeit one that is less personal than a phone call. Bill, the "parachute" teen living with his aunt, regularly used e-mail to communicate with friends and with young people he has never met who live around the world - but not with his own family. And on our latest home visit to one Guatemalan family in Pico Union, 12-year-old Adalia showed us her "in box" of email messages from her cousins, as well as samples of cards, photos, and video clips that she had received from them. Their computer was equipped with a video camera that allowed them to send live images to Guatemala, regularly, and at a low cost. (They could not receive images because their family at the other end did not have the video technology.) Adalia's contact with her cousins back home has increased dramatically because of the ease, speed – and thrill – of email; her mother noted, "It's so easy, so fast! Because sometimes we send (an email), and within an hour or two they have written back." Only those families with access to a computer and modem on each end can benefit from the new technology, however, and many families living in rural areas of Central America and Mexico do not own phones, let alone a modem, computer, or internet hookup.

Home video cameras are another form of new technology allowing a more vivid connection between distant family members than was possible in the past, but again with

financial and emotional costs. One girl in Pico Union wouldn't talk to her father for four days after seeing a videotape he had made on a trip to El Salvador. The father had filmed a daughter who lives there (a half sister to the daughter in Los Angeles). This was the first time the girl in Los Angeles had seen her half-sister, and the video seemed to provoke sibling rivalry that had never before been expressed. While this video use seems to have had somewhat negative consequences for building and sustaining transnational relations, in other cases video has served as an important tool to keep families in touch with one another's lives. Orellana attended one funeral service and wake that was videotaped – not to record the memory for future viewing by participants, of course, but to share the experience with relatives back home.

Families in Pico Union explore creative ways of staying connected across long distances, and with limited economic resources. We found that families in the area had a wide range of degrees of contact with their home countries. Adalia's family, for example, had regular email contact; they traveled to Guatemala once a year for at least several weeks at a time; and they received several visits a year from extended family members. About three fourths of the children whom we talked with had visited their home countries with their families once or twice, often in response to family emergencies; a smaller group had never gone. The implications of these varied kinds and degrees of contact bear further exploration.

Discussion and Conclusion

Children are involved in family migration processes in many different ways that are shaped by sociopolitical circumstances, global economic conditions, geographical locations, historical and political relations between countries, available resources, and cultural practices and beliefs. Our intent is not to make fixed claims about the migration experiences of any group, but to illuminate how the presence and participation of children may help shape processes of migration and the constitution and uses of transnational social fields.

Immigrant children, like all children, are to some extent dependent on adults for physical, economic, and emotional care. However, just how and in what ways children of different ages and genders are seen as dependent, and how their perceived needs are met, is culturally constructed. Beliefs and practices are in turn influenced by material realities,

and the resources and obstacles that exist in any setting. Families may find that children's physical, emotional, and economic needs conflict, or that they are not able to provide for them in the ways that they would like.^{iv} Parents who leave their children behind (or send them abroad) worry that their children will suffer physically and emotionally in their absence, but they separate from them in order to provide for them economically.

Transnational families challenge mainstream constructions of "motherhood" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), as well as, middle class assumptions that all of children's needs can and should be provided by parents in nuclear families based in one community.

In making decisions about leaving kids, bringing them, or sending them back, adults are actively engaged in the process of "developing" their children toward the goals and values they hold for them. Sometimes families may temporarily neglect their children's presumed needs (or, in the eyes of some observers, appear to be neglectful) in order to open up possibilities for their futures. Some transnational moves involve deliberate, long-term strategies; others represent forced choices based on limited options. Families who are pressed for household survival do not have the luxury to foreground children's "developmental needs." Families who are separated by national borders, operating with minimal economic resources, do, however, make great sacrifices - including perhaps the loss of a certain quality in their own love for their children, and their children's love for them - in order to give their children opportunities, as parents told us, "to come out ahead."

In seeking opportunities for their children's futures, families are also strategizing to improve their collective conditions. The individualistic focus of traditional Western views of child development tends to neglect the collective interests of families, and ignore the tight links that may connect children to larger family networks. The "development" of "parachute children," for example, is closely tied to their deployment for families' future class positions. Transnational arrangements can help families to reposition themselves within a changing global economic order, disrupting class relations that may more rigidly bind families back home. By operating in a transnational sphere, in an historical moment with increased flows of labor and capital around the world, families and individuals create room for maneuvering, and for altering the trajectories that were seemingly laid out at birth.

In this article we have focused on the ways in which children figure in *adults'* decisions to stay, to settle, or to return. In most families, adults *are* the ones who make decisions, though their decisions are often influenced (far more profoundly than they might admit) by children. When their opinions are not directly invited or respected, children may assert their wills by whining, nagging, complaining, or refusing to engage with adults' agendas. In other work (Thorne, Orellana, Lam and Chee forthcoming), we are exploring how the process of immigration also *reconfigures* generational relations, sometimes giving more power to children than they had vis a vis adults in their home countries. Warner and Srole (1945) describe shifting generational lines of power and authority in families in earlier waves of immigration, but this topic deserves much further exploration in the contemporary context.

A number of scholars have examined the activities of children in facilitating the assimilation of immigrant families into U.S. society (e.g., Valenzuela 1999). Without firm roots in the country of origin, children often come to identify with their new homeland in ways that parents may not. This was true among the families we studied; parents noted, for example, that when the U.S. played El Salvador or Mexico in soccer matches, their children cheered for the U.S. Families who might otherwise return to their home countries may remain, for their children's sake, even when they feel their own lives are harder here. The children with whom we talked did not envision themselves returning to live in their home countries; they saw their futures here.

At the same time, children play an important role in linking nations, and keeping parents connected to their homelands. This is especially true when an immediate family is split, with some children left behind. Even when all children live in the U.S., families may maintain ties with the home country because they want their children to know and value their roots; or the children themselves may ask for this connection. In helping to develop and sustain transnational social fields, children may effectively change the contexts for their own development and identity formation. Adalia's sense of identity was shaped by her yearly visits to Guatemala, and she could locate herself within more than one ethnic and racialization schema. Here she did not identify as "American" (a label she reserved for white native-born U.S. citizens), but rather as "from here," or, when pressed to check a box, as

when taking standardized tests in school, as “Hispanic” (“because that’s what I am, I’m Hispanic). But when we asked if she is considered Hispanic when she goes to Guatemala, she laughed. “No, there I’m, well, I’m just me.” As they move across borders, children forge different identities, and views of themselves and their social worlds, and this border crossing can help to contest the subordinating and racializing processes they experience in the U.S. (Olsen 1997).

When scholars ignore the presence and participation of children in processes of migration or frame children as baggage that is left behind, sent for, and weighing down adult migrants, they obscure a central axis of family migration. Children actively shape the nature of their families’ journeys as well as their experiences once they are here. And in shaping that journey, they help to shape their own trajectories as well.

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ⁱ Despite official claims to favor “family reunification,” U.S. immigration policy has often propelled the separation of families and/or the development of illegal mechanisms for reunification (Garrison and Weiss, 1979; Zinn and Dill, 1994). The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 allowed many newly legalized male workers to send for family members. On the other hand, families that did not qualify for amnesty under IRCA have found reunification more difficult. And 1997 changes in immigration law make it harder for families who have reunited illegally to remain together while processing papers (Mirta, 1997). Most parents actively work toward family reunification, but the process can take a long time. Meanwhile, new siblings or half-siblings may be born in the U.S., and different constellations of transnational families are forged.

ⁱⁱ All quotes are from the original Spanish (translated into English by Orellana) or Korean (translated into English by Chee); all of our Yemeni American informants speak English.

ⁱⁱⁱ It was not easy to tap children’s perspectives on the differences between life here, and there, though we tried to do so by asking them in a variety of ways and in different contexts. Children whose parents are not legal residents may have been taught not to say much about their transnational ties as a protective measure. Then, too, when they are immersed in their daily lives in Los Angeles or Oakland, “over there” may seem very far

away, not easily formulated into words to respond to the prying questions of researchers. When we asked, kids talked about seemingly mundane differences between here and there (“the paper there it’s more crinkly”), though some of these everyday observations seemed to tap into their understanding of economic or of the urban/rural divide, as for example when 11-year-old Muhammed noted that in Oakland, in contrast to Yemen, “there’s hardly rocks around here. It has a freeway. That’s it.” Kids also mentioned differences in forms of play (“in Yemen I never used to like it because there was too much kids that throw rocks and have a lot of fights”). The most common response when we asked children what they *liked* about their countries of origin, seemed to tap into the same aura of freedom that parents noted – they talked about life in the countryside; about chickens, cows and other animals; the beaches: “it’s beautiful;” “it’s all sparkly;” “it’s like cool.” Of course, children’s geographically-associated feelings of freedom may be bound up with freedom from the temporal and institutional constraints of their daily lives in Los Angeles; they also talked about going to water parks and other excursions with their families. When we asked 11-year-old Adalia, who visits Guatemala each year with her family, what she likes best, her response sounds like one that could apply to family vacations anywhere: “The parks, the, like, you know here it’s Disney land and Six Flags. There it’s water parks, with a lot of slides, and it’s cool.” Similarly, 12-year-old Ahmed compared amusement parks in Oakland and in Yemen: “I like this place because they have games. They have roller coasters...I like roller coasters. I like here. But the crashing cars and stuff, and the circus, I like that there, in Yemen. Because they have more better ones there.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Whether or not immigrants are recognized as refugees depends on the United States' policies toward their homeland. Most of the Central American children in Pico Union are here as a direct or indirect consequence of civil wars, but there is little official recognition of the traumas they may have experienced.

^{iv} The needs of different family members may also conflict. Models that assume that households follow a unified strategy in working out immigration projects too easily gloss conflict and differential relations of power (Wolf, 1990). And the standard division of families into "adults" and "children" overlooks differences between those of different ages and genders, and with varied sorts of entitlement (such as citizenship), capacities, or skills.