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Raising Children, and Growing Up, Across National Borders: Comparative Perspectives on Age, Gender, and Migration

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The participation of children in processes of migration came to the world's attention in 1999 through the widely reported saga of Elián González, a five-year-old Cuban boy who became the focus of a child custody struggle among members of a transnational family. Elián was rescued from the ocean off the coast of Florida after his mother and stepfather drowned when their boat capsized on the way to the United States. He was taken to the Miami home of his great uncle, a Cuban émigré, who assumed temporary custody of the "unaccompanied minor" (the five-year-old's classification under U.S. immigration law). Claiming that Elián would face "imminent and irreparable harm" if he were returned to Castro's "island prison," the great-uncle petitioned the Immigration and Naturalization Service to grant the boy political asylum. But the father, Juan Miguel González, demanded that his son be returned to Cuba, where, he said, Elián "does not lack anything" and "has his health care and education free."

The INS and the Justice Department agreed that giving custody to the Cuban-based father would be in accord with U.S. laws as well as "in the best interests of the child," although several members of Congress actively supported the great uncle's efforts to retain custody. The great uncle and his supporters in the Miami Cuban enclave defied a Justice Department order to return the boy to his father, who flew to the U.S. with his second wife and infant son to retrieve Elián. Eventually, federal agents seized Elián and reunited him

with his father; in June 2000, after a federal appeals court gave legal clearance, they returned to live in Cuba.

The unfolding story of Elián González highlights the experiences of families whose members sustain relationships, including those involved in the raising of children, across national borders. As Elián's situation makes clear, state-defined age categories, such as "unaccompanied minor," figure centrally in the regulation of migration, as do negotiations of "social age," or perceptions of an individual's relative dependence or maturity (Solberg 1997). The González story points to the relevance of child-rearing practices, ideas about the "nature" and needs of children, and comparisons of growing up "here" vs "there" in the shaping and uses of transnational social fields.¹ It also reveals complex relationships of age to nationality, racialized ethnicity, and gender.

What if Elián had been Haitian instead of Cuban? That question was posed by a number of news commentators who were alert to the racist and anti-communist double-standards of U.S. immigration laws and public opinion. If he were Haitian, the rescued boy would have been thrown into the legal limbo and degraded circumstances of over 4,000 "unaccompanied alien minors," some of them in juvenile jails, who await deportation from the U.S. Racial-ethnic, national, and political positioning clearly entered into the sentimentalized constructions and relatively privileged alternatives that framed the experiences of Elián González.

There is another question that no one, to our knowledge, has posed: What if Elián had been a girl? The category of "five-year-old child" conveys images of physical, emotional, economic, and legal dependence that mute the salience of gender. Whether Elián or Eliana, a five-year old's legal position as a citizen of Cuba and as a potential applicant for asylum in the U.S. would remain the same. However, like, and in conjunction with, racialized ethnicity,

gender may enter into judgments about maturity and competence, perceived manipulability and dependence, emotional needs, assessments of risk and opportunities, and positioning in family dynamics – all of which affect interpretations of a child’s social age and enter into decisions about where and how a child should be raised.

Intersections of Age and Gender in the Study of Migration

This chapter examines the intersecting significance of age, national origin, citizenship status, and gender in shaping the back and forth migration of transnational family members. Our central focus is on children (an age group), with the goal of bringing their presence, participation, and relationships with adults more fully into research on migration. Before the transformative work of contemporary feminist scholars, research on migration was mostly organized around the lives and actions of adult men (Daniels 1990). Recurring phrases like “the immigrants sent for their wives and children” portrayed women and children essentially as luggage – brought, left behind, or sent for by men, the central actors and decision-makers.

Over the last two decades, as exemplified by the papers in this volume, feminist scholars have challenged this passive and marginalized image by documenting women’s participation in processes of migration and settlement, and by unraveling the gendered dynamics of a range of transnational social practices. But children remain in a peripheral and luggage-like conceptual space, mostly framed as a source of contingency in decisions to migrate, stay, or return. Furthermore, compared with the attention given to social divisions of racialized ethnicity and gender, age as an organizing dimension of migration has been relatively neglected (significant exceptions include Kibria 1993; Menjivar, forthcoming; Soto 1987; Stack and Cromartie 1992).² Since gender and age are basic axes of kinship, more attention to their intersecting dynamics, in conjunction other lines of difference, such as social

class, ethnicity, and sexuality, would be especially fruitful for the study of families and migration.³

In this chapter we highlight the presence and participation of children in the transnational practices of families who have migrated to California, but who also sustain close ties with their places of origin. We compare the intersecting dynamics of age and gender in the construction and uses of two transnational social fields, one linking the Pico Union area of Los Angeles with parts of El Salvador, Guatemala, and México; and the other bridging between Oakland and Yemen. Two conceptual strands weave through our analysis of age, gender, and processes of family migration:

1) *Legal constructions of age and gender* Although transnationalism is often equated with the diminishing significance of national boundaries, state practices loom large in the regulation of family life, the constitution of childhoods, and in the shaping of patterns of family migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mayer and Schoepflin 1989). The U.S. government confers citizenship upon all individuals born in the U.S., regardless of gender; thus a child may have rights, such as access to a passport and to social services, that are different from those of a sibling or parent born in another country. According to a study based on 1998 census data, the rate of Los Angeles county children living in families with mixed citizenship status is nearly five times the national average, partly because of the large number of undocumented migrants from México and Central America. In the late 1990s, when the U.S. government ruled that non-citizen parents could no longer receive food stamps, the food was also denied to children who were U.S. citizens (McDonnell 1999).

Families who organize their lives across national boundaries may have to negotiate different legal definitions of “child” and “adult.” For example, according to the laws of Yemen, a “child” of either gender legally becomes an “adult” at age 15, but U.S. laws set the

formal transition at 18. Gender, as well as age, may be embedded in the legal practices that govern movement across national borders. In the U.S. and in México gender does not bear on the formal right of adult citizens to apply for a passport, but women who are citizens of Yemen must have signed permission from either a husband or father, which limits options to migrate on their own. Laws that govern the allocation of child custody after divorce also vary. In some Latin American countries mothers either have full custody or share it with their former husband; in other countries, the father is automatically given full custody, and it is illegal for a divorced mother to transport a child across national borders (Guy 2000).

2) *Gendered constructions of childhood and of processes of growing up and raising children.* Our analysis of the daily lives and practices of transnational families draws upon insights from the sociology and anthropology of childhoods (for reviews see James, Jenks, and Prout 1997; Stephens 1995). These fields were invigorated by Philippe Ariès' (1962) argument that the immaturity and dependence of infants and children, and processes of maturation toward adulthood, have been perceived and organized in historically changing ways. Building on this insight, Viviana Zelizer (1985) documented a striking transition in dominant American constructions of childhood that consolidated at the turn of the century through laws that excluded children from paid labor and required them to attend school. (Note that these laws tended to mute the salience of both gender and social class in the formal organization of children's daily lives and activities.)

The image of childhood as a set apart and protected time of life, situated in families and schools and defined by (increasingly commercialized) play has been exported by the media and by the circulation of commodities produced by corporations like Disney and Mattel (Stephens 1995). But the media also circulate other images that unsettle conceptions of childhood as a protected and sentimentalized space, such as reports about child soldiers

(mostly boys) fighting in Colombia or Rwanda, about children who live on the streets and manage to survive more or less on their own (both genders, although boys are more visible), and stories about girls and boys who make significant contributions to the economic survival of their families. While most of these reports come from non-industrialized countries, some, such as stories of homeless children, child workers, and sexualized images that undermine traditional notions of child innocence also come from the U.S. American childhoods have always been more diverse than conveyed by dominant images, and widening income gaps and high rates of immigration have added to the diversity.

The concept of “childhood,” a term with structural and discursive valence, refers to the positioning of an age-defined group. Terms like “growing older” and “child-rearing” put the matter of age into motion, within contexts of dependence and guided movements toward adulthood. Metaphors such as “rearing,” “raising,” and “bringing up” children convey the purposive, caring, and controlling orientation of the adults (disproportionately women) who assume this responsibility. Children also exercise agency in the process; they see themselves, sometimes ambivalently, as “growing older,” and they may variously cooperate with, negotiate, or resist adult efforts to guide and control.⁴ Growing up / bringing up is a guided but open-ended and highly contingent process, involving conflicts of will and desire, and struggles over autonomy and control (Allat 1996; Brannen 1996; Solberg 1997). Gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, and other socially constructed differences may inflect this process in a variety of ways.

How do age-related processes unfold when children are raised, and grow up, in family and school contexts that extend across divides of geography, political economy, and culture? Transnational family arrangements provide alternative, gendered ways of being and becoming, which adults and children may consider as they negotiate decisions about living or

visiting “here” vs. “there.” As processes of transmigration unfold over time, they may alter the social relations of adults and children, as well as men and women. We will return to these analytic issues after a brief discussion of our research sites and methods.

The California Childhoods Project: Research Sites and Methods of Study

The cases we will analyze, in a comparative and theory-generating spirit, are drawn from a larger ethnographic study of childhoods in contemporary California. We began this project with a local focus, trying to grasp the effects of rapid social change, such as extensive immigration and widening income gaps, on the daily lives of children and families living in two urban areas. In 1995 Marjorie Orellana began three years of fieldwork in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles, a low-income urban enclave, mostly of migrants (some legal; many undocumented) from México, Guatemala, and El Salvador; Anna Chee gathered information about Korean families living in that area and elsewhere in Los Angeles (see Orellana, Thorne, Chee, and Lam, forthcoming). In 1996 Barrie Thorne, Wan Shun Eva Lam, and others began fieldwork in our second site, a public elementary school, located in mixed-income area of Oakland, whose studentbody is about half African American and 20 percent Cantonese-speaking (mostly families from China and Hong Kong), with smaller numbers of European Americans and children of immigrants from México, Central America, Yemen, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and several other countries..

We have used multiple methods to map the contours of children’s daily lives across lines of social class and ethnicity, including extensive fieldwork in the public school that anchors each research site, and in neighborhoods, households, after-school programs, public libraries, and other child-related contexts. We also interviewed parents and children from the range of economic and cultural groups in each area; where relevant, we asked about histories and experiences of migration. 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 2000). All of these data inform our analysis of growing up and raising children in transnational families.

We have organized this discussion of children, age and gender relations, and transmigration by selecting two empirical cases that seem especially good to think with. One is a case study of Spanish-speaking families who are raising children in transnational social fields that extend between Pico Union (where the children come together in a large public elementary school) and various parts of México, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The other case, with fewer numbers, involves immigrant families from Yemen who live in Oakland, with various members going back and forth, sometimes for extended periods of time, to stay with kin who are based in a city and in several villages “back home” in the Middle East. Yemenis are a small minority of the children who attend the ethnically diverse public school that we studied in Oakland, but their cultural difference is highly visible because some of the girls wear headscarves, leggings, and long dresses to school.

After briefly sketching the historical and economic contexts of these two case studies, we will examine the significance of age and gender in patterns of initial migration, movements back and forth, and in the deliberate use of transnational networks in the raising of children.

Migrants in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles, With Close Ties to México and Central America

In the 1980s the number of Central American migrating to Pico Union dramatically increased when Salvadorans and Guatemalans began to flee civil wars in their home countries (Chinchilla and Hamilton, 1992). Los Angeles is now home to more Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans than any city outside of the capitals of those nations. The sheer numbers of

migrants, as well as comparatively close geographic distances and local infrastructures for the movement of goods (such as overnight courier services), information (Spanish-language television and radio stations), and people, make it relatively easy for families to sustain active ties “back home.”

There is no single story to tell about the transnational patterns of Pico-Union residents, nor about the contexts they left behind when they initially migrated. Some come from rural areas, others from small towns or in cities; levels of education vary widely. Some are from indigenous communities and speak Spanish as their second language. Some individuals and families frequently travel back and forth between Los Angeles and their country of origin, while others travel more rarely; many stay in touch through letters, telephone calls, e-mail, and the exchange of home videos (Orellana et al, forthcoming). Although extended kin figure centrally in family arrangements that cross national boundaries, a substantial number of nuclear families are divided, with some members living in Pico Union and others living “back home.” In one first-grade classroom where Orellana observed, more than half of the children said they had a sibling in their country of origin.

In order to manage the high costs of living in Los Angeles, Central American and Mexican immigrants often crowd into small apartments, with frequent changes in household composition. Many adults are only able to find work in the informal economy. Women are often employed in garment factories or as paid domestic workers, and men more often work as day laborers in construction or as gardeners. Most of the families in Pico Union live on the economic margins; according to Los Angeles School District records, in the late 1990s over 98 percent of children in the large public elementary school qualified for free or reduced lunch.

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, which began to even out the sex ratio. Some men went into business, mostly through the labor-intensive work of running small grocery stores or newsstands; others continued in factory or migrant farm work. Women have relatively low rates of formal employment in Yemen and among Yemenis living in the U.S.; and, unlike a growing number of women from México and Central America, they virtually never take the lead in migration or migrate on their own.

Children from three large extended families, whose households expand and contract as visitors from “back home” come and go, attend the public elementary school in our Oakland research site. They are part of a larger network of East Bay Yemenis who participate in the activities of several mosques in Oakland, including one with an Arabic school attended by over 100 children for three hours on Saturday and Sunday. (Some parents and kids refer to public school as “English school” to differentiate it from Arabic school.) This geographically dispersed network of Yemeni migrants includes families from a range of economic circumstances. Some are extremely poor; others, like the families we have gotten to know, are solidly middle class with property (homes, land, small businesses) in the Bay area and back in Yemen.

Yemen has one of the highest fertility rates in the world – an average of 7.6 children per woman (Worldwatch Institute, 2000). Yemeni families in Oakland also tend to be large, with extensive contact among extended kin. References to “cousins” and “aunties” pepper children’s accounts of their activities and patterns of friendship, as do descriptions of large gatherings to celebrate marriages and birthdays. Some of these families have satellite television, and they watch programs in both Arabic and English. The families in our study have thick ties to kin and fellow villagers back in Yemen, with some (but not all) family members occasionally travelling back and forth and sometimes staying in one or the other place for several years at a time. Relative affluence, high rates of citizenship, and extensive cross-national networks of kin facilitate these patterns of movement.

Unlike the transmigrants who live in Pico Union, the Yemeni families in Oakland do not live in an ethnic enclave, but many of them, even in the second and third generation, are determined to retain some of their religious and ethnic traditions. They mix these practices with those of American culture as they go about rearing children, and growing up as children – sometime with with considerable conflict. We will now turn to a more detailed analysis and comparison of these two case studies, highlighting the dynamics of age and gender in patterns of transmigration.

The Significance of Age and Gender in Patterns of Transmigration Between Central America, Mexico, and Los Angeles

When it comes to adult decisions to migrate, the construction of children as “luggage”– at least young children – holds some truth. Children’s dependence and needs for care, as well as bonds of love and attachment, indeed may constrain the movements of otherwise mobile adults, especially the mothers of infants and young children. However, various combinations of necessity, such as dire poverty, and of opportunity, such as the

availability of jobs doing paid domestic work in the U.S., have drawn a growing number of mothers into the migration streams that lead from México and Central America to California (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). When mothers and/or fathers migrate, decisions about whether to bring young children or to leave them behind are largely shaped by the availability of resources here or there for the day-to-day care of children, with little distinction made between the needs of girls or boys. As children grow older, gender weighs more heavily in decisions about whether they should come with parents, stay behind, or be sent for.

Parents may leave young children behind to avoid the uncertainties of life during the transition or to protect children from the dangers they might encounter traveling by land or crossing the U.S. border without legal documents. One mother in Pico Union told us about a five-year old boy she knew who had come from El Salvador by plane. It took five days for “coyotes” to pass him through Texas and into Los Angeles (for a fee of \$3000), but the dangers of land were avoided. Among teenagers, more boys than girls make journeys north unaccompanied by parents, both because boys are more likely to claim and be granted autonomy of movement and because girls are perceived as more vulnerable to dangers en route.⁵

In a focus group discussion among Pico Union parents who had “left children behind,” in México or Central America, there was animated discussion of whether, when, and how to send for children. The parents mentioned a range of considerations, such as having 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. The word “freedom” comes up repeatedly when immigrant parent and children, especially those from rural areas, compare

life “here” and “there.” They contrast the spatial freedom of children who live in safe physical and social circumstances and can move about on their own with the spatial confinement associated with the danger of living in urban areas in the U.S.

When Alma Martínez and her husband came to the U.S. to seek work, they left their son with his paternal grandmother back in Guatemala. They had a second child a year after they arrived in the U.S. In the focus group discussion, Sra. Martínez contrasted her seven year-old son’s freedom of movement in the Guatemalan countryside with the spatial confinement, but material advantages, experienced by the six-year old daughter who lived with them in Pico Union:

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.

Parents worry about the children they “left behind,” fearing that they will not be well fed, clothed or cared for, that they will feel abandoned or unloved, or that something bad will happen to them while they were out of parental reach. But the parents believe that working here and sending money home is the only way they can provide for their children and offer possibilities for their futures. Elsa Fuentes explained (in Spanish), “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 emotional costs of leaving a child behind:

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 [in L.A.] 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.

The parents' discussion touched on children's dependence and on their developing capacities to assume responsibility – and to get into varied kinds of trouble. The parents also spoke of conflicts between taking care of children's present needs, and securing opportunities for their children's futures. And they described complex patterns of cooperation and reciprocity that tied them to caregivers back home. Because Central American and Mexican conceptions of family include extended kin, taking care of “other mothers' children” (Dill 1994) may not be seen as a problem, especially if the parents send remittances. However, when money is short, extra children may be experienced as a burden. Sra. Martínez spoke of strained relationships with her mother-in-law back in Guatemala:

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.'

As children who have been left behind grow older, they become more self-sufficient, thus lessening the amount of hands-on care required from adults. With increasing age, children are also able to contribute to systems of household labor. Both in Pico Union and “back home” in México or Central America, girls help with housework and sibling care; boys are more likely to help fathers who work in the fields “back home” or as gardeners hired by homeowners in suburbs of Los Angeles. Children's work, done alongside school and periods of play, is shaped both by necessity and by beliefs about what children of different ages and genders are capable of doing and should be expected to do (Schildkraut 1975). Negotiations of social age (Solberg 1990) occur during assessments about whether a child should migrate,

stay, or return. An older girl may be left behind, for example, because she will be able to help care for her aunt's younger children. The contexts and phases of growing up shape trajectories into adulthood, and when children reach school age, parents may arrange their migration to the U.S. to facilitate access to long-term educational and occupational opportunities in this country.

Transmigration Between Yemen and the Bay Area

Yemen is much further away than México or Central America, and the full journey cannot be made by land, which increases the cost of travel and amplifies the risk of trying to enter without documentation. The mobility of Yemeni women is more constrained than that of women from México, Guatemala, or El Salvador. While women in Yemen have the right to vote and are employed in some sectors of the economy, Islamic culture defines them first and foremost as wives and mothers. Signed consent from a husband or father is required before a woman can get a passport for international travel, and there are strictures against women interacting with men to whom they are not formally connected by marriage or descent.

Afrah Assad, a Yemeni-born woman who is active in the Oakland mosque, told us that she had never heard of a woman who migrated on her own from Yemen, nor had she ever heard of both parents migrating and leaving children behind. She generalized, "The father comes first, then he sends for the eldest son to help the dad in the business. Later they help the rest of the family to come." The rest of the family – wives, parents, sons and daughters, brothers, cousins – may migrate, or not, as opportunities, resources, and contingencies permit, but the migration of married women is closely tied to the migration of their unmarried daughters and younger children.

This gendered pattern of chain migration began for the Assad family in the 1960s when Hussein Assad (Afra's father-in-law) left impoverished circumstances in rural Yemen

to work in the oil fields of Bahrain. He migrated from there to the Central Valley of California, where he did migrant farm work and continued to send regular remittances to his wife and child back in Yemen while also saving enough money to buy a small grocery store. His teen-age son migrated to help him build the business, and his wife followed. They moved to Oakland and had three more sons who got to know life in Yemen through occasional visits back home. Eventually Hussein Assad and his sons acquired a farm and other property back in Yemen as well as several liquor stores in the East Bay. Their transnational arrangements have a strong material as well as kinship base.

The Organization of Labor in Transnational Families

The migration streams from Mexico and Central America to and from Los Angeles and between Yemen and Oakland include many families from rural farms and villages whose relationships have developed within essentially pre-industrial, household-based systems of production. Patterns of interdependence extend beyond smaller units like the nuclear family or single-mother households to encompass grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Adult divisions of labor tend to divide by gender, with Mexican, Central American, and Yemeni women assuming major responsibility for the daily care of children and families. In addition, many Mexican and Central American immigrant women are employed, primarily in female-dominated parts of the economy, like paid domestic work. Rates of female employment are much lower among Yemeni immigrants, although some women help out in family businesses and a few have paid jobs. After her children were raised, one of Afrah Assad's older sisters-in-law obtained her GED (high school equivalence degree) and began working as a real estate agent. This trajectory into employment inspired another sister-in-law, Khalid (who married another of the Assad brothers when they were both fifteen), who took a part-time clerical job in the real estate company and enrolled in classes to prepare for the GED exam.

Immigrant parents who are raising children in Pico Union assume, as they did when they lived in Guatemala or Mexico, that children will be contributing members of the household (Orellana forthcoming). One mother told her children, “You have a family, and if we’re a family, we work together.” Some children pitch in without questioning, such as seven-year-old Eva Morales who, when we got to know her, lived with her parents, an uncle, two younger brothers, and occasional rent-paying lodgers in a one-bedroom apartment in Pico Union. Her father worked as a day-laborer in construction, and her mother was employed off and on in a garment factory. In various visits to the household, Orellana saw Eva unpack the grocery bags her mother brought home and put the food away (without being asked to do so); answer the phone and take a message for her father; get her youngest brother out of a bath, toweled, and dressed; and read to her two brothers and teach them English rhymes she had learned in school. When asked how she helps at home, Eva animatedly replied (in Spanish): “I wash dishes, vacuum, arrange my clothes, every time we go to do the laundry my mom tells me, ‘Eva, why don’t you help me to fold.’” One of Eva’s brothers is a year younger, but he does far less housework; during our field visits it was always Eva who was attentive to the guests and to the needs of her younger siblings. Our interviews with parents and children in California provide further evidence, across ethnic groups, that girls, like women, do a disproportionate share of housework (Goodnow, 1988).

Children in Pico Union participate not only in the activities of housework, but also in the informal economy, for example, by selling food, clothes, or other merchandise alongside adult street vendors. They also help their parents with paid work such as cleaning houses, doing childcare, mowing lawns, or clearing tables in a restaurant. “Outside,” like “inside,” tasks are skewed by gender – boys more often help fathers; girls more often help mothers. Some parents and children do piecework at home; for example the parents and five children

(ages four to twelve) of the Rodriguez family gather in the evening at their kitchen table to put price stickers on Barbie sunglasses that are sold, they said, at Toys 'R Us.

When families move from rural areas or small towns to inner city Los Angeles, the labor contributions of children change and may diminish. Instead of hunting in the mountains, raising chickens, or planting rice and corn, children may be sent to corner markets to buy groceries. But the need for children to care for siblings and assume other household chores may increase when families are detached from the support networks of extended kin and when parents work long hours at some distance from Pico Union. Since they go to school, children of immigrants acquire essential skills that their parents do not possess, especially knowledge of English. Translating for parents and other adults, sometimes in freighted contexts like medical appointments or job-related negotiations, is a major way in which children contribute to their households in Pico Union (Orellana and Lam 1999). Girls more often than boys serve as the designated family translators, although birth order and level of skill also enter into the allocation of this work (a pattern also reported in Valenzuela 1999).

Because the Yemeni immigrant parents we have gotten to know have lived in the U.S. for some years and work in family businesses like liquor stores or mini-marts, most of them know English, and their children do not regularly serve as translators. But children are expected to contribute to family labor systems in other ways. Back in Yemen, as Afrah Assad explained, "the boys do the work outside – pick fruit, carry grass. The girls work inside, doing the dishes, cleaning." An outside/inside gender division also organizes the work of the Assad siblings and cousins in Oakland. Starting at age seven, on weekends and sometimes after school, the boys stock shelves and help out in other ways in the family's stores; their responsibilities increase as they grow older.

Girls also start helping, in their case with sibling care and household labor, between the ages of five and seven. When Thorne interviewed Afrah at her home, with four of her children quietly listening and sometimes chiming in, the mother praised Nadia, the oldest daughter (then eleven) for doing “all the work at home. Today there’s no school; Nadia cleaned the dishes, vacuumed, took the clothes to the washer. She did it on her own.” During the interview, Nadia initiated activities that showed that she, like seven-year-old Eva in Pico Union, had assumed the responsibilities of a regular caregiver. Nadia leaned over to wipe mucous from her two year-old sister’s nose, and, without any directive from her mother, took the toddler into the hall and changed her diaper. Afrah said that the two year-old is so attached to her older sister, she calls out for Nadia as soon as she awakens in the morning.

When they describe their weekly routines, Yemeni parents and children frequently use narratives of gender difference, emphasizing the duty and suitability of boys to work in the stores and of girls to do housework and childcare at home. But in conversations about what actually took place during a particular day or week, girls sometimes talked about helping out at the store after Arabic school, and boys told about helping with the dishes at home. In the allocation and negotiation of labor, considerations of need, convenience, and ability (which is partly linked to age) may override gender (Goodnow, 1988).

The Deliberate Use of Transnational Practices in Raising Children

Since Yemeni families in Oakland live in homes and work in small businesses scattered across the city, they regularly interact with neighbors, customers, and schoolmates who know little about Islamic or Yemeni culture. But the parents (and some, but not all of the children) are emphatic about wanting to retain at least some of their “traditions.” As Afrah Assad said in an interview, “We don’t want to lose what we came from and who we are. We want to keep both things.” Back in Yemen, she said, most people are very poor, and she

considers her family lucky to be living an essentially middle-class life in the U.S. with “medicine, doctors, good home, education.” But Afrah and her husband also want their children to grow up as Muslims, devoted to their extended family, and sustaining strong cultural and personal ties to Yemen. They also want them to experience the contrast with “back there” so they will appreciate what they have here.

Saying that “kids will be kids,” Afrah is flexible about some of the ways her children engage with American culture. She and the other Yemeni adult women we got to know during our fieldwork always wore headscarves when they went out in public. Afrah’s daughters and nieces wore headscarfs when they went to Arabic School, but didn’t wear them to “English school” until fourth or fifth grade. When she was in fifth grade, Nadia dressed in hybrid ways, mixing assorted bits of culture. At a family math night she wore a head scarf of soft white fabric, the ends wrapped around her neck, a white sweatshirt with “Birthday Blast, Discovery Zone” in bright pink letters on the front, Nike shoes, jeans, and chipped off silver-blue nail polish; a bulky grey and black Oakland Raiders jacket hung on the back of her chair. Women and girls (including those as young as five) from another of the Yemeni families whose kids attend the Oakland public school are not so eclectic; they dress as they do when they’re in Yemen, with head scarves, long dresses, and leggings. Note that adherence to traditional culture is marked in the dress and comportment of girls and women much more than in the embodiment of boys and men.

Both of the Yemeni extended families make a point of taking their U.S. born children back to the home country so that they will get to know their relatives, come to appreciate Yemeni traditions, become more fluent in Arabic (spoken, along with English, in their Oakland households), and appreciate what they have in the U.S. Entire families journey back to Yemen, for occasional summer vacations and sometimes for longer periods of time. Afrah

Assad has a stock of before and after stories about the transformative effects of taking children back to Yemen; for example:

My nieces [ages 15, 13, 12, 10] went last summer, and you should see the difference. Before they went, they didn't want to listen to Arabic music and they didn't know the words. They only wanted to hear English music. When they went back home they got in touch with what we're talkin' 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.

However, trips back home don't always work out as parents intend. Twenty-seven year-old Khalid, Assad, who was born in the U.S., has been to Yemen once, when she was six years-old. The family was supposed to stay during all of summer vacation, but they got sick and returned to the U.S. after a few weeks. Khalid now has no interest in visiting Yemen, although she and her husband "try to keep our religion. Cultures and religions are different." She wears a headscarf, goes to mosque, and wants her children to grow up as practicing Muslims. But she and her husband agree that their three daughters should be able to choose whether, and whom, to marry. Khalid likes going to school and to her part-time job because "nobody tells me what I'm doing or where I'm going. It's a lot better." She wants her daughters to "make something of themselves," and she identifies with Yemeni women who are doctors and teachers.

Sending Kids Back

Few families in Pico Union have lived in the U.S. as long as the Assads, nor are they as well established; indeed, Pico Union often functions as a "first stop area" before migrants move out to other places. They live in a Spanish-speaking enclave near others with similar food and customs, and they aren't as intent as some Yemeni immigrants on "going back

home” for cultural replenishment (visiting relatives is another matter, of great importance to travellers in both transnational fields). Most of the Pico Union parents want their children to speak both English and Spanish (Orellana, Ek, and Hernández 1999) partly because they anticipate that, given the unsettled nature of economies and politics, the next generation may continue to navigate between the U.S. and Mexico or Central America.

When asked about the goals and hopes that guide the ways they bring up children, parents in the Pico Union focus group said that they want their children to do well in school, to secure decent jobs as adults, and to live in a moral way. When children seem to be going off track, for example, with behavioral problems at school, parents sometimes threaten to send them back to live with relatives in Central America or Mexico. More parents threaten “sending back” than actually carry through, in part because children actively resist, some by lording their own citizenship rights over their parents or by threatening to call “911.” Struggles about whether to stay or move back are a recurring theme in the generational conflicts of these families.

Parents’ anxieties about younger children (who are defined by dependence, vulnerability, and innocence) focus on questions of physical safety, with minimal differentiation by gender. As children grow older and more independent, especially as they make the transition to middle-school and into the heterosexualized positioning of “pre-teens” and “teens,” parents’ fears become more gender divided. While drugs are a general specter, parents believe that their sons are especially at risk of being drawn into gangs and violence. Fears about daughters focus more on the dangers of sexuality, especially the possibility that they will get pregnant or become promiscuous. This may also be a risk “back home”; one Mexican immigrant mother observed that girls back there get pregnant very young, and that keeping a daughter here, under the watchful eyes of her parents, may be the better strategy.

As they go about the difficult task of trying to keep teenagers out of serious trouble, parents actively weigh what might happen there compared with what might happen here, although the specifics of “here” and “there” vary widely.

The worries of Yemeni parents also become more gendered as their children move into middle school and especially high school. The parents are vigilant about the dangers not only of gangs, violence, and drugs, but also of alcohol (while they own liquor stores, Yemenis who consider themselves good Muslims do not drink or allow their children to drink) and any hint of teen-age romance (the line is drawn far short of actual sex). Sending back is a more practiced option for more affluent Yemenis than for the lower-income parents in Pico Union. Since most of the Yemeni teenagers are U.S. citizens, they can be more easily retrieved, and rural Yemen (the “back” in this case) is quite different, and distant, from Oakland. One of the Yemeni fathers told the story of a 15 year-old nephew who “wasn’t listening” and was getting into trouble; “he was having girlfriends and staying out all night and saying ‘It’s America, I can do anything I want.’” So they sent him back to live on the family farm and work in the orchards under the watchful eye and discipline of his grandfather. After a few years he returned “a different person,” got married to a young woman in the Bay area Yemeni community and now has his own store.

When Yemeni girls get into trouble – these stories mostly focus on trouble as being interested in boys – parents arrange marriages for them (girls have the option of refusing a particular groom).⁶ Khalid explained the philosophy:

It’s the culture. When they see a girl reach her puberty, instead of going out there and getting in trouble, in our culture, they like to keep them married. If something goes wrong, they have somebody to support them.

In recent years several of Nadia's cousins in the Bay Area got married at ages as young as 14. We recently learned that Nadia and her parents decided that she would no longer attend high school in Oakland because (in her mother's words) boys were "touching her"; Nadia switched to a home study program run by the school system which provides three hours of teacher assistance twice a week. Afrah Assad believes that home schooling is not an option for her boys, one of whom had been beaten up at school, because "if you tell them to do it, they won't finish it. They have to be in school." The raising and disciplining of boys extends beyond the family; girls, to varying and sometimes contested degrees, are more confined.

When they talk about the risks of raising children in the U.S., especially during the teen-age years, immigrant parents from Yemen, Central America, and Mexico refer to a kind of "freedom" quite different from the spatial freedom of younger children growing up in safe rural areas. This dangerous kind of freedom, which they associate with American culture and especially with American teens, is the freedom to "do whatever you want," to claim independence from family and parental authority, and to engage in age-graded activities like going out with friends, dating, and participating in commercialized youth culture. External forces like the media, and life in and around large urban middle schools and high schools (where youth, who are outside parental surveillance, may get drawn into drugs, gangs, sex) compound the risks of raising children in the U.S. This is especially true for immigrant parents who want to sustain beliefs and values they have brought from "there" to "here."

Conclusion

Families who raise children across national borders often compare life "here" with life "back home," a split orientation that brings perspective on and pressure to negotiate different ways of organizing labor, child-rearing, the process of growing older, and – embedded in all

of these domains of family life – relations of gender and generation. As Hirsch (1999) and Pessar (1999) have observed, the renegotiation of the authority of husbands over wives has been a central theme in feminist research on gender and migration. This literature highlights the horizontal or, as it is often called, gender axis of patriarchal kinship, but it has been relatively inattentive to the vertical or age dimension of family structure, which is also gendered. In this chapter we have examined the intersecting dynamics of age and gender in shaping the back-and-forth lives of migrants who are raising children, and growing up, in transnational families. We conclude by asking how patterns of transmigration, viewed from the perspective of migrants' U.S.-based lives, may, in turn, reconfigure their experiences of age and gender

The immigrant parents we have gotten to know through fieldwork in California tend to be ambivalent about the Americanization of their children. Many of these families migrated to the U.S. in search of educational and employment opportunities unavailable in their countries of origin, and they want their children to learn English, do well in school, and engage with life in this country. But immigrant parents also fear that their children will pull away from family obligations and cultural roots and succumb to the individualized excesses of “doing what you want,” which many immigrants regard as a central feature of life in America. This ambivalence, as previously discussed, mobilizes efforts to “take children back” and “send them back” to countries of origin.

American individualism is embedded in patterns of childrearing that emphasize the self-development of children and that frame the process of growing up as the negotiation of increased autonomy, the lessening of overt parental control, and the eventual shaping of one's own pathway through life. Families who come from rural ways of life in Mexico, Central America, or Yemen frame growing up not in terms of increased autonomy but as a

process of assuming greater responsibility within family systems of labor (Brannen 1996). Thus, Nadia Assad and Eva Morales experienced themselves, and were validated by their families, as growing older, in a gendered way, when they began to care for younger siblings and help with housework. The Assad boys grew older, also in a gender-marked way, when they began regular stints of helping in the family stores. Within these households, family-organized labor functions as a gendered “domain to grow by” (Haavind, forthcoming). Because these unpaid forms of work are organized and controlled by adult kin, partly under the guise of parental teaching, they do not become a basis for claiming individual autonomy or resources apart from the family. (This contrasts with immigrant women’s movement into paid labor, which provides spatial and material autonomy from the authority of husbands.)

On the other hand, adult authority may be undermined when immigrant parents depend on their children for help with tasks they cannot do themselves, like translating into English and dealing with U.S. bureaucracies. Children gain resources, and thus some autonomy from parental control, not only by attending school, but also through the U.S. discourse of children’s rights. Patterns of physical discipline that may be acceptable back home may be unacceptable in the U.S., and children of immigrants sometimes threaten to phone “911” to report what they regard as abusive behavior by their parents or other adults. The power and authority of parents over children, which has physical, economic, legal, and emotional dimensions, is double edged. When infused with an ethic of care, it may operate as the power to get things done—to protect, attend to needs, and help a child flourish. But adult power and authority may also shade into domination and exploitation. Which form of power is being exercised is partly in the eye of the beholder, and in

situations of sharp cultural difference, those from marginalized groups may be especially suspect.

The equation of growing up with increased autonomy to “do what you want” is amplified by commercialized youth cultures and styles of dress, music, language, and behavior that distance youth from their families. In the age-graded cultures of U.S. schools, the transition to middle-school is also a transition into social worlds that are organized around heterosexual dating and sexualized identities, making gender far more salient than in the official curriculum of schools (Thorne 1993). This world, which troubles parents from many different cultural and social class backgrounds, is sharply at odds with Yemeni prescriptions against casual heterosexualized contact. Mexican and Central American parents are less prohibitive in the domain of teen romance, but they keep an watchful eye on their daughters. In both our Los Angeles and Oakland fieldsites girls from immigrant families tend to be more spatially confined than boys (a pattern also reported by Olsen 1997; Kibria 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1999), although there is no shortage of worry about the dangers (drugs, gangs, violence) boys may encounter as they grow up in U.S. urban areas. Children and youth, as well as adults, are active participants in negotiating cultures, shaping pathways through childhood and adolescence, and in the short and long-term reconfiguring of family relations.

Notes

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1. Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994) introduced the concept of “transnational social fields” to refer to “multi-stranded social relations” developed through processes of migration across national borders, linking places of origin and of settlement. The transnational social fields that we discuss, which variously span between part of the U.S. and parts of Central America, Mexico, and Yemen, are well established, and for the families we describe, transnational practices are a habitual part of life as in the situations analyzed by Georges (1992), Guarnizo and Smith (1998), Mahler (1999), and Rouse (1991).
2. Research on the dynamics of age and migration has been conducted mostly under the rubric of “generation,” as in studies of assimilation that are framed by the distinction between first, second, and third generations. This usage, as Kertzer (1983) demonstrates, tends to confuse “generation” as kinship (relations of grandparents, parents, and children – a theme central to this paper); age cohort (a succession of people moving together through time); and “generation” in the sense of people who live in the same historical period. The latter two meanings are evoked by recent research on “the new second generation,” a term

used to refer to the children of contemporary immigrants, although it also extends to children who migrated along with their parents (Rumbaut [1994] calls the latter group the “1.5 generation”). Researchers who have studied “the new second generation” have primarily focused on contexts of reception, patterns of adaptation, modes of incorporation, and prospects for mobility of this cohort of children growing up in the U.S. (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou, 1997). This chapter explores dimensions of age that come to the fore when one highlights the presence and participation of children in processes of transmigration, such as the negotiation of age divisions and of shifting relations between adults and children as families move across space and through time.

3. The familiar assertion that age (in the relational sense of descent and generation) and gender (defined by heterosexuality) are axes basic to kinship and family structure has been unsettled by the deconstructive work of feminist and queer theorists such as Weston (1991). The empirical cases discussed in this chapter encompass varied constructions of “family,” both in the cultural and experiential sense of “who counts” and in the material sense of household dynamics. Our focus is not on reified conceptions of “family,” but rather on beliefs, relations, and social practices connected with child-rearing.

4. The Norwegian feminist psychologist, Hanne Haavind (1987; 2001) describes this relational process with the metaphor of a “running wheel” that turns in the minds of mothers and other engaged caregivers as they mentally record how a child is doing, both now and with an eye to the future, and as they adjust their daily practices in accord with these assessments, as well as other pressures and obligations. Children, in turn, monitor their own changing capacities, sometimes refusing to “go forward” or trying to accelerate the pace, and they may head in directions other than those mapped out by parents, teachers, or other adults who are raising them.

5. Our colleague, Hung Thai, took a close look at data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (2000) and found striking intersections by age and gender. Of all legal immigrants entering the U.S. in 1998, 53.5% were females and 45.4% were males. But there were skews by age groupings; women predominated among legal migrants between the ages of 20 and 39 and ages 55 and above. Men predominated among all migrants between the ages of 40 and 54. There were also more males than females among legal migrants between ages 5 and 19. Among adult legal migrants from Mexico, 57% were women and 42.9% were men; but among children and youth (ages 5-19) migrating from Mexico to the U.S., 52% were boys and 48% were girls. Statistics for Salvadoran immigrants fell into a similar pattern. Only 1,859 legal migrants from Yemen entered the U.S. in 1998 (compared with a total of 167,254 from Mexico or Central America – 25% of the total).

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