Introduction to the *Research Handbook on Child Migration*
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Some learn the importance of age early on in their life, from birthday celebrations, school procedures or customary rituals. Others live in societies where age is a construct with little salience. They have the importance of age inflicted on them much later, in harsh circumstances when it becomes a critical variable for access to a desired outcome. So, it is with advocates, policy makers and scholars working on migration. Some learn about the importance of age early on in their work, through exposure to child migrants as a concomitant of their engagement with refugee practice, anti-deportation activism, migration history or immigrant rights community organizing. They see the urgency of special attention to the needs and rights of children as a distinct category where routine procedures produce manifestly unjust or partial results. Others, a majority, overlook age specificities until pressing circumstances render this impossible – a court case that makes the headlines, a drowning that captures world attention, an exposure of abuse that shames a government.

The same, *mutatis mutandis*, can be said for the importance of migration history and status in a consideration of childhood. Some know from their first years that they do not belong in the society they live in, or that they are somehow different, perhaps less acceptable, while others have the luxury of ignoring the radical impact of migration status. And experts on childhood manifest this same polarity – some dedicate themselves from the start to the intersection between the two statuses, alienage and minority, while others proceed in their scholarship or practice as if all children were citizens with a legal status and full child protection entitlements.

This book is a testament to the fact that age has become, if belatedly, a critical variable in the study of and engagement with migration, and that migration history and status have become important facets impinging on the study and practice of children's rights. As editors, we hope that the book's scope, disciplinary, methodological and geographic, captures the richness of the field, and the dramatic challenges still ahead.

One of this book's central goals is to introduce readers – scholars, students, advocates, policy makers, practitioners – to the wealth of scholarship that now exists on child migration. In recent years, a plethora of resources on this topic has emerged, a concentrated avalanche of publications, as if to make up for decades of lost time when the topic barely surfaced in the extensive literatures on children and on migration. Among this wealth, the preponderance of material addresses legal norms, challenges and strategies relevant to processing child migrant cases. A large literature also documents the harsh human rights abuses and violations to which child migrants are subjected.[1] The overwhelming majority of authors are thus lawyers, human rights investigators, researcher/journalists or policy experts. Reflecting the familiar maldistribution of global resources across disciplines, the

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bulk of work focuses on the reception of child migrants in Europe and North America, with much less attention to experiences and challenges in the global South.

As editors, we have endeavored to select quality work across a more diverse set of domains. One of the criteria that has informed our selection is a search for work that showcases ways in which the experiences of child migrants provide a valuable perspective on tension points, inconsistencies and fissures within our broader normative frameworks. Many of the chapters in this volume show how, by better understanding the experiences of child migrants, we learn about the underbelly of power and its many, often unseen, ramifications.[2]

Another goal of this research volume is to highlight work that shows how attention to child migration complicates facile dichotomies of legal/illegal or forced/economic migration. At a time of considerable public attention to migration management and concerted effort to craft more effective and capacious policies (or, in some quarters, to roll such policies back), this input is an important corrective to dominant political narratives. Children force migration policy makers to foreground rights considerations, and migration considerations compel domestic child welfare professionals to enlarge the scope of their expertise and impact. Many crucial questions complicating the dichotomies just mentioned are raised in the following pages. What should we make of situations where children are moved across borders as infants by their parents and then endure a life of irregular status (as is the case for the US "Dreamers" or "DACA-mented")?[3] Are they economic migrants? Have they broken any laws? What constitute just remedies? How should we characterize children seeking a new life who have been sent away from conflict zones by families decimated by terrorism, sent away to avoid the risk of recruitment and with a mandate to send back remittances to enable the family's survival? Many, like the thousands of young Afghans in this situation, are automatically considered illegal entrants, even "anchor babies", and denied access to asylum procedures?[4] And what of the sizeable population of young people who seek "the compensatory possibility of success and fulfillment" elsewhere, whose circumstances generally are not covered by any readily available legal status? Driven from desolate and unrewarding home circumstances, they hope to realize a legitimate youthful aspiration – access to a rewarding, self-sufficient and productive future. How do children's rights and migration control norms converge or clash in these situations?[5]

These common situations facing child and youth migrants give a distinctive urgency to the mandate to "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people", a life strategy that is particularly elusive for children and young people.[6] The overwhelming majority of regular and orderly migration opportunities (for work, for visits, for investment, for family reunification) are limited to adult initiated migration. That explains why children and adolescents are at much higher risk of abuse and exploitation when they migrate than adults.[7] The legal mobility mandate just referred to is set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the recently agreed international development agenda. For the first time in the catalogue of global development priorities, the SDGs include a migration goal that is informing the global discussion about reform of refugee and immigration mechanisms.[8] Children's treatment by legal systems, by social service organizations, and their testimonies describing these experiences afford an underexplored lens into the challenges of realizing this goal for a large and growing proportion of the world's population. Details about children's journeys and aspirations,

and their reflections, such as those offered here, provide a unique set of insights into these challenges and their urgency.

A third goal of the editors has been to ensure that this volume showcases the exciting range of new methodologies being used to study child migration, often by young scholars and activists. We have consciously chosen to include work from both experienced and recognized scholars in the field, and research by younger colleagues, embarking on their professional careers, an important corrective, in our view, to prevailing publishing practice. In the follow pages, some authors provide commentary on legal norms and on evolving case law, relating both to political developments more broadly, while other contributors show how children's narratives, their photographs, their testimonies and their behaviors convey the "social imaginaries" they associate with migration, the way in which young refugees and immigrants picture themselves, in relation to both the settings they are in and the people with whom they engage.[9]

The structures and experiences discussed in this Research Handbook cover both court decisions, government regulations and administrative policies about whether child migrants qualify for refugee status or other human rights protections, and the historical legacies that influence official policy and migrant behavior.[10] This material illustrates, in its variety and complexity, the intricate tango that develops between bureaucratic action and human behavior, the evolution of social practices by administrators, human rights advocates and child migrants themselves. These practices generate the web of expectations, disappointments, protections and vulnerabilities that contemporary child migration consists of.[11] By presenting this broad canvas of scholarship and reflection, we hope to stimulate readers to develop perspectives on child migration that move beyond the tropes of child vulnerability, abuse and protection narrowly conceived, critical though those are.[12]

Several of the authors included in this collection explore common decision-making stumbling blocks – the givenness of age, the transparency of "evidence", the essential components of "protection", the meaning of "resilience". Scientific evidence on brain development or comparative human biology is referenced as appropriate.[13]

The international acceptance of a unitary definition of "child" as any person under 18 imposes a homogenizing protective obligation on state parties. In the case of children who are also migrants, this obligation clashes with other central state goals – promoting national self-interest, enforcing border control, privileging the priorities of citizens over non-citizens. This tension is probed by many of the contributions in this volume. Some address historical approaches, examining the development of child protection and social welfare strategies in emergency situations generated by mass refugee flows, genocide or political revolution.[14] Their investigations resonate, across time and space, with contemporary attempts to build protective social work practices for children on the move, in West Africa or Ireland for example.[15]

Throughout this book, intersecting constraints on youthful migration are addressed, from the perspective of law, of political theory, of psychology, anthropology, sociology, demography and history. The book explores the complex intertwining of national historical legacies and traditions with personal drivers and institutional determinants of contemporary child and youth migration. It reveals generational disparities, tensions between embedded social expectations back home and, related to these pressures, the performance of successful migratory outcomes.[16] Some chapters address the deeply personal

and intimate correlates of these entrepreneurial adventures, the individual determination and the courage, the resilience, creativity and ingenuity displayed but also the suffering, the depression, the disorientation rarely visible, until desperation or illness force them into public view.[17]

Another thread running through the volume, one that links the historic legacies of domination and land expropriation with contemporary youth migration across regions, is the layering of differentiated experiences, the contrast between family and community networks supporting groups of migrants along familiar routes and strategic choices, as opposed to unaccompanied independent adolescents and youth embarking on self-initiated journeys against all odds.[18] These two patterns generate, within the same community, remarkably different trajectories – predictable and well-worn mobilities on the one hand and complex, often protracted individual odysseys on the other.

In many cases, the heterogeneity of histories and routes contrasts with the convergence of the forms of oppression and suffering, conflict with authorities, periodic destitution, racist violence, that shape the young migrants' social life en route and at destination. Many child migrations, despite the sharp differences in their genesis and trajectories, are fueled by a strong sense that staying at home represents social and community failure, a life of boredom and lack of prospects. Individual and family goals often intertwine as young migrants struggle to realize the vision of material success and consumption that they see depicted all around them. These influences lead to pre-departure and transit strategies fraught with peril and to overwhelming social pressures not only to succeed but to demonstrate success. Whereas some youth remain tied to their communities and generate resources to support them, other carve out precarious existences on the margins of their societies, concealing the extent of their hardship to avoid loss of face or status back home, or to spare parents the heartache and grief they would experience.[19]

An important theme running through the volume is the challenge of reconciling attention to a child's best interests with respect for an adolescent's agency and growing independence. Several authors show how, by denying the views and agency of children as migrants, their imperatives to exercise mobility and seek out entrepreneurial solutions to their home challenges, child protection measures in the migration context often engender rejection and escape on the part of the child migrants, rather than acceptance and collaboration with the structures offered. As a result, growing numbers of child migrants find themselves challenging social work practices intended to protect them but which, instead, they experience as coercive, restrictive and ultimately in conflict with their migration plans and aspirations.[20]

The editors hope that this Research Handbook captures the extensive and growing scope of high quality work in the field of child migration and that it stimulates a broader and better informed engagement with one of the most pressing human rights challenges of our time. As we head into a period of intense policy debate about migration management and the future of diverse and heterogeneous immigrant societies, and as we are increasingly brought face to face with the gaping inequalities of the world we live in, it is clear that just, sustainable and well informed interventions to protect and promote the mobility of the next generation are an urgent priority. If this Research Handbook generates greater understanding about the complex field of child migration and encourages broader engagement with the human rights challenges it raises, it will have accomplished its purpose.

NOTES

1. Within the last few months alone, at the time of this writing, many excellent publications have appeared, including Marisa O. Ensor and Elżbieta M. Goździak (eds), *Children and Forced Migration: Durable Solutions during Transient Years* (329 pages), regular statistical bulletins on child migration flows including Eurostat News releases, a comprehensive OECD report on *International Migration* including information on schooling access and integration (432 pages), a report on *Children on the Move in Italy and Greece* (Reach June 2017), a UNICEF report *A Child Is a Child: Protecting Children on the Move from Violence, Abuse and Exploitation* (May 2017 – 64 pages), a joint UNICEF–IOM report, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea, at Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation* (September 2017 – 60 pages), a peer reviewed article by Laila L. Hlass on representing child migrants, "Minor Protections: Best Practices for Representing Child Migrants", 47 *New Mexico Law Review* 247 (2017) and a 250 page *Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* by the Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children.
2. See for example Chapter 7 by Peyroux (the impact of anti Roma stigma on East European family economic strategies and related child exploitation), Chapter 8 by Coutin (the legacy of colonialism in El Salvador), Chapter 19 by Kumin (the application of culturally myopic criteria to assess credibility) and Chapter 32 by Liwanga (child labor in the Democratic Republic of Congo as part of a global supply chain of rights tainted goods) in this volume.
3. See Chapter 26 by the Suárez-Orozco's and Chapter 28 by Terrio in this volume.
4. See Chapter 17 in this volume by Lundberg about Afghan migrants in Sweden.
5. See, in this volume, Chapter 6 by Vacchiano about North Africans in Italy, Chapter 30 by Tibet about Somalis in Turkey and Chapter 31 by Senovilla Hernández and Uzureau about Sub-Saharans in France. See also reflections by David Thronson (Chapter 11) and Farmer (Chapter 12) on the tensions between a child rights and a migration framework.
6. Sustainable Development Goal 10(7), https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.
7. UNICEF and IOM, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea, at Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation* (September 2017).
8. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld. For more discussion of these issues see Chapter 12 by Farmer in this volume.
9. For careful accounts of the development of legal norms, regulations and caselaw see Chapter 9 by O'Donnell, Chapter 10 by Smyth and Chapter 13 by Frydman and Bookey in this volume. For more on the now widely used concept of "social imaginaries" see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2004).
10. See chapters in Parts I and II.
11. See chapters by Vacchiano (Chapter 6), Tibet (Chapter 30) and Senovilla Hernández and Uzureau (Chapter 31) for example.
12. See for example Chapter 29 on the impact of exploitation and abuse by Digidiki.
13. See for example Chapter 18 by Hjern et al. on identity assessment, Chapter 19 by Kumin on credibility; Chapter 12 by Farmer, Chapter 16 by Rozzi, Chapter 11 by David Thronson and Chapter 29 by Digidiki on protection; and Chapter 23 by Ní Ragallaigh Chapter 25 by Kohli on resilience.
14. See Chapter 1 by Kunth, Chapter 2 by Feyrenbach and Chapter 3 by Torres in Part I of this volume and Chapter 7 by Peyroux in Part II.
15. See Chapter 21 by Geissler and Lagunju and Chapter 23 by Ní Raghallaigh.
16. See chapters by Treiber (Chapter 4), Timéra (Chapter 5), Peyroux (Chapter 7).
17. See Chapter 25 by Kohli and Chapter 30 by Tibet for example. For a remarkable account of the extraordinary odyssey of a young unaccompanied Somali refugee across large swaths of East and Southern Africa see Jonny Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope* (2015).
18. See chapters by Timéra (Chapter 5) and Coutin (Chapter 8).
19. For a moving account of this see Chapter 6 by Vacchiano.
20. See O'Donnell (Chapter 9), Smyth (Chapter 10), Farmer (Chapter 12) and Rozzi (Chapter 16).