Home Abroad: Eastern European children's family and peer relationships

after migration

Introduction

Contemporary patterns of global mobility have led to an increase in the number of families who live separated by borders. Migration is 'a special case of the development of social networks' (Eve, 2010), and its effects on families have only recently become subject of in-depth investigation. The importance of children's relationships for their development, well-being and life opportunities has been emphasised by research. In this article, we are interested in how children's relationships are affected by family migration, and how they adapt to the need to reconfigure their networks, through ties maintained with their homelands and new relationships developed post-migration. Family migration engages children in a variety of social, cultural and emotional settings which represent the contexts within which their networks develop. As the significance of social networks has been extensively discussed in research with adults (Ryan, 2011; McGhee *et al.*, 2013), we think it is important to turn our attention to the role of children's networks.

This paper reviews first the theoretical and research underpinnings of social network analysis to the study of children's relationships and argues for the need of a more nuanced examination of children's multiple networks, as reconfigured by migration. We also examine the extent to which children are empowered agents in the processes of network mobilisation and review the factors that influence children's networks, including parents' decisions, place, social class and ethnicity.

Transnationalism, family networks and children's agency

Research with migrant adults has shown how the pressures of succeeding in the new country and maintaining links with those left behind represent 'competing obligations' (McGhee *et al.*, 2013), with significant emotional strain for both migrants and families left behind. Studies have examined how households continue to function across borders, and how migration calls for a redistribution of traditional divisions of labour. For instance, practices of 'caring at a distance' (Baldassar, 2007) or 'transnational mothering' (Parreñas, 2005) are common, with migrating adults doing the caring and supporting of children over the phone. However, children are more than just passive recipients of their parents' migration decisions (Knörr, 2005). Forms of resistance, such as arguing or complaining, are used to influence adults' decisions and to put pressure on parents to return.

Studies on children who migrate with their families have shown how concerns about children's future and welfare are key influences in adults' decisions to migrate (Orellana *et al*., 2001). Recent calls to examine migrant children's agency are based on the 'competent child' approach (Bak and Brömssen, 2010), inspired by the new sociology of childhood (James *et al*., 1998). Migration causes significant changes in the power dynamics of the parent-child relationships. Children, for example, become cultural brokers for families (Schaeffer, 2013), as they learn the language more quickly through schooling. This emphasises children's active role in navigating the local and transnational spaces (Devine, 2011; Ní Laoire *et al*., 2011), notwithstanding the conflict of living at the intersection of contrasting cultures. In the context of transnationalism, defined as 'processes, patterns and relations that connect people or projects in different places in the world' (Harney and Baltassar, 2007:190), the role of children is still to be fully understood.

Children's experiences post-migration need thus to be seen in the contexts of adults' views of children as in need of protection and of increased anxieties that a new, unknown place may pose (Olwig and Gulløv, 2003). Elias and Lemish (2008) say that families undergo two adaptation processes post-migration: one of "outward" integration (i.e. sociocultural adaptation) and an "inward" integration (i.e. preservation of family unity and cultural values). This can lead to intergenerational conflict, where children integrate more quickly (Levitt and Waters, 2002) and challenge parents' attempts to control them and the relationships they develop. The study presented here aims to examine children's multi-sited networks, with a focus on their active role and capacities to mobilise and sustain these.

Researching children's networks post-migration

Network theory (Riviera *et al*., 2010) provides a useful framework for analysing children's networks, with three types of perspectives traditionally used by research:

- *Assortative perspectives*, which emphasise shared attributes between individuals, for example, ethnicity or class;
- *Relational perspectives*, which focus on relationships within networks, issues of trust and information exchanges;
- *Proximity perspectives,* which reflect on networks as developing in time and space.

Numerous studies on children's friendships have focussed on the assortative mechanisms, where shared attributes function as 'the glue' of children's friendships. Gender, for example, is a key determinant of 'best friend' networks from a young age

(Evaldsson, 2003) and friendships based on same ethnicity (Reynolds, 2007) or religion (Wendzio and Wingens, 2014) have been shown to help minority children bond or maintain their sense of cultural identity. However, children are also involved in networks characterised by difference, often fulfilling different purposes. Reynolds (2007) found that inter-ethnic ties allowed children to explore the new culture, while in Devine's study in Ireland (2009), migrant children used their friendships with Irish peers to get help with school work and protection against racial abuse.

Another strand of research on children's friendships has focussed on the relational, 'within-the-network' elements (Riviera *et al*., 2010), to examine children's position at network level, the strengths of ties and the factors which facilitate trust between members. Reynolds (2004) has highlighted, for example, how tight kinship systems within Carribean immigrant families have led to positive orientation of children to schools. In studies of multi-ethnic networks, membership of groups was not on equal terms and hierarchies between ethnicities were reported (Aboud *et al*., 2003). Overall, children appear to find it more difficult to engage in inter-ethnic friendships, reflecting findings on migrant adults (Ryan, 2011). Furthermore, children's inter-ethnic friendships are less stable and key factors identified for exclusion from groups were different cultural norms (Jugert *et al*., 2013) and racial prejudice (Aboud *et al*., 2003). This may explain why migrant children go to great lengths to maintain friendships transnationally with friends in their homeland (Haikkola, 2011).

The third approach used in explaining the establishment of social networks focuses on proximity mechanisms and the importance of sociocultural environments in facilitating interactions (Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Olwig and Gullog, 2003). Schaffer (2013) has highlighted the significant role of public places such as parks and playgrounds for children's brokering role in their parents' inter-ethnic relationships. Research on migrant children's participation in community activities has been however limited. Cheong *et al*. (2007) have criticised the emphasis on recent initiatives on migrants' responsibilities to participate in society, while sidelining interventions needed to tackle the inherent inequalities within neighbourhoods where migrants live. In researching migrant children, how neighbourhoods impact on children's opportunities to engage in valuable networks is key to understanding their experiences post-migration. However, the role of place needs to be considered beyond the local, by taking into account the multi-sited nature of children's networks, including the transnational. Children's spaces are also significantly controlled by adults, who legitimise this through ideologies of care and protection (James *et al*., 1998), and adults' role remains key to any investigation.

Migration poses thus considerable challenges for children's relationships. Informed by the existing research and adopting a social networks approach, this paper examines the processes through which children's networks change due to family migration and the processes through which they negotiate existing networks and form new ones post-migration. We define networks widely, to include family members, friends and peers, neighbours and community acquaintances. The significance of one's networks in providing practical, emotional support and benefits such as company or social integration is well documented (Hill, 2002). Migrant children however need to reconfigure their networks in order to benefit from these positive network functions. In this sense, we consider children's networks as dynamic and as influenced by a range of factors, including their own agency.

The case of Eastern European migration

Since 2004, international migration has been a major cause of family separation in Eastern Europe. The disintegration of the Communist regimes and the ongoing political transformations since the late 1980s brought new challenges in relation to the social, economic and family policies. Despite the establishment of major democratic freedoms, many families were faced with anxieties about their future, fuelled by economic turmoil and high unemployment (Robila, 2009). Since the early 1990s, aspirations towards the Western values and living standards have driven many families in the East to migrate to the alluring West. While migration was restricted by visa regulations in the 1990s, the enlargement of Europe after 2004 meant that citizens from the Accession countries were given unrestricted access to work.

During the Communist regimes, people often relied on informal networks of support to access resources and compensate for inadequate state provision. As a result, family and friendship networks were highly trusted, while representatives of the state institutions and services were not (Bukowski, 1996). In the post-Communist transition, lack of trust in state institutions, combined with high unemployment and perceived corruption and nepotism, have acted as 'push' factors, motivating many to leave in search of better opportunities. Many of the immigrants from Eastern Europe to the Western countries have been young, college-educated (Castles and Miller, 2009). Studies have shown how years of reliance of informal networks have influenced people's strategies for migration, relying on friends already migrated to find jobs or accommodation (Ryan, 2011), or on family networks, to help with looking after children or older parents left behind. However, among those migrated, competition as well as collaboration was shown to affect diaspora relationships (Robila, 2009). There are no studies on how adults' limited trust in state institutions and competition with

other migrants has affected migrant children's attitudes, although an assumption could be made that parents' views would be shared with children. Although children in our study were born in the post-Communist era, many had experienced the poor access to resources and choices available to their families pre-migration and were aware of these as 'push' factors for their families' migration.

Research methodology

This qualitative study aimed to explore the adaptive processes of children of Eastern European migrant workers. Initially, 11 focus groups were carried out with 57 children of various nationalities, all first generation migrants who lived abroad for less than four years. Focus groups have been used in research with migrant children (Reynolds, 2004; Devine, 2009; Bak and Brömssen, 2010), as they can generate a greater rate of responses based on shared experiences, acknowledging children as experts (Hill, 2006). The second stage involved in-depth case studies with 23 Eastern European families, including 29 children. These cases included some children from the focus groups, but also newly recruited children, to ensure diversity of nationalities. There was a majority Polish families (n=13), while the other cases involved 5 Lithuanian, 4 Slovaks, 2 Bulgarian and 2 Romanian families, as well as 1 Hungarian, 1 Russian and 1 Czech family. In terms of social class, the majority (n=19) were families working in low-skilled jobs, such as cleaning, agriculture, food industry and construction, although many had college-level qualifications. Five were single parent families.

The research was informed by ethical guidelines for researching with children (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). After discussing and eliciting consent, children were visited at home twice, to provide a more relaxed context, and asked to complete diaries and take photographs of their life in Scotland if they wanted to. The use of visual methods recognises the multi-modal nature of children's everyday lives (Sharples *et al*., 2005) and gives them some control over the research process. In the study, we relied on children's diaries and photographs as prompts for conversations. Interpreters were present, when required, and a multiple perspective was gained by interviewing at least one parent in each family.

Once collected, the data were analysed thematically (Boyatzis, 1998). Initially, an overview thematic grid was produced, mapping out descriptive summaries of the issues emerging. Relevant sections of the transcripts were then assigned appropriate thematic codes and refined sub-categories emerged. An NVivo package was used to systematically code all transcripts. Since this study is based on an interpretivist paradigm, transferability of the thematic findings to all migrant families is neither possible nor the aim of the study. All names used in the article are pseudonyms.

Family relationships after migration

The idea of family relationships as under pressure post-migration has featured in other research (Baldassar, 2007; McGhee *et al*., 2013), but few studies have explored children's perspective. In our study, children commented on how their relationships were under pressure from the moment parents decided to migrate. In most cases, one adult migrated first and then the family followed, although this was not immediate and had direct consequences for family relationships.

'He'll always blame the mother'- leaving children behind

Consistent with other research, families reported complex migration circumstances, which often included parents migrating alone at first. Children remembered what it was like to be 'left behind' and how this had affected relationships:

> It was just me and my mum and you almost forgot your dad was away. And then when we came here, it was different, like you thinking, why did he leave me? (Agnieska, 13, Polish)

Many children knew that they would follow their parents abroad, provided parents would find suitable employment. This meant that the pre-migration stages were marked by mixed emotions, of excitement and anticipation, but also considerable anxiety, and sometimes led to blaming the migrant parent. Benas had lived alone for almost a year with his 14 years old sister in Lithuania before coming to join his mother:

> Interviewer: How do you think a child feels about their parents when they first come Scotland?
> Benas: He hates them, definitely. He doesn't hate them, I mean, he just doesn't like them very much (laughs).
> Interviewer: So that's why there's tension with the mother, you said.
> Benas: Yeah, because - because mother is trying to protect him and she goes first to find work and to check things are ok. But he still thinks that his mother is to blame. (Benas, 13, Lithuanian)

Parents were usually aware of the children's feelings and talked about their emotional strain at having to leave them behind, while also dealing with pressure from the rest of their family, who did not want them to leave. They kept in touch regularly, to reassure children that reunion would happen 'soon', although in many instances, families had to wait years before the situation would be favourable to family reunification. This processes of 'caring at distance' (Baldassar, 2007) could do little to address the significant changes that families were already undergoing on an emotional and relational level.

'It's not like you imagined it'- Family reunification

Feelings before migration meant that when family reunification took place, relationships involved a fine balancing act. Children talked about feeling slightly distanced from their parents and the 'strangeness' of being a family unit again:

> It was 28th October. I remember because, each year we celebrate our arrival, because my father was so busy and he didn't have time to get food, and our first meal was in KFC. And we sat there eating and I was just thinking, this feels strange, back to our old family. (Marta, 11, Polish)

In some families, the strain of temporary separation led to divorce, and children found themselves in single-parent or reconfigured families post-migration. Andrej and Karolina moved with their mother from Poland six months after their father came to find work, but a year later, children were living with their father and the paternal grandfather, who came over to help with childcare:

> Interviewer: Who did come to Scotland with?
> Karolina: I came with Andrzej and with my mum - my dad was already here.
> Interviewee: Did you always live in this flat?
> Karolina: We first lived in another house, but then my mum went to Spain.
> Interviewer: Your mum went to Spain?
> Karolina: Yes. But now she lives here in the village again, with her boyfriend.
> Interviewer: And do you get to stay with her at the weekends?
> Karolina: Weekends and sometimes in the week, too. (Karolina, 9, Polish)

Life post-migration was not always as the children had imagined it, with tensions in the adult-child relationships, as family members had to rely more on children and were themselves under pressure to 'make it'. Vincent, a 16 years old Lithuanian boy, was living with his mother and brother in Scotland for almost two years:

> Interviewer: So how have you changed as a family since you moved here?
> Vincent: I never talked to my mum in Lithuania, I never talk to her here. I just ignore her most of the time.
> Interviewer: You don't talk to each other too much?
> Vincent: I argue with her all the time- don't like her.
> Interviewer: Did you used to be close when you were younger?
> Vincent: Nope. She'd never actually be with us. Most of the time she'd be away, and now is the same, she just works. So…Maybe because she's brought us here, just don't like this country at all. It's not like you imagine it before you come.

While parents worked longer hours, often in low-skilled jobs, and in the absence of extended family networks, children had to take on responsibilities such as looking after younger siblings, do more house chores or even taking on small paid jobs

themselves, contributing thus to "family divisions of labour" (Orellana, 2001). This often led to resentment of parents and more reliance on siblings for emotional support.

'I miss my grandmother'- Doing relationships long distance
Children talked about the fact that migrating was not their decision (Knörr, 2005) and how migration meant lost opportunities of interaction with relatives:

> I miss my grandmother, I used to spend my summer holidays with her and she looked after me when my mum came first to Scotland. I'd help her in garden. Here, we don't have the garden like in Poland. And we'd do things like paint Easter eggs, play cards and so on. (Agnieska, 12, Polish)

As a result, children often adopted an active role in keeping transnational relationships alive, through writing letters and cards or via technology. This occasionally involved children teaching family members how to use computers, demonstrating again their transnational agency (Reynolds, 2007). Such intergenerational interactions were valuable sources of cultural capital:

> My grandma has now internet so we can keep in touch better. She asks me what it's like here, and I say, it's different. So I show her the school uniform, tell her about the weather, and when we celebrated St Andrew's Day at school, I told her about that, then she tells me her things. And we speak in Polish, which is good for me. (Natalia, 12, Polish)

Most children described frequent visits to their homeland, due to cheaper travel costs, and some had visited other countries where their relatives had migrated. Vlad, an 8 years old Romanian Roma boy, explained how his family were spread across Europe:

> Interviewer: So are the rest of your family in Romania?
> Vlad: Well, my grandpas are in Romania, but my big sister lives in France, and my auntie in Ireland.
> Interviewer: And do you visit them?
> Vlad: We go at Christmas to Ireland and then in summer, we go to Romania.

For migrant children thus, transnational relationships were a normalised feature of their life post-migration. As Olwig (2003) claims, country of origin and nationality did not represent migrant children's main places of identification, as social and cultural practices were more important to them and often stretched over several countries.

Maintaining kinship relationships was a priority for all families. Parents talked about wanting to give children a sense of stability and how they purchased technology or organised visits back home to facilitate the maintenance of ties. They saw transnational relationships as a source of cultural capital (Eve, 2010), ensuring that children remained familiar with the language and cultural norms and also valued the emotional support children received from friends and relatives left behind. In some cases, the precarious situation of jobs gave parents an additional reason for maintaining transnational ties, in the eventuality of family return.

Children's friendships after migration

Friendship networks have been shown to fulfil various positive functions (Hill, 2002), including access to wider, capital-forming networks. In our study, friendships were key to children's overall satisfaction with their migratory experience. However, the nature, strength of ties and dynamics of friendship networks varied considerably between children, and depended on factors such as age, gender, social class and children's resourcefulness in initiating and maintaining new networks.

'I tried to stay in touch with my friend'- Transnational friendships

In the initial stages post-migration, children employed complex strategies to maintain transnational friendships (Haikkola, 2011), including writing letters to friends who did not have computers, chatting online and visiting friends during occasional trips to their homeland. However, these friendship bonds seemed to weaken over time:

> I tried to stay in touch with my friend back in Russia, writing her letters, but …I don't know, we just kind of stopped because she didn't get my letters … I sent them again and she didn't get them, then she sent one and I didn't get it, so…'
> (Jelena, 13, Russian)

Kasia, a Polish girl aged 10, talked about the symbolic value of objects that reminded her of a friend who would not keep in touch:

> Kasia: I sent her many emails, but she didn't write me back.
> Interviewer: Maybe she doesn't check her email often.
> Kasia: She hasn't replied for months.
> Interviewer: What about calling her?
> Kasia: I don't have her number, that's the problem. The only thing I have is this clock she gave me, and those flowers she painted.

Overall, girls seemed to long more for friendships left behind, or at least express their feelings more freely. They also tried to find possible explanations for why friends left behind would become more distant in time. Gintare, a 16 years old Lithuanian, put this down to her friends' limited experience of the world and perhaps envy:

> Gintare: I mean they've never emigrated and they're living in the same country … and they can't understand you sometimes. They think 'Oh, you're dreaming'. Like it can't be real, this life, they can't believe in me. And it offends me sometimes. We still keep in touch, but…
>
> Interviewer: Do you miss them at all?
>
> Gintare: Hmmm… not anymore.

These findings suggest that children had eventually come to the realisation that old friendships would fade due to the lack of regular contact, unlike family relationships which were based on stronger ties. They were also realising how they had changed in the process due to their new experience, which meant a lack of a shared experiences with their 'old' friends and the need to move on.

'You speak the same language'- Building intra-ethnic friendships

Schools are important sites of socialisation and development of peer networks (Bak and Brömssen, 2010; Devine, 2009). Many schools encouraged children to develop friendships with children of the same ethnicity, reflecting teachers' a-critical approach to working with diverse learners (Devine, 2011). This was mostly the case with Polish children, who arrived in bigger numbers, especially in urban areas:

> Interviewer: And what about friends in Scotland?
> Katarina: Here, you might have friends, but not so many as in Poland.
> Interviewer: And would it be very difficult to make friends here?
> Katharina: If a child doesn't speak English, then yes, she can't make friends, you can't communicate with them.
> Ewa: She might have friends who are as well Polish. (Focus group, Polish)

While children thought that a shared language helped initially, being from the same country was not enough to ensure new networks, due to markers such as social class or different interests:

> Karolina: Well, me and my brother are the only ones that actually work hard. The other Polish children at school swear in Polish all the time …
> Interviewer: I see. So you are not friends with them as much?
> Karolina: No. (Karolina, 9, Polish)

> Well, there's different ways how you say things in different parts in Poland, like accents, and we play different games. And then we like different things, we have different families and places we like to go to. (Agatha, 11, Polish)

In addition to school, opportunities for intra-ethnic networks were also created by diaspora, through complementary schools and churches. These were seen by parents as important spaces for children to experience cultural-specific norms and build friendships. However, attendance was not always the children's choice:

> I'm not that keen [on the Saturday school], I'd rather play football with the boys outside, but my dad insists that I go, he says it's good for me to learn Polish and how they teach things in Poland, in case we go back. (Kamil, 9, Polish)

Kamil's answer shows how conflicting values can lead to intergenerational conflict post-migration (Levitt and Waters, 2002). His view illustrates migrant children's experiences of navigating between social and cultural places post-migration. Negotiating between activities their parents wanted them to engage in, due mainly to an idealised view of values that need preserving, and children's preference for activities brought by other networks was a feature of family interactions. Children often put pressure on parents through strategies such as arguing, pleading or cajoling to give in and make allowances for their preferences. While children articulated an understanding of the importance of maintaining culturally specific ties, they were also active in mobilising and developing new networks locally, based on attributes other than shared ethnicity.

'It's like they are so united' – Making inter-ethnic friendships

Making friends with children of other nationalities was a difficult aspect of life post-migration for most children (see also Devine, 2011; Heikkola, 2011). Some mentioned the fact that their arrival did not coincide with the start of the school year and their language skills were initially a significant barrier:

> If you come like in the second term and the group are already used to each other -they kind of reject you. Then you would be close to something like two friends after two years, that's the real friends, that's it- 'cause you can't speak (the language). (Martin, 13, Hungarian)

Almost all children felt there was a difference between old friends from home and new friends in Scotland, emphasising their marginal position in inter-ethnic networks:

> I'm not saying it's hard to find friends, but it's not easy either. I mean the Scottish children are like "one". One is doing something, everybody's doing

that. And say you offend somebody, they will stick together and try and do something bad to you, they are so united. (Benas, 13, Lithuanian)

It's difficult, because I can talk about everything with my Czech friends, but not with my Scottish friends, they wouldn't get some things. (Jan, 12, Czech)

Nevertheless, children were resourceful and established friendships in a range of settings, which often assumed different levels of closeness and different network benefits. Marta, aged 11, in Scotland for two years, explained how her friendship networks were mapped across contexts:

Marta: My best friend is Weronika, she lives in Poland.

Interviewer: Do you stay in touch?

Marta: Yes, by email or Skype, although we don't speak that often.

Interviewer: In the diary, you wrote that your other friends are Agnieszka, Dominika, Laura, Mika.

Marta: Laura is from Scotland and Mika is from Philippines, they are my friends from class, we do homework together, and Agnieszka and Dominika are from Poland, but they live in Scotland and they go to Saturday school, so we talk about Polish things together. And Sylwia, she is friend from my street.

Marta's example illustrates the dynamic and multi-sited nature of children's friendships, many of which bridged over aspects of difference (Juggert *et al*., 2013), such as ethnicity or social class, and often bonded over gender as the main attribute. In time, many children had positive experiences of making Scottish friends. They felt that their Scottish friends were supportive, helping them to learn the language and looking after them:

Kasia: My Scottish friends helped me a lot … they taught me different words, and then they brought me books in English, showed me around the school.

Interviewer: So they helped you because the teacher asked them to?

Kasia: No, they are my friends, that's why they helped me. (Kasia, 10, Polish)

For Calin, a Romanian Roma boy, friendships with children from another ethnicity were mainly about protection, reflecting perhaps Roma's historical experiences of discrimination:

Calin: I have many friends here, some of them are Serbs. And if anyone fights with me, my Serbian friends help me.

Interviewer:: So how many friends would a new child have in Scotland?

> Calin: About 3 or 4.
> Interviewer: So what country are his friends from?
> Calin: Romania, they are from Romania. He stays with his friends from Romania, it's safer. (Calin, 9, Romanian Roma)

Not all inter-ethnic friendships were however straight forward. While younger children seemed to develop networks more easily and despite their limited English skills, older children were much more selective. In certain cases, segregated ethnic groups would form and conflicts between these would erupt, sometimes fuelled by stereotypical views children carried with them from Eastern Europe. Roma children, for example, were often seen as 'undesirable' by Romanian, Slovak or Polish children. Jonas and Vincent, Lithuanian brothers aged 13 and 16, explain why they could not be friends with Polish children:

> Interviewer: You don't have any Polish friends?
> Jonas: No (laughs).
> Vincent: Oh no, none of them, they're rivals.
> Interviewer: They're rivals, are they?
> Jonas: Yeah.
> Vincent: I don't like them. I'm not being racist, just…
> Interviewer: Do you actually argue or?
> Vincent: No actually, I don't even want to talk to them…just ignore them.
> Jonas: They're always like standing in corners-
> Interviewer: Does that come from living in Lithuania or was it just when you got here?
> Vincent: A bit it's coming from, living in Lithuania and when we came here, it just got worse. It's like 22 of them in the school, so…

This case highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to the analysis of children's networks post-migration, by taking into consideration children's multiple cultural frameworks which influence their networking decisions. Children tended to draw upon a combination of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic networks post-migration, often for different purposes. However, engaging in inter-ethnic friendships was not straight forward (Jugert *et al*., 2013), and issues such as cultural differences, stereotypes and social class seemed to influence considerably the type and strengths of interethnic ties. Overall, children's friendships emerged however as key aspect of their migratory experience.

Neighbourhood and community relationships

Putman (2000) highlights the crucial role of the local area in one's access to useful social networks. In the case of migrant workers, who often find low-paid jobs below their qualifications, cheaper housing is the first step in the transition to life abroad. As neighbourhoods are segregated in Britain, families often found themselves in areas of deprivation, blighted by social and economic problems.

Because of the area we live in'- The importance of place

Many children were aware that the areas they were living were worse than expected, but they accepted it as a temporary compromise:

> Because of the area we live in, there are many teenagers who take drugs, drink and smoke in the park, and sometimes you hear them shouting things like stupid, f**king Polish when you pass by, so there is no way my mum would let me play there. Maybe after we move… (Bartek, Polish, 12)

Parents perceived their neighbours as 'different' from themselves. Difference was often expressed in terms of social class, with attributes such as locals' perceived level of education, aspirations and lifestyles mentioned. In this cases, parents actively encouraged children to move beyond the neighbourhood in identifying new friends:

> Mother: Well, I see a really big difference in class- and the differences of bringing up children. I can tell someone's background, just by hearing how they speak, looking at their clothes.
> Ana: Yes, my mother doesn't like me to socialise with these people, she says I should find other friends.
> Mother: Well, these parents are unemployed, on social benefits, they create a vicious circle because their children mostly when grow up they don't want to work. So no, I don't like that influence on you. (Ana, Bulgarian, 12)

If parents felt that the area was unsafe, they often restricted children's access outdoors. This loss of freedom of movement impacted considerably on how children perceived life in Scotland:

> My mum doesn't want me out much, she says it's not safe…there were some problems with the local youth, they threw stones at us and shouting swearing words. I tend to stay mostly at home, while back in Lithuania, I could go out by myself. You can imagine I'm not that happy about it. (Radicz, 13, Lithuanian)

In the circumstances, migrant children's coping strategies included ensuring that they did not access spaces perceived as 'dangerous', making friends with local children who could 'defend' them if needed and speaking with a Scottish accent, to blend in:

> Interviewer: You have quite a Scottish accent.
>
> Sara: Yeah, 'cause then people can't recognise you [as foreigner], so they're not racist, so it's good. (Sara, 15, Polish)

'I met them at the playground' - Neighbourhood networks

In addition to the significance of neighbourhood characteristics, many families talked about the changes in levels of engagement with neighbours post-migration and the sense of isolation, due to the language barrier and cultural differences. For some who moved from rural areas, the impersonal urban neighbourhoods where one does not know their neighbours was a source of stress. Children were however brokers of neighbourhood relationships, forging relationships with local children:

> Interviewer: Do your friends come to play with you?
> Kasia: Sometimes. Last week, my neighbours came to me. One is in my age and the other is younger. I met them at the playground.
> Interviewer: And are they from Poland?
> Kasia: No, they are Scottish, and there is one other girl on ground floor, I play with her too. (Kasia, 10, Polish)

Children also took an active role in identifying local activities and often persuaded parents to let them attend. Girls seemed to favour activities such as dance, swimming, drama classes, and boys bonded over football, basketball and karate classes and street-based play. Involvement in leisure activities was important in mediating children's opportunities for integration and new support networks, not just with other children, but also with professionals such as librarians, sport coaches or community youth workers. This also helped migrant families get to know others locally, although many parents felt they had acquired 'acquaintances' rather than friendships.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the accounts of the Eastern European children has revealed the sheer diversity of children's relationships as reshaped by family migration and emotional impact this has on them. We aimed to examine migrant children's networks and this has led to some important critiques in the way in which these are conceptualised. By relying on Rivera *et al.*'s (2010) typology of network mechanisms, we have identified several key observations in relation to the creation, persistence and dissolution of children's social relationships post-migration. While some networks based on assortative aspects, such as same gender or age, maintained their durability across time and space, allowing children a sense of continuity during this important transition, others were lost or became less significant in time, and their loss affected children emotionally. Similarity in children's attributes before migration was not enough to keep

relationships alive when separated by distance. The assortative mechanisms became however manifest again post-migration, when children entered new networks. Inter-ethnic networks were part of children's life post-migration (see also Aboud et al., 2003; Schaeffer, 2013), and aspects such as shared age, class and gender, were often as important as shared language. Inter-ethnic relationships were not always devoid of conflict or emotional strain, as ethnic and class divisions were "imported" and children reverted to patterns of network exclusion familiar to them pre-migration. Migration leads thus to the diversification of children's networks, which are configured by the new spaces children access, but also mapped out on learnt relational mechanisms (Riviera *et al*., 2010), whereby trust and relationships within a network are conditioned by ethnic and class stereotypes. Some children are thus seen as 'undesirables' mainly due to one key characteristic, such as ethnicity or class identity, and in this instances the relational mechanisms at network level are fraught by cultural stereotypes children bring with them when migrating.

These findings both confirm and challenge some of the existing evidence on children's social networks post-migration and lead to important conclusions in relation to the significance of proximity mechanisms (Riviera *et al*., 2010) in children's networks. Migration places children in new social and relational contexts, different in terms of family and friends they can rely on in their everyday lives, family income and local opportunities for network development and this poses a considerable strain on them. However, children display significant resilience and agency and they identify quickly strategies that allow them to simultaneously maintain significant ties transnationally and develop new networks. These factors also influence their transition, in addition to aspects they have no control over, such as the decision to migrate or families' income and living circumstances post-migration.

The empirical evidence from our study has demonstrated the different sites of networking for migrant children, highlighting the role of children's agency in negotiating membership to networks across sites. As children are unable to make decisions about where they live, living in undesirable neighbourhoods due to parents' low income means fewer opportunities to develop bridging networks with local children or access services. This implies that children's social networks are most effective when other factors, such as class status and family income, support their opportunities for network creation and maintenance. Others have shown how migrants 'do not only move as individuals, but just as significantly as members of a family network' (Olwig, 2003) and how parents' control impacts on migrant children's experiences. Children's immediate social and cultural environments post-migration

are key aspects for creating opportunities for chance encounters and interactions with significant others.

The uncertainty about families' settlement abroad long-term reflected an acute awareness that children's relationships remained dynamic, contingent and in a state of constant flow, with direct impact in terms of strengths of ties and durability of new networks. This has highlighted the importance of empirical research focused on children's experiences across different settings, through a more nuanced understanding of how various contexts and individual attributes interact at different times. How children enhance some networks or distance themselves from others in order to adapt post-migration and also how various factors impact on the strength, usefulness and durability of such networks remain valid empirical questions worthy of further exploration.

Acknowledgments

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