

CHILDREN AND YOUTHS'
MIGRATION IN A GLOBAL
LANDSCAPE

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CHILDREN AND YOUTHS' MIGRATION IN A GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

EDITED BY

ADRIENNE LEE ATTERBERRY
State University of New York at New Paltz, USA

DERRACE GARFIELD MCCALLUM
Aichi University, Japan

SIQI TU
New York University (NYU) Shanghai, China

AND

AMY LUTZ
Syracuse University, USA

SERIES EDITOR

LORETTA E. BASS
The University of Oklahoma, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Adrienne Lee Atterberry is a US-based Sociologist. She currently works as a PRODiG Postdoctoral Fellow with the title of Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Her research interests include international migration, parenting, and school choice. She is the author of *Optimizing the Benefits from Schooling: School-switching Behavior Among Return Migrants in India*, and *Pathways to US Higher Education: Capital, Citizenship, and Indian Women MBA Students*. Her current research investigates children's experiences of education within transnational social contexts, and teachers' work at elite schools. She is also working on a book project that examines parenting practices, school choice, and identity among transnationally mobile Indians and Indian Americans.

Derrace Garfield McCallum is an Assistant Professor of English and Cultural Studies in the Department of Global Liberal Arts at Aichi University in Nagoya, Japan. His main research interests include migration, transnationalism, family, race/ethnicity, multiculturalism, gender, care, and social policy. He is the author of *Untold Stories: Jamaican Transnational Mothers in New York City*; *Typologies of Caring Roles in Filipino Transnational Families: An Analysis of Care Circulation from a Life Course Perspective*; and *Going Home to Learn: Educational Journeys of Children in Filipino Transnational Families in Japan*. He is currently conducting research regarding the transition of Japan into a more multicultural society; primarily focusing on the experiences of relatively new migrant groups.

Siqi Tu is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow for Global Perspectives on Society at NYU Shanghai and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Ethics, Law, and Politics of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany. She received a PhD in Sociology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York (2020). Her research interests focus on global citizenship, elite education, global middle class(es), and contemporary Chinese societies. She is working on a book about Chinese upper-middle-class families sending children as young as 14 to the United States for private high schools.

Amy Lutz is an Associate Professor of Sociology in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. Her research interests include sociology of education, racial and ethnic inequality, and immigration. Her new coauthored book is titled *Parenting in Privilege or Peril: How Social Inequality Enables or Derails the American Dream*. Her current research includes a collaborative project on the school and early labor market experiences of children of immigrants in the United States, France, and Germany. She is also currently working on a collaborative project on mothers' experiences of remote schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Zsuzsanna Árendás is an Anthropologist, Ethnographer and works as a Research Fellow at the Center of Social Science since 2017, and a Research Fellow at Democracy Institute, Central European University (CEU), Budapest since 2014. She worked in a number of international research projects. She has also been a Visiting Faculty at CEU, Cultural Heritage Studies Program and Undergraduate Studies Program. She taught courses on transnational migration and mobility at the Open Society Foundation summer university (Chiang Mai, Thailand), at Roma Access Program of CEU and at Open Learning Initiative (Olive-Up) at CEU. She has published academic papers in English and Hungarian. Her main research interests include social mobility and education, transnational mobility, and children/youth, as well as the educational integration of immigrant children.

Adrienne Lee Atterberry is a US-based Sociologist. She currently works as a PRODiG Postdoctoral Fellow with the title of Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Her research interests include international migration, parenting, and school choice. She is the author of *Optimizing the Benefits from Schooling: School-switching Behavior among Return Migrants in India* and *Pathways to US Higher Education: Capital, Citizenship, and Indian Women MBA Students*. Her current research investigates children's experiences of education within transnational social contexts, and teachers' work at elite schools. She is also working on a book project that examines parenting practices, school choice, and identity among transnationally mobile Indians and Indian Americans.

Rosa Capobianco is a Professor of Statistics in the Department of Education Science of the University of Roma Tre, where she teaches Social Statistics and Statistical Methods for the Analysis of Social Data. She is the author of numerous essays about issues of statistical methodology and data analysis.

Ernesto Castañeda is an Associate Professor of Sociology at American University in Washington, DC and the Founding Director of the Immigration Lab. He is the author of *A Place to Call Home: Immigrant Belonging and Exclusion in New York, Paris, and Barcelona* (Stanford University Press 2018); *Building Walls: The Exclusion of Latin People in the U.S.* (Lexington Books 2019), and with Charles Tilly and Lesley Wood of *Social Movements 1768–2018* (Routledge 2020).

On Ni Chan is a Fellow of the Women Leaders Program to Promote Well-being in Asia, one of the six Leading Graduate School Programs of Nagoya University, Japan. Her recent publications include a chapter titled "Reconsidering Inclusive Migrant Education: The Case of Burmese Migrant Youth in Thailand" in

Education and Migration in an Asian Context by F. Peddie & J. Liu (Eds.). She has a keen research interest in educational opportunities of underrepresented young migrants in transnational contexts.

Pradeep Kumar Choudhury teaches Economics at Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the recipient of China–India Visiting Scholar Fellowship (2021–2022), jointly hosted by the Asian Century Foundation and Ashoka University, Delhi. His research interests span a wide range of issues in education and development economics. Currently, he collaborates with the Delhi Science and Technology Cluster, IIT Delhi, and recently completed an international comparative study on assessing and improving the quality of higher education with Stanford University, USA. His co-edited volume titled *Contextualising Educational Studies in India: Research, Policy and Practices* was published by Routledge India in 2021.

Cynthia Cristobal holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology from American University in Washington, DC. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Social Work at the University of Southern California.

Judit Durst is a Sociologist, Ethnographer, a Hon. Research Fellow at the University College London, UK, in the Department of Anthropology, and a Senior Researcher at the Center for Social Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Science. She has been a Faculty Member on Central European University Summer University's Romany Studies Program for many years; and was on the Scientific Committee of the European Academic Network on Romany Studies. She holds a doctoral degree in Sociology. Her main research interests include ethnicity, poverty, reproductive decision-making, economic anthropology, and transnational and social mobility. She has published several academic papers and book chapters.

Angel A. Escamilla García is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell University's Migrations Initiative. His research focuses on children and youth living in high-risk environments, especially migrants. His current project uses ethnographic methods to explore how Central American youth navigate the constant threat of unpreventable violence as they traverse Mexico on their way to the United States. His other research interests include indigenous youth migrants and the history of sociology.

Mauro Giardiello is a Professor of Sociology in the Department of Education Science of the University of Roma Tre. He teaches Sociology of Education and Family and Social Networks. He is the author of numerous essays and books on the study of local communities, youth culture and public space, social cohesion and generativity, and marginality.

Angrej Singh Gill is an Assistant Professor (Economics) at Panjab University Rural Centre, Kauni, District, Sri Muktsar Sahib (Punjab), India. He completed

his MA and PhD in Economics from Punjabi University, Patiala. His major area of interest is *Economics of Education*. He has authored numerous research papers published in prominent research journals, and presented papers in various national and international conferences. He has also written articles that are published in newspapers. At present, he is carrying out a Azim Premji University-sponsored research project entitled “*State, Market and Universalization of Elementary Education in Punjab*.”

Daniel Jenks is the Deputy Director of the Immigration Lab and a graduate student in Sociology at American University in Washington, DC.

Noémi Katona finished her PhD in Sociology at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2020. Her dissertation focused on prostitution and human trafficking. Since 2017, she works at the Centre for Social Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre for Excellence as a Research Fellow. She is a Member of the Working Group for Public Sociology “Helyzet.” Her main research interests include gender, migration, prostitution, and care work.

Vera Messing is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center of Social Science since 2004 and a Research Fellow at Democracy Institute, Central European University, Budapest since 2008. She has experience in empirical research on ethnicity, minorities, migration, social exclusion as well as social science methodologies. Her work focuses on comparative understanding of different forms and intersections of social inequalities and race/ethnicity and their consequences. She was part of a number of European comparative research projects in the past 15 years and is the principal researcher of the Hungarian team of the European Social Survey. Currently, she works on “MIMY: Migrant youth integration and empowerment” (H2020) researching on young migrants in vulnerable conditions. Her publication list includes articles and book chapters in international academic journals.

Serah Shani is an Associate Professor in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Mercy College in New York, USA. She conducts research in Africa and the African Diaspora. In the USA, her research broadly explores the intersection of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, health and sociocultural life of immigrants in urban settings and how these aspects inform access to social services and socioeconomic mobility. Her current research looks at urban immigration, global and transnational movements, identities and the sociocultural economic adaptation of recent African immigrants to the United States. In Africa she has conducted research on the configuration and consolidation of elites in Kenya. She is also author of two books: *African Immigrant Families in the United States: Transnational Lives*, and *Schooling and Indigenous Elites in Africa: The Case of Kenya's Maasai*. Most recently, she has been awarded a generous grant from The John Templeton Foundation for her project titled: *The Cultural Evolution of the Conscience, Virtues, Character Development, and Human Progress*.

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INTRODUCTION – CHILDREN AND YOUTHS’ MIGRATION IN A GLOBAL LANDSCAPE: YOUNG LIVES LIVED IN MOTION

Derrace Garfield McCallum and
Adrienne Lee Atterberry

As globalization continues to affect every aspect of contemporary life, new communication and transportation technologies allow frequent and multidirectional flows of people, ideas, goods, and cultural practices. Consequently, increasing numbers of children and youth are becoming more involved in migration, whether they are physically mobile or otherwise involved in transnational networks. Indeed, migration as an actual part of one’s life history or as an imagined future has become an important dimension of the lived experiences of many children and youth globally. Additionally, the relatively young are growing up in a world characterized by different forms of mobility that are complex, multidirectional and increasingly dynamic (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry 2007; Veale & Donà, 2014).

CHILDREN AND YOUTHS’ MOBILITY

As Fresnoza-Flot and Nagasaka (2015, p. 30) elaborates, many children and youth are living “mobile childhoods” whereby they “... experience fluxes and movements in different contexts (familial, social, political, cultural, material, symbolic, and so on) and periods of life related to migration.” Indeed, many recent scholars and researchers have shown interest in interrogating migration experiences during the life course stages of childhood and youth. These studies document a broad range of developmental transitions experienced by young

people. In some cases, we see that children and youth live highly mobile lives while in other cases, for instance, children of migrants experience mobility vicariously through their parents' migration or through a globalized youth culture that brings the world to them, even if they never leave their home communities (see Gardner, 2012; Knapp & Krall, 2021; White, Ni Laoire, Tyrrell, & Carpena-Mendez, 2011). Children and youths' mobility, in this sense, incorporates varied aspects of their actual or subjective experiences; as well as the macro-level processes that surround their lives and socialities.

Some scholars have conceptualized a "mobility turn" in sociological and migration studies while others have detailed a new "mobilities paradigm" (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Urry, 2000, 2007). Using this framework of interrogation, it is possible to focus on children and youths' passage through time and space, as well as between social classes. Moreover, the larger repercussions of these movements are foregrounded and scholars are now recognizing the implications of different patterns of mobilities across and within national borders for varied reasons. Indeed, in elaborating their concept of "mobile childhoods," Fresnoza-Flot and Nagasaka (2015) emphasizes that, as well as spatial mobility, it is crucial that the temporal and contextual mobility of children and youth in transnational contexts be considered. According to them, these considerations reveal the various forms of mobilities that children experience as a result of migration. Many children and youth, today, are considered as transnational and/or mobile because they exist within transnational networks and social fields.

Over the last few decades, a growing number of migration scholars have embraced a transnational perspective, which explores the diverse social relations and linkages that migrants and others in their social networks maintain across international borders. According to Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton (1994), transnationalism can be understood as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p. 6). This initial conception has since been widely accepted and developed by other scholars (see Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Pries, 2005; Smith, 2005) who stressed the fluidity of social spaces within which transnational migration takes place. Moreover, they elaborated the simultaneous embeddedness of transnational migrants who maintain multidimensional relationships in multiple geographies. As some scholars highlighted, transnational migrants "live across national borders and link together different contexts" (Schuerkens, 2005, p. 550). Thus, through their interactions with migrants, even those members of the social network who have not moved physically are drawn into these processes of social change. In other words, even the lives of children and youth who are "left behind" are transformed by new life experiences and perspectives obtained and shared by migrants (Levitt, 2001). Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) idea of "transnational social fields" emphasizes the possibility of a space where national borders blur and actors and processes in diverse geographies become as one, virtually cohabiting within the same social space.

Certainly, not all scholars accept such a conception of children and youths' mobility. Nevertheless, scholars such as [Veale and Donà \(2014\)](#) argue that children of migrants are often not physically mobile, but their active imaginations and subjective experiences pull them into the mobility framework. This dimension of mobility is possible based on [Urry's \(2007\)](#) elaboration of five forms of mobility: physical, corporeal, imaginative, virtual, and communicative travels. Hence, it is necessary to consider that children (whether or not they move) are social actors living and interacting within broader transnational social fields and are affected by global socio-political processes ([Levitt, 2004](#)).

The mobility perspective, therefore, considers all forms of mobility, including daily routine movements around the immediate physical spaces (homes and communities), as well as long distance migration and virtual mobility facilitated by communication technologies. It is about people's dynamic encounters across space and time. We adopt this broad conception of mobilities in this edited volume. We believe that such a comprehensive framework allows us to adequately understand the migration of children and youth in a global landscape.

MIGRATION CONTEXTS WITHIN A GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

Migration offers a wide range of opportunities and constraints for children and young people. Globally, many children and youth migrate for personal or collective pursuits such as education, work or pleasure. Their migrant experiences are likely to include favorable outcomes, while simultaneously being curtailed and constrained ([Lems, Oester, & Strasser, 2020](#); [Smith, Rérat, & Sage, 2014](#)). As young migrants are characteristically embedded in overlapping contexts, they often experience emotional and other dislocations associated with their mobility. However, the way they experience and negotiate these dislocations are influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, class, ethnicity, and migration policies.

For instance, some globally mobile children of highly skilled expatriates who frequently move with their parents, or children whose family can afford to send them off to overseas-based schools or colleges, may have less fractious experiences as compared to refugee children and youth who are more likely to be subjected to complex systems of immigration control and limited social support that already assumes they are outsiders and, in some cases, criminals ([Chase & Allsopp, 2021](#)). The former group of children and youth may be privileged to have access to cosmopolitan lifestyles characterized by frequent travel, the ability to speak various languages, frequent consumption of fine cuisine and multiple nationalities and passports, etc. Regardless of the specific nature of migration experienced by different groups of children and youth; in this edited volume, we acknowledge and highlight that they are all constantly making transitions as they navigate social, political and emotional spaces on their way to adulthood.

As children and youth navigate their lives and relationships, there is an exigent need to study, document and theorize their narratives to make sense of their everyday lives. In the realms of migrant children and youths' ordinary lives, migration and mobility (physical and social) is often intertwined with life course trajectories as they proceed from childhood, through youth and toward adulthood. [Skeldon \(2012\)](#) argues that such transitional processes involve all kinds of changes, and he prompts us to contemplate the interconnections of children and youths' transitions within the wider economic, social, political and historical contexts. In that sense, it is important to capture children and youths' meaning-making over time and space ([Holmegaard, Ulriksen, & Madsen, 2015](#)). We are, therefore, interested in the ways children and youth actively make sense of the complex social environments they are moving through.

The editors and contributors of this edited volume recognize that the most central element of our academic and sociological exploration is the comprehension of children and youths' personal and collective quest for human dignity, contentment, security, and achievement. In their pursuits, transitions across time and space coincide with cultural and social shifts that may expose them to new places, people, foods, morals, customs, religious practices, and other social encounters. As children and youth navigate these (new) spaces, they might experience inclusion and support; as well as isolation, exclusion and discrimination. These are often spaces riddled with uncertainty and precarity, but also where aspirations abound. It is within these sites and spaces of encounter that identities are (re)negotiated, (re)constructed, and reinforced. We are interested in these encounters of transition. We would agree that there is something profound and worthy of interrogation about these experiences of not just "being" but of "becoming"; of transformation, of engagement with self, others and the surrounding contexts. Recognizing that these are opportunities for creative (re)invention, even as they are disruptive, in this volume, we seek to develop a better grasp of the complexities involved in the relational dynamics that characterize the migration experiences of children and youth across the globe.

EXISTENTIAL AGENCY IN TRANSITIONS

Life transitions are essentially about an interplay of personal, social and historical processes ([Chase & Allsopp, 2021](#)). As children and youth travel their life journeys, their personal realities unfold within socio-political and cultural frameworks that are global in nature. Within these expansive contexts, children and youth are often thought of as ill-equipped or unprepared to take on the journeys or to properly navigate the complexities involved ([Lems et al., 2020](#); [Ní Laoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrrell, & White, 2010](#)). However, the editors and contributors of this volume are attentive to the ways in which children and youth actively make sense of the complicated environments they are moving through. Our emphasis is, therefore, on children and youth as competent experts of their own lifeworlds; as observers, participants and orchestrators of their desired destinies, despite contextual constraints.

Agency as a concept has featured prominently in studies regarding children and youth over the last few decades. The historical conceptualization of childhood and youth as just a transient pathway to a more desirable state of being an adult has been profoundly challenged across many disciplines (Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015; Oswell, 2013). Until more recently, children and youth were regarded as developing beings and not as social actors exercising their agency; an understanding of childhood and youth as the ages and stages of human development that culminated in the psychological and social maturity of adulthood (Han & Antrosio, 2015). Nowadays, more and more social scientists are creating space for the agentic voices of children and youth to surface. These scholars are rightfully shifting our focus to the perspectives of young people (see Coe, Reynolds, Boehm, Hess, & Rae-Espinoza, 2011; Dreby, 2007; Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015; Parreñas, 2005; Veale & Donà, 2014; among others).

As it relates to the experience of migration and mobility among children and youth, scholars have made much progress recently in sketching a full picture of the lived experiences of transnational children. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly crucial that children and youths' experiences of migration be aptly documented and theorized (Ní Laoire et al., 2010). Indeed, Oswell (2013) underscored that the new social studies of childhood have started highlighting the agency of children and youth in situations of migration and mobility. Still, many scholars continue to be discontented with adult-centric studies, which tends to discuss children as appendages of adults' narratives or as objects of adults' direction and guidance on a path to a desirable adulthood (see Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015). In other words, children and youths' agency and viewpoints are often stifled or diluted.

While efforts are being made to center children and youths' experiences of migration and mobility, we still do not know enough about the nuances of how different groups of children and youth across the globe navigate their shifting socio-political and cultural terrains. How do these young people deal with the ambiguities surrounding their liminality? What ideas and memories about their childhood and youth are being generated and stowed in their consciousness? How do they make sense of the daily struggles they are confronted with? What hopes and dreams propel them on their journeys? These are some of the questions we aim to explore in this volume.

By bringing together rich ethnographic accounts of the migration of children and youth across the globe, this volume demonstrates the divergent and particular ways childhood and youth are experienced, interpreted and theorized in different contexts. In keeping with our focus on the lifeworlds of children and youth, we are in concert with a growing cadre of social scientists and researchers who deploy ethnographic methods to gain a more nuanced understanding of children and youths' lived experiences (see Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015; Ní Laoire et al., 2010; Ní Laoire, Hite, & Skelton, 2017; Veale & Donà, 2014; White et al., 2011; among others). Our aim, in this volume, is to center children and youths' narratives. In doing so, we are careful that we adequately consider their current situations in relation to their histories and futures. We are also keen to grasp their interactions with the surrounding contexts and constraints. In our assertion that

children and youth must be brought to the forefront of our analyses, we are especially attentive to the imperative of not essentializing the categories of childhood and youth, since they have diverse meanings and realities in different contexts.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE VOLUME

The volume opens with Angel A. Escamilla García's (Chapter 1) discussion of the effects of Mexico's deportation and detention policies on the geographic mobility of minor migrants from Central America. In this chapter, García documents the motivations behind the US' externalization of its southern border to Mexico, and, in response to the US' border externalization, the perilous journey that minor migrants face as they travel northward with the goal of making it to the USA. García complements the discussion of US–Mexico border policies with minor migrants' narratives. In doing so, this chapter explores how minor migrants navigate the perils of corrupt government officials, their long and perilous journeys northward, and the emotionally taxing asylum-seeking processes.

In Chapter 2, Ernesto Castañeda et al. move us from Central America to the USA. This chapter, which draws upon interviews with immigrant minors from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, relays the varied experiences minor migrants have when relocating from Central America to the USA to live with their biological parents or legal sponsors. The stories they include describe the diversity of minor migrants' experiences as they integrate into family life in the USA. Their experiences range from feelings of emotional distance from parents/legal sponsors to having a sense of comfort and safety. Minor migrants' different responses to the family integration process are due to a variety of factors. Some of these factors include emotional trauma, differences from their US-based family members/legal sponsors, and their connections to family back "home." The central concern of this chapter is how minor migrants generate a sense of familiarity within a relatively unfamiliar space.

Adrienne Lee Atterberry (Chapter 3) moves us from talking about issues related to belonging within family contexts, to exploring how the transnational migration process affects youths' understanding of their ethnic identity. She does so by analyzing interviews with Indian American college students. Her respondents are youth who lived in the USA for part of their life, before moving to India. They once again relocated back to the USA to complete college. In this chapter, Atterberry describes how national context shapes transnationally mobile Indian American youths' relationship with their ethnic identity. She relays her participants' experiences of marginalization on account of their racial-ethnic background in the USA, which contrasts with their general feeling of ease within India. She also documents how youths' participation in ethnic return migration serves as a catalyst for them to redefine their ethnic identity and re-evaluate the status of their ethnic identity relative to that of their US-raised Indian American peers. Atterberry documents how the ethnic return journey ultimately leads to transnational Indian American youth feeling *different from* Indian Americans

raised *only* in the USA. In making this argument, Atterberry contributes to conversations related to transnational mobility, multiculturalism, and identity.

In the following chapter, Mauro Giardiello and Rosa Capobianco (Chapter 4) highlight issues related to inclusion and belonging among migrant schoolchildren in a rural town in Italy. The authors discuss migrant children's experiences of marginalization and exclusion within their community and school, while also documenting the opinions of privileged witnesses, which include school managers, representatives of voluntary associations, social service operators, and political actors. This study analyzes quantitative and qualitative data to explain how and why migrant children experience their communities and schools differently from their Italian peers, and the relatively paltry response of leaders within their community to effectively address this situation.

In a gripping account of the experiences of West African Muslim youth in New York City, Serah Shani (Chapter 5) discusses how youth navigate various aspects of their lives, including their religious identity, morality, and career pathways. The author does so by inviting readers into the lives of West African Muslim youth who attend a weekly Madrasa at a mosque in the Bronx borough of New York City. The stories conveyed in this chapter provide a detailed portrait of the complexities of being a West African Muslim youth in the USA.

The next chapter scrutinizes how social status, racialized class belonging, and capital affect the schooling experiences of return migrant children. Focusing on the case of return migrants and their children in Hungary, Zsuzsanna Árendás et al. (Chapter 6) argue that the children of high-status families experience educational "gains" from their trips abroad, while children from relatively low status families experience "losses." In some cases, the educational "losses" experienced by children from low status families result in them being in a worse position at school relative to where they would be had they not ever left Hungary. Árendás et al. suggest that this differential in outcomes results from how local schools recognize (or fail to recognize) the non-dominant cultural capital that children acquire while abroad. For example, this chapter discusses how schools fail to recognize the non-dominant cultural capital of children from low status families. Meanwhile, the non-dominant cultural of children from high-status families is not only recognized, but also rewarded. For children from high-status families, the recognition of their non-dominant cultural capital serves to reinforce their dominant cultural capital and, subsequently, their social status. Therefore, this chapter asks readers to consider how schools may reinforce social inequality.

On Ni Chan (Chapter 7) moves the conversation about schooling and inequality from Central Europe to Southeast Asia. In this chapter, Chan discusses the appeal of migrant learning centers (MLCs) to migrant youth from Myanmar who currently live in Mae Sot, Thailand. In doing so, Chan scrutinizes the unique and comprehensive resources provided by MLCs, while deftly critiquing their ability to effectively connect their students to robust career and higher education opportunities. In constructing this chapter's argument, Chan underscores the gaps between migrant youths' education and aspirations.

The concluding chapter, written by Pradeep Kumar Choudhury and Angrej Singh Gill (Chapter 8), synthesizes many of the themes discussed throughout the volume. Through an examination of the current literature, the authors explain why youth migrate for higher education, and the mechanisms that facilitate their educational mobility. To do so, this chapter delves into how the quality differential between colleges and universities in the Global North relative to the Global South, parental and youth aspirations, and access to the requisite resources propels the willing and economically able to universities abroad. While the act of going abroad may help some acquire the skills needed to navigate opportunities within the twenty-first century's global economy, the authors stress how this process reinscribes enduring forms of social inequality.

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY ...

This volume takes us on a journey into the lives of transnationally mobile children and youth from across the globe. The chapters highlight the experiences of those from Central America, the USA, Italy, Hungary, and Thailand, while exploring topics related to migration policy, family integration, ethnic identity, belonging, religion, education, and aspirations. Not only does this volume reflect the geographic diversity of the children and youth engaged in transnational mobility, but it also covers a wide variety of topics related to “everyday” aspects of what it means to be a transnationally mobile child or youth.

Furthermore, this volume is a timely contribution to a growing body of literature that offers deep insights into how children and youth within migration contexts are engaging with rapid and constant social change. Each contribution shares new and fresh perspectives on unique contexts and directs us toward a deeper contemplation of the transitions children and youth experience across time and space. Situated in the mobile lives of children and youth across the globe, this book pulls us into an encounter with the realities of young lives lived in motion. We hope you join us on this dynamic journey.

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