

ASIA-PACIFIC CHILDHOODS IN AN AGE OF GLOBALISATION

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Abstract

Childhoods in an age of globalisation may not conform to the regular socialisation processes which link the young generation to the world-view and core values of the older generation for there are now many alternative communities which challenge the conventional wisdom of relationships and networks of human society. Migrants who change localities to secure economic livelihoods live on the periphery of global communities for they are “captured” by memories of the past in their community of origin and live in transience between past and present realities. Their networks are cognitive and diasporas as imagined as they are real but this is possibly one way in which they neutralise experiences of relative deprivation. Children and adolescents of migrant women on the other hand subject themselves to multi-local communities which provide them with some participatory experience of globalisation. In the absence of mothers and with increasing access to global communication, they develop networks of friendships in multilocalities in different time. Hence childhoods of parents and their children have lost their cultural connectivity, embedded in disparate communities which are cognitive or virtual, offering personal stability and coherence in experience which would otherwise be difficult for them to comprehend. These embedded relationships derived from experience are “systemic” to the different institutions which generate them. They relate to different kinds of cultural experiences which produce different states of deprivation and means to resolve them. Childhoods in this global discourse are represented as communication activity; as “media in process”, establishing networks past, present and future and building experience upon experience until these form *metablogs* of what may be the new global ethnographies for social scientists to discover. In order to understand this better social scientists may have to use new theoretical tools and methods of observation to come to terms with the global ethnographies which are being processed. The application of moral philosophies on cultural commercialisation ignores the amoral character of childhoods and obscures the want of belonging which socio-political realities are unable to provide.

Childhood Ethnographies: Multilocalities in Different Time

Studies of women and gender has engaged numerous post-structuralist writers in debates on theories of the democratisation of knowledge, mainly to challenge male-centred perspectives in writing (Foucault; 1990; Lacan: 1998; Derrida; 1976, 1978) and the more masculine character of colonisation (Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1996) which has rendered women almost invisible in the creation of history, except in their sexuality as a strategy of politics (Foucault: 1990; Karim; 1992). In this process, children have been

almost forgotten in contemporary social theory on industrial and post-industrial society. Early perspectives of psychological anthropology in the works of Benedict (1934) Mead (1928) and Lewis (1963) were more concerned with relating childhoods as fundamental processes in the patterning of cultures and sub-cultures but these approaches were subject to criticisms of universal functionalism and became unpopular except in the context of discourses on emotion as conflict (Karim;1990a) in more recent feminist psychology. In more recent years, with the rise of concerned scholarship in gender relations in early industrial societies and the rapid demise of institutional structures of support for migrant women in the developing world, children have become 'things' which we assume will be there if we study the household economy in transition moving from food-based production to waged labour on assembly lines or service centres. (Karim;1990a; 1993) Psychologists are very keen on children mainly because they provide the link to the problematic nature of absentee or lone parenting while social workers dwell on children because somehow they have to be cared for when everything debated by sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists on the nature of culture and society are of no help to children at all. As for political scientists, children are not part of the evolution of global politics and conflict and if the world has to be kept safe for the next generation, this generation must be one of young people who were "born and parented" by UNICEF or "Save the Children Fund" or some public trust to that effect.

It is also unsurprising that the vast field of literature on women and globalisation have evoked little concern for children because social discourses are now gender rather than "child sensitive" and are positioned in the equality of gender relations which excludes the child. The child as "the third party" has become a crowd. Adolescents seem to generate problems which require a separate analysis from gender and family. The child may evoke some sympathetic reflection but it appears as one of the problems of "multi-tasking" which women are subject to in an age where more women are choosing to be waged rather than work unwaged at home. In the construction of roles and responsibilities in "multi-tasking", children have become a source of disempowerment for working women since they continue to be associated with the roles and responsibilities of women rather than the joint-responsibility of men and women. Trends towards the feminisation of poverty arising from single-motherhood, women's low entry in the global labour market, job insecurity and immobility poses more concerns for children as victims of global forces which are removing their parents away from them in search of jobs to sustain livelihoods.(Folbre;1990)

Mothers are joining the exodus of youth in the global labour markets as remittances from men who have left become irregular or are insufficient to cater to the basic and felt needs of households. In many regions in Southeast Asia such as Southern Thailand, Java, Sri Lanka and Southern Philippines, an increasing number of children are brought up in communities without mothers who have ventured to more developed neighbouring countries to look for work to support them. If they experience knowledge and information illiteracy, children brought up by grand-parents and kinsmen may become the next generation of youth ill-prepared for the challenges of globalisation where jobs are increasingly competitive and require greater professionalisation and specialisation. However, if the money provided for them by working mothers can keep them in school, they may not suffer the fate of contributing to poor human capital- the future generation

of poorly prepared youths entering the competitive global market may not be the children of women migrants but those whose mothers never left.

The dependence on women rather than men to keep skeletal family structures going imply that more of these communities are becoming matri-focal and matri-local as kinswomen attempt to assist one another and these are usually women led or women initiated. Hence childhoods continue to be associated with local women's networks with the added complementary access to modern technologies in the form of mobile telephones, video recordings and internet at cybercafés and schools. Communication modalities and access becomes more crucial than ever before and children in turn through formal information learning at schools and self-learning at cybercafés experience global networking processes which form a fundamental part of their social experience. The digital divide may reduce the democratisation of a global information society (Martin: 2005) but such a need to communicate and be informed is producing a younger network society even among the poor and deprived (Castells; 2000)

Debates on social and gender equality also exclude the socio-biological connectivity between mother and child or father and child to develop a theoretically valid and fair premise in analysis. Indeed the "father and child" relationship is under threat of academic extinction as social scientists view the increasing scenario of single motherhood as a sign of social fragmentation and reassess new options to develop sustainable structures of human livelihoods. The increasing visibility of single motherhoods and gradual invisibility of the "father-child" relationship implies that the nuclear family as a secure stable social institution of human society is under threat of change but whether this is going to create more problems for social welfare depends on women's capacity to advance their capabilities in the way men have done so for many centuries Yet the nuclear family is the minimal unit of organisation and if the size of this institution is shrinking further, the child and the adolescent warrants new sociological interest .Social scientists need to observe "the child" or the "youth" as a worthy social phenomenon of investigation. The young generation is changing and is changing fast, faster than what we can comprehend and we may need new theoretical tools to understand the 'strange' new childhoods they identify to.

For this reason this study attempts to observe childhoods as activity patterns in transient communication experience. While their parents maintain cognitive trajectories to relate to their childhoods in personal time, children and adolescents use global media to activate multivariate experiences in different time. Hence there is significant cognitive discontinuity between parent and child or youth in the way social communities are developed and the kinds of support structures they derive from these communities. Children's childhoods in the present are part of the new age experiences of transcultural globalisation. Migrants use global media to reinforce original or historical localities .Their cognitive recollections are selective- highlighting events from past childhoods to establish common origins in single localities. These diminish contemporary global experiences unlike those of children which enhance them. Both are Diasporas of a different kind which explain some level of dissociation with real life experiences. Yet in a sense childhoods as "media in process" are part of the growing phenomenon of dissociations from embedded ethnographic experiences as understood by sociologists and anthropologists. Real communities may fragment but as long as such alternative communities are born in pluralistic and multi-local settings through cognitive association

or multivariate including virtual networking, these may compensate “leakages” in parent and child intimacy and withstand the stresses of change and adjustment in transmigration and globalisation. For anthropologists and sociologists, it may mean acquiring new tools of observation and admitting that prescriptive ethnographies through conventional participatory wisdom grounded in communities with shared origins and histories may require rethinking.

Systemic Relational Analysis: Disconnections in Networks, Connections in “Communities”

This study adopts the term ‘childhood’ as a trajectory of events over time either through retrospective analysis of selective memory patterning by women and men or through synchronised relays of messaging over multiple localities in different time by children. In reality the ageing process enable women and men to indulge in retrospective analysis of childhoods while the shorter real time limitations of children are compensated by their wider range of social experience in global communication networks. Both parents and children practice “*memory capture*” through selecting different range of experiences suggesting that adults and children create their own kinds of childhoods and produce person-centred ethnographies - personal interpretations of life-experiences. If many of these childhood memories of adults in and out of their communities are collected, they will form a fairly accurate representation of real life experiences but the kinds of stories, conversations and chats that go on in the world of children will enrich these ethnographies in multi-cultural context. It can provide us with a better idea of the kind of global ethnographies which are being produced in the current dynamics of fragmented social experiences which are ego rather than group centred.

This kind of analysis is here referred to as “*systemic relational*” for it is concerned with the way in which motherhood and childhood as institutions relate to one another through its own endemic connectivity- a relationship or relationships which exist through their own interdependence on one another and which are embedded in the processes of change and global transformation.(1) Women’s local networks are a consequence of the dire need for women to be dependent upon one another to generate resources for sustainable livelihoods to ensure the needs of children , elders and other members of the family but these networks are constantly subject to change with new work experiences in the global labour market (Karim;1987; 1992) It seems that interdependency is systemic to the institutions which are generated by women for their own survival. In the same way, children have become increasingly alienated from the world of their parents or parent and use multivariate networks to develop more enriched childhoods. They go beyond the local to hyperactivity. In pre-industrial societies, the childhood experiences of children were embedded in processes of socialisation in a progressive “rites de passage” where childhood was early adulthood and parental control and supervision an integral force in determining how society retained its core values. (Karim; 1979; 1980). Without such guided supervision small communities were incapable of cultural production .But globalisation introduces contestations on the connectivity between intergenerational networks .The process of reinforcing network dependency in migratory experiences and the alternative processes of interdependency among children is systemic to the growing institution of netted communities. Children seek their own strategies of survival

and friendships of any kind and on any level overcome kinships . Youthful communities are wired and form part of the new central socialising experiences of children growing on their own.

These fragmented and splintered relationships based on adult diasporas into childhoods or youthful diasporas promote ethnographies as “ethnoblogs” in the real and virtual worlds of people and children.(2) Cultural experiences are obtained in blogging patterns, and each memory capture proposes new entries. Hence there is no permanence or completion in the way ethnographies are formed but at the same time they are not existential for they can be posted in real or virtual memory and can be recalled in the future. *Memory capture* proposes a scenario of person-centred descriptions of communities which are mobile, migratory or transient, communities which have become increasingly dependent on plural time and locality networks to establish a sense of identity or belonging with people in similar positions and using similar modalities of survival.

Lost Cultures and Histories and a Journey into Personal Time

Childhoods of women and children are cognitively different in the sense that women recall past experiences while children live through the present. Childhood memory capture begins with the nostalgia for places and cultures of origin, when men and women evoke social memory and select events from the past to reinforce meanings of origin and identity within a certain spatial or temporal frame of reference. It can also be associated with Diasporas of migrant women and men attempting to establish specific localities of villages or townships in their country of origin. Powerful childhood memories can be drawn from comparative encounters with the early histories of other communities when current post- colonial experiences with more dominant populations evokes memories of being ‘colonised’ in the past. The histories of post-colonial countries of the Asia-Pacific are created through imperial powers and much of these societies have lost their cultural identities as they forecast a future in relation to the “hegemon” or the ‘motherland’, stated with cynicism by social historians and sociologists. So part of the process of reflection or reflexivity are attempts to deconstruct the colonial past , to reach “lost culture” through accounts of childhoods –a “journey in personal time through personal histories which can transfer pride and glory back to native lands rather than to “motherlands” in Europe and the United States.

King and Connell (1999;2) writing on island migration suggest the island people in particular have this need to establish social connectivity with a place of origin given that they are surrounded by seas and have a need to establish a sense of rootedness in a world visualised as “global”. However since adults were once children regardless of whether they have left their homeland or are rooted in their original country, they will have their own unique encounters with “childhoods” based on selective memory. My memory of my childhood was the happy carefree days we spent with my mother and great grandfather on the beaches of Penang and I did not realise until recently that this memory pattern was matrifocal and matrilocal selected through my mother who had spent her happiest days in Penang as a pampered child brought up by her grandfather. She was so happy then that I wanted to share this happiness with her and came to regard Penang as my town of origin. In reality I had spent more time in Taiping with my mother, my

father's birth-place but I just cannot remember my father ever being there with us. I must have missed his presence so carved my childhood through my mother's own memories of her childhood. My father in turn had such a stressful childhood there, he must have refrained from returning to his birth-place secure with the thought that my mother would bring us there to keep good relations with his family and kinsmen. Hence *our "childhoods" are a narrative discourse of our subjective experiences and those of others familiar to us. It is an important evocation of cultural and human history within personal time when spatial boundaries have become redefined by the "globalisms" of life.* This homogeneity has intensified the need for diversity through recollections of shared experiences with groups and communities familiar to us. The phenomenon of women's migration over the last half century is now an area of research which is fast gaining interest. Women more than men actively integrate the child and family back into their life experiences. Men move on and look to the future; women move on and look back. (See *Memories of Penang*;2000:11-16) *The child in person or memory remains a fundamental component of the state of "being" a woman representing her decisions and tribulations-* the Kantian dilemma between reason and passion and the search for gratification of being of that gender.

The migration of women from the Asia-Pacific region since the Second World War is related to the liberation of the global economy in the late 1950's and 1960's where policies of rapid industrialisation in the developed West followed the massive importation of cheap raw materials from former colonies and dependencies struggling to generate revenues for domestic economic growth. This phenomenon led to the rise of dependency and modern world system theories of Andre Gunder Frank (190;1998a, b) , Samir Amin (1990) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1990). (3) The process of imperial exploitation from the sixteenth century by corporations like the East India Company operating under the flagship of the English crown led to the rapid colonisation of the Asia-Pacific and African countries which for the next two to three hundred years struggled to regain their freedom from the British, Americans, French, Germans, Portuguese and Spanish who only conceded after much violence and bloodshed. Even so after the granting of independence, most of these countries found that markets for their raw commodities continued to be controlled by multi-national corporations from these former centers of power and could not be penetrated until and unless they were willing to trade on the terms extended by these powers- large-scale exports of cheap raw materials in exchange for direct investments in labour intensive industries or allowing cheap labour from former colonies into their industrial centres for deployment in low-end work in manufacturing and services.

The provision of a diverse range of jobs led to policies of economic diversification except that most of the investment continued to be extended by foreign multi-corporations with minimal inputs by locals. In the 1970's and 1980's, so lucrative were these terms of trade and investment that the developed economies of Northeast Asia, West Europe and the United States expanded their manufacturing and service sector to intensify their need for cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour. But as industrialisation gathered momentum, male workers became more conscientised on issues of workers rights and good work practices. Trade Unions became powerful instruments of negotiations for higher wages and better work conditions. Hence with wages rising and cutting into profits, what was now needed was a docile labour force to curb the powers of

Trade Unions which were gaining strength in representing the interest of male workers.(4) This was when women workers became an attractive proposition. The opportunity cost of hiring cheap unrepresented labour was too attractive to ignore for increase in profits could allow even more capital to be invested in production which could increase profits even further.

Gendered Diasporas and Reclaimed Childhoods

Women were gradually emptied out of their homes to serve these multinationals either in Free Trade Zones (FTZ's) in neighbouring towns and cities or in other developing countries (Karim; 1987) Unfortunately for social scientists studying this massive traffic of migrant women workers, most women were desirable of waged income not so much for the euphoria of gender equality or the need to test new territories of space and freedom but to feed their children, educate them and provide care for the aged. The strength of Trade Unions declined rapidly as more women joined the work force. According to Drakakis-Smith (1992 ; 228) the supply of cheap labour in Europe seemed endless . Employers became more confident in their mastery of labour relations adopting more aggressive strategies of employment and deployment.. In the 1970's millions of migrant workers from former colonies in France, West Germany and Britain were employed in menial repetitive low-paid work without "civil rights" and generally herded in "dormitories" unfit for human habitation but "the slightest signs of protest" through Trade Unions led to the revoking of work permits and dismissals. Hence as more men left the formal work force and joined the informal work sector as illegal migrant workers or set up their own businesses, women took their places in the formal sector and became the new silent workers of Europe's assembly lines.

Hence gender empowerment in the service and manufacturing sector was hardly an issue and women were willing to work long hours, endure nightshifts despite not having proper alternative child-care services or accept piece-rate or daily payments which were without social security or medical benefits. As a result, more women began to leave their children in the care of sisters, aunts or mothers. (C and L Macpherson; 1999) but as these women became late entries in the global labour force, children were left in the care of even more distant relatives . It is in this twilight-zone of vaguely caring, luke warm non-committal relationships, in the transference between close and distant kin that children were abused. Elders were more negligent and sought alternative ways to enhance their rewards despite receiving remittances,by placing them children in workshops, coffee-shops and even brothels to earn extra cash earnings. In Malaysia, Chinese parents were known to farm out their children to "mother surrogates" in towns and villages, taking them home only during weekends and sometimes only when they were able to get extended leave in a year. Malay parents would send their children back to their villages to be left in the care of grand-parents and when these got too attached to them and became rebellious when they were brought home would take them away from their grand-parents to be cared for by neighbours and friends. Malay grand-mothers are infamous for visiting their children and grand-children in the city and not staying for extended periods, despite appeals from daughters and sons (Karim; 1997). Child-care centers were not affordable and every additional child incurred double costs. Yet the

grand-mother only visits and is restless to return to her house in the village , with the usual statement - “*tak ada orang di rumah*” (“the house is without a person”) (5)

The island communities of the Asia - Pacific were possibly more adversely affected as women received inadequate remittances from husbands who had left to look for work. Cluny and La’avasa Macpherson (1999) writes (1999: 276) that over the last fifty years, there has been a definite pattern of out-migration of people from poorer islands like Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, the Cooks Islands, Niue and the Tokelau Islands in search of productive employment in New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii. Men were generally less able to hold on to their jobs since the “no women no song” complex found them in situations much left to be desired. These were societies where loose sexual unions and multiple family structures had become a life-style of the city. Urban poverty was a fundamental issue but a social system which permitted sexual co-habitation without commitment and responsibility reduced the chances of married women to receive stable remittances from husbands who had left. Eventually they were forced to leave these islands for the more developed countries of the Asia Pacific in search of work and the most natural choice was the one closest to their island where historic relationships of dependency had been earlier established with annexations and territorial claims by White settlers. The desirable choice was to leave children in the care of mothers or elder sisters with children but while young girls were easier to monitor under the keen scrutiny of older women, young boys more easily slipped out of the system and roamed the streets of neighbouring towns and cities in search of work and adventure. As these communities became more matri-focal , families became more dependent on the earnings of women rather than men who in turn became dependent on earnings of wives or mothers until tensions reached crises situations and these men left their homes to attach themselves to other earning women. Domestic violence, child-abuse and child vagrancy develops at this stage until women are better able to take stock of their lives and focus on the needs of children rather than personal emotional needs.

Romancing Islands of Poverty

Significantly, the popular romantic depiction of Pacific island communities as “paradise “ has been contributed by laid back European artists like Gauguin who developed permanent images of Tahiti as the idyllic “noble savage” haven for Frenchmen , Hollywood movie makers and song writers. Cornell and King (1999: 20) writing on island migration said that “In the Caribbean and Pacific, islands were deliberately exoticised for the tourist gaze in musical form. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby took the Road to the Islands and Bali Hai (transplanted from Indonesia to the Pacific!) became the South Pacific of global dreaming.” Hawaii was beautifully etched by Elvis Presley’s “Blue Hawaii” and even Samoa enjoyed its moments of glamour when the dashing Marlon Brando captured the adoration of local women in an eroticised interpretation of “Mutiny on a Bounty” In reality, in the Caribbean and the Pacific, the Rastafarian, Reggae and hula culture symbolise the defeats of men who have lost their productive lives except in the display of their bio-rhythmic talents for tourists. Connell (1999; 197) writes of similar patterns of exodus on the islands of the Torres Straits between the northern tip of Australia, Cape York and the South coast of Papua New Guinea. The majority of seventeen of these islands is mostly occupied by indigenous

Melanesians and is in culture and history closer to the Papuans to the north rather than Australian aborigines but they have gradually moved into Queensland in Australia over the last two hundred years in search of productive employment. Sponsored by Australia's welfare migration policies, these islands like Guam, Western Samoa and Tahiti have become part of the growing chain of economically dependent Pacific island communities described as having MIRAB economies- Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy. Hawaiian academicians like Barbara and Leonard Andaya (personal communication; May,2003) refer to these islands as "Spam communities" since this is the cheapest meat available and is readily consumed by the poor with the combination of other high fat and carbohydrate foods .Hence indigenous Hawaiians, Samoans, Maoris and Guamese who remain on the lowest socio-economic sector of these island and migrant communities have among the highest incidence of obesity and diabetes in the world causing health epidemics among children and youth brought up on such diets.

The health epidemic was only one of the serious factors affecting these indigenous Pacific communities. Their dependency on the economies of Australia and New Zealand implied that they would also suffer massive job losses when these economies contracted during trade recessions and without any other kind of skill to generate alternative sources of income, their poverty levels increased in the cities subjecting them to increased states of economic dependency, prejudice and racism. New Zealand Samoans for example "moved back to more sustainable forms of kinship mobilization" (C and L Macphersons; 1999; 293) –traditional "solutions to new social, economic and political realities". (6) The contraction of the New Zealand economy in the 1980's throughout the 1990's incurred heavy job losses on Samoans who were concentrated in industries which had closed down or moved off-shore with the removal of tariff protections. Samoan unemployment rates rose from 1% in the 1960's and 1970's to 20% in 1991 and from 28% in 1988 to 54% in 1995. An increase in part-time employment occurred but there was less income to provide for families with children. As explained earlier, by the 1990's the deregulation of the labour market weakened the powers of Trade Unions, leading to loss of legal protection and a decline in real wages. The Employment Contract Act (1991) removed opportunities for arbitration or strikes and as welfare benefits decreased in a growing liberal economy, disposable income levels dropped significantly. Lower income was offset by lower taxation but this was insufficient to offset inflation and a rise in consumer spending. The resulting impact on children was even more serious as we witness a growing phenomena of "welfare children" who are "orphans of the State" .These "welfare children" had been subject to an increasing range of abuses from members of the family who find children to be the subject of their misery and guilt- constant reminders of their inability to provide for their own welfare.

Studies of low income families in Indonesia and the Philippines have found discernable differences in the way parents bring up children who are wanted or unwanted at the time of the pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancies lead to greater negligence of a child's health in the seeking of treatment relating to diarrhea, influenza and other illnesses which may increase under-five child mortality. Jensen and Ahlburg (2001;278) argue that "reducing unwantedness should be a powerful policy lever in reducing under-five mortality". In Indonesia, the introduction of minimal fees for primary health care in 1991 including maternal and child health led to a significant drop of visits to clinics by almost 50%, within three years in 1994. Increasing treatment for health however affects

different Indonesian communities in different ways for communities enjoying rising incomes in the urban areas of Java and Bali were not significantly affected. Besides, with declining fertility levels, these families were able to spread more resources around fewer children. Jensen and Ahlburg (2001; 277) further argue that income levels in Indonesia and Philippines are significantly lower than the five Asian miracle economies of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand and “low incomes imply harsher trade-offs between number and quality of children” when “quality” is translated into nutritional care, treatment of illness, and time allocated to the well-being of children. Hence although earlier studies by sociologists have shown that the Javanese are better able to spread the responsibilities of child-care across a more extended social support group than others, this may indicate the cohesiveness of extended family relations rather than the state of “wellness” of children who are spread across many homes with many mouths to feed. The “wellness” of children has not been a highly critical point of observation. It is generally assumed that as long as these networks are in place, children will be reasonably well provided for.

In my own studies of child-care and child-rearing among low-income Malay, Chinese and Indian families in rural Malaysia, (Karim; 1979) I found significant differences in the way these three ethnic communities managed children in relation to the needs of mothers and other members of the family. All three communities treated child-care as a “woman’s domain” with Malay fathers more than Chinese or Indian, being more willing to extend a hand over the care of children above five. It was very common to see Malay fathers ferrying their young children on motor-cycles or bicycles or eating with them at the local coffee-shops. The period of confinement of 44 days after delivery was also when Malay fathers gave maximum help around the house, even to the extent of cooking the family meal and washing clothes. I did not see Chinese or Indian fathers engaged in similar tasks although Chinese fathers exercised almost total responsibility in the purchasing of essential foods, tonics and medicine for their wives and children. In Malay families, maternal grand-mothers or some elderly aunt would always be around to supervise the care of older children while a full or part-time midwife (*bidan*) would be in firm control over the newly born baby. In Chinese and Indian families, a child-minder would extend daily visits to cook food for the mother in confinement and to bathe the infant but Indian families did not indulge in the nutritional requirements of the mother as much as Chinese and Malay families. Once the mid-wife or child-minder is no longer required after the period of confinement, Malay husbands go back to their regular routine and I recall Malay women telling me that the 44 days of confinement are the only days in their lives when they actually felt pampered, like princesses - and many remember this phase with nostalgia (Karim 1979; 1984). Soon, young children are trained to carry and fetch napkins, milk bottles, cradle the infant in the cot and many other tasks which can easily be done by husbands if they were to spend their leisure time at home instead of the coffee-shop. In Chinese families, a school-going child is less likely to do this compared to Malay or Indian children and the chances are they will be doing their home-work under the scrutiny of their mothers nursing the infant. Chinese children are the most closely supervised and disciplined and Malay children the least with hardly any incidences of corporal punishment.

It is interesting however that all three ethnic communities refrain from referring to their children as unwanted during pregnancy or after delivery and all welcome the birth

of a new child as something extraordinary. Malays in particular no matter how poor will always state that a child is *murah rezeki*, a “spiritual merit”, willed by God and not something to reject since it is beyond the control of human endeavour. They welcome the birth of a new born infant as a “gift from God”. Indian or Chinese mothers were more likely to say that their husbands would have preferred a “girl” or a “boy” depending on the sex of the child but that it made no difference to them. The choice of gender seems to be less important now in the more patriarchal family systems of the Indians and Chinese but has never been important in Malay families. Currently all these ethnic groups talk about the growing success of women in the work-force and all discuss their daughters as the future bread-winners of the family. Some Chinese women said that daughters were now better than sons since they have proven to be more reliable in the transfer of remittances and were more likely to care for their aging parents than sons who seem to be living under the growing influence of their wives’ sets of preferences and rules. Men were now “queen controlled” and have gone “soft” are common reflexive observations of Malaysian men generally agreed by older Chinese and Indian women who now find it difficult to get sons to side them in conflicting relationships with daughter-in-laws.

While there is a clear relationship between poverty and deprivation of the rights of children, for those socialised in the traditional setting of close knit communities, images of warm and happy childhoods in villages and small towns continue to haunt memories of city migrants. The state of ‘wellness’ of being in cohesive and caring social settings where people generally look out for one another seem to be more frequently recalled than the state of poverty or neglect they were in. Obviously as explained earlier, social memory is based on selective recollections of events which bring nostalgia and happiness rather than bitterness or regret, unless traumas were so extensive that they removed any little recollection of happiness there once was in the deeper recesses of the mind. But generally caring communities are recalled more than violent communities. This is evident in the rush to “return to the village” (*balek kampung*) among Malays, Chinese and Indians at the slightest opportunity such as extended week-ends, religious festivals and the host of wedding feasts (*kenduri*) during school-holidays. Children in particular look forward to these events and seem happiest when they are left alone to explore the village neighbourhoods or townships. Third generation city migrants may go on holidays to rural or sea resorts but they usually state their deprivation in not having a village or town of origin to go back to. Many women who no longer have parents in their villages retain their village home merely to open it up once a year during *Hari Raya*, the celebration of the end of the month of *Ramadhan*. This institution called *buka rumah* or “to open the house” is also sometimes combined with a reunion of cognates and affines who live in different cities or work in other countries.

Selective memory patterning or memory capture describing the “wellness” of poor but caring childhoods is a product of the cushioning effect of supportive social networks which lighten the discomfort and degradation of economic deprivation. In economic terms, poverty itself was not a critical issue, it was rather if social support systems were able to establish social safety nets against the onslaught of hunger, ill-health, homelessness or other states of deprivation (Karim; 2006). (7) As long as these social systems were in place, the fulfillment of basic needs was not a pressing issue and if the fulfillment of basic needs was already possible through individual or family economic initiatives, these social support systems could nurture higher end goods and services

which made life more comfortable, such as pooling credit systems, labour exchanges, food-exchanges at rituals and feasts and other institutions typical of Asian-Pacific societies. Hence I would like to argue that deprivation is a problematic economic issue which is subjectively and qualitatively defined according to relative support structures of families. The availability of networks of exchanges of goods and services which meet basic and felt needs may help to define the level of deprivation families in poverty are experiencing. As for migrant workers, the problems of adequate child-care and “wellness” of children is compounded by their inability in some situations to reshape these systems into place or to maintain them over long periods of absence as an insurance against contingencies. Natural disasters like the catastrophic Tsunami disaster of 26th December, 2005 in Aceh, Nias, Phuket, Sri Lanka, Maldives and many other islands of the Indian Ocean have tragic consequences on children because survivors have only a thin thread of support to hold onto from Aid agencies and nothing else. Social support systems take decades to build and evolve from relationships of balanced reciprocity and trust. Hand-outs from donors should be used to facilitate this process rather than stunt its growth. The transference of Aid into sustainable relationships of this kind has never been undertaken on any significant scale in areas recovering from natural disasters of this magnitude. Missionary organisations usually take the opportunity to substitute these much needed relationships with dependency on the church or mission but in reality this transforms a highly self-reliant social enterprise into another relationship of dependency and ultimately hand-outs again. Even if the ultimate aim is self-reliance through income-generating activities and empowerment, the ideology of missions is such that faith becomes the stimulus of individual and participatory engagement in enterprise. It will generate dependencies on religious leaders where the congregation becomes the ultimate support group stunting the development of indigenous support groups without borders.

The Second Generation On Line

It is generally agreed that children who grow up in economically stable and emotionally supportive families are more likely to have higher education and better employment than children from poorer livelihoods. Nevertheless despite significant differences in income and life-style between those with higher education and those without, there are some similarities in the way they respond to Information Communication Technologies (ICT) as a much preferred network of exchanges and this has to a fair extent democratised the younger generation more than the older. More value is placed on lateral egalitarian rather than vertical hierarchical networks and this has had a profound effect in limiting intergenerational communication within the family. Virtual communication with children and youth from different localities and regions removes the sense of belonging to a “homeland” or country and personal rather than national identities become sharpened as blogs in life journals and friendship webs enable them to express their “difference” in similar language where the only relevant factor is the need to communicate. Differences in religion, ethnicity, education and work culture become anecdotal events to be exchanged as events of the day- a kind of upgrading of Geertz’s, “culture as text” theory (1983) of people innovating cultural experiences through exchanges which provoke them to change the way in which they think out ideas or do things. Childhoods become synonymous to “cultural production” and reproduction” with the aid of tools from ICT.

The traditional adult socialisation process remains important on the level of the family as fragmented pieces of advice to remember whenever there is a need. It resembles leakages in welfare programmes which reach that not in need. There is no moral philosophy worth holding onto except for the philosophy of “now” and “us” in the future. The real world is an alternative source of relationships and networks, not a primary refuge into social or cultural identity. It must be able to offer something worthwhile to consider, preferably with some entertainment value and definitely more utilitarian and materialistic than the virtual.

The increasing dependency of children on connectivity has promoted Rifkin (2000) to refer to the present century as “The Age of Access, where virtual networking has entered the realm of primary relationships among the young. He views “cultural production’ as the commercialisation of culture when ICT technopreneurs innovate links to different cultural experiences through friendship webs, travel blogs, schedules for real life travels, genealogy maps and numerous other products of “culture on line”. He explains this as the “protean” generation when cultural diversity becomes a resource which is commodified - participants are suppliers who are innocent or ignorant of the extent to which this voluntary and democratic exchange of cultural knowledge can bring profitable gains to technopreneurs who innovate them. He states (2000: 12),

“The young people of the new “protean” generation are far more comfortable conducting business and engaging in social activity in the worlds of electronic commerce and cyberspace, and they adapt easily to the many simulated worlds that make up the cultural economy. Theirs is a world which is more theatrical than ideological and oriented to a play ethos than to a work ethos....they are as likely to perceive themselves as nodes embedded in networks of shared interest”

He further argues, “Now the economy has turned its attention to the last remaining independent sphere of human activity: the culture itself. Cultural rituals, community events, social gatherings, the arts, sports and games, social movements, and civic engagements all are encroached upon by the commercial sphere”

Thus although arguments of democratic connectivity and free and easy access are often used by the young generation to demonstrate their preference for virtual connectivity, these are diasporas which are derived from virtual migration and have no association with real world events and issues of socialisation, identity and belonging. It devalues the search for personal and cultural histories and creates indifference to the conservation or misappropriation of cultural property. However there are other positive outcomes-children develop a sense of “well-being” and “happiness” despite diverse social, economic and political experiences. They remain connected to one another without resorting to drugs, sex or violence unless of course the connections they choose are of this kind. Indeed, the problem is that the virtual community lacks communal moral responsibility and is unable to guide children in making the right kinds of connections. The networks they choose continue to be dependent on qualitative parenting and as this gets weaker a vicious cycle of indifference develops with children becoming easy targets of predatory sexual offenders and syndicated criminals.

Stability in Transformation

The connectivity between children and mothers (or parents) is based on prescribed codes of principles of relationships such as reciprocity, trust, discipline and intimacy and children tend to follow these same guidelines in their multivariate networks of young global communities. Earlier agents of socialisation are still important to nurture them into the global. So in a sense childhood diasporas of elders must relate to global diasporas of the young and while the migratory character in both are endemic in the life transformations of people, the need for cultural stability in transformation seems even more important now than before. “Stability in transformation” may seem a contradiction in terms but what it calls for is the development of a sense of control and autonomy in the way change affect human lives and those of children. *To be empowered by change is more important than to find change to be necessary in empowerment. If we know what it is we want and understand our limitations we may be able to proceed to change them. And to lose a sense of direction in change may be as dangerous to those who direct change as to those who are directed.*

“Stability in transformation” may seem a contradiction in terms but what it calls for is the development of a sense of control and direction in human lives. If real life communities are threatened as global communities take precedence, the young generation will find it more difficult to understand the usefulness of social rules which govern society. Principles of redistributive justice, fairness, trust and responsibility may not be readily accepted but it appears from growing evidence in the internet that children develop a kind of “societal” conformity in friendship networks. Rawls In “A Theory of Justice” (1971) explains “justice” as the fundamental concept which cements the order of society but this may seem more rhetorical than real to youth who have found alternative ways of expressing justice where cyber connections can offer quicker or emotionally satisfying solutions in “dark justice” , “hate cells” or “ terrorist hideouts”. Here youth find ready made solutions to problems the quickest possible way and the rules of engagement in civil society may be too sedentary and academic for those who are used to the speed of connectivity and exchanges in messaging , chatting and blogging. However this preoccupation with negative nets is less prevalent when children use the same principles of reciprocity and trust in forming social networks in local and global communities and may be more characteristic of isolated youth or those who feel isolated from the values of civil society.

Ethnoblogging Childhoods and Childhood Histories

In the same way as women and men have found it necessary or inevitable to contain experience in selective episodes of “memory capture” when present events trigger selective recollections of childhood and define these as impersonal sociological experience or ethnography, so are children now doing this in a shorter pace of time through technological tools which define virtual experiences as social reality. In a sense “memory capture” of childhoods has been a form of “*ethnoblogging*” when *childhood histories are recalled through different episodes in present time or one blog at a time, until eventually these episodes connect as meaningful coherent descriptions of*

childhood history .But this personal ethnographic history , on another level and based on the total sum experiences of others, represent fairly accurate accounts of social history.(8) Given that past histories are derived from contemporary episodes which force one to select memories which relate to the present in a meaningful way, it should then be understandable that children and adolescents also do this in daily or regular blogs which are posted in the memory bank of childhood recollections. Their histories are also selective and creative and merge between fact and fantasy. It is possible that if thousands of blogs are subject to content and emotive analysis, this can form a representative “memory capture” of contemporary social and political experiences of youth in global contemporary ethnography. Thus we can have a sense of what their childhood is to them *now* in the same way as we have a sense of what our childhood was to us *then* through “memory capture” .We are doing in real time what they are doing in cyber time except that their span of childhood is limited - but through global connections, they defy the limitations of the Gregorian calendar as contacts and exchanges in different regions and time zones are secured simultaneously.(9)

Children and youth who are about to be besieged by hostile countries may use blogs to define their childhoods as an experience of futile encapsulation in structures beyond their control. The sense of loss and betrayal is urgent and more necessary to capture than our own loss childhoods. Blogs of Iranian children and youth which are now traveling in cyber world describe unhappy childhood encounters with two formidable worlds, the Iranian totalitarian regime and the American military and these have become more frequent as hostilities between the United States and Iran reach a critical height in the summer of 2006. This is personal time which converges with social time. Childhood histories are not ethnographic in the way social scientists have been made to understand what ethnography is.

If childhood histories of adults exist as selected events in personal time , the new societies of the young and powerless also reflect children’s personal perceptions of society .They also convey a similar need for stability and rootedness except that children are now capable of using a number of different tools to relate these needs. Adults “post” their childhoods in selective memory patterning while children blog them in the web or other kinds of social media which are intelligible to them. If personal history is the foundation of social history and communicative writing in multivariate media the foundation of contemporary early thinking in children and youth, then the collection and analysis of childhoods in communication activity may form valuable sources of ethnographic knowledge a generation from now. It is more important to understand the conditions which prompt them to use one media rather than another, for example the virtual rather than the real, than to challenge the functions or usefulness of the media in a generic sense as destructive to the institutions of society. Children are as remote from the institutions of society as adults are from the institutions of children and despite the ambiguous morals of modern media and ICT, it is this ambiguity which provide children the freedom to explore their childhoods in a wider playing field. In particular where there is access for deprived and lonely children trying to come to terms with childhoods without mothers or fathers, the internet as a social tool enable childhoods to be captured as diasporas in the web.

Childhoods and Cultural Reproduction

Social scientists seldom pass judgment on adult diasporas of childhoods but do so immediately with those of children as if we adults are free from the moral implications of their choices. Social scientists utilise many different approaches to “objectify” their observations of people but it does not preclude the fact that their observations come from “knowing” people or “intelligent” people whose views and perceptions of their society have been shaped by their personal experiences. Everyone is then guilty of misrepresentation—the scientist, the intelligent informant and the child—but the child is less guilty than the scientist and the informant since it is still subject to processes of socialisation. There are few ways to represent them objectively and one way may be to allow their knowledge to be contained in the systems they choose to represent them. By this I mean the systems which drive them to process their ideas in a particular way which is comprehensible and meaningful to them for the purposes they are to be used. These systems also contain procedures to move ideas in a particular direction. Cultural production as a process is a consequence of these systems which exist external to the translator of cultural knowledge but the translator is also useful in that she communicates to a different audience about what culture is or can be to different kinds of people. Understanding this can increase the process of objectification of observation and translation but it does not make the scientific method more capable of arriving at this state of objectification. It only describes a level of choices based on the capabilities of the translator while the informant, child, mother or anyone else participating in local and global communities require different tools to comprehend the unique circumstances of their lives and to come to terms with them.

The use of web networking among children and youth in a multi-faceted relationships enabling on-line communication to link with the off-line and vice versa has prompted internet analysts to describe soft wares concerned with social networking as “social soft wares”. “Friendships” in the web may or may not coincide with “real friends” off the web but they are based on the same principles of trust and reciprocity. To include a friend in one’s web links is to say that one likes to read what a friend writes so friends are those “whom we like to read about” or “chat”. If such friends stray away and prefer to read others more, there is a tendency to also “unread” a friend or “to unfriend” a reader and so on. (Hyperfriendship Lj 2004). Contrary to the opinion of some who state that cyber chats, messaging and blogs do not produce a metanarrative and are merely instrumental in creating an alternative space for social networking, there is growing discussion on how the web through personal life entries is generating *indigenous knowledge production* on a global scale and enabling grass-root communications to be published almost as they are produced. Hence the people studied by the cultural translator produce their own writings which form the new global ethnographies of the future.

Hence this form of knowledge production bypasses the cultural specialist as the knowledge broker. It also reduces the elitism and hierarchy of knowledge creation in the academe and formal journalism. Before one is accused of confusing fiction with fact and fantasy with science, it is increasingly obvious that interpretations of fact and science in the scientific world of social sciences and formal journalism has also been subject to

distortions of reality through the biasness and prejudices of our own cultures and histories. Early anthropologists were less concerned with disguising the reasons why non-Western cultures were studied- Mead in 1928 wrote that she studied “primitive youth for Western Civilisation” while Schesbesta (1924) in his study of the Negritos (Semang) in Malaya was interested in converting them to Christianity; a Forward quoted him, “ How can I help them find the connection to the larger world of Mankind without which the wheels of civilization will be crushed?”. These days, the words that are used are more carefully worded like to “study them to understand ourselves better” and “reflexive research”- although the basic principle of how other cultures can advance knowledge about human society continues to show that research is more often generated for users’ ends rather than a means to empower the people to use research tools for their own ends. The ultimate objective no matter how scientific is still to generate the scientist’s own source of social capital. Mothers, migrants and children are still tools of the knowledge enterprise linked to the exercise of scientificity.

The Anthropologist as “Cultural Translator” and the End of Prescriptive Ethnography?

More important is the idea that migratory histories and diasporas are objectively recorded through impersonal and sociological recollections of early and late childhoods of women and men and that this represents what we know as history. Even when hard quantitative and geopolitical data is offered to provide evidence of strategic events and encounters, these may serve to reinforce such recollections of events and encounters. Objectification is seldom without a motive or agenda and hardly impersonal in the ways facts are made to support certain ideological positions which are currently popular. Opposing views may bring out other kinds of evidence to prove the contrary and the only way such differences may be resolved is to use theories of “justice” or “realism”, that there must be an externally adopted position based on universal assumptions of acceptable premises of moral philosophy to evaluate the “truth” or “relative truth” of cultures. Even so if it is relative to one another, there cannot be such a thing as an “objective truth” or “objective reality” if it is presented through the perspective of the cultural translator.

There can however be a proper system of relating the “truth” or “social realities” .This is through knowing what is the “systemic” or “endemic” condition which prompts people to do things the way they do. This is obviously what the cultural translator does best. For example, let us examine the statement that the study of gendered networks is important because they create social cohesion and stability. Now let us consider another statement that the study of gendered networks is important because they produce, distribute and redistribute limited resources and services which ensure sustainable livelihoods. Surely this could be and probably is one of the reasons why society is reproduced by women. Social cohesion and stability is the consequence of the activity of institutional building through networking and is not incorrect but it does not explain underlying issues which relates the processes to the agent of action. Society is not a given thing like a trophy which needs to be kept in a “House of Colours”. It is the end product of practical social action and not a consequence of altruism. It works if there are people to work it and fragments when there are none. But there are reasons and issues

which cause it to work in one way rather than another or which causes it to fragment if these ways do not work according to the rules which govern it. As translators of culture, the observer has a responsibility to understand these processes for what it sets out to do rather than for what it means to the translator. This explains why even when people are capable of producing their own meta narrative, the work of the translator is still important in understanding the systemic relational processes which produce it.

Rosaldo in "Culture and Truth" (1989) discusses the contradictions in the position of people as knowledge specialists (the foreign anthropologist as intruder) and informants as the indigenous repository of culture. Informants may be the more legitimate "knowledge specialists" if one relates the fact that they are the source of all valuable information obtained by the foreign specialist namely the anthropologist or ethnographer. But because it is presented in the text of modern writing and analysis, it obtains its institutional legitimacy through foreign intervention while the onus of defining the "specialist" falls on the anthropologist or ethnographer who claims a superior position as a translator of culture to a global audience. The relative truth which can be really stated without contradiction is s/he derived this source of strength from the "other" who has as a result become invisible or marginal to the process of cultural production. (Karim 1996b). But to go one step further, given that exchanges of experiences are "endemic" or "systemic" to the way individuals relate to one another and that there is little reciprocity in these forms of exchanges, the modern cultural translator in the age of global ethnographies is still useful in providing new knowledge about disempowered people who seek new ways to empower themselves. Children separated from migrant mothers migrant into multivariate networks, local and global to find communities which can provide them with a family ambience.

Similarly, the cultural translator is now more sensitive to felt needs and emotions and goes beyond reason and practical action to understand society. They may find it hard to reject the exchanges of children on the basis that they understand them better. The cultural translator may be less inclined to dismiss the children purely because their fact/fiction/fantasy recollections of contemporary childhood fail to correspond to our idea of objectified ethnography. Thus childhoods can be better understood through exchanges with other children in the medium they choose to make these exchanges meaningful. What has been defined as "virtual" exists only "virtually" in the scientific world of internet communication but to those busy young communicators, telephony, messaging, chatting and virtual networking more than compensates for the incoherent world that has been created for them of lost mothers and fathers in the global chase for small money to feed them and keep them in school. This same global world is a source of consternation for it supports continuous violence and abuse of the innocent. Generally we seem to have provided little evidence to support the idea that we have conformed to the moral standards we impose upon them. Our virtual networks then is their real and our real is more virtual than real. We may be hardly aware of our daily life contradictions and inconsistencies. We believe we are in control but to what extent do we ourselves indulge in tedious misrepresentations of life on a global scale? Indeed global media networks are choosing our sources of information and making major decisions for us on the basis of the news they disseminate. Are our cultural ethnographies our own?

As an academician working on the Pacific Rim in Manoa, University of Hawaii in the first six months of 2003, I had the opportunity to witness an episode in America's

growing war culture and observe the construction of a global war ethnography beginning with the Muslim Middle-East. There were the constant messages of cruel Muslim dictators and terrorists, the chief culprits of who were Saddam Hussein and Osama Ben Laden. Next were the images of poor women and children shrouded in black and blue *purdah* and the *hijab* going about their daily life tasks, the victims of oppression and Muslim patriarchy .When war was declared on Iraq in March 2003, the nation was subject to colour coding with red being “high alert” and orange “alert” and so on as if to warn the Americans of possible terrorists attacks from the “enemy”; yet it was America which initiated the attacks –a countless number of Iraqi civilians (Iraqi deaths are not counted as the deaths of American soldiers) women and children included, succumbed to the invasion but not a single American citizen , women and children included, died on American soil from a terrorist attack during this period. There were hardly any images of the same tired and poor women and children dying. These were not “captured” in the memories of journalists and photographers. Instead the media provoked fear and uncertainty in Americans who were not even there. Discussions in the internet, through blogs and free news sites were more objective and gave a more balanced and neutral coverage of the war.

From a nation on the offensive, the colour codes made America a nation on the defensive, victims of aggressors and unseen enemies ready to destroy the social fabric of a peaceful nation. Thus a nation was reduced to fear responding to colour conditioning on national networks. Whether it worked as well on adults as on children is not really the point; it was ascribed to all viewers and it was meant to generate mass terror. In the construction of a war ethnography when a warring society is being created, wars may become permanent childhood memories and children whose nations are on the offensive may see themselves as “victimised”. Children may become dissociated from other childhood experiences and be fixated on these images which are overpowering. The media then may be guilty of deluding children into thinking they are the real victims of war. Furthermore, the psyche of war is disempowering and diminishes parental control over children as both are subjected to external institutions of control. This complicates the discussion on childhoods as “media in process” because it suggests that there are some kinds of networks like television, radio and so on which prescribe negative messages and others like the internet which are more positive but this discussion does not imply these contradictions. It merely suggests that all childhoods are about communication activity and that some may be based in experience which are violent while others may be more peaceful .What it does to childhoods is to engage children in the exercise of cognitive selection and what they select will determine the character of their childhood.

Children are not passive participants of communication but actively search for ties which bind and if the media does not provide networks of friendship but instead networks of mistrust, it is the cultural translator which has to show the contradictions and inconsistencies in the messaging of modern technologies.. Hence children of advanced societies who are the dominant consumers of communication activity have childhoods which are on the axis of “media in process” but may be presented with the “other side of the story” from children of underdeveloped countries. Hence the global ethnographies which are emerging may differ based on their own personal experiences of childhoods , whether migratory, predatory, and so on but nevertheless it is an end product of selective cognitive experience . However media research of this kind is still in its infancy and it is

uncertain if children lean on one kind of media more than another because it makes them sociable and give them a feeling of being in control.

There was no real violence in America during the war, only surreal violence and the real violence in Iraq was surreal to Americans watching the war on screens where real images of terror were seen on the faces of women and children from the “other side”. Other than their soldiers, Americans watched the war as spectators of mass violence - while Iraqis died in the real war in Iraq. To add to the incomprehensible situation, the violence was commodified through embedded journalism which provided networks like CNN massive publicity on all American initiated wars over the last decades especially in Iraq since “Operation Desert Storm” in 1991 and Afghanistan in 2002. We should ask ourselves how real is this violence in the media war societies and are we not developing a kind of global warring ethnography of the West against the rest of the world, in particular Muslim Asia? ? Is it comparable to the virtual violence children subject themselves to in the internet? Given these contradictions in the phenomenon of violence in modern media and the kind of predetermined fatalistic stories it conveys, distinctions between the real and virtual or real and surreal are hardly worthy of analysis except to say that people are capable of living in an endless series of contradictions without knowing that they are actors of imagined realities. Media socialisation without parental supervision can end up making the young world of children seem more real, friendly and meaningful than our own. And even if one can provide scientific evidence that it is not, it does not in any way remove the illusory dimensions of modern society which will be with us for a long time until and unless one can admit that children have found a better and safer way to relate to one another than we have. At least they have found a way of belonging to one another which we are not capable of even if it has removed them one step further from the moral philosophies we have developed in civil society. Many pacifists state that they have given up reading the newspapers or watching television and instead do searches in the net and this seems to suggest that they believe the internet is more objective, egalitarian and democratic. Hence childhoods as communication activity may not be such a bad thing given the kinds of choices that remain but it does mean that theories have to move away from earlier ideas of objective observation.

On a more positive note, the Tsunami disaster on the 26th of December, 2004 was also viewed on large screens globally and had a tremendous impact on the global community- there was a general pouring of grief regardless of ethnicity, religion and language because the media created an illusory sense of global belonging. It confirmed the best of human character that networking and reaching out to others in need is the reality of humanitarian concerns - that we were all similar and equally vulnerable- God’s creatures against nature’s violence. Humanitarian relief came on an unprecedented global scale. Although this episode was one of the better performances of the big screen media, the sufferings of women, men and children in Aceh, Sumatra, Phuket, Thailand, Penang Malaysia and coastal areas of Sri Lanka, South India, Maldives and Madagascar continue as problems unfold in the reconstruction and rehabilitation period caused by bureaucratic delays, political interventions and grass-roots mismanagement.

There may be another wave of migrant activity in these areas where aid is slow and reconstruction too early to produce sustainable livelihoods. Women and children will face further separation as mothers and fathers move out again in search of new economic opportunities and surviving children will be forced to abandon real friends and playing

fields and start all over again. Childhoods will be produced in multivariate localities and women and men will reminisce about their villages of origin and the loved ones they left behind. The episode is over but different participants produce different sets of ethnographies of the disaster shaped by their own experiences. For urban viewers a natural catastrophe becomes a network episode, or an *ethnoblog* in the internet. Child viewers will write what they feel to their friends and there will be a chain of exchanges and responses. It will be a source of new memories of childhood and part of their socialisation experience. As children, scrape through different episodes of childhoods ethnographies will be fragmented etchings of reality and perhaps the best from these episodes may be selected to represent history at another time.

Conclusion

This discussion is an exercise in understanding how childhoods are a product of communication activity, of “media in process” when a diversity of experiences provide fragments of cultural ethnographies which are early findings of global ethnographies or what has previously been referred to as “metablogs.” By using a systemic relational approach, this study suggests how the shaping of personal ethnographies is determined by the specific circumstances of people in different life situations; children with shorter life histories expand experience through media aided networks, building friendships in multimodalities in different time while migrants recover lose origins and childhoods through selective cognition, referred to as “memory capture”. Viewers of large screens networks in more developed countries have most of their ethnographies typecast or shaped by them and whether in fear or compassion, their worldviews are conditioned by their specific experiences of being of that ethnography whether waring or peaceful . For those engaged in more productive activity of making a day of life complete, social realities may also be removed from reason to provide small comforts in a world made transient by its every globality. The relationship between networks and ethnographies suggests that children and their parents may no longer be in a simple unitary relationship guided by socialisation for many new challenges to value based learning may place choices which are hard to avoid. It simply means that childhoods and adulthood may no longer be related in a simple trajectory of socio-biological intimacy and may be dissociated from one another through cognitive and virtual Diasporas. This may not be such a bad thing except that it may no longer be realistic to study ethnography through conventional localities in specific time where culture is associated with people who belong together through origins of history. Indeed the growing development of global ethnographies suggest that there may be a need to understand the systemic character of human society as reproducing a diversity of communication styles and relating to new systems of communication as biotechnical tools to advance relationships which are already there. If in the process the mother- child or parent-children relationship becomes dispersed or disparate, it may be constraining to judge what this means to us now and in the future based on morals of biosocial communities because the representations of culture are now different. If any, communication modalities are amoral and it depends on how we use morals as tools of reference to adulthood. Once we have chosen carefully it is left to us to impart whatever morals we wish on our children to assist them navigate the difficult journey ahead.

Endnotes

(1) I have used the term ‘systemic relational processes’ to explain the relationship between institutions which are endemic to the production of human society and which provide the ingredients of stability or conflict and the processes which make it move in one direction or another. Endemic institutions based in the nucleation of people through biological, affinal, ethnic or linguistic affiliation generate networks, sometimes, productive and at other times, destructive depending on the combination of factors or forces which produce them while these networks in turn produce further institutions which are dependent on the its original structures of network formation . In the context of childhoods, the shift from fact-to face to virtual networks is part of the systemic relationship of the younger generation to the information age , their comfort with portable technologies which are able to connect them to a world more comprehensible than the one created by adults. As for adults who are not dissociated from the web of social networks in the virtual, the greater satisfaction with face-to face is expressive of their fundamental need to relate to what is historically familiar to them in their growing years. Their childhoods are their comfort zone which shapes their sense of identity and belonging to the present. The existence of multi-local and multi-time constructs of childhoods demonstrate similarities in past and present systems of social networking except that the present is technology aided. The processes which shape and link them are based on the pervasive rules of human groupings which are “societal”-trust, reciprocity, free will, equality and so on and these in turn draw upon institutions such as family, kinship and origin to start the cognitive processes of networking before it moves to more challenging global frontiers

(2) The term “ethnblog” is used as a convenient reference to the way in which recollections of personal histories are written in the context of current events which have strong associative links with the past or the way in which personal histories reflect cultural diversity in web social networks. Basically I argue that our selective memory patterns influence the way in which we think about ourselves and others and that often the so called “informants” from whom we obtain our ethnographies in anthropological research also indulge in the same kind of selective memory patterning. Hence classic or formal ethnographies are in reality blogging journals of people who recall whatever we ask from them but in the way they understand it in the context of the experience with the anthropologist and the particular circumstances of the event or relationship at that time or in the past or future. There has been much written on reflexivity in research but this process of objectification defeats the way in which most social knowledge is produced which is always for “a reason and a passion” and always over multiple time and spatial constructs-being in different time and space modes; for example the past as the future , the present in the past; localities of the past which forces one in the present or localities of the future in which one wants to go or be. Web networks of people and children express the convergence of virtual diasporas where people with similar needs and interests meet to make exchanges which they find to be productive or meaningful. Such networks enable them to be stable and change over time .

(3) In a note on the death of Andre Gunder Frank (1929-2005) Samir Amin gives a clear tribute to Frank as the founder of dependency theory. He said that “in 1972 in Mexico at the Congress of CLASCO (Latin American Council on Social Sciences), Frank , F.H. Cardoso, Anibal Quijano, Rui Mario Marini and others proposed the “ dependency theory”. Says Amin, “we naturally found ourselves in agreement with the world-System school of thought introduced during the 1970’s by I. Wallerstein. Thus was established our “gang of four”(Amin, Arrighi, Frank, Wallerstein).The “four” accordingly became joint authors of two books, *La Crise, Quelle Crise?*”(1982) and *Le Grand Tumulte* (1991) both published by Maspero-La Decouverte...Though establishment of the neoliberal global economic system had only just begun and capitalism’s new global strategy was just becoming perceptible, we already ascribed strategic importance to the new global movements

and that ten years later, at Porto Alegre in 2001, were to join together in the “World Economic Forum”.

(4) Drakakis- Smith (1992; 228) further argues that the post-war miracle of rapid expansion of the service and manufacturing sectors was assisted by the rise in women’s tertiary education which enabled them to join the formal sector of employment. This in turn created other kinds of services which were women related such as child-care, domestic cleaning, commercial cleaning, food and catering services and so on. These were the jobs offered to Pakistanis, Indians and East Europeans. The rise in manufacturing created jobs for production workers and again women were generally favoured.

(5) It is not implied here that these elderly women did not want to take care of their grandchildren. On the contrary they did but did not want to do so as temporary residents in the homes of their children living in towns and cities away from the village. Refer to

(6) Samoans have resisted colonisation from the nineteenth century but British, German and American governments have persistently tried to take control of these islands to extend their political empowerment in the Pacific. The political and social organisation of Samoan society was too complex to understand and there was no uniform strategy to dismantle it. Christian missionaries succeeded in homogenising religious beliefs but there continues to be strong polytheist and anthropomorphic elements in the practice of Christianity. Finally in 1899, the Treaty of Berlin gave the eastern islands of Samoa to the United States and the western islands to Germany without any knowledge of the Samoans who had now to wrestle with the US Naval Administration and the German Imperial Government. World War I brought defeat to the Germans and New Zealand was asked by the British government to annex it. This annexation was formalised by the League of Nations in 1919. New Zealand’s rule was harsh and a local resistance movement known as Mau sought to topple colonial rule and provide Samoans with political autonomy. In 1929 11 Samoans were killed by New Zealand forces during a demonstration and this intensified the Mau movement. After the Second World War, the United Nations gave the trusteeship of West Samoa to New Zealand to prepare it for independence and West Samoa was given a plebiscite in May 1961 and granted independence on the 1st of January, 1962. The US continue to control the eastern islands of Samoa.

My research in Hawaii covered the duration of six months from January to June 2003 .I was attached to the Centre for Asian and Pacific Studies and held the Andrew’s Chair in Asian Studies during this period. The native Hawaiians constitute only 25 per cent of the population while various communities from the Philippines constitute the majority at 50 per cent. Both of these communities are among the poorest with the Hawaiians having the highest rate of mortality from diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The wealthiest communities are the Japanese and Chinese at 15 per cent followed by the Caucasian Hawaiians at 10 per cent. Most professional businesses are controlled by the Japanese and Caucasians who also dominate the civil service while service and food industries are controlled by the Chinese. A minority of native Hawaiians is from the neighbouring Hawaiian islands of Maui, Oahu, Big Island and Kauai Lanai and most have come in search of better education and employment facilities.

(7) Work in progress, “Gendered Economies in Global Asia: Networks and Nets of the Poor”. First Draft of Manuscript 2006.

(8) One of the most popular social soft wares is the LiveJournal, a virtual community where internet users create blog journals using an open source server software that was designed to run it. The LiveJournal features a self-contained community where social networking is one of the objectives of blogging, similar to other web communities like the Friendster and My Space. The LiveJournal was created as a company Danga Interactive in 1999 by Brad Fitzpatrick as a way to keep in touch with his high-school friends. In January 2001, a blogging software company, Six Apart purchased Danga Interactive .Since then, media analysts have been interested to understand how people are affected by social technologies and how web communities, popularly know as “comms” evolve from the virtual to the real and if these “comms” will eventually replace real

communities. In a sense, if the most intimate communities are created at intensive stages of child and youthhood and if these “comms” help to maintain relationships which would otherwise wane as friends are scattered all over the globe in search of jobs and new life opportunities, such live journals will be the best records we will have of childhoods captured in web diasporas. People migrate geographically and virtually and the recording of childhoods in face to face and blog media suggest that more direct and democratic forms of communication may question the premise of scientificity in social science research.

It follows that if people and even children are more than capable of doing this on their own, they have developed their own metanarrative or ideologies for wanting to do this which makes the purpose of ethnography all the more questionable in the sense that we as anthropologists in the name of science are doing it with people who cannot get access to these social networks because of destitution or lack of infrastructure. Yet we are saying in our production of knowledge that we are assisting the world know about the marginal and oppressed in the hope that eventually they will be known? There is no logical explanation for us wanting to represent them for given the tools of technical production they can do it better. There is also no scientific glamour in this expose for this kind of representation is hardly scientific unless we show that they are scientific in knowledge and skill. Even so is this lost and found information going to help them retain it or own it or are they going to be victims of further exploitation from State and corporate agencies out to control biopatenting of indigenous people? Should ethnography then not be empowerment to assist marginal and oppressed people obtain their fair share of entitlements? I have written about this before in “Anthropology without tears...” (1996) but the issue in this paper is not about this. I am merely saying that scientificity in anthropology has been wrongly valued for providing objective truths. These do not exist but the links between institutions which are systemic to the stability and transformation of human society and the processes which enable them to be stable and change over time is what should be determined with accuracy and conviction..

(9) Ethnoblog.livejournal.com is the address I use to post my ethnoblogs on Cambridge society developed from March- July 2006 while I was a visiting-fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. In these blogs I relate my experiences at Cambridge as if I am entering a new society not experienced before but although this started as an experiment to illustrate how an Asian post-colonial feminist anthropologist would view the English, I was compelled to recollect so many incidences and events of my childhood that my writing became a kind of jubilant catharsis, a happy journey into time and I began to associate event I experienced here with earlier episodes in my life. I had visited Cambridge before but for shorter periods and could never really get into “Cambridge” the way I could this time writing ethnoblogs as a presentable pastime. It was also interesting that I began to find most things that I observed amusing and I cannot explain this except to say that I wrote when I was most relaxed and totally unperturbed. Perhaps this is a rare emotion in an anthropologist and a different kind of field from the tough stressful fieldwork experiences of anthropologists in the Asia-Pacific and in Africa and it would be interesting to know if anthropologists would end up writing humorous ethnographies or inspirational novels (or pursued their talents elsewhere in areas like appropriating technologies or midwifery) had they been more at ease with their surroundings and not unduly concerned about getting degrees and pursuing every native as a potential treasure of information.

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