Independent Child Migration in Southern Benin:
An Ethnographic Challenge to the 'Pathological' Paradigm*

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by

Neil Howard
Dphil Development Studies,
Department of International Development, University of Oxford,
neil.howard@qeh.ox.ac.uk

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Introduction

'People say that moving is bad but what alternatives do they offer? ... They have never even been here to find out how we live'.

(Interview with Trevor, 30/08/2007)[1]

In the contemporary discursive space inhabited by international civil society actors focused on child welfare, independent child migration is often characterised as a negative process that hinders positive 'child development'. Migrating children are seen as prematurely isolated from parental warmth, exposed to exploitation or rendered vulnerable to the insalubrious aspects of the 'adult-world' significantly before they are 'ready' (see, for example, UNICEF 2002; ASI 2003; Ouensavi and Kielland 2000). Intricately linked to these understandings has been the emergence and growing importance of the notion of 'child trafficking' within international debates around child protection. Described recently as 'a global problem' that 'strips children of their childhood' (Boonpala and Kane 2001:1), trafficking has become a central preoccupation of governments and NGOs around the world (see Kempadoo 2005).

In July of 2005 I began working with a Beninese Child Rights NGO in Cotonou and was immediately exposed to the governmental and non-governmental concern at the apparent 'problems' of trafficking and migration. The consistent flow of research, funding and rhetoric ensured that these 'problems' remained on the policy agenda and the result was that children's 'best interests' were promoted particularly by their being encouraged to stay at 'home' (see, also Thorsen 2007; Whitehead et al. 2007). Village committees were established around the country with the help of UNICEF Benin and other major donors specifically to 'sensitise' both children and their parents to the dangers of child mobility (UNICEF Benin and CEFORP 2004). National icons were encouraged to speak out against 'the phenomenon', again by big donors such as UNICEF Benin, and the singer Angélique Kidjo even released a song -*'Ces Petits Riens'* ('These Little Nobodies') - in which she cautioned against the dangers of letting children depart.

Increasingly, however, dissenting voices have begun to emerge, offering a challenge to the stereotype of the 'child-victim' who is threatened as soon as she leaves home. Acutely aware that the dominant narrative of child migration fails to reflect the intricacies of every child's migratory experience, a number of critics have begun to question the dominance of institutional representations. At the ground level, these critics have included some of my own colleagues and their misgivings have recently been mirrored by a handful of academic publications. O'Connell Davidson and Farrow, for example, have argued for the importance of a holistic approach to the analysis of child migration. According to them, greater attention needs to be paid to the social, cultural, political and economic context within which migration takes place in order to avoid the typecast

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[1] All names have been changed to protect the identity of informants. See references for details. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French are my own.

categories prevalent in much of the literature (2007:9, 24-25). Similarly, in her study on separated children, Gillian Mann has emphasised the importance of using relevant 'ethnographic evidence' in order to avoid the generalisations which ignore the positives children can draw from the migratory process (2001:38).

Central to the thrust of these new perspectives is the increasing realisation that many orthodox institutional understandings of children and their worlds are based on a number of unquestioned normative assumptions about the way people(s) do (and should) organize their lives. These can include the nature of family structure, the place of children within that structure, the trajectory of human maturation and the relationship between people and place (see, for example, James and Prout 1997). In the case of child migration, Whitehead et al., amongst others, have argued that these normative understandings can be identified as revolving around a largely Euro-American set of tropes, including the nuclear 'family' as the locus of healthy childhood and 'home' as a geographically and genetically delineated space (2007:7).

Gillian Mann has noted how these assumptions themselves are dependent in large part on the influence of Western developmental psychology, for which children everywhere 'develop' according to set patterns and rules. Most influential in this regard has been the work of John Bowlby, for whom the 'attachment' of a child to its parental caregivers forms the basis of healthy maturation (2001:13). Given this understanding, Iman Hashim has argued that the largely Western-influenced anti-migration literature views the child's departure as an *inevitably* counter-productive, counter-rational movement (2003:2). Deviance from the norm is thus conceivable only 'through the lens of crisis', as a result of poverty (and hence lack of alternative), ignorance or unruliness (Thorsen 2007:7). For Hashim, what this amounts to is nothing less than the discursive 'pathologising' of the child's migratory process (Hashim 2003:2).

This is problematic not simply for the fact that it involves a misrepresentation of realities that are multiple and varied (Whitehead et al. 2007), but also because, in classically discursive fashion, these representations serve to negatively act upon and reductively mould those very realities themselves. Following Boyden, the normative assumptions that construct child migration as a 'problem' offer ever-greater legitimacy to the state's managerial incursion into the lives of children and families, specifically in order to 'fix' that problem. (1997:207-8). Accordingly, an increasing number of governments have passed legislation restricting the mobility of minors, criminalising displacement and problematising what had previously formed the entrenched coping strategies of the poor (ibid. See also Thorsen 2007; Whitehead et al. 2007; Hashim 2003). Importantly, this has also been the case in Benin, as the state has recently promulgated a law effectively criminalising the independent movement of children (Loi Nº 2006-04).

Given this situation, then, and the fact that, as James and Prout have argued, erroneous and harmful discourses are constantly reproduced and multiplied by those upon whom they act (1997:23), a challenge to the dominant paradigm seems essential, in order to free both people and policy from the chains of orthodox representation. This paper aims to offer such a challenge.

The second half of this introduction will provide a brief context for the research setting and will clarify the key concepts that will underpin the following discussion.

Section one develops the theoretical framework forming the basis of this project. It will begin by using context-relevant institutional literature to outline the central unquestioned assumptions upon which dominant 'pathological' representations of independent child migration are based. A critical discussion (and deconstruction) of these accepted concepts will be offered and normative conventions about family, childhood, migration, maturation and children's agency are all problematised.

Section two is the first of four sections that offer an ethnographic application of the theoretical critiques outlined in section one. Along with section three, it will draw on primary and locally grounded secondary data to present a contextual picture of Southern Beninese social structures and the norms that frame them. Both sections will highlight the social forces generated by these norms and will explain how, in contrast to the 'pathological model', child mobility is perceived as natural, likely and indeed positive in the region.

More specifically, section two will show that child mobility is inherent to structures in which both childcare and identity are communalistic and that it is made more likely by the systemic centrifugal forces operating to encourage out-migration by children and young people. Section three, in turn, will examine the socio-cultural, economic and historic place of migration in Southern Benin, showing it to be an integral, natural, generative process in the lives of many Southern Beninese, including children. I demonstrate that it is understood not as a 'rupture' but as part of a broader process that often involves the maintenance of original pre-migratory ties. Rather than a response to crisis, it is also often viewed as a proactive strategy for the accumulation of social status and economic capital.

Sections four and five will build on this and offer a further demonstration of the 'pathological' model's inapplicability to the Southern Beninese context by presenting empirical findings from the 60 interviews I carried out with Beninese children and adults. Both sections present answers to the central research question: why do children and young people leave the parental home in Southern Benin? They each discuss the decision-making processes involved and highlight the important trends in reasons given. Section four offers insights into the type and nature of familial decisions, situating the parental decision for children to leave in the context of collective survival strategies *and* collective/individual self-advancement, as well as contextual understandings of child development. Southern Beninese families are shown to make reasoned choices based on an understanding of their lived realities, to which they respond in ways that demonstrate the inter-generational distribution of power. In similar vein, section five presents children's own independent reasons for migrating and explains that, despite their relative powerlessness vis-à-vis the adults that comprise their socio-cultural worlds, children do have agency in the decision to migrate. Though children, as well as adults, can choose migration as a response to 'crisis', this is far from the only reason for which children

independently migrate. Together these sections lead into a conclusion, ultimately problematising institutional understandings of independent child migration.

Setting the Context for Research

This paper offers an exploration into the nature of independent child migration in Southern Benin and the ways in which this is institutionally perceived. Given the critical approach that it will take, however, the central concepts in this discussion must be defined at the outset. Though, as the following chapters will argue, 'children' and 'childhood' are situational concepts varying according to time, place, culture and social structure, amongst other things, and though the notion of 'independent child migration' has itself also recently been problematised (see, for example, Iverson 2002), the institutional literature on the topic takes children to mean individuals under the age of 18 and independent migrants to be those who migrate without their families. As we will be reflecting on the appropriateness of such institutional designations, I have chosen to engage with them on their own terms and, for this discussion, will define 'children' and 'independent child migrants' in the same way.

The social structures, cultural norms and economic geography relevant to this thesis will all be discussed in detail in sections two and three. I need only specify here then that, in focusing particularly on Southern Benin, my choice was motivated a) by logistical considerations (to cover the entire length of the country would have been impossible given the time constraints), b) by the recognition that, despite their differences, the four principle ethnic groups of the region (Adja, Fon, Minan and Yoruba) have historically been seen to comprise one broad ethno-cultural and economic region, the '*Adjatado*' (see Savary 1976) and c) that the NGOs and INGOs active in the region focus the majority of their projects in the South.

The research detailed in this thesis draws on 10 weeks of fieldwork carried out between July and September 2007. Given that I am exploring the nature of independent child migration and the way that this is institutionally perceived, six weeks of fieldwork were spent working in an INGO shelter for rescued children in Cotonou. The remainder of my time was spent doing interviews, structured observation and gathering secondary data in Cotonou, or in interviewing representatives of migrant-sending communities in the rural South. The data reviewed in this paper are drawn from the wider literature, representative policy documents, fieldwork observations and from 60 interviews, 30 with adults and 30 with children. Of the adults, eight were NGO or INGO representatives, three were 'former traffickers' and the remainder were either parents of migrated children or members of communities identified as important sources of out-migration. Of these, a further seven were themselves former child migrants. Amongst the children there were 11 girls who had been either domestic servants or hairdressing/tailoring apprentices and who were now in the care of the Centre (seven) or back in their villages (four). Nine of my child interviewees were street-hawkers interviewed in central Cotonou in an area often frequented by child salespeople. A further nine were male apprentice blacksmiths at work in the central market of Cotonou. Six were self-identified temporary migrants in the city for the summer holidays to earn enough money to go back to school. The same was true

also of three other children though they were from Cotonou and had not migrated. For further details, see References. Further details of methodology can be found in the methodological appendix.

Section 1 - A Theoretical Framework:
The 'Pathological' Paradigm and Its Discontents

Introduction

This section will present the theoretical framework underpinning the empirical challenge made by this paper to the 'pathological' institutional model of independent child migration in Southern Benin. Though, in certain instances, such migration *can* take the form outlined by the 'pathological' model, it is my contention that in the majority of cases it does not. While this will be demonstrated empirically in sections two to five, in the present section I will draw on theory to underline my case. The section will suggest that the disjunct between reality and institutional representation results principally from the way in which the 'pathological' model is conceptually framed. Relying largely on a central collection of powerful implicit assumptions, the model is inapplicable to the context of Southern Benin. In order to show this, the section will begin with a selective review of representative institutional depictions of independent child migration in this and the surrounding regions. These will be drawn principally from the institutional bodies spearheading the propagation of this model, namely UNICEF Benin, the ILO, various government departments and a core of indigenous NGOs. From their documents I will draw central examples of the assumptions and accepted truths upon which this model is based. In the second part of this section I will take these assumptions and, with reference to relevant theoretical and empirical material from the emerging critical literature, will deconstruct them. As such, the section will lay the theoretical foundations for the empirical discussion to come.

Seven Central Assumptions

A review of the major institutional literature pertaining to Southern Beninese independent child migration reveals that analysis and understanding is structured around seven main assumptions. These are:

1) That there is such a thing as 'normal, healthy child development'.
2) That this development depends on the close bond formed between parents and children and, in turn, that children need to remain in close parental contact for this bond to be strong.
3) That migration away from 'home' is therefore 'bad', given that it 'ruptures' this bond and thereby the process of 'healthy child development'.
4) That this is made worse by the generalised negativity of the consequences arising from migration.
5) That migration therefore only occurs as a result of extreme circumstances, such as orphan-hood, poverty or parental ignorance.
6) That parental ignorance manifests itself in the persistence of the historical-cultural practice of intra-kin child placement, even though this practice has become distorted as a result of the corrupting influences of colonial and post-colonial economic and cultural imposition.
7) That children are non-agentive and would never independently *choose* to migrate.

Such assumptions permeate the texts in question and can be demonstrated by a brief overview of some paradigmatic excerpts. Given that the first three are largely bracketed together in statements on the negative developmental effects of child migration (the first two being more or less implicitly implied therein), we will deal with them together.

1), 2) and 3): 'The migratory rupture and its negative consequences for healthy child development'

According to the ILO, 'a child is a child' and, as such, 'it is our duty to ensure that children develop fully' (BIT 2006:vi-vii). Such development is indeed a child's 'right' and includes, at a minimum, 'medical care, schooling, play time and a family environment' (ibid.7). This assessment is paralleled by Kielland and Sanogo. For them, 'above all, the four most basic needs of children worldwide are love, protection, food and education'. 'Traditionally', 'in African culture, the child's closest family and kin would…cover all these four needs' (2002:1) and, when they do, a child's development can be said to be 'full' and 'harmonious' (BIT 2006:vi-vii).

For Dogbe Gnimadi (on behalf of UNICEF Benin), however, 'nowadays, a child's life can sometimes oblige him to work for other people or for far-off relatives who deprive him…His physical, nutritional, intellectual, social and economic development are consequently all often under threat' (1999:11). The consequences of this are depicted emphatically by Fangbo Egin, whose thesis is a point of reference in Cotonou's UNICEF library:

> 'Given that he left his place of birth when still very young, that he returns as an adult with no qualifications, and that he is at a loss for how to survive, [the former child migrant] becomes a beggar. In the worst cases, he becomes the local criminal; he vandalises, takes drugs, becomes an armed robber. [He] needs to be rehabilitated' (2003:46).

The movement here then is clear. We begin with a universal, happy childhood, guaranteed and secured by the 'love' and protection of the geographically and genetically defined 'family environment'. This childhood 'develops' accordingly (and teleologically) in fullness and in harmony until, at a certain stage, it is shattered by separation. This separation consequently inverts the developmental process, leaving us, at its end, with the antithesis of harmony.

In both Fangbo Egin's and Dogbe Gnimadi's portraits, the defining moment of this antithesis is the unspoken departure from the village. The difference between 'home' and 'elsewhere' is both implicit and decisive. 'Elsewhere' is seen to deform or even reverse the 'natural' progress of maturation, the picture of abuse being a clear inversion of the implicit counterfactual that is represented in the harmonious 'family home' of Kielland and Sanogo and the ILO. The importance of this home to the development it guarantees is made clear by these authors. For them, this model is applicable to all children, as is

underlined by the phrases 'children worldwide' and 'a child is a child', the semantic circularity of which implicitly denotes a universal totality.

4) 'The generally negative consequences of migration'

For many of the institutions involved in child rights and welfare in the region, however, child migration is not negative solely for the fact that it truncates this process of 'healthy child development'. In many cases, this negativity is seen as intrinsic to the process of migration itself. Thus, migration is variously a 'phenomenon', a 'curse' or a 'problem' in the institutional literature on the topic (see, for example, MFPSS and ARD 2002; Fangbo Egin 2003).

This negativity is further emphasised by the broad tendency of the literature to conflate the process with 'child trafficking'. One classic example of this is the 2002 report by the Beninese Family Ministry and the Danish Embassy which aimed at developing 'a strategy to combat *migration and trafficking* in the Zou region' of Southern Benin (MFPSS and ARD, emphasis added). In this report, the reader is told that migration has a historic precedent in this part of the country. Immediately thereafter, however, the text slips imperceptibly into a discussion of recent trafficking trends and concludes that 'the problem persists still today in the form of child placement' (ibid.1). Thus the textual movement from migration to trafficking and back again is complete and the reader is left with the impression of a certain conceptual interchangeability between the two processes. This interchangeability is further entrenched later in the report, as one central recommendation offered for the dual 'fight' is to 'sensitise' villagers to 'the negative consequences of child migration' in general (ibid.38).

Similar ellipses are present also in the 1998 report by CEO and UNICEF Benin into international child trafficking in Southern Benin. In this document, international trafficking is described as 'a simple outgrowth of domestic trafficking (rural-urban migration, familial placements, etc.)' (1998:31). Here the clarificatory parentheses contain examples *only of migration* rather than of trafficking, thus semantically collapsing the two processes into one. More emphatically still, in their concluding analysis of the different types of migration relating to trafficking, we find the following sentence:

> 'In the three regions concerned by the study, the populations in question continually tried to disguise the traffic of children through other types of migration' (ibid.19).

The possibility that these populations were telling the truth and were engaged in legitimate, non-exploitative child migration is not even considered. The collapse of one into the other is therefore complete.

5) 'Pathological causes'

Given what has been shown above, it should perhaps be unsurprising that the next move in the discourse is to attribute the causes of migration-trafficking entirely to extreme, extraneous conditions. It is assumed that, under the circumstances, no informed parent would willingly *choose* to let a child migrate (the possibility of a child choosing independently is also discounted, as will be demonstrated below). 'Poverty', 'ignorance' and 'hardship' are therefore the central explanatory tropes in this pathologising analysis.

For AFJB, 'rural poverty, illiteracy and an ignorance of child and human rights' are central to the fact that parents let their children leave (2000:1). Similarly too for CEO and UNICEF, who describe 'food insecurity, worries for the future [and] extreme poverty' as the '*forces* that *push* peasants' to place/traffic their children (1998:10, emphasis added). Likewise also for the ILO, according to whom 'economic and social poverty' are the key. More generally, 'political *instability*, the *impoverishment* of households, *traditional* practices encouraging movement outside the nuclear family, *irrational* beliefs…*forced* marriage, as well as regional *conflicts*…have all contributed to the unprotected movement of children' (2006:v, emphasis added).

The descriptions above implicitly deny agency to the actors involved in the migratory process. Structural causes are enumerated and an automatic cause-effect chain is established. Crucially, each cause contains an unexpressed counterfactual *norm*, against which the abnormal context of migration can be established. Stability, sufficiency, rationality, modernity, education, peace and non-coercion all comprise this normative landscape.

6) 'Parental ignorance, the placement of children and its modern distortions'

The 'parental ignorance' referred to above is largely cited in relation to the continuing of 'traditional practices', which, under the stress of modernity, have become distorted or corrupt. 'Child placement', 'fosterage', or '*vidomègon*' (in Fon) has a long history in Southern Benin and in the surrounding regions. Variously explained as a sign of solidarity, an act of collective assistance and an expression of 'African' familial values (see, for example, Adihou and ASI 1998; AFJB 2000), the vast majority of the literature on child migration and child trafficking now sees this placement as an integral negative force contributing to the exploitation of children.

According to AFJB, the once positive system of child placement has been 'perverted'. 'No longer a means of healthy socialisation, the humiliating practice…of chaotic placement' is now the norm (2000:6). A similar analysis is made also by UNICEF and the Beninese Family Ministry. They write of the need to 'fight', 'eradicate' or 'ban' the 'phenomenon'. For them, 'parental motivations for child placement are financial and material. This was not always the case' (1997:49-50). According to their civil society interviewees, 'the child was once seen as a collective treasure belonging to the entire community. In these good old days, placement had no economic connotations' (1997:43). Such a picture is paralleled too by Fangbo Egin. For him:

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> 'The trafficking we see today is no more than an evolved, modernised form of certain practices adopted by our ancestors…[In the past], child placement was a social act. Widespread across this cultural region, it was a form of mutual solidarity to offset the effects of poverty…With modernity, however, the system has taken on new dimensions…through which the child has become "a commodity" that we buy' (2003:40-1).

Clearly, then, the vignettes above revolve around a halcyon conception of pre-modern social relations. Parents are ignorant because they are unaware that child placement has become negative. The reason for this negativity is that now the practice has taken on 'modern', economic connotations. Once again, there is no place for agency in this analysis. Impersonal social forces are understood as key.

7) 'The non-agentive child'

Even more incapable of agency, in this script, are the children who constitute the focus of the literature. Children, it seems, are considered entirely incapable of *wanting* to migrate. As such, none of the major institutions even consider such a situation. The pioneers of this perception, again, are UNICEF Benin and the ILO. For the latter, 'children need to be saved' (BIT 2006:4). Accordingly, in their analysis, no mention is made of children actively saving themselves. Everywhere it is 'we' who must 'fight' for 'them' not to have to migrate (ibid. 2006:vi-vii). Similarly, for UNICEF Benin and CEO, two types of migration are identified in Southern Benin - labour migration and forced migration. In the former category we find 'adults' as the principal actors involved. In the second, we find children. Children are thus conceived as entirely devoid of agentive power, capable of displacement only when forced by the adult world (1998:19).

More generally, this lack of agency has been formalised on the international legal level most emphatically in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, (otherwise known as the Palermo Protocol). In this document, 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation' is considered trafficking, *regardless* of whether or not the child gives his or her consent (UN 2000). In similar fashion, Benin's own national law-makers have since followed suit. At the end of 2006 the President ratified a bill according to which 'no child can travel inside the country unaccompanied by his biological parents or other legal guardians without special authorisation granted by the competent local authority' (Article 7, Loi Nº 2006-04). As such, the child is constructed specifically as a non-agent unable to migrate independently.

Deconstructing the 'Pathological' Paradigm

The normative assumptions permeating the institutional literature on child migration should by now be apparent. The purpose of this section, therefore, will be to introduce the theory and beliefs upon which they are based and to deconstruct them using the

alternative theory and empirics that have emerged over recent years in response to their hegemony.

Let us begin then by examining the core of the institutional pathologising – the assumption that independent child migration is negative because it hinders, or even reverses, the 'normal' process of family-based 'child development'. According to Gillian Mann, such a conception rests principally on the influence of 'mainstream psychological research', including, primarily, that of Jean Piaget and John Bowlby (2001:17).

Piaget held that 'normal' children everywhere develop according to what he described as a set of 'stages', namely the 'sensorimotor', the 'preoperational', the 'concrete operational' and the 'formal operational'. These stages demarcate the gradual transition of a child's cognitive development from that of an infant to that of an adult (Inhelder and Piaget 1958). They are seen as inevitable and, indeed, 'invariable: normal children go through [them] in the same order' (Mussen et al. 1984:227). This analysis finds itself echoed also in Bowlby's work, specifically in his 'theory of attachment'. For Bowlby, 'attachment' refers to 'the affectional bond' that humans form between one another. These bonds structure the human experience and, fundamentally, depend on the 'original', 'primary' bond between parent and child. The most important bond of all, he states, is therefore 'that between a mother and her young' and this is the central foundation upon which 'normal', Piagetian, healthy child development can occur (1968[2007]:84-5).

That this is the case is demonstrated for Bowlby by an analysis of patient pathologies. Evaluating his patients' problems, he retrospectively deduces their cause to be either a malformation of the maternal bond or 'a deviation' from its 'normal relationship' (1977[2007]:163). 'Psychiatric disturbances in childhood', he claims, are largely attributable to 'disruption of bonds once made' (1968[2007]:88). Similarly, in adulthood, 'cruelty, sexual promiscuity or perversion,…addiction, suicide [and] repeatedly abandoning [one's] job' are all seen as the direct consequences of such deviation (ibid.88-9), as are anxiety, insecurity, immaturity and depression (1977[2007]:162). Sociopathy and indeed psychosis, too, are seen as the result of 'faulty development having occurred in an atypical family environment'. 'Atypical' is of course taken to mean one in which the said bond had not developed 'normally' (1968[2007]:87).

Despite the enormous influence of this model (see Woodhead 1990), neither Piaget nor Bowlby remain free from critique. Chief among their detractors, it seems, are those who point to the ethnocentricity and normativity that sees both theorists conflate what are trends observed in one society with universal human processes. According to Rose, this is perhaps unsurprising in Piaget's case given that his sample is made up almost entirely of Western, nursery-going children observed performing the same tasks (Rose in Jenks 1996:26). The same is true also for Bowlby, the vast majority of whose research was carried out in London. Thus, Mussen et al., for example, have demonstrated how Piaget's developmental paradigm rests on very Western assumptions about cognitive reasoning (1984:236). Similarly, for Woodhead, Bowlby-esque analysis relies on '*cultural* [read:

Western] prescriptions for childhood…presented as if they were intrinsic qualities of children's own psychological make-up' (1990:74, emphasis added).

This ethnocentricity is further demonstrated in the critical, historical and comparative ethnographic literature. Beginning with Philip Ariès, a number of scholars have demonstrated how even in Piaget and Bowlby's West, childhood has either been unknown or very differently expressed (1962). Hugh Cunningham, for example, documents the changes which British childhood has undergone over the past millennium, arguing that children have variously been disregarded by the Middle Ages, idolised by the Romantics and disciplined by the Victorians (2006). In the contemporary world too, childhood is seen to vary widely, representing very different things for each different culture. So, what Thorsen refers to as the 'globalised childhood' of Western norms, for example, does not apply to the Burkinabé child migrants with whom she works (2007). Thus, while in the Piaget-Bowlby model 'child development is assumed to take place in stages [that are] natural and universal' (Mann 2001:18), a good deal of literature has begun to show both child development and childhood as anything other than 'natural' or 'universal'. Indeed, for Jenks, 'childhood is not a natural but a social construct' which *varies with time and place* (1996:29).

It is not only the childhoods depicted by Piaget and Bowlby which vary empirically, however, but also the familial contexts within which they 'develop'. The 'bond' that Bowlby describes certainly does not apply everywhere in the same way. In the most extreme example of divergence from his 'script', Scheper-Hughes has demonstrated how mothers in the Alto do Cruzeiro shanty-town of Northern Brazil selectively choose which of their offspring to nurture and bond with, depending on their assessment of each child's survival chances (1987). In a different context, Alber has shown that, among the Baatombu of Northern Benin, parent-child bonds are not even an option. Here it is in fact culturally inappropriate for biological parents to maintain close geographic and parental contact with their offspring, for in this social system solidarity is maintained specifically by an extra-biological rotation of children (2003). Even parenthood itself, then, represents different things in different contexts.

This is indeed further demonstrated by the 'sociocentric' familial and parenting practices in which the parent-child bond remains intact, only in more diffuse form. This is the case, for instance, in much of West Africa. This region has long been noted for its traditions of 'child fosterage', whereby young children are sent to live with relatives in order, amongst other things, to ensure their healthy maturation (see, for example, Goody 1982; Nhlapo 1993). The practice is thought to be so widespread that up to 18% of all children live without their parents in the region (Mensch et al. in Mann 2001:24). Though these children often live (for at least certain periods) away from their mothers and fathers, it is not the case that their development is 'impaired' by 'shattered' bonds. Nor is it true that, given the relative 'weakness' of the parent-child bond, other bonds are similarly fragile (see Bowlby 1968[2007]:87). Quite the opposite seems in fact to be the case. Gillian Mann has drawn on the work of Thomas Weisner to illustrate this point. For Weisner, the multi-caregiver societies that comprise much of the non-Western world, including West Africa, produce children characterised by 'the diffusion of affect' and 'attachment to

community'. These children are often cared for by older siblings or non-parent adults. In such environments, parental 'attachment' and the parent-child 'affectional bond' can therefore be less central to a child's life. They are often still important, but remain contextualised within the wider relations of the sociocentric *community* (Weisner in Mann 2001:33). As such, the nuclear family upon which the entire theory of 'attachment' is predicated seems entirely context-specific.

Clearly, then, the Bowlby 'norm' of parent-child bonding applies explicitly to a certain social and cultural milieu. So too for Piaget's developmental stages, which have been challenged even by Western academics observing different generations of Western children (see Mussen et al. 1984:229). When removed from their context, it seems, the Piagetian/Bowlbian analyses appear more normative than insightful. Their applicability, therefore, must necessarily be seen as limited. When this realisation is made, the 'pathological' model of independent child migration begins to look thin. If separation is not *necessarily* bad for the maturation of a child, then it is not inconceivable that parents might actually choose for their children to leave. As such, their migration does not *automatically* have to result from 'pathological', crisis-situations.

That this is the case is indeed further confirmed by certain ethnographic studies, in which, far from being a negative truncation, migratory parent-child separation can actually be understood as a positive stimulus for child development. Rousseau et al., for example, demonstrate how, in certain Somali groups, the practice of sending young boys away to learn about tending cattle is seen as an essential step on their road to maturity (Rousseau et al. in Boyden 2003). Castle and Diarra, too, have shown that, in Mali, both parents *and* children perceive migration away from the familial home to have positive effects (2003). This analysis is echoed also by O'Connell Davidson and Farrow. For them, 'when rural children reach the age at which they would normally be expected to start earning independently and/or contributing to the family income, they are often unable to find paid work in their home area. Many therefore migrate to where work is available, a decision that is often viewed as positive by both the children concerned and their parents' (2007:23). Migration in this picture thus embodies the very *confirmation* of (local) developmental norms, rather than their curtailing.

Furthermore, in societies in which the young are expected to contribute actively to familial economic and social standing, child migration is often recognised as a proactive, positive, collective livelihood strategy. Hashim, for example, has shown this to be the case in her study of independent child migrants from Northern Ghana. She shows that child migration is seen as a strategy that brings benefits 'at the level of the household' *and* 'also at the level of the individual child' (2005a:34). Equally, in Thorsen's research, migration is seen by children and their families as a source of livelihood, with young people 'repeat[ing] the wish to support their parents or guardians in the village' through their earnings elsewhere (2007:16). Such a perspective has also been confirmed by Riisøen et al., who show how individual children are often perceived as vehicles for collective advancement across much of West Africa (2004).

In explaining why child migration may have such positive connotations, then, we should perhaps note that, throughout the world, economic resources are variably concentrated and so, as the early Todaro models of migration show us, people are often inclined to move from where there is little to where there is more (Harris and Todaro 1970). Taking a Bourdieusian perspective here, however, might profitably broaden our analysis. Bourdieu famously theorised that economic capital is only one of many 'capital' components underpinning social standing: symbolic, social and cultural capital being another three (1984; 1986). Building on this, Rye has recently argued that migrants move not only in order to increase their economic capital, but also their cultural capital and, thus, their 'social standing' (2006). Similarly, using Bourdieu's definition of social capital - 'the aggregate of actual or potential relationships which are linked to possession of durable networks of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (1986:247) – an understanding of migration as a positive force becomes almost inevitable. The more useful and well-placed contacts one accumulates, the greater one's stock of social capital. As such, the more one moves, the more one might be expected to increase such stock.

According to some authors, then, the general anti-migration tropes prevalent in much of the institutional literature (assumption four) have causes deeper than is suggested solely by an analysis of the impact of developmental psychology. Indeed, many claim that they are the consequence of a broader pathologising of the phenomenon of migration itself, as a result of which much ordinary migration is either demonised or conflated with human trafficking (see Howard and Lalani 2008; Kempadoo 2005). This is due, in large part, to a generally sedentarised/territorial bias on the part of many policy-makers. This bias has been demonstrated widely by various scholars (particularly in the field of forced migration), and is argued to have emerged in parallel with the rise of the politico-territorial state (Scott 1998; Scalletaris 2007). When tracing the development of this state and its bureaucracy, Scott introduced the concept of 'legibility' to analyse the top-down perspective a state has on its people. This legibility, he argues, is made more difficult by popular mobility and so early efforts at state-bureaucratic formation naturally worked to suppress it (1998).

Though the sedentary populace was not always and everywhere the norm, then, its formation seems to have been internalised, taken as a given, and turned into the central perspective for policy analysis. Thus, for Scalletaris, 'movements of people are *always* seen as problematic, almost *pathological*. The problem to be solved is related to displacement itself, rather than to the circumstances that induced displacement. As the term "dis-placement" itself seems to indicate, it is assumed that there is a place which individuals belong to, where their roots are and this is the place where they are naturally supposed to stay' (2007:46-7, emphasis added). Such an assessment finds favour also in the work of De Haan, for whom 'views about migration and migrants are often based on an assumption of sedentarism, that populations used to be immobile and have been uprooted by economic or environmental forces' (1999:5). That this is inapplicable to all cases is demonstrated by historical and contemporary ethnographic studies of either nomadic or non-sedentary people. David Rain provides one example, with a study of Sahelian circular migration in Niger. In this picture a centuries-old practice of dry-season

migration is described, challenging the belief that movement is always reactive (1999).

Intricately linked with this sedentary discourse is the widespread and also unquestioned artificial distinction between home/family and away/non-family. This distinction is particularly apparent in the sixth assumption identified above - that child placement (*vidomègon*) has now become exploitative simply because it has taken on monetised connotations and that, under the circumstances, 1) it should be stopped and 2) its prevalence can therefore only be explained by parental ignorance. This analysis, however, is itself based on two crucial accepted truths, namely 1) that 'home' and 'family' are safe and protected, while away and non-family are not, and 2) that the domestic sphere is economically unproductive, in contrast to the public, productive realm.

These assumptions have been widely critiqued as both inaccurate and normative. Rosalind O'Hanlon, for example, has exposed the first as resting on a powerful colonial patriarchal discourse that institutionalised the disenfranchising of women and children by confining them to the home on the pretext that they needed 'protection' (2001). Such a discourse finds itself echoed even in the work of Bowlby, for whom the essence of the mother-child bond was 'protection from predators' (1968[2007]:87). The second accepted truth too, is based on a highly patriarchal conception of the nature of production, and found itself exposed and exploded by Ester Boserup's study of domestic labour and intra-household distributions of power (1970). For the institutional analysis of the 'economisation' of child placement to hold, it must also be true that child labour in the home and child labour historically in households into which children had been placed possess(ed) no economic value. Boserup, however, clearly shows this to be false, demonstrating the household production of value to be a collective, if not always remunerated, enterprise (ibid.).

Historical and contemporary studies of the processes of child fosterage also belie this simplistic institutional characterisation. Guillaume et al., for example, have argued that even unremunerated, intra-kin fosterage is a way of evening the spread of children across the extended family, sharing both the burden of care and the fruits of labour (1997). Alain Adihou, too, explains how, in Benin, the 'ancient' practice of fosterage is often based on an analysis of labour shortages (with ASI 1998:4). Thus, elderly relatives who need to be supported often receive children, a perspective that is in fact confirmed by the historical ethnographies of both Mercier (1963) and Argyle (1966). Moreover, as Jacquemin demonstrates, while it is true that child placement has recently taken on more monetised forms (2000), this does not automatically correspond to abuse or exploitation. Indeed, she demonstrates how the kin/non-kin distinction is not that which defines whether or not a child placed as a domestic servant will be exploited (2006). Clearly, therefore, the institutional designation once again falls short of representative accuracy.

The view that children (as residents of the domestic realm) are not economically productive, is integral also to the constitution of our final assumption – that of the non-agentive child. An analysis of the nature of this assumption and a review of the critical literature that challenges it demonstrates that this is a convention based on a historical

combination of three principal forces. The first is economic, the second ideological and the third psychological. Firstly, as Zelizer, amongst others, has explained, children in the West were not always considered non-economically productive. In reality, children were gradually removed from the labour market as capitalism in the region developed. With development, production became more specific and less labour-intensive, fewer jobs were therefore available and adults consequently claimed them as their prerogative (1985). Intricately linked to this were the combined forces of Enlightenment Romanticism and Victorian Evangelism, which, according to Hendick, constructed the child as an 'innocent' in need of both protection and formation. (1990).

Such views also carried over into the third central force – that of child psychology. Once again, the crucial figure here is Piaget and his notion of cognitive development. As an example of the nature of his views regarding children's agentive capacity, the following abridged extract merits being quoted at length:

> '"The child does not build systems. His spontaneous thinking may be more or less systematic…The child has no powers of reflection- i.e. no second order thoughts which deal critically with his own thinking. No theory can be built without such reflection (Inhelder and Piaget 1958:62). Feelings about ideals are practically nonexistent in the child…This is to be expected…The notions of humanity, social justice…freedom of conscience, civic or intellectual courage, and so forth,...with the child's mentality, except for certain individual glimpses, can neither be understood nor felt (Inhelder and Piaget 1958:69)"' (in Davies 1984:277).

The child is thus conceived as an automaton, an instinctual individual responding automatically to stimulus without consideration. As such, she is constructed as the opposite of the rational adult self from whose perspective Piaget writes. That this is inappropriate is perhaps intuitive. The crying toddler, for example, often displays considered agentive power in the very recognition that crying will obtain the caregiving attention desired. Similarly, for Davies, children not only actively perceive their worlds, they also actively engage themselves in them. The following is a conclusion she draws from empirical psychological evidence designed to challenge Piaget's caricature:

> '[Children's] ability to know themselves, to know others and to interact competently with others in a complex social world is not limited by any deficit in cognitive functioning that I can locate, nor through an inability to act on the basis of moral principles where these are relevant. Certainly the content of their world is different from adults, as is their context…They have thus developed the requisite skills for interacting with members of the adult world with all their conflicting principles and behaviours. They are practical theorists: they ground their statements of theory in the events of the everyday world, and they use those theories as a basis for action in and upon the world' (1984:18).

Davies' perspective is paralleled also by the work of Boyden and Levison (2001) and Levison (2000). Both authors draw on observations of economically, politically and socially active children around the world to highlight the disjunct between orthodox representations of children and children themselves. The normative assumptions which

construct the child as a non-agent, then, are widely seen to be inapplicable. This will be demonstrated empirically in the following discussion.

Conclusion

In this section I have endeavoured to demonstrate the inapplicability of the 'pathological' model of independent child migration. Through an elaboration of the implicit assumptions that permeate its textual representations, I have shown the model to revolve around a set of central, unquestioned conventions. These in turn are shown to be based on a number of theories which are themselves characterised by normativity. Using the emerging critical literature I have deconstructed both these theories and the assumptions to which they have given rise. In so doing, I have strived to show theoretically how the 'pathological' model is a construction and not a reflection of 'reality'. As such, its descriptive and analytical powers are limited. In the following four sections I will empirically demonstrate this to be the case. The picture that will emerge from these will be complex and will challenge the central assumptions detailed above by offering an alternative picture of multiple and varied realities. It will show independent child migration *sometimes* as a response to structural factors and *sometimes* as unwilled. Mostly, however, it will represent a careful, reasoned agentive decision on the part of both adults *and* children.

Section 2 - Childhood, Family and Social Structure in Southern Benin: Embedded Mobility and Centrifugal Outflows

Introduction

This section represents the first of four empirical discussions designed specifically to build an ethnographic vignette of the nature of independent child migration in Southern Benin. In line with the critiques offered in the theoretical framework, it seeks to offer a balanced and contextually grounded picture of social life in the region, highlighting particularly those aspects of Southern Beninese social structures which make child mobility both *natural* and *likely*. In so doing, the section aims to offer a platform for exploring the migratory process in Southern Benin and a framework within which the migration of children can be understood, not necessarily always as a reactive, enforced or exploitative movement, but rather as one embedded in deep yet ever-evolving socio-economic and cultural realities. The section will draw principally on primary and locally-grounded secondary data and will argue, first, that child mobility is widespread in a region where social organisation (including childcare) is both communalistic and collectivized. Second, it will posit that beneath the surface of collective sociality there lie historically embedded, internal, structural conflicts that operate as centrifugal forces encouraging out-migration by children and young people as a reasoned expression of self-realisation. Finally, it will draw attention to the changes wrought by 'modern' challenges to 'traditional' social forms and will highlight the impact that these changes have had in further fostering child migration. As such, the section presents a challenge to a number of the assumptions prevalent in the dominant 'pathological' model.

Social Families: Collective Living as a Basis for Child Mobility

The organisation of Southern Beninese socio-cultural groups has been widely characterised as communalistic (see, for example, Adihou and ASI 1998; Mercier 1963). According to commentators, this communality is expressed variously and communal living and eating arrangements (Field Notes, 27/08/2007), group linguistics (see Adéèkò 2005:122; Kopytoff, 2005:131) and collective property-management (Argyle 1966:137) are all said to be important. Crucially for the purposes of this paper, however, one major expression of this communality comes in what Nhlapo has described as 'social parenthood'. For him, 'as a concept, social parenthood primarily relates to those pro-parental institutions where the roles of parenthood are split, delegated or transferred while the link between the child and the biological parents remains intact' (1993:37). In other words, it relates to the situations in which children are the responsibility of a wide number of caregivers, be they siblings or non-parental adults. At the most basic level, this means simply that children can receive instruction from any social senior and, at the most complex, can find themselves 'fostered' to adults other than their genetic parents.

In the case of the groups with whom I lived and worked in Southern Benin, the realities of such a social system were more than apparent. At the day-to-day level, my

observations point to a very diffuse, collectivised approach to the chores of child rearing. With regards discipline, for example, I found it not uncommon to observe errant children being berated by any present elder, including older children. Similarly, with personal hygiene, older children often washed their younger peers while adults performed other household tasks. Further, at the structural level, I found it very common for children 'in need' to be living with adults other than their biological parents. Of the ten children and young people I lived with, for example, only two were the biological offspring of the household head, the others being largely the children of poorer relatives (Field Notes, 22/08/07). Similarly, in a rural setting, I spoke with Adam, who had four youths living with him, all of whom were the children of his brother, who had recently passed away (Interview with Adam, 21/08/2007), while PJ, who had 17 children in his care, was responsible for the nine children left to him by his dead sibling (Interview with PJ, 30/08/2007).

What must be noted, however, is that these collective approaches to parenthood and the mobility they entail are not simply the outcome of communal approaches to responsibility-sharing (see Bledsoe and Brandon 1992 for more on this) – they are also a question of collective *resource*-sharing (Adihou and ASI 1998:5). In a sociocentric space in which the collective is key, individuals (and especially children) are often conceived largely as collective assets that have to be formed for the good of the collective and to which all members of the collective have access[2]. As such, 'the-child-as-collective-asset' reveals two other central functions of social parenting: namely, 1) to mould the next generation into actively contributing collective assets and, 2) to allow different parts of the collective to access the asset-value that children represent.

Firstly, then, as Adihou explains, children in Southern Benin are often 'educated' by any elder seen as more able to inculcate the gender- and age-appropriate roles expected of members of the group (with ASI 1998:9). Sometimes this will occur at 'home' but frequently it will involve the child relocating. Often, as Le Biavant-Aureggio observes, this is because it is felt that the experience of difference will teach the young 'to adapt and cope in different environments' (1994/5:22). The reason why such 'coping' is important, it is argued, is because in a resource-poor environment such as this, independence and 'self-sufficiency' are highly valued. Thus, children are sent to where these qualities can be developed as soon as is possible (Adihou 1998; see also Hashim 2005 for a similar discussion).

Secondly, and equally importantly, research demonstrates that children are sometimes relocated from biological to social parents in this region specifically in order to respond

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[2] This is perhaps particularly the case with children, as children are seen as the embodiment of 'communal patrimony'. Indeed, it is frequently asserted that 'the child is a precious thing' (UNICEF Benin 1996:48) or 'a gift from God' and equally often that 'the child belongs to everyone', all of which demonstrate the perceived *value* of children. This is attributable to a number of factors. Firstly, as Argyle has shown historically with the Fon, the preservation of the lineage is a central social consideration (1966:141), while, for Mercier, children have great ritual and spiritual importance specifically because they represent the next generation of that lineage (1963:149). Beyond this, children are seen as important symbols of power - strong, influential men and their families have many offspring and numerous people in their care (Argyle 1966:136), while Mercier has argued that, in a region where physical security has not always been easy to guarantee, an extensive lineage and many 'allies' can be very important (1963:299). More fundamentally still, of course, UNICEF Benin show that in a society in which production is very labour-intensive, having a big family is seen as central because it means that 'more land can be cultivated' through the essential contribution of children's 'indispensable' labour power (1996:48-49).

to more immediate, wider, *collective* imperatives. According to Alber, these can be many and varied and include the need to reallocate labour power from households in which there is too much for production to be efficient, the need for elderly relatives to have daily support and the need for the child (and through him or her, the family) to access opportunities (2003:488). As such, in the words of Isiugo-Abanihe, such child relocation 'is largely a consequence of the need to reallocate resources within the extended family or kin group' (1985:56), while for Adihou, 'child placement' in Southern Benin is very often a practice of sending children to relatives 'lacking in domestic labour-power' (with ASI 1998:4).

What this brief discussion should point to, therefore, is the very mobile, fluid nature of childhood, childcare and child rearing in the highly communal, socio-centric space that is Southern Benin. Collective considerations are central to social organization and a key manifestation of this is the fact that children are seen as both the *responsibility* and the *wealth* of the collective. In such a situation, familial child mobility is a central social norm, embedded in the very essence of Southern Beninese social worlds[3].

Hierarchies, the Distribution of Power and Entrenched Centrifugal Forces

Though the picture elaborated above underlines the highly communitarian nature of Southern Beninese social groups, what is much less frequently acknowledged, particularly by the members of those groups themselves, are the hierarchies and conflicts that lie beneath the surface of collective harmony. The purpose of this section will be to explore these conflicts and demonstrate their role in the generation of systemic centrifugal forces, as (particularly young) individuals seek to break away from the social authorities that structure (and restrict) their life-worlds (see Kopytoff 1987 for a general historical discussion of this process).

In recent decades, much feminist research has emerged to challenge the collectivist paradigm that characterises socio-cultural groups such as those in Southern Benin, and feminist scholars have made great strides forward in disaggregating the individual component parts of perceived collective agents like the household (see Folbre 1986; Katz 1995; 1997; Haddad and Hoddinott 1995). At the origin of this new departure is the realisation that, contrary to traditional understandings, these collective agents are not homogenous communal entities, but rather a number of tightly inter-related individual agents within a collective structure. As such, the focus shifts to the intra-collective dynamics at play within collective entities and recognises the potential for disharmony between actors. In highly sociocentric communities such as those of Southern Benin, this disharmony can often result in the desires and interests of the individual being subsumed within those of the group, and both the literature and my observations show this to be the case.

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[3] That this is the case has in fact been shown statistically by a number of recent studies. One author suggests that as many as 17% of 6-9 year-olds and 22% of 10-14 year-olds are fostered out in Benin (Pilon 2003:11), while the latest census claims that that over 20% of Benin's people live in households other than those of their biological parents (2003:xxxii).

One classic illustration of this can in fact come in the decisions involved in the process of child relocation. Despite the socio-centrism outlined above, it is not inconceivable to find children relocated against their will and one frequently hears the justificatory refrain, 'it's in the family's best interests'. It is indeed for this reason that, despite her cries to the contrary, Elisabeth was told that, '*for the good of the family*', she had no alternative but to go to work in Nigeria (Interview with Elisabeth, 25/07/2007), while Yasmine was sent against her will to work in Abidjan, irrespective of her painful experiences in Accra (Interview with Yasmine, 25/07/2007).

Similarly, drawing on the observations made by Le Herissé, Argyle showed these conflicts historically at work in the instrumental relocation of young men for the maintenance of 'the family name' and the corresponding lineage property. He states: 'one of the principles governing inheritance and succession was that "the name should never disappear". If a man had founded a compound of his own, the memory of his name had to be preserved'. Consequently, 'even if an heir had gone off…the first male child born to him of the wives he inherited would be considered the son of his deceased father'. This child would then 'be sent to live in the original compound and take over the property of the founder' (1966:134). Though Argyle was writing over 40 years ago, my recent discussions revealed similar practices still to be prevalent today. One young man I was told about, for example, had been forced to leave the school he attended in the city for just this reason (Field Notes, 08/08/2007).

What must be realised, however, is that just as there are agents for whom the expression of the 'collective' will represents a constraint, so there are agents who have the power to articulate and enforce that will on the collective's behalf. When one examines the finer mechanics of these decisions and the processes that lead to them, what emerges are very clear lines demarcating the intra-collective distribution of decision-making power. As with many social groups in this region, the axes along which this power is distributed in Southern Benin are marked by both gender and generation, with power firmly concentrated in the hands of older men. For reasons of space, we will limit ourselves to two illustrative examples.

First, we will examine the issue of marriage. While, according to both my observations and those of Savary, a certain degree of autonomy is afforded to individuals in choosing potential marriage partners (1976:122), it is still apparent that fathers, as the representatives of familial authority, exercise a good deal of influence over the process. This is the case particularly with girls and was demonstrated to me by a story a key informant told me in a village near Bopa. A number of years ago, a village girl had fallen in love with a Spaniard who had been volunteering in her community. The man shared her feelings and had asked permission to bring her back with him to Europe. Unfortunately for them, they found her father immovable in his opposition to the union and so it was forbidden, the girl remaining in Benin and the Spaniard returning home without her (Field Notes, 01/09/2007).

Though this expression of intra-collective power betrays both its gender and generational components, our next example regards the power that older men have over their younger

male peers and, as such, is a prime example of specifically inter-generational differentiation. According to Lesthaeghe, much African social organisation can be described as 'gerontocratic'. Quoting Saucier, he explains that a 'gerontocracy' is a system in which older men maintain control over land, resources, puberty rights and the consequent access to 'the procreative and productive capacities of a woman'. Though this centralised control is often expressed in the name of the 'collective', Lesthaeghe argues that its principal focus is the maintenance of 'power over young men' (and, particularly, over their labour power), for whom access to material or symbolic resources depends on their male elders (1989:22). This can be highly problematic, it seems, and was expressed to me as such in Southern Benin. In the case of four youths I interviewed, for example, such control meant that they had to wait until their late twenties to get married. Women are married for economic reasons, they said, and unless you are 'an important man', you will not have the chance to find a wife (Interviews with Yomana, Frederic, Bernard and Paul, 01/09/2007).

Ultimately, therefore, what this means is that young people in this region are (and historically have been) faced with a difficult choice – either to accept the will of the collective as expressed by the adult males who formulate it, or to leave, and attempt to pursue their own goals and follow their own path independently. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that both my data and the literature demonstrate the prevalence of children and young people opting for the latter option. Argyle, for example, has shown this historically to be the case with young males fleeing their villages in order to escape the weight of ancestral duties (1966:136), while Lesthaeghe argued this to be true also of young girls eloping to avoid unwanted marriage (1989:34). The centrifugal tendencies of such social systems seem inherent to Southern Benin's 'internal frontier'.

Modern Cha(lle)nges and the Increase in Centrifugal Relocation

Though the discussion so far has demonstrated both intra- and extra-group child and youth mobility to be inherent to the socio-structural forces shaping Southern Beninese communities, what must be avoided is any characterisation of 'social life' as a static, unchanging reality. All social structures are the result of intricate processes of on-going conflict and negotiation and, as such, they must be recognised as essentially in flux (Aluko 2002). That this is the case also in Southern Benin has been widely acknowledged by both academics and their subjects and 'change' is frequently pointed to as the norm, rather than the anomaly (Field Notes, 25/08/2007). What is interesting from the perspective of this paper, however, is that the changes being experienced by Benin's many social groups seem to be adding even further weight to the centrifugal forces at work in the region.

Though there is much debate as to what has provoked these social changes (see, for example, Hristov 1976, Greuter 1984 and Mair 1969:1), the diagnosis as to their effects has largely been the same - modern forces are undermining 'traditional' norms, prompting a challenge to the current configurations of power. The principal manifestation of this has been what some have identified as the rise in 'Western individualism', marking a serious encroachment on collective sociality and authority. According to

Savary, for example, 'the introduction of a Western lifestyle has resulted in the emergence of a certain individualism in family relations. In particular, the authority of the lineage or collective head has seen itself increasingly challenged or rejected' (1976:101). This seems to express itself along the very lines outlined in the section above as more social space is opened for both inter-gender and inter-generational resistance. Two examples will suffice here and, again, they relate to both boys and girls 'running away', or independently relocating, to escape the yoke of gerontocratic control.

In the case of boys, the increasing prevalence of casual wage labour opportunities seem to have encouraged an upsurge in independent relocation and the rejection of paternal authority. Ola-Aluko has described the 'lessening importance of the family as an economic…and welfare institution' (2002:67; see also Mercier 1963:252) and it seems that, where modernity has brought opportunities for cash payment, this has been the case. Referring to a failed attempt at persuading a youth in her village not to move back to Nigeria after he had been 'rescued' from employment by a local NGO, Cynthia explained to me that young men want to move because 'here they are not paid for their labour, whereas there they see that they are' (Interview with Cynthia, 30/08/2007). In other words, when in the bosom of the family collective, boys' productive output forms part of the communal wealth administered by group elders; when alone, working on the farm of an unknown employer, what they earn is what they keep. As such, they have greater autonomy to pursue individual, rather than 'collective' projects because, with modern wage labour, boys now have a more readily accessible outlet in situations where their preferences diverge from those of their parents.

In the case of girls, the situation is similar. Though girls' collective duties are much more domestic in nature and include, principally, either domestic service or marriage, it is not uncommon for girls to leave the parental home rather than submit to the compulsions of their elders (see Ouedraogo 1995 for a wider discussion). The presence of female runaways is the childcare centres of Cotonou is one clear expression of this, especially as they principally fled unwanted domestic placements. In conversation with one key informant I was told that 'much has changed now with the advent of women's rights' (Field Notes, 01/09/2007), and one central result of this has been the increasing space for women and girls to challenge their male elders.

Clearly, then, one crucial outcome of the 'peculiar symbiosis of traditional and modern' (Szentes 1975:1) in Southern Benin has been to offer more opportunities for the expression of intra-collective dissent. Where collective sociality manifests itself in relative disempowerment of some group members vis-à-vis others, some level of popular outflow must be expected. Where this occurs in a space in which the individual is increasingly offered opportunities and cultural referents for personal ambition, this must be increasingly anticipated.

Conclusion

What this discussion has attempted to show are the embedded social forces underpinning child mobility in Southern Benin. Sociocentric approaches to life are highly conducive to

intra-familial fluidity, with children often raised by multiple non-parental caregivers. Child mobility is thus seen as the continuation of a norm, rather than either its exception or its rupture. Beneath the surface of collective living, however, this chapter has highlighted the complex webs of hierarchical control and coercion at the heart of local groups. In what is a predominantly gerontocratic social space, power and resources are concentrated in the hands of the old, thus largely limiting the freedom of the young. One expression of this is indeed in the process of child relocation as children can be sent elsewhere against their will. The hierarchies that facilitate this, then, themselves therefore operate (and have historically operated) as centrifugal forces producing outflows of young people. These outflows are further exacerbated by the ongoing loosening of hierarchical ties as the result of increasing social change.

The picture that has been, drawn, then, is one in which the mobility of children is anything but abnormal. This does not seem to be a space in which children move solely in response to shock or to any other 'pathological' impulse; rather, their movement is an integral part of the very structure of the societies they inhabit. Nor does this picture suggest that children are the non-agentive beings they are often seen to be. By contrast, movement here can be the ultimate expression of child agency as it represents a strategy for self-realisation and a liberation from oppressive social forces that sometimes entail a struggle between individual and collective.

Section 3 - Migration and Mobility in Southern Benin

Introduction

Drawing on the recent advances made in the field of migration studies, this section seeks to provide a locally-grounded, context-specific account of the meaning of migration and mobility for the peoples of Southern Benin. In so doing, it will demonstrate the intrinsic importance of human movement for the region's socio-cultural groups and will show the decision to migrate as embedded in the historical, cultural and economic realities of their members' life-worlds. The section will draw largely on primary research and will be supplemented by relevant secondary data. Firstly, it will begin by outlining the historical background for contemporary migratory movements and will locate these within developments of the past centuries. Secondly, it will discuss the significance of migration as an economic strategy and will explain this with reference to wider understandings of socio-economic and geographical stratification. Next, the section will demonstrate the importance of migration as a vehicle for the increase of social status as well as economic capital and will in turn situate this within the cultural-historic valuation of the migrant pioneers at the heart of each group's foundational myths. This is further used to demonstrate the continuing importance of maintaining ties to one's place of origin and the broadly collective, cyclical nature of the process of migration and return itself. As such, the section challenges the sedentary, territorialized bias at the root of the pathologising institutional understandings of independent child migration, and offers a different perspective to the one which conceives of migration specifically in terms of a 'negative' 'rupture'.

Historical Background

The historical literature on both Southern Beninese and regional West African migrations draws a clear distinction between the periods before and after the European encounter. Prior to European arrival, the region was 'a scene of mass movements of people', with groups moving to escape conflict, find better land or attain social freedom (Amin 1972:66; Mercier 1963:17). Indeed, 'the current peopling of Benin', it is claimed, 'is the result of many mass migrations, long pilgrimages…,ethnic assimilations and environmental adaptations' (MPD and INSAE 2003:32). As such, mobility is seen as having represented a natural component of life, an inherent force 'engrained' in the history of the societies that populate the area (de Bruijn et al. 2001:1). Crucially, this force affected children in much the same way that it affected adults. Mass migrations included whole clans or families and, thus, children also inevitably migrated (see Adepoju 1995:89).

With the advent of colonial and post-colonial social restructuring, however, these movements were replaced largely by 'migrations of labour' (Amin 1995:29). The arrival of the French saw forced territorialization accompanied by state efforts to proletarianise the peasantry, as the government sought to lay the foundations for the expansion of mercantilist capitalism (MPD and INSAE 2003:32). The introduction of large-scale concentrated forms of production and the imposition of tax levies worked to stimulate the

mass migrations necessary for colonial surplus extraction by forcing people to move in order to access the monetary resources essential in a rapidly monetising economy. Once the Europeans departed, the state bureaucracies that ruled in their absence continued in similar vein, such that once again, though in different form, labour migration became a norm (see Greuter 1984; Le Meur 2006). Crucially, although these 'new' migrations were predominantly a male preserve, they were certainly not restricted solely to adult men. As the last chapter explained, the young in Southern Benin are (and historically have been) progressively socialised into the adult roles and responsibilities that they will have to adopt. As such, they become economically active well before the age of 18. Boys and young men have thus always comprised a significant proportion of the labour migrations that characterised the last century.

Finally, though rarely recognised by the literature, transcending these two historical periods has been a consistent flow of specifically female migration, in the form of marriage. Given that the institution of marriage has historically been patrilocal in nature, females in Southern Benin habitually relocate from their father's compound to that of their husband (see Savary 1976:111). Since, traditionally, girls here often marry in their early teens, this too has been an important historical source of child migration (see Van Dijk et al. 2001:13,21).

It is against this backdrop, then, that we must consider the contemporary forms and views of adult and child migration in Southern Benin. As we shall see, there are significant consistencies between these historical foundations and their current manifestations.

Contemporary Migrations and the Preference for 'There' over 'Here

As with much of the region, Beninese migratory demographics have evolved in recent decades and certain changes have occurred. Van Dijk et al. point to the fact that, amongst other things, more and more people are moving inter-continentally and that, of the mass of labour migrants, an increasing number are female (2001:11). This being said, however, there are still fundamental similarities between the processes outlined above and those which have emerged from them and which can be identified today. As Section one demonstrated, migration is still seen as a vehicle for the attainment of greater social freedom, even if now that migration tends to occur on a more individualistic basis than in the past. Similarly, despite the challenges from women's and children's rights groups, marriage remains largely patrilocal and so young girls continue to migrate frequently to join their new husband's compound (AFJB et al. 2004). Most fundamentally of all, however, despite the changes observed, colonial and post-colonial trends of economic labour migration still constitute the major contemporary expression of mobility in the area.

According to the census, the vast majority of migrants in Benin move to the huge economic centres of Cotonou and Parakou. The reason, we are told, is the relative 'economic weight' of these places (2002:169). Such a picture is indeed confirmed by my own findings. As one key informant stated, for example, access to money is crucial and if there is more money to be made elsewhere, people (including the young) will move

(Field Notes, 26/08/2007). Such an understanding was echoed by Joss, a 16-year-old former labour migrant, when asked what she felt was the major impetus for movement in the region. 'It's money of course', she emphatically replied (Interview with Joss, 06/08/2007).

Though one should be weary of drawing from this data overly economically deterministic conclusions, it is still nonetheless apparent that what this reflects is a general awareness of the variable distribution of monetary resources in the country. Indeed, my data systematically demonstrate an extremely widespread, deeply entrenched understanding of this fact, to the extent that people consistently express a desire to be almost anywhere other than where they are. Steve, for example, articulated the classic position when he said, 'in the village there is nothing', arguing that young people have to move to the towns in order to find work (Interview with Steve, 09/08/2007). Similarly, PJ argued that, in his village, people (and particularly the young) are forced to leave because there are no economic opportunities. When asked to identify the one thing that the village would need in order to change the status quo, he said 'apprenticeships for the young' (Interview with PJ, 30/08/2007).

Such analyses have been echoed also in work by the UNDP in Benin on rural and urban perceptions of poverty and socio-economic well-being. In their rural study they sampled four representative communities, two of which were from the South. In the urban version, they interviewed 60 residents from four cities, three of which were Southern (Cotonou, Port-Novo and Abomey-Bohicon) and surveyed a further 1,800. In each case, very similar trends were detected. Poverty was described principally as a lack of money and the explanation for this lack was given as a shortage of economic opportunities. Both rural and urban populations felt largely the same things and the need for employment was seen as paramount. One's own location seemed to be synonymous with negative economic prospects and, as such, 'home' (be that rural or urban) is viewed as the negative counter to 'away' (PNUD and MPD 1995; 1996).

Clearly, therefore, the socio-economic and geographic stratification that lay at the root of the colonial monetisation of the rural poor has continued to be of importance today. It has become fixed in the minds of the people and fundamentally shapes the way that migration is perceived. Where access to more money through labour is recognised as inevitably necessitating movement, migration can be seen as a positive economic strategy, for it can take someone away from 'here' and towards 'elsewhere'.

Social Status and the Importance of 'Being Considered'

What these perceptions demonstrate, however, is much more than a simple awareness of the unequal distribution of resources and the ability to access them through one's own labour-power. Migration in this region is not seen solely as a way of gaining greater access to financial capital, it is also widely perceived as a vehicle for the enhancement of social status, and the very fact that 'elsewhere' is viewed so much more highly than 'here' is fundamental to this.

In a number of my interviews and observations, the importance of being 'considered' was repeated as a central concern. To be 'considered' is to be well thought-of, respected, seen as an important or successful person. It is an essential ambition for many people and, from my data, is inherently related to the process of (successful) migration. Nourredine and Red offer a classic example of this. In discussing just why rural people see the city as so alluring, they decided to tell me their own migratory history. When they were teenagers both had been enamoured with an uncle who frequently returned from Cotonou on his motorbike. He was a highly esteemed, 'considered' man, a son of the village who had made good and who showed this through the possession of a big vehicle. The boys both decided to follow him down to the city, in order to themselves one-day be 'considered'. Though, as they admitted, they had struggled at first, their very presence in the village on the evening of this discussion was testament to their ultimate success. We had travelled together from Cotonou in Nourredine's car, after collecting Red from his middle-class home, and when we spoke it was in the most prestigious house in the village, after a group of locals had come to pay their respects to the two men (Interviews with Nourredine and Red, 18/08/2007).

The link between migration and this level of social success was made even more explicit to me in another discussion with a colleague. Though a university student in urban Cotonou, this man professed to me his dissatisfaction with his current social and geographic situation. 'I want to go to France', he said, 'I pray that I can'. When I asked why he explained to me very clearly that 'a man who goes away is "considered" by his community'. 'Just look at all the big people in Africa', he continued, 'and just look at you, you all travel and return with your experience and people are impressed' (Field Notes, 22/08/2007). Such a perception was echoed clearly by a young boy whose story I was told by Cynthia. Despite the negative reports he had heard, the boy was desperate to migrate, specifically because he felt that it was through 'suffering elsewhere' that he could 'become a man' (Interview with Cynthia, 30/08/2007).

It seems apparent, therefore, that in this part of the world migration represents a way for people to socially affirm themselves, to attain the status of being 'considered'. Though almost entirely unaddressed by the literature, my observations suggest that this perception has deep-rooted socio-historic foundations, and that these are demonstrated by the continuing socio-cultural importance of mythical-ancestral migrant-founders. The discussion on historical background demonstrated that pre-colonial migrations were often motivated by the desire or need for social freedom. Igor Kopytoff has systematised this analysis in his seminal work, *Internal African Frontier* (1986). What he also argues in this work is that he who arrives first at a place and founds a new settlement there attains social and regional immortality – a principle that he describes as 'the primacy of the new-comer'. What this means is that, historically, great social and material rewards have awaited the successful migrant. According to Kopytoff, this has consistently represented a huge 'pull-factor' encouraging migration and, from my observations, it would seem that this is still the case. The importance of the celebrated migrant-founder is still observed near universally. Almost everyone is able to trace their own personal or village lineage back to one 'considered' man, and this man is always held in the highest historical esteem (see, for example, Gayibor 1986). The central historical image of success, therefore, is

the migrant and it is clear that this image continues to exert strong influence even today. As such, the social status attained by the successful migrant has a solid historical precedent.

Maintaining Links and Migration as a 'Collective' Process

The foregoing discussion points to the fact that migration, above all, is a specifically 'social' reality. This is clearly indicated by the importance of social status in the migratory decision and the fact that migration has such historical and contemporary social currency. One can, after all, only be 'considered' by other people and credit is only credit if it is communally conferred and validated. As such, this highlights the importance of two final interrelated factors in our discussion: namely, 1) that migration is a collectively understood strategy and 2) that migration is only one side of a coin of which the other is return and the maintenance of original ties.

Intuitively, the social status bestowed on the successful migrant is entirely contingent upon return. Nourredine and Red were known to have succeeded specifically because their return demonstrated as much. They were therefore honoured as returnees. Similarly, my colleague's assessment was largely predicated upon the admiration that he believes people receive when they come home. Such a perspective is indeed also corroborated in the literature, particularly by Caldwell, who penned the seminal work on West African rural-urban migration. For him, the successful migrant returnee 'enjoys the respect he receives in the village, and there is widespread agreement that [he] deserves it' (1969:215).

What this suggests is that migration in this region is perceived more as a continuation of existing links than as a rupture (see also Greuter 1984:163). My data emphatically show this to be the case and, importantly, they do so irrespective of the duration of the migration. Short-term, targeted circular migration, for example, has a historical precedent in this region and is known in Fon as '*Djoko*'. Bands of young men and boys migrate on a seasonal basis to large farming areas at times of harvest. Once the work is completed, they return to their villages. Such practices also occur on a rural-urban basis. All of the summer migrants I interviewed in Cotonou, for example, stated their intention to return to their villages at the end of the school holidays (about which, more will be said in Section five). Even long-term migrants, it seems, openly demonstrated their continued links to 'home'. The majority frequently visited their place of origin and all stated their desire to ultimately one-day return. One important source, for example, told me that she intended to be buried in 'her' village despite the fact that she had moved to the city as a baby (Field Notes, 29/08/2007). Likewise, Tim, who had been working in Nigeria for so long that his children had been born there, told me that he and his colleagues were building a school so that their children could learn French and one-day be able to come 'home' (Interview with Tim, 30/08/2007).

These links to 'home' are clearly central. Their importance has been emphasised in the literature on remittances and networks, which demonstrate the collaborative ties between those who leave and those who stay (see, for example Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler

2003; Fawcett 1989; Iverson 2006). In light of this, Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler have argued that 'migration decisions are not made by isolated individual actors but within larger units of interrelated people, typically families' (2003:5). In other words, for these authors, migration is both a collectively understood and a collectively articulated phenomenon. In some cases, this can mean that migratory decisions are made for the good of the collective (as will be demonstrated in the following sections). In others, it means simply that in a highly collectivised, interactive environment such as this, migration can be a joint strategy. This is confirmed by my data, which show this to be the case in Southern Benin. Many child migrants moved with or were sent by their relatives. In many cases, they moved in groups along pre-established routes that have long been trodden by their people. One useful example of this comes from the blacksmiths in the central market of Cotonou. Every single one of the 10 boys I interviewed here was from a small region outside Porto-Novo, as were all of the men with whom they worked. A number of the boys had moved either with or to people from their area and the strategy of young males moving here seemed strongly established. Not only does this imply that migration is a collective strategy then, it seems also to be a collective norm.

Conclusion

In summary, therefore, what this brief exposé has tried to do is to demonstrate the deep-rooted and important place that migration occupies in the societies of Southern Benin. Where the institutional literature conceives of the movement away from home in specifically negative and pathological terms, the peoples of this region have a wholly different view. Migration, for both adults and children, has historically been entrenched in collective narratives and has long been accepted as a strategy for economic and social advancement. As such, migration here can have positive connotations - it is often seen as a choice, and not a reality that is reactively and reluctantly accepted. Crucially, migration is not seen in Southern Benin as a rupture from place or past. It is seen as a moment in a journey that will inevitably involve continued contact with place of origin. In the words of Van Dijk et al., therefore, migration in Southern Benin 'is not a break with the past or a breakdown of…normal social environment' (2001:14). It seems, rather, to be an expression of it. The following sections will attempt to demonstrate this further.

Section 4 - Adult Decisions for Child Relocation

Introduction

This section and the next will present the empirical trends that emerged during fieldwork in response to the principal research question: why do children and young people leave the parental home in Southern Benin? Analysis of results demonstrate that decision-making processes reflect either choices made by parents, on behalf of their children, or choices made by children themselves. The present section will therefore outline the reasons underpinning parental decisions for child migration, while section five will examine those which inform children's own independent choices to migrate. In contrast to the 'pathological' model that frames most analysis of the migratory process in the region, both sections will show the migratory decision to be a contextual, reasoned response to perceived social, economic or cultural needs. While it is true that *some* decisions do represent a reaction to crisis or a response to poverty, in the majority of cases they do not. The discussion will begin by documenting those which do.

Burden Release

As much of the micro-economic literature on risk-sharing will tell us, in times of hardship, standard approaches to communal welfare can come under strain (Dercon 2002; 2006; Dercon and Krishnan 2000). This fact became increasingly clear during my interviews as child after child explained to me the events that had precipitated their departure from the familial home.

In the case of Erick, for example, the death of a sibling was what directly prompted his moving to Cotonou to become an apprentice blacksmith. He had been in school and was doing well but was sent away by his father following the family's loss. Though, according to Erick, this decision was made 'in order to protect' him, it is likely that this is simply what Erick was told, as it later transpired that his brother's death had been preceded by a protracted (and, no doubt, costly) illness (Interview with Erick, 24/08/2007). Similarly, with Fernanda, the death of her father left the household in such difficulty that her mother was forced to place her in a hairdressing apprenticeship in Cotonou. An indication of the desperateness of their situation is that, though Fernanda was insistent on her desire to learn sewing, she was actually placed with a hairdresser, as this was the only opportunity that was immediately available (Interview with Fernanda, 07/08/2007).

In the case of Elisabeth, by contrast, it was divorce rather than death that lead to her being sent away. The separation of her parents left her household in such a difficult situation that, when the chance presented itself, her father was insistent that she had to go and earn her living elsewhere (Interview with Elisabeth, 25/07/07). As the introduction explained, the patrilineal nature of most Beninese groups is such that children stay with the father in the event of divorce, while it is the mother who leaves the family compound. When this happened to Elisabeth and her family, her father was left with over 10 children to care for and had no partner whose labour would help support them. Unsurprisingly,

therefore, he sent Elisabeth off to lighten both the load on his and his family's shoulders, and because he believed that life would be better for her elsewhere (Interview with Elisabeth's Father, 25/07/2007).

According to Isiugo-Abanihe, this type of decision-making can be characterised as 'crisis fostering'. For him, 'child relocation resulting from the dissolution of the family of origin by divorce, separation, or death of a spouse may be termed crisis fostering' (1985:57). Its purpose is simply to mitigate the shock that has been experienced by the family and that has rendered ordinary coping mechanisms futile.

In some situations, however, no exogenous shock is apparent and parents decide to foster their child simply because their situation is seen as so dire that they recognise no alternative if the child and the wider family are to survive. This, in fact, was the case with a number of the children I spoke with. One boy of 10 had been sent away because, in his own words, his mother 'had no money' (Field Notes, 08/08/2007), while another, also 10, had been placed as an 'apprentice' on a building site outside Cotonou because his extremely poor parents could no longer afford to keep him (Field Notes, 26/07/2007).

In discussing these and other, similar situations, the key refrain I heard was: 'it's a question of means'. Children are often apparently sent away because their parents lack 'means', or money, and, as such, the decision is described as a result of poverty. Take Freddy, for example, himself a former child labour migrant and now a relatively educated adult, speaking in a village in rural Southwest Benin: 'Poor people…are the ones that send their children away', he said, 'they have to because they decide and think that going away will be better for the child' (Interview with Freddy, 18/08/07). Likewise, Trevor, who exclaimed 'it's all about poverty', in the middle of a stinging deconstruction of the concept of 'trafficking', (Interview with Trevor, 30/08/2007).

In Response to Demand

A 'lack of means' was also cited as an important factor in the decision to send children away when 'employers' manifested demand for their labour power. The paradigmatic example of this came from Adri, a young man of 21 who, at the age of 15, had been one of the children caught up in the infamous Etireno Affair[4], the event which sparked the explosion of INGO and government interest in West African 'child trafficking'. In his own words he was at school in his village when a man from the area came to look for 'apprentices' to take back with him to the fishing regions of Gabon[5]. While he hesitated to go at first, he ultimately accepted the view of his father that to migrate would be beneficial given how poor his family were in Benin. Significantly, when he left, he was

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[4] The Etireno was a Nigerian trawler which was being used by a gang of people-smugglers to illegally transport Beninese children to Gabon. In 2001, after a night raid, the Gabonese authorities uncovered the smuggling ring and refused to let the Etireno dock in Libreville, ordering the captain to return his passengers to Cotonou. The captain instead tried to return to his native Cameroon in order to flee and in the process the authorities were alerted. A multi-country diplomatic crisis ensued in which the Beninese ambassador to Gabon tried to ensure the release of the children and the safe passage of the vessel. The children were stranded at sea on the Etireno for a number of days until the boat ultimately returned to Cotonou, where they were released and the crew arrested.

[5] The fact of the destination being a fishing region is important as Adri's village too is one where fishing is the principal activity. I in fact came across a number of people in this area who had links with people fishing in Gabon and it seems that there exists an established channel of migration in expertise from the Lakes area of Benin to that of Gabon.

accompanied by four other adolescent boys, all sent from the same village (Interview with Adri, 21/08/2007).

In another, similar situation, Yasmine was sent by her parents to work in Accra, Ghana, after a woman had come to her village in search of children to help with her work (Interview with Yasmine, 25/07/2007), while Jen, from a different part of Benin, was sent to Cotonou to help a woman trader in her market activities, after this lady had herself come to Jen's village to find such help (Interview with Jen, 06/07/2007). Likewise, Regan, who was sent by her parents to work with a woman in Lomé, only departed after this woman had come to Regan's village 'looking for a domestic servant'. It is revealing to note how, during Regan's stay, it emerged that she had been solicited by her 'employer' specifically to replace another child domestic servant who had unfortunately passed away prior to Regan's arrival (Interview with Regan, 25/07/2007).

The demand for child labour thus seems to be a significant factor in the decision by parents to send their children away. In each of the cases presented above, the active manifestation of labour demand was the key trigger for movement. What is crucial to recognise, however, is that in every case, those who responded to this demand were, without fail, those who identified themselves as 'poor' or in hardship, while those making the demand were, according to interviewees, people who needed labour power to support their economic activities.

This data suggest, therefore, that in times of crisis, or in response to poverty, parents do opt to send their children away to alleviate strain on both the household and the individual. What the following examples will demonstrate, however, is that, as suggested in the previous sections, these are certainly not the only reasons for which children leave the parental home. The decision for them to do so must be viewed as the contextual, reasoned choice that it is.

Socialisation

As Section two underlined, in the sociocentric environment of Southern Benin, it is widely considered normal for children to leave the parental home. This is principally an expression of local approaches to child rearing and child learning. Childcare in this part of the country is not genealogically restricted and it is seen as more than appropriate for many adults (or older children) to participate in the raising of a family's young. Thus, if it is felt that a child will benefit more from residing outside the parental 'home', it is considered perfectly natural for that child to be sent away.

This analysis is in fact borne out by discussions with parents and children as to why a specific child was conferred to a third party. In one example, I encountered a boy who, according to his family, was very difficult to control and who was therefore sent to an uncle considered to be more authoritarian and thus able to instil more discipline and respect in his charges (Field Notes, 06/08/2007), both attributes seen as essential characteristics for the young in many West African societies (see, for example, Bledsoe 1990:10). Similarly, in the case of another boy with whom I worked, his father decided

that he should be raised by an aunt given his need for what was seen as an essential maternal influence in the absence of his own dead mother. His understanding was simply that a 'normal', well-adjusted child needed the hand of a female caregiver to develop in the same way as his peers (Field Notes, 06/08/2007).

While both of these examples revolve principally around behavioural formation, section two showed that local processes of child rearing and understandings of children's learning can take many forms and this, combined with my interviews suggest that there is also a strong emphasis on the development of self-sufficiency. Thus, one of my interviewees explicitly stated that children are placed 'so that they learn how to take care of themselves' and his words were echoed and confirmed by a further four men in whose presence they had been spoken (Interview with Red, 18/08/2007).

As has been noted, however, this 'taking care of oneself' is not simply about knowing how to cope with the different aspects of social reality. Learning and having opportunities to make a contribution to the collective welfare through one's own labour is also important. The semantics of the French expression repeatedly used to indicate this to me might here be instructive. 'To take care of oneself' is translated as '*se prendre en charge*' which has at once the simple meaning of looking after oneself and, more subtly, of carrying one's own burden. '*Une charge*' can be used to refer to a weight, responsibility or other load and so to look after oneself can mean, inter alia, to carry one's own burden (Interview with Red, 18/08/2007).

In line with this, I came across a number of cases in which adults and children explained to me that a child had been sent elsewhere specifically to avoid him or her 'doing nothing' – a refrain repeated on a number of occasions. My discussion with Trevor showed this particularly clearly. He had been institutionally recognised as a 'former trafficker' because he had accompanied a number of minors across the border from his native town of Zakpota in Benin to the Nigerian town of Abeokuta, where he had arranged for them to begin apprenticeships or work placements. In each case, he claimed, parents had approached him on his visits to Zakpota asking him to bring their child back with him to Abeokuta, where he lived and worked, so as to avoid them wasting their time unproductively at home, '*doing nothing*' (Interview with Trevor, 30/08/2007). Similarly, two young blacksmiths I interviewed in the central market of Cotonou, Jerome and Jules, found themselves sent away to work by their adult relatives in order to avoid a comparable situation. One is 12 and the other 14 and they have both been 'apprentices' for some time. Jules failed at school and so as an alternative his brother brought him down to Cotonou to learn a trade, while Jerome, who was unable to attend school as a result of his family's poverty, followed his brother down to the market after he was told that, rather than do nothing, he had to get a job (Interviews with Jules and Jerome, both 24/08/2007). In both cases it became apparent that 'doing nothing' actually meant, 'doing nothing *productive*'.

Intra-Familial Labour Transfer

The sociocentric norms that underpin much child mobility in the region are expressed not only in the sending of children to ensure that they both learn the importance of collective productivity and have an opportunity to put in into practice, but also in order to productively reallocate their labour power within the extended family. Indeed, Alain Adihou explains in his 1998 report with ESAM and ASI, that child placement in Southern Benin is very often a practice of sending children to relatives 'lacking in domestic labour-power' (1998:4). An ageing grandparent, for example, may expect a grandchild to be offered as a helping hand with what have now become taxing daily tasks. Thus, in the words of one of Adihou's interviewees, 'this child was entrusted to us because my wife and I are retired and no longer have any of our own children here' (ibid.22). Likewise, in his work with the Baatombu people of Northern Benin, Alber has found similar things. His research has in fact shown how the word for 'foster' actually translates as 'to hold', which he heard principally in the expression 'he holds the child for sending it out [to run errands]', clearly indicating the crucial importance of adult access to child labour power in that part of the country (2002:496).

Section two demonstrated this and my interviews and observations further confirmed it to be the case. In all of the households with which I was most familiar there resided non-offspring adolescent girls who took care of most of the daily domestic tasks. These were all the children of rural relatives who had been brought to Cotonou to assist the senior female of the house in the management of family business. Similarly, from my interviews one particularly illustrative example comes in the case of Nicola who was sent by her mother to live with her sister as a young girl. Nicola spent her early years in her parents' compound before moving on to her sister's, where she stayed for many years. When I asked why she had to move she explained to me very clearly that her elder sister had had a baby and therefore needed help with daily domestic chores, commercial activities and childcare. Nicola was therefore sent to help her sister as she founded her new home and stayed with her until she was no longer needed (Interview with Nicola, 09/08/2007).

Interestingly, as she was telling me this, Nicola seemed perfectly unperturbed and this fact, combined with her clarity as to why she was placed, seem indicative of just how normal her experience was. Indeed, according to Le Biavant-Aureggio, it is in fact a cultural practice of the Fon people to whom Nicola belongs for a new bride to be accompanied to her husband's home by a young female relative who will be her principal aid in the management of daily affairs (1994/5:23). What this demonstrates therefore is the normality of intra-familial relocation as an integral part of the life-course.

Individual and Familial Investment

The importance of the life-course is also apparent in decisions that express socio-economic ambition, as the children to whom this applied were all of an age where they would be expected to become fully economically active. This ambition was expressed to me extremely clearly in one interview in Western Benin, where I was told quite openly

that, fundamentally, sending your children away is all about 'the desire to give them a better future' (Interview with Red, 18/08/2007). In fact, Red's words were echoed again and again throughout my research and, despite other factors, this was mentioned in almost every case. In one particularly eloquent formulation, Winston, for example, told me that 'we want our children to make something of themselves'. In order to achieve this, he continued, they have to leave, as life in the village is hard, with barely enough to get by, and no opportunities for advancement (Interview with Winston, 21/08/2007). It was with this understanding, therefore, that Winston and his brother-in-law, Wilis, both decided to send their daughters to Gabon, where it was felt that they would have a better chance of knowing success (Interview with Wilis, 21/07/2007).

Interestingly, however, my interviews show that child migration in Southern Benin is not only seen as a potential vector for individual improvement, but also of improvement for the collective. In a social space where the extended family and extended family loyalties represent integral aspects of a person's life, this is perhaps unsurprising. As the saying goes, 'if there's food for one, there's food for all' and, in the same way, if one is a success, so are they all. In reflecting on this concept, Sam proved to be particularly lucid. For him, child placement is more than just a parental decision on a child's future; it is actually a familial economic investment. Parents hope, he said, that by sending a child away, not only will that child become a success but that, given the nature of family networks, this will bring benefits for the entire family. 'At least this one will amount to something' Sam exclaimed, with the underlying meaning that, of all our familial assets, this one should bear fruit (Interview with Sam, 08/08/2007).

Such an understanding seemed to underpin a number of the decisions I came across. Even Elisabeth's father, for example, in explaining how he had felt when his daughter returned home after a very abusive, traumatic experience as a domestic servant, highlighted one of his biggest regrets as the fact that she had come home empty-handed. Though faced with little alternative than to send her away, he still hoped that the decision to do so would prove to be a sensible communal investment (Interview with Elisabeth's Father, 25/07/2007). Similarly, Trevor, in explaining the process of child placement as he was involved in it, was sure to underline the fact that parents had negotiated in advance the wage their child was to receive, on the understanding that the money would be sent directly to them (Interview with Trevor, 30/08/2007). In an even more telling example, Cynthia, who works for the government in trying to reduce child migration, explained how now, in the Zakpota region, parents have become wise to the fact that children sent away and repatriated are taken into care by NGOs, bringing benefits to the entire family. As a result, she said, even more children are leaving (Interview with Cynthia, 30/08/2007).

Clearly, therefore, independent child migration occupies an important place in both the survival and development strategies of children and their families.

Conclusion

Before drawing this discussion to a close, then, it would be useful to once again retrace the broad lines it has sketched. Building on data gathered in response to the question as to why children leave the parental home in Southern Benin, this section has shown the parental decision for children to relocate is a considered, contextual response to perceived economic, social or cultural imperatives. In situations of crisis or extreme resource-poverty, migration of children is seen as a way of relieving both the familial and individual burden. Children are thus sent away when little alternative is seen or when demand for their labour manifests. This is not the only reason why they are sent however. Children are also relocated as an expression of local developmental norms, whereby they learn how to become the responsible, productive adults they are expected to be as members of their collective. This is coupled with the process of moving children within the extended family to where their labour is needed. In a sociocentric environment such as this, it does not seem abnormal for children to be sent from their parents' home to that of another relative, if need dictates. Finally, data suggest that older children are also sent away as an expression of individual and collective ambition, based on the widespread understanding that 'elsewhere' holds more opportunity than 'here'. As such, this section offers a further challenge the institutional, 'pathological' model elaborated above.

Section 5 - Children's Individual Decisions to Migrate

Introduction

This section will draw largely on interviews with children themselves and will outline their stated reasons for migrating. The principle focus of the section will be to demonstrate the overwhelming evidence that, in contrast to the assumption of the 'pathological' model outlined above, children do have agency in the decision to migrate and, as such, show themselves to be economic, social and cultural actors in their own right. Importantly, the gerontocratic nature of Southern Beninese social structures means that the principal constraints operating on this agency are the adults that comprise children's socio-cultural worlds. As such, this section will take an inter-generational perspective in the analysis of children's own migratory decisions and will show the reasons underpinning these decisions to be wide-ranging and diverse, representing either a confirmation of, or a challenge to, hierarchical parental and social authority. The discussion is divided into three parts. In the first, we will address decisions reflecting parental will, including those choices which echo the perceptions, analyses and actions underpinning the parental decisions explained in the previous chapter. In the second we will turn to negotiated decisions, where child and parental preference are divergent and where compromise, acceptance and collaboration are the norm. Finally, in the third, we will focus on the conflictual decisions which reflect a rupture in the inter-generational contract[6] between parent and child and result most often in a child's independent and clandestine relocation.

Decisions Reflecting Parental Will

Given the fact that children and adults inhabit similar if not the same social, cultural and economic spaces in Southern Benin, it is perhaps unsurprising that the decisions they make with regards to migration are comparable at a number of levels, including the understandings which inform them, the processes they go through and the consequences thereof. In this sub-section I will document the types of decision which fall into this category, ranging from simple intra-familial relocation to the expression of individual or collective ambition. They include independent decisions that simply mirror parental choices and those with which parents openly collaborate.

Intra-Familial Relocation

Sections two and four demonstrated that parents are often comfortable sending their children to reside with relatives in whose presence the child is deemed to have a better chance of positively developing. What is interesting to note, however, is that in such a context this relocation is often precipitated by child, as well as adult, decisions.

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[6] The notion of the inter-generational contract has been discussed and elaborated by demographers and feminist economists for some time and was expounded clearly by both Hoddinott (1992) and Kabeer (2000). Whitehead et al. draw on these works for their own recent discussion (2007) and it is on their understanding of the contract as a series of flexible, negotiated and cooperative parent-child interactions governed by pre-existing norms and practices that I base my use of the concept. In practice, it can refer to the mutual obligations that parents and children have towards each other and their overarching interdependence.

Accordingly, very young children in this region sometimes leave the parental home simply because they prefer living elsewhere, with an aunt, uncle, grandparent or other relative, for example. In such cases, it seems, they express their wish demonstratively and forcefully until their parents either acquiesce or definitively ignore them. Thus, for one man I spoke with, the fact that his five-year-old daughter was living with an aunt was entirely the result of her stated wish to do so (Field Notes, 06/08/2007). Similarly, Bernard, who grew up in the village of Akotomey even though his parents were from Allada, enjoyed his visits to his grandmother so much that, in his own words, he decided at one point simply to remain with her in Akotomey, rather than return to Allada to live with his parents (Interview with Bernard, 01/09/2007). Likewise Bridget, who was entrusted to her maternal grandmother in Bante when very small, eventually decided that she was no longer happy with this grandmother and so demanded to be allowed to relocate to her paternal grandmother, in the North of the country, where she remained for over a year until this woman passed away (Interview with Bridget, 06/07/2007).

The picture that emerges from these stories, then, is one in which even at a very young age children have the agency and awareness to both recognise and clamour for intra-familial movements that they see as positive for themselves. Such an image is further evidence of the importance of the 'diffuse attachments' described by Weisner, and has been paralleled by a number of other studies of the region's multi-caregiver societies, including those portrayed by Verhoef (2005:378).

Clearly, then, just as adults send their offspring to their kin for the child's positive socialisation, so it seems that even small children make the same choices for themselves, based largely on where and with whom they enjoy spending their time. As such decisions fall in line with a social norm as understood by adults, they are often respected.

Shock-Response

As with many parental decisions, however, children's decisions to relocate are not always so positively proactive. In more difficult circumstances, it seems, children, like adults, make choices reactively to exogenous shocks. Just as adults often make personal or familial migratory decisions in response to events such as death or divorce, then, so too it seems that children and young people also choose migration as an emergency insurance mechanism in times of crisis. The cases of Gary and Yomana are here informative. These boys were both at school in their village until their father passed away. Their mother has since remarried and moved to another area, leaving the two alone in the village, as their other remaining relatives have all either died or migrated. Thus, with only their father's field to sustain them, they both decided to follow their peers down to Cotonou to sell scratch-cards over the summer and so put together a small amount of money to keep them afloat, something they had been doing for a number of consecutive summers by the time I met them (Interview with Gary, 18/08/2007; Interview with Yomana, 01/09/2007). Similarly, Christophe, who I encountered working as a blacksmith in the central market in Cotonou, had chosen to relocate in response to a double shock. He unexpectedly failed his school exams and so chose to find work rather than bear the cost of repeating the year.

His father agreed with this choice and so helped him put it into practice. Unfortunately, it seems, his departure from the village in search of work was further hastened by parental death, as he spoke of being orphaned in the period between deciding to leave school and then leaving the village (Interview with Christophe, 24/08/2007).

As with the case of Adri detailed above, the collaborative nature of Christophe's decision is important. What it seems to suggest is the fact that independent child migration is both a commonly and collectively understood response to shock, one which both parents and children turn to and make their own - in this case collaboratively. The last chapter demonstrated how parents use placement of children as a way of coping with the impact of such shocks and the data used here show how children too, as actors in their own right, make similar choices, either in concert with, or in the absence of, their parents. Where there are no adults to influence a child's choice, as in the case of Gary and Yomana, it seems apparent that children still nonetheless make similar choices to their elders – a fact that is perhaps unsurprising given that they inhabit the same socio-cultural and economic contexts and are faced with similar opportunity sets (Riisøen et al., 2004:39). Where there are adults present, however, as with Christophe, it seems that such decisions are respected, even facilitated, by adults, as they represent a collectively understood response mechanism.

Ambition

Migration is not simply a response to destitution or an expression of preference with regards to residence, however, and, as has been demonstrated elsewhere in this thesis, it is also seen as a vector for ambition and advancement, both at the level of the individual and of the family. Parents send their children to work and learn outside the familial home specifically because they perceive opportunity and positive experience to lie elsewhere. According to my data, children and young people, too, actively seek such migratory opportunities, based on very similar understandings to those of their adult peers.

Take the case of Bernard, for example. Though doing well at school and living comfortably with his grandmother in her village, he decided at the age of 15 that his future lay in Cotonou. Unimpeded by a grandmother more in favour of him working than being at school, he left for Cotonou where he began work on a building site, a job in which he remained for over a year, before returning to continue his studies (Interview with Bernard, 01/09/2007).

Echoing this are the words of Trevor and Tim, one a former migrant worker and the other still currently employed in Nigeria, both of whom have been institutionally recognised as 'child traffickers' for the fact that (as noted in chapter four) they have accompanied children across the border from their villages in Zakpota in search of work. Trevor had moved originally at the age of 12 or 13 because he wanted to earn some money, while Tim moved later for similar reasons. 'Here there is nothing to do', he said, whereas 'there, if you are hungry, you can work and earn and eat'. In explaining why they helped other children follow the same path as them, both were impressively lucid. Trevor picked up a role of tape and said simply, 'if I go and earn one while my brother stays and earns

five, clearly there is no reason for me to go', while according to Tim, the crucial determinant is that, 'what a child can earn during his time in Nigeria can be enough to put a roof on his father's house' (Interview with Trevor, 30/08/2007; Interview with Tim, 30/08/2007). Evidently, therefore, one central motivation for child migrants in Southern Benin is the potential that their migration will lead to opportunities, which in turn will bring positive benefits for both the children and their families. Again, this reflects a strategy wholly in keeping with those adopted by adults in this part of the world.

Negotiated or Compromise Decisions

It is important to realise, however, that not all decisions made in this context are as harmonious as the ones documented above. As perceptions and preferences diverge, conflict inevitably surfaces and a need for compromise becomes apparent. This sub-section will discuss just such decisions and will focus particularly on the importance of access to money, the fruits of one's labour and formal education. Education will in fact serve as a case study example of the processes involved in parent-child negotiations around children's migration decisions. What will be shown is that in a context where there is differential access to capital and where both household contribution and self-sustenance are related directly to age, migration (particularly temporary) serves as a vehicle for the expression of children's growing independence and for securing the capital necessary to satisfy personal, as well as collective, preferences. Importantly, however, such a situation is characterised by a continuation in, rather than a rupture of, parent-child cooperation and collaboration within the broad household economy.

In my research, the principal focus for compromise was the question of children's access to formal education. It appears from my data that, very often, children value formal education much more than their elders, making it in many households very much a matter of personal consumption[7]. Bernard, for example, and his grandmother openly disagreed as to whether or not he should still be at school. In telling me of this, he was in fact mildly dismissive of her, referring to her as 'the old woman', as if to suggest that she was too elderly to understand how important school can be (Interview with Bernard, 01/09/2007). Similarly, with Giles, though he was placed with an aunt to help her with her business, he too wanted to go to school and had to persuade and argue to be allowed to do so, as school was not considered important by his elders (Interview with Giles, 18/08/2007). In such cases, then, some form of compromise is crucial to maintaining a cooperative relationship between adult and child, particularly given that, in the majority of instances, those young people expressing a desire to remain in school are of an age where greater independence is expected of them. In my experience then, what this results in is a situation where adults mostly avoid imposing their wishes on the young, instead allowing them simply to provide independently for what is seen as a personal consumption, either aiding in the process or simply allowing it to happen.

In reality, what this often entails is children engaging in a short form of 'targeted migration' ('*Djoko*') whereby they move (usually to the city) to begin two to three

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[7] This is further demonstrated by the fact that, in the case of external shock, spending on school is often stopped as children are forced to either work or migrate for work, as shown in both this and the former section.

months of holiday work, in order to put together a stock of capital sufficient to pay school fees. A classic example of this was Darren, who I met along with a number of other young boys working as a blacksmith in Cotonou's main market. His parents said they were unable to afford his school fees and so he came down to the city every summer to work with his father, also a blacksmith, to put together enough money for the coming year's fees (Interview with Darren, 22/08/2007). The situation was similar with Bernard and again also with Ethan, who I met selling scratch-cards on the streets in central Cotonou. He had come down in a large group from his village in July and would be leaving again in September when the school year began again (Interview with Ethan, 12/08/2007). Most emphatically of all, however, I came across Euan, Ethan's brother, who corroborated Ethan's story entirely (though independently) and who, flanked and echoed by four other young migrants who had come down in a group from the same village, explained that during their stay they can each earn around 15,000FCFA from selling their scratch-cards, which is just enough to pay a year's school fees (Interview with Euan, 24/08/2007).

These data clearly point to the importance of money in children's targeted education-focused migratory decisions in Southern Benin. It seems clear that access to it and control over its use are central considerations for potential migrants in this region, be they either adults or children. One explanation of the centrality of access to money in these children's migratory decisions is simply that, in rural Benin, money is scarce and variably distributed and, as in any market economy, it is essential for most activity, including schooling. As section three demonstrated, therefore, migration has become naturalised in most Southern Beninese societies as a part of familial and individual economic strategy. Amongst children, however, the need to move to secure it is further exacerbated by what section two described as the 'gerontocratic' nature of many Beninese groups, in which resources and control over them are concentrated principally in the hands of adults, as are the fruits of children's labour. Where this is the case, children and young people who wish to access money and have control over that which they produce (in this case for use on school fees) must either negotiate with (or do paid work for) their elders at home or leave to be able to do so independently[8],[9].

In either case, the fact that the children discussed here have done just this offers emphatic testament not only to their agency but also to the fact that, for them, negotiated cooperation within the inter-generational contract had been achieved. This is underscored in part by the fact that they all left with relatives known to their parents (brothers, uncles etc. - implying that their parents had consented to their movement), and that they intended to return 'home' at the end of their brief stays in the city. None were planning

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[8] In the vast majority of cases, children's household labour is either poorly remunerated or unremunerated and so working for one's parents as a means of accessing capital, even if possible, is in practice less likely than migrating (see Hashim 2005:20). This was in fact openly acknowledged by Cynthia who said that one of the principle reasons why children leave her region in central Benin is because at home they are not paid for their labour whereas elsewhere they are (Interview with Cynthia, 30/08/2007).

[9] That adult-child negotiation does at times occur is in fact clearly demonstrated by the fact that, according to a number of the people I spoke with, children's wages (and freedom to use their labour to access them) are determined principally by their size, rather than by their age. Both Trevor and Tim explained this to be the case and claimed that when children are larger (which, of course, is very often correlated with their age), their wages upon migrating to Nigeria increase because they can 'make more noise' and because, as a result, they must be paid sufficiently to satisfy both basic parental demands on their output and their own material desires (Interview with Trevor, Interview with Tim, both 30/08/2007).

on definitively relocating and all expressed the intention to return to their families to continue their schooling - in a context where they would presumably also resume contributions to the household economy. More than this, however, compromise is also demonstrated by the fact that some of the children specifically expressed the intention of sharing the product of their temporary migrant labour with their parents. Henry, for example, explicitly told me that he was working over the summer purposely to raise the money needed for school fees *and* to contribute to his household welfare. Once school fees had been paid, I was told, what was left would go to his parents in the form of a 'contribution' (Interview with Henry, 24/07/2007).

Conflictual Decisions

As might be expected, however, not all cases of divergent parent and child preferences are solved with such compromise. In many instances parents and children cannot come to an arrangement whereby both are accommodated and, in such situations, conflict is the result. Chapter two systematised an analysis of such situations and argued that, where this is the case, children and young people's migratory decisions can reflect a unilateral demonstration of their agency as an expression of their self-realisation. They can also represent a rupture in the inter-generational contract.

Runaways

The classic migratory manifestation of irresolvable conflict between parents and children is the runaway - where children secretly flee the parental home, running from their elders and the controlling constraints they represent. Such a situation can either manifest in one of two ways – where children run *from* something or where they run *to* it. In the first scenario, migration can emerge as the by-product of irreconcilable differences between adults and children (for example, in situations of serious personality clash or abuse), while in the second, it surfaces as a direct result of disagreement over a specific decision, where children perceive and choose clandestine relocation as the only option for satisfying their wants.

The first type of case was apparent in a number of the children I spoke with, particularly as I was working in a Centre for rescued children. Lilian is one example. Orphaned of both mother and father, she was adopted into the family of her maternal uncle at the age of 11 or 12 and lived with them for over two years. Immediately in conflict with her aunt she also struggled to keep up with her uncle's strict and rigorous approach to childcare, asking repeatedly to be allowed to move to a different uncle, preferably the one with whom her brother now resides. Refused on a number of occasions and desperately unhappy, she eventually fled to her neighbours complaining of abuse and later found her way down to the Centre (Interview with Lilian, 07/08/2007). In a similarly difficult situation, Clemence, though living with her sister, felt constrained to flee in order to escape the abuse she suffered. This was indeed so serious that even her sister's husband beseeched her to escape (Interview with Clemence, 06/07/2007).

Clearly, then, what these two stories demonstrate is how, in times of real crisis, children can use migration as the ultimate expression of constrained agency – fleeing from a situation which offers little alternative but to seek an escape. This type of decision seems to be characterised by a movement specifically *from* rather than *to* something and represents a decisive rupture in what is an already frayed inter-generational contract.

Many runaways, however, are moving from much less difficult situations and use their clandestine relocation as a strategy to get to something, rather than from it. Giles, for example, found his educational ambitions frustrated by an aunt that refused to finance his schooling and required him to work excessive hours on her stall. Torn between his desires and her requirements, he ultimately ran away (Interview with Giles, 18/08/2007). A similar situation was expressed by a girl I spoke with from the North of the country. Desperate to continue her education but denied by her father she too ran from her family and moved independently to Cotonou to fulfil her dream (Field Notes, 02/08/2007). Likewise Didier, who, in contrast to these two cases, wanted to leave school and begin work, found himself constrained by a father who valued formal education very highly and so refused to allow him to stop. Unable to reach a compromise and certainly not in agreement, then, Didier ultimately ignored his father, secretly informed his mother and illicitly moved to Cotonou to begin an blacksmith's apprenticeship (Interview with Didier, 22/08/07)[10]. Again, though substantively different from the runaway decisions above, this type of decision also very strongly underscored the exercise of children's agency in the satisfaction of their preferences.

Patterns

One central factor in enabling such unilateral relocation, it seems, is the existence of well-established and very fluent patterns of child migration into which children can slip if they need to. Thorsen notes the importance of such patterns and cites the influence of older, returning former child migrants on the perceptions and motivations of other, younger pre-migrants and posits this as an important factor underpinning the desire of many to move (2007:21). Iversen, too, has noted a similar phenomenon, claiming that 'migrant children often follow set patterns of migration, tracing the paths set out by their peers' (2002:819-820). In my research, this fact was also abundantly clear. Of all the children I interviewed, the vast majority had actually migrated in groups or along set channels of displacement where many of their peers and predecessors had been. The street-hawkers such as Ethan and his brother were one classic example and they, like Henry, Gary or Yomana, all came from a similar region in the West of the country. In each case, I was told how children had migrated together in large numbers and ordinarily returned together in the same groups. Similarly, of the ten boys I interviewed doing iron-work apprenticeships in Cotonou, four mentioned specifically that one of the highlights of the job is the amount of other young boys there are to interact with, a fact which is especially important given that they all originate from the same small area of the country. This was one of the reasons which in fact inspired Christophe to move to Cotonou in the first place and, more importantly still, was identified by Didier, the child whose

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[10] Such action has been widely documented elsewhere in the region and, in Ghana for example, is known as 'dodging' (see Whitehead et al., 2007:13).

migratory decision could most clearly be characterised as conflictual (Interview with Didier, 22/08/07; Interview with Christophe, 24/08/2007). What this reflects, then, is the power of peer perceptions and peer sociality as an extra-parental influence in children's lives.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conclusion, then, we must highlight at once the central importance of children's own agency in determining their migratory trajectories. Children exist as social, cultural and economic actors in their own right and they, like their adult peers, make decisions as to their and their families' well-being based on a reasoned consideration of their opportunity sets. At the most simple level this can include a toddler crying for it's aunt while at the most complex it can involve a teenager secretly fleeing to access the labour market. In either case it is with adults that children most frequently have to negotiate to exercise such agency. In such a scenario children's decisions therefore represent either a reflection of, a compromise with, or a challenge to adult authority. The inter-generational bond is important, though neither fixed nor permanent, and challenging it can often be a key step on the road to self-realisation. As such, we can only conclude, once again, just how misplaced the assumptions underpinning orthodox, institutional understandings of independent child migration actually are.

Conclusion

This paper began with the belief that institutional understandings of independent child migration in Southern Benin significantly misconstrue the nature of that migration. Based on an initial, prior observation of the multiple and varied experiences of independent child migrants in the region, the research was designed in order to more fully explore the tension between lived and represented realities and to provide more accurate responses to the question as to why children leave the parental home.

The discussion began by arguing that the orthodox institutional position can be characterised by what Hashim has described as a discursive 'pathologising' of the child's migratory experience. In this 'pathological' model, migration is seen as a negative break in the 'normal' order of things and one which thus occurs only in the event of extreme, unfortunate circumstances. Taking a critical theoretic perspective in the analysis of this model as embodied in its central textual manifestations, I have suggested that it is based on seven central assumptions and that it is these assumptions themselves which narrow the lens through which the model draws its conclusions. In examining these assumptions, I have shown how they in turn are based on a number of problematic accepted truths, normative theories and reductive discourses. By exposing these as such, I have challenged the basis from which the model analyses independent child migration and have endeavoured thereby to offer a theoretical platform from which it can be viewed differently.

The bulk of the paper, therefore, has proceeded from this platform by trying to build a more contextualised, representative and balanced picture of child migration in the region and the social forces and individual actors that shape the child's migratory (and pre-migratory) experience. The empirical work began in Section two by offering a contextual account of Southern Beninese social structures and explaining how these offer a backdrop for 'embedded' child mobility. The discussion showed how this mobility occurs on both intra- and extra-kin lines. In the former case it represents an expression of collective social imperatives and child rearing practices, while in the latter it can be a vehicle for individual children's self-realisation. Section three continued elaborating this grounded picture by analysing the historical and contemporary place of the migrant and migration within local social spaces. It argued that migration is, and historically has been, often viewed as a positive process in the region, offering a means for the cultivation of both economic capital and social status.

Whilst these two sections developed the contextual perspective within which child mobility can be understood, in the final two sections I presented trends which emerged during the interviews conducted specifically in response to the principal research question as to why children leave the parental home in Southern Benin. These trends were divided in to two strands - 1) decisions made by families, on behalf of, or in agreement with, the child, and 2) decisions made by children themselves based on their own understandings of their life-worlds. In contrast to the dominant institutional representations, these sections both showed child migration to be much more than a reactive 'crisis-response'. Parental decisions are explained as an expression of collective survival strategies as well as of communal approaches to both childcare and economic or social advancement. I show parents to decide in response to social, cultural and economic needs such as they perceive them. Their decisions are

not, therefore, the ignorant reactive responses that the 'pathological' model paints them to be.

Similarly, Section five empirically confounded this model by demonstrating children to be economic and social actors in their own right. Drawing principally on interviews with migrant or former migrant children, children's migratory decisions are discussed as the reasoned, considered choices that they are. Though largely constrained by the gerontocratic structure of the social worlds they inhabit, the children in this study have shown themselves to actively negotiate around their constraints. Crucially, it is often through migration that they do so.

In conclusion, then, it should by now be clear that the hegemonic representations of (and discourse around) independent child migration in Southern Benin draw more from their own implicit biases than they do from grounded understandings of local social realities. Given that these representations continue to inform both policy and practice with regard to children, their families and their migratory decisions, a challenge to their dominance becomes imperative. As Escobar famously observed, the most productive way to challenge the hegemonic representations that structure our world is to ethnographically observe, and learn from, their subaltern alternatives (1994). This paper has been an attempt to do just that.

Research Methods Appendix

Introduction

The history of the study of children has, until recently, been coloured by the same positivistic, paternalist approach that has characterised and, many would argue, undermined, much social science research. In trying to emulate and attain the status of 'natural science', the social science quest for objective knowledge has led to an instrumental and top-down approach to the gathering of information about people and their worlds (see Acker et al.1983). Where those people have been young the negative effects of this approach have been all the more apparent, as demonstrated by both the mischaracterisation of young people's understandings and life experiences and the consequent misdirection of policies concerning them (see Rogers 2004). It is with this in mind that the research process undertaken for this thesis rejected early social science paradigms and proceeded from the assumption that truth and knowledge can never be objective, that all reality is inter-subjectively constituted and that a participatory, continually self-reflexive, qualitative (largely ethnographic) methodology must be central to data collection, especially where interpersonal interactions so clearly embody potentially harmful power differentials between researcher and researched (see Boyden and Ennew 1997). In reflecting on this methodology, I will first elaborate the epistemological and methodological framework that underpinned my research. The following section will review the individual methods used in the gathering of data, highlighting the reasons why each was chosen, how they were used and the limitations they posed. In the final sections I will reflect on my own positionality within the research process and on the ethics of that process, before concluding with a summary of the foregoing discussion.

Epistemological and Methodological Framework

This study emerged as an exploration of the tensions between the *represented* and *lived* realities of child migrants and 'child victims of trafficking' in Southern Benin. For the most part, the research thus far into independent child migration in the region has been characterised by both superficial levels of analysis and an entrenched positivism. A classic example of this is the influential report by Ouensavi and Kielland (2000), in which large numbers of systematically sampled mothers (and only mothers) were surveyed to provide a regression-based quantitative analysis of what they claimed to be the reasons behind their children's migration.

That such an approach is problematic has been demonstrated widely by the critiques offered in the post-positivist tradition of critical, feminist and post-modern theory. Johnson (1998), for example, demonstrates how such a reliance on quantitative data is based on the reductive assumption that reality is singular and thus objectively knowable by individuals, as a result of careful observation. The relativist deconstruction of this modernist fallacy, however, has opened the way for understanding reality as multiple, varying and constituted between the often unequal inter-subjective space between individuals. As such, the naivety of research that attempts to explain social phenomena through quantitatively-based postulations sees itself increasingly challenged by contemporary social science research, including my own.

In line with this, I opted to conduct my research using a broader, person-centred, ethnographic approach in the hope of yielding what Geertz terms 'thick description' or 'deep data' (1994:214). The critiques outlined above now argue that more insight can be gained into particular social realities by using the ethnographic method of inquiry. In its early form this approach was moulded by what Malinowski termed the grasping of 'the native's point of view, his relation to life…*his* vision of *his* world' (2007[1922]:52), or what has more recently been termed an 'emic' perspective. In this understanding, participating and gaining perspective on the life-worlds of others is the essence of good research. In a post-positivist, relative world where even an *insider's* understandings of her own realities can be problematised, however, even this approach offers no claims to representative authority. Therefore, as with Geertz, my approach aims to yield 'thick description' or 'deep data', not as 'a search of law, but [as] an interpretive one in search of meaning'. Since all research writings are simply 'constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (1994:214-217), my research never claims to be the objective, quantified authority claimed by researchers like Kielland and Ouensavi, but rather to achieve the 'thick descriptions' of more contemporary ethnographers. I thus aimed to build as detailed and contextualised a picture as possible of the life-worlds of Beninese child migrants, trying to understand them on their terms, through interaction with them, in the aim of ultimately 'guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions for better guesses' (Geertz 1994:224).

Given the recent emphasis on the importance of reciprocity in a world now recognised as constituted equally by and in the space between individual agents, and the consequent centrality of contemporary discussions on the hidden nature of power relations between people(s) in the research process, I chose to use mainly open-ended questioning and participatory techniques in formulating these 'guesses' so as to avoid the imposition and exploitation that has been argued to characterise much other social research (see Boyden and Ennew 1997; Punch 2002; ILO 2002). I also chose to focus largely on the under-represented *objects* of the Kielland study, the children themselves, who, following the advances of women's and childhood studies, I considered not only to be the most useful individuals to consult in establishing (and potentially positively impacting upon) the nature of their realities, but also morally *entitled*, as individuals, to be heard in a study about their own life-worlds. This was complemented by a necessarily self-reflexive analysis of the role of the researcher and research tools in the research process and the creation and representation of realities. Particular attention was paid to the way the research would impact on those researched. All efforts were taken to do no harm to participants, either immediately, during research encounters, or later, during the dissemination of reports.

In choosing a research site consideration was given to time and resource constraints and to potential access to data. Given my already strongly established professional and personal links with local institutions in Southern Benin (particularly Cotonou), the socio-economic disparities in the region and the fact that most child migration and most government and civil society bodies appear concentrated around this area, the decision was taken to base the first phase of research in the Childcare Centre of a large INGO in Cotonou. Time was divided between interviewing and observing individuals either associated with relevant institutions or in specifically selected parts of the city, and gathering secondary textual data (particularly representative policy

documents). The second phase of research involved field-visits to different rural (migration-sending) communities to interview children and adults.

<u>Overview of Methods</u>

Given the approach to this research and its stated aims, there were a number of specific methods that seemed most appropriate for the collection of data in the field. This section will discuss those methods and will highlight the theoretical debates as to their merits, explaining precisely why each was chosen. It will also discuss the limitations, both theoretical and practical, to each of the methods, and highlight how these were overcome.

Participant Observation and 'Hanging Out'

Bernard describes participant observation as the 'sine qua non of anthropological fieldwork' (1998:16), while for Atkinson and Hammerseley, all 'social research is a form of participant observation because we cannot study the world without being a part of it'. In this view 'participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers' (1994:249).

Participant observation was therefore one of my most central tools in elaborating a picture of the realities of Southern Benin, its children and their migration. Through time spent living amongst Beninese families and engaging in the daily rhythms of life, through working, talking and playing with Beninese children, through 'hanging out' (in the truest ethnographic sense [see Rodgers 2004]), I was able to gain a more detailed, 'thick' insight into the multifarious nature of Southern Benin's societies and the place of children, including migrants, within them. The careful recording of, and constant (personal and collective) reflection on, the realities of which I was a part enabled me to supplement and solidify my own understandings.

Although the balance between participant and observer was one I tried to maintain throughout my research, it was often a difficult balance to sustain. Dewalt et al. observe the huge and necessary tension involved in being at once participant and observer and, consequently, elaborate a scale of different levels at which one can be both one and the other (1998). In my case, one of the key differentiating factors (aside from my age, gender, race and mother tongue – as discussed below) between myself as a participant and an observer was the taking of notes. Though widely recognised as central to the process of ethnographic research - as the tool through which observed realities are recorded by the researcher (albeit in imperfectly transliterated textual form) and refracted for others as representation - the taking of notes can immediately distinguish the ethnographer as observer from the ethnographer as participant. The barrier that the notebook can create can thus affect the nature of data collected. I therefore had to train my memory to record as much detail as possible before finding a suitable moment when I could document all that I had gathered, though this approach inevitably left me open to the problems of data recall (Levy and Hollan 1998:356). Alternatively, where this was too challenging, I was conscious to use as inconspicuous a notebook as possible and openly offer to those around me the explanation of why and what I was recording. Fortunately, with children, this was a sufficient, even enticing clarification (as it was an excuse for them to participate and show me how they, too, could scribble, thus building deeper bonds of trust between

us), while with literate adults, it was understood as a natural accompaniment to my research. With illiterate adults, I recognise that it could have distanced me somewhat from them, affecting the nature of the data, but these fears were allayed by the fact that, in such encounters, I was accompanied by an interpreter known to the adults in question, placing them at ease.

Institutional Affiliation

Moore and Stewart describe the 'explosive growth' of NGOs involved in the development process (2000:80), while Clarke describes NGOs as 'important actors in the developing world' (1998:37-39). In this context I felt that an investigation inspired by the institutional understandings of certain children's realities should involve contact with specific organisations. Whilst this can be problematic, there are distinct advantages to the choice of working within an institutional framework.

Primary among these is logistical. Having well-established links with well-established actors in the institutional field enabled the access necessary to 'snowball' my collection of potential interviewees and crucial secondary data, as I had both the contacts and credibility of someone established in the field before even arriving.

This played out positively in the choice of the principle organisation with which I was to affiliate. This INGO works with the 'target group' of 'child victims of trafficking' and therefore seemed perfectly placed to facilitate my research. Their childcare centre and large population of children presented a group that I could productively engage with. Moreover, given the difficulty of identifying or safely reaching 'trafficked children' or those engaged in some of the more challenging/hidden labour activities (see Zimmerman and Watts 2003), I thought it more prudent and feasible to at least begin by researching with children in a protected institutional setting. Furthermore, considering the importance of establishing trust with respondents (Levy and Hollan 1998), especially children, (for whom the researcher-researched power imbalance is so acute [Boyden and Ennew 1997]), I felt that working on a daily basis in their presence would aid in developing the trust essential to gathering quality data.

Finally, in line with feminist theory, it is my belief that research should be both 'action-oriented' and participatory, and, as such, beneficial and empowering for the participants (see Adkins 2004). In the words of Seymour-Smith, researchers must try to 'perform some useful or valued service in return for the collaboration require[d]' (Seymour-Smith in Robben and Sluka 2007:9). Given the complexities involved in operationalising such an approach, I felt that interning in a shelter such as that in Cotonou would give me at least one concrete opportunity to positively contribute to the lives of those I wished to understand.

Despite these positives, however, researching in an institutional setting did provide numerous challenges. Not least of which was the need to balance personal and professional responsibilities and aims. Whilst I never felt the fear of being co-opted, in the way O'Neill (2001) argues that one might, I did have to be careful to avoid being sidetracked from my research goals. Though I took the precaution of clearly explaining to all concerned my primary focus (to avoid the conflict of interests and expectations that Hilhorst (2003) or Mosse (2006) encountered), I still found balancing the aims and needs of an employer and a research project at times difficult,

especially where the internal lines of communication between different organisational levels were sufficiently crossed for each to hold different attitudes towards, and understandings of, research.

This occurred in specific situations when individuals obstructed the progress of my work. As the approach of staff members to children was often very different from my own (being much less person-centred or participatory) I occasionally found myself in the uncomfortable position of witnessing what Massarik terms 'the hostile interview' (Massarik in Wengraf 2001:153). Fearful for both the children's emotional well-being and the implications my association with such a process might have on my trust with them, I insisted on accompanying the children back to the shelter from the interview rooms, careful to talk to each about what was happening and why, comforting and empathising with them. While this may have averted more serious problems (and, though difficult to verify, it may have strengthened the bonds of trust), it was still a serious and arguably unnecessary challenge.

Participatory Techniques with Children

Participation in research is a methodological approach that is part of an ethical-philosophical framework that sees all people (including children) as individuals on equal footing with the researcher and as subjective agents in the research process. As Veale argues, 'such research is [about] the 'generation' of knowledge, rather than its capture or extraction' (in Campbell and Trotter 2007:33), while for the ILO, it involves 'learn[ing] from children, not just about children' (2002:3).

The generative learning of knowledge can occur in multiple ways and can include either the use of specifically *participatory tools* (such as those advocated in toolkits and manuals for research with children) or through the application of a *participatory style* in the use of traditional research tools such as the interview.

The most important active tool I utilised for my research was the interview. In accordance with the participatory style, I used what Levy and Hollan describe as the 'person-centred approach', which involves open-ended questions that invite participants to elaborate the interview in ways they see fit, rather than being directed (and thus constrained) by the researcher (1998). This style allowed participants to exercise their agency in shaping the encounter, which in turn provided me with more contextual ethnographic data than could have been obtained with the closed survey-questioning of traditional social research (Boyden and Ennew 1997:8). Furthermore, in constantly being receptive to the possibility of a young person initiating and leading discussions with me, it allowed the young people around me to set the research agenda themselves, offering me information in ways and in details that I, as the researcher, might not otherwise have thought to seek out. More importantly, these methods left those I worked with, at worst, happy at having had the chance to be involved in interesting activities and, at best, 'released' or 'unburdened' by having been given the chance to speak about their experiences and be taken seriously by another individual (Field Notes, 06/08/2007).

In order to encourage greater comfort with my young participants, I also conducted group interviews. Many commentators note how, given the apparent physical and social power imbalance between adult and child, some child research participants are

more at ease surrounded by their peers. Although this can cause reactivity in the presentation of their stories, I felt that anything which puts children at ease and which minimises the power imbalance would be useful in obtaining 'thick' data[11].

There are, however, problems associated with interviewing children in a participatory fashion. As Punch explains, 'children are not used to expressing their views freely or to being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society' (2002:4). This can leave children feeling inhibited where they do not receive the explicit guidance they are socialised into needing, which, in turn, can affect the data collected. In societies where children occupy a largely subordinate position, the use of participatory techniques in interviews is also often obstructed by adults, including childcare professionals. Although, as Wilson (1992) cautions, I was careful to explain to all research assistants precisely how I wished to conduct my research, I found myself frequently constrained by the adult-centric prejudices of those around me. In one particularly informative example, I was forced to rescue an interview situation that had degenerated when my translator began to take control, probing the child with her own questions, aggressively pushing for a response.

Language, therefore, demonstrated itself to be an essential prerequisite for the use of both a participatory style and participatory tools. As Levy and Hollan argue 'it is deeply distorting not to work in the respondent's core language' (1998:338). My inability to speak Fon (and my consequent need to work in French or with a translator) affected the nature of data I received. Arguably, it inhibited the children and placed a structural barrier between our fluent communication, widening the interpretative gap between us through the interpreter (Fontana and Frey 2003:77). This was particularly problematic especially when the interpreter was an institutional employee and had personal methods for working with children that did not align with my own - a tension which played out most apparently when I tried to employ more innovative participatory techniques.

Following Punch (2002) and Boyden and Ennew (1997), I also involved drawing, story-telling and group discussions as ways of encouraging younger people to communicate more freely. Additionally, I tried to encourage young people to interview each other. These methods proved very difficult to implement. In my case, the unwillingness of some staff to help me or to recognise my methods as appropriate left me relatively powerless to have activities carried out in a suitable fashion, considerably affecting the nature of data I was able to gather. As Campbell and Trotter (2007) found, there can often be a real difference between participation in theory and participation in practice.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Adults

Participatory methods are also applicable for use with adults. Not every method is appropriate to all situations however, and given the fact that the adults I interviewed were either influential figures in civil society and important resources in the childcare profession, or rural people to whom I was introduced, I chose the semi-structured interview as my primary research tool.

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[11] This also includes sitting at eye-level with children, avoiding placing symbols of authority such as tables between them and the researcher, avoiding interruption and encouraging them when they open up - all of which I was sure to do. I also chose to avoid using a voice recorder, despite the potential resultant problems of recall, for fear this would disturb the children.

With important members of civil society I recognised that open-ended questions might become frustrating, appearing too directionless for people with limited time. As Winkler demonstrates, access to such 'elites' can in itself be very challenging (1987:134). I therefore felt that a certain level of structure was needed for such interviews. Accordingly, I made sure to have a minimum of framing questions to open the discussions and to 'steer' conversation towards the issues that needed to be covered, without stifling the interviewee in such a way as to leave him or her feeling unsatisfied. Such an approach can offer 'elites' a positive confirmation of their status (Levy and Hollan 1998:338).

With rural people, however, my challenges were of a different nature. One of the central and most crucial elements to successful ethnographic research is *time*. In order to build contacts, trust and emic understandings, to develop and refine 'guesses' (in Geertz's sense) and to gain 'entry' into a community, one has to make significant temporal investments (Johnson [1984]2007). Since a key structural limitation of this study was time, and whilst wary of doing the 'Landrover research' of which Boyden and Ennew caution (1997:88), I was obliged to be relatively direct in my engagement with many rural adults, opting for semi-structured questioning. Fortunately, I was accompanied to all my rural interviews by an interpreter who was both a close colleague of mine and a recognised figure in each local community, thus facilitating entry and reducing the risk of respondents feeling unsatisfied at our less that ideally participatory encounter.

Personal Positionality

In Mullings' seminal piece on the importance of understanding 'positionality' in research, she defines it as the 'unique mix of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and other identifiers' (each of which can shift fluidly with time and place), and argues that, as a result of these different vectors of identity and their interaction with those of other people, a researcher's understandings of a given situation can only ever be 'partial' (1999:337).

In my case as a white, male, adult, graduate student from a Northern, Anglophone society, I inhabit demonstrably different identities to the black, Francophone-African, often female and frequently unschooled children I was researching. This unquestionably affected the nature of the bonds I was able to form and the understandings they enabled me to cultivate, though not only in negative fashion. For Mullings, it is not simply that 'insiders' or 'outsiders' get better information, for in different contexts being 'the same' or 'different' can help or hinder the research process in equal measure. Where identity is multiple and fluid, what is most important is to seek common ground which can 'engender trust and co-operation' (1999:340), or in Berreman's terms, to learn 'impression management' ([1972]2007) and activate different aspects of one's identity at different points in order to better relate to different others.

In managing my impressions I was careful never to be dishonest about who I perceived myself to be or where I recognise myself as from. That said, however, different aspects of myself (or selves) came to the fore at different times. For example, while some children were intimidated by my difference and consequently

shied away from research encounters with me (perhaps resulting in bias), with many my difference was largely an object of curiosity. For some, my foreignness also enabled them to open up to me in a way they would not have with an adult from their own society, while for others the opposite was true.

Similarly, with adults, this management of impressions was equally important. As a white man in an African country, at times I was seen to embody the global weight of socio-economic difference. With some, therefore, it is possible that my research interactions were coloured by the implicit expectation that talking to me could result in material benefit, a reality I took careful precautions to avoid. For example, I was sure to be accompanied by someone known to the community, or to return to areas where I was already recognised and where my status was less important. By contrast, however, embodying the global elite of an educated white male did, at times, serve to open certain doors that would otherwise have been closed. In gaining access to Beninese elites or European expatriates involved locally in childcare, my association with Oxford and with respected local organisations enabled me to obtain interviews with an ease that few researchers can enjoy.

Particularly interesting, was the frequently liminal space that I inhabited which allowed many people to feel comfortable with me in ways that would not have been possible had I been definitively one or another thing. For example, being a Francophone enabled me to converse freely with people in a way that an Anglophone could not, but in being British, I was able to avoid the negative colonial and post-colonial associations of French politics in the region. Furthermore, communicating in what was a second language for both myself and for the many Beninese with whom I spoke engendered a familiarity and a parity in our interactions that would not have been possible were we speaking in a language that was mine, and not theirs. Moreover, my approach to Fon, the dominant language, was also integral to this. In taking time to learn a few key words and phrases and employing them as often as possible, I relaxed people by placing myself, culturally and linguistically, on the same plane as a child in the process of learning.

More importantly, the fact that I had lived and worked in Benin previously and already attained a certain level of intimacy with Beninese cultures meant that, in contrast to many researchers, I was already in many ways an initié to the situations I was experiencing. This worked in my favour as people were pleasantly surprised at my knowledge and were constantly prepared to take me into their worlds. To my ethnographic satisfaction, 'you are a Beninois at heart' was a refrain I frequently heard.

Ethics

The University of Oxford's ethical guidelines served as a framework for ensuring the ethical nature of this research. Many of the ethical issues, such as the balancing of institutional and research goals, have already been discussed. I will therefore only highlight here the other central precautions and steps I took to ensure that my research conformed to accepted ethical standards.

Foremost amongst these was of course the obtaining of informed consent from research participants. In my research I was careful to obtain and continually

renegotiate such consent. As Boyden and Ennew argue, this 'is especially important in research involving children because they are much less able than adults to exercise, or indeed recognise, their right to refuse to participate' (1997:41). Consequently, I took great care to ensure that each of the children I worked with was both aware of this right *and* fully informed as to what the research entailed, in order to be able to exercise it from an informed position. One way of achieving this was to ask the children if they could explain to me what they thought I was trying to understand after having introduced my work. Another was to ensure that participants were offered the opportunity to reaffirm or withdraw their consent at different points throughout our interactions. In line with Laws and Mann (2004), however, I declined to obtain written consent from any of the children I worked with for fear that this should either alienate them (where literacy was low) or cause discomfort amongst those unfamiliar (or too familiar) with institutional authority.

Another critical concern in any research is ensuring the security and safety of all participants and I took all measures necessary to achieve this. In the Centre, security posed less of a problem and was largely taken care of by the institutional protocols to which I adhered. For non-institutionalised children and adults, however, I took care to conduct research encounters in as safe and comfortable a setting as possible, which, in the case of street selling children, for example, occurred largely in an environment they had selected. Now away from the research site, I have continued to protect the identity of all respondents and any sensitive data they gave me, by coding and securing my notes.

Another important issue in an action-oriented study is reciprocity. Whilst I was able to ensure reciprocity in my research exchanges with the children I worked with in the Centre (as discussed above), this was harder to achieve with children working and living outside an institutional setting. Thus, with street sellers or village traders, for example, I was careful to purchase something every time we spoke. Each time I did, I made my purchase at the beginning of our exchange so as to avoid biasing their interaction with me. Rather than offer simple payment, I felt this to be much more of an equal gesture.

My last crucial ethical concern is with the politics of representation. Hastrup and Elass (1999) show how even when advocating for a group (or for a more 'accurate' representation of that group), you have to be careful to avoid the homogenising tendencies of almost all representation. With a group as broad and, frankly, externally defined as 'independent child migrants' this is especially true. In order to avoid misrepresentation, I took pains to discuss and reassess my interpretations with participants as I was making them and am still in contact with many sources with whom I discuss my conclusions.

Conclusion

In this appendix I have tried to present an overview of the research process undertaken to investigate the realities of independent child migration in Benin. I have demonstrated the epistemological and methodological leanings which underpin this research and shown how these have informed the way my research progressed. In trying to stay true to an action-oriented, participatory, ethnographic style, I feel I was able to successfully negotiate the balance between my responsibilities to research, to

those who participated, and to those I have been trying to represent. If I have managed to approach the 'thick' description hoped for, then this research has not been without purpose.

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Interviews With Children:

No.	Codename	Date	Sex	Age	Employment/Activity/Position
1	Henry	24/07/2007	M	14	Scratch-card-Seller
2	Henrietta	24/07/2007	F	13	Street-hawker
3	Elisabeth	25/07/2007	F	13	At School/Former Domestic Servant/Market-Seller
4	Regan	25/07/2007	F	16	At School/Former Domestic Servant/Market-Seller
5	Yasmine	25/07/2007	F	15	At School/Former Domestic Servant/Market-Seller
6	Yolanda	26/07/2007	F	10/11	Former Domestic Worker
7	Joss	06/08/2007	F	16	Former Domestic Worker
8	Bridget	06/07/2007	F	15	Former Domestic Worker
9	Clemence	06/07/2007	F	16	Former Domestic Worker
10	Jen	06/07/2007	F	9	Street-hawker
11	Lilian	07/08/2007	F	13	Lived with Uncle
12	Fernanda	07/08/2007	F	10	Former Hairdressing Apprentices
13	Jess	09/08/2007	F	10ish	Former Domestic Servant/Market-Seller
14	Nicola	09/08/2007	F	16	Former Domestic Worker
15.i,15.ii,15.iii	Pip	08/08/07,04/09/07,05/09/07	F	8	Summertime Pineapple-Sellers/Schoolchildren
16.i,16.ii.16.iii	Nape	08/08/07,04/09/07,05/09/07	M	10	Summertime Pineapple-Sellers/Schoolchildren
17.i,17.ii,17.iii	Celia	08/08/07,04/09/07,05/09/07	F	16	Summertime Pineapple-Sellers/Schoolchildren
18	Ethan	12/08/2007	M	17	Street Scratch-card-Seller
19	Gabby	14/08/2007	F	16	Former Domestic Worker
20	Ewan	16/08/2007	M	13	Summertime Pineapple-Seller/Schoolboy
21	Pierre	22/08/2007	M	14	Apprentice Blacksmith
22	Frank	22/08/2007	M	16	Apprentice Blacksmith
23	Didier	22/08/2007	M	13ish	Apprentice Blacksmith
24	Milton	22/08/2007	M	10	Apprentice Blacksmith
25	Darren	22/08/2007	M	13	Apprentice Blacksmith
26	John	24/08/2007	M	12	Apprentice Blacksmith
27	Jules	24/08/2007	M	14	Apprentice Blacksmith
28	Erick	24/08/2007	M	10	Apprentice Blacksmith
29	Christophe	24/08/2007	M	16	Apprentice Blacksmith
30	Euan	24/08/2007	M	15	Street Scratch-card-Seller

Interviews with Adults:

No.	Codename	Date	Sex	Age	Employment/Activity/Position
31	Nourredine	24/07/2007	M	50s	Child NGO Director
31.i	"	18/08/2007	"	"	"
32	Elisabeth's Father	25/07/2007	M	45	Farmer/Father of Elisabeth
33	Teddy	25/07/2007	M	35	Farmer/Former 'Trafficker'
34	Sam	08/08/2007	M	45	NGO Worker
35	Steve	09/08/2007	M	30	Placement Intermediary
36	Red	18/08/2007	M	45	Bureaucrat
37	Freddy	18/08/2007	M	60S	Village Elder/Carpenter
38	Giles	18/08/2007	M	30s/40s	Village Elder
39	Gary	18/08/2007	M	30	Unknown
40	Winston	21/08/2007	M	35ish	Fisherman
41	Wilis	21/08/2007	M	35ish	Fisherman
42	Adri	21/08/2007	M	21	Fisherman
43	Adam	21/08/2007	M	40	Fisherman
44	Olaf	24/08/2007	M	42	NGO Child Policy Specialist
44.i	"	28/08/2007	"	"	"
45	Cory	28/08/2007	M	40s	NGO Child Policy Specialist
46	Mary	30/08/2007	F	29	Child NGO Employee
47	Cynthia	30/08/2007	F	50	State Social Worker
48	Trevor	30/08/2007	M	40s	Former 'Trafficker', now Photographer
49	Tim	30/08/2007	M	35	Former 'Trafficker', now Labourer in Abeokuta
50	PJ	30/08/2007	M	40	Farmer/Father of Girl in Care
51	Group1	30/08/2007	M	Elderly	Farmer/Grandfather of Boy in Care
52	"	30/08/2007	M	Elderly	Farmer/Villager
53	"	30/08/2007	M	Elderly	Farmer/Villager
54	Yomana	01/09/2007	M	22	School-goer/Odd Jobs
55	Frederic	01/09/2007	M	27	School-goer/Farmer
56	Bernard	01/09/2007	M	22	School-goer
57	Paul	01/09/2007	M	22	Apprentice Mechanic
58	Sandra	01/09/2007	F	45	Senior Child NGO Staff Member
59	Alexia	02/09/2007	F	35	Senior Religious NGO Staff Member
60	Jeremia	0209/2007	M	35	Multilateral Organisation Representative

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