Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Youth: Navigating Relational Borderlands

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Abstract:

With increasing empirical focus on young people's border crossings, theoretical understanding is needed to contextualize the complex relations between borders and young people. This chapter provides a nuanced discussion of theory that is missing from the limited literature on unaccompanied minors but that is critical to understanding young people's mobility and migration. It connects with U.S. immigration policy and is a litmus test for the increasingly violent effects of inequalities in the global political economy. Unaccompanied child migrants are caught in literal and symbolic borderlands that permeate their experiences of childhood, adulthood, family and community membership, and citizenship. As youth, they are always on, in, around, or going under, over or through a border of some kind. Rather than purely physical, these borders are relational.

Key words: children's geography, borders/borderlands, transnational youth migration, post-structural theorizing

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Liliana is a 6-year-old girl from Tamaulipas, Mexico. In 2012, her parents hired smugglers to bring her across the Mexico-United States border. They feared for Liliana's safety because of the cartel violence that plagues Tamaulipas. Yet, Liliana's smuggler failed to get her across the border unnoticed. While he fled, she was apprehended by a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agent, taken to an adult detention facility near the border for processing and then transferred to a U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelter for unaccompanied minors. There, she was clothed and counseled while awaiting reunification with her parents. The center also provided an opportunity for Liliana to join other detained child migrants in a classroom setting, where a teacher provided lessons to stimulate children of various ages. Like all detained unaccompanied minors, Liliana's legal immigration proceedings began immediately following her apprehension. She attended her first court hearing once released from the shelter. When questioned by the judge, Liliana did not understand that she had crossed an international border and was presently in a different country (Preston, 2012). She only knew that she was finally with her parents.

16-year-old Miguel, on the other hand, left his parents behind when he fled Guatemala's capital city. Miguel was first approached by the transnational gang, *Mara 18*, while playing soccer outside his school. He refused to join. The gang's recruitment efforts continued and then escalated to violence when, one day, mistaking Miguel's brother for him, they fired a gun in his direction. With Miguel's brother permanently injured from the shooting, the family began receiving threats and demands for money. Worried for his life and his family's safety, Miguel escaped through Guatemala and into Mexico atop trains until he reached the Mexico-U.S. border. He too was apprehended while attempting to cross, taken into custody and transferred to an ORR shelter within 72 hours. Miguel now lives with his uncle in California. He misses his mother and

talks to her on the phone regularly. Miguel never asks her whether *Mara 18* still harasses them, as he cannot bear to know (Green Sterling, 2013).

Liliana and Miguel are two young people of thousands who come to the United States each year and millions that leave their homes elsewhere in the world for a host of reasons (Kennedy, 2012, 2013a). While some are as young as a few weeks old, most are between the ages of 14 and 17 (WRC, 2012). The vast majority of unaccompanied youth come from Mexico, but in recent years there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of child migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These three nations, in particular, have a growing transnational gang presence that challenges the state's ability and willingness to protect its citizens (Kennedy, 2013b). This rise is reflected in government data on apprehensions: in 2008, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended approximately 8,000 unaccompanied youth at the border, but by 2012, the number had risen to almost 25,000 apprehensions. During this short four-year period, almost 87,000 unaccompanied child migrants have been caught crossing the Mexico-U.S. border without papers (U.S. Border Patrol, 2012). These numbers do not reflect the thousands of undocumented youth who successfully evade detection.

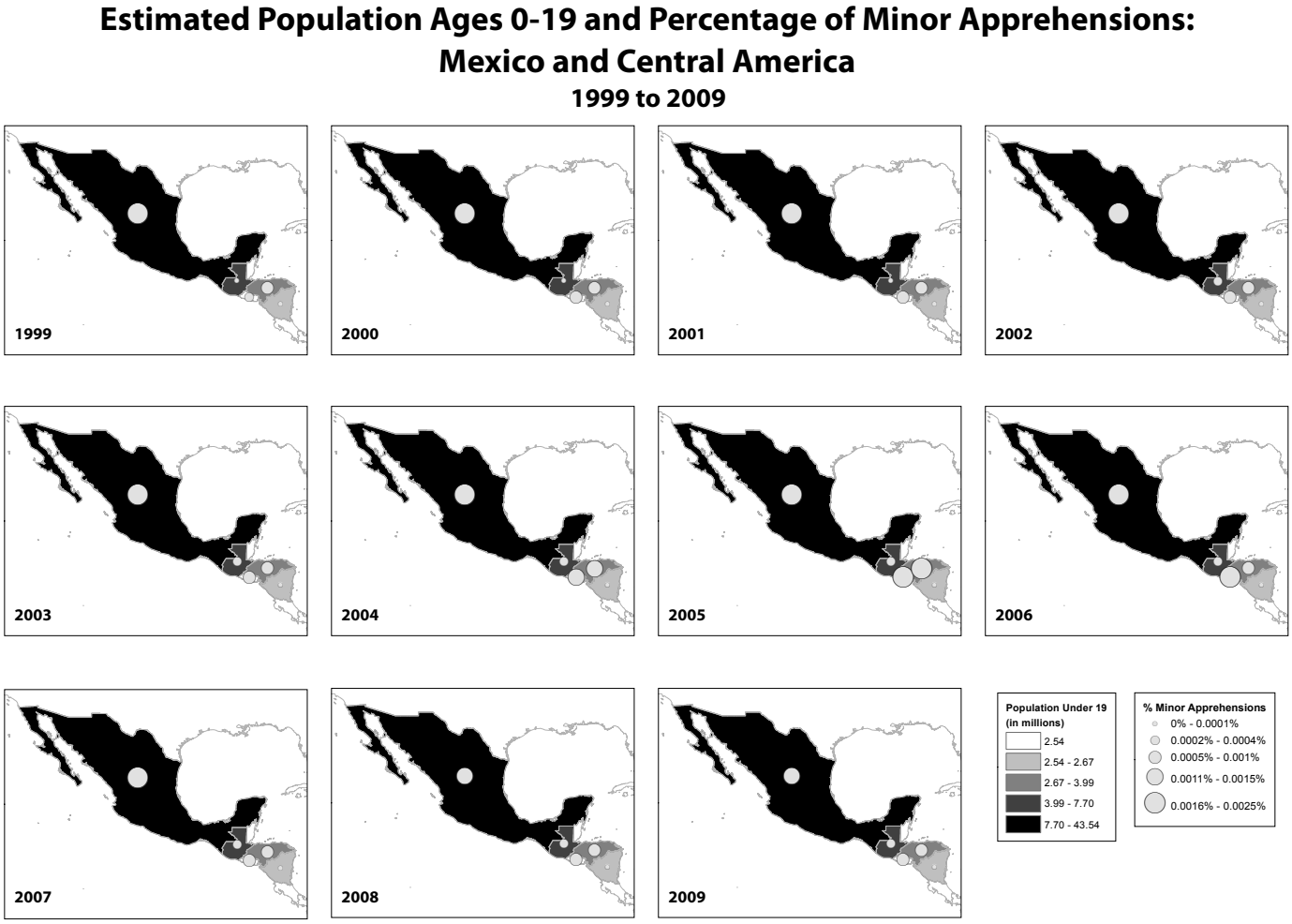

Figure 1. Central American source areas of children apprehended crossing the US/Mexican border without documentation. While Mexico is the primary sending country, because of a consular agreement between Canada, Mexico and the United States, most citizens of immediately neighboring countries are subject to expedited removal. In practice, this means that unaccompanied minors from Mexico are rarely admitted to ORR shelters, where 88% of youth are from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (Data Source: U.S. Border Patrol's Enforcement Integrated Database; Map created by Crystal English).

Aggregate data on unaccompanied minors crossing borders are unreliable, given that some cross successfully, while others are apprehended (Aitken and Herman, 2009). Figure 1 is a series of maps compiled from U.S. Border Patrol data on minors apprehended at the U.S.'s Southwestern border normalized by the most recent national census data for children under 19 years of age. Liliana and Miguel are part of these data. Nonetheless, the paucity of information of this kind limits our ability to monitor and explain young people's movements. By lumping their movement with their adult counterparts, they are often neglected in citizenship and migration studies. This neglect of autonomous children limits our abilities to understand the nuances of transnational movements (Huijmans and Baker, 2012), not just in terms of monitoring flows or addressing the debate between youth trafficking and migration but also in terms of the familial and generational practices that propel those movements (Bosco *et al.,* 2010; Aitken, 2008; Aitken and Plows, 2010). By focusing on young people moving from and to particular places, important questions are raised about the relations between life-course choices, citizenship, the global political economy and state violence (Pratt, 2012). The processes and experiences through which children move and develop further highlight larger global economic and political forces (Aitken *et al.,* 2008). For these reasons, their movement is of significant concern locally, nationally and internationally.

The Mexico-United States Border

The Mexico-United States border is a particularly pertinent place to study the lives of unaccompanied minors. It is the largest land border in the world. Mexico is both an origin and destination country for migrants, and the United States hosts the largest migrant population (of

approximately 43 million) globally, with Latinas/os as its fastest growing subset. This border attracts migrants from throughout the Americas as part of long-established communal, economic, historical and political flows. This political border – like only a few others in the world – has become an over-determined space, orientated towards criminalizing anyone who tries to come across without appropriate legal documentation. As such, it is a structured, disciplined space that treats six-year-olds like Liliana and 16-year-old asylum seekers like Miguel the same as undocumented 45-year-olds in search of work.

The Mexico-U.S. border is hugely contradictory. The easing of trade restrictions (such as the North American and Central American Free Trade Agreements) allows goods and jobs to flow freely. Concomitantly, the tightening of migration legislation and enforcement practices increasingly restricts human movement, even while offering employment to those who come. Those wishing to enter, reside and work legally in the United States must obtain a visa, which can begin migrants' pathways to permanent residency and then citizenship. Yet, present wait times for visas of all types have skyrocketed from several weeks in the early 1990s to several years – or even decades depending on country of origin (National Immigration Forum, 2012). The heavy militarization of the approximately 3,200-kilometer border began in 1994 with the introduction of Operation Blockade in El Paso and, in 1996, with Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego (Figure 2). Both involved all-out efforts to reduce illegal border crossings by investing in surveillance equipment, fencing, and increased border patrol agent presence. After 9/11, U.S. security concerns heightened further, leading to the Secure Fence Act in 2006, which resulted in federal approval for a 700-mile double layer border fence (Figure 3). With a budget that has increased nearly tenfold from 1993 to 2011, the influx of money has been used to quintuple the number of agents on the ground from 4,028 in 1993 to 21,444 in 2011, supply large stretches of

the border with intermittent control towers, and employ 10 unmanned, maritime-equipped military drones for surveillance (Perez and Barrett, 2013). Additionally, Mexican border agents have been trained by U.S. agents in an effort to deter or return migrants before they reach U.S. soil (Archibold, 2013).

Figure 2: Border fences at Tijuana's *Playas Parque.* The first reads 'Butterflies are free not me,' referencing the fact that butterflies may move freely between the two beaches, whereas people cannot. The second shows the fence extending into the Pacific Ocean. The third reads 'Guardian … aqui empezo. 18 anos despues, 5,800 muertes logro [Guarding began here. 18 years later, 5,800 deaths accomplished.]', a reference to this fence's resurrection – as a result of 1996's Operation Gatekeeper – and the number of deaths that have resulted from persons crossing through the desert, mountains and other dangerous, uninhabited areas instead. (Photographs by Elizabeth Kennedy)

Figure 3: The U.S.-Mexico border in rural California. As of 2013, the Secure Fence Act has installed one layer of fencing across a 650-mile expanse (Photograph by Kate Swanson).

The result is that apprehensions have increased, as have drug and other illicit goods seizures. Deaths have also climbed as migrants venture through more isolated and dangerous areas to avoid detection. For example, instead of crossing through heavily urban areas, such as El Paso, Texas or San Diego, California, many now venture into the desert or mountains and risk death by dehydration or exposure. Some estimates suggest that since the introduction of Operation Gatekeeper, well over 5,000 migrants have died while attempting to cross the Mexico-U.S. border (Jimenez, 2009). Testament to this is the largest, unmarked, non-military gravesite in the United States, located within kilometers of the Mexico-U.S. border. This site contains over 600 "John and Jane Doe's", names given to bodies found in the region's deserts and mountains that are unclaimed and unidentifiable (Figure 4). As border crossings have become more dangerous and difficult, people smugglers (*coyotes* or *polleros*) are now essential for those who can afford them, and even those who cannot (Andreas, 2000; Kanstroom, 2007; Mexican Foreign Ministry and US Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997). Unfortunately, some of these same smugglers work for the Mexican drug cartels, which means that the trafficking of arms, narcotics, and persons are intertwined. Worryingly, undocumented Central American migrants are targets of the cartels, since they have few perceived rights as they journey North. They are robbed, raped, kidnapped for ransom, and sometimes forcibly recruited into the cartels to smuggle drugs, work in the sex trade or in other forms of forced labor. For instance, in 2011, over 11,000 Latin American migrants were kidnapped by Mexican cartels over a mere six-month period (BBC News, 2011). Those who do not comply with the cartels are sometimes murdered. One of the most renown of these incidents was the abduction and massacre of 72 migrants by the Zeta Cartel in 2010 in Tamaulipas (six-year-old Liliana's home).

Figure 4: Holtville Cemetery, California. Some of the gravesites are marked with memorial rocks and stones which state, 'No olvidada' or 'Not forgotten' (Photograph by Kate Swanson).

The contexts of violence and death in and around the Mexico-US border notwithstanding, constructing a clear understanding of the movement of young people across this border without recognition of larger global inequities as a context of state violence would be difficult.

Young People, Globalization and State Violence

Some academic writing over the last decade places children closer to the center of our understanding of consumption, production and reproduction and at the heart of inequities generated by globalization (Ruddick, 2003; Aitken, 2004; Katz, 2004). These works highlight the broader historical and geographical contexts from which the lives of children are elaborated. It is

remiss, then, to not consider children's work and movement within global discourses of social reproduction that include understanding family transformations, community changes, and local and regional migrations.

We believe that it is problematic to consider issues of children's work and movement outside of issues of global consumption, production and reproduction. In a connected world of flexible capital, instantaneous market adjustments and increasingly transnational families, local places are hugely important for understanding the contexts of children's well-being (Jeffreys and Dyson, 2009). Focus on children and social reproduction is important insofar as it 'break[s] the frames of dominant models of transformations in the world system' (Stephens, 1995, p.8). A further implication of the globalization debates for children is that children are marked as flexible and mobile – perhaps the most flexible and mobile – consumers and producers of capital. This suggests the notion that children are pivotal artifacts of contemporary globalization. The so-called nature of childhood changes as the objects around children – social practices and institutions, immigration policy, family and community structures, migration routes and labor relations – shift. Of course, young people are not a simple *tabula rasa* upon which the will of capital is etched. Children not only 'become' through the influences of these changing objects, they also bring a large part of themselves into cultural life as they actively participate in the day-to-day workings of places. Further still, to the extent that the implications of globalization and transnationalism structure and transform for children's lives, then issues of disequilibrium and inequality are very much manifest at the local level.

Local geographies are emphatically impressed on the lives of young migrants. For example, in a recent publication, former World Bank president, James Wolfensohn, describes his surprising encounter with a street youth at a shelter in Honduras. Taking note of the boy's

remarkable English, he learns that he lived in South Central Los Angeles until he was deported. Wolfensohn uses this encounter to suggest that, 'geographical boundaries are no longer relevant' (2001, p.44). He goes on to say that countries in the Global South have built 'direct and immediate links' to global city regions around the world. There is no doubt that transnational linkages are being forged through circuitous migration routes and flows. Moreover, in an age of globalization, capital goods and the global elite move freely across international borders. Yet, counter to Wolfensohn's claim, geographic boundaries remain highly relevant to Latin American youth. For those who are the generational product of decades of state disinvestment and structural poverty – such as this recently deported youth, borders matter deeply.

As a consequence, we believe that globalization is multi-scalar, emanating from, and effecting, a variety of spatial levels. The local focus of globalization suggests a complex web of processes that impinge upon the lives of workers in a myriad of ways, and it is young workers who flex most under pressures to adjust. Globalization includes disinvestment in certain locations, deindustrialization, the decline of Fordist forms of manufacturing, and the rise of economies based on the service sector and high technology. The quest for new forms of investment driven by flexible capital often leads to particular forms of industrialization in previously non-industrial countries and the concomitant devastation of subsistence economies. In the same sense that the processes of globalization are neither unidirectional nor even, then it is impossible to characterize or position a uniform context for childhood because the local conditions of global children are so varied. In short, geographical studies argue that childhood is not only constructed in different ways at different times but is also varied depending upon where it is constructed (Holloway and Valentine, 2000).

The geographies of Central American and Mexican children have been shaped by a myriad of forces in distinct but also familiar ways. Over the last few decades, structural violence – what Farmer (2004) refers to as indirect and systematic violence exerted by a dominant group – has deprived young people of opportunity and a freedom to thrive. El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, and Mexican low-income communities have been devastated through processes of disinvestment and structural adjustment, which have not only diminished opportunities for young people but have also pushed many to leave. Currently, these Central American countries have some of the highest criminal violence rates in the world, and most of this violence is being experienced through the bodies of youth (Rodgers *et al.,* 2009), who are targeted by state and non-state actors (Kennedy, 2013b).

Staggering rates of violence in Central America and Mexico are tied to high levels of social inequality. The structural adjustment programs of the 1980s brought on by the World Bank and IMF devastated state support for education, healthcare and community services (Torres and Momsen, 2003; Popke and Torres, 2013). Crippled by debt payments, states became unable to invest in low-income communities. Meanwhile, rural areas watched agricultural profits disappear as export-led, large-scale agribusinesses monopolized farm profits. Left with few options, rural residents move to the cities to seek out a living among the growing masses. Shanties and slums pop up on the outskirts of growing metropolises, and generations of children grow up in high density, informal and inadequate housing structures (Davis, 2006). While urban wages allow some to purchase televisions and material commodities, these goods also allow them to measure the scale of their relative material deprivations. The stark economic discrepancies become more and more obvious through the luxurious lives depicted on the nightly *telenovelas* (soap operas). Meanwhile, the growing urban poor watch in real time as the urban

elite cloister themselves in private gated communities, while holding the majority of the nation's wealth and power. Since the 1980s, income inequality has continued to rise in the region, leaving many youth disenfranchised and lacking opportunities for social mobility (Swanson, 2012b). For some, gangs can represent a form of community since theirs have been torn apart through ongoing structural violence or a viable way to gain status, upward mobility and prestige (Jones and Rodgers, 2009). Importantly, the two largest gangs in Central America today – *MS-13* and *Mara 18* – began in Los Angeles' impoverished neighborhoods when refugee youth found themselves unprotected and at risk. In 1996, the U.S. began deporting convicted gang members, even if they had citizenship, just as Central American nations were ending and rebuilding from decades-long civil wars. As a result, both transnational gangs quickly established their presence in the region, and it has only increased since (Kennedy, 2013b).

States have responded to rising youth crime rates by implementing *mano dura* – or iron fist – policies designed to forcibly and punitively crack down on unruly youth. In some Central American nations, this has almost made being young and poor a crime (Zilberg 2007, p.76; see also Hume, 2007). In fact, by targeting young people believed to be gang-affiliated, over 20,000 El Salvadoran youth ages 12 and up were arrested under *El Plan Mano Dura* in 2003, although these arrests were later declared unconstitutional for violating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Rodgers *et al*., 2009). In response to rising violence and increasingly repressive and punitive policing strategies, many young people are choosing to leave their countries altogether to migrate to the United States (Swanson, 2013; Zilberg, 2007). Given high levels of daily violence, combined with ongoing systemic, structural violence, young people see few options left in their homelands. They are presented with limited opportunities for growth, employment, or even for education, and so, they leave in increasing numbers.

Yet the violence does not end here. To begin, they must evade the frightening cartel violence along their journeys and the same transnational gangs that control routes out of the country (Kennedy, 2013a). Once they arrive at the Mexico-U.S. border, another form of state violence awaits them, but this one is imposed by the United States through its heavily militarized and fenced border space. Those who make it onto U.S. soil must then navigate punitive U.S. immigration and deportation policies, which impose further layers of state violence upon youth bodies. As young people cross through these often violent border spaces, they are acting upon a desire for change. Like Liliana and Miguel, they are hoping for a better life – or perhaps even a shot at the increasingly elusive 'American Dream'.

From Territorial Borders to Symbolic Borderlands

Despite the relentless violence and the realness of the Mexico-U.S.'s militarized territorial border, what the border means symbolically is complex and often distinct from simplistic understandings of legal and illegal movements, or insiders and outsiders. As unaccompanied minors traverse these conflicted and difficult spaces on buses, trains, boats, cars and foot, they are always on, in, around, or going under, over or through a border of some kind in relation to their identities and goals. As such, they are caught in the *intersticios,* or in the spaces between the different worlds they inhabit (Anzaldúa, 1999, p.42). For young people, movement through these borderlands is particularly poignant, because they are more than likely transgressions across a host of other interstices. These interstitial borders include the territories between childhood/adulthood, family/community, as well as nation/globe (Aitken *et al.,* 2011; Swanson, 2012a).

While unaccompanied minors may grasp the scale of their movements as they cross rivers, mountains, plains and deserts in terms of time and distance covered, many are not familiar with aforementioned concepts and those of 'nation' and 'border,' as illustrated earlier by Liliana's story. Instead, they are journeying to improve their life circumstances, to reunite with family members, or to escape violence, amongst other motivations (Kennedy, 2012). The changing statistics and judicial demarcations discussed above belie a set of constraints, contexts and meanings that come together in ways that are not easily understood.

Several recent studies raise questions about children as agents shaping their own lives in terms of movement across borders (cf. Aitken et al., 2008, 2011). Hopkins and Hill (2008) and Huijmans and Baker (2012), for example, conduct research on the experiences of children migrating independently between world regions. Other researchers study children moving from homes to life on the streets (Conticini and Hulme, 2007; Hecht, 2004; Plummer *et al.,* 2007; Beazley, 2007; Swanson, 2010). In general though, children's independent transnational movement is not well understood or represented in the literature because 'the context of their movement tends to be subsumed … on family migration or on "trafficking", where it is assumed that coercion plays a major role' (Hashim, 2007, p.912). By labeling the bulk of young people's border movements as trafficked, the agency and energy of young people themselves is dismissed, as is their volition as co-creators in their own destinies. Nor does trafficking necessarily help explain the increasingly unsafe journeys upon which young people embark, which must be placed at the feet of state institutional policy-making and violence perpetrated by drug cartels, transnational gangs and fellow travelers. This is not to downplay the very real violence emanating from these latter sources but to raise awareness concerning the state violence against

which young people necessarily push as part of their journeys. That push is clearly another important part of their agency and energy.

Theoretically, we begin with the work of Elizabeth Grosz (2009, 2011), who advocates a new feminism that focuses on 'freedom to' (positive liberty) rather than 'freedom from' (negative liberty). While not dismissing the importance of removing the limitations that constrain individual freedoms (from exploitation, oppression, tyranny, and patriarchy) that are a traditional focus of feminism, Grosz argues that this is a partial story linked to Western-centric autonomy and choice. What is additionally needed is an understanding of what freedom enables (freedom to work, move, and play). Grosz argues for a new liberatory perspective that favors presence, action and mobility alongside the older, more passively articulated, rights-based approaches.

Key theoretical questions thus arise: what it is like to grow up in a world where geographic mobility over long distances is taken for granted? What, for example, is it like for a child to imagine their future as a different, faraway place? What is it like to travel great distances at some considerable personal risk without understanding the scale of your movements? What is it like to be dropped into a culture, sometimes violently, within which your frame of reference comes solely from what you've watched on television or heard about from friends and family members?

Desire and Movement

When considering the plight of young people and borders, questions of power, identity and mobility deserve consideration. We argue that a theoretical focus on affect and emotion goes some way to getting at UN concerns about the robustness of qualitative assessments (see Aitken

and Herman, 2009). Henri Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1999) is a beginning plea for a coherent focus on what he calls intuition (as opposed to analysis) in trying to understand the world. Through his notion of intuition, he was one of the first to look carefully at what Grosz (2011, p.1) calls 'imperceptible movements, modes of becoming, forms of change, and evolutionary transformations that make up natural, cultural and political life'. To the extent that the movements of unaccompanied minors are invisible and beyond the limited information on maps such as those depicted in Figure 1, they are nonetheless exquisite modes of becoming, forming the young lives that show up in the United States in profound political ways. These lives push against institutional violence and draconian immigration policies to the extent that change is inevitable.

From a close reading of Darwin's intuition about sexual selection, rather than his analysis of natural selection, Grosz is able to prescribe the power of desire over the so-called survival of the fittest. Darwin was concerned about the evolution of life within environments, and so his work has some bearing on young people and borders. Focusing on 'Darwin as he speaks in his own writings' (Grosz, 2011, p.2), rather than how he is translated by evolutionary biologists and ethologists, Grosz elaborates local evolutions of life as complicated, reoriented and transformed through the operations of sexual selection. Sexual selection is about desiring machines awash in difference. With desire, there is movement, and with movement, there is differentiation.

This goes some way to addressing concerns about painting all migrants with the same brush, designating their border crossing-actions as illegal or lumping all unaccompanied minors as trafficked. Grosz (2011, p.1) is particularly interested in movement and difference rather than what things become – that is, identity (illegal migrant, trafficked child) – because 'movement pre-exists the thing and is the process of differentiation that distinguished one object from

another'. Movement does not attach to a stable object, putting it in motion, and so it is the movement that defines the ways objects are differentiated.

The process of movement makes and unmakes objects, including young people, institutions and policies. This post-structural, theoretical rendering is particularly important because it applies to people and policies, suggesting neither are constructed immutably. What Grosz is interested in are the ways that material and living things overcome themselves and become something different. Movement, for Grosz, is about differentiation. From a clear post-structural perspective, it is a context of difference that is about the relations and movement between things. The forces of change emerge from within and then meet other forces that surround, embroil and entangle. From this, it is much easier to see the ways that young people come up and push against the seemingly overwhelming forces of immigration and judicial policy; in the encounter, both change. The catalyst for change is desire, and its power is as simple as the desire of a child to reunite with her parents, but the outcomes are manifest vaguely in hugely complicated and unpredictable ways. Change, then, comes from desire and as such Grosz's perspective derives further from Deleuze's critique of Freud's ideas of desire and repression.

Deleuze and Grosz assume that desire is always positive. Desire is not an object or a drive in the Freudian sense, although it can be made to be these things at one level. From a wider understanding, desire is about co-causal becoming and, on the human level, it is never strictly a personal affair, but a tension between sub- and super-personal tendencies that include the non-human (trains, border fences) and institutions (courts, border agencies) (Massumi, 1992, p.82). Cravings to kill or maim or abuse are not about desire because they do not involve co-creation. As a positive force in the world, desire is that part of movement when one moving force (a child)

meets another (an immigration policy), and change is inevitable. Of course, although desire may be thought of as a positive force of change, a deportation order is not a positive outcome. This is where the theoretical work of Henri Bergson (1999) offers some assistance.

Bergson is concerned that the mode of understanding most commonly associated with science (and judicial systems that base their outcomes primarily on rational decision-making) is 'analysis' rather than 'intuition'. The tendency of this kind of analysis is to stop the world in order to understand it better, but by so doing, all tendencies and movements disappear. Alternatively, Bergsonian intuition is about combining with a moving object in order to understand not only what it is but also what it is becoming. In the face of a problematic court outcome for an individual child migrant, Bergson's project is to transform our understanding of the person's status (a child's being) from a static, immobile concept (e.g. illegal migrant) to an intuitively mobile idea of becoming (a worker, reunited with parents, a citizen). Becomings are differentiated, open-ended elaborations of tendencies and virtualities and the movements of these tendencies. The movements form relations with other tendencies and virtualities to form, from moment to moment, Deleuzian desiring machines that have some demarcation but are fundamentally unpredictable (the young person may become a productive worker, or she may become a gang member). A person or subject does not become; rather, it is the tendencies and virtualities that move towards a multiplicity of becomings (Grosz, 2011, p. 51). Life is not a subject or a material object but is, as Grosz (2011, p. 52) points out, 'inserted into the world of material objects only to the extent that it partakes of them and can use them for its own purposes'. Importantly, drawing on Darwin, Grosz argues that material objects must be capable of 'housing the aspirations that life imposes on it'. This is the promise and hope that our theorizing moves towards in light of a repugnant empirical reality.

Grosz (2010, pp.71-72) points out that although Bergson's ideas predate Darwin's notion of sexual difference, his conception of freedom links actions to a form of self-making that parallels an understanding of difference as something that is virtual, or in the process of becoming. Bergson's ideas of freedom link not to choice and autonomy but to innovation and invention. Freedom, for Grosz, is about action; it is positive and imminent and not contained in anything that is predictable from the present. It is not a state you are in or a quality that you have, for it resides in the activities you undertake that transform yourself and (a part of) the world. Pointedly, it is about the autonomous child's journey and aspirations rather than her judicial status. It is not a property or right bestowed on or removed from an individual by others but a capacity, a potentiality, to act both in accordance with the past, as well as 'out of character,' in a manner that surprises (Grosz 2011, p.72). This sets in high-relief the notion of child rights and citizen rights that we will deal with in a moment, but first we elaborate more fully what this positioning – of desire before outcome, of movement and action before status and identity – means for mobile child migrants. To do so, we spend some time in the next section with the ways post-structural theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1988) influence Grosz's thinking and posit how this helps us understand child/space relations.

Children and Borderspaces

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988) articulate the confluences and contradictions of what they call smooth and striated space. The latter are Euclidean and hierarchical, demarcated by laws, policies and particular goals. The smoothing of a striated space such as a firmly demarcated border occurs when the place and people moving through it take on a different

orientation, one that is unpredictable and potentially transformative. Striated spaces often work to reify actions and behaviors that those in control of the mode of production put their stamp on future actions through a variety of constructs including the media and policy-making; at the same time, the rest of us (including unaccompanied minors) come to see ourselves as we are repainted by policies and media (citizen, immigrant, Chicano, alien).

The work of unaccompanied minors as they cross the border is striated to the extent that they are pushing towards getting a better education or job (I am a worker), joining a parent (I am a daughter) or obtaining legal status (I have a green card). Nonetheless, it embraces another space, a smooth borderspace (literally and metaphorically), that is nomadic, folded, non-hierarchical, un-orientable and made up of free-work action of doings. The striated space, then, is the space of 'I am' that tends to eschew the dangerous work of traveling to the border and then crossing (I run, I escape, I play, I cross). The 'I dos' cohere through a variety of pressures into something that may adhere to, be enveloped by, and resist the changing faces of state violence. In merging with these borderspaces, young people's identities are not randomly conceived, and yet, they are not predictable either.

The illness-*and*-remedy borderspace finds an echo in I am-*and*-I do, a rapport with I and *non*-I, the latter a series of repetitions that presents the changing faces of state violence, immigration policies and capitalism. The *non*-I is an imposition that for our purposes here becomes a striated space of fractal repetitions, of endless smiling children joining a loved one in the U.S. Nor is this representation fixed in its repetition or mutually exclusive as something that is striated. Neither striated nor smooth spaces are pure or fixed categories but rather they are constantly ebbing, flowing and contested constructions of space.

That said, Brian Massumi (1992) argues that smooth space is favored as a territory for becoming-other, becoming-different, becoming-citizen-and-different (Bosco *et al.,* 2009; Grosz, 2011). This territory speaks to the problematic distinction between 'being' (I am, Bergson's analysis that is static) and 'becoming' (I do, Bergson's intuition that is mobile) that has warped discussions in the new social studies of children and focused them into a simplistic dichotomy between children as pre-adult becomings (becoming-the-same) and as social actors in their own right. Privileging the latter, the so-called new sociology of childhood has tended to celebrate children's resourcefulness and creativity to the detriment of an analysis of wider social and spatial contexts. Spurred in part by the 1979 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's focus on children as independent actors, the new sociology of childhood emanated from the writings of Allison James, Chris Jenks and others (Jenks 1996; James *et al.*, 1998). With an initial focus on typologies of children (e.g. the 'savage' child, 'natural' child and the 'social' child) on the idea of children as independent actors, the new sociology of childhood attempted to reinvigorate childhood as a political category, but in so doing, it lost sight of the relations and dependencies that comprise the lives of children and adults alike. In so doing, there was a tendency towards the reification of the child as a universal and self-serving category of existence and policy, wrapped hugely in state capitalism (Holloway and Valentine, 2000, p.6). As a category of existence subsumed within the state, children may have been recognized as 'beings' but any sense of 'becoming' was ultimately crafted as 'becoming-the-same' as an integral part (i.e. consumed and commodified) of state capitalism around which deviancy (undocumented, illegal, alien) was dealt with harshly.

'Becoming-the-same' is a painful recognition of norms; "being" carries with it a huge burden of responsibility and separateness. On the other hand, Massumi's (1992, p. 95) concept of

"becoming-other" invites, in a post-structural Deleuzian sense, 'each contained and self-satisfied identity to be grasped outside its habitual patterns of action, from the point of view of its potential, as what it is not, and has never been, rather than what it has come to be'. From Massumi's reading of Deleuze, becoming is an equilibrium-seeking system, what we might view as a child and her parents together. Through too much separation, this system reaches a crisis point. The point is aggravated because of deterministic constraints like a national border, strict immigration policies, and border patrol agents. Such constraints catapult those involved into a highly unstable supermolecular state – a train journey or border crossing – that envelops an uncertain future of death, deportation, or reunion with parents). In more spatially explicit terms, the concept of becoming draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The former process deconstructs the individual and its contexts and thus opens up new possibilities for existence, while the latter reassembles this intensity to form a new identity that is viable within the context in which it finds itself (Figure 5). Borderlands emphatically create these kinds of differences.

Figure 5. A deterritorialization of the border fence in Tijuana, thwarted by two more fences before the U.S. is reached (Photogtraph by Stuart Aitken).

Borderlands, as striations and smoothings, collide and collect, moving and transforming the movements of unaccompanied minors. As invisible as they are, their endless repetition as unaccompanied/independent/autonomous produces a camouflage behind which the young people work within the existing order to ensure their own survival and sometimes that of their families and communities (Figure 6).

Bodies-in-becoming must be what Massumi calls ‘passing-persons capable of simulating the molar being assigned to them by the grid of political value judgment’ (Massumi, 1992, p.105). This is a risky orientation, because it is all too easy to become who you are/I am, trapped into operating entirely on hegemonic terms. The trick, according to Massumi, is to throw off the camouflage as soon as you can and still survive. This “coming out” is never complete. What is important is the process and the desire.

For Deleuze, the individual is really a multiplicity, an assemblage. This assemblage also involves the border, the crossings, the apprehensions and the court cases. The discussion of children’s becoming-other signals that young people of all ages are always in motion, both as people in their own right as well as people with specific but mutable characteristics and abilities. As a representation, ‘I am’ suggests a fixed class: the ‘underclass’, the ‘informal sector’, the ‘unaccompanied minor’. Alternatively, ‘I do’s’ are about action, perhaps, substantial transformation (Aitken, 2008). The notion of multiplicities in motion is a rejection of representations and generalities, of strict divisions between cause and effect in favor of angles of encounter and non-representation. The past, the present and the future reside in the individual. The will to power, for unaccompanied minors can be characterized as a capacity for creativity rather than a desire to dominate (Deleuze, 1993). What we mean by this is a necessary eschewing of the will to power through a rights-based agenda in favor of something more creative, more fluid, and less deterministic.

Figure 6. Young people hide in plain sight in a culvert on the Tijuana River while awaiting dark and an opportunity to cross the border (Photograph by Stuart Aitken).

The Dependencies of Independent Child Migrants

Dependency is a concept central to the definition of childhood in Western cultures. As a result, children's independence, autonomy, and actions are often overlooked or, when recognized, discussed in negative terms and as the result of adults' failure to exercise responsibility for children. There are constant disruptions between boundaries of meaning around what constitutes childhood, because children exercising autonomy are often characterized by adults as unchildlike (Aitken, 2001). An eleven-year-old traveling alone through Mexico by bus and on the tops of trains may be construed as unchildlike, but it resides in the belly of Deleuze's

desiring machine. This raises the specter of children as monadic beings with complex desires and motivations that can help inform research on child migrants, because it incorporates a strong understanding of the potential for children to think and act independently. Considering unchildlike behaviors, for example, a large number of studies have used experientially based qualitative methods to examine the life circumstances and everyday activities of children living in street situations (e.g., Onta-Bhatta, 1997; Rafaelli *et al,.* 2001; Beazley, 2007; Conticini and Hulme, 2007; Kudrati *et al.,* 2008; Swanson, 2010). These studies are typically set in the majority world, with mobile 'homeless youth' more frequently seen as a focus for research conducted in minority world contexts (e.g., Ruddick, 1996; Ensign, 2003; Gibson, 2011).

The context of youth migration and citizenship brackets ideas of familial dependency with a focus not just on children's views and experiences but also on their relations to communities and the state (Suainan, 2009; Bosco *et al.*, 2010). In line with Tanja Rener's (2010) critique of neoliberal policies that regulate young people's lives globally, we find that the lives of unaccompanied child migrants do not align with more popular notions of individualization or communitarian perspectives on citizenship (cf. Bosco *et al.,* 2010). From the post-structural perspective we adopt here, children's movements, participation and citizenship must be examined in terms of interdependent relationships rather than simply in terms of familial connections, rebellion or autonomous rights. Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha (2005) redefines children's rights by examining whether children are able to have a *presence* in the many different relationships within which they participate. By presence, Moosa-Mitha (2005, p.381) means the degree to which the 'voice, contribution and agency of the child is acknowledged'. Presence – as much as autonomy, individuation or dependence – defines the citizen-self in relation to families, institutions and the state. The questions raised for unaccompanied minors revolve around their

relations to places of origin, companions on the road, future lives in the U.S. and the way the state intervenes in these relations when young persons are apprehended. The extent to which the latter context of a young traveler's life relates to a restructuring of economic and social policies that lean heavily towards neoliberalism suggests a form of violence that is duplicitous in its actions and global in its reach.

Border Rights

The question of children's rights is difficult in the face of unaccompanied minors' supposed illegal act of crossing an international border without the appropriate documentation to do so. The construction of illegality can be seen as a form of state violence: it individualizes the actions of the children and disavows a series of dependencies as well as the independencies of the travel, transnational familial contexts, isolation and communities. At one level, scholars such as Liebel (2003, p.271) argue that children have rights and need to be able to take part in all decisions that concern them and to ultimately determine their own lives. Given the seeming peripheral status of unaccompanied minors in a rapidly polarizing global economy, the continued increase in their flow across the U.S. border even while adult flows diminish suggests many things, not least of which is the context of children as having a significant place in a peripheral capitalist society. And yet, capitalism is a chimera with many faces, and this survival economy and the roles of the children also have different faces.

Liebel (2003) argues that the survival economy is characterized by a new kind of poverty and is encountered by children making it through their world and moving on to other worlds if they can 'on their own', devoid of connection to family and community. This seems to us an

unreasonable erasure of the sincere dependencies that continue as a huge part of the lives of young unaccompanied travelers. More pointedly, the world that Liebel paints is distinguished by rugged individualism, isolation, competition, violence and exploitation of whomever is weaker: the survival of the fittest as each traveler struggles to make the border. Our work on the border suggests that the unaccompanied minor's world also contains elements of community, consideration of seeming weaker children, respect, and mutual help and companionship that feed from life experiences under non-capitalist, non-representational conditions.

An evocation of 'survival of the fittest' returns us to Darwin's and Grosz's (2009, 2011) reworking of his ideas on sexual selection to suggest a move towards understanding difference. Her reworking of Darwin moves through Bergson and Deleuze to look at the contexts of difference and desire in a new, liberatory way. Her conclusion takes us away from the survival of the monadic being to the collaboration of the desiring becoming. But what happens when desire collides with various contexts of state violence?

Conclusion

Borders matter, particularly to the Latin American youth who risk their lives to migrate to the United States. In addition to metal fences and concrete buttresses, there are other aspects to borders that are fluid, permeable and relational. Territorially, each year, hundreds of thousands of migrants cross the Mexico-U.S. border without legal documentation, often managing to enter and evade deportation after several attempts. They come in search of community, family, opportunity, safety, work or a combination of these and additional factors. Increasing numbers of migrants are under the age of 18, and many of these young people are traveling without parents

or legal guardians. Their movement is about difference and desire, about transformative experiences and becoming other. It is also about a push against and through the state violence perpetrated by draconian immigration policies that deport gang members from Los Angeles to Tamaulipas, which is also a deportation of violence. Escalating violence sent Liliana and Miguel North to push against one of the world's foremost militarized borders and the tightest U.S. immigration policies in the history of the nation.

The movement of unaccompanied minors is an increasingly recognized global phenomenon. The neglect of autonomous children as a cohort of migration and citizenship studies limits our abilities to understand transnational movements, as well as a host of other institutional factors such as familial and generational practices and nonhuman forces such as long train rides and scorching deserts. This chapter lays down a theoretical rationale for focusing on the movement of young people in particular places and raises important questions about their desires and the relations between life-course choices, citizenship, the global political economy and state violence.

As a desiring-machine, Liliana stands before a judge in Texas. She is from Tamaulipas and does not understand the relations between Texas and Mexico. The court and the judge are also desiring machines and the assemblage of child, judge and court is joined by a reporter who desires that Liliana's story 'shocks our world' in the Deleuzian sense that desires are put in motion and a specific territory/policy is deterritorialized and reterritotialized in an innovative and inventive way. Some territories are harder to reimagine than others, but none are immutable.

The moving context of Liliana and Miguel speaks to the changing faces of global capitalism locally and how these aesthetics play out in the lives of young people, their transnational families, and their aspirations to belong and to become other. This is where the

story of the doings of these particular children finds power amongst repetitive generalities. At some point, these young people are visible and a power through which the larger institutional framework of state violence falls apart. This is our hope.

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