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Title	Every Wednesday I am happy: childhoods in an Irish asylum centre
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Publication date	2011-03-22
Original Citation	White, A. (2012) 'Every Wednesday I am happy: childhoods in an Irish asylum centre', Population Space and Place, 18(3), pp. 314-326. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/psp.659
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1002/psp.659
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Download date	2026-11-01 16:09:30
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/3025



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"Every Wednesday I am happy": Childhoods in an Irish Asylum Centre"

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Revised submission to *Population, Space and Place,* July 2010

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This is the post-print (i.e. final draft post refereeing) version. This paper is published as: White, A. (2012), 'Every Wednesday I Am Happy': Childhoods in an Irish Asylum Centre. Population, Space Place, 18: 314–326.

doi: 10.1002/psp.659

See: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/psp.659/full

Intro:

This paper draws on research[1] that explores the experiences of children (as opposed to adults such as teachers or parents) living as part of family groups within the asylum system in a Western society (the Republic of Ireland). By taking a 'children centered' approach this paper provides alternative perspectives to 'adultist' views and accounts of asylum-seeking children that predominate in research literature (see Rutter 2006).

Contemporary western ideologies have emphasised the importance of residentially fixed and stable childhoods, thus children who move subvert these beliefs and the very fact of their movement, it follows, produces negative consequences (Fass 2005: see Malkki 1992; 1995 for similar arguments about refugees). When researchers take migrant children seriously (which they do in an albeit piecemeal fashion) they tend to focus on specific groups of vulnerable children (such as unaccompanied asylum seekers) and to emphasise and reproduce adultist views of children as passive, dependent and lacking social agency (see Ní Laoire et al. 2008; forthcoming; White et al. forthcoming). Exploring the complex ways in which childhoods in the Irish asylum system shape, and are shaped through, different lived spatialities is of critical importance because it helps develop understandings of migrant children as active and engaged subjects and as living lives that are marked by more than passivity, dependence and vulnerability (see below). I will show the ways in which children living in this system interpreted, understood and acted upon the spaces and places that make up their day to day lives as well as the specific structures and constraints that they experienced.

[1] Research carried out as part of the Marie Curie Migrant Children Research Project, funded through a Marie Curie Excellence Grant (Number: MEXT-CT-2004-014204)..

Debates about spatiality and the socio-spatial have had a lengthy history within human geography and these ideas have been used to explore children's worlds (see Horton et al. [2008] for a review, for examples see Holloway and Valentine [2000b] and Christiansen et al [2000]). With some exceptions (see Sirrayeh 2008; Sporton and Valentine 2007; Sporton et al. 2006; Valentine et al. 2009) these arguments have not been used to explore the lives of refugee children or children who are seeking asylum (whether alone or as part of a family group). Following Holloway and Valentine (2000a) thinking about children's spatialities offers a way "in" to *focus on those everyday spaces in and through which children's identities and lives are made and remade* (p.11). This is important because as Sporten et al. (2006: 215) remind us

"…geographical sites matter – if processes of identification are situated accomplishments and we recognise that processes of marginalisation are not inevitable but that individuals might interpret and respond to them in different ways, then as geographers we need to understand the role of specific sites … in enabling or undermining the ability of young people to achieve positive outcomes in often adverse circumstances"

However this is not meant to overstate the question of childrens' agency, which I understand as being (following Hess and Shandy [2008]) the intention as well as the capability (and power) to act. Thus we need to explicitly recognise the limitations that are imposed upon children in an oppressive system like the Irish asylum system. The Irish asylum dispersal and direct provision system acts to subject adults, families and children to a series of controls that shape and direct their everyday lives in minute detail. Decisions being taken by adults (such state agencies like the Reception and Integration Agency [RIA see below] or parents)

play a central role in shaping the access that children have to the resources and power needed to articulate their agency[2].

In the following sections I outline the basic shape and outline of the Irish system of direct provision and compulsory dispersal and provide an account of the methodological approach and use of child-centered techniques by researchers in an asylum accommodation centre in Ireland (henceforth referred to as 'Glengarry[3]'). The paper then goes on to explore aspects of the spatialities that shaped and framed these childrens' everyday lives, in it I argue that the children's lives in Glengarry were inscribed by multiple, overlapping, often contradictory spatialities. As a place Glengarry was experienced by different children through various (dis)connections between it and a multitude of different sites, locations and spaces. I argue that concentrating solely on the children's social and spatial isolation reproduces views of them as dependent and passive. Instead I show how the ambiguous and contradictory positions created for children living in Glengarry reflect the uncertainty and ambiguity that surrounds them as immigrants, as asylum seekers and as children.

The Irish 'direct provision' asylum system

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[2] As Hess and Shandy (2008: 765) argue *children have roles as individual actors, but this agency is tempered by the notion that adult oversight of these youth is frequently a function of the state or a negotiated reality between parents and the state*. While childhood studies and childrens' geographies can sometimes work to reproduce a *celebratory view of agency* (ibid. 2008 : 771) when researching with children and families with such a specific relationship with the state one needs to be cogniscent of the very real constrictions and limitations to this agency.

[3] In accordance with the ethical protocol for the Migrant Children Project, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect participants' anonymity. These pseudonyms cover place names as well as individuals. The ethical protocol for the Migrant Children Project is available at migration.ucc.ie/ children/ethicsadult.html

The Irish 'direct provision' asylum system was introduced in 2000, just weeks after the introduction of a similar system in the UK. The purpose behind this system (which was part of a broader institutional and legislative reorganization of the Irish asylum system) was to provide asylum seekers with basic dietary and accommodation needs, thereby disobliging the state from providing asylum seekers with supplementary welfare allowances which are no longer 'needed' (Breen 2008). The Direct Provision system works in the following manner. On receipt of an asylum application in the *Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner* (ORAC), asylum seekers (whether single or as part of family groups) are placed in temporary accommodation in the area Dublin for a period of 14 days. After this period they are relocated (usually outside Dublin) to one of 75 asylum dispersal centres where accommodation, three daily meals and a weekly cash payment (of €19.10 per adult and €9.50 per child). Asylum seekers are also entitled to a bi-annual exceptional needs payment of €100. Asylum seekers (again whether single or part of a family group) are obliged to remain in the centre while they are in the asylum determination process. Most dispersal centres do not permit residents to cook their own food and asylum seekers are prohibited from gaining paid employment. The (limited) research that has been carried out on the Direct Provision policy in Ireland has consistently pointed to the problems associated with extreme boredom, material deprivation, social exclusion, feelings of helplessness, anxiety and depression amongst residents (see Nasc 2008; Breen 2008; FLAC 2003). Case studies of Direct Provision centres (in Galway and in Waterford) confirmed these findings and highlight tensions associated with living in a cramped, communal environment on limited resources (WAP et al 2006; Vanderhurst 2007). Research with migrants who have left the Direct Provision system consistently return to these themes (Coakley and Healy 2007; Smyth and Whyte 2005). It is worth noting that despite the negative

impacts the Direct Provision system can have on many residents, these same residents and management in individual centres can sometimes work together to relieve these tensions and difficulties (Coakley and Healy 2007; Vanderhurst 2007). Concerns have been raised over the quality of Direct Provision accommodation provided, the lack of child-friendly facilities in centres and the need for childcare services for parents living in centres (see Iroh 2010, Pieper et al 2009, Smyth and Whyte 2005). These findings are consistent with research across the EU which points to the obstacles that dispersed asylum seekers face accessing welfare entitlements such as healthcare (Norrendam et al. 2005; see also Pieper et al. 2009).

There is little disagreement that the direct provision and dispersal system is deliberately designed to segregate out populations of asylum seekers from the majority host community (see Fanning, Staunton and Loyal 2000; Fanning and Veale 2004; see also Malloch and Stanley 2005; Zetter 2007). It seems obvious to point out that an aim of the dispersal policy is to prevent asylum seekers from settling into a community or locality until a decision about their asylum claim is has been made (a process that can take many months, if not years).

This system of direct provision in combination with a compulsory dispersal in Ireland has introduced a distinct set of policies towards asylum seekers and the demarcation of a part of the population through the creation of specific places for these men, women and children. It is ironic therefore that as these places have been constructed and shaped by the asylum system in Ireland there is little research in Ireland on the importance, role or relevance of place and space in the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, however as Spicer (2008) points out this situation is replicated in other national contexts.

In December 2007 approx 30% of those living in Direct Provision centres in Ireland were below 12 years of age; this numbers 1,964 children (RIA 2007). Efforts are made by the *Reception and Integration Agency* (RIA), the government agency who manage or contract out management for Direct Provision centres, to accommodate family groups separately from single asylum seekers. Concerns have been raised at the quality of accommodation provided, as well as the lack of child-friendly facilities, in many of these centres (see below; see also Smyth and Whyte 2005). In 2001 Fanning, Veale and O' Connor produced a report for the Irish Refugee Council on the effects of the asylum dispersal system on families and children in these centres. Their report found that diet, accommodation standards and basic amenities were lacking and many of the children were suffering extreme material deprivation. This research pointed to the specificity of child poverty for children in the asylum system in Ireland. Research in Cork city has come to similar conclusions (Collins 2002; Nasc 2008). Collins (2002) noted that the social isolation experienced by children in the Direct Provision centres is compounded by their geographical isolation from their local communities (see also NASC 2008).

These reports, particularly Fanning et al. (2001) and Fanning and Veale (2004), are important, timely and politically engaged insights into the effects of child poverty in the Irish asylum dispersal system. It is clear and I acknowledge the existence of widespread child poverty and high levels of social exclusion in the asylum dispersal centres in Ireland. However these arguments are informed by a *social-structural* approach to childhood, one in which childhood is a universal category which is underpinned by formal (and informal) discourses and institutions of the law (see above, see also Holloway and Valentine 2000b, Watters 2008). This is problematic, not because they misrepresent the lives of

children in direct provision centres but because they take 'adult' understandings and transfer these onto the experiences of children. In other words the problem is not that children living in direct provision centres live lives that are not geographically isolated (indeed as I go on to show fieldwork produced numerous instances which provided evidence that they do). Rather the problem is that research on children in direct provision centres in Ireland (and elsewhere) reflect assumptions that the lack of social interactions with local communities automatically means that children do not 'integrate' or fail to develop meaningful connections or attachments to particular places and, as a result, to fully belong in Ireland. This paper argues for more nuanced and hetrogenous understandings of how children in direct provision in Ireland view 'where' they live. In it I hope to provide an alternative view of childhoods in an direct provision centre by exploring aspects of the spatialities of these childrens' lives which might show ways in which the children were (and were not) capable of and able to interpret, understand and act upon the spaces and places that make up their day to day lives.

Methodology

The arguments and analysis presented below are based upon an extended period of fieldwork in an asylum accommodation centre in Ireland[4]. The centre in question, 'Glengarry' provides accommodation primarily (but not exclusively) for families with children of school age, Glengarry is located in a suburban/commuter locality in the Republic of Ireland. Glengarry was home to

[4] The fieldwork that this paper is based upon was carried out by the author and Dr Naomi Tyrell (née Bushin). A more detailed account of this fieldwork and the centrality of 'child-centered' research methods is the subject of a separate (joint authored publication) (see White and Bushin 2009).

families from many different parts of the world however the majority were from subSaharan Africa and Eastern Europe. This is consistent with data on the country of origin within the residents of Direct Provision centres in Ireland in general (RIA 2010). The accommodation in Glengarry consisted primarily of family groups occupying single rooms for sleeping with a handful of families living in separate accommodation with multiple rooms. Eating and socialising were carried out in communal areas. The main building in Glengarry was surrounded by open spaces that included a garden with trees and flowerbeds. The (school-age) children attended a local primary school, a (free) bus service picked and dropped off children on weekdays.

Coming up with an exact figure for the numbers of children living in the centre is difficult such is the frequency of the turnover of families through the system (some families were granted refugee status or humanitarian leave to remain and others returned to their home countries after reaching an end to their claim for claims, yet others were transferred between accommodation centres during our fieldwork) but while the research was taking place a group of approximately 15 school-aged children and approximately twice that number of children below 4 years of age lived in the centre. An independent childcare company called *Sunshine*[5], provide after-school playtime for children aged over 4 years, every Wednesday afternoon during term-time and three times a week during school holidays. Once meetings with *Sunshine* staff had taken place to develop a research plan, permission was received from RIA to carry out research in asylum accommodation centres.

These discussions with Sunshine staff played an important role and influence on our research design and execution. A separate publication (White and Bushin

[5] Pseudonym

2009) outlines how Sunshine staff helped introduce the project to both children and adults and provided advice throughout our fieldwork. Sunshine staff also played a key role facilitating a feedback session where children were thanked for their participation in the Migrant Children Project.

The research project was introduced to parents and children in Glengarry via letters translated into specific languages (including French, Croation, Ukranian and Romanian). These were given to the children and their parents or guardians, the letters introduced the researchers and explained the purpose of the Migrant Children Project.

Following this, researchers began attending weekly sessions of the Sunshine-led after-school club at Glengarry in April 2007 and continued to attend until February 2008 (a period of 9 months). We also attended some of the more frequent sessions in the school holidays and two social events organised by Sunshine and the management of Glengarry. The lengthy period of fieldwork enabled a number of different methods and techniques to be used in the research. These included: drawings exercises; 'life journeys' and life lines exercises; play; map drawing exercises; model making exercises; supervised and unsupervised photography work; interviews and discussion; as well as ethnographic observations.

Thus an array of 'child-centered' research methods were used throughout this fieldwork. These methods have been designed and used by researchers because they are sensitive to an array of competencies, children can be encouraged to feel at ease and to offer their interests, skills and talents in the research process (Kesby, 2007). This, in turn, may lead to better quality research (Punch, 2002; see also Einarsdottir, 2005). Recent discussion has focused on ways of engaging with children's competencies and the need for researchers to reshape research

methodologies with adults as well as children (see Cahill, 2007; Kesby, 2007). Importantly as well using 'child-centered' methods gave us the opportunity to develop good working relationships with different groups (children, staff and families) in Glengarry and this helped us negotiate the delicate and at times problematic research relations that can typify research with refugees and those in the asylum system (see White and Bushin 2009 for a fuller discussion of these points).

More importantly (for the purposes of this paper) using a mix of methods gave us important perspectives and insights into the children's experiences of direct provision, of school life in Ireland, of their migration histories and of the ways in which migrant families and households are comprised of (often temporary and fluid) assembledges of people moving through several physical sites that might span international borders.

Childhoods in 'Glengarry' as geographically isolated.

As mentioned above, a frequent critique of dispersal systems and asylum accommodation centres in Ireland (and elsewhere) rests on the manner in which living in these centres isolate and marginalise asylum seekers, setting them apart from local host communities. Zetter (2007) argues that (in Ireland and the UK) the asylum dispersal system serves to marginalise and ultimately alienate refugees from their local milieu and host society. Malloch and Stanley (2005) claim that the rationale behind the policy of introducing asylum accommodation centres in the UK is based upon ensuring the exclusion of asylum seekers from local host communities. Anderson (2000) provides examples of the geographical and social isolation in the lives of children living in a German residential facility for asylum seekers. Drawing similar conclusions about the Irish dispersal and direct provision system Fanning et al.(2000) comment that *those who have been*

accommodated under direct provision are subject to a form of apartheid whereby they are compelled to live apart from the majority community without the social and material support structures to interact with the native population (15). Following on from these observations Fanning et al. (2001) argue that the Irish direct provision system *excludes asylum seekers from participation in host communities* (p. 33) and that this can impact onto children in specific ways.

Fieldwork in Glengarry (which included observations, conversations, activities and interactions with the children attending the 'Sunshine' after school care club) revealed numerous examples of childhoods marked by isolation and disconnection from local communities and neighbourhoods. In specific ways Glengarry represented a 'bubble' and a world in itself (a feeling that the grounds, borders and walls of the centre reinforced). This was explicitly referred to by the leader of the 'Sunshine' after-school club in a conversational interview:

there is that kind of isolated kind of being stuck in their [the childrens'] *place, you know they are not really connecting to much with the outside world so they don't have the freedom maybe that other children do in one way, I mean they do in another way because they have that great space - they have all those children there to play with - but its a bit disconnected to the rest of the world.* (Interview 10-12-07).

Comments such as these were supported by other observations during fieldwork. In the 9 months during fieldwork children from outside the centre who were not related to residents or staff only came to play with the children Glengarry on only a handful of occasions. When these visits took place there was intense competition amongst the children in Glengarry to gain the attention of visiting children, as well as some confusion (among the Sunshine staff members) over whether visiting children should be discouraged or not. In a number of

ways then these factors conspired to construct visiting children (who were not accompanied by an adult) as 'out of place'.

Fieldwork also uncovered evidence that the children living in Glengarry had little contact with the surrounding neighbourhood. While building a model of Glengarry the children participating were happy to draw (both 'real' and 'imagined') pathways, woods, flowerbeds, grassy areas and buildings that were *inside* the boundaries of Glengarry (which were clearly marked out by a wall and gates surrounding the centre on three sides, the remaining side being bordered by hill covered by dense undergrowth and trees). That the children were unwilling, or unable to do the same for anywhere outside of these same boundaries suggests at least a lack of knowledge or engagement with these places.

While talking about attending a schoolmate's birthday party 'J'[6] (8 years of age, from West Africa) was asked if she had invited this schoolmate to her birthday party. Her response was that she hadn't but the manner of this response (confused, contradictory and quickly brushed off) implied that she had not had a party or was unable to invite her schoolmate because of where she lived. Thus (as with Fanning et al. [2001]) it is possible that J was unable to invite school-friends for play dates or birthday parties *because of where she lived*.

It is important to note that, treated in isolation, none of these examples offer 'proof' (if such a thing were possible) of the children's isolation from their localities. Nor do they mark out the children in Glengarry as especially

[6] Following the Migrant Children Project Ethical Protcol (see migration.ucc.ie/children/ethicsadult.html) children/participants were given the opportunity to chose their pseudonyms. However in certain cases this was not possible as children were unwilling or unable to choose their pseudonyms. In these cases the decision was taken to identify these children with single letters.

disadvantaged and isolated *because they were in the asylum system*. It could be, for example, that because of their age, rather than their migrant status) the children were subject to adult and parental control and sanction and were, as a result, prevented from leaving the immediate environs of Glengarry (like children in Valentines [1997] study).

Nevertheless taken together (and alongside other observations and conversations with children and adults in Glengarry as well as the research already cited) these examples do suggest (at the very least) that the lives of the children in Glengarry were marked by isolation and disconnection from a local wider community. The fieldwork suggested that the children in Glengarry lived lives that were disconnected and excluded from local (and non-local) communities and geographical contexts. Conclusions drawn in research (cited above) on childrens' lives in asylum accommodation centers in Ireland and other national contexts have also pointed to this isolation and segregation as an aim of the policies of dispersal and direct provision.

While it may be true that the children in Glengarry lived isolated and segregated lives it is not necessarily the case that children were unable to develop meaningful senses of attachment and belonging to Glengarry and other places. In what follows I will show how the children's engagement with local, regional and transnational spaces beyond and within Glengarry were shaped by complex spatialities that could have contradictory and ambiguous results.

Glengarry as a space of interaction, linkages and connections

Within Glengarry: peer groups

It would be a mistake to draw simplified, causal relationships between the spatial extent of the childrens' knowledges of the locality and their participation and interactions with each other (after all the lives of many children in Ireland [and beyond]) are divorced from local contexts and cultures whether they are living in specific institutional and legal contexts - like the asylum system - or not [see O'Connor 2005]).

While it can be argued (as above) that the children in Glengarry were isolated from the local host community, seen another way they have a supply of friends and peers to interact with and for play. Reading Glengarry simply as a space where children led lives that were cut off and disconnected from their local communities and peer groups omits the ways in which the spaces, routines and daily interactions in Glengarry offered the children tangible opportunities for developing and cultivating important and significant peer friendships. Kirsten (a 9 year-old girl from Central Africa who lived in Glengarry with her mother and two younger brothers) commented on her (daily) interactions with her best friend were made possible through the spatial proximity of families living in Direct Provision:

> *Everyday when she goes to the library she comes in my room and she says 'Kirsten can you play outside' and I say 'yes' and we play. We find so many plays and after when we are finished we take the lunch and we go in her room and we play*

For Kirsten the limits of the social spaces available to her in Glengarry are not as important as her close friendships in Glengarry. As Kirsten's comment above suggests, the spatial proximity of childrens' lives in Glengarry could encourage and foster important peer friendships and relationships amongst the children, a point that the leader of Sunshine acknowledged '[the children] *really like that* [living in one location] *even though it does have its own problems that is something*

very exciting for children to have - a group of playmates all together like that (Interview 10 -12-07).

Anderson (2000) reports similar intense 'initial' friendships between children in German asylum hostels, which he notes could often cut across cultural, ethnic and national grounds. Children in Glengarry had experienced disjunctures and dislocations in their lives as a result of their move into Ireland. Many spoke of missing friends from their 'home countries'. Many had been (and still were) separated from immediate family members as a result of their migration to Ireland (see below). The significance of a supply of potential friends and peers should not be dismissed as it proved important in the development of new peer networks for some children. These peer networks could prove important to these children's efforts to re-construct their sense of self in the aftermath of the disjunctures and dislocations of their migration to Ireland.

As part of this the spaces, routines and interactions of the childrens' daily lives played an important role. Living in communal conditions offered opportunities for developing and cultivating important and significant peer friendships among the children. In addition the grounds around the direct provision centre offered children access to spaces that were free from adult and parental supervision. On a number of occasions the children used the grounds and spaces around Glengarry to escape and hide from the monitoring and supervision of adults (parents and child workers). Some children enthusiastically showed the researchers these places and the 'secret' routes used for accessing these places. It was revealing that on drawing and making a 'model' of Glengarry participating children spent longer concentrating on drawing the trees and wooded corners to the sides of the entrance of the centre than they did on the building where they lived with their families.

Research consistently points to the detrimental effects of close, cramped and insufficient accommodation on residents living in Direct Provision (see examples cited above). Parents in Glengarry confirmed these conclusions while also pointing to ways in which direct provision undermined 'normal' family life. The lack of money and resources, coupled with the exclusion of parents from local labour markets generated very difficult living conditions for parents as they struggled to provide for their children on meagre resources. In addition parents in Glengarry also commented on the detrimental effects of communal living on their parental authority. For example D's (7 years old from Eastern Europe) mother complained that her daughter had learned inappropriate language from older girls in Glengarry.

Children in Glengarry echoed some of these views, for many of the children the attraction of moving out of Glengarry and into a 'proper' house rested on having their own room and their own space. Living within the Irish asylum system and in Glengarry compared unfavourably with some of the other places and domestic contexts that some children were used to. Paradoxically when this (i.e. leaving Glengarry) happened to some children (5 family groups left the accommodation centre during our fieldwork, the majority were given residency status) this was described by the children as *exciting* but also as *really scary*

Within Glengarry – language use

Significant and important friendships were fostered between different children in Glengarry and, as with any group of children, this meant certain children were isolated and excluded from these friendship groups. Typically these were organised around gender, however specific cultural practices, most notably language, represented another key means by which certain peer groups were

formed. Children from different national backgrounds might share a specific language (such as French amongst the children from Central Africa) and use this in their interactions and play, often engaging in 'code-switching' between languages.

Heller (quoted in Nilep [2006]: 16) defines 'code-switching' as *the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative act*. However understanding code-switching as language variation is not meant to imply that there was a consistent relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings (i.e. that rational speakers switched languages because of the perceived costs and benefits of specific language behaviours). Instead following Nilep (2009) code switching is understood as emerging out of specific interactions between speakers and interlocutors and the meanings and functions of particular linguistic identities are negotiated through these interactions and code-switches.

In Glengarry the children's self identities - as boys or girls, as 'babies' or 'big' - were unfinished, contingent projects and constructed through the intersection of key socio-cultural categories – gender, race, class, age etc (see White and Bushin 2009). Their social identities were not necessarily stable and coherent but were constantly created, indexed and ratified through their social behaviour and such language 'code-switches' . The children switched between English and other languages in part, as Ochs (1993) points out, to denote their membership of specific social groups. Rather than being simply 'read' from code switches these social groups were inferred by the children through their interactions as well as their stance and interpretation of these interactions.

These interactions and talk can be understood, following Delph-Janiurek (2000) as 'situated social activity', a social activity that is mutually constituted through its performance in specific interactional and institutional spaces. Thus, as with

Valentine at al. (2008) I understand the role of language switches in Glengarry as instances where social identities were made and remade in a specific social context which is itself made and remade in the process. The interactional and institutional spaces in Glengarry during the Sunshine after-school club shaped this talk and the meanings of these code swiches in particular ways. As in Valentine et al (ibid.) the children were bi- (usually multi-) lingual and their decisions about which communicative acts and practices to employ opened them up to several possible *enactments of the self* (376). The children were multilingual and routinely would switch from language to language depending on audiences, interactions and context. In Sunshine, while staff spoke English to the children these code switches were acknowledged and encouraged, being multilingual was actively praised by staff in their interactions with the children. This contrasts with the Irish education system where migrant children are presented in problematic terms as deficient in English (see Knowlan 2008) and English language proficiency is prioritized for migrant children (resulting in fixation with the funding and provision of English Language Support teaching in official and media discourses about migrant children in Irish classrooms [see ni Laoire et al 2008)). While this emphasis may be understandable in terms of Irish educational policies it prioritises formal adult-controlled educational contexts (of the classroom) where the language competencies of teachers (as bilingual speakers of English and Irish[7]) are valued over the informal spaces of the school outside lesson time when the multilingual capabilities of children may be of value. As Valentine et al. (2008: 382) point out *language competence is not about skill or potential per se, but rather about positioning in space*

[7] The Irish primary school teacher training system requires teachers to be proficient in speaking and teaching the Irish language.

Kerstin (who spoke at least three different languages) commented

> *today I was so angry because today I don't want to go to school…. everyday the teacher shout at you English!, Irish! I don't like that… every Wednesday* [the day the Sunshine afterschool club is on] *I am happy*

The Sunshine afterschool club represented an organized space within which multilingual identities could be expressed and were sanctioned and given encouragement and support by majority host community adults. Of course at times this was problematic in the sense that speaking specific languages served to include some and exclude others. As a child-oriented (but adult-controlled and organized) space the Sunshine club defined the language competencies and abilities of the children in markedly different ways in comparison to the school. The leader of Sunshine explicitly highlighted this when she argued

> *What we have done mainly is… give them positive feedback about themselves, about who they are what they look like, that it must be amazing to have so many languages, that it must be so interesting to come from somewhere else and to talk about how brave they are to go into another school and another language*

Speaking different languages and choices about using English and other languages represented important ways in which many of the children who lived in Glengarry sought to perform and articulate their self identities as part/not-part of Irish society. In this way the children and young people's used language to negotiate a sense of belonging to Irish society.

Within Glengarry – public/private space

In Glengarry public space and private space overlapped with each other in particular and unique ways. Where exactly the boundary between the public and the private is placed is always fluid, contested and political (see Blomley 2005). In

childhood studies (in the West) the boundary between public and private can be used to define where the public, neighbourhood and community ends and the domestic, or family or 'home' life begins. Such a public/private dichotomy may appear stable and fixed, it is however undermined by the messy realities and complexitites of people's everyday lives. As Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2001) argue it is perhaps more useful to think of public and private as constituted through *overlapping and interpenetrating sites of social practice and orientations* (772). Thus Gullov (2003) argues that the boundary between public and private plays a key role in the contradictions and ambiguities that surround childcare as a social practice. For parents placing children in childcare exposes their parenting competencies and family lives to public gaze. To childcarers (who may be themselves parents) the childcare setting is the venue for paid professional employment, to children it may be the setting for private, intimate and intense friendships and relationships. Thus many of the debates surrounding childcare (in Denmark) are focused upon where exactly this blurred boundary between public and private may be fixed.

Childcare is (obviously) shaped through particular understandings of childhood and many childcare providers (like Sunshine) stress the autonomy and promote the self management and expression of children. Paradoxically however childcare also reproduces private authoritarian parenting practices (through leaving choice about childcare to parents). The contradictory dilemmas that surround childcare as a social practice (simultaneously promoting ideas about the autonomy and independence of children and reproducing authoritarian parenting) reflect Gullov (ibid.) argues, Western uncertainties and ambiguities about children (as simultaneously independent and autonomous and as not-

Adult and not responsible). They are also constituted through these overlapping and interpenetrating public and private realms.

In Glengarry 'normal' institutional arrangements for childcare were turned on their head - here childcare was brought to the children, not vice versa – and the uncertainties and ambiguities about children reflected in Western assumptions about children presented the Sunshine staff with specific and to an extent unsolvable problems and difficulties. The leader of Sunshine commented

> *the fact that the children are living in this situation makes it also quite difficult for us to negotiate because it is not children coming into a space that is set up for them and they are in it and then they leave, it is so much part of their home that we are trying to negotiate what is- you know, where do we draw the lines? when they are in and when they are out, you know all the things that happen you will have children that just arrive on bikes or whatever and you are kind of thinking 'are they our responsibility or are they not?' so lots of lines aren't as clear*

This represented a perpetual headache for the Sunshine staff as they sought to use sign-in sheets to gain parental consent as well as keep a record of who was/was not 'in' the afterschool club. This was further complicated by Sunshine's policy (in line with childcare practices in Ireland) to distinguish between pre school (i.e. below 4-5 years of age) and school age children and to separate these in their weekly activities (by having a parent and toddler group in the morning and the Sunshine club in the afternoon). Frequently these younger children would want to play (often with their older siblings) with the materials and resources in the afternoons and their exclusion from the afterschool club proved to be a point of tension between some parents and the Sunshine staff.

Here the childcare policies Sunshine were trying to implement were in flux and subject to day-to-day negotiations and dilemmas. These were based in and

shaped by the interpenetration of public and private spaces in Glengarry. Within this context particular childcare practices - registering attendance, gaining parental consent, supervising and separating toddlers from older school age children – were difficult to implement. Thus in Glengarry children could exercise more autonomy about their use of the spaces provided in the Sunshine afterschool club (through attending the club, playing and using the resources provided by the Sunshine staff). Thus while their lives were subject to micro-controls and surveillance through the Irish asylum system the children in Glengarry were also able, in part, to express and articulate their agency. This was possible through the *gaps and fissures of the uneven and contradictory state policy* (Hess and Shandy 2008: 773). Here the overlapping, interpenetrating relationships and practices that made up public and private realms played a key role exposing these gaps and fissures.

Beyond Glengarry – local, regional and transnational family networks

Glengarry provided direct provision accommodation to family groups seeking asylum. The family forms the wider background upon which childhoods in Glengarry need to be understood. The children's lives were located in webs of connections based around family and kinship that operated over international, national and also local scales.

Migration can often result in the fragmentation of families and households as different members move at different times. For many children in Glengarry, as with many migrant children (see Christopoulou and De Leeuw 2004) their lives were marked through absences – of specific members, of entire families and kin groups –for many of the children these kinship and family networks were experienced through such feelings of loss and absence. For children in the

asylum system these feelings of loss and absence were painful and often related to their traumatic experiences of exile and asylum. When asked to choose the significant events in her life Kirsten highlighted her father's disappearance and her mother's flight to Ireland with some of her siblings. She followed some time later, leaving an older sister in her home country. D spoke of her father in her home country who was estranged from her mother and had remarried. She recognized that she would not have any contact with her father while she stayed in Ireland. Any contact could only happen if she were to *go back*, something she was very ambivalent about and unwilling to do.

For other children family networks and connections were reproduced through contact and relations with family members across national and international spaces and scales through phone calls, email and letters. While many children talked about about extended family members in other European countries as well as home countries, the extent to which they were in regular contact with these members of their extended family varied in different families. As Bryceson and Vulorela (2002) argue transnational families have to deliberately construct and carry out the emotional and economic functions of 'family' because of the spatial separation and infrequent physical contact between family members. Thus in Glengarry parents played an important role encouraging the 'emotional labour' involved in maintaining family links and connections for their children. Some children placed a great deal of effort into 'doing' family life - keeping in contact, exchanging gifts, remembering birthdays etc.. Kirsten kept a photo of herself to send to her sister in her home country via her mother's friend, she also talked to her cousins in other European countries regularly, talked about other cousins and grandparents and visited other relatives in Dublin with her mother and siblings. In contrast John while he spoke of missing his sisters in his home

country was not in contact with them or anyother family members (in Ireland or elsewhere). Elena, (unlike many of the other children) had an extended family (including cousins and at least one grandparent) who lived locally and would visit regularly. For Elena the emotional interdependencies, shared affections and pooling of economic (and other resources) for communal benefit that typify the ways in which family life is constituted could be taken for granted as part of face-to-face and everyday interactions between family members. However even with this close family support Elena's family were unable to return to her country of origin (because they were in the asylum system). At different points in time (such as the death or illness of a close relation 'back home' for example) this might become a problem for members of Elena's family. Thus in different ways in Glengarry different families shaped and were shaped by migration, separation and reunion and the boundaries and borders established through these processes.

Conclusion:

In specific ways the children's lives in Glengarry are marked through marginalization and geographical isolation *as well as* significant interconnections within Glengarry and between Glengarry and a series of other spaces, sites and places. Some of these interconnections and linkages (for example that surround the practices and realization of family life) are shared with other (migrant and non-migrant) childhoods. Other interconnections/links (for example that surround groups of children sharing and using cramped institutional spaces) are specific to children and families living in asylum dispersal centres like Glengarry. Others again (such as code switching and living in a multilingual

environment, being part of transnational family relations) are simultaneously the same as (and different to) other migrant childhoods.

So pulling these themes together what I am saying is that the children's engagement with the local, regional, national, global worlds beyond Glengarry was shaped by complex and frequently contradictory spatialities, simultaneously disconnected and connected. Glengarry was indeed a bubble, isolated from a wider world *however it was also* a porous space crisscrossed by institutional and familial linkages from other spaces and places. For different children Glengarry as a place was shaped by the (lack of) interconnections between it and a host of other local and non-local spaces and places. These contradictory spatialities in turn had contradictory effects on the children in Glengarry simultaneously reinforcing and combating their isolation and marginalization from their peers in Glengarry, in school, within their family networks over local, regional, national and global spaces and scales.

So in effect the exclusion and marginalization experienced by children (and parents) in Glengarry was real and significant. This wasn't however solely as a result of being socially and spatially 'cut off' from the local host community. Thinking about the diverse and complex spatialities that made up the children's lives allows us to enhance our understandings of children in the Irish asylums system as being capable and active and not simply passive and dependent. Following Horton et al. (2008) being attentive to the importance of everyday spatialities allows us challenge everyday understandings and reveal complex and hidden worlds of children. This is especially the case when these children are occupy marginal positions within society.

Mannion (2007) argues that in order to 'get real' we need to 'go spatial'. Such a 'real' analysis involves insights into the ways in which the children's social and

cultural identities were being formed, and these were multiple, fluid and changing. Some of the children in Glengarry were better positioned than others (through peer friendships in school, family networks in and beyond Ireland) to use a variety of local, national and global sources to create a sense of belonging to place (see Olwig [2003]). Ultimately however decisions being made about their lives, by RIA, by the owners of Glengarry, by the school and by their parents played a key role in determining the level of their access to these resources. In fact attending the Sunshine playtime was one of the only arenas, in so far as we could tell, where (some of) the children did have explicit autonomy and in this case this, despite their best intentions, did work out as problematic for the staff at Sunshine. In a number of different ways then the frequently contradictory and ambiguous positions created for children living within the Irish asylum system reflect the uncertainties and ambiguities surrounding them as immigrants (as part/not part of Irish society) as children (as child/not-adult) and as asylum seekers (as separated out populations in dispersal centers).

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