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**Sylheti-heritage children in Urban Scotland:  
Challenging the deficit model through the lens  
of childhood in Sylhet**



**Maggie Morrison  
Doctor of Philosophy  
The University of Edinburgh  
2018**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is of my own composition, based on my own work, with acknowledgement of other sources, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Maggie Morrison      25/2/2018

## **Abstract**

This thesis seeks to challenge deficit approaches to ‘different’ childhoods. It does this through documenting the everyday life experiences of Sylheti-heritage Muslim children in urban Scotland, and reading these childhoods through the lives of children and their kin in rural Sylhet, Bangladesh. The research is based on 3 years’ ethnographic fieldwork (January 2008-February 2011), in Scotland and in Bangladesh, and incorporates various child-friendly creative research methods used to elicit data on children’s realities and perspectives on their lives. These data are supplemented by data from the children’s mothers (and occasionally wider family) in both locations.

Transnational migration between the Indian subcontinent and the UK is not new, but little research has focused on childhoods, in particular the lived experiences of young Muslim children of marriage-migrant mothers in Scotland, where this minority ethnic ‘community’ is quite small, later-formed and largely invisible. Little early childhood research has been conducted on children’s everyday lives either in rural Sylhet or in Scotland. The history and context of migration and the realities of children’s lives in Scotland, as migrant-heritage Muslim children, are largely unexplored and their particular needs are little understood. Some media and public imaginaries and discourses portray Muslim families and their communities as ‘problematic’, increasingly so since September 11th, 2001, with recent events in the UK, mainland Europe and the Middle East adding fuel to such sentiments. Many Sylheti-heritage families experience harassment and abuse, or live in fear of such eventualities, and the women and young children in my Scottish cohort have largely withdrawn for safety from the visible public domain.

This research aims to contribute to a body of knowledge on early childhood(s). Early childhood interventions are high on Scotland’s, and the UK’s, policy agendas. These policies aim to create better futures and greater inclusiveness for all residents, but they are problematic for families that do not match the very Euro-American middle-class conceptions of childhood and family norms that inform policy. Despite the introduction of strengths-based models in family and childhood policy and practice, such ‘different’ children and families may still be viewed from a deficits perspective. Such deficit discourses may be rooted in a language of cultural deprivation and special needs, focusing on perceived deficiencies, resulting in the pathologising of certain groups, which become normalised over time. The global Early Years’ agenda is also reflected in interventions in rural Bangladesh, with imported global ideals and norms of which most village families have no knowledge and which bear little relevance to their everyday lives. For example, many interventions exist for early childhood in the form of pre-school and nursery provision, but many are based on very Eurocentric models of childhood, which although pertinent in the Global North may not ‘fit’ with the realities of life for most rural children and their families. There is an over-emphasis on children’s futures and children as ‘becomings’, the future citizens they will become, rather than on their quality of life here and now as ‘beings’.

This thesis frames children's everyday lives in terms of 'domains': places of childhood (locations of children's day-to-day activities), 'networks': spaces of childhood (social networks and relationships with kin and friends); and 'preoccupations': pursuits of childhood (how they spend their lives and what meaning, if any, they attach to these different aspects of life). The gendered character of these experiences is highlighted throughout. Children's lives, particularly when young, are influenced and shaped by their kin, yet opportunities for agency also exist. When women migrate after marriage from Sylhet to Scotland, some aspects of childhood and family lives remain fairly constant while others change quite radically. For instance, whilst children's lives continue to be centred on close family, family may be much smaller and less accessible than in Sylhet. Concepts of house and neighbourhood continue to be important, but Sylheti village childhoods are largely spent outdoors, whilst children are largely restricted to the family home in Scotland; children's physical domains of activity diminish and women and children have few opportunities to connect socially beyond their existing family networks, particularly in the early years. Social life, very rich and foregrounded in Sylheti villages, becomes potentially more restricted in Scotland although women work hard to create and maintain social opportunities and networks in Scotland, with wider Diasporic kin, and the Sylheti villages to which they have connections. Through their representations and narratives, both drawn and spoken, children convey rich examples of their childhood experiences, in both locales, which challenge deficit discourses on 'different childhoods'.

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*Suhana: my family in Rowanlee, child-diaries, 2011*

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

The central aim of this research was to engage with the everyday lives of young Muslim children (approximately ages 2-8 years) of Sylheti heritage in inner-city Scotland, in order to explore how these lives might help challenge the deficit approach to ‘different’, non-normative experiences of growing up. This deficit approach is common in academic childhood studies, as well as in policy circles, in Scotland, but also much more widely, and has a global reach. Distinctively in my research, these young lives are not read through the lens of normative family lives in the UK, but rather I centre how these young children and their parents, understand their lives through the lens of family life in the villages of Sylhet district, rural Northern Bangladesh. I specifically chose this research agenda to challenge deficit discourses of Muslim migrants, and also of their kin ‘back home where they come from’<sup>1</sup>, as well as to explore the richness of family life and childhood in both locales. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork, as well as children’s narratives, to share aspects of two distinct but interrelated sites – two inner cities neighbourhoods in Scotland, fictively named ‘Rowanlee’ and ‘Calder’ (the areas where the families now reside) and rural villages in Sylhet, Northern Bangladesh (the sending areas of the marriage migrant mothers). Throughout I show that, given the opportunity, young children are perfectly able to share aspects of themselves, their life courses, identity, social relationships and places of their everyday lives (Rasmussen & Smidt, 2001). I argue that they do this in ways which reveal that, if there is any deficit, it may be in the policies and practices of the Global North, which tend to treat all children and all childhoods as the same, and those who do not measure up to Northern norms as lacking.

This introductory chapter situates this project in the specific context of research on migration with children and families. In particular I focus on the importance of gathering perspectives from children on their lived realities, as to date there is a significant gap in the literature on this aspect of migrant lives. I then proceed to

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<sup>1</sup> Sadly, within my home city in Scotland I still hear such utterances as ‘they should go back home where they come from’, in regard to visible migrant individuals and families.

discuss the rationale for my dual-sited research. Early piloting of this project on Muslim childhoods in Scotland showed that many of the beliefs and practices existing within my study cohort's family lives are informed by the lives of the mothers *prior* to marriage migration, pasts which remain salient for the marriage-migrant mothers, and thus of importance in terms of considering policy and childhood practice. Next, I discuss the wider issues faced by Muslims in Scotland, the deficit discourses which prevail which have negative effects on what is a small and relatively isolated migrant population. I emphasise the uniqueness of the Sylheti migrant population in the context of Scotland and argue that they cannot be understood through the lens of previous studies in areas of the UK, where there are longer settled and large communities from Bangladesh; such data is not generalizable to this population. I highlight the historical specifics of Sylheti migration in England and Scotland, to provide context for what is included in the following chapters as well as aspects of family recomposition in Diaspora. The chapter then highlights my specific research questions, which surfaced from the pilot study and the children's initial participation. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure for the rest of this thesis.

### **Researching migration with children and their families**

Current debates on migration are rarely approached from a family-perspective (Lymperopoulou & Garratt, 2017). Much of the mainstream focus has been on the lives of economic migrants, particularly on solo men, with a tendency to view their lives as if lived in a social vacuum (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Hyman et al, 2008). Indeed, Bonjour and Kraler (2015: 3) emphasise that until recently, family migration remained 'a blind-spot in migration studies'. More widely researchers contend that as long as migrants were approached almost exclusively as individuals driven by strictly economic motives, the role of the family in patterns of migration, settlement, and integration was neglected (Kofman, 2004a; Kofman et al, 2011; Boyle & Duke-Williams, 2004). Despite much emphasis on supporting social inclusion in the context of Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2006), this thesis argues that many migrant communities, especially from a 'whole family' perspective, are little understood and

consequently not sufficiently regarded in social policy, in terms of having their needs met and there is even less focus on everyday childhood(s). Within areas of migrant settlement, migrant families may well be socially excluded and isolated and this may be particularly so for marriage migrant mothers and their children (Chalmers, 2004; DeSouza, 2004). Research from Scotland acknowledges that:

There is a significant gap in our knowledge of how people considered to be socially excluded perceive their own position. The opinions and views of those who will ultimately form the target groups of policies aimed at tackling social exclusion are essential in tuning such policies to their needs and circumstances.

(The Scottish Government, 1999)

This would include the voices of adults and children, all whom may comprise households and families, as some voices are missing when the literature is reviewed (Chapter 2). Often, very little information is available regarding the realities of migrant family lives; where families appear ‘fine’ or are under the radar of wider local service provision, very little attention is paid to understanding their prior local social norms and practices nor informing and helping them access services. Whether service providers incorporate migrants under the general term of the ‘disadvantaged’ is not clear but may be a reason why little attention has been given, up until recently, on the specific needs of different migrant communities and individuals.

Many studies which do consider social aspects focus on integration and its’ outcomes; evidence suggests these may be different for men and women and by association their children. For example, Boyd and Grieco (2003: 4) state that ‘Integration outcomes are primarily influenced by three factors: 1) the impact of entry status on the ability to integrate and settle; 2) patterns of incorporation into the labor market; and 3) the impact of migration on the status of women and men’. Although not the main focus, these factors are important to consider within this research as the Sylheti men are part of a wider economic migrant community in terms of incorporation into the world of work, while Sylheti women remain excluded from the labour market. Consequently, they and their children may not be able to integrate in the ways which are taken for granted by their menfolk. There is

thus a need for more holistic and gendered approaches which acknowledge the aforementioned dimensions but also encompass the wider family and children, who may be or become part of this journey, both physically and culturally, their differential experiences from those of men. There is little attention to families more generally and more specifically to the aspect of early childhood in terms of migrant lives, or to the lives of the children and families ‘left behind’.<sup>2</sup> Accounts that do exist (cf Zeitlyn, 2012, 2014; Gardner, 2012; Goulbourne et al, 2010; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Rabain-Jamin, 1994) tend to focus on an older cohort of children and young people or on children who may be separated from their parents across locales. There is very little research which positions young children’s own perspectives at the centre of analysis (Mayall, 2002) and this may be due to concerns about the difficulties of working with such a young cohort, as well as concerns about potential ethical challenges.

This lack of attention to children’s perspectives in the migration literature reflects current practice in the field of family research. Until recently, little family research considered incorporating a focus on children’s everyday experiences of family life (Brannen & O’Brien, 1996), but rather addressed distinct spheres of childhood, such as schooling (Brooker, 2002), or a perceived problem, for example bullying (Reynolds, 2008). Research has shown that children’s social worlds are distinct from the dominant social worlds in which they are embedded, nevertheless ‘the rules in children’s peer groups are deeply influenced by the surrounding society’ (Buhler-Niederberger, 2010: 370) but how this plays out for migrant heritage children is little known or reflected upon. Now, however, scholars are increasingly becoming sensitive to children’s own voices and opinions concerning their everyday lives and work and ‘the way that meaning is ascribed to various activities’ (Dyson, 2007:29). Children are intrinsically social and are primed to acquire, create, and transmit culture (Greenfield, 1997) and, I argue, subvert culture too, as evidenced within this thesis. Children are also, as shown in what follows, extremely capable of sharing their views when given the opportunity, space and resources to do so, thus providing

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<sup>2</sup> What evidence exists in this regard is very much focused on the children left behind by migrating parents (see for example, migrationpolicy.org; Antman, 2012; Acosta, 2011), not on the extended family, cousins and wider kin, as my research illustrates.

testimony which challenges mainstream views and deficit discourses on their lives and the lives of their wider families. For Jeffrey, a ‘focus on the changing landscapes of children reminds one that children’s cultures are never simply ‘the pale reflections of adult ones’ but that children are active producers of culture in their own right (Jeffrey, 2007: xi).

What was clear at the early stages of this project was that despite the new (now not so new) sociology of childhood (Adler and Adler 1986; Alanen 1988; Ambert 1986; Jenks 1992; James and Prout 1998; Qvortrup et al.1994; Thorne 1987; Waksler 1986), discussed in detail in Chapter 2, there is still a dearth of evidence from the perspectives of young children, and specifically in the context of Scotland.

Moreover, there is little in the way of evidence from migrants or the heritage children of migrants and *more explicitly* from young Muslim children – a crucial gap in knowledge at an important social and political juncture.

Children’s lives, as told by children themselves, are essential to contemplate and consider across the research settings, if we are to consider child and family well-being and to develop appropriate policy, service implementation and support structures where required. The question of how they are situated in the world we all occupy together is an important one and I argue that children are ideally positioned and competent to make their lives known. It is vital that these ‘fit’ from a child’s viewpoint, taking into account the numerous experiences and complexities of young lives, and also that provisions are efficacious and sustainable too. Crucially, as well as considering children individually, there is significant value in studying children relationally, as I have done here, as agents whose strategies are profoundly shaped by both their peers and adult society and who in turn influence older generations (Behera, 2007: 23).

Regarding policies and practices designed for children and young people more generally, evidence exists that often ‘top-down’ approaches fail or cannot be maintained (Davis & Smith, 2017), because they do not reflect the realities of

children and young people's situations and do not seem relevant. The Scottish Government (2012, npn), states that

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children the right to express their views and have those views listened to in matters affecting them. Children's participation in policy making may also enable better policies to be made or services to be delivered more effectively; allow children to learn about civic rights and responsibilities; and have benefits for children such as increased confidence and new skills.

Despite an increasing expectation that children's views will be taken into account in developing policy and delivering services, projects involving children may not be genuinely participatory in their design (Hart, 1992; Hudson, 2012). While it is politically important that governments and other organisations are seen to involve children, this can lead to a risk of tokenistic participation, where children's views have little impact but an organisation is seen as 'doing something' (Cockburn, 2005) and is thus protected from later criticism (Tisdall & Davis, 2006). My work is thus addressing a significant aspect of this 'gap in the evidence' by engaging specifically with one migrant-heritage cohort of children in urban Scotland.

### **Researching Scottish Muslim Childhoods through Sylhet**

My approach to this research includes not only a focus on Sylheti-heritage children in Scotland, but also their families in Bangladesh. This dual-sited approach is justified on the basis that much of the experiences of lives lived in the context of Scotland are, for this distinctive migrant group, read through the lens of family life in rural Sylhet and informed by childhoods and past life recalled from the perspectives of their mothers and other kin. This decision is based on what the marriage-migrant mothers initially shared with me in terms of the continuities and changes they experienced over their life and migration course(s). I have detailed what the Sylheti-heritage children in Scotland chose to share. What is patently clear, that although relocated, much of what is practised by the families in the Global North is informed by life from pre-migration in the Global South.

Importantly, what I also show, from the childhoods in the South, is that much that has been ‘left behind’ in terms of the quest for ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ in the North, are actually key and enriching components of childhood, central to building social awareness and resilience too.<sup>3</sup> There is much that can be learnt from the rural setting. As a brief example here, but to be revisited in later chapters, we have since the mid twentieth-century seen such a dramatic decline in children’s freedom to play, and especially in their freedom to embrace risk, particularly in urban centres of the Global North, but also influencing Southern childhoods due to the globalization of childhood (Chapter 2). Recent evidence suggests that we deprive children of risk, creative and spontaneous experiences at our peril and we have seen an equally dramatic rise in all sorts of childhood mental disorders (Sher, 2017; Jarvis, 2010) and behavioural issues (Panksepp, 2007; Eden, 2008). Nature has been replaced by an emphasis on materiality and consumption. However, childhood experts are now suggesting a return to something more wholesome and natural, in the form of forest schools, loose parts play and free-flow in early year’s settings and emphasis on wider education, much of the evidence stemming from the writings of Froebel (Bruce, 1997; Tovey, 2007). I consider, in the Global North, are we now merely ‘reinventing the wheel’, re-establishing aspects of childhood, which were once considered the norm, more free-flowing, risky and embedded in nature, before the advent of such an emphasis on materiality and structure (Bruce, 2011; Lillard et al, 2013). Such childhoods are still visible in the Global South, within the villages of my research in rural Sylhet, but increasingly, in that locale too, they are coming under threat with the introduction of modernizing agendas and accompanying initiatives, many of them built on very privileged and Eurocentric models of childhood (Panelli et al, 2007; Aitken et al, 2008).

### **Sylheti Migrants in Scotland**

My focus on the diversity of childhoods, and the implications of taking children’s own accounts of their lives seriously, as an important sources of data, emerges out of

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<sup>3</sup> Early Years policy in Scotland currently places great new emphasis on ‘back to nature’, ‘rough and tumble’ and ‘loose parts’ initiatives, some influenced by Frobelian principles, which remain the norm in rural Sylhet and were at one time the norm in the Global North too.

my own previous professional experience in Early Years education, my current interactions with early years professionals within my academic career, as well as the emergent and dynamic field of childhood studies and in particular the ‘new sociology of childhood’ which surfaced in the 1980s. Prior knowledge as a professional in Early Years Services in Scotland inspired my research. I encountered many families who faced disadvantages, and were often subject to deficit discourses in the wider public imagination, media and from some practitioners too, but were remarkably resilient.

A starting point for the research was my concern for the fact that despite negative attention *on* them, Muslim views are generally absent from current political and popular discourse as subjects and agents?<sup>4</sup>, with many families largely hidden within the mainstream, particularly in smaller ‘communities’ of geographical settlement, as exist in Scotland. The families, in particular, marriage-migrant mothers, may have little idea of wider life beyond their ethnic community, what possibilities may exist and little knowledge and understanding from the wider population may prevail. Where evidence is presented, it is usually drawn from South Asian Muslim areas of settlement in larger cities in the South of the UK, where the Sylheti presence, amongst others, is longer established, larger and more visible. Within such locales, services do exist, not just for this distinct ethnic group but more widely; there is a Muslim focus and information-sharing emphasis, within and across support agencies (JRF, 2007). However, there is a danger in both homogenising ‘Muslim’ peoples as well as attempting to provide ‘Muslim-appropriate’ services. Much diversity prevails *within* so-called ‘Muslim communities’ as well as *between* different groups, emanating from different world regions at different times and aspects of gender, life-stage, education and social class produce strong effects. For example, Muslims of British descent, born in the UK from earlier migrants may be more in tune with local mores and attitudes too and generally be better versed in reading the local terrain, both socially and geographically. In addition, as one research respondent highlighted, ‘there are many shades of Muslim’ (Assima Ali, (2008) Rowanlee, personal

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<sup>4</sup> With the exception of the voices of religious and ‘community-leaders’, often the self-appointed spokespersons for the wider ‘communities’.

communication), who when questioned asserted that different degrees of religiosity prevail and may produce different effects. Although this is not central to this research, it is still noteworthy in terms of wider assumptions and the potential for homogenising agendas in terms of needs and service provisions too.

There is now a wider acknowledgement that the issues migrants face in Scotland are different from in England and Wales (BBC, 2014) and acknowledgement that regarding migration ‘Scotland’s needs are different from the rest of the UK’, (Scottish Government, 2017: 4)). In the past Scottish public bodies haven't broken their statistics down by ethnic origin to produce more nuanced data. In one pertinent phrase, about access to mental health services, the EHRC admit that in fact ‘there is limited data available for Scotland, however, these gaps do not relate to the absence of an issue, but simply an absence of data’ (EHRC, 2016: 2). It is also relevant that the proportion of the population from non-white ethnic groups is just 4% in Scotland, compared with around 13% across the UK, so issues in the Scottish context may be considered even less important less apparent than in areas of greater immigrant settlement. Significantly, the Bangladeshi population in Scotland is under-explored in the literature on South Asians in Britain (Arshad, et al, 2003; Eade, 1989, 1997). Jamieson and Kidd, (2011: 2.2) note that:

research has often assumed the experiences of ethnic minorities in Scotland are the same as elsewhere across Britain. Therefore, it has been suggested that there is a lack of relevant research into the experiences of ethnic minorities in Scotland, and in particular the experiences of Scottish Muslims (for example Hopkins, 2008; de Lima 2005). Similarly, it has been suggested there are important differences in Scotland in comparison to England that require research to be conducted in Scotland.

Currently, Scotland has a Bangladeshi population in excess of 3788 (Scotlandsensus, 2011). This ethnic group is a relatively young population with the majority of men aged under 44 and women aged between 25 to 34. Following devolution, Section 5 of the 1998 Scotland Act reserved 11 key policy areas to Westminster, among them immigration, employment and social security, while devolving most services to the Scottish Parliament. As a result of this division,

decisions about levels of migration and access to benefits are made by the UK government, while key services affected by migration, including health care, education, housing, children's services and policing are the responsibility of the devolved government (Scottish Government, 2007d).

When read through an intersectional lens, evidence shows differing prevailing local physical and social environments, conditions and structures may produce diverse effects and needs for different migrant cohorts (Bernstock, 1993). The Sylheti migrants in Scotland are generally a much later settled migrant community than those in the bigger communities in England (Tower Hamlets, London and Bradford, for example) and this is important to consider, in regard to both their practices and more widely to childhood and family-friendly policy. Recent research (cf ESRC, 2014: 2; Lympelopoulou & Garratt, 2017) highlights that policies designed to reflect the needs of recent migrants will often be very different from those required for the second and later generations. For instance, while language classes should be mandatory for first generation migrants, this may not be necessary for the second and later generations.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2016) emphasises that people from ethnic minorities in Scotland are four times more likely than the general population to be disadvantaged, to live in overcrowded accommodation and they are also twice as likely to be poor and out of work (BBC, 2016). Bangladeshi families stood out as being particularly in need of additional support. In relation to migration to the UK, Modood (1997) argues that the Bangladeshi community presents a particular historic and economic profile, meaning they may face additional barriers to success, even suffering downward social mobility on entry to Britain. Consequently, they tend to be disproportionately affected by unemployment, poor working conditions, inadequate, overcrowded housing and poor health. They are represented more widely in the wider minority ethnic literature as one of the most impoverished groups, often facing barriers to accessible and affordable housing, inequalities in educational attainment, obstacles to employment as well as being more likely to experience health inequalities (Netto et al, 2011: Platt, 2007; Modood et al., 1997; JRF, 2007, 2011, 2014). More widely, Muslim families may be disproportionately

affected due to their lack of visibility and in some cases engagement within mainstream British culture as a result of fears of racism and persecution as discussed above. This is more pronounced for families in the early stages of migrant settlement, as are the families who are central in this research and may impact on wider well-being. In much of the current body of research Bangladeshis still present extremely poor socio-economic and health profiles in comparison to most other ethnic groups, although there is evidence that these structures of disadvantage are rapidly changing (Brice, 2008: 2).

Thus, in Scotland, evidence shows that families may face significant disadvantages, first and foremost as members of minority ethnic communities. Gender inequalities prevail too, which may mirror conditions in migrant sending areas, but become magnified in areas of settlement due to other factors coming into play too. The Scottish Government analysis of the 2011 Census found that older Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women report considerably worse health than older men in these ethnic minorities. There are more foetal and infant deaths where the mother identifies as "South Asian" or "Other" ethnicity than would be expected too with problems for some families in accessing health services (Scottish Government, 2014). Many families and individuals may be disconnected from available support and services are lacking in knowledge and access to what exists; indeed, this is evidenced within this thesis. Additionally, some media, public imaginaries and discourses portray Muslim families and communities and in particular, Muslim women, as especially 'problematic', 'a problem defined by linguistic isolation and limited awareness of cultural difference' (Gedalof, 2005: 222), which is stigmatizing. Recent events in the UK, mainland Europe and the Middle East adding fuel to such sentiments. Visibly Muslim families may retire from view for fear of reprisals (Joppke, 2009, 2014).

What I evidence is that despite the problematizing that often prevails, the young Sylheti children and their families are extremely resilient and adaptable, lead rich and social lives, of which little is known or understood (or seemingly cared about) from wider societal perspectives. Furthermore, families, especially mothers, are resourceful and creative in making opportunities for themselves and particularly for their children, of whom they hold high aspirations, although often lack the

experience, knowledge and resources to fully support them. This evidence challenges deficit discourses on the Sylheti migrants but does not mean they do not face challenges. Overall, there is significant policy and political work needed in Scotland in order to value diverse cultures and viewpoints, and provide necessary support and services, where required, as well as celebrating some of the richness and positive attributes of migrants.

### **Histories of Sylheti immigration to the UK**

Migration from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh to the UK is not new. The roots of Sylheti migration to the UK are closely linked to histories of colonialism and subsequent patterns of trade, which continue to be crucial in understanding the lives of migrants now.

Following the partition of India in 1951, and a tumultuous period of unrest and bloodshed, the State of Bangladesh was created in 1971. Bangladesh, literally the country where Bangla is spoken, was borne from massive upheaval and migration from within the Indian subcontinent thus characterised as a country where migration is accepted as a normal part of life, as people migrated for work and trade. Migration continues to play a significant role in modern Bangladesh, both in domestic rural-to-urban movement and in huge numbers of Bangladeshi international labour migrants (Carey & Shukur, 1985; Garbin, 2005; Gardner, 2010). I outline some of this history, as well as contemporary migratory practices, in order to provide some context for understanding the lives of the Sylheti families in Scotland who are at the centre of my study.

Migration to Britain pre-dates creation of the Bangladeshi state. The first migrants from East Bengal, now Bangladesh, arrived in the UK in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with many originating in the area that is now Sylhet (Choudhury, 1995; Garbin, 2004). Early patterns of settlement within areas of England, predominantly the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and London, reflect patterns of trade and labour shortages within these areas. Migrant communities flourished in areas where raw materials from the subcontinent arrived and were processed. For example, jute was

accompanied by workers with expertise in this material who settled in Dundee, Scotland, at one time the heart of the linoleum industry, while the North of England saw textile mills established as cotton and muslin was imported from East Bengal with many of the earliest ‘communities’ established there, for example, in Bradford, still one of the most densely populated areas of UK Bangladeshi settlement. Colonialism and migration continue to be important factors in the experiences of Bangladeshis living in the UK. Memories of past times remain salient and many people still allude to this history, and a sense of entitlement to be in the UK, as a result of perceptions of past endeavours, as well as oppressions.

Migration grew during the post First and Second World War periods, as workers, required to rebuild the British economy, were recruited from the Commonwealth and invited to migrate to Britain. The numbers of Bengalis in London rose through the 1930s and in the period up to the end of the Second World War (Adams 1987). Soldiers from Bangladesh fought on the side of the British in World War 2, an oft unrecognized part of British history. Thus Britain’s labour deficit was the main economic ‘pull’; and the key ‘push’ factors were pressure on employment in rural Sylhet as a result of diminishing land inheritances over time, as well as the political instability of Sylhet (Carey, 2004: 1). In Bangladesh, traditionally land ownership has symbolised wealth, but over generations increasing sub-divisions of land, may leave it unproductive or unprofitable. Migration has been viewed as an escape route out of rural poverty, especially for the younger male members of small land-owning families. Many went to work in the docks of Calcutta and Bombay and were later recruited as seamen by British (and other) shipping companies, eventually making their way to Britain and settling in the Docklands area of East London, where Britain’s largest Bangladeshi settlement is still to be found (Carey & Shukur, 2010). This early association with London has left its mark, as in Sylhet, many people use ‘London’ to mean anywhere ‘abroad’ and those who have migrated to the Global North are commonly called ‘*Londonis*’<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Consequently, due to these geographical affiliations, it is not uncommon for young children in Sylheti villages, to add ‘innit’ to the end of their Sylheti sentences, so commonplace are kin who periodically return but settled in the East End of London, where this parlance is common.

By the mid twentieth century, Bengali immigrants had moved from working directly in trade-related industries, to setting up small businesses, namely Bengali cafes to cater for new arrivals. These became the first Sylheti-owned ‘Indian’ restaurants, still the mainstay of Bangladeshi business enterprise and employment opportunities. The origins of this contemporary pattern can be traced to the nineteenth century when the Sylheti seamen recruited by shipping companies often worked as cooks and assistants in ships’ kitchens and they then established cafes when they planned to stay (Ballard and Ballard, 1977:24).

Through practices of chain-migration<sup>6</sup>, this area of business has expanded to the present day; approximately 85% to 90% of the 9,500 Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants and take-aways in Britain are exclusively Bangladeshi owned (The Guardian, 2012; Carey, 2004: 1). The curry industry employs over 150,000 people, contributes £3.6 billion to the economy each year and is highly popular amongst the mainstream population (The Guardian, 2012; Rezaul, 2007). Significantly, Kalra (2004: 23) highlights that for many people these restaurants may be the ‘only sites of interaction between majorities and minorities’, as many Bangladeshis, particularly in the smaller communities, have little contact with the mainstream society beyond their work either in the family restaurants or in taxi businesses.

The UK Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which was about to remove the rights of Bengalis to settle in UK, witnessed a rush of Bengalis to migrate to beat the ban. Thereafter access was restricted to those with ‘vouchers’ granted on the basis of employment in Britain, specific skills or Armed Forces service during World War 2, as well as to dependants of those already in Britain (Anwar, 1979: 24). This reinforced patterns of migration from certain areas of Bangladesh, to specific areas of the UK (Shaw, 1988: 25-6). Currently, the majority of Bangladeshi migrants to the UK come from the North Eastern area of the country, Sylhet. Most came with the intention of earning money and eventually returning home, where their families remain (Anwar, 1971). However, this ‘myth of return’ was transformed after 1960s immigration

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<sup>6</sup> Many of the men in this research were sponsored to the UK by close kin from their home villages; patterns of immigration and employment have resulted in great wealth for some at the expense of the poorer, often illiterate majority, of economic migrants.

reforms women and families started joining them as men realised they could make a better life in Britain for their families. The number of Bangladeshis in the UK now exceeds 451,529, mostly living in England (n=436,514), especially London, Birmingham and Bradford (UK Census, 2011), the smallest South Asian population in the UK, but nonetheless economically and culturally significant.

### **Family (re)Composition in Diaspora**

What has become the UK Bangladeshi ‘community’ did not form until the arrival of women and children during the 1980s, once men found work and became established enough to feel they could support a family (Eade, 1997: 149; Gardner, 2002: 7). Many men were single migrants and given the preference for brides from ‘home’. Because immigration was male-dominated, there was a shortage of Bangladeshi women of marriageable age in the UK. This situation was exacerbated by British immigration procedures, and strict controls, which contributed to slowing the process of community formation, with women’s entry to the UK dependant on their status as wives or mothers (House of Commons Report, 1986-7; Ballard, 1994). The 1988 Immigration Act brought about more changes, with dependents of men who settled before 1973 no longer able to join them, unless they could provide evidence of self-sufficiency and ‘non-dependency’ (Gardner, 2002). Many migrant men took many years to establish themselves financially and be able to support a family. Many Bangladeshi migrant marriages involve a husband substantially older than their wives, who they tend to marry in Bangladesh and eventually relocate to the UK (Ballard, 1994). The Bangladeshi women who have migrated through marriage perhaps represent an ideal of ‘cultural purity’ to the men, as discussed by Cohen (1997: 180) who states that diasporas often exhibit common features, including ‘collective memory and myth about the homeland, accompanied by idealisation of the ancestral home.’ Traditionally, in Bangladesh, most men marry younger women, which has been attributed to men selecting young women due to their high reproductive value and the fact that husbands can count on them in old age (Blanchet, 2004: 161), with women preferring older men due to their wealth and high social status (Nahar, et al, 2013); this preference appears to persist in the migration context, although it remains to be seen if it continues through generations . The result

of this practice for migrant wives, who are placed low in the wider hierarchy of the affinal family (Mitra et al, 2006) may be adjustment problems, restricted mobility, household responsibilities, early pregnancy after marriage, taking care of children, and other social restrictions which may limit them from taking the advantage of education or work opportunities (Mathur et al. 2003). These aforementioned factors are extremely pertinent in regard to the women who formed the ‘migrant mother cohort’ in this study.

Within the context of migration, Sheel (2005: 335) states ‘the complex interplay of money, marriage and gender have significant impacts, with implications for women’s well-being and autonomy, as well as the constructions of culture, tradition and patriarchy’. These may be thrown into sharp relief in the context of migration which will have implications on the lives of children born into such families. Additionally, from the wider research, (Kalra, 2001; Tomalin, 2010; Kindler, 2015), there are challenges, within policy and wider societal representations, to assumptions of cultural homogeneity within Asian communities; this factor is pertinent to patterns of settlement as well as gender dimensions amongst the Sylheti ‘community’ in Scotland. Kalra (2001: 12-13) contests the assumption of cultural homogeneity and closure within Asian Muslim communities, using a Mirpuri family example,

A young Asian Muslim born in Oldham has a deeply different structural upbringing from his sister who lives with him as well as his brother in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir. From an early age this young man will be exposed to an English language media promoting the dominant values of the society. From the age of four, compulsory schooling formalises the process of value transmission. ... Even in those schools where the hijab is a norm, where there is a prayer room for daily prayer, where halal meat is served at lunch times, the history curriculum will still consist almost entirely of European subjects and particularly of the British monarchy.... It is the case that White children know nothing of the values of other traditions but certainly Asian Muslim young people are educated into the operative dominant values of the wider society.

Diversity of experience certainly exists along gender lines, as well as in regard to social class and education, within the families in this research, so an intersectional lens has been used to consider migrant experiences. Women and children are disadvantaged to a greater degree. Beyond consideration of cultural norms of purdah,

it is unsurprising that many men are more at ease in the public domains of Scotland; many fathers and other male kin had a very different experience of growing up from the women in their communities, often visiting or residing in the UK from birth or early childhood<sup>7</sup>, providing greater access to learning English language and literacy, and enabling extensive connections to wider UK cultural norms and experiences than many women who arrived as adults, having been born in rural Sylhet and lived since puberty in relative seclusion (*pardah*) in their rural villages, before their marriage migration to the UK.

Some women married and migrated to fulfil roles as carers for ailing men, paralleling patterns observed in England (Kofman, 2003; Eade, 1997; Gardner, 2002). The result of often intersecting factors as above, for marriage-migrant women in urban Scotland, is they are often socially isolated, do not develop skills in English and lack support during motherhood, unless they live in an extended family, less the norm in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global North. Isolation is evident in Scotland, with girls and young women often restricted and denied opportunities to socialise out-with their households. This is common amongst young mothers, often compounded by unfamiliarity with their new locales and being married to men often unknown from before with little in common between them (Roy, 2006, personal communication).

What has been shown above is the distinctiveness of the migrant community with whom I have engaged in the context of Scotland and the requirement to include the voices of young children in order to gain a better understanding from their perspectives. I have also show that their lives in Scotland continue to be connected to the sending areas of rural Sylhet, so a transnational lens is required throughout to fully consider their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> Many of the fathers and uncles in this research had lived in the UK for many years, some from birth but often from childhood, due to patterns of 'importing' male children from their natal Bangladesh homes and villages, to where fathers had migrated, sometimes also incorporating second wives, as carers, in their UK lives and leaving birth mothers behind in the *Desh* (Refs.).

### **A note on terminology**

When discussing global processes, such as migration, geographical terminology is often employed to distinguish between different kinds of places and to describe relationships between these places. In the Cold War period of the 1950s and 1960s, the ‘First World’, ‘Second World’ and ‘Third World’ were used to describe key political, geographical and ideological divisions between capitalist liberal democracies, communist states and newly independent post-colonial societies, respectively (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016: 16). Over time the term ‘Third World’ came to be associated with poor, post-colonial and aid-dependent countries. Additionally, experts and scholars in development studies have referred to ‘developed’ and ‘un[der]developed’ world(s) to denote varying levels of affluence and industrial development in different regions. Some people with more radical philosophical leanings may use the terms ‘core’, ‘periphery’ and ‘semi-periphery’, borrowed from geography, suggesting uneven development does not happen randomly but is actively constituted through unequal relationships between wealthy and poorer countries, eg colonialism or neo-colonialism. Majority World and Minority World have now gained prominence particularly in the childhood literature and have been problematized, although I argue they can be fair and representative if used correctly. By this, I mean the Minority World refers to the developed and affluent countries, where a minority of people live in a relatively comfortable fashion and from which many of the current childhood discourses and developments emanate, whereas the Majority World refers to the majority of the world’s population who live in poverty, predominantly in rural settings and suffer as a result of the Minority World interventions and exploitations, both past and present. More recently, scholars have used the terms Global North, for industrialised countries and Global South, for developing countries, as alternatives (Boyden, 1997: 204). I choose to use Boyden’s terminologies here, despite the fact they are not clear cut, for example, in using the term Global South, I exclude countries like Japan and Australia.

## Research Questions

My overarching research question is ‘how might understanding Sylheti migrant children’s experiences and those of their child kin ‘back home’ help challenge the deficit approach to ‘different’ childhoods? Family lives, childhoods and migrant lives more specifically, are complex and after consultation with children and observation across locales, I decided on a four dominant themes to allow me to explore aspects of everyday life for children in Scotland and Sylhet: ‘Place’, ‘People’, ‘Peers’ and ‘Preoccupations’. I emphasise that these themes at times intersect and overlap, for example, people and peers presented individually is an artifice, but one refers more to adults (people), the other children (peers)<sup>8</sup> and, of course, within every discussion and depiction the different elements and dimensions may be seen. These themes inform how I have organised the chapters of this thesis. Chapter 2 introduces the sociological literature on childhood, and my argument challenging migrant childhoods as deficient. Chapter 3 provides an account of the creative research methods used to engage with children, both in Scotland and in Bangladesh, as well as a reflexive account of my position as researcher, and reflections on inherent ethical issues. Chapters 4 to 7 draw on my empirical research, from the children’s artworks and narratives, as well as incorporating the voices of other family members, in particular the children’s mothers, in both locales. These chapters are broadly centred around issues of Place (Chapter 4), People (Chapter 5), Peers (Chapter 6) and Preoccupations (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 comprises the conclusion to the research and highlights both its success and possible shortcomings and future directions for study too.

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<sup>8</sup> Neither the children nor I are suggesting that ‘peers cannot be people’ or ‘people be peers’.



Jadid: *Playing in the paddy*, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

## **Chapter Two – Conceptualising Childhood**

I situate my study of Sylheti-children in Scotland in the context of current literature on childhood. Childhood research in and from the Global South emphasises that dominant approaches to childhood all rely on Northern constructions of childhood (cf Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Schildrout, 2002; Punch, 2003; Bass, 2004; Katz, 2004; Honwana and De Boeck, 2005). How we view the child, or childhood, has a powerful impact on how children are treated, and what we consider necessary in terms of provisions and meeting needs. I contextualise some of the dominant definitions of children and childhood in terms of some of their historical antecedents in the Global North, particularly as framed in Western European and North American culture. These conceptualisations continue to feature powerfully in the political, policy and public imaginations – often producing children from the global south, and migrant children as ‘deficit’ in relation to assumptions about northern childhoods as the norm. The chapter proceeds by considering recent literature on the globalisation of childhood, before then considering the appropriateness of children’s rights approaches. The gendered nature of childhood is then discussed followed by a brief allusion to aspects of age.

### **The Globalisation of Childhood – Southern Childhoods as Deficit**

Current policies pertaining to children and childhood are all embedded ‘in more generalised social and political upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014: 7), and the regulation of the embodied lives of children has developed alongside these broader cultural and epistemological shifts (cf Elias, 200; Foucault, 1991; Aries, 1962). The new sociology of childhood has cast light on changing ideas on children and childhood and is relevant in terms of my research. It has revealed the ways in which the new studies are ideally placed to consider core dichotomies of contemporary social theory, as follows:

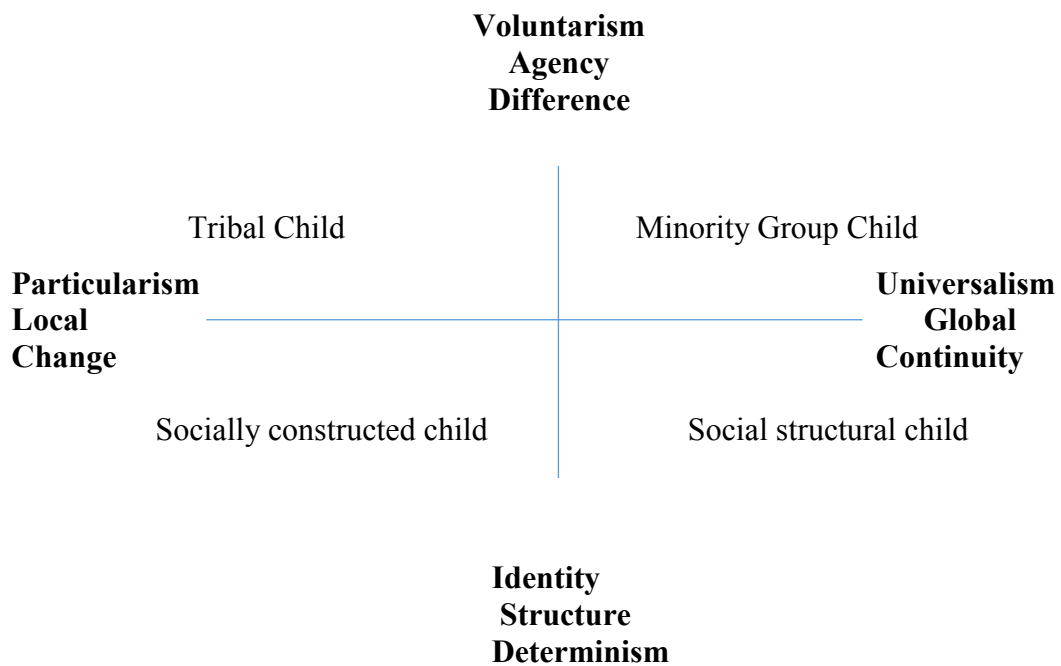


Figure 1. Theoretical Field for the social study of childhood (James et al., 1998: 206)

The four models presented above are largely dichotomous, dividing childhood between the universal and the particular, voluntarism and determinism, agency and structure, continuity and change, global and local. However, James et al (1998) highlight that these models are dynamic, with significant overlap between them, recognising that there are possibilities for movement between and across these approaches, for example:

the socially ‘constructed child’ and ‘tribal’ child often stand in close relation, collude or experience elision in the approaches adopted in childhood studies. And an identical fluidity and potential creativity exist between the ‘social structural’ child and the ‘minority group’ child. Movements in the other directions are, however, relatively rare. Thus the ‘social structural’ child and the ‘socially constructed’ child are locked in different, and even antagonistic, formulations, as are the ‘minority group’ child and the ‘tribal’ child (James et al., 1998: 217).

While acknowledging differences, Qvortrup (2005: 5) argues that the plurality of childhoods creates the danger of making unnecessary dichotomizations at the expense of ‘eradicating the social contours of childhood’. In respect of this, I would add, it is important to explore how rural and urban childhoods, rich and poor

childhoods, working and idyllic childhoods, and contributing and consuming childhoods all intersect with and divide each other (Bebe, 2007). In this respect, I argue like Jenks (1996) that the diversity of childhoods should be classified by social traits like class, age, religion, sexuality, gender and race/ethnicity, by rural and urban location, and by disability and ill-health in specific and interconnected places, thus an intersectional lens is required. Secondly, as Philo (2000: 253) argues, there is a need to ‘look at the larger picture encompassing many different sets of children spread across different places, and accept the challenge of tackling macro-scale, structure-based geographies of childhood as shaped by broad-brush political, economic and socio-cultural transformations’.

Boyden (1997: 190), in her research in the Global South, asserts that during the twentieth century, a specifically European conception of childhood was exported to the Third World, with values based on white, urban, middle-class ideals. These ideals are based on a construction of childhood which is one of innocence, where children must be protected from the adult world, their time filled with play. This globalisation of a particular conceptualisation of childhood ‘finds a counterpart in the assumption of some kind of universal experience for all children’ (James & Prout, 1997: 4). This then may have the effect of rendering ‘deviant or deficit’ childhoods that do not correspond to this standard. There is then a need to question whether this then implies there exists such a phenomenon as ‘the global child’, if not in reality of ‘lives lived’ but in the eyes of the Global North (developed/affluent world) or those who broker most of the power and decision-making. Most certainly the twentieth century has been known as ‘the century of the child’ (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014: 35), with the emergence of childhood as the focus of national and international policy concern. There has been increased and intensive scrutiny on the care of children within their families and also the international community has paid close attention to standards within specific nations and world regions.

Sociologists and anthropologists have long understood that different cultures and societies have different beliefs regarding children, of how children should be raised and thus varied constructions of childhood exist (cf Mead, 1928, 19935, 1954; Opie

& Opie, dates; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Bolin, 2006 (High Andes); Lancy, 2015). Comparative historical and cross-cultural examination reveals the existence of a variety of childhoods rather than one simple, singular phenomenon, for example as shown in the works of Punch (2001) in rural Bolivia, Blanchet (dates) in Bangladesh, Nieuwenhuys (1994) in rural Kerala, Stephens (Ed.), (1995) and Roopnarine et al (1994) in diverse societies worldwide. However, Woodhead, (1997: 63-84) argues that the diversity of childhoods is being destabilised by current trends towards a 'world view' of childhood, with a rhetoric and an emphasis on children's needs which ignores specificities of place and social and cultural choice. Woodhead asserts that if we accept that 'need', like 'childhood' is also a social construct, one particular version may gain broad, even universal acceptance, with the result that childhood could become a universal concept. Through the United Nations, the World Bank and various aid agencies, projects have been instigated which demand that recipient governments adopt particular policies, with the result that 'a certain form of political philosophy, based on the values of liberalism and the language of human rights' is also being exported (Montgomery, 2003: 68). These are founded on Western notions and now influence children's lives globally in many ways, with a particular agenda being imposed on the rest of the world. As Nieuwenhuys (2008: 7) emphasises in regard to globalisation of childhoods and children's participation in India,

Even when children are approached as meaningful actors who have the right to participate in the solutions offered, as is now increasingly the case in NGO interventions, the agenda is firmly set within the parameters of a limited set of choices. These choices are designed to help guide Indian society towards realizing what development agencies have decided is the highest possible goal, the emulation of a kind of childhood that the West has set as a global standard.

From the twentieth century, particularly in the Global North, childhood has increasingly become regarded as a separate category from adulthood, with children attributed special qualities, deficits or (dis)abilities, which then receive great attention and may result in the adult world portraying children and childhood as poignant, a basis for anxiety, based on a nostalgia for youthful innocence (Aries, 1962). Within such a construction, there is no place for the childhood which may involve labour, hardship or responsibilities. The result of this is that the political and

social condition of entire societies is now judged by ‘the status of its children’ (Boyden, 1997: 191).

Following from this, beliefs and values regarding childhood are globalised. Developing nations have articulated legislative and policy initiatives pertaining to children to match ‘modern’ standards of education, child development and protection, in line with international obligations under treaties and conventions, most notably the UNCRC (UN, 1989) (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014). As an example, every country in the world, with the exception of the U.S. and Somalia, has signed up to and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, agreeing that every person below the age of eighteen years is classified as a child. Although the UNCRC enshrines children’s rights in international law, it is not without its critics and shortcomings. A main area of critique is the fact that it is rooted in the Global North. Debates highlight tensions between universalist claims and cultural relativism and the construction of a normative global child ‘against which nations in the Global South may be judged in their capacities to deliver’ (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014: 55).

This is problematic as evidence shows children do not magically become adults at eighteen in all societies and cultures, nor may they be necessarily conceived of as children up to that age; for example, in many societies, persons under eighteen years may be fully embedded in work settings, be parents or any combination of differing identities, more closely associated with the world of adults than those of children. In many regions and societies, adulthood is attained through a series of stages, rituals, rites of passage too and there is a gradual process of attaining rights. Children may be viewed as maturing and reaching adulthood through aspects relating to maturity, of understanding, intention and thought and behaviour (cf Blanchet, 1996). For example, in Bangladeshi society children and young people may be assigned roles aligned to perceptions of having reached ‘a state of understanding’ (Blanchet, 1996: 62), that is, being deemed responsible and mature enough to cope with said role or task. However there now exists compelling arguments that cultural variations are diminishing as globalisation spreads, with ideas on childhood, inevitably part of the process. This is illustrated in this example from the World Bank (1996) on child development, and stages of attainment, aimed to have world-wide significance but

based on very Western notions of what children should be and what childhood is comprised of. For example, there are chapters titled such things as ‘Helping Parents Care for the Very Young in Israel’, which adopt a very deficit approach to what may have prevailed for generations. In addition, many concepts are based on models which are not universally applicable, nor meaningful, for example,

‘Because human development is a dynamic process that unfolds in a predictable sequence-notwithstanding variations from individual to individual and culture to culture-it is possible to tailor early child development activities to developmental stages that roughly correspond to age groups’ (The World Bank, 1996: 17).

Much of this ‘World Bank ‘evidence’ is presented as fact, purported to be universal and based on scientific ‘truth’, but may be only relevant in societies which recognise this ages and stages approach, not the norm in many societies and certainly not in my research in rural Sylhet, nor amongst many of the migrant families in Scotland. For example, this excerpt, fixated on the ages and stages model, highlights many taken for granted assumptions (with my emphasis):

Toddlers (age one to three): For toddlers active learning means having the opportunity to explore an environment safely yet actively and to play with a variety of objects and games. Play objects need not be manufactured toys or purchased equipment but can be items such as pots, pans, cooking utensils, and containers that children can use in a variety of ways to learn about physical relationships and problem solving (box 5). Toddlers need to continue to interact with adults, and they need to interact with other children, which teaches them the social skills of cooperation, helping, and sharing. *To develop children's mental skills, adults frequently read to them and engage them in conversation. To develop their gross motor skills, children will need a safe place in which to run, jump, climb, play with balls, and otherwise play actively.*

Pre-schoolers (age three to six): Active learning for pre-schoolers entails engaging in simple problem-solving tasks; developing such self-care skills *as dressing and eating*; developing the social skills needed to interact with adults and other children; and developing such cognitive skills as *telling stories, associating the written word with spoken language, drawing pictures on their own about their play, and listening and moving to music.*

The majority here bears little relevance to the children of the Global South and is ethnocentric, presented as if universally relevant and applicable. Significantly, as childhood is presented over time as more scientific, with experts on hand to measure physical, psychological and moral development, the idea of a universal child with universal needs has gained ground. The natural extension of this has been in ideas about the 'ideal childhood'. For example, Rousseau espoused the notion that children should freely 'jump, play and run all day', which may not match childhood realities, particularly in the Global South, where conditions and traditions may prevail which mean children take on early responsibilities and work, often through economic or social necessity. Northern societies have reinforced the idea that work and childhood are incompatible and that nature, play and school are the natural domains of children. Pressure has been applied to governments in world regions where childhood may be 'other' than these ideals, for example, in regard to child labour in Bangladesh, where sanctions were applied on the import to the U.S. of all Bangladeshi garments. The intention may have been admirable in an agenda of reducing harm to children but the result of this was increased hardship within Bangladesh for children and their families – it did not make the phenomenon of working children disappear (Boyden, 1990; Rigg, 2007). Indeed, many children were required to relocate for work to more hazardous occupations, such as rickshaw pulling and brick factory work.

Burman (1994) adds to the debate on the potential for harm by highlighting that Western ideas of childhood actually penalise Southern children, in the way that childhood is represented, with the 'global child' an ideal which poorer nations can never fulfil or meet for their children, thus presenting a deficit model in some regions. For children of migrant families, this deficit model may follow to their ultimate destination, so rendering children of Southern migrants in need of fixing and rehabilitating, to become 'more like us'. Not only is this very demoralising and disempowering for children and their families who may be faced with such assumptions, but over time, such ideas are normalised, so reifying cultural and geographical differences, thus ensuring a lack of cohesion and inclusion within societies, as 'us and them' is reinforced in the public and media imaginations. The result of this is that some families, and by association, their children are viewed in terms of requiring to be fixed or educated, to more match an ideal. In this way the

globalisation of childhood is perpetuated, both at the core and also in the peripheral regions where such ideas and ideals are introduced.

Like Boyden (1990) and Burman (1994), Holland (1992) expressed concerns arguing that people in the North have expectations of how Southern people should be, so reinforcing the idea that there is a global ideal of childhood which children in the South fail to meet. This is reinforced through media representations and depictions of poor 'helpless' Southern people. These play on racist stereotypes of incompetence and failure on the part of adults to adequately protect their children, passively staring in the face of disaster. The extension of such notions is that the only way to progress is through the interventions of the North, saving innocent victims of their individual country's failures to protect and provide, based on very Northern standards. Holland can be critiqued however as she has a tendency to depict Southern children as passive victims of adults' inadequacies and neglects, with no space in her reckoning for children's active participation and agency.

### **Children's Rights approaches**

In order to make sense of the childhoods of Syhleti children in Scotland and how they link to those in their homeland, some account of children's right debates is useful. Shifts in academic work in childhood studies have also been accompanied by shifts in global governance of childhood, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and ideas on children's rights more widely, as well as development agendas. Such agendas are often fuelled by deficit discourses and involve the application of normative Eurocentric standards for childhoods, for example, in regard to working children (Boyden, 1990). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has also fuelled interest in childhoods and commitments to more child-centred research. Article 12 of the UNCRC outlines the rights of children to express their views in decisions affecting their lives. There is further evidence to support the positive benefits for children who are afforded this right (Bruce, 2014: 514-526). Nonetheless, the UNCRC is not without critics. Now ratified across the world (with the notable exception of the USA), Blanchet (2001: 1) argues that the UNCRC represents an

‘ultimate moral value’, but is not a ‘culturally neutral’ document and she holds the Convention to account for constructing a Normative Global Child. In the context of Bangladesh, implementation may require ‘a revolution of customs’ and a shift in mind-set, with what exists at present being poorly grasped, in terms of the difference between children’s ‘needs’ and ‘rights’. Additional problems lie within the UNCRC as, if aimed at national levels to confirm children’s rights as ‘embedded in nations’ rights’, this does not address issues of power, with those in power not necessarily representing everyone (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014: 11). The idea that society *should* respect the best interests of the child is seen as fundamental in all cultures. Children do symbolize the survival of the family, the group, the nation and even humanity itself. However, we must ask whether this idea is respected in reality and if local context and prevailing beliefs and structural dimensions are considered sufficiently.

Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires member states to observe the “best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.”

Illustrations exist of ‘best interest’ principles being used to undermine and contradict participatory rights, for example in the realm of parenting after divorce, in which subjective and often value-laden discretionary legal judgements transpire. Expert opinions provide little clarity, and decision-makers are stumped when asked to precisely define what they mean by “best interests.” ‘Expert definitions often clash with what children and parents themselves consider to be the core elements of the concept’ (Kruk, 2015: 1).

Difficulties exist in regard to child engagement, with Leeson (2009: 269) arguing that ‘we only allow the children we perceive as competent to be rights holders, entitled to have their view’. Adult claims to expertise over determining ‘competence’ can trump a child’s expressed wishes, with the result that many people working on behalf of and with children seek to move beyond a rights-based approach to a more holistic model, which considers child well-being, as a basis for global policy and action (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014: 69-73). In an era when the UNCRC is increasingly

powerful at national levels, accompanied by new emphasis on children's participatory rights, it becomes imperative for childhood practitioners to have access to critical conceptual resources and children's evidence to consider its relevance and its implementation (Ansell, 2005).

Eleven years after the adoption of the UNCRC, the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) (UN, 2000) have been introduced, partially in recognition of the limitations of a rights-based approach to children. This is recognising that in a global context, particularly in the South, many areas and communities struggle with basic survival issues, particularly in infancy and early childhood. To date these have not proved effective which may be due to their very Northern ideals and representations, as well as being too ambitious in scope with unrealistic expectations overall (Fehling et al, 2013).

Forms and processes of globalisation are insinuating themselves into children's lives, transforming childhood and youth experience whilst also reconfiguring the very essence of childhood and also the nature of child-serving institutions in the process (Chin, 2003; Fass, 2007; Stephens, 1995). Despite advances relating to this modernising agenda, children and childhoods remain objects of concern, and in some regions of anxiety. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has seen the emergence of renditions of the disappearance of childhood (Postman, 1994) or the 'death of childhood' (Strasburger, 2017), with children and childhood endangered by late modernity. Certainly wider forces of globalisation have played a part but I contend, from this research evidence, that childhood is very much alive and well, in very diverse global locales, albeit increasingly subject to development agendas from elsewhere, particularly in the Global South as well as the effects of transnationalism, digitalisation and the new communication technologies. I turn my attention now to the topic of migration in regard to globalisation before then examining some of the pertinent literature on migrant families and childhoods more specifically.

Yeoh (2009: 1), asserts that the countries of Asia, with their long and complex history of migration (Chapter 1) has figured prominently as sender, host and as a

place of transit, ‘within durable people flows which form part of labour, trade and commercial networks and which sustain diasporas and transnational communities.’ Such migrations have been one of the main drivers of social change within countries of Asia and this is visible when the institution of the family is examined. The geographically dispersed family as a new form of living arrangements in which familial relations may reside and develop is becoming more common across a wide spectrum of society. What has emerged are ‘networks’, ‘remittance flows’ and ‘circuits of care and affection’, often facilitated by easier communications to connect dispersed members. Thus migrants and their families increasingly live at ‘the intersections of different spaces...different times and different speeds’ (Abbas, 1997: 41) and all these factors are visible within my writing. The realm of the family continues to retain its significance in the face of dispersal, distance and translocality, although the concept of family may be being continually reformulated, with scholars using terminology like the ‘transnational family’ and ‘global householding’ to try to capture the essence of change. Transnational families are conceptualised as continuing to share strong bonds of collective welfare and unity even where dispersed across two or more nation-states (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002) while ‘global householding’ emphasises the view that the formation and nurture of households is increasingly reliant on the international movement of people and the transactions among household members resident in more than one nation (Douglass, 2007). This highlights the flexibility with which the household’ is being stretched across boundaries, often geographically distant and diverse and made porous to migrant ‘others’. The literature on transnational families views the flexibility as both a strength and a weakness in the wider goals of the family, while at the same time the idea and reality of ‘being family’ remains enduring perhaps broader, encompassing a vision which transcends dimensions of time and space to encompass new spaces and future generations too (Yeoh et al, 2005). Transnationalism is also a means to accumulate social and cultural capital, linked to future social mobility, which is relevant to consider in regard to the Sylheti migrants, their wider families and their children, both home (*desh*) and abroad (*bidesh*), where evidence of growing inequalities are manifest, attributed to the growth of transnationalism, its associated networks and effects (Gardner & Mand, 2012). Regarding transnationalism, very few

researchers have chosen to focus on everyday aspects of children's lives and little evidence exists on transnational dimensions from the perspective of early childhood lives although there are notable exceptions (cf Katz, 2004; Erel, 2002).

### **Gendered childhoods and migration**

Gender is an important focus in this research, and there is increasing attention to the complexities of gender in the context of migration, and the significance of transnational relationships. Studies suggest girls often find that physical restrictions on them alter when they migrate. Some girls find more physical freedom in rural villages, while for others it is the opposite, and they are more likely to be in *purdah* at an earlier stage in the villages, than would be the norm in London. Zeitlyn's (2012) study is insightful in tracing shifts in practice across locales, as well as changes in identity too. He finds that British identity is more foregrounded in public spaces, while young people's primary ethnic identity becomes more salient within their own community. Halsted's research (1994: 312) also addresses identity, and is concerned with Muslim children feeling 'trapped between two cultures', between traditional Islamic parental values and the more liberal, often secular values of places like schools and nurseries. My own research counters this, suggesting the Sylheti-Muslim children often enjoy negotiating the different social and cultural domains, with all the creativity this may entail, although this may be contingent on age, maturity and having the social support of older, more experienced children around them. Halstead does however draw attention to the need to gather children's perspectives on diverse life issues which may affect them. Robinson (2008) also tackles the subject of cultural identity in regard to perceptions of racial discrimination and acculturation strategies which was insightful in regard to my findings, resonating in particular with themes of difference but their intersection with social class and education too.

While most of these studies were conducted in England rather than Scotland, these studies are still useful as they continue to highlight the significant gap in the literature: namely into migrant childhood research in Scotland; into the lives of very young children; and also, moving away from a specific problems-based focus, into

more general day to day aspects of life. Yet few of these studies focus on gender, or other aspects of children's identities.

While scholars have tended to study class, race, and gender as discrete realms of experience, building on feminist theory, I try to consider them together in my research (Leviit & Glick Schiller, 2008: 290). Gender, like other identity dimensions and social aspects, does not operate in isolation because other facets of personhood like age, maturity, one's place in the family, ethnicity, social class, religion and location change children's experiences of every day life. Because of the dominance of developmental psychology (Morrow, 2006), until the 1960s theorisations of gender were dominated by essentialised and biological perspectives (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Much of this work has derived from Kohlberg (1966) and Piaget's (1929) theories of universal stages of development, 'particular ages when children notice differences between people and learn their gender label and act accordingly' (Kohlberg, 1966; Piaget, 1929, both cited in Morrow, 2006: 93). This suffers from what Speier (1976) calls 'an adult ideological viewpoint', which is based on very rigid ideas about children, and an adult-led approach to identity construction. Piaget has also been critiqued (Donaldson 1978) because his work downplays children's competencies. Katitcibasi (1996) adds to this by arguing that Piaget's work does not attend to the complexity and diversity of children's lives and he tends to ignore children's own views and experiences.

Yet children can be understood to be actively engaged in 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987), rather than only being on the receiving end of being imbued with a gendered identity. Just as identity construction may be perceived as continuous, 'always in a state of renegotiation as power relations shift', then so too are the ways in which femininities and masculinities are constructed (Paechter, 2007: 2). Morrow (2006) has pointed out the need to develop theory relating to the role of socio-cultural factors and children's agency in regard to gender practices and this is a key feature of my research.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in and preoccupation with gender in research on migration (cf Cahnt 1992; Anthias 1992; Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000; Jolly, 2005), with attention to both continuities and change in gender roles and norms between sending areas and receiving areas. There are two particularly pertinent and interconnected aspects of gender, relevant to this study, those of ‘gendered care’ and ‘gendered labour’ (Wells, 2015: 49). Wells argues that it is through the allocation of tasks and the organisation of time and space that many aspects of gender emerge. Thus children come to understand what gender means through understanding where they can go, what they can do and, importantly within my research, with whom they can associate. It is through these daily social rituals that children come to invest in themselves as gendered people, that they desire to be not just a particular kind of person or child, but a particular kind of girl or boy.

Work is crucial to being a boy or girl, as most children in the world perform some kind of work, although this is more attributed to childhoods in the Global South, as has been reviewed within the economics literature (Edmonds, 2007), as well as within the childhood literature (Boyden et al, 1998), with Liebel’s (2004) study of cross-cultural perspectives on working children pertinent too. The nature and locale of children’s work depends on where they live, as well as class and gender. Boyden has pointed out that it is not always simple to decide whether a child is working or not, as some work may be more overt (Boyden et al, 1998, 20-23). Some children may work for wages or food, while others may work within the household, or alongside adults, involved in land-use and livelihood strategies. What is clear is that where children are working, this does not mean they have stopped playing (Katz, 2004). Indeed, distinct divisions between the domains of work and play prevail more in the industrial and post-industrial world, than in agricultural societies (Wells, 2015), and also between the worlds of adults and children. In Sudan, Katz (2004, 60) documents the lives of rural children and highlights the fact that work may not be apparent, as for most children an element of play was fused with their work: ‘they worked at play and played at work’. Liebel (2004, 182) notes in research on the pre-industrial integration of play and work in children’s lives in the Andes, that ‘separating, play, work and life would appear to the people of the Andes as if nature

had been transformed into a resource to be exploited'. He also highlights the integration of games like races into the cattle-herding of Ethiopian boys (2004, 184). In regard to Aboriginal children in Australia, evidence shows children 'helping the adults or imitating them while they worked.... girls go with their mothers or grandmothers and aunts on the daily search for food, roots and tubers, fruits, small animals....boys practice hunting, aiming at birds, lizards and other small animals' (Thomson & White, 1993, 373f).

From these descriptions it is clear that boys and girls often do different work, with boys more in the public sphere of activity, girls more likely to be helping the women of their families with domestic tasks and childcare. Lancy (2008, 244) suggests that girls tend to work at an earlier stage than their brothers as 'what is considered 'boys' work may require more skills and physical strength than young boys have'. Significantly, Niewenhuys' (1994) study in Kerala, South India, shows how most of girls' work is in child-care and caring for their homes, in food tasks and weaving coir, but that this is not regarded as work, but merely 'helping out'. When boys undertake similar tasks, especially in regard to the weaving, they expect to get some formal recognition for doing so, as work. In this way many girls and women's contributions are invisible and unrecognised as they are thought of as care rather than work (Wells, 2015), which significantly distorts understanding of what girls and women do with their time. Importantly for me, drawing on fieldwork in Bangladesh, Blanchet (2001) provides an account of the gendered nature of work, family honour, *izzat*, and the division of labour amongst children. She shows that, whether in informal village-based livelihoods or urban work, the workers in the public domain are overwhelmingly male, the home workers female. She suggests this is not an issue of capabilities, but rather a case of cultural norms of public work being 'dishonourable' for girls, who may become 'spoiled'.

What will be clear from my own work later, is how gender intersects with other dimensions including religion and stage in family formation. Many gendered patterns continue to prevail within the rural villages but change is noticeable, most strikingly in the impact of urban living and education. Over time different priorities come into

play which change family practice (Gardner & Mand, 2012) with effects for girls and women in the urban setting, but also filtering back into every day practices in Sylhet.

### **A brief note on age**

In research, policy and practice on childhoods and family life in the North, biological age is often used as a key criterion for categorisation of children based on quite rigid ‘ages and stages’ approaches developed from psychological studies on child development (cf Bowlby, 1988; Vygotsky 1978). From the outset I wished this research to include young children but I had no idea which range of children may be included and this very much followed from what ‘who I found’ in terms of family composition in both locales. Although age is reified in the Global North I did not find this to be so in the village settings of Sylhet, where adults were more likely to consider their children in terms of maturity attached to behaviour and capabilities (Blanchet, 2001; Punch, 2008). For reasons of understanding, I have reluctantly included children’s ages attached to their narratives but in some cases these are quite general, or in few cases absent completely, due to parents’ and children’s vagueness or uncertainty with me.

*Why you [sic] always asking about age, why is this important?*

Rahella, Sylheti migrant-mother, Calder, Field-work notes, 2008

I became aware that parents and carers from Sylhet did not consider ideas of ‘child development’ in the formalized sense of ages and stages, in which it is used in the Global North. Bengali culture and language recognise life-stages but years of age are not regarded as relevant. Indeed, Blanchet, (2001: 17) emphasises more broadly the concept of ‘otherness’ does not seem to apply in Bangladesh as in the West (James, 1993), with other social dividers bearing more significance, for example in regard to gender and social class. People are more likely to focus on broad criteria and ‘signs’ regarding their children, related to thriving, general well-being and capabilities: ‘reaching a state of understanding’ (Blanchet, 2001: 17).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted that despite the diversity of conceptualisations of childhood, these childhoods are predominantly northern childhoods. These conceptualisations profoundly shape, and are shaped by, policy and practice, with devastating consequences on the everyday lives of children, both in the global north and the global south. The overwhelming dominance of assumptions about and from the global north is possible, in part because of the dearth of research on childhoods in the global south, as well migratory childhoods. Moreover, I argue that much that appears ‘deficit’ in regard to both Southern and migrant childhoods is the fact that such childhoods do not conform to Northern ideals. My research aims to address this gap.



*Asfak: Swimming at my bari, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011*

### **Chapter 3 – Researching Childhoods**

Cultural life is not geographically bounded so research should not be [...].

Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 9

My multi-sited ethnographic research uses creative, visual and participatory methods to generate narratives to understand the everyday realities of Sylheti migrant childhoods. Unexamined assumptions about the nature of childhood and children often frame research design. Research may reflect a propensity in adults, ‘a need to know’, and many beliefs may be attached to perceptions of danger and risk for children that consequently result in a desire to control and protect children’s lives. Over time, particularly in the Global North this has resulted in increased surveillance of children with the view that if children are out of sight or adult control, they are potentially at risk or deviant (Kelly, 2000). Such discourses are now filtering into policy and legislation too (Rigg, 2008; Woodhead et al., 1998; Nsamenang, 1999).

My approach to this research is grounded and exploratory, with much of the data generated centred around participants’ stories, which are articulated through several media: drawings, spoken narratives and conversations, supplemented by my documentation of the research process as it unfolded. The research sought to create an opportunity for young Sylheti-heritage children and their families in urban Scotland to generate their own stories about their everyday lives. Also considered, is what it means to be a child of migrant parents, living in a setting very different from whence one’s mother migrated.

My research has sought to focus on the views and experiences of young children, and sometimes their siblings and mothers, in Scotland, and in relation to Sylhet. Consequently, I adopted a broad and flexible approach in order to respond to salient issues as they arose. Thus, I could adapt my strategies as required dependant on the setting and the needs and inputs of participants, drawing on what I had learnt at one stage to guide what I would do in a later stage.

This chapter comprises, firstly, a discussion of my research questions, the research sites and research participants. Section two introduces the methods I used to engage with research participants and the challenges of these processes. The final section focuses on specific aspects of ethics including access, informed consent and reflexivity.

### **My Research Question**

My overarching research question is ‘how might understanding Sylheti migrant children’s experiences help challenge the deficit approach to ‘different’ childhoods?’ From early on in my research I decided it was imperative to look at both ‘sides’ of the migration process, the areas of family settlement in Scotland *and* the ‘sending’ areas in rural Bangladesh, informed by wider literature on family life and transnational migration (cf. Gardner, 2010, 2012; Jeffery, 1976; Charsley, 2005, 2012; Garbin, 2004). This strategy was confirmed as informative and pertinent by several of the migrant mothers in Scotland, as this comment highlights:

*Go there and then you will see...*  
(Momtaz, Sylheti migrant mother in Scotland, field-notes, 2006)

The mothers’ remarks sustained my resolve to conduct research in rural Sylhet, as they had shared accounts with me of how very different their lives were prior to settlement in Scotland. What Momtaz and the other mothers wished me to understand were the very different experiences of childhood and motherhood they had experienced and witnessed prior to marriage and migration. In terms of rural location, culture and associated practices may play out very differently; social class, gender, education and experience, as well as overarching social conditions and structure will produce effects very different from those prevailing in the North. What I witnessed and documented were striking contrasts with their family lives in Scotland, which informed my efforts to challenge the deficit views on the migrants’ lives. The varying dimensions viewed matched well to the Sylheti-heritage children’s ideas on narrating their lives and also fitted well with a research agenda for rural Sylhet, in terms of children sharing their lives in that locale. Following this and

guided by the child participants, I decided on a number of key questions to allow me to explore aspects of everyday life for children in Scotland and Sylhet, as follows:

What and where are children's everyday domains? – Place

Who are children spending time with? – People

Who are children's friends and where situated are children's friendships? – Peers

What are children's everyday activities and responsibilities? – Preoccupations

The justification for this was that such detail should show the children's accounts of their lives whilst also highlighting the richness within family life, in both locales. In Scotland, my research was conducted within two fictively-named inner-city locales, 'Rowanlee' and 'Calder', both sites of Bangladeshi settlement. Rowanlee had many Bangladeshi families residing within the area, as well as other diverse migrant groups too. Calder had few Bangladeshi families but comprised of many families of Eastern European origin, South Asian families as well as longer settled local families and individuals. I highlight these differences here as they became pertinent within the wider research agenda (Chapters 4-7). I have anonymised these areas as a means of protecting the identities of my research participants, in what is quite a small, closed 'community'. Within Sylhet, my research was conducted in several rural villages, the natal homes of many of my participating mothers in Scotland, merely named 'Rural Sylhet' within my writing, for reasons of anonymity too.

### **Gaining Access**

Initially, when I envisaged this research, I had wanted the focus to be on young Sylheti migrant mothers and their children in Scotland. I was aware from my prior professional experience in early year's education that many mothers experienced isolation and lack of support and understanding from the wider communities in which they lived, especially in the early stages of family formation and settlement in Scotland. However, after a pilot project I realised this was too broad and I decided to focus on childhood whilst also including the mother's views where pertinent. In many ways it was easier for me to find potential child participants than to seek to engage with the migrant mothers, who for the most part were not a visible presence in any of my research locales. I was aware from previous professional experience and a comprehensive literature review that there was a primary school in an inner-

city area in Scotland, named 'Rowanlee' here, that had received critical acclaim for supporting and integrating diverse minority ethnic children and their families. I considered this a possible entry point for research, if there were sufficient Sylheti-heritage children in attendance. Fortunately, this was so and I was welcomed by the head-teacher who was also concerned about the lack of evidence from migrant child perspectives in Scotland, asserting his view that 'Scotland could do it much better for its migrants' (Personal communication, Mr Ross, Head-teacher, Rowanlee Primary School, 2006). He added that his extensive experience in a very ethnically diverse setting led him to the conclusion that there was little understanding of the struggles and complexities of many migrants' lives, particularly for non-EU migrants, nor the resilience which many families displayed. He also alluded to the fact that he thought it important to have knowledge on 'sending areas' of migration, patterns and practices of family life, as this may then 'paint a fuller picture' in understanding and supporting migrant children and their families where necessary, in their areas of settlement. Through his unstinting support and information, I was able to conduct ethnographic fieldwork within the nursery and primary school, as well as being introduced to Sylheti parents both within the immediate neighbourhood of the school as well as in other locations across the city. A disadvantage of this strategy was that I was aware that Bangladeshi families do not always utilise early years' provision such as nurseries well, with only 18% using such services in 2007 (Hill et al, 2009: 61), and so I recognised that my research cohort could be limited. However, Rowanlee is considered an exemplar of social inclusion (Scottish Government, 2004, 2009), and as well as educating over 54 diverse language and cultural groups of children, it also provides physical space and social/emotional support for the children's wider families within its building. From this perspective, I viewed it as a 'springboard' for my Scottish research. Mr Ross emphasised that amongst the migrant families he encountered from day to day, the Sylheti-Bangladeshi children and women struck him as particularly 'vulnerable', in need of more inputs from support services and that my research 'could only do good' (Mr. Ross, personal communication, 2006). He also introduced me to a Bengali teaching assistant whom I call Razia, who became an invaluable informant and central to facilitating meetings with Sylheti

children and families, as well as inviting me to share in her own family life and wider 'community' events to further understanding and network too.

As Rowanlee was then quite a distinctive school, I also wanted to conduct research in another neighbourhood and nursery/school and eventually discovered there was a handful of Sylhet-heritage children in another area of the city, within a neighbourhood and nursery/school I name 'Calder'. Both Rowanlee and Calder are inner-city neighbourhoods in disadvantaged and multicultural areas. On visiting Calder School, I was immediately aware of contrasts with Rowanlee. Where Rowanlee had many children attending from the same ethnic communities, the children in Calder were more isolated ethnically and linguistically, although there were a new cohort of Polish children arriving around the outset of my research. Nevertheless, I received permission to research from the Head-teacher Mrs Munro, who displayed very different attitudes from Mr Ross, stating in my first meeting with her, 'the Bangladeshi children just don't seem to want to learn and their parents are disinterested; what can one expect from such an impoverished cohort of peasant-migrants' (Personal Communication, Calder, Primary School, 2006). I was shocked by her response, but convinced this setting was worthwhile to study alongside Rowanlee, Rowanlee being a neighbourhood with many Sylheti families and Calder being an area with few. Her negative comments also reinforced to me the importance of undertaking this research, both in terms of providing evidence of problems, but also in challenging the deficit perspective.

Having received permission from Mr Ross and Mrs Munro to conduct a study within their schools, and introductions to families, I then had to begin the formal process of gaining further permission from the Local Authority, which became protracted and difficult. While individual head-teachers had agreed to support my research, it was necessary to fully inform the Local Authority and await consent before proceeding with formal data collection. I had been warned by experts on childhood research that consent could take some time, so was diligent in lodging the relevant paperwork early. The Local Authority, although acknowledging my request, was very slow to respond. Although I routinely badgered them, I still had not received the consent

after ten months. This was frustrating, as, although I was able to proceed in some areas of the research, it created a sense of insecurity and time was passing by. A second layer of consent was also imperative, in regard to gatekeepers, and this eventually helped me to gain support from the local authority, as follows.

### **The Role of Gatekeepers**

Through a key informant, whom I call Anil, within the Bangladeshi community in Scotland, I was made aware that it would be important and polite to inform and discuss my research with their community leaders. From previous research and from other literature I was aware that powerful community members could often play a gatekeeping role in regard to community members (cf McAreevey & Das., 2013; Clark, 2011; Scottish Government, 2003). Indeed, in regard to this issue of gatekeepers the Scottish Government (2003: npn) states, 'By acting as gatekeepers to communities and individuals they have the potential to make decisions on behalf of their clients and communities without actually consulting them.' Moreover, McAreevey & Das, (2013: 116) add that:

They [gatekeepers] have the power to deny access to the researcher and they may also influence whether individuals opt in and out of a process. By negotiating directly with prospective research participants, gatekeepers can speed up the recruitment process. By acting as cultural mediators or brokers they can help the researcher become more culturally competent.

Following from this, I arranged a seminar at the University of Edinburgh to which I invited all the leaders with the help of Anil. During this event I introduced my research and my review of existing research on Sylheti migrants in the UK. The community leaders had requested that this seminar be filmed 'for the record' and although initially resistant to this request I agreed, as in many ways I could see how it could formalise and cement the proceedings, but left me nervous at the thought of being filmed<sup>9</sup>. I decided open-ness and compliance were beneficial at this juncture, as I was made aware the leaders had the power to support or veto my project

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<sup>9</sup> In the longer term the filming proved useful as it was screened at various community events to encourage children and families to participate in my research and also aired in key villages in Sylhet, by way of Bangladeshi Channel S, their community broadcasting network. Thus many individuals and families had prior knowledge of me and my research before I went to their villages.

(McAreavey & Das, 2013), and I needed to build relationships of trust if I could, based on my commitment to the research and how I presented myself within the forum. The event was nerve-wracking as I was in the spotlight, the only woman present and the only white person; the attendees were all Bangladeshi business men and many talked on their mobiles and interrupted throughout the proceedings. There were several points where power struggles between various men surfaced and it was at times hard to follow as they would switch between speaking Sylhet-Bangla and English, often leaving me uncertain of what was being discussed. Eventually, after listening, questioning and various negotiations, the leaders granted permission for me to engage with the families of whom they seemed very protective. Crucially, it was also agreed they would collectively help me to access more families and two leaders took charge of this dimension, maintaining contact with me throughout my research, offering help as needed. In this way my work was legitimised by the leaders. In Scotland the Bangladeshi community leaders are very politically active and aware of social justice issues. They work hard on behalf of the wider cohort of families and having decided my research was worthwhile, they made efforts to offer their support to my project. The intervention of the leaders also played another key role. To date I am not sure whether any of the community leaders directly intervened with the Local Authority on my behalf but this may have been the case. Once the Local Authority was aware that 'the community' were aware there was a question mark over whether consent would be forthcoming, then permission seemed magically granted.

Regardless of whether strings were pulled or not, to facilitate and expedite the granting of permissions, I was satisfied my project could now proceed in a positive, sanctioned and supported direction. I was also aware that Gatekeeper's involvement may reduce the participant's ownership or control in that research process, as well as create limitations for me as researcher but fortunately once my agenda was fully understood, I did not experience direct interference from the community leaders or the local authority.

## **Data collection**

My more formal data collection in Scotland was conducted in sites of early years' provision and pre-school because initially this is where I encountered the young Sylheti-heritage children. How I carried out the research on a day-to-day basis was very much constrained by individual staff. This was challenging as all the settings were very busy and noisy and generally I had to work around the constraints of that and the time that could be afforded within a busy school day and curriculum. Within Rowanlee, I was very fortunate as Mr. Ross allocated a free room to me for the duration of the data collection, diary-making/discussion activities (Section 2), although on rare occasions we had to share this with other staff and children. He also provided jotters, which, when customized (being made unique with decoration by each child), became the children's diaries, as well as colored crayons, felt tip pens, glue, rulers, erasers and anything else I requested to support the project.

My initial six-week piloting visit to Sylhet in 2007, with my (then) eleven year-old son Isaac, had been exploratory and largely situated in rural villages, where we lived with the kin of some of the families, with whom I made contact in the early stages of my research through Rowanlee School. A member of the Sylheti community in Edinburgh became my language teacher and he was, as well as facilitating my initial language learning, a key person in securing contacts in rural Sylhet. I was aware that I was necessarily reliant on those I knew in making possible introductions to others. I was surprised at the ease with which people welcomed and accepted us within their family homes and overwhelmed by their generosity. On reflection my surprise illustrates my naivety. I did not realise quite the strength of social networks between the two locations, Edinburgh and rural Sylhet, and consequently, the degree of prior knowledge people had, of my research and me.

Taking part in village life gave me an opportunity to learn and document the richness of Sylheti family life and specifically childhood in their homeland, and to help me better understand to what migrant participants were comparing their experiences in Scotland. Within the village-based pilot project, I was also keen to investigate more structured activities for children. However, villagers with whom I had contact were

not very interested in discussing childhood or child-centred initiatives, which was a significant factor. Consequently, my progress was slow on locating suitable 'formal' research sites. What became immediately apparent was my need to immerse myself in rural family life to gain knowledge and fluency in the local language, Sylheti, a dialect of the official language Bengali, or Bangla, as it is more often called.

Eventually I received help from the British Council (B.C.) in Sylhet city, who had a British woman working for them, who at one time coincidentally had been a teacher in Scotland, so understood where my research was situated both physically and conceptually. The B.C. provided information about the local government education offices and also NGOs working in the surrounding district, which had an emphasis on working with young children and their families. They also helped me find a language school as advised by my funders. During a prolonged visit to Sylhet in 2008 and through contact and discussion with several government officials and NGO directors, I was thus able to identify suitable sites for research. Over six months, I was thus able to conduct fieldwork and undertake formal language learning.

Once I had established contact with suitable organisations and individuals, progressing to accessing study sites was straightforward, if time consuming. As in Scotland, I was careful to provide all organisations and individuals with details of my research, including my university affiliations, supervisors and funders. This provided clarity on my agenda and seemed to add credibility to me as a researcher. People were overwhelmingly welcoming and hospitable regarding the research and everyone seemed well connected to other relevant and interested people, so introduced me to other organisations and helpful resources.

The ease of access in Sylhet was, I believe, due to several distinctive factors. Firstly, in South Asia generally and Bangladesh more specifically, there has been an upsurge of interest in an Early Years agenda and associated 'parenting' support. Secondly, there is not the same attention paid to ethics and issues of child protection, so there were less layers of procedure to negotiate. Undoubtedly, the fact I was a white Northerner with academic credentials helped, although often this was a source of

discomfort for Isaac and myself as we were often subject to extreme attention within the villages and traveling between. Many people, especially children, within the villages had never encountered white people before so we were subject to much scrutiny and comments. Additionally, but sadly from my perspective, people were very keen to be ‘connected’ to the Global North<sup>10</sup>, so many perhaps viewed us as conduits to a different life and locale, if not for them, then for their children. In addition, the legacy of colonialism has led to people revering whiteness, as associated with higher status or social class, which I mention here but is too large and complex a topic to explore in a few sentences, but most definitely had a disquieting affect for me and Isaac, over our visits.

In Sylhet, B.C. officials as well as NGOs liked to include people from the Global North where they could and they viewed academic input as potentially beneficial for future developments and importantly for attracting funding and wider public interest to their projects. Organisations were keen to hear my impressions of their provision, and where I was able, my recommendations for development within their projects. Reflecting on this from a temporal and geographical distance, I believe organisations in some way placed greater value on my perceptions than they might have had I been a Bangladeshi researcher. While this was advantageous to me, and my agenda, it created a certain unease and tension for me within my day-to-day interactions within the provision sites. It perhaps reflected the emphasis on importing ideas from the North and methods to ‘modernise’ indigenous systems, which struck me as a form of neo-colonialism. These may result from the influence of global discourses on early years and education (cf EFA, UNICEF, 2012) as previously discussed (Chapter 2) and inputs from Northern-based NGOs. More generally, transnational migration and its networks, has resulted in importation of ideas and schemes from elsewhere, privileging of knowledge and positive emphasis and prestige attached to most things Northern (Gardner, 2009).

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<sup>10</sup> Many people did and continue to view the North as where ‘success’ lies, in imagining better futures for themselves and their children, so perhaps viewed me as a potential ‘foothold’ in this regard.

## Research Participants

Within Scotland, thirty-five Sylheti-heritage children, aged three to eight years, participated in my research, alongside some white British children of the same age range. Additionally, some older primary school children also participated in some aspects, as I knew they could offer peer support (Tisdall et al., 2009) and I also was interested in their views of their earlier childhood, their social worlds and the role they played in the lives of the younger children. I was aware of the important role that siblings often play in supporting their younger kin. Several Sylheti young people played a helping role in the research process. Eighteen Sylheti mothers participated in this research, both individually and collectively, often incorporating their children but sometimes not. The women were aged between approximately nineteen and forty-seven years of age and had all migrated to the UK after marriage to Bangladeshi men with British citizenship, many long-settled in the UK. Fifteen women were from rural Sylhet and Sylheti speakers and the rest from other areas of the country and spoke Bengali. Women's educational experience and qualifications varied greatly, but in general the women had very little formal education or training, having all left school young to care for siblings or undertake domestic responsibilities. Few of the women in Scotland were fluent in English and none had English experience prior to arrival, although most were multilingual in the languages of South Asia, with Dhaka women showing higher levels of education and literacy overall. Several head-teachers and many teachers and support staff also participated in the research, as well as interested professionals in related spheres, for example health care workers and various third sector organisations, working with children and families. While not directly contributing to the data for analysis, their support and information was both encouraging, in terms of the rightness of conducting this research, as well as providing some valuable background data.

Within Sylhet, participation was for some parts of the research on more of an *ad hoc* basis. Many children were more casually part of my research in Sylhet, as they were all Bangladeshi or Sylheti, so I was not making the distinction I had to make in Scotland of choosing children based on their ethnicity. Thirty-seven children aged

between approximately three and eight years formally participated in the research. By formally, I mean they were participating with consent, both from their families and themselves. Fifteen of the children were involved informally in the participant observation phase in Sylhet and did not participate in more structured tasks. These children were 'chosen' as they were the first children I got to know on my initial fieldwork trip and were the kin of families based in Scotland, although they had never been overseas. The children lived in two villages where I spent much of my time initially and if mature enough, attended their village government primary schools. Through immersion in these settings I was able to get a good overview of village life and existing early years provision in those locales and have a basis for understanding how migrant Sylheti children's experiences might be read through their knowledge or memory of Sylhet.

It was crucially important to the success of my project for me 'to successfully build rapport with those who were to be my research subjects' (Punch, 2002a: 329), but also with those who played a gatekeeping role: the adult NGO directors and workers in village provision sites as well as guardians and family members of the children who were central to the research process (Morrow, 1999). I did not assume that building rapport with adults would result in the process of rapport-building with children being made easier, but I knew that ultimately, if the gatekeepers did not trust me or value my research agenda or skills, I would not succeed in my aim of permission to interact with the children and their immediate families.

In my experience, rural Sylheti people are very generous and a culture of hospitality and sharing prevails, so we were very soon at ease with the village family and all the people they introduced us to, their wider kin and neighbours. Undoubtedly, our arrival within the village where we were initially resident and in particular our presence within the *bari* caused initial excitement and may have interrupted the natural rhythm of daily life and associated practices. The children although initially shy, adjusted to our presence over time, and were very happy to spend time with us, showing curiosity at our appearances, laughing at our language and social naivety. Over time people got used to our presence and we were able to fit in with their

routines and lives. Beyond the village settings and children and their families, I also needed to find a more formal centre to conduct some research, as in Scotland.

Twenty-two children were resident within or around a village North-East of Sylhet city, which I call Rajpur, and attended an NGO-led 'Succeed' preschool program there. *Succeed* is an initiative concerned with *early childhood* education and transition to school developed by Save the Children USA/*Bangladesh*, and funded by USAID/*Bangladesh* from 2005 to 2010. The goal of *Succeed* is to prepare children for school and support their successful transition. The Succeed program aims to improve children's learning and children's school success by developing and testing an affordable, sustainable preschool model that can be implemented in school, community and home settings (Aboud et al., 2008: 295).

I had previously arranged meetings with interested parties in Sylhet, negotiated visits to this particular Succeed program and discussed aspects of my research with as many relevant people as possible. At times arduous, due to differing cultural and religious interpretations of social interaction, institutional and gender hierarchies and people's genuine curiosity about me, the process of gaining access to the Early Years' settings was complex, although I did not have to go through so many formal layers of bureaucracy as in Scotland. This phase of the research was time-consuming, partly due to the fact that sites were scattered across the countryside and often facilitated by local people. As a stranger to the area, I spent considerable time trying to find villages and schools, which were often far from main roads, in unmarked buildings. This was compounded by the onset of monsoon rains and negotiating the mud and floods, at the end of my research visit. Villagers were curious about me and much time was spent talking with them as they crowded around and followed me on my sojourns into their villages. An equal amount of time was spent drinking tea with interested officials and workers. Although stressful at the time, due to constraints of time and funds, I realized that it was important to be patient, I was wholly dependent on the help of the people I met, who were to some degree playing a gatekeeping role over the village communities of families and children. Eventually I gained consent and appreciated considerable help and support from the Succeed project.

On reflection, I could have made greater progress had I initially sited my Sylhet research within a NGO head office, as they were well-connected to other childhood services, well educated and also used to the concept of academic research. I did not consider this as a possibility when I was designing the research, as I had already established research settings within the affinal family villages and homes of some of the migrants in Scotland. However, over the time of my research I met another researcher who was based within the NGO head office, who although Bangladeshi had grown up in the UK. She received considerable support from the NGO in the form of research assistants and transport, but she also was more beholden to the NGO, and so constrained in other ways (Zachariah, 2010; Yu, 2003).

The Rajpur children were part of my participant observations within their pre-school program, around their village and within their homes as they played and ‘worked’ (my perception of some of their activities, not theirs). I was thus able to gain a more nuanced overview of village life and existing early years’ provisions in those locales. This provided a basis for understanding how migrant Sylheti children’s experiences might be read through their mother’s knowledge or memory of Sylhet. They also took part in another aspect of the research, discussed later, the diary-making project.

### **Methods – Working with Children**

Using a broadly ethnographic approach, I encompassed many tried and tested methods in the course of this research, adjusting and adapting them as suited to the participants and location. James et al (1998: 169) emphasise that doing research is a messy affair, wholly dependant on personal choices, negotiation, adjustment and serendipity as well as meticulous preparation, which was certainly my experience.

Given the limits of an ‘observational approach’ as discussed by Pink (2006: 4), my own approach was rather more collaborative and participatory in nature, as I thought the children’s narratives would aid my understanding. There are however, limits to working with children, as they may become disinterested, bored and distracted. Thus I chose to supplement their perspectives with the views of other actors present,

predominantly older children and young people as well as the children's mothers and wider female kin.

Guided by the UNCRC Article 12<sup>11</sup>, and my own prior professional and research experience, as well as knowledge of the current literature (Thomson, 2008; Burke, 2008; Punch, 2002a), led me to believe that given the appropriate conditions and environment as well as time, equipment and trust, children are competent participants within the research arena and well able to engage with issues pertinent to themselves and their peers. They can provide valuable insight into their life worlds and acts of meaning making (Thomson, 2008; Tisdall et al, 2009). From this standpoint, research design has been an iterative, rather than a linear, process, with decisions and strategies continually being reviewed and changed in the light of participants' insights and later evidence. For example, it was highlighted to me by an educated member of a village that drawing was frowned upon as an activity for children by some conservative and more religious families. This is an example of one 'taken-for-granted' aspect of the project that had to be stalled and reconsidered, although I did eventually receive permissions to proceed with this dimension after discussion with individual parents and their children. Many such examples transpired over the course of the research, too numerous to mention here, but dealt with in a practical and ethical fashion as they presented themselves.

### **Children's Participation**

Having previously conducted qualitative research with isolated migrant families and children, using a range of methods, I was aware of the difficulties, which may be encountered, due to the many aspects within the research cohort's profile, unfamiliar to myself and also the possibility that much that was my taken-for-granted

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<sup>11</sup> In 1991, the UK Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This human rights treaty guarantees to all children and young people the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and for these views to be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity (Article 12).

perspectives and practices would also be unfamiliar and alien to them. Thus I envisaged and designed my research to be flexible, incorporating the views, where relevant, of all whom I have encountered on this journey, as much from their own perspectives as possible, but foregrounding the views of the children. I utilised participatory and child-led methods where I could, in an effort to gather children's life stories and views from their perspectives and chosen methods. What I became aware of, over the research was that, although children were very forthcoming about the content of their day-to day lives, they did not attribute much meaning to what they shared, which is perhaps a shortcoming of working with a young cohort, particularly across different cultural settings. What I came to realise was that children within this ethnic culture are not asked for their opinions or feelings, as other matters within families are more pressing. Hierarchies of age and gender make expression of opinions quite limited for more subordinate family members. What was my norm within my own childhood and that of my children, was not to be found here. Thus at points I required to be adaptable and have included the voices and views of adults, particularly mothers, but on occasions other community members too.

The heart of participatory research 'turns on the understanding that data that are *by* the people differ from data that are *about* the people (Wang et al, 1996: 16). There is now an emphasis in policy too, of seeking children and young people's views with increased consultation, although largely on pre-defined adult-constructed interests and agendas (Stewart/EPPI, 2010; Scottish. Government, 2012; Allnock & Miller, 2013; Bruce, 2014). McLeod (2010, 67-73) asked the question: 'are we listening yet?'. From her findings there is a sense that adults are beginning to. My understanding of this, following my own interests and wide review of the pertinent literature is that, participatory approaches, however well-intentioned, are often not far-reaching enough, do not involve children and young people's 'genuine' participation. In regard to this, Sanders & Mace's (2006: 89-109) research, in regard to child-case conferences, found that there was a 'remarkable lack of clarity as to whether the views, wishes and feelings mentioned were actually those of the child or whether they were an adult's assumption or judgment of what they thought the young person's view was.' Furthermore, many participatory projects make

unrealistic promises and do not provide feedback to the participants, so leaving children and young people disappointed or less likely to consider future participation due to not 'feeling valued' (Hill et al., 2009: 128-153). As Ann Cunningham admonished:

*Do not assume that all children want to make animations or investigate their environment on a skateboard – some might want to sit at home and read Foucault. After all, these are people you have just met – allow them to have potentials you couldn't have imagined.*

Anne Cunningham, Education Consultant, the Lighthouse, Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City (in Tisdall et al, 2009:164)

Yet enabling genuine participation has proved challenging with young children, particularly when it may not be their cultural norm to engage thus and where trust-relationships may be often slow to develop. On a more purist level, in regard to genuine participation, (Davis, 2009: 160), it could be argued that most research with children and young people is flawed if they did not initiate the process themselves. Pragmatically, if we took this approach then many valuable opportunities would be lost to really engage with what children think about their lives and what their daily realities may be.

Consequently, I decided to exercise pragmatism in my strategy and approaches, to some degree allow the participants and setting to guide the research process, while keeping in mind that I had a clear idea of what I hoped to achieve. For the most part my strategy was successful but this was largely dependant on the setting of my data collection; for example, within the schools, where teachers were supportive of my research, data collection was fairly straightforward. Where settings were less interested in my research, then this created obstacles and was less insightful. I did have to take a flexible view of the day to day as I was aware how busy teachers and schools are and how having a researcher around can be an additional source of stress.

What follows are discussions on methods employed, which I built on over time. I include mention of my methods as a pointer to 'what I did', so making clearer what

follows in my substantive chapters. I discuss more fully, however, issues I took into account regarding participant observation and my decision and the impact of using visual methods as a form of engagement with children. I also discuss my choice in using ‘family dolls’ to help children to describe their families and wider households.

### **Images as Narratives – Children’s Diary Project**

I am inspired by the work of Paulo Freire who has used visual methods, predominantly observation, photography and film, in his efforts to elicit the life experiences of marginalized and non-literate people in his native Lima, Peru. Through the development and utilization of visual methodology, particularly when created by people themselves, he was able to facilitate reflection on lives lived, articulating and clarifying aspects previously concealed, thus providing a platform for discussion and framing ideas for change. He was able to highlight the importance of respecting uniqueness of culture and difference, the richness within, while also, and importantly in the context of my research aims, uncovering the inherent tensions arising from unequal power relationships within the research process that may also illuminate inequities of power within wider society. Burke (2008: 26) reminds the reader, that although there has been a development in visual methods as a means to engender children’s ‘voice’, few studies have explicitly conceptualized this in terms of children’s political status. The concept of ‘visual rights’ may serve to collate questions of meaning making, change and ‘truth’, in terms of ownership of the finished visual material, but also how that material may be utilized, represented or indeed manipulated in the future. Davis (in Tisdall et al, 2008: 164) asserts that academics see themselves as ‘having ownership of research findings’ and to this end the children’s spoken narratives were meant to be part of the process of analysis of their drawn representations, in the hope that their narratives were ‘given voice’, that is, brought to life by themselves, not merely gathered and interpreted by myself. I emphasise that this was a point of concern for me so children were involved throughout in discussing their representations. It was agreed after the ending of the project that images and any data used in this project would be returned to the child participants and where this was not possible, then the materials would be destroyed. Additionally, any materials included in the thesis (drawings, photographs and

narratives) would be with the permission of the children.

I was keen to know from the children how they best felt they could tell me about their day-to-day lives, from their perspectives, as a means of supporting participatory methods. Using creative approaches has been widely recommended as a way of eliciting children's stories and ideas on certain themes. However, I did not want to merely assume these would be the preferred method, but rather asked the children how they could tell their story, or at least a small glimpse into them. Initially, after I was introduced to the children, we held a general group conversation about how we should proceed and children inputted their ideas. Some children wanted to talk, some to draw, some to do both so we held a series of smaller discussions until we reached a 'middle-ground' in terms of the approach. For example, we discussed them telling me stories, in verbal form but they decided that that may be quite challenging due to issues of language and time. Additionally, some children did not want the teacher or the wider cohort to 'know' their stories. Other children were happy to share their experiences but we decided that drawing may be a good way to record their days. Participant observation had given me the opportunity to observe and document much of children's lives in Sylhet and Scotland. Although spending numerous weeks immersed in rural villages and early years' provision in Sylhet, and early years' provision and family homes in Scotland, observing many children and kin, it was not clear to me how *they* perceived their day-to-day, in terms of activity and social interaction. I did not want my research to be based on my perceptions of their life worlds, but rather to also engage with their own perspectives. Narratives are an ideal way of gaining understanding of children's knowledge and experience and from the outset of my research I had hoped to include a creative and visual element to the data collection process, as a means to share reality through 'visual voices' (Burke, 2008: 2006). Historically, children's drawings have been widely used in clinical and diagnostic research settings for example, in psychotherapy and psychology (Linesch, 1994). In childhood studies there is a growing tradition within schools to use this approach as a means of child-centred enquiry (Edwards, 2000; Fielding & Bragg, 2003).

I developed a plan to make diaries with children as a means of documenting their daily lives, to create visual narratives. This decision was influenced by the work of Malaguzzi (1993) and what he termed ‘the hundred languages of children’: the verbal and non-verbal ways in which young children communicate. I was also influenced by Alison Clark’s work with young children, most particularly her ‘Mosaic Approach’ (2005), which incorporated many creative strategies to elicit children’s views. The strength of this approach is that it is participatory with children and adults as co-constructors of meaning, through combining both visual and verbal methods, with emphasis on ‘listening about living’. Leitch (2008: 37) suggests that the creation of visual images can result in rich individual and collective narratives. Such initiatives may offer children the opportunity to show aspects of their lives often invisible or hidden from mainstream and largely adult view, consequently enabling better understanding of their worlds and actions. This is demonstrated in my using ‘Family Dolls’ to elucidate details of kinship:



*Image 1: Family Dolls (portrayed as 3 generations here) as research strategy, to gather details on family or household composition. Sylhet, 2010 and Scotland 2011*

Thus, metaphors, stories and narratives of the child’s experience may be conveyed better using visual rather than verbally oriented methods of enquiry. Visual methods could play a role in this, especially as many of the children were pre-literate and additionally, to enhance my understanding of children’s worlds when working across

languages, cultures and with differing belief systems.<sup>12</sup> This is also potentially a way of overcoming the frequently subordinate social and political status of children whilst facilitating children's engagement in community dialogue and possible development. Rose, (2001: 6) states that such representation is never innocent and the children's images are never merely 'transparent windows on the world' but rather, interpretations of their world, displayed in a particular way. John Berger (1972: 7) states that 'seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak'. Within both settings I was keenly aware of the issues of language and cultural difference, between the participants and myself, and believed that it was important to explore methods that were easily transferable across different language groups and not based on more formal question and answer methods. Shaver et al. (1993) used drawing as a 'form of dialogue' in their qualitative research and commented on the fact that in contrast to an interview where response is immediate, in terms of answering, the use of drawing allows for more flexibility and fluidity of response; the children created the drawings and then we reflected on them together at a later stage, thus giving the children the opportunity to reflect back on their depictions and respond to my prompts and comments. Crucially, my research, is not based wholly on the spoken word and how one may interpret language or structure questions.

I chose to use methods with children that played to their strengths rather than weaknesses, or deficits of communication (mine) due to language and cultural dimensions. Children completed pictorial activity diaries on a day-to-day basis, so recording some aspects of their free time, snapshots of their lives, when not engaged in their early years and school provision. Such a method proved flexible, inclusive and accessible to all, over diverse geographical environments and time. During the course of the research, I successfully facilitated diary-making projects in two key locations, an inner-city nursery/ primary school in Edinburgh and an NGO in a small village in rural Sylhet.

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<sup>12</sup> I previously conducted visual projects in the U.S. with children and young people from marginalised Latino communities (homeless and from substance abusing families).

The point of the diary making exercise was that the drawings could be spontaneous in subject matter, depicting topics of the children's own choice. Factor (2004) emphasizes that schools, early years' spaces and playgrounds are significant spaces in the lives of young children, but much of what is initiated and experienced within, is from an adult viewpoint. I hoped, through examining pictorial evidence, to learn a little of children's perceptions of their lives, as a way of 'seeing' their world, through their representations. Importantly, Coates (2004: 10) states that without knowledge of the prevailing emotional and social aspects and of the wider cultural setting, it may be impossible for the researcher to more than surmise about choices children choose to portray within their drawings. However, they may aid expression of narratives of lived experience while also 'uncovering the unrecognized, unacknowledged or 'unsayable' stories they hold' (Leitch, 2008: 37). Thus, after completion, I decided the representations would be discussed, with the children (individually), myself as the researcher and Max. Spoken narratives would be recorded (with permission), then transcribed, to provide understanding and greater depth to the children's depictions. Although individual children discussed their images, other children were present within the rooms, and I was aware that this may have influence on children's future depictions and descriptions too. However due to constraints of time and space I decided to accept this as a potential flaw or shortcoming in my research strategy, to be further discussed in Chapter 8.

Punch (2002a: 331) states that drawing can be an effective tool for enabling children to be actively involved in research and in addition to be creative and fun, providing 'space' for children to be reflective on what they may wish to depict and have more control over the process. This can also be adapted, added to or changed as they wish. Children may use drawings to explore ideas and take time and thought over their representations. From my perspective, time to reflect and focus on their own ideas and sense of self through the drawing process, was crucial to my research approach and provided more insight than spoken interactions, although these were useful in addition to the drawings. In this way, I hoped what may seem insignificant or inconsequential from an adult perspective may become apparent, through the children's depictions, as significant in the lives of the children.

Like any other ‘text’, an image may be read in many ways, and the intention of the creator may not be apparent to the person who is trying to interpret it. Each of us will bring our own unique experience in terms of social and cultural understanding as well as individual life experiences, which undoubtedly will colour our act of interpretation. This is complex as it suggests what the children may actively choose to ‘show’ me may not be what I (or indeed any other observer) ‘see’ within their drawings. Thomson (2008) also makes the point that children’s images may not be amenable to straightforward adult readings and children may be surprised by how an adult may interpret their work. I think there is also a huge question over what the researcher may choose to include or disregard, what to present in their work.

For this reason, the inclusion of spoken narrative to accompany the children’s drawings has been crucial to *my* understanding and subsequent documentation of *their* constructions of their worlds. Not only is the eliciting of feedback on the individual drawings time consuming but also may be insulting to the children’s sense of self and their perceptions about their competence as artists. Punch (2002a: 332) states that the drawings themselves are representative and so self-explanatory so should not really need to be qualified with narrative description, but I was keen not to merely impose my adult interpretations through misrepresenting their drawings. Throughout the process, I was careful to ask children to describe what their drawing meant to them and why had they chosen to draw certain images, rather than asking what it was they had drawn.

However, drawing is very much viewed as associated with play and pleasure, indeed childhood itself, but this is culturally specific and not inherently a child-centred activity, as many people assume.<sup>13</sup> So, there was a need for care so universalist assumptions about children and childhood were not driving the choice of methods. Within the context of Europe and North America, drawing is regarded as a common

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<sup>13</sup> Within the context of South Asia, there exists a long history of the use of visual images to both encounter and as a means to express oneself, for example, as viewed in the richly woven and embroidered textiles, still valued for garments by indigenous people and further afield, and the colourful depictions of rural life, flowers and animals, displayed on rickshaws and *tellagaris*, (hand-carts), the everyday forms of transport for most people and things. In Bangladesh, it is apparent that people are immersed in a culture where visual imagery and art as forms of self-expression are commonplace; one’s senses are immersed in a sea of colour and imagery wherever one goes.

form of expression in childhood, but not necessarily so in the context of Sylhet. I had witnessed drawing and painting as commonplace activities within Northern early years settings and indeed in some family homes. What was less clear to me was whether such self-expression was encouraged or nurtured in childhood in Sylhet, beyond the boundaries of the early years provision.<sup>14</sup> Staff assured me that within the Succeed program this activity was permissible so I decided to proceed. Interestingly, this raises many questions about knowledge and power and whose knowledge and power is privileged in the day to day of rural Sylhet and more generally. What was regarded as ‘distasteful’ or even taboo by individual families was permissible if validated from an ‘educational perspective’ showing the influence of recent initiatives in early years and formal education (cf. Viruru & Cannella, 1997; Viruru, 2001).

### **Bridging different languages and cultures**

Although learning Sylheti language, I was by no means fluent, and so I required language support. I was advised I should not, as a lone western woman, travel around rural Sylhet as there had been various instances of kidnapping and hijacking of public transport by political extremists (Personal communication, Sylhet, 2010). Consequently, I recruited an apprentice. Max, a young Sylheti university student often accompanied me. He was introduced to me by a mutual friend and interested in the development agenda in rural Sylhet. He knew his way around the rural environs, so was an ideal companion. Most importantly, Max has fluency in English, as well as Bengali and Sylheti, so could aid me in explaining the project with villagers and Early Years providers, as well as supporting discussions around analysis and dissemination. Max was a very good assistant, reliable and focused, and coming from a large family, very at ease with the children and families. He made the task of data collection much easier, not just in terms of helping with the physical act of gathering and discussing diaries, but also as someone with whom I could talk through research ideas and my understandings of what I observed and was told.

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<sup>14</sup> I had on more than one occasion within village settings witnessed distaste at depictions of humans and animals, sometimes on everyday objects such as children’s clothes and toys. This, I was informed was due to a very strict interpretation of Islam, which forbids the depiction of human and animal forms as *haram*.

However, several issues must be highlighted. Max, although from a rural background, is from a very wealthy and educated landowning family, with much contact with relatives overseas and influence through the international media in his daily life. Consequently, I knew that what was unfamiliar to me about the lives of the children and villagers would maybe also be so for him, in so much as it would not have been *his* experience of childhood, although he would have observed much that was similar in village settings and households with whom his family were involved. Fortunately, Max's family lived quite far from my research sites and none of the villages where the research was conducted were personally known to Max and no-one knew him either. I believed this issue was potentially problematic in terms of confidentiality so this aspect worked well. Overall, Max's input was hugely helpful as he appeared more familiar to the children and families, by virtue of his ethnicity, which played a role in bridging between myself and the village children and families and I would certainly consider such strategy again if I were working in unfamiliar terrain, both socially and geographically. For much of our interaction, I had the sense that, while I was 'making the strange familiar' (Cockburn,2008, citing Novalis (1772-1801), Max was doing the opposite, in 'making the familiar strange', continually questioning and reinterpreting his previously taken for granted ideas on 'how things were', for rural children and their families. Overall he stated he found the entire process both insightful and thought-provoking.

### **Research Reflections**

The benefit of having an allocated 'research room', in fact a small empty former classroom, in Rowanlee school, was a luxury in that I could set up my activities, as I wanted them to be and introduce the children to the space as our 'diary room'. The children enjoyed time out from their classroom and peers and we were able to talk freely without worry of being overheard or disturbing classes. They often mentioned that the fact they had been chosen made them feel more 'special' in the process. Children were generally in groups of four or eight and worked individually on their diaries within an allotted time (half an hour) every day for six weeks. I had previously planned themes for the diaries as a way of introducing ideas but overall I wanted children to create and express themselves as they wished at the time. What

was problematic, was that partly due to the school environment and the intensive structuring of school time, children were not confident about being given freedom to express their own ideas and often, as a group, wanted me to provide themes for their daily diaries. This in many ways took us away from the main point of the activity and my aim to gather data from the children's perspectives on their everyday lives. We eventually compromised, as I felt the support of the school was tremendous, not just in terms of supplying space and materials, but also in terms of the accommodating the disruption to teaching schedules as I removed children from their classes. I sometimes supplied themes, for example 'my family' or 'the playground', but also had 'free days' when children did what they wanted in their diaries. Some children enjoyed this, but some were unsure of what to do and I was aware that children often colluded, or that more confident children could 'lead' with their ideas.

The diaries were very insightful to children's lives and equally illuminating were the discussions that arose through the process and the way that children wanted to develop themes and ideas. I was particularly interested in the children's social worlds and what they were doing when not in nursery and school and this was sufficiently depicted over the time of the project. What they were keen to talk about were the politics of school 'culture', of belonging, feeling excluded, often based on feelings of sameness or difference, of skin colour, language and even what football team they may support! Much of this was depicted within their diaries and extensively discussed. I had fortuitously asked permission to audio record the entire process and so was able at a later stage to reflect on what was discussed, alongside their pictures and words within their diaries. What I valued within this setting was the lack of input from staff unless I specifically requested help. They did not expect to be part of the process nor to see the children's diaries or my interpretations of them. The children had decided across this setting that they did not want school staff and associated adults to see their diaries and I respected this at all times. I did remind them that in the future they would regain ownership of the diaries and this was something they would need to consider, with regard to whom they may choose to share their depictions and words. I emphasised their ownership both of the process and the final product.

Calder early years and school setting were happy for me to visit and conduct participant observation and to interact with the children through play and discussion. However, they did not have sufficient numbers of children to conduct the diary-making project so my data is based on my perceptions substantiated by discussion and occasional drawings with the children. Often, within these settings, I felt that staff were uneasy with my presence or imagined that I would be critical within my analysis, rather than just an interested observer as often they seemed to feel the need to justify their practice. I ensured that I always made staff aware of my research agenda and intentions and was interested in the children as a means to providing examples for reflection and development, for practitioners and policymakers. On one occasion a teacher was hostile although agreed I could visit her class, commenting however that she could not understand why I would want to observe her one Bangladeshi child as, in her experience, 'they were extremely boring'<sup>15</sup>. On hearing such a deficit pronouncement on the Bangladeshi families, this strengthened my resolve in regard to my research agenda, as confirmed what I already suspected to be so in some settings. Children may appear quite passive but this does not mean they are 'boring, or not deserving of attention or inputs. Beyond the school settings I spent much time in visits to family homes, once I had gained trust with local families and children helped to facilitate the process, by virtue of knowing me from early years and education settings.

Punch (2002) states that the choice of setting in the research process must be carefully considered and I often left the setting wondering if there was 'a better way and place' to undertake the process of diary discussion with the children. On a positive note, children were comfortable, both physically and socially, within the Succeed setting, with each other and their teacher. While the individual children were discussing their depictions with us, there were other activities that the remaining children could engage in, so they did not lose interest or 'drift off'.

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<sup>15</sup> On enquiring as to what she meant here, she stated that the Bangladeshi children were very passive and as such contributed nothing of note to her class, which from *my perspective* appeared very negative and non-inclusive. As an experienced early childhood educator, in a previous professional role, I would view it as my responsibility to aid active participation from all my cohort of pupils; as such I would not be viewing any of them as 'boring' but full of potential but perhaps requiring greater support to enable confidence of expression/participation.



*Mohibur: 'Football', Rowanlee, Scotland, Diary-making Project, 2011*

This may have been in part due to the limited physical space afforded to this initiative, with children contained in one small room., as shown in the image below of a review of a child's diary, whilst other children and parents are crowded within the space.



*Talking about a diary, SUCCEED Program, Diary-making, Sylhet, 2011*

From my perspective, the room was hot with no ventilation, dark and crowded so was not ideal as space to review the drawings; background noise, of children and families, was distracting. However, on reflection, rooms were generally hot and dark due to lack of electricity and shutting out the sun. Also noise and sociability are the norm in Sylhet and people are more often crowded together. Issues of 'personal space' were not as defined as perhaps the rule in my society and this is an element on which I reflect; what were my norms in terms of space and room around myself were not shared here (Rigg, 2007; Gardner, 2012). There was no emphasis on health and safety regarding pupil numbers, space and staffing as I was accustomed to in the context of my early years' professional practice in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017). The presence of the teacher was an added impediment to open discussions and the logistics of the (confined) space largely determined our possibilities for interactions. The teacher, Dilara Begum, was keen to know what the children were telling us, what we were asking and our responses to the children's representations and hovered around anxiously at dissemination/discussion sessions, despite being asked not to and having other children with whom to engage at this time. She was a very conscientious worker and perhaps was overly worried about her role in the process, concerned that she may be perceived as not efficiently managing the children and their project.

What was a greater problem, was that despite the fact that children were central to this diary process, with Dilara Begum and the guardians informed that we were interested in the children's representations and productions, *from their perspectives*, Dilara and the guardians felt the need to comment on the children's diaries. Consequently, they would tell us they felt the drawings were 'not very good' or 'rubbish', that certain children were 'stupid' or 'lazy', which was undesirable and unsettling.

This may have been in part due to the fact that Bangladesh until recently, made no provision whatsoever for art or crafts within its public school system. Despite the richness of the local environment and the use of decorations in everyday life, people were unfamiliar with the idea of drawing as a form of self-expression, a means to

reflect, express and convey, rather seeing it as an ‘outcomes’ based activity. However, within Succeed programs, children did have access to drawing materials, but individual freedom of expression is not encouraged and much of what is regarded as ‘education’ is more akin to imitation or ‘learning by rote’.

Max and I worked hard to show interest and praise the children and the artworks, displayed in this thesis, are quite unique and outstanding in their detail. We were always keen to point out that the diaries were perfect, exactly what we had asked for, and that it was neither an academic exercise, with right or wrong answers, nor a competitive one. On reflection, it was a good decision to ask the children to carry out their diary activity outside of Succeed, as I have a suspicion that had they conducted it within the centre, we may have been witness to more or less identical representations on each day.

Max and I worked from the premise that the children were the ‘experts in their own lives’ and were always very positive about their contributions, praising them regularly, while also trying to ignore or minimize the effects of comments from the adults. Significantly, older children were often present during the process of dissemination but they were never, within earshot, critical or disparaging of the younger children’s diaries, but often quite interested and supportive of the younger one’s efforts, laughing and asking questions. At times, they seemed quite envious of the attention and interaction the younger children were experiencing, sometimes looking for reasons to ‘help’ or remain present.

### **Ethics – Researching Childhood in the Global South**

I focus my discussions here on four inter-related dimensions: firstly, the broad topic of researching childhood in the Global South; secondly, issues of power and asymmetrical relations between myself as researcher and my participants; thirdly, access and informed consent, and finally researcher status, insider and outsider perspectives.

Overall, the North-South balance of academic knowledge and interest is out of kilter

but additionally, there is a wider concern – the review of the literature has highlighted a channeling and domination of Northern knowledge to and over the South (cf Sultana, 2007; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Nagar & Ali, 2003; Tikly & Bond, 2013). Most conceptual and theoretical approaches and frameworks with their roots in the North are used to ‘frame and explain’ the South. Rigg (2007: 187) suggests there are reasons to think the South is different, as follows. Historically and politically the Global South is the postcolonial world; culturally and socially, it is the ‘non-Western’ world. Economically, it is the object for development and the target for investment. Logically, then, research in the South may be different from in the North. Yeung and Lim (2003) highlight the fact that rarely does the flow of knowledge run counter to this North to South stream nor is it greatly considered that the South may have something to teach the North.

In regard to childhood research, Farrell et al, (2015: 7) highlight,

reviews of widely cited and influential studies show a preponderance of work from the Global North, that is, from those countries or regions that are wealthier in education and in social and economic resources than those of the Global South. Barnett’s (2008) sample of 28 studies (by research strength), for example, features only three from outside the USA: the Mauritius Study (Raine et al., 2003), Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) (Melhuish et al., 2008), and Effective Preschool Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) (Melhuish et al., 2006).

Such reviews reveal differential research resources, research infrastructure, research personnel, and research networks across and within the Global North/Global South configuration. Moreover, much work on childhood, particularly in the Global South, is focused on distinct ‘problems’ and ‘vulnerabilities’ of childhood, often connected to issues of poverty and material insecurity (Behera et al, 2007; Rigg, 2007; Ninno et al, 2000, 2002; Conticini, 2005: 72; Nabi et al, 1999, 2000; Narayan et al, 2000). Corsaro (2009: 308-9) points out that very little is known about the nature and complexity of children’s lives and peer cultures in ‘non-western’ societies, which may be attributable to several factors.

Firstly, existing research has tended to focus on psychological development, rather than broader childhood features. Secondly, children in the Majority World often face

challenges due to political instability and poverty and these aspects may be deemed problematic to research. Children and young people enter the adult world of work at an early stage in their lives – childhood thus lived may be conceptualized differently. Additionally, many groups remain hidden or inaccessible within their daily lives of work (Basu, 1998; Punch, 2009). Furthermore, the dominance of English language internationally, and particularly in Northern academia, results in many ‘local’ studies and reports in settings in the Global South remaining unknown to an audience beyond their language group or society. Indeed, the opposite exists too; it would be useful for English-language studies to be made available to non-English academics and wider audiences, through translation, although timely and expensive. Moreover, McCoy et al (2012) state there currently exists a glaring inadequacy in the theories and methodologies developed in the North, crystallised in the mainstream social sciences, to provide the required instruments for the attainment of a sound understanding of the issues prevailing and problems confronting the countries of the South. Greater collaboration could contribute to the promotion of a better knowledge and understanding of the theories and methodological approaches developed in different regions of the South as alternatives to the dominant, Northern-based paradigms that have shaped the social sciences (Appardurai, 1996; Sanders et al, 2004).

### **Ensuring Consent**

I have already described and explained some aspects of making initial contact with children and families but this section looks more explicitly at aspects of ensuring understanding and consent to participate too.

Considering how to get the informed consent of children and adults I was working with was crucial for my research. Key challenges were around negotiating consent with young children. Langston et al. (2004) state that, in the UK context, access to children under five has increased in complexity, despite the fact that children are spending time in out of home settings on a more regular basis than in previous generations, for example, in playgroups and formal day-care environments. While in the past, research with children could be conducted with the sole consent of their

parents, currently childhood research frequently requires negotiating a range of gatekeepers in order that strict child protection guidelines are met, informed consent negotiated and confidentiality ensured. Crucially, I wanted the children to understand and agree to participate from their own perspectives.

After conducting a pilot project as part of my MSc in Childhood Studies (2006), I arranged to meet with various key figures-head-teachers, teachers, council representatives, parents and children, in order to present my research agenda and hope they would be interested. Over time, I was invited to attend a series of meetings and events in various settings with various interested parties. As part of this process, I issued individual sites with information sheets regarding my research for children, parents and professionals. Similar information was contained in all the information sheets but was adapted; worded and presented differently, depending on who was the target audience; whether for service providers and associated agencies, the parents and families or for the child participants. For example, for children, the information was presented on bright coloured paper, with simple large words and illustrations to accompany them too. My previous work in Early Years provision had provided me with insight into many of the challenges of communication with professionals, young children and their families, and the need for an adaptable approach, especially in settings where differences of religion, culture, language and literacy are profound. I was careful to try to address these factors within my information sheets in a sensitive fashion. Throughout the process of informing on the research and encouraging the engagement of children, families and service providers, I placed an emphasis on the voluntary and participatory nature of my research and the possibility of opting out at any stage. I stated my research plans and questions and the flexible approach I was using and a commitment to listening to the views of all who participated with the possibility of adapting the process as required to suit participants and the wider research aims.

For the benefit of children and families, my various personal identities seemed vital to mention. Thus, I included a photo of myself, some broad biographical information and mentioned I had two (now adult) sons. I hoped that by sharing these personal

details, I would appear less threatening, which in the view of Lofland and Lofland (1995: 41) can facilitate entry to or sustained engagement within research settings. I also included details of my previous early childhood work; for example, as well as my early years' practice, previously I have worked extensively as a homework helper with disadvantaged children and families, as well as a play worker for children in hospitals, and volunteered in two agencies supporting Minority Ethnic communities in Scotland. I believed these aspects to be relevant and show commitment to my chosen field of study. The fact I had an Enhanced Disclosure, following criminal record checks, perhaps enhanced my trustworthiness, as not harmful to individuals and families. I also included recent (relevant) academic experiences, for example, research I had conducted with undocumented Latino migrant families in California concerning family support and well-being. Fortunately, all the families with whom I had contact decided to participate. The children were keen, perhaps encouraged by their parents, but at times apprehensive due to unfamiliarity with me and what the research might involve, as follows from Rowanlee's child cohort (2010):

*I'm a bit worried if I don't like it...*

*Can I leave it if gets too tiring for me?*

*Can my brother come along to be with me?*

We discussed the finer details at length and the fact the whole project would be voluntary, adapted as required. Older siblings and parents conveyed some of children's concerns to me informally to aid understanding and we talked on two separate occasions about how best to 'tell their lives'. The young children's concerns vanished once they got to know me and engage with the research processes.

I believed my various identities enabled the research in terms of access and the chosen range of activities. My Early Years practitioner past, the fact I am parent, and also my academic research identity, were strengths; they enabled me to understand the research issues from three distinct viewpoints. Most importantly, I sought to

reflect on the research intentions and agenda from a child's viewpoint as I realised without their agreement to engage there would be no project. Furthermore, parental understanding was paramount as without parents' understanding and agreement, access would not prevail to engage with their children; I needed to put myself in both the children's and the adults' shoes. I was careful not to sell my research in terms of bringing about definite changes but rather framed it in terms of information sharing as I did not wish to make promises around 'outcomes' which may not prevail (Lewis et al, 2004). I also considered all that the research entailed from the perspective of service providers, in terms of potential for disruption or uncovering aspects which they did not wish to become public, as well as in my present role as researcher, my interactions within and between the various cohorts and settings. I was thus able to reflect in depth and build on issues pertaining to my research agenda, from these diverse perspectives and past experience too.

In Sylhet, I explained the research agenda to villagers with the help of a member of a predominant local family, with whom I had ties in Scotland. Jafar was a young adult man, who for the most part lived and studied in Sylhet city and was learning English, with a view to migrating overseas. He had made contact with me by email before my visit to Sylhet, on the instructions of kin already residing in Rowanlee neighbourhood. Jafar's father had died, and although young, he assumed household head of his immediate family, comprising of his mother and five younger siblings. Jafar's paternal grandmother and uncles lived in the *bari* (homestead) where we initially resided. I considered the possible effect of Jafar's position within his family, in terms of gender, education and slightly more affluent status, on wider family decisions to give me access and permission to research with their children and wider families. However, his relatively prestigious status (in the city) was offset by the fact he was quite young (26 years old) so older kin in the village had more authority than him and he, although autonomous in the city, deferred to his uncles and Dadu within the extended *bari*. Thus he played the role of introducer, translator and discussant with his wider kin, initially only the men, who in time discussed aspects with their wives and children. Many villagers did not really understand the point of what I hoped to do. The reasons for this will become more apparent in the following

chapters, nor were they particularly interested, but they agreed to let me observe and interact with them and crucially with their children. Gaining signed consent was deemed pointless as few of the families were literate nor understood the concept nor worth of academic research. I did however at a later stage gain a kind of informed consent from the young children in terms of specific participation and prolonged engagement with the research. Within the diary-project phase I also gained consent from children and families through the SUCEED Program as part of the initial talking through the project element. I remained aware however throughout my research, that issues of power would be implicated, and even proceeding with awareness and caution, may play a role, as follows.

### **Power in Childhood Research**

Currently, Northern-trained scholars who live in the affluent Northern world conduct the predominance of Southern-focused research. Where collaboration does exist, it overwhelmingly is created in partnerships, where the Northern-based partners enjoy greater advantage; they have more authority as well as funding. Thus the power is concentrated in the North and exercised in the South, so may be conceived of as North to South partnerships. What would be more advantageous would be to incorporate indigenous knowledge and intellect and perhaps endeavor to create South to North partnerships but to enable this, the imbalance in power between researchers in rich and poor countries must be bridged. McCoy et al (2012), in relation to Global Health, state that academic and non-government institutions in more developed countries benefit disproportionately from the meager research funds that are focused on poor health in developing countries. This imbalance is in a context where academic and research institutions in developing countries are struggling to gain their own funding and find it difficult to retain good staff. Additionally, there is often a tension between the value given to research by Southern researchers and Northern researchers, which was highlighted in this project in the attentiveness of Sylhet-based NGOs, wishing for my input in, perhaps from their perspectives, adding credibility and validation to their endeavours. This tension is further illustrated in the focus on publication (Northern priority) versus capacity building (Southern priority); the desired outcome of research may be different between partners. Then, it is often not

clear how to measure the value of research – how can the impact of research be evaluated when partners see the intended outcome or goal in different ways? Managing this tension and considering how to evaluate research is central to effective partnerships and the strengthening of Southern scholarship. This aspect is beyond the scope of wider discussion here, but highlighted as a considerable ongoing concern to myself, as a white Northern scholar in Southern setting.

More generally, I have considered the fact that because of geographical location, lack of infrastructure and material poverty, many children and families in rural Sylhet had no knowledge of the concept of research and even more fundamentally, may never have encountered and interacted with white people before. Such aspects are echoed in Punch's (2002) research in rural Bolivia, with my experiences in many ways similar to hers. The children in rural Sylhet, on first encounter with us, our fair skin and hair, our green eyes, were either fascinated or frightened, assuming Isaac and myself to be angels, monsters or some kind of *Jinn*, a spirit in the Muslim community's belief systems (Mullick et al, 2012; Kahalifa et al, 2011), who may bring harm to them. Muslims believe in the existence of three separate, but parallel, worlds including that of mankind, Angels and Jinn:

*And indeed, we created man from dried clay of altered mud and the Jinn we created aforetime from the smokeless flame of fire. (Qur'an)*

(Kahalifa et al, 2011)

Bearing such facts in mind, research needs to be, both well-deliberated and considerate, slow and attentive, to the possible apprehensions and tensions within, many of which cannot be anticipated nor imagined from the curious outsider perspective, although the apprehensions perhaps mirrored those concerns pertaining to the unfamiliar for myself and my son, from the 'other side'. The fact we came recommended and lived with kin of much-revered relatives in the North certainly helped us to become accepted but we were mindful of existing differences, of power and choice too. Research methods, initially immersive through hanging out, engaging in play and village sojourns, household helping tasks and meal-times, followed by more focused participant observation helped to ease the uncertainties and gain trust.

Taking all the above into account and after a thorough review of the (predominantly Northern funded/domiciled) academic literature, I proceed with caution and have sought to include the views ‘from the periphery’ rather than fixating on specific issues. Existing research on children in the Global South tends to be more applied and focuses on documenting their poor living conditions rather than the day-to-day aspects of childhood(s). While such aspects may be a feature of the lives of many rural children and families in Bangladesh, and more widely, it was not the aim to explore such themes, as the children did not depict such issues in their interactions with me. There are excellent examples, which illuminate the day-to-day of childhood(s) (Nsamenang, 2008; Behera et 2007; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Goncu, 1999; Viruru, 2001; Blanchet, 2001) and these examples guided the research in terms of many dimensions, including issues of power.

Within what follows and being mindful of children’s participation and the UNCRC, I depict what the children chose to reveal of their day-to-day lives rather than, as researcher, fixing the agenda with a specific focus. In regard to the materials I gathered another issue relating to power is revealed. In designing conceptual and theoretical frameworks for visual research, it is useful to consider the idea of ‘visual rights’ to bring together questions of meaning-making, truth and change. Through the process of drawing, aspects of the children’s lives and thoughts, feelings and desires were made visible to scrutiny by adults, peers and perhaps the wider public (children’s teachers and supervisors/examiners for example), which raises questions about ownership and confidentiality. Through sharing of collective or individual stories ‘voice’ may be given to participants. Thus researchers ‘convert private problems into public issues’ (Richardson, 1990: 28). Also, if for example play, as a key component of children’s culture is made visible, it is necessary to consider the effect of making the hidden, intimate aspects of childhood valid in a research sense, while still allowing them to continue, untrammelled by adult’s propensity to try to control, to ‘need to know’ all aspects of children’s lives.

### **Reflexivity and Insider versus Outsider status**

As a former early childhood practitioner, a researcher and social anthropologist,

reflexivity is part of my professional training(s). I tried to pay attention to ‘the complex, diverse and subtle negotiations that take place within research encounters’ (Bondi, 2013). Reflexivity acknowledges that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations between researchers and research participants (Bondi, nd.: 4) although critiques of the notion of ‘reflexivity’ do exist, particularly in terms of recentering the researcher rather than the researched (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998: 6,7; Stronach & MacLure, 1997). Relevant here, although dated, Ruby (1980: 154) emphasised,

the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it... For us, being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice that requires researchers to ‘stop being "shamans" of objectivity’.

Thus, I have been required to consider the constructed nature of the research process (Mruck & Breuer, 2003: npn); ‘who I am in relation to the people with whom (or issue with which) I wish to engage’ as well as the wider motivations for the research. I acknowledge, in the first instance the research may be viewed of greatest benefit to myself, in terms of successfully gaining my Doctoral degree, although I also wished to inform wider society and contribute to a wider social justice and inclusion agenda, through my evidence, in the hope of moving away from existing deficit models of diverse families and childhoods. I also seek to highlight the rich possibilities which are presented in researching with children, and to demonstrate how capable they are of sharing their narratives.

It is important within the research process for researchers to be as open about themselves, their identity, their motivations and agenda as possible, to gain trust and credibility. After all, knowledge produced through social research is imbued with aspects of the researcher’s biography: why we selected what we chose to research, all influenced by our experiences, past and present, education and academic leanings, politics, gender and wider identity. I wanted the children to share with me aspects of their lives, so I regarded it as important that I shared some aspects of mine.

In the Sylhet phase of my research, I took a world atlas and maps of Scotland to show the children where my land is in relation to theirs as well as photographs of my city, my house and family and some of the children with whom I was engaging in Scotland and their schools. I had talked this through with children and families in Scotland and obtained their permission to do so. I regarded it as necessary that I conveyed as much as I could about the setting in which I lived and the Sylheti-heritage children with whom I was conducting my research, so the children could understand more about my work. I did similar with the children in Scotland and showed some photos of myself and Isaac within the Sylhet villages and Succeed program, with permission from depicted children and adults. Throughout the process of my research, my intention and my commitment to social justice has been to use this knowledge as a means to show a perspective, a truth, which may not fit with a mainstream (or possibly adult) viewpoint on 'how things are', to thus assume the role of advocate on the children (and their family's) behalf through using their voices to try to influence policy and practice.

However, I also considered whether if people or their life-worlds are 'hidden', perhaps they should have the choice to keep it so and not have their lives documented by people like me. Although I shared many attributes with some of my research participants, in terms of gender, motherhood for example, I considered myself an 'outsider' at the beginning of this research in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, education and the fact I was an adult, although had previously experienced childhood. Insider status may assume that the researcher has similar language and culture, but this concordance does not in itself guarantee academic rigour and further measures must be considered and implemented for stringency. Adult participants in both settings commented on the fact I was an 'outsider' as something positive. This was largely based on aspects of kinship and 'telling the researcher that which you may not wish or be wise to tell' within your wider family and community, sharing emotions and feelings which may normally require to remain hidden. Some academics suggested that outsider status can bring a more objective viewpoint too, but this is a contested point. Insiders within a research agenda have distinct advantages in terms of language and religious/cultural competency and may thus

more immediately gain a degree of trust and cooperation. However, bearing in mind the former remarks on outsider-status, insiders may struggle to gather sensitive data, by mere fact of being ‘insiders’, pertaining to varying degrees of research ‘depth’ and trust, of wider social relations between researcher and participant and aspects of self-interest too (Serrant-Green, 2002; Chawla-Duggan, 2007; Dwyer et al, 2009).

Overall, like Attia & Edge (2017: 33), throughout my research data gathering and wider interactions, I heeded ‘the importance of the researcher consciously stepping *back* from action in order to theorise what is taking place, and also stepping *up* to be an active part of that contextualised action.’ In this way, I could consider and adapt as required, in a mindful and deliberate fashion, whilst taking account of the various implications of the social relations within the work and the need to treat participants and their communities with care and respect.

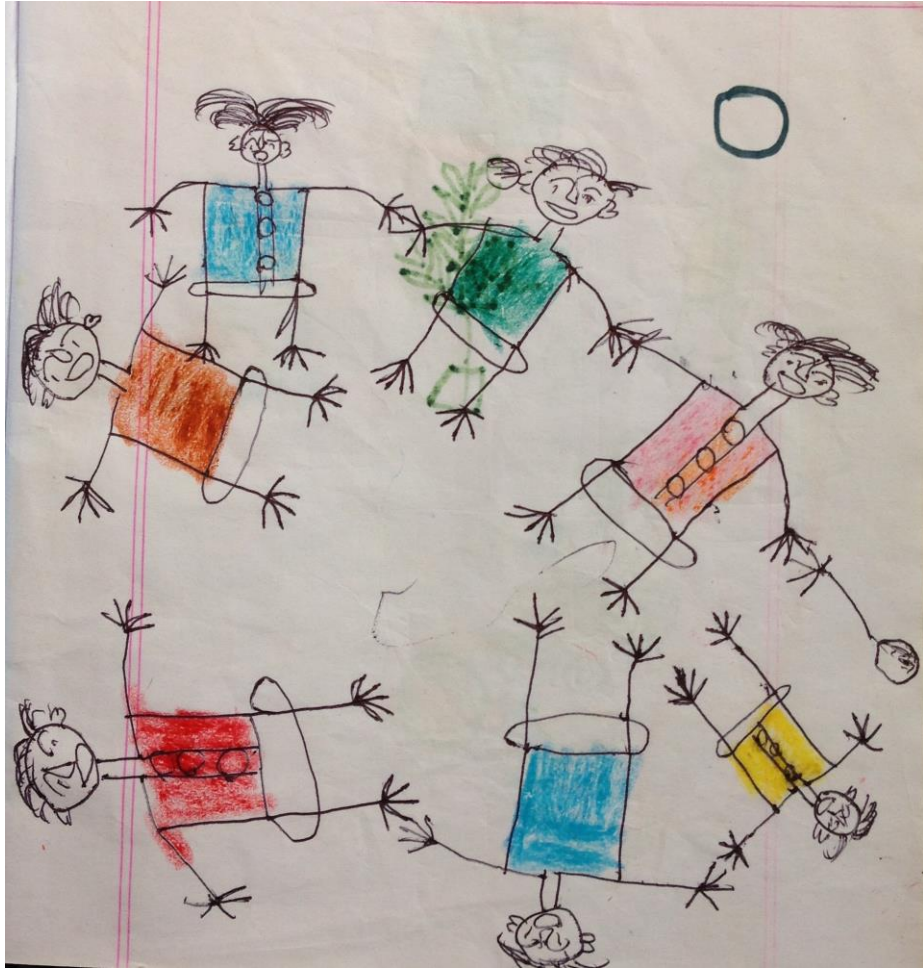
## **Conclusion**

What this reflection on research methods and associated issues highlights for me is the non-linear process of conducting research. Working with people in an ethical fashion, the agenda will develop considerably from the researcher’s original intentions. From the outset, my research agenda was complex and challenging, based on my decision to situate my work transnationally, to work with children and to work across the bounds of language, cultural and religious difference. However, the biggest challenge that I faced within this process was gaining access to participants and I assume that this is a factor in all research although particularly so in researching ‘hidden’ communities. I contend that this is something that is under-acknowledged within the research literature although there are numerous discussions on methods to collect data.

In my experience, access also seems very much taken for granted in discussion with colleagues regarding their research design. Research methods textbooks often describe a process which appears to be linear, with all the individual components neatly defined. Certainly in my engagement with new researchers when asked to

identify the problems they may encounter, access is rarely highlighted as challenging, but rather a 'taken-for granted'. This may be so in research which is supported through formal channels, through organisations and existing structures, but as more of the research fraternity seeks to engage with new ideas and indeed communities, the challenges of access will become more evident.

On reflection of my fieldwork process, what is clear in hindsight, is that often the process is far from clear and much data appears irrelevant until a later stage, perhaps due to the fact that, by necessity, research with people cannot be logical and linear. Patience and tenacity is required and, with further exploration and analysis, can lead to better understanding and eventually enlighten the researcher to emerging themes and to asking the key questions. However, Katz (2002: 85) points out that in the research process the pressure to remain engaged may obscure the realisation that what is being witnessed and documented is particularly useful or indeed that given observations are especially important. This may continue to be so during the write up of the fieldwork and it may only be when one is attempting to construct a text that certain aspects of the data become more compelling and salient, as shown in what follows in Chapters 4 to 7.



Asif: *Play*, Child-diary, rural Sylhet, 2010

## Chapter 4 – Domains of Childhood

### Introduction

My research shows that, although settled in Scotland, the Sylheti heritage childhoods continue to be informed and influenced by experience *prior* to parents' migration, particularly regarding the knowledge and practices which were the mothers' childhood and family realities in rural Sylhet. Both home and land, or neighbourhood in the Scottish setting, are the dominant localities in the children's early lives. These themes of 'domains' emerged from the children's prior discussions and diaries. In this chapter, I proceed by discussing my findings thematically. These differences are in themselves of interest but more relevant in terms of how they inform the migrant lives in Scotland.

Localities are an integral part of the experience of childhood regardless of setting, whether in the Northern or Southern world, urban or rural; family dynamics are intrinsically interwoven, beyond the bounds of the home, within the fabric of their local neighbourhood (Kasinitz et al, 2008: 116; McKendrick in Qvortup et al, 2009). Furthermore, in relation to migration and locales, Rigg (2007: 135) points out that the relationship between conditions in sending communities, patterns of migration and impacts of migration on 'sending communities' and those 'left behind' is complex. Just as migrant identities are changed through the experience of relocation, so too are sending contexts more generally. Equally, 'receiving communities' are transformed through waves of migration, with impacts for both the longer settled 'community' and for those who migrate, with both continuity and change observable in both locales. In the past, scholarship has tended to focus too exclusively on the migration process and 'final destination' rather than wider context(s) and effect(s) although there are notable exceptions, (cf. Crozier, 2006; Gardner, 2002, 2012; Garbin, 2005, 2008; Hopkins, 2007b, 2008) in regard to Bangladesh and Diasporic populations and more widely in the writing of Punch (2001, 2007) on Bolivia and Borjas (2013) on Mexico-U.S. migration. Oakes and Schien use the term 'translocality' in relation to their research in China on mobilities and localities

...translocality does not only mean people. It is crucially constituted as well by the circulation of capital, ideas and images, goods and styles, services, diseases...Translocality is also fashioned out of the rise of instantaneous modes of communication...and out of the profusion of media forms...that transmit images of other places.

(Oakes & Schien, 2006: 1)

This aspect of translocality defined by Brickell and Datta (2011: 4) as ‘simultaneous situatedness across different locales’ (see also Appadurai, 1995: 204-225; Cadier, 2013; Vertovec, 2001: 1) is relevant with regard to this study. What I viewed throughout, in both locales, was that children and families were informed not merely by ‘the local’ but also by ‘the global’ in terms of their social relationships with kin and all the variations in practices and beliefs therein; thus never static as if suspended in time, but part of the dynamic ebb and flow of daily existence, informed by life both near and far.

### **Home and Neighbourhood**

Here I highlight continuities and change across geographical locations, comparing home, living arrangements and wider neighbourhood in rural Sylhet in urban Scotland. I emphasise that rural life in Sylhet continues to resonate in the minds and practices of the mothers, and by association their children, now residing in urban Scotland.

In Sylhet, children are largely visible and relatively free in the wider environs of their villages. ‘Home’ (*bari*) is a broad concept, as site of kin, more important than ‘house’ (*ghor*) in the rural settings, so may encompass several dwellings as sites for day-to-day living. This fact may be attributed to kinship relations and patterns of local settlement as will be explored within the substantive chapters. Children experience familiarity to their accessible environment and many connections to wider society, people and places, toing and froing between homes, connected socially through kin associations, although over time this may diminish for girls due to gender norms. Aspects of ‘neighbourhood’ and nature play a key role in village childhoods, as sites of learning, sociability and responsibility over time, through immersion and example (Chapter 5) and of play and work responsibilities too

(Chapter 6). Danger is largely conceived of as existing in social relations and may be attributed to aspects of moral behavior; there is an important gender dimension to this. Danger is also located within the physical environment, an aspect which has recently received increased attention in the rural villages (Ball & Wahedi, 2010: 369).

In early childhood, 'home' in Scotland is largely conceived of as 'house' the setting of most childhood activity and day-to-day living. 'Home' also sometimes encompasses the homes of kin in proximity and also the *Desh*, familiar to some children from family visits, but not to others as a physical place, but familiar in the imaginations of all, from family discussions and plans (Chapter 5). 'Neighbourhood' and the local external environment are less familiar and less accessible due to more isolating factors, until children are immersed in nursery and school (Chapter 6). For many children and families, wider neighbourhood is experienced only fleetingly between more private spaces, perceived for many as a site triggering apprehension, uncertainty and fear, of unknown people and unfamiliar landscapes, with all the dangers that may be imagined or can exist externally, beyond the safety of their family homes.

There are clear implications based on geographical location but also on parental experience and past memory too. Parenting may appear more concentrated and 'contained' in the Scottish settings – due to carers' increased proximity and interaction with children; requirements for more entertainment and amusement for children may prevail (Chapter 6), accompanied by the potential for greater physical and social isolation, and increased levels of adult surveillance of childhood activities. Parenting or caring is more shared and socially dispersed within the rural locales and with less surveillance of children overall, due to the free-ranging nature of childhood. Correspondingly, the urban children may experience (particularly when viewed through the lens of Sylhet) less access to wider childhood environments and lack of potential for childhood connections (Chapter 5) beyond their ethnic community, little connection to nature and free outdoor play.

Conversely what may be seen is that the rural children may experience a richness in nature and a flourishing resilience within their wider physical spaces, with all the learning opportunities and social dimensions which may exist therein, not however without challenges.

In the first section I focus on the former concept, 'home', and within the second section, the focus shifts to that of the latter concept of 'neighbourhood', in the two distinct settings. The two concepts of home and land/neighbourhood are in reality inseparable and intertwined. However, distinctions become apparent with the two concepts more physically and theoretically the same in the rural setting; children did not make such a distinction between home and neighbourhood whereas in the urban locales these two concepts and indeed places are conceived of more separately. First I review the village locales, previous homes to the migrant mothers in their childhoods. Then the focus shifts to Scotland, the Global North, residence for the migrant heritage children.

### **Home: Rural Sylhet**

*I live in a very nice house beside the pond. My mother and father and baby brother, and sometimes my uncle, live with me. We have a very special cooker where my mother makes food and a yard outside where we play. There are trees of papaya, which we pick and eat, and a stream behind where there are fish we can catch. We have everything here you see? [Points to picture]. And down the road is my big [oldest] uncle's bari - he grows rice, has a mill, and we take some of that; I sometimes collect it with my father but sometimes my big uncle brings to us on his motorcycle.*

Rahim, ♂, 5 years, Field-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011



*Rahim: my house, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011*

Rahim's depiction of his home was quite typical within the rural children's illustrations and wider discussions, with his home environment envisioned as encompassing elements of the world around it, emphasizing the part that wider neighbourhood and nature plays in children's conceptualisations of 'home' and their daily lives, as well as the social relationships between family members who are a key component in the day-to-day experiences of the children (Chapters 5 and 6). Strikingly, his depiction, told more about the wider environment and kin than his house *per se* and this was standard within the way that the children chose to represent 'home' in Sylhet.

In Sylhet, children portrayed several versions of family composition and household dwelling, which are relevant to their wider daily activities, as follows.

*Amar Bari*<sup>16</sup>[my house]

*In this picture you can see my house, beside the bean bushes and there, points], where Dadu [paternal grandmother] lives with my big uncle and his family. Over there is where my middle uncle and his children live and there is the house of my little uncle who does not sleep there because he is in London.*

Asif, ♂, Child-Diaries, Rajbari, Sylhet, 2011

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<sup>16</sup> In my experience of rural Sylhet, *Bari* was used as the generic term for home, as in the frequently asked (particularly of me as researcher) question '*tumar bari, qunano*'? This question was also often posed to Bangladeshi migrants in the context of Scotland and referred to their natal home in *the Desh*, not their Scottish abode.

If a family or lineage has sufficient wealth, they may have an extensive area of land, their '*bari*', as Asif shows, which will be shared by members of a lineage, the extended family, which will comprise of senior family members, adult sons and their wives and children as is the norm in virilocal societies, generally living in small nuclear units within the land area, so having their own hearths, which are symbolic of conjugal relationships (Khondker, in Rai & Reeves, 2009: 137). Families share a communal central courtyard (*uthan*), which acts as an extension of the indoor living areas of the huts, which are characteristically inadequate. Elderly kin, particularly where widowed or lacking a spouse usually resided with their eldest son's family, as Asif mentions in regard to his Dadu above, although it was also common to see arrangements where elderly family members circulated between households and resided with different sons at different times as wider conditions dictated. A typical *bari* may not, however, contain all the adult males within a family as some may be overseas for work or may have relocated to a different rural or urban area. This may be for strategic economic and livelihood reasons as mentioned, due to second or subsequent marriages (Hossain, 2003) or due to tensions and arguments within extended families often over land and resources (Gardner, 2009, 2010; Aziz & Maloney, 1986). There is generally a boundary at the perimeter of the *bari*, often a high wall and ornate metal gates, where afforded, or perhaps it may be simply delineated by trees or a ditch, and children, especially girls, and also women, will usually remain within the bounds of this, transgressing the boundary at their peril (Islam, 1991; Sinha, 1989a). Such a boundary provides the necessary 'curtain on the wider world' as prescribed within such a purdah society (Jeffery, 1979; Vreede-de Stuers, 1968) so playing a moral 'policing' role too. Additionally, it symbolizes class status to the wider village, as well as discouraging less desirable or welcome societal members from entering the *bari* or house.



*Mina: 'ghor' and 'murgh', Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011*

*Here is my house [ghor], where I live with my Mum, which is very small but has a lovely kitchen and verandah and see, we even have chickens [murgh] like on the roof, and a goat and water behind it. I help my mum.*

Mina, ♀, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Where a family has less wealth and land, or has separated from a larger family unit, they may occupy a single dwelling, a 'ghor' as depicted by Mina, perhaps situated centrally in a village or on more marginal or publicly accessible land by a main footpath or roadway, which may still be referred to by many people as their 'bari'. This dwelling may also contain several generations of family members and generally comprise of two to three rooms maximum, or less. If the family is fortunate, they may have a verandah and a small patch of land to the side or rear (*kanta*), on which to grow vegetables and keep chickens and goats but often houses are built very close together due to land and housing shortages (Gardner, 2008; Blanchet, 1996, 2001; Muktadir & Hassan, (N.D.) Such households may also share, own or lease land some distance from their dwelling, which was sometimes portrayed within the diaries, on which they may cultivate rice or other crops, or graze livestock.

*I live in here with my family, my dad and mum, brothers and baby sister and sometimes more people who live in London. We stay downstairs but sometimes live in that little house beside (points to a small overshadowed brick, bamboo and tin-roofed house close by). They (his Londoni kin) have upstairs but we can go on the roof, which is as big as the trees. We have extra current (electricity generator) for when the power is off and a bathroom.*

Mohammed, ♂, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Like Mohammed above, several families within the village lived in larger ‘Londoni’ dwellings (*pucca* houses), within the village, often on the periphery of the densely populated areas, surrounded by land or sometimes standing incongruously and looming amidst smaller village homes. Such houses tended to be massive and ostentatious by local standards and built in a former colonial style, of masonry, often painted in bright or pastel colours. They are symbols of status and prestige for their owners and wider kin too. Villages with a preponderance of such dwellings are generally more affluent, socially stratified and well-connected to the Global North. Often smaller family homes are demolished, then replaced by larger dwellings, with families related by kinship sometimes resettled in rooms within the new houses as Mohammed alludes to, resident but insecure, sometimes requiring to relocate back to their previous dwelling (if still standing), or some peripheral house, as kin affairs and visits may dictate. Rural families were often content to bargain their small homestead and the land it occupied for the building of such homes, as it may be a source of wealth exchange for them and also they may benefit from the prestige of living within the *Londoni Bari*.

Such families were usually temporarily occupying the homes of wealthier kin, migrated ‘Londonis’ who lived overseas, who may only return to their natal village every few years (Garbin, 2005, 2009; Gardner, 2008). Although such houses were usually large, in my experience the tenants occupied just a small part of the house, one or two rooms on the ground floor, similar in size to their previous dwellings, and generally could be viewed as undertaking care-taking duties. This housing could provide some benefits and modern-conveniences such as in-house running water and western-style bathrooms, still not the norm for most villagers, but could be an insecure arrangement in the longer term. The remainder of the interior could remain largely unoccupied, gathering dust for years at a time, until overseas kin could make (afford) a visit ‘home’ to the *Desh*. Often such houses, although spacious and modern, were devoid of much outside land as this had been subsumed and incorporated in the desire for larger houses. Displaced local kin, whose homes were demolished in this building project however, were just as frequently relegated to more marginal lands on the periphery of the *bari* in very rudimentary structures, as

was the case for Mina's family and also periodically for Mohammed and his close family. Mayson and Charlton, (2015), from their research in South Africa, posit the idea that there is often an adverse relationship between accommodation and livelihoods; people with the least secure livelihoods, who may face economic uncertainty, are often subject to the greatest housing insecurity too (cf. Chambers, 1995); this was observable within the rural villages and in children's depictions and will also prove to be the case when we look at the data from Scotland in part B of this chapter.

Children highlighted many of the above housing typologies within our walks and portrayed these dwelling types within their diaries. A striking feature of the children's depictions on 'home' was that they were largely represented from the outside, as structures, and few had any depictions of inside. The children whose families had the most personal or communal wealth, who lived within the bounds of an extended *bari*, were more contained and restricted within the land of their homestead, whereas children who did not have a large enclosed homestead with a distinct boundary were more free-ranging throughout the village domain. Shami's depiction, (Chapter 2), was quite typical of a child whose family lived in a joint family set-up within an enclosed area, whereas other children's wider depictions were more broad-ranging in terms of spatial dimensions and activities as Jilad shows below.

*Here is where I stay with my family, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and Dadu (paternal grandmother). Here is where I went the other day. See, there's the house and further along, the house of my uncle and over there is the pond where we go fishing and there is my father's vegetable plot.*

Jilad, ♂, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011.

Jilad, like Minu, lived in a small house on the main thoroughfare of Rajbari, without adjacent land portrayed, and his domain extended far and wide beyond the boundaries of his home and street and although young, he appeared to have immense freedom within his village. This may be attributed to the fact that he was one of seven children, with three younger siblings, a father who cultivated for the local bazaar, on land beyond the village boundary, and a mother who seemed permanently

to be occupied with domestic duties and her 7-week old baby. I walked the route Jilad had described in his drawing and it took us to a distance about 17 minutes walk from his home. Here within the trees, on the periphery of the village, he and his friends were out of view of adults or elders and could amuse themselves as they pleased. Strikingly, girls' portrayals of home were less 'far-ranging', in terms of accessible land as Minu's description above illustrates, often more focused on or around the domestic sphere, and incorporating aspects related to domestic tasks and artefacts. This theme of gender difference will recur throughout the substantive chapters and is relevant in both the rural and urban settings.

The examples of Shami, Jilad and Minu illustrate a phenomenon, which was evident within many of the children's descriptions of their daily lives and becomes more significant in Part B when we examine the lives of the Sylheti-heritage children in Scotland. Aspects of social class are implicated here; in rural Sylhet, as families seemed to prosper, the physical domains of childhood activities seemed to shrink. This can be attributed to two main factors; firstly, patterns of land acquisition and settlement; where there is available enclosed land this is available for children to play within. Secondly, there is greater seclusion of women (*pardah*) in more affluent families, within the bounds of the *bari*. Many people misguidedly attribute *pardah* exclusively to Muslim beliefs and practices, 'something that Muslims do', but this practice is established more widely in some geographical areas, more a symbol of socio-economic status and prestige, predating Islam (Abraham, 1998; Jeffery, 1978; Hoodfar, 1994; Lazreg, 1988; Badawi, 1997). Affluent families are able to maintain women and girls in this fashion as they have no need to transverse their family thresholds for extraneous activities such as work (Jeffery, 1979; Chowdury, 1993).

Families may prosper and find support by remaining in extended family set-ups, with sharing of both land, resources and construction of dwellings, resulting in clear delineation of land that is 'theirs' and land that is 'outside'. Crucially, in regard to this research, there are kin who are readily available for both companionship and help as needed. Thus, not only is there a boundary around the physical area of settlement but also in a social sense, with family life, particularly that of women and

children, generally lived within the walls of the *bari*, so corralling the children and their childhood domains, whilst also ensuring that strict rules of *pardah* are maintained for women and older girls (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000; Jeffery, 1979; Papanek, 1973). I return to this theme of gendered divisions in the next section and also in Chapter 5.

This physical and social seclusion contrasts with the lives of those who lived in a more nucleated fashion, who generally did not have much bounded land around their homes; where they did, it was usually under cultivation for subsistence crops and small livestock usage, so not readily available for children to occupy and play within, although indeed children would congregate and colonise anywhere out-of-doors. Many of these smaller homes were rented rather than owned by the occupants. Children whose families were less prosperous, like Jilad, had greater autonomy regarding their environment and physical freedom than children in the wealthier, extended, households. Additionally, the women of such less-affluent families were more likely to be evident within the public domain in the course of living their day-to-day in maintaining livelihoods; where such women were not occupied within their homes on household tasks and childrearing, they were often employed elsewhere, within the homes of wealthier families, so did not generally have time to devote to supervise their children where they may be or what they were doing. Other adults and older children would take partial responsibility for this aspect as evidenced within this thesis (Rozario, 2002; Chowdury, 1993).

Much has been written about social class in the context of South Asia (Sultana et al, 2009; Jeffery, 1979, 1989; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996; Blanchet, 1996, 2001; Abdullah & Zeidenstein, 1982: 73). The above example may be evidence of one aspect of the class divide. As families gain wealth and associated power, women become removed from the public realm as they are able to keep *pardah*, whereas women in families who remain in relative poverty are more visible and thus, their children also. This factor is relevant in the rural domains and also in the lives of the Sylhet-heritage

children in the context of Scotland as shall be discussed below and in subsequent chapters.

When considering ‘home’, children provided rich examples of their daily activities and those of kin, related to these spaces. Home appeared related to people and activity inherent within and around in their imaginations and daily realities too.

*Today my Father brought the rice from my uncle’s house and my Mum and aunties are sorting it on the front verandah. That is called a dheki, the wooden thing they use (points to object within her drawing, used for husking the rice). We (Rubina and small siblings) played around the back and in the stream so you can’t see us in this picture.....*

Rubina, ♀, 5-6 years, Child-Diary, Sylhet, 2011.

*A man is mending the wall of my house today but we played at Uncle’s yard, which is just at the side, see.*

Fahmid, ♂, 6 years, Child-Diary, Sylhet, 2011.

‘Home’, then, is very much depicted by the children as a site of domestic and wider activity, adult-centred, rather than a zone for child activity as such, although the child activity may be proximal, situated around ‘home’ for the children; where there is more land, within an extended *bari* space was plentiful, but less so around the smaller dwellings, with children ranging more widely. Children may be more housebound during the rainy season but this was not illustrated as it was not during the fieldwork phase. It was noteworthy that activity around and inside the home was depicted as being very gendered, with domestic tasks shown as being the domain of the women and girls, as Rubina illustrates above, and other ‘outside’ publicly-situated tasks, the domain of men and boys, as Fahmid shows above. This does not mean that women do not undertake outside and heavier manual duties, just that amongst the families within this research, the women and girls were not engaging thus. I did witness many less-advantaged females engaged in rough and arduous outdoor duties, where they required day-labourers’ wages or did not have sufficient support from men and older boys (Siddiqui, 2008; Choudhury, 1993).

Strikingly, girls’ drawings and discussions alluded to domestic activity in a way that was absent in the boys’ diaries, often containing drawings of domestic artefacts and cooking utensils, indicative of gender norms, aspects which would become more

familiar and important over time in the lives of the girls, as they matured and became protected within the closed aspects of family life within their homes, those of kin or affines. Although children may be playing around the home environment, from my wider fieldwork observations and from the children's illustrations, there appeared to be very little intentioned adult interactions or surveillance, with children's activities running very much in parallel to the adult preoccupations (Chapter 6).

The children's depictions made the role of 'nature' very apparent in their lives. This aspect will be further discussed in Part B of this chapter but is relevant to mention here as 'home' is clearly regarded as something broader, more complex, different from 'house' and how it is largely constructed in Global Northern thoughts, and experiences, particularly in urban settings. It may be merely that the material elements of home are less emphasised in Sylhet, and the social aspects more to the fore (Chapter 5). During the field-work, I visited many homes and although different in structure most were similar within, in terms of furnishing, although some were more spacious than others, with slightly more ornate furnishings, especially within the *Londoni* houses. For many families, space was scant within the village homes, with most rooms being dual purpose as living and sleeping spaces. In the context of village life, there was an assumption and generally the possibility of life extending beyond the boundary of the front door, to verandahs, yards and wider neighbourhoods too, with much household activity and childhood pastimes occurring outdoors. This contrasts sharply with in urban Scotland. Most homes contained shelves or a display cabinet of some kind, within which there were items, which symbolised the family's successes and aspirations, their social connections, such as photographs and trophies, gifts from guests and items concerned with their Muslim faith, for example photos of Mecca, their Holy shrine.

#### 'Home is where I sleep'

For the rural children, 'home' is where kin reside, rather than just the dwelling place of immediate family. Home, thus, is conceived of more broadly than physical structure or 'house' and seemed to pertain to social dimensions, as Gardner and Mand (2012) also highlight in their work with Sylheti-heritage youth in Tower

Hamlets and a *Londoni* village in Sylhet. This conceptualisation encompassed a certain flexibility, as Shafa illustrates below within the expression ‘where I sleep’ but may be elsewhere, away from the natal home, her permanent close family residence.

*Here, I am with my sister and my cousins. Sometimes, we are here to sleep [points to house area in drawing – contained private area], sometimes there [points to outside immediate household boundary] and I sleep wherever my family are, my house, auntie’s house.....*

Shafa ♀, 4 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Shafa refers here to two distinct social spaces, firstly the more secluded space inside the *Bari* and secondly, the wider land of the *para*, where kin reside, albeit in less seclusion. I ask Shafa what she means by sleeping ‘wherever her family are’ and she states that could be with her natal family or elsewhere with family, ‘aunties’. In this way the concept of ‘home’ is broad in how imagined by the children and could be their own home or that of others, for example, a father’s brother’s home. Gardner (2002b), regarding Sylhet-Bangladeshi culture, states that the boundaries of familial relationships are both *porous* and *inclusive*. Thus children made little differentiation between these ‘home’ spaces, which were largely portrayed as being the same, or indeed in distinguishing the people within, who were all kin. This may be attributed to the closeness of family ties, manifest in frequent visiting and sleeping overnight with kin, as visits, geographical locale and distance, as well as time may necessitate. Indeed, for many older children, this may include becoming a semi-permanent resident in the home of family members, other than one’s parents, as economic conditions demanded or household help was required (Aziz & Maloney, 1986; Hartmann, 1983).

From my fieldwork in the villages and visits to family homes, a facet of daily life, which was really striking for me as outsider, was the gendered division of physical and social spaces, into public and private domains. I noted in my field-diary:

Thursday morning, chatting and drinking tea in the kitchen of the *Miah Bari*, with several women of the wider household, assorted small children milling around too. Suddenly, there are yells from outside, and Akish, an older boy, darts in saying something incoherent to my unaccustomed to Bangla ears, while simultaneously drawing a curtain across the doorway, which separates the kitchen from the front part of the dwelling. The entire atmosphere alters;

women visibly bristle, gathering their *ulnas* (shawls) to cover their heads whilst adjusting other garments too. Small children fall silent, one or two clinging to their mothers' sides. Attention shifts to me, and the women adjust my *ulna* over my breasts and hair, with *Dadu*, the matriarch of the house, as if by magic producing from within the folds of her sari a couple of hair-pins, in case any of my hair should remain visible. The local holy men are visiting with Abdul, the resident male head of household, and the older boys will be receiving their weekly instruction in Arabic and Koranic texts.

Field-notes, Miah *Bari*, Sylhet, 2010

This moment was revealing of gender norms, as well as class and social hierarchy, in the area. I questioned (to myself) whether the women would have been so tense had it been non-religious males visiting the household; however, this was the norm of appropriate behaviour related to wider aspects of respect, with women and young children always deferring to men and often older boys too. In such a *pardah* society, partitioning of homes is common, with some area generally able to be temporarily partitioned or curtained should men be present, behind which women could withdraw for privacy. The above event transpired within an affluent '*Londoni*' house and I wondered whether the same practice would prevail in the smaller simpler village homes. I was to learn over the course of the research that this habit of curtaining or seclusion was commonplace in all settings, with houses designed to accommodate this aspect, often with fixed doors or screens in the more affluent settings. '*Purdah*' literally means curtain (Jeffery, 1979; Chowdury, 1993), between self and the wider world. Strikingly, children made no allusion to this aspect in their narratives but few women appeared in their drawings of domestic spaces.

### Home: Scotland



Rafi: *my house in Rowanlee, Child-diaries, 2010*

### We have a lovely house

*Here is my house here, see [points to 3<sup>rd</sup> level on a picture of a 1970's apartment block], it's high up and close to Aisha's place too [points again to depiction of windows above] where we sometimes play...*

Rafi, ♂, 4 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

*Yes and I live just along from Rafi too, I can see his house from mine, but mine is older and doesn't have a balcony. Here is my bedroom, which I share with my brothers.*

Faisal, ♂, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

*I don't live close to them (Faisal and Rafi) but I go to their school on the bus with my brother. My house is a flat too, but across town and it's in a stair with seven others. None of my friends live near me....*

Sana, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Calder, 2012



*Famida: house, Calder, Child-diaries, 2012*

### This is where I stay...

*My house has five rooms, is quite big really, but I only play in two of them so it stays clean and my mum can watch me. Other people sleep in them too [the other rooms].*

Famida, ♀, 4-5 years, Child-diaries, Calder, 2012

Children provided many images of their houses and alluded to some restrictions within their homes, both spacial and social, providing rich descriptions of their interiors, which matched quite well with my perceptions from my home visits during the research. Inner-city neighbourhoods have historically comprised of small dwellings, often quite aged, which seem to have attracted waves of immigrants over generations. It is also the norm for many of the majority population to live thus, especially for less-affluent members, younger people or families in the first stage of formation (Nathan & Unsworth, 2006: 5; Champion and Fisher 2004). Existing research (Robinson & Reeve, 2006) suggests that new immigrants, regardless of legal status, migration pathway, ethnic origin or cultural identity, typically reside in poor quality accommodation that is often inappropriate to their needs in terms of size, design, location, facilities and services (Buck, 2001; Wilson, 2001; Cole and Robinson, 2003; Shelter, 2004). Many of the research cohort lived in dwellings, which were owned by wealthier kinsmen and were often made available to newly-arrived or newly-wedded couples, through the prevailing networks. Commonly reported problems amongst the migrant mothers included overcrowding and cold and damp issues, compounded by the failure of landlords to carry out essential repairs. Such conditions have been reported to be particularly extreme within the private rented sector (Garvie, 2001), but poor physical living environments prevail in all rental sectors. Problematic features prevailed in some of the family homes but the children never alluded to these, and were very happy and proud of their homes. Regardless of length of settlement, something all the research cohort families aspired to was moving out of the inner-city, to the periphery of the city, where families had existing kin and felt safer, had more space for their families, including, significantly, a garden for their children. Children depicted home interiors as quite similar in style and furnishing across the Scottish settings. The presence of sofa or two and a large TV dominated living rooms. Like the rural village houses, most homes contained a display cabinet of some kind, within which there were items, which symbolised the family's successes and aspirations, their social connections, such as school photographs and trophies, gifts from guests and items concerned with their Muslim faith, for example photos of Mecca, their Holy shrine.



*Rafi: home interior Rowanlee, 2011*

*This is where I am when I come in from school.*

Rafi, ♂, 4 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

Children often depicted themselves in the living-room, with the TV, which in my observed experience when visiting, was generally tuned to Bangla language and culture channels or occasionally cartoon channels. Adults favoured children watching Bangla television as children would learn through immersion in their mother-tongue about language and *Desh* culture, although what was represented on TV, in terms of music and dancing, was unlike the realities of village life, from my experiences there. Homes were devoid of many toys and children's artefacts; children barely alluded to these aspects.

*Here I am in the kitchen where I spend a lot of time*

Romina, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

Kitchens were quite small and contained many cooking accouterments and foodstuffs from the *Desh*, 'home', as perceived by the mothers. South Asian cooking is labour-intensive and food a mainstay of daily life and sociability, thus women, mothers and aunties, were predominantly in their kitchens; children would often accompany them as they worked, playing at the table or at their mother's side or feet. Despite having 'western-style' kitchens, many women chopped and prepared food on the floor, while squatting, as I observed in rural Sylhet, and children would often be in close proximity to such activity.



*Aisha: my bedroom, Rowanlee, 2010*

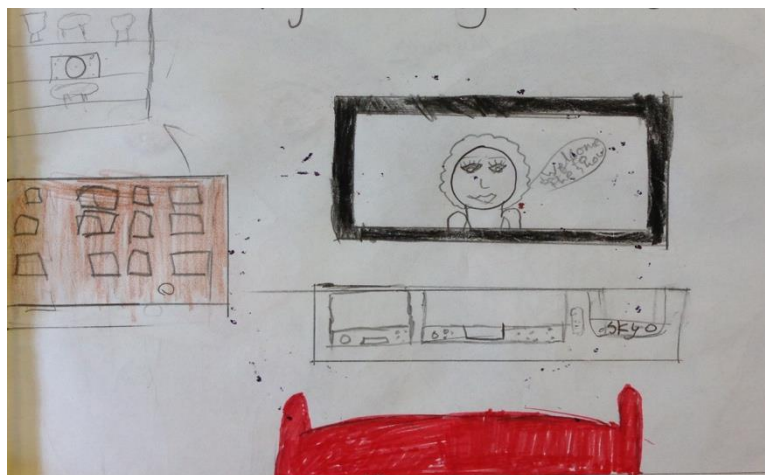
*I stay here when my mum is busy or cross, sometimes play here too. I have three books, a plant, a lamp. There's our cat, I like drawing him, my backpack too. And my orange cupboard-that's my favourite colour.*

Aisha, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

Aisha was exceptional, as she had just got her own bedroom, after her grandmother left the family home. Bedrooms were generally full of beds so provided little floor room for free play. Many children portrayed such spaces within their diaries and the furniture and objects within them, very focused on inside, which contrasted strikingly with the depictions from rural Sylhet, which were almost exclusively of outdoors. However, 'home' for the children was conceived and depicted as extending

over more than one place, to the homes of kin, comparable to the children's depictions within the rural villages. Home in Scotland, may be some distance from that of other kin and friends, as depicted by Sana in Calder or it may be that children have kin and friendships close by as was the pattern in Rowanlee. Nevertheless, regardless of setting, accessibility to the social sphere and wider outdoor activity is limited, with families visiting each other in a more deliberate and fashion and predominantly indoors. Thus 'home' is a more important feature in daily life. I attribute this to the prevailing social and geographical structures, the indoor more 'contained' and individualized aspects of life in inner-city Scotland (Gardner, 2012; Portes & Zhou, 1993) as well as the weather. Crucially too, the spaces between residences are generally public areas, which could present restrictions for many families, due to norms of purdah (Pareñas, 2005).

Within their homes, children seemed to live between three distinct areas, which they depicted above in their diaries. They spent family time in their living rooms and kitchens and play-time either in their living rooms or bedrooms or, as depicted above, with their female kin in the kitchen.



*Shuhag: living room, Rowanlee, 2011*

So where can I be....

*I am at home here, see, some days I don't know what to do. Saturdays are worst; there is no school, my dad sleeps longer as he is always late on a Friday with prayers and work. I stay in the living room or kitchen with my baby (brother) and mum. She closes the door and does cooking, so I draw or play with my cars. My big brother goes to Bangla class all morning, then to my uncle's house later. Sometimes I just look out of the window. I can go in the bedroom but my dad's room is next door. I need to be very quiet so it's boring. Sometimes I go shopping with my mum and baby or to look at the trains from the bridge. I think where all the people are going.... I like trains. My dad helped me make this drawing [below].*

Shuhag, ♂, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012



*Shuhag: train, Rowanlee, 2011*

Shuhag's narrative above, gives a clear delineation on gender dimensions of the adult family members' prescribed roles. Sometimes children had few places to play freely. Generally, the families lived in quite cramped accommodation, although commonplace within the migrant community and wider too (Parrenas & Sui, 2007; Mayson & Charlton, 2015), compromised further by the need to remain indoors and in specific areas, while kin are sleeping. This was a reality for the migrant children

but a source of stress for their mothers when viewed from their past memories of childhood outdoors and little adult interventions.

Generally, children's depictions showed homes with most domestic activity contained within, accompanied by restrictions, greater adult surveillance and interventions for children, due to increased proximity and little accessible outside space when viewed through the lens of past experience (mothers) and knowledge (the children) of the rural settings. Some children, like Shuhag, mentioned feeling bored but that was contingent on whether he had company or not.

Nevertheless, despite physical restrictions, 'home' for the children was depicted and seemed imagined as extending over more than one place, as was also the case in rural Sylhet. Children often mentioned visits to and from family; just as they might go to visit elsewhere, so might kin come to visit or reside with them. Home, thus imagined, is manifestly social in the children's imaginations and experience, not merely a structure, but a place of sociability too.

### **Visiting family**

As in Sylhet, 'home' is the domain in which people eat and sleep and wider lives are situated although in the Scottish setting. In Scotland, socializing with kin often involved a journey of some sort, which does not have the unpremeditated aspects prevalent within the rural settings; children described this as exciting and 'something' out of the usual.

This shift in social dynamics I would attribute to the practice of nuclear family settlement in the context of Scotland, where the extended family model was less apparent (Burholt et al, 2003), rather than spacial dimensions per se. What is clear is that home was a very important site for all the children and depicted as both safe and happy, welcoming of visitors, with children making little differentiation between their home and that of kin, once they were there, as Rabia states:

*Home is here and home is there, anywhere my family may be...*

Rabia, ♀, 5 years, Rowanlee, Child-diaries, 2012

Notably, within this conceptualization and indeed reality, ‘home’ may be relatively local but extend to the *Desh*, familiar from visiting for some children as a tangible place but not others but more an imagined community (Anderson, 1983; Zeitlin, 2012). Nevertheless, the *Desh* is familiar as a concept to the children, from their mothers and wider social connections and appeared to me as a common trope for all, which bore strong social and emotional legitimacy within this research agenda, even where the children had not visited. Home thus may be conceived of as possessing a duality of meanings, as ‘house’ the physical structure but also, more widely, in regard to notions of belonging, as Rabia summed up above ‘anywhere my family may be’.

### **Home as inside**

#### ‘There is No Land’

*Yes, we never can go there and there are dogs so it’s not safe. My dad tells us to stay inside. Home is always inside, here [Scotland] but not there [Sylhet] as I told you before. There is no land here.*

Rugie, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

Strikingly, when compared with the rural children, the children resident in Scotland included few depictions of the outside environments immediately surrounding their homes, either in drawings or in their life narratives. Where there was mention of nature more widely, it was in regard to negative dimensions or perceptions of such and the fact there is ‘no land’. In fact, the functions of the two locations (home and outdoors) are reversed when comparing settings, as Rugie alludes to, above. Where out of doors was the key domain in the village children’s wider experiences, home or house was the key domain in Scotland. Thus children are making the connection between ‘the lived’, their realities of daily life and ‘the imagined’, what they may

know from their mother's prior childhood experiences or what they may have enjoyed on their own family sojourns to Sylhet.

Sylheti-heritage children however did mention the wider environments of their lives, beyond their homes, in their spoken narratives on 'home', as somewhere they would like to encompass into their lives, beyond the constraints.

*Sometimes I would like to go to the park, see my friends but my mum says it is cold, the park is dirty and there are dogs. People are sometimes not nice to us. We need to wait until my dad is around but that's boring as he's always at work. Maybe we can go with you, Auntie? It's boring at home....*

Ali, ♂, 4 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

As mentioned earlier, children's depictions and discussions of 'home' pertained to indoors; children generally lacked access to public outdoor space and where they did have space, as Ali mentions above, 'people are often not nice to us', they may be subject to abuse or harassment, much of which may be attributed to racism (JRF, 2014) or thus perceived by the mothers and wider family. This aspect is noteworthy here as it contrasts sharply with the depictions and narratives from the rural villages, largely due to issues of 'visible difference' in Scotland.

Other constraints existed in the minds of the children, particularly in regard to Scotland's inclement weather, although this was more of an issue for their mothers, raised in Sylhet, where people deem it unhealthy to venture out if there is rain. Dogs were another source of fear and this factor seems to apply across many Muslim communities. Dog saliva is viewed as polluting (Personal communication, Jeffery, 2017), thus related to concepts of purity, pollution and disease.

### **Summary – Home**

When reviewing this 'home' section, there are some noteworthy points to be made. Some perceptions and realities of home showed striking differences across the two settings, where others showed congruence and continuity. The children in Scotland experience 'home' as interior, houses as similar, home as where immediate family

are, but as separated from the local neighbourhood environments. This is informed by their knowledge of the *Desh* in which the outdoors, varied homes, wider kin and the surrounding environment are included in experiences of 'home'. Strikingly, however, 'home' does also refer to the *Desh* so has fluidity. There is noticeable shrinkage of childhood domains from house and encompassing outdoor spaces (Sylhet) to childhood domains more contained within the settings of home and house (Scotland). Access to the outdoors is a key component of 'quality childhood' as conceived in the global North (Scottish Government, 2016) in terms of childhood well-being and sociality. What is also really striking and relevant is that 'home' in both settings is perceived as a place of 'belonging' and connected to notions of kinship, wider family and sociability. Home is a place for sharing of social time, whether one's own home or that of wider family and a very positive and vital feature in the lives of both the rural children and the Sylheti-heritage children, in terms of security, family identity construction and wider sociability (Chapter 5), albeit sometimes harder to access and maintain in Scotland (Sugarman, 2006).

Home within the Sylhet setting is village or locally conceived whereas home for the Bangladeshi migrants and their children may differ between generations, with children more likely to see Scotland as home, their parents, mothers<sup>17</sup> in particular, may view home as the *Desh*, as if Scotland is but a temporary place of residence, due to patrilocality in marriage practices. However, assumptions must not be made which suppose this is the case for all migrant mothers as life-course and migration stage may play a role; no ideas and practices are cast in stone, so potentially subject to change over location, time and life-stage. The subject of 'neighbourhood' will now follow, within both Sylhet and Scotland.

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<sup>17</sup> Mothers perceptions may be attached to notions of kinship too as your lineage is where 'true (natal) home' may be. Thus for women, even within the setting of Bangladesh, 'home' may be where you were born or grew up, rather than where you migrate to after marriage. This distinction is important to consider within this patrilocal culture.

## **Neighbourhood**

As in the literature of the Global South (cf. Rigg, 2007), much work on urban Northern migrant childhoods commences from the perception of a ‘problem’, a disadvantage, particularly for inner-city children, perhaps, but by no means exclusively, living in overcrowded and impoverished circumstances (cf Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007; JRF, 2007; Sutton et al, 2007; Gapen et al, 2011; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). Factors such as neighbourhood violence, poverty, and perceptions of neighbourhood danger have consistently been linked to children’s futures in terms of poor behavioural and educational outcomes for urban children and youth, (Colder et al, 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Tienda, 1991). Additionally, they feed into deficit discourses both in the public imagination and also the popular media. Pitzer (2014: 2) highlights racialized deficit discourses in her writing, ‘that blames poor urban youth and youth of colour for school problems, constructs them as objects in need of control and correction, and misrepresents their families and communities.’ Conversely, perceptions of neighbourhood cohesion, where children are largely absent from the public domains with the exception of crossing them for school and more structured activities, have been associated with reduced negative outcomes for children, although these are generalisations too (Morris et al, 2007; Votruba-Drzal et al, 2015). Perceptions of danger may have the effect of isolating families affected, and impact on protective strategies from parents, as evidenced here. The migrant parents are very protective of their children, for a plethora of reasons, which will unfold over this and the subsequent chapter, but I commence from what the children chose to reveal. What is striking when viewed through the lens of the rural childhoods is a distinct shrinkage of childhood spaces in the context of urban Scotland.

## **Childhood in nature**

Children in this rural setting have a very out-of-doors existence, with much physical freedom and personal autonomy. From a very early age, most rural children are allowed to roam, predominantly in the company of older children. Indeed, Blanchet (2001) notes that whenever young rural children are independently mobile, they are

usually more immersed in the world of the wider *bari* or *para* than merely in their childhood homes. Such practices and experience are the norm within the rural Global South. Parental agendas may differ greatly from those found in cities and in the Global North and where differing conceptualisations of children may also prevail (McNaughton et al, 2010; Rigg, 2007; Stephens, 1995), with issues such as social class and family status also implicated. Consequently, ‘home’, as discussed above, was conceived of as much wider than their ‘natal’ house, with the children’s neighbourhood, encapsulating the surrounding area of homesteads, streets and the wider village land, particularly for boys.

Typical village infrastructure is such that some areas are quite built up, with dwellings close together and other dwellings more fragmented in settlement. Cultivated plots, bounded by paths and small roadways may be interspersed between dwellings, are often flooded during monsoon, so transforming them seasonally into rivers and streams, in areas close to rivers where little provision has been made for drainage. Some village houses are more peripheral in their location, towards the boundary of the village, where livestock may graze, fish farms may flourish amongst bamboo plantations, and where rice is cultivated, as well as a diversity of other cash and subsistence crops (Hoque, 2001: 5-19).

Centrally located is the bazaar, commonplace even in the smallest of villages, if only a small row of rudimentary structures functioning as shops, although more prominent and permanent in larger villages and towns. Mosques are a key feature too and these two foci function as the hub of most villages, sites of both work and human congregation, social spaces of adult men and boys, often accompanied by young children. Children produced many illustrations and the majority contained aspects of their outside environments.

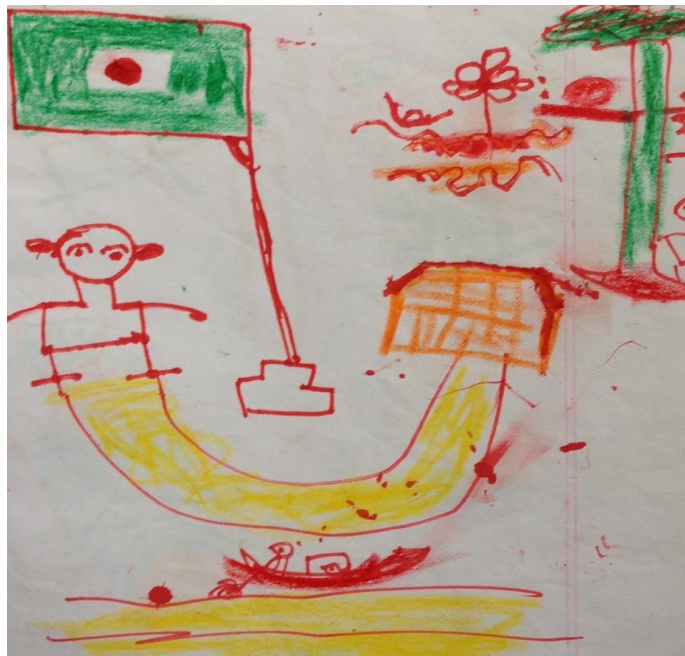
*We like to go there [points to derelict barnlike structure], or here [points to watery location-yellow in sketch below] around the other side of the pond, where there are trees and it's overgrown, no-one goes, there are frogs too...*

Jadid, ♂, 5 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

*We can go there, into the jungle<sup>18</sup>, no-one is looking for us to do jobs, other things.*

Jamil, ♂, 5 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Wherever there were gaps between buildings, on unoccupied or uncultivated land, children were congregated, although sometimes dispersing on the arrival of adults. Strikingly, children sometimes mentioned that they liked to remain out of the sight of adults, where ‘non-one goes’ as Jamil stated above, as they were more likely to be asked to undertake a job if in adult view, or chased away. Younger girls often depicted such representations too, but less often than boys overall, as often they may be employed in helping tasks around their homes or those of kin, child-minding and such like.



*Jadid: village, with path to barn, boat and Bangladesh flag, Sylhet, 2011*

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Jungle’ is used in this setting to loosely describe any dense overgrown land.



*Rukia: different aspects of her environment, with elements of nature and village structure-the paddy field, water-pump, flag, her house, Sylhet, 2010*

*Some days we are here, [behind the house], some days here [by paddy field], or here [drawing of herself] or sometimes everywhere; no-one cares as long as we are good. We play by the pond too but sometimes there are cows there, so then we stay away.*

Rukia, ♀, 5-6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Significantly, Rukia mentions 'no-one cares' where they go as long as they are well-behaved. This is a short-lived aspect of life for most village girls who will be subject to increasing scrutiny over time.

*We go over there, quite out of the village, but don't play there with our friends because there is a mad man in that place, he shouts and tries to beat us with his stick...*

Fahad, ♂, 5 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2009

*We sneak around behind the house because no-one else likes to go there; we can hide in the long grasses, so he can't see us.*

Sadat, ♂, 6-7 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2009

Laughing as they recounted this narrative, Fahad and Sadat were brothers who lived near the centre of the village in a small dwelling with no free land around it, who appeared autonomous, able to roam widely within and beyond their village and were known by all. The 'mad man' they allude to was in fact an old Muslim *Pir* (holy

man) who lived in a shack on the periphery of the village, who seemed to be socially isolated and of whom the children were afraid. This did not, on occasions, deter them from venturing close by, as Sadat mentions, knowing they may be out of view; few other people would be in close proximity. It seemed, from Sadat's comment, quite a daring place to venture, perceived by younger brother Fahad as quite dangerous, but confirmed by Sadat as somewhere they may go which would be at odds with local values and of which their kin would disapprove (Chapter 7).

What was clear was that children, from a young age, are trusted to explore and enjoy the wider neighbourhoods with adults preoccupied with livelihood strategies and domestic activities. It is the norm in such rural locales for the wider community of adults and young people to watch over children (Rigg, 2007; Behera, 2007) in a way which is disappearing in the Global North. Children's diaries depicted many scenes of 'playing' around their homes and natural environs, extensively towards the boundaries of their village or *baris* and indeed children were evident in such locales when I visited village homes. There were, however, a few exceptions to where they chose to roam, as follows.

*This is beside the new Masjid and we never go here unless we have to receive instruction [in Koranic recitation or Arabic associated with boys over 6 years in this locale]. It is not a place for having fun or making noise – our families would know and we would be beaten. This is a place to be serious and at all times quiet.*

Sarhan, ♂, 6-7 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, June 2009

Exceptions to the children's free-ranging did exist; they were within the vicinity of the Mosques which children stringently avoided, with the exception of older boys at instruction and prayer times, and they tended to avoid the village schools too. This was out of a sense of propriety and to avoid the harsh reprimands of the local Mullahs and schoolteachers, who knew all the children and families, and who passed judgment on all. These areas were alluded to as no-go areas and significantly, children mentioned presence of adults too, which seemed to formalise these locales and where there would be increased surveillance and scrutiny. Beyond these sites, children stated they wandered quite freely and played where they chose.

## Physical risks, resilience and confidence

A commonality amongst the rural children was a keen awareness and confidence in their rural environment and this may be attributed to the fact that they are immersed within the rural; subsistence existence requires that, with the exception of the affluent or frail, everyone participates however minimally in livelihood strategies (Rigg, 2007). Children were all very aware of and knowledgeable on their natural environment in their locales, as has been found elsewhere with respect to childhoods in the Global South (Nieuwenhuys, 1994 in India; Stephens, 1995 in Sudan; Rigg, 2007).

Many of the villages had communal areas, which could be challenging for children, particularly younger children who were largely unsupervised, as Rana depicts below, showing two village children playing beside a deep pond built into the landscape at the side of their *bari*.

*We like to come here as we can splash and cool down when it is hot but sometimes the cows are here too and scare us.*

Rukia, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, May 2011

*This is where everyone comes to wash and swim but only after dark for the big girls.*

Rana, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, May 2011



*Rana, 'pond, swimmer, fish, children in bari to side and back', Sylhet, 2011*

This pond was a focal point in the *bari* and it was common to observe children here, largely unregulated by adults, who may be present in the wider environs, perhaps occupied with a domestic or agrarian task. Children appear very confident and fearless in such locales, except for in regard to the cows (Rukia). Parents appeared more at ease with allowing young children time to ‘free-range’ and there seemed to be trust in children’s innate ability to manage physically (Blanchet, 2001; Katz, 2004) with less supervision than that which has become normalized in the Global North (Gill, 2007; Penn, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004).



Much of parents’ innate trust in their children has been attributed to fundamental religious-cultural beliefs in this locale, an unstinting devotion to Allah, which has been criticized as at times making people fatalistic and passive in regard to daily life (Morrow et al., 2014; WHO/UNICEF, 2008). Rural parents are often viewed from a deficit perspective (Patel et al, 2004; Rigg, 2007) which I challenge; they are criticized as not being sufficiently vigilant of their children, which may be attributed to a plethora of causes including having too many tasks to attend to, lack of

education and knowledge and access to relevant media, as well as health and nutrition status. I emphasise that children in lower socio-economic status households in rural Sylhet have parents who are time-poor, burdened with many domestic and subsistence tasks on a daily basis, and often poor nutritional health causing fatigue, hence reasons why children may be largely unsupervised by adults. Childhood accidents do occur and interventions have been implemented by several NGOs (cf. BRAC, 2008) to ‘train’ parents to the intrinsic dangers. Indeed, Rogoff, (1981: 18-36) discovered similar in her research with Mayan children in Highland Guatemala, which although dated, is still relevant in regard to ‘risk-taking behaviours’ and considering rural societies lacking great technological advancement. Similarly, Seymour (1975: 52), in relation to traditional families in India, stated ‘there was little concept of ‘child rearing’ *per se*’, although socio-economic status may play a role in such contexts, with less parental supervision in the lower socio-economic households than those of higher socio-economic status, who may have access to education, healthcare and scientific knowledge. This aspect of socio-economic status fits well with my rural observations and the children’s depictions; as aforementioned, childhood spatial dimensions and physical freedoms certainly appear to shrink with growing affluence, although gender and maturity are implicated here too. There exists a wealth of evidence (Fjortoft, 2001; Strife & Downey, 2009) that such free and unsupervised play is important for all round health and social well-being too and generally, children in the rural villages exhibited this in abundance. This is not to say there were not accidents and mishaps, squabbles and compromises to be made but for

the most-part, children negotiated amongst themselves, finding resolution as fitted their situations.



Romina: 'beshi mehg'- heavy rain, Sylhet, 2012

*We like to be here by the edge of the paddy as there are tiny frogs we can catch and hold; sometimes we see fishes too. It's very muddy here and wet-see it's raining. We can make roti out of the mud and snack too [children meant the equivalent of 'mud pies' here]. Once we found a very big knife, which we hid [Romina, wide-eyed, puts her index finger to her lips in telling their 'secret']].*

Romina, Shukla & Tabassum, ♀, 5-6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012

As the girls showed me, on our walks, and Romina illustrates above, they play here on the village margins on a regular basis, using a broken plastic sieve to catch the frogs. They are playing in a very damp and isolated environment, with potential dangers inherent in terms of the physical dimensions and also their social isolation – when crouching they are unseen, hidden from view, behind the growing rice crop. From an adult perspective, this would be considered a 'no-go area' for the girls, as it is quite dirty and unseen, so there is potential for harm. Thus children show how they play, are aware and learning of potential dangers, but also responsible in this wider natural world. They are also indicating how decision-making and resilience may be gained through negotiating the terrain, with the potential of danger, the water, the

mud, the earth and waterborne diseases, which may seasonally prevail. Undoubtedly they would have been reprimanded for being outside in the rain; people here remain indoors when it rains for fear of disease. Additionally, such activity is but a small 'window' of opportunity to venture into the wider environs beyond the social conventions in this location, with all the gender norms of female restriction and containment inherent. Such 'hidden' physical activity may be short-lived in the lives of the girls, although boys could be more overt in their activities, even when in very public places. I continue with an illuminating excerpt from my field-diaries.

I decided to walk up through the bazaar to the main road today, which joins a modern bridge, very high, spanning a vast and fast-flowing river. It is monsoon season and the river below has spilled over into the shanty-town and permanent housing settlement to its side and partially into the bazaar, with small businesses affected, flooding, detritus and mud all around. The main road is very busy with chaotic traffic; brightly decorated trucks overtaking precariously-laden buses, children and men atop them, overtaking tuk-tuks and rickshaws, pedestrians suppressed to the road's edges, with chickens, goats, small children, many vehicle horns and rickshaw bells sounding and much smoky pollution from old and tired engines. On the concrete edges of the bridge, climbing barefoot between its metal spars, I spot several small boys I recognize from local households. They are shouting and laughing, throwing debris into the void between them and the torrent below. They are also playing some kind of game of 'chicken' amongst the traffic, pushing and jostling each other, darting between traffic, gesticulating wildly...

Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2012

Such sights were not uncommon in such public locations such and I considered whether the boys' guardians would know how they spent their time and if ever they were warned against such play. Certainly other adults were viewing their behavior and occasionally passers-by muttered at them but no-one actually tried to prevent them from continuing; they seemed to be 'autonomous' in their activity. This perception of physical danger did not receive much attention from parents, although

was increasingly on the agenda of local and international NGOs (BRAC, 1980, 2008; WHO, 2008) as aforementioned.

Romina et al.'s description and that of the boys above were quite typical within the children's narratives of their neighbourhood domains and activities therein and much of this is supported from my observations. Young children certainly seemed to enjoy quite wide exploration often in potentially dangerous physical locales. What was noteworthy in their depictions and narratives was that the activities of the girls were more covert (in general) than those of the boys, which may be attributed to social expectations and norms within this setting. Boys were able to freely negotiate the wider public environment, whereas girls undertook such forays and activities therein more secretively, which predicted the more secluded lives they would lead in future years, whereas the boys would always remain part of the wider public realm. Additionally, where boys did transgress, they were seldom chastised in the way that girls were.

### **City neighbourhood**



*Rugie: bedroom and tenements outside, Rowanlee, 2012*

Children were aware of their wider neighbourhood contexts but did not generally have much free or spontaneous access to them. Where children did have access to the wider neighborhoods, there were distinct differences based on gender, with boys having greater access than girls, as reflects their future roles as they mature (Chapter 7).

'I don't really go anywhere much'

*Here is my house, my bedroom and street where I play after nursery school and at the weekends with my sister Rimi and my upstairs auntie's children, Fa'mid, Aisha and Ahab. We don't go outside much as it's cold and my mum is tired but sometimes she takes us to KFC or MacDonaldis or the supermarket, see here. I can see them from the window but not sure what's beyond there but it is not safe....*  
Rugie, ♀, 7 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee, Scotland, 2012



*Rugie: 'weekend', Rowanlee, 2012*

Within the short excerpt, and drawings, Rugie introduces the reader to her daily life in the neighbourhood of Rowanlee. When not at nursery, she is immersed predominantly in an indoor world, which is shared with her family, her mother, father and sister. Rugie's weekend description was quite typical of the urban children, particularly the girls. Rugie depicts a 'wider world out there' of which she is but fleetingly a part but keen to explore further, alluding to constraining factors such as the weather and the lack of safe outside space, as well as her Mum's tiredness.

Rasmussen (2004: 1) states quite accurately that 'In their everyday lives, children largely stay within and relate to three settings – their homes, schools and recreational institutions.' These environments have been created by adults and designated by them as 'places for children' (Aziz& Said, 2010; Kernan, 2010; Christensen & O'Brien, 2003). Moreover, Zeiher, (2003) conceives of these sites as 'urban islands', which may define, or appear predominant, in a child's life. This appears to

be pertinent to the descriptions given by the children as seen above in Rugie's drawing and wider narrative, with her home, her school and the local shopping mall, and take-away restaurants within, featuring as the three main customary sites in her life.

With this in mind, the children and I discussed aspects of their local neighbourhoods and they undertook a map reading exercise within the school and nursery, which they all enjoyed greatly. This was a means to understanding their expeditions within and connections to the wider society, including and also beyond the boundaries of their 'community'.

### Our neighbourhood

*Look there is our school, the playground, and here is my home, the railway bridge, and the football stadium [makes 'walking actions' with index and middle finger over the map, pausing at the points mentioned].*

Alam, ♂, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2012

*Yes and we go to the supermarket [points to map] and the Bengali shop, 'Aacha', that's there [points to another area on map]. The supermarket is full of people we don't know but the Bengali shop has people who are friends. My mum buys her phone card there and things we like from Bangladesh, mangoes, paan chopri, things like that. My mum does not like shopping as we have to go past the football ground, see [points again].*

Ziah, ♂, child-diary, Rowanlee, 2012

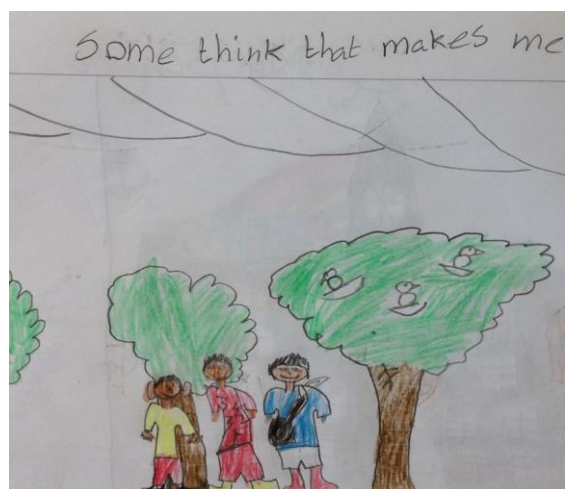
### 'I don't go anywhere'

*I just go to school, the shops and home again, with my mum or big brother but we don't know the people. I only see more children in school and if we go to a party. It is cold so we stay in the house to be warm, watch TV, things like that.*

Safia, ♀, 4 years, Calder, Field-diaries, Scotland, 2011

What was commonplace and revealed by Rugie (in Rowanlee) and Safia (in Calder) was that there was not much outdoor time spent by the children and families with home conceived of as 'the hub', at the centre of most childhood and wider family activity when the children were not in institutional settings such as school or nursery. Strikingly, children in Rowanlee were able to enjoy a wider social dimension to their existence than children in Calder, due to greater proximity of Sylheti Bangladeshi

families in this neighbourhood, explored further in Chapter 5. There were however exceptions to the restrictions illustrated above, as elucidated below.



*Famid: Some think [sic] that makes me happy.  
I go to the park with Rafi & Jahed after nursery. Rowanlee, 2011*

In regard to his picture, Fa'mid said,

*Beside my house is the play park and I can go with some big boys if my mum allows me. That makes me happy and they [the boys] are older so look after the small children, but sometimes forget! [He grins] Sometimes my dad plays football there with me or we go to the Mosque in the car or KFC or somewhere like that. My mum stays at home with my sister and the baby. Mostly I am at home and I play with my friends or downstairs at my aunties'.*

Fa'mid, 4 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Fa'mid's seemed to enjoy a wider social domain than that of his sister Aisha and girl cousins Rugie and Rimi, although they both live in the same street within Rowanlee neighbourhood. This description was quite typical of many of the boys, which is a noteworthy aspect of gender divisions within this ethnic community. On considering this aspect of the children's lives, girls are more generally constrained than boys. The lesser constraint evident in the boys' lives was largely attributable to access to older male kin who would include young boys in activities from which the girls were excluded. Public roles would be the norm for the boys in their future lives, whereas, with maturity, girls may vanish from the public domain as their cultural values may

demand. Boys had the advantage of often being absorbed into the world of the men and older boys, most of whom had been longer living in Scotland or the UK and who consequently could deal with social mores and wider conditions. Thus the boys gained experience and knowledge of the wider society from which many girls were sheltered, within the female realm. Such public engagement aspects were often difficult or imagined impossible for the women, as illustrated below by Romina, Safia's mother.

*I have always found it difficult in the streets here as everything is strange. I usually just take and collect Safia from school, shop if I need to, then go home. Often my husband will do the shopping so we can remain at home.*

Romina, parents' narratives, field-work Calder, 2010

Romina refers to 'everything as strange', which her (longer-settled) husband's brother's wife, Saba, explained was due to the traffic and language issues as well as the fact that Romina perceived that people would stare as she negotiated the streets to deliver and collect her daughter from school, thus adding to her apprehension. Romina had been in Scotland for three years but had not managed to participate in any English classes nor make local friends beyond her kin so experienced isolation. This was compounded by the fact that, perhaps as a visible minority, none of the parents in the school playground spoke to her or made her feel welcome. Her only local social connections were within the Bangladeshi community, who had children in the upper levels of school, so did not share her daughter's school drop-off and collection times, thus not presenting meaningful social opportunities. The restrictions for women may appear more marked in Scotland due to the more 'closed' aspects of family housing and neighbourhoods in the urban setting, as well as patterns of dispersing into nuclear families. There results more likelihood of social isolation particularly when contrasted with the freedom which many local or longer-settled women and families enjoyed<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Women often spoke of their dependence and vulnerability in regard to the migration decisions that had been made for their married lives, although also conceded there were many advantages to their lives and those of their children once settled in the new locale. Thus, I do not wish to imply here that the women were victims, but rather more just lacking much power in the initial stages of family formation, until they could establish their own networks (Akter, 2013.)

*We never go places unless my uncle takes us in his car. It's always cold or raining and difficult for my mum and baby sister.*

Rimi, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010.

The younger children were able to verbalise one common factor, which they perceived impeded their ability to participate in public domains, which is the weather in Scotland. While the changeable and often cold climate was the norm for the majority of local children and families, it was not so for their mothers and older relatives born in Sylhet. Inclement weather was frequently cited by children (and adults) as a reason for not venturing outside, although challenged by children from the mainstream as James shows below.

*If it rains or is windy my mum is sad and then we can't go out, except for school of course but sometimes we miss that too. It makes me cross when the weather is bad.*

Asif, ♂, 5-6 years, Rowanlee, Child-diaries, 2010

*That's stupid as the weather is usually bad here!!*

James, Asif's classmate, Rowanlee, Child-diaries, 2010,

The Bangladeshi children frequently mentioned their disappointment in this aspect; their lives or hopes were compromised when they remained indoors because it was raining or cold and their mothers were reluctant to venture out. The children had generally never known any other climate with which to compare, although their mothers had. I revisit this constraint in Chapter 6, when it is highlighted as a factor, which encroaches on wider family participation in relation to pre-school and early years as well as wider services in the context of Scotland.

### **Adult-child interaction in urban Scotland**

From their depictions and narratives, a very striking dimension of the urban children's lives, when viewed through the lens of the rural villages was the amount of time spent in adult company, with all the associated aspects of surveillance and supervision inherent within such social interactions (Rose et al, 2006). This resulting

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in greater structure in the day-to-day too, often fitting around the wider activities and needs of their families; children spent less time in outside, unsupervised free play and exploration than their Sylhet-based counterparts. This aspect is particularly pertinent in regard to the lives of the girls, who seemed to always be under the watchful eye of their kin; in many ways their behaviours mirrored that of older women, in terms of constraints, although differently imagined and expressed. Where women were very accepting and generally compliant with the wider norms of their group, girls would sometimes question this.

*Some of my nursery friends play in the back green and the park beside Tesco too. I see them when my Mum goes shopping and wish I could go too...*

Shazia, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, my brothers get to do this but not me.*

Tabassum, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Generally, families were not trusting of the wider environment, perhaps compounded by the women's lack of agency and opportunities for assertiveness in regard to their migration to Scotland, in some ways making them less curious and perhaps fearful of their wider environment. It may also be about facing the challenge of 'negotiating tradition, culture and honour with increased independence' (An-Na'im, 2000: 1).

*I go every Saturday to the swimming pool with my big brother and his friends. I've done that since I was very little.*

Jess, (White Scottish), Fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2010.

*I could never go there!*

Rana, (Sylheti), ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010.

### So, Where Will We Go?

*I have never been to the swimming pool although my big brother (primary 6) went from school. I think this is something we might do in school but not on*

*the weekends. My sister is not allowed to do this. But, my dad played football in the park with me, and my friends, when he was not at work.*

Th'amid, ♂, Fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2010

*I go with my big brother to the pool all the time and my mum gives us money for chips afterwards. If we save our 'pool money', like miss a week or two, then we can go to the cinema, which is just through the underpass.*

James, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

*We could never go there-my family says the cinema is bad. The underpass scarey too, with bad people, so we would never go there but some nursery friends do....*

Th'amid, ♂, 5-6 years, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

*The underpass is dangerous; you shouldn't go there.*

Amina, ♀, 6 years, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

*Amina's right, bad people are there. My family, we always go the long way around....*

Th'amid, ♂, 5-6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee

Many of the locations familiar to the local children, as places of play and leisure, were not known by the migrant children or were inaccessible. For example, after a particularly rainy weekend, some Scottish children talked about going to the local leisure centre to play football and swim and this was somewhere with which few of the migrant children were familiar. Many other children said there were 'no-go' areas in their neighbourhoods; when I probed to discover why such places might be unknown or where known, perceived 'dangerous', their responses were significant. Children were predominantly in the care of their mothers and older sisters/aunties, unless their father or other adult males was free from work; many 'indoor but away from home spaces', such as sports centres, cinemas, were deemed 'unsuitable'. Younger children were unable to express to me why this should be; I largely relied on the older children and teenagers to enlighten me. 'Unsuitability' took several forms from the children's and young people's perspectives, some attached to cultural and social beliefs and some to the geography of their host country. Certainly, the Scottish children had more freedom and confidence within their neighbourhoods and seemed to be able to transverse the cultural domains quite easily. The migrant children often mentioned their boredom and restricted domains. Through immersion in the wider cohort of local children, in schools and nurseries, the migrant children

were learning of the wider world around them, in a way they could not learn from their mothers.

Arguably children see the world in ways that grown-ups do not (Malone, in Behera, 2007: 43-64). Children's culture is heavily contingent on peer interactions, so continually growing and transforming in a way invisible to adults and, in this locale, blending together the local children's knowledge and practices with those from the migrant children's experiences. For example, children were sometimes surprised to know that their Scottish or longer-settled peers regularly attended play centres and swimming pools and they were often quite envious of this, as well as the fact that children were often out and about unaccompanied by elders.

The very nature of Scottish society and social provisions for children is so very different from those in the villages of Sylhet. It was clear the migrant children were absorbing many aspects of the wider norms within their neighbourhoods but often could not share in such experiences due to restrictions and the fact that their mothers were informed by their childhood experiences from the *Desh* and could not reconcile the two distinctive locales. Thus, many neighbourhood domains were merely points of transition for the children and their female kin, much as discussed within Rasmussen's (2004) study. Exceptions existed in visits to shops and sometimes fast-food restaurants, which children alluded to, as well as social visits (Chapter 5).

Children also alluded to many aspects and details of daily life they noticed in their day-to-day transitions through local environs, as illustrated in this discussion.

*I always see the same man when my Mum takes me to school; he is old and smokes outside his door. Our street is quiet but the one we go onto for nursery and school is busy, many cars and buses, dogs too, noisy and dangerous.*

*We go through the park in the mornings and sometimes you see the same people and their dogs - I don't like dogs - a lady always smiles at me. There are not so many (people and dogs) when we go back home but the park is*

*quite dirty with rubbish, bottles and things. Yes, that's those boys Kevin told us about who smoke.*

*There are two dogs, which always chase each other. Sometimes we go a longer way to school, with my mum, as she does not like the busy streets so we go behind the football park and up the other side. It's quite quiet there but dirty too with some old houses but not so many cars and trucks. I like the busy road better as you can watch the cars. The buses are busy too and people all seem to look from the windows.*

Sylheti-heritage children primary 1- 4, fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2010

These excerpts highlight how much children are observing and absorbing of the wider community, as they move through it, however rarely lingering. Many striking details of their neighbourhoods were depicted and numerous children alluded to aspects which were deemed unsafe or frightening, if not for them, at least for their mothers and aunties.

#### 'We do not Feel Safe'

For the migrant families, there exist many perceptions of danger in their home settings, which I emphasise may be compounded by underdeveloped social networks, not the case for all families, but certainly for some, particularly in Calder neighbourhood, which had fewer Bangladeshi migrants resident within.

#### My mum and my cat are my friends

*In my house I have my mum and she is really my best friend. I just play outside with my cat and we have fun. Sometimes there are bad boys in the garden [shared back green] and they are mean, break the swings, throw stones and chase her and me, so we go inside. My dad takes me there sometimes and then it's fine but he does not live here<sup>20</sup> so there's no-one.*

Sharmila, ♀, 7 years, Child-diaries, Calder, 2010

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<sup>20</sup> Sharmila's dad worked in Newcastle so was a frequent but not permanent member of her household—men living away for work was quite a common practice in this research.



*Sharmila: 'shared garden, herself and her cat', Calder, 2010*

*We can only go if my dad or uncles can go with us.*  
Rugie, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

A factor which impinged on children spending time outside their homes or within various public spaces, was 'unsuitability' from the perspective of children's mothers, compounded by real and negative behaviour from other locals; mothers would consequently avoid the wider neighbourhood and keep their children indoors. This factor is partially attributable to the realities of inner-city life as well as to cultural norms of *purdah*. Women were reluctant, inexperienced and sometimes fearful to enter the public domain, particularly in what they perceived to be 'male-inhabited spaces' like sports and leisure centres. This also affected women's perception of urban public parks and gardens, with many women viewing them as 'men's spaces' (Shamima, Rowanlee fieldnotes, 2010). Such domains are rarely present in their natal country and where they existed, were urban, generally only accessed by the affluent few, mostly men and boys, or by accompanied women and children, often

*Londoni* visitors<sup>21</sup>; thus beyond the experience of most rural families. A pertinent issue within this research context is that prior life experiences may vary between the migrants; more adjustments will be required amongst migrant wife couples.

Many children, like Rugie and Sharmila above, described such restrictions relating to *who* could accompany them and to *where*. Younger boys also corroborated this, as follows,

*I only go if my brother or his friends will take us*

Humayun, ♂, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

*Sometimes we are frightened going up the stairs to my aunties so we run...*

Asfak, ♂, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Children mentioned that if they went to public places, even enclosed within their housing building or complex, they preferred to go with a man or much older boy as this would, they imagined, ensure an element of safety. Consequently, chaperoning of children is the norm in the Scottish setting, much as most women are chaperoned in rural Sylhet. Although their distinctive attire as visible minorities, their cultural norms and practices of seclusion could be considered as compounding restrictions, this was further constrained by structural features within their local neighbourhoods. There has been a decline in the management and social control of public parks and spaces, largely due to public spending cuts. Additionally, Valentine (2001: 241) asserts 'increased surveillance and exclusionary practices on the streets and in semi-public spaces have pushed so-called 'undesirable' groups into parks and open spaces, which may represent the only 'free' spaces to hang out'. This may then impact on the freedom of other children and young people and perceptions of safety and suitability.

Shafa's grandmother, longer-settled in England was brave and experienced enough to venture forth in urban Scotland, with her granddaughter; this is how Shafa recounts the excursion.

*My Dadu [paternal grandmother] took me to the gardens as my mum was ill with the baby, it was nice and we had ice-cream but then some men*

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, several conglomerates of *Londoni* businessmen had set up such adventure parks and leisure centres in Sylhet district at the time of my fieldwork. From a local perspective these were expensive and out of the reach of the majority of the population and largely unknown to the village families.

*came who were shouting and wild so we left. Then when we tried to get home, the streets were very crowded and people shouted at us. There was a big football match. Dadu was scared and so was I so we went to the home of my uncle [close by] and waited there and then a man came and took us home, after a long time...*

Shafa, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

In many neighbourhoods, to reach public facilities, children and mothers had to negotiate the local streets which involved not only walking by shops and pubs, often with drinkers and smokers outside, but also in the case of Rowanlee, they had to contend with aspects of living in the shadow of a major football stadium, with all the social dimensions inherent within this. For example, on at least two Saturdays per month, their local streets would be filled with football-supporting crowds, predominantly male, youthful, loud, and perceived as aggressive in their overt displays of masculinities, so viewed as ‘threatening’ by the families. Consequently, like Shafa’s experience above, negative experiences coloured the perceptions of the families more generally. Unless absolutely essential, the Sylheti families would never venture out on such days, or as a rule, unless ‘necessary’ were not the custom for the migrant families and often viewed as threatening, or ‘unsuitable’, resulting in restricted access to the domain beyond the bounds of home.

It may be questioned the extent to which different urban forms and environments affect the nature and intensity of interaction between diverse communities residing in such neighbourhoods and whether this may be a barrier to integration for some families and individuals. Immigrants however, do not live in a vacuum; they are but one layer of the complex local urban fabric and the social dynamics therein. For example, increasingly, immigrants, gentrifiers and native working classes live cheek by jowl and may compete for the same resources and places (JRF, 2006; Gest, 2016). Discovering *how* immigrants engage within their new spaces and places may well be problematic, particularly where many may choose to shy away from public engagement or have no concept of avenues for doing so (Robinson & Reeve, 2006). The children’s narratives may shed some light on these aspects of space and place. Some sites are shared and some are not, both physically and conceptually. However, beyond the issue of who occupies the neighbourhood spaces and how they are conceived there is a very real issue, within both Calder and Rowanlee, of lack of

child and family friendly spaces, for *all* the community to enjoy (Burgess et al, 1988: 115), which may be compounded by the process of gentrification in both neighbourhoods (Chapter 3). Within the course of the diary-making project, this factor was further highlighted by what the indigenous children depicted in terms of outside space and access to it. None of the research neighbourhoods had very well designated ‘child-friendly’ areas with the exception of ‘leisure centres’, which incurred an entry fee. Where existing, the migrant children rarely accessed them and many local families would struggle to pay the entry price on a regular basis too. It is not clear whether Sylheti families would view these places as ‘child friendly’. In Scotland, the concept of ‘unfriendliness’ or danger may be more attributed to *people* than *place*, more about perceptions of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, ‘familiarity’ and ‘unfamiliarity’, both social and cultural, than anything pertaining to geography or landscape.

## **Conclusion**

The aspects of childhood in Scotland noted above, resonate with what children and mothers know of the different childhoods, past and present in Sylhet. Some of the current experiences of village childhoods are likely to have been similar when mothers were growing up. Strikingly, the village children’s depictions all shared two common themes of land and nature with much outdoor activity and sociability portrayed therein. Their representations were compelling for their attention to detail, as I viewed much of the day-to-day activity of the village community played out in the ‘outside’ domains. Homes are usually small in size, with the exception of monsoon season, the weather is generally agreeable, and sharing of time and resources seems to prevail. Other writers, in discussing rural subsistence economies in diverse regions, highlight similar physical and social aspects (cf. Rigg, 2007 in several locales globally; Nieuwenhuys, 1994 in South India and Nuckolls, 1993 in India). Nevertheless, within the outside activities and domains, there was a strong gender division, both depicted (but unspoken) and visible; over time as girls mature they disappear from outside, the wider public sphere, with the exception of very poor

and disenfranchised women and girls who may lack male kin to support their wider lives.

What is illuminated when juxtaposed against the mother's understandings and experiences of childhood in Sylhet and those depicted by the rural child kin is that the structures in Scotland appear deficit, not the children and their families. The children's diaries in Scotland indicated that their physical domain was attenuated particularly beside their peers' depictions in rural Sylhet and 'home' seemed to be more important than 'land' in their lives. However, this may be partially attributable to the prevailing conditions in inner-city Scottish cities, of high population density and little green local spaces, rather than to the fact they are unfamiliar with the urban settings, although this undoubtedly plays a part. Land was portrayed predominantly 'as somewhere one needed to cross, to get to where one needed to be' although some children did express a desire for more access to the wider neighbourhoods in which their lives are situated. However, such areas were not somewhere children or their parents, particularly their mothers or female kin, would choose to linger within.

Much of this understanding and the migrant family's associated practices may be linked to the mother's experiences from their former lives in the *Desh*. Childhood, in the early years, is wider with 'home' encompassing the outdoors too. Public space is not inhabited by women, although young children are free to roam unaccompanied, although gender boundaries are apparent over maturity, which may also be contingent on intersecting factors of social class and education too.

Due to the safety concerns of city life, free-ranging and playing out is not a possibility for the Sylheti-heritage children in the inhospitable environs in which many of their lives were perceived as situated and may also be an issue more widely for the mainstream population. I contend then that what now exists in our urban environs is deficit in regards to meeting children's and young people's needs. This is particularly so when viewed through the lens of rural Sylhet, where many free-ranging and creative opportunities prevail. This is an aspect I will return to in the Conclusion chapter, as The Scottish Government has in place its Play Strategy which encompasses outdoor dimensions as part of its wider remit; what I show here is that

this is certainly not the reality of life for the Sylheti-heritage children and may be problematic more widely for childhoods situated within urban locales, particularly inner-city areas.

Nevertheless, the children's depictions do challenge deficit depictions and discourses of migrant lives and childhoods, showing great richness of family life, peer relations, kin support and sociability within the constraints of city existence. Children are cared for and provided with opportunities as they may present themselves, with mothers adapting as required, within the climate and housing types available to them, in their assigned areas of post migration settlement.



Humayun: *'football'*, Rowanlee, 2012

## Chapter 5 – People and Social Networks

This chapter takes a broadly ecological approach to understanding children's early social worlds and their social networks. This is a means to conceptualizing and understanding children's social worlds, both close to home and more widely in their communities, near and far, as well as considering overarching social structures. I justify this approach as it is appropriate across diverse locales and takes into account the fact that although situated in one place, family life is still informed by life elsewhere, in the remembrances of the mothers of their rural childhoods, as well as what is kept alive and often relevant, through the transnational nature of life and connections which prevail and continue to be salient. Significantly, for most people, human life is inherently social and social bonds and networks are intimately connected to notions of support and well-being (Gilligan, 1999; Hill, 2005; Scottish Government, 2012). Within social relations, negative dimensions may also prevail, although not highlighted within my research findings, with the exception of in regard to the wider neighbourhood and fear of racism.

Much of the recent theorising in the area of childhood socialisation has come from the field of psychology accompanied by ideas about child development of which I am skeptical, regarding child development as a social construct which predominantly prevails in the Northern World (Burman, 2008) and may be largely irrelevant to areas where families and their children may have more pressing concerns. Much of the theory on socialization is based around the concept of intergenerational transmission; that is, the practices and patterns of behaviour in which we are embedded as children, largely shape who we are and what we will become. This model then is very linear and one-directional and links to the concept of the child as *tabula rasa*. It views children as passive recipients of inputs, when in fact I assert children are active participants in the process of socialisation, along with their peers, also to a partial degree their close family and the interactions and experiences within the wider environments in which they exist. In the North, programs of child development have been used to justify increased surveillance, shaming of parents and their children accompanied by interventions, where deemed necessary, in the

form of parenting programs. The result is we now live in an era where deficit views of children and families who do not 'fit' an ideal, are perpetuated in both the media and the public imagination and overall an agenda of governmentality prevails (Rose et al, 2006). Such developmental approaches have filtered into the Global South too and are equally problematic, in terms of their Northern ideals and their potentially globally homogenizing affects.

Ecological approaches are adaptable and thus good to use as tools (Bronfenbrenner, 1972, 1979) to consider all who may be relevant within a children's social sphere as they consider the wider social environments in which children's lives are played out. I also draw on the writing of Vygotsky (1978), and Bourdieu (1985, 1986, 2000), in regard to the Global North. Regarding the Global South, Katz (2004) and Nieuwenhuys, (1994) provide excellent examples of children's social worlds from rural settings, which are pertinent to my research, as well as the work of other authors in diverse Southern locales (cf Behera, 1998, 2007; Rigg, 2007; Rogoff, 1981,1994, 2003; Stephens, 1996; Blanchet, 1996).

Broadly speaking, Bronfenbrenner, (1993: 7), defines the ecology of human development as

...the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between those settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.

I have emphasized the importance of environments, both local and dispersed, as contexts for understanding young children's social worlds, attitudes and behaviour (Chapter 4). Crucially, the development of young children's social networks, ethnic attitudes and identities, as well as other perceptions of various forms of similarity and difference, need to be understood within the specific contexts in which they are located. In the classical Vygotskian sense, such attitudes and identities can be regarded as representing the internalisation and/or embodiment of the immediate social relationships in which young children are embedded and engaged (Vygotsky, 1978). In describing the ecological environment for an individual, Bronfenbrenner

(1972, 1979) described five levels: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. At their most fundamental, typical microsystems for a child in the North could be the home, school, and peer group settings. Conversely, narrowly defined, typical microsystems for a child in the South could be home, immediate neighbourhood and wider outdoor domains too. The child is impacted by his or her perception or interpretation of the activities, roles, and interpersonal relations that occur in each of these microsystems. Bronfenbrenner conceptualised childhood relationships as being contained within a series of concentric spheres with the child at the centre, surrounded by different domains, the close and extended family, the broader neighbourhood and wider society too. The mesosystem would comprise of the interactions between the microsystems so are also be relevant to this study. The exosystem contains environmental and wider structural elements that have a profound influence on a child's development, even though that child is not directly involved with them. The macrosystem is the fourth layer and consists of the cultural context in which the child resides. Finally, the chronosystem is made up of the environmental events and transitions that occur throughout a child's life, including any socio-historical events, which could include aspects such as migration, transition to nursery or school for example.

Although useful to consider in regard to the migrant-heritage children, this model can be critiqued as producing a vision of childhood as static, passively contained within these domains, and the child as lacking agency, the people and structures surrounding as suspended in time, rather than fluid and dynamic. In reality the childhood experience may be very different and take various and unique forms (Connolly, 2003, 2007; Rogoff, 2003) contingent on a plethora of factors, many of which may intersect with each other. Certainly, this research has highlighted that microsystems may encompass 'the near' and also 'the far' in terms of both physical domains and social dimensions too, which may be linked to notions of translocality (Brickell & Datta, 2011) and imagined community (Anderson, 1983).

A useful way of making sense of the process of socialisation is through Bourdieu's (1990a) notion of the 'ethnic habitus' as a set of dispositions, towards life, and especially in childhood towards learning, which is acquired by individuals and

families, through experience. This is the person or family's present-day 'product' of past history and their class and cultural context (Brooker, 2002; Bourdieu, 1990a: 56). Adapted from the work of Bourdieu (1986: xi, 2000: 18 & 28) and Connolly (2003), the 'ethnic habitus' represents the 'taken-for-granted' ways of thinking and behaving that we all, including young children, come to internalize over time in relation to socialization, social relationships and factors such as identity and ethnicity. Conceived thus, it is another means of reconciling agency with structure, the individual with society. This may become increasingly complex in regard to transnational families, their 'habitus' encompassing more than one distinct locale or set of ideas and practices.

However, we must consider that actions are both a product and a reflection of habitus, although habitus is *shaping* rather than *determining*. In other words, through the sets of relationships in which they are engaged and the influence of the wider social environment of the local community, young children can be seen to develop particular cultural dispositions or habits reflective of their own social and ethnic group (Bourdieu, 1972; Rogoff, 2003; Behera, 2007; Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Goncu, 1999). These however, are not static but always fluid and dynamic, reflecting agency and the characteristics of the wider community and society too, in which the minority families (in this research agenda) may be embedded. This point is vital to consider. I question what this might mean for children who are engaged in a wider and more diverse social environment than their mothers, who are for the most part, contained within the bounds of their ethnic community. Evidence suggests that, over time, children of migrant parents incorporate aspects of the wider mainstream society into their individual habitus, through access to institutions beyond home, their schools and social centres. Thus the children can be viewed as products of both their parental ethnic habitus, intersecting with ideas and practices internalised from beyond their ethnic community. The ethnic habitus may often manifest itself in relation to young children's preferences for and dispositions towards the cultural events, symbols and practices of their own community. It can also be seen in terms of children's taken-for-granted preferences to want to be with others 'of their own kind', what is often called 'in-group preferences' (Rigg, 2011: 134-5) and, for some children and individuals, in terms of a negative disposition towards those who are different from

themselves, ‘out-group prejudices’ (cf, Aboud, 2003: 48-60; Pettigrew, 2008). Adopting an ecological model is thus an excellent strategy for understanding children’s social worlds, who is accessible, both physically and virtually too (Baldassar et al, 2007) and how ethnic divisions impact upon and may become internalized by young children (Connolly, 2002). Importantly, I emphasise, evidence must come from the children themselves, rather than as imagined or assumed from an adult perspective (Punch, 2004; Stephens, 1995). Ecological models also fit well with Sampson’s model (1988) of ‘enssembled individualism’, which places emphasis on the child’s relational membership in the social world and focusing on a self with fluidly drawn self/non-self boundaries and field control. Thus it is important to look at the child’s relationships to discover more about the world the child inhabits or is excluded from. John (in Stephens, 1995: 127-129) states that if the relational context is the basis for a developing sense of personal being and agency, then exclusion from participation in the wider social world may be detrimental in the development of the self or to the child’s social competence within a domain wider than the family (Rigg, 2011: 123, 140, 157, 160). Thus, this fact may then be related to the development of deficit models and discourses in regard to some families who remain on the fringes and are excluded from aspects of society and genuine participation. This may be due to their identities such as ethnicity, poverty, social class, (dis)ability and more, which may cause disadvantage and exclusion and may be intersectional in nature. Consequently, I question, if the wider environment is not accessible, for whatever reason, both physically and socially, how can families, and by association their children, join or learn to negotiate what may be unfamiliar terrain. Significantly, Youniss (1983) and Harris (1998) question the role that adults play in teaching children and whether we can consider whether adults are in fact agents for society. I use the table below to depict the differing roles of adults and children in children’s socialization process.

<b>Child relations with Adults</b>	<b>Child relations with Peers</b>
Restricted outcomes - power imbalance	Reciprocity within friendship - power imbalance may still exist
Relations tend to mystify	Relations engender mutual understanding
Tendency to create separation between people	Tendency towards solidarity

Respect attached to adhering to external criteria      Respect to be mutual, the establishment of consensus

*Roles of adults and peers in the socialisation process (Youniss, 1983; Harris, 1998)*

The above illustration is a useful set of ideas with which to consider relations and interactions within the lives of children, but for the Sylheti-heritage children, this may in fact be different from those proposed above, which are built on a Euro-American view of childhood socialization, through the lens of Piagetian theory (1970). Building on the ecological model, Rigg (2011: 54) argues that when looking at the dynamics of family and wider sociability, it is necessary to take the entire family ‘and its immediate environment’ as the unit of study, rather than merely looking at the child(ren) in a vacuum, as young children are rarely alone and surrounding factors both encourage and constrain their sociability. One must consider the stage the family is at and has reached within its household life cycle (Punch & Tisdall, 2010), as both the individual and household may be influential in relation to people’s actions and both enabling and limiting options, especially for the more subordinate household members. However, family units are dynamic so must not be viewed as rigid and unchanging in relation to social practice, not homogeneous within different ethnic or social groups, as has already been revealed within this research.

Nevertheless, early family composition factors, such as migration and resettlement, and having to care for young children, place restrictions on the wider engagement of mothers and, by consequence, their children. Mothers may be forced, by circumstance or choice, to remove themselves both spatially and temporally from the public landscape or may be subject to cultural restrictions as alluded to previously, in order to take account of their responsibilities. When considering the life course, motherhood is a significant factor which can impact on sociability, and I argue more so in the context of the lives of the Sylhetis in Scotland, who are largely without extended family on hand, to support and help as is taken for granted in the rural villages (Orellana et al, 2001; Chalmers, 2004). Thus it may be that families have to adapt their strategies to take this factor into account; where once extended family

may be literally on one's doorstep, now they may be further afield, although virtual support may still be available (Mahler, 2001).

### **Networks of childhood – socialisation and sociability**

This chapter focuses specifically on children's perspectives on their social worlds. In urban Scotland, children's social networks were attenuated, much less extensive than as evidenced in Sylhet; for many children social opportunities and occasions were sporadic, due to issues of accessibility, beyond the immediate family. Contrastingly, in rural Sylhet, children had very wide-ranging social networks, which were an integral part of everyday life and encompassed many people from across the life course. In Scotland, 'home' is more contained within built household structures, thus childhood socialisation may appear comparatively less advanced and established. With the exception of close kin social interactions may not be so available and embedded in the day-to-day so taking more effort to establish, cultivate and maintain.

The concepts of socialisation and sociability are intertwined, and both depend on social-interactive dimensions to be enabled. In terms of socialisation children are initiated into the features of their socio-cultural world through which they learn about social rules, rituals and meanings (Woodhead, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). Socialisation creates opportunities for children in learning to relate to one another, form and feel part of groups and potentially become part of the local community around them, with all the inherent behaviours and practices therein. Much early socialisation takes place within the family; however, there are assumptions about the nature of interaction within the family, with many early studies implicitly adopting a uni-directional approach to the interaction and learning within this (cf. Piaget, 1971; Bruner, 1991), from adult to child, whereas I would assert a more jointly regulated and cooperative model, in which the participants may influence each other (Hoogsteder et al, 2004). The sibling relationship is also considered influential in the development of young children's social and emotional understanding (Dunn 1983, 1988; Howe, 1991) and may provide a 'training ground' for testing appropriate behaviours before venturing

forth into the wider social sphere (Volling et al, 1997). The safety of close-peer dyads or small groups serves to promote socio-emotional, as well as cognitive, skill-building and bolster positive self-image (Smith & Hart, 2011). To become fully developed children must have experiences in which they can encounter and practise this dimension of themselves. For most children, globally, home, with family or guardians, is the primary physical and social setting of socialisation and sociability. As most children mature their primary familial social relationships are ideally supplemented within interactions in the social world of their peers. Peer culture may result from placing or coming together of cohorts of children, through social mechanisms such as age differentiation, gender or interest groups, for extended periods of time. It may result by intention or chance, through spontaneous activity or intentioned actions of children and carers or wider social aspects. Although children produce their own culture, it is not entirely separate from adult culture. Authors (James et al, 1998; Punch, 2002, 2007) refer to the term 'tribal child' as one marker of childhood 'difference' with the idea that some aspects of their lives can exist independently from the adult world. The children are actually participating in, and part of two cultures - children's and adult's - as Corsaro (2005; 2009: 301) describes 'intricately interwoven in different ways across space and time'. Dynamic, constantly evolving and interacting with other aspects, childhood is exposed to the same societal forces as adulthood and children are themselves co-constructors of childhood and society. Conceived thus, children are not merely imitating or appropriating directly from the world of adults; rather children use their uniqueness and creativity to appropriate information and ideas from adult and wider culture to create their own peer cultures. Creativity is manifest in the ways in which such appropriation both extends or elaborates peer culture while simultaneously contributing to the existence, reproduction and extension of the adult world (Corsaro, 2009: 301).

Furthermore, Corsaro uses the term 'interpretive reproduction' (1992; 2005) to describe this creative appropriation, following from Giddens' (1984: 25) argument that structural properties of social systems are both a medium and outcomes of the practices they repeatedly and routinely organise. Thus social structure may be viewed as both constraining and enabling and the children are involved not merely in

internalising the adult culture but rather with peers, producing a series of peer cultures. In this way these peer cultures become subsumed within the wider culture, contributing to its reproduction and extension, through ‘collective negotiations and interactions with adults’, thus can be viewed as dynamic, fluid, malleable; constantly, like life itself, in a state of flux (Corsaro, 2005).

In terms of sociability, several theories hold that, beyond adult carers and siblings, relations with same-age peers contribute to the development of children’s interpersonal competence, conflict-resolution skills, perspective-taking, and social-reasoning skills (Piaget, 1932; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss, 1980). Indeed, poor peer relationships and peer rejection in childhood have been associated with subsequent social difficulties in adolescence and adulthood (Parker & Asher, 1987). Children, when socialising freely with peers and adults, develop the ability to see the world from another’s perspective, learn skills for cooperation, sharing, helping and problem solving (Trevarthen, 1998). Specifically, children’s friends and peers serve ‘as a social mirror different from that provided by supportive adults’ (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003: 247).

Social networks comprise of all a person’s interpersonal relationships, which can be strong or weak depending on a person’s ability to both develop a network then access their network, as well as sustaining it. Social networks are a key aspect of a person’s life providing resources and assisting in maintaining good mental health. Recent research in the UK has shown that social networks may also be a powerful tool in the support and rehabilitation of problem individuals and troubled families (GIRFEC, 2012) so recognising *who* may be part of these networks is important when considering children and the family’s wider well-being. The social networks of children are much more extensive than the traditional nuclear family may suggest and, although important, only focusing on the parent-child-sibling relationships can disguise the significance of relationships in the wider social network. A child’s ability to access their social network is determined by six factors: Age, gender; number of people in the network; frequency of contact with the network (embeddedness); help received from the network (enacted help) and the perceived

quality of support (Gilligan, 1999). Additionally, Gilligan (2000) suggests that having multiple roles or identities in society (daughter, sibling, pupil, for example) can increase the size of a person's social network, which can improve one's ability to create and hold positive relationships.

Generally, we assume children learn to behave like the other people in their social category and physical location as well as in their sphere of influence. This is largely achieved through interaction with peers, albeit with familial investment, as Harris so succinctly argues,

Socialisation is not something that adults do to children; it is something children do to themselves, with peers. Thus it looks as if the parents are conveyors of the culture – they are not, the peer group is.

(Harris, 1998: 357-358)

In some settings socialisation may be achieved quite organically, such as in rural Sylhet, whereas in other locations, like Scotland for the Sylheti-heritage children, social interactions may require more work, in terms of establishing and sustaining them due to restricted opportunities. Before attending to the children's evidence on their social worlds, I digress slightly by including mention of aspects of childrearing and views on childhood from rural Sylhet, highly relevant within this research agenda.

### **Childhoods in Rural Sylhet: Sociability as a rural norm**

In Sylhet village society, children are rarely alone; everyone, whether adult or child, is seldom engaged in individual activity or finds time to be solitary (Blanchet, 1996, 2001; Rigg, 2007). Communal cultures stress interdependence with most individuals sharing common values and beliefs although they may vary depending on factors such as social class, education, gender, age and place within the wider family.

From their evidence, both verbal and visual, and my observations, children experienced wide social networks, within their natal family, with other children and adults within their villages and surrounding areas. Wherever one ventures in the rural villages of Sylhet there are children involved in some interaction or other. When first

I visited village homes, children appeared curious but shy hanging back around the doorframes and verandas of their dwellings in small groups; as they became used to my presence they would return to their childhood activities and games, or sometimes accompany me through the village in ‘Pied Piper’ fashion, curious and full of energy. Strikingly, children seemed familiar both to and with most people they encountered on such expeditions.

I begin my discussion on sociability with some excerpts from my field-diaries relating to early childhood, care-giving and family life, which then is related to depictions and narratives from the village children.

I often visited Minu, Foisal’s wife, in the cooler late afternoons and watched the baby Fa’mid and her older son Fa’zhan who was around two years old. Minu appeared very young, was shy but very hospitable, offering tea when I arrived. Her home was very tranquil. She was attentive to her children; when Fa’mid cried his mother would give him attention, breast-feed him on demand, cool and cleanse his body with a damp rag and carry him around. Fa’zhan was usually playing in the vicinity, with whatever items came to hand, around her feet or in the yard, although he received little individual attention, except when his behaviour drew his mother’s negative attention; she would sometimes, if he was in proximity, swipe him with a thin bamboo cane and speak to him harshly.

Note: I refer here to Minu as ‘Foisal’s wife’ as she was thus introduced to me, and never by name although I did ask her as I got to know her. This aspect is revealing as it shows how women are subsumed within their husband and his wider lineage’s identity.

Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Women's and more specifically young wives and mother’s lives are very restricted and private, focused around the inside areas of their dwellings and immediate courtyards (Blanchet, 1987, 2001; White, 1992; Jeffery, 1979). During the first few months of life, following a period of seclusion, it is commonplace, as elsewhere, for babies to be cared for almost exclusively by their mothers. All the babies I visited were breastfed on demand. It is familiar to enter a dwelling and find the mother lying on her bed feeding her infant at her side. It is hot and humid and this is most restful for the mother and child. Infants are never left untended but rather looked after by kin or taken with their mothers as they work, as this excerpt shows.

When Fa'mid was quiet his mother laid him in the centre of their vast wooden bed, commonplace in these homes, and he remained passive, grasping the edge of the embroidered cover, gazing around or dozing as she worked close by. If she was outside, she either carried him on her hip or he lay on some cloth on the dry earth while she tended her chickens and vegetables or washed their clothes in the communal pond. Sometimes she covered him with an upturned wicker basket, to protect him from insects and the sun, much as newly laid chicks were covered to safeguard them from predators. Like other infants I observed, Fa'mid was never left alone or abandoned in a separate room; caregivers were attentive to the slightest sound, and he was always in close proximity to an adult or older child.

Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

This caregiving is focused extensively on feeding and this pattern continues throughout childhood, and indeed later life, as in the practices of hand-feeding young children, even when they appear mature enough to feed themselves. Love and sociability are expressed very strongly through practices of feeding and Sylhetis articulate nurture and hospitality through food sharing, even where resources seem limited or constrained (Rosario, 2002). Women stated that babies should not be left to cry and should be picked up and nursed as much as possible. It is customary for babies to be breast fed for around eighteen to twenty-four months but for boys, often as much as three years. Certainly, this was what I observed, with sons often fed for longer, as some people believe they take longer to mature and are often more in receipt of investments than daughters in the same family. Blanchet, (2001: 52) states 'boys represent wealth, but girls are seen as a cumbersome responsibility'. This differentiation may hold less worth now than in past times as aspects of this thesis will show (Chapter 7).

Although relatively young Tani, pictured below, regularly cares for her baby cousin, Moni, while her auntie is tending to other domestic tasks around the *bari*. Tani is at a stage where she could be attending pre-school provision of some sort but is often to be seen helping around the homestead. Although mothers are very committed to caring for their babies, they are usually laid down when not being fed or carried around by older children or women. In my fieldwork experience, young girls play a pivotal role in supporting new mothers, like Tani. Separate dwellings within the *bari* often had walls or fences around them to delineate land ownership and usage and on the boundary the wall or fence gap was often covered with a curtain to create

privacy. Women and children would move freely between the separate dwellings, but men approached with more caution.



*Tani and her nephew Tahid, Sylhet, 2011*

Children, who were present would often play an intermediary role between women and men, whilst also helping with younger children. By the time the rural child is weaned and walking, even often before fully mobile and physically independent, they are spending increasing amounts of time predominantly in the company of older peers, other children from their own family or kinship group, who may or may not live under the same roof. Indeed, Blanchet (2001) states that by the time a rural Bangladeshi child is around eighteen months to two years of age, they are probably only spending two to three hours a week in intensive interaction and nurturance with the mother and generally cared for and watched over by older children, usually family members. Children are omnipresent and I regularly observed both boys and girls equally involved in interaction in a child's early months and beyond. Older children loved to hold and play with the babies and young children, and seemed very considerate and proud of them, confident in interactions and self-reliant in decision-making too. This aspect of childhood may be short-lived as other infant kin are born, so also requiring attention, as excerpts from my diaries show.

Fa'zhan appeared quite ignored and neglected, but content, self-sufficient and self-absorbed, receiving little attention from his mother beyond being roughly scrubbed under the communal water pump, scantily clothed and hand-fed rice, fruits and other foods from time to time. He had no toys and tended to play outside his home, with twigs, sticks and other things from nature, often chasing chickens, their young and the goats, which roamed freely around.

Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Thus children could, from an early age, be 'free-ranging' within the bounded area of their homestead, and beyond in the neighbourhood, where homesteads were more spatially constrained, with older children leading by example. While children showed great affection to the infants, this diminished over time, like the example of Fa'zhan, who had been subsumed into the more general culture of childhood, so receiving less individualised attention.

Fa'zhan was often to be found trailing along beside Tasneem and her younger sister Taneem, within the wider *bari*. He would often toddle off behind other *bari* children usually under the watchful eye of one of the more mature children, usually a girl, who may receive care instructions from Minu. This day he is digging with a broken tree branch in a pile of sand, as tall as himself, beside a half-built brick house while the girls are playing at 'mehendi' close by. There is little verbal interaction between him and the girls. I notice Tasneem keeping a watchful on him, glancing over from time to time, albeit from a distance.

Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Children often had to think quite hard before replying to research questions regarding their younger kin and siblings, which I attributed to this aspect of life being very much 'how things were', taken for granted or certainly not given much conscious thought.

*I remember when I was very small and Tasneema was a baby... going to see Chuto Chacha and Bhabi [youngest paternal uncle and his wife]. Bhabi let me hold Tasneema and play with her and now, we have been playing ever since. Now there are more little ones than big ones, it's more fun anyway and she can now take care of the infants while I do other things.*

Hasan, older cousin to Tasneem(a), fieldnotes, rural Sylhet, 2010

The care-giving seems to pass through the range of family members, with boys such as Hasan involved too, although this seems to be in his past with school and other responsibilities now taking precedence and Tasneema taking on a similar role to his

prior helping task. Much of what Hasan expressed above has implications beyond this present discussion, which will be explored later, but telling in terms of the continuity of family life within the *bari* and the role of women and girls. Certainly, children were active social agents in shaping their own childhoods and those of their peers (James & Prout, 1997), playing a central role from an extremely early stage in each others' lives, apparently often to a larger degree than their natal parents and in so doing exercising rights of autonomy and self-expression, making decisions concerning their own welfare and that of others, particularly the younger children (Alderson, 1993, 2000). James and Prout, (1997: 7) state that 'the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture'. In rural Sylhet, where formal social interaction takes place, it is very adult-centred and children are tolerated but largely unacknowledged, like Fa'zhan above, except in the infant phase. Although often present they receive attention around issues of feeding, hygiene and toileting but little else with the exception of being reprimanded. They are nevertheless deeply valued, as people were consistent in reminding me, as shown here:

'Our children are our lives and that of the Desh'.

'It is the point of human existence, to procreate and in this we are blessed'

(Parents' comments on children. Fieldwork notes, rural Sylhet, 2008 & 2010)

Often parents and other adults would state that it is the earthly duty of Muslims to procreate, thus children are very much valued as a sign of religious devotion as well as the purpose of married life. Love is not necessarily expressed through lavish attention or objects but rather through one's place within the wider social fabric of family and the *bari*, as evidenced above, with few people isolated. Babies and young children, consequently, do not expect to receive intensive focus, or undivided time, nor are engaged in formal 'play' or educational activities with the adults. This does not mean they are uneducated or lacking 'development' opportunities; children are socialised and educated, learning the 'rules' of their family and wider culture through immersion in the setting and this certainly becomes more apparent over time (Chapter 6). In a sense it appears that childhood is thus more 'organic' in nature - children are raised in settings where they are but a small part of a greater whole, the

joint family, which may include many people. I choose to call this immersion and interaction ‘embedded’ as activity relating to children appears less formal, intentioned than is the norm in the Global North and more ‘by virtue of just being present’ in the wider day-to-day of family existence. Significantly, Rogoff (1990) distinguishes between two very different styles of learning through adult-child interaction depending on cultural context. In the rural Global South, children are adapted *to the situations*, thus involved and incorporated by adults and elders in the daily life of the community, initially by observing and then by agency and participation (Chapter 6). Conversely, in Northern (particularly middle-class<sup>22</sup>) contexts, situations may be adapted *to children*; the child is the focus. In Sylhet, this may be in part due to the demands on parental time, or lack of emphasis until recently on pre-school and primary education<sup>23</sup> (Viruru, 2001), although social class does play a part in this, with children of more affluent parents receiving greater individual attention and inputs and remaining *shishu* for longer<sup>24</sup> (Blanchet, 2001). As children mature, their sociability is more widespread and predominantly child-centred (Chapter 6), although for girls this is short-lived, merely a passing phase in their development, before they enter *purdah* (Jeffery, 1979; White, 1992; Blanchet, 2001).

Village childhood is very much based around peers and young children are predominantly engaged in spending time with child siblings and wider kin, both adults and children, as well as other people, like Romana’s *Dadu* mentioned above, who may live near by. Those people who lived close-by were usually kin, although variation was noted in different settings, due to geographical settlement and livelihood strategies, relocation and diverse social arrangements<sup>25</sup>, but generally

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<sup>22</sup> Much of the existing research in the Global North has been conducted with white middle-class children so it is not possible to generalize in this way beyond this cohort.

<sup>23</sup> Conversely, it may in fact be that the lack of provision is more reflective of the lack of regard that children have received as a separate group until recently.

<sup>24</sup> I did meet a few affluent families with children who did not participate in day-to-day helping within the household. They were encouraged in education and more formal (material) aspects of play and were treated as ‘vulnerable’, and often very indulged, although some of them were quite mature and able.

<sup>25</sup> Family tensions, economic issues and care-requirements were amongst the issues, which may require individual families to relocate or move further afield from their wider natal kin networks (Gardner, 2006; Goulbourne et al, 2010).

villagers were agnatically related. Adults were present but appeared, in general, preoccupied and distant in the children's day-to-day, with the aforementioned exception of intentioned care activities for babies and younger children.



*Romana and her sister, arriving at her Dadu's home, Sylhet, 2011*

*I am walking to the house of my grandmother and my uncle with my [baby] sister. My mother is busy so we are going there to play with my family [child cousins]. Sometimes my brother Rafi will come too but this day he was asleep. I will take my small sister home later, after teatime prayer, when my mother has finished her work or if my sister is hungry but she can eat rice at grandmother's house. When we walk this pathway, we see many people, our friends, sometimes they walk with us. My grandmother does not mind and they can play there too. If we need help there are many people we know...*

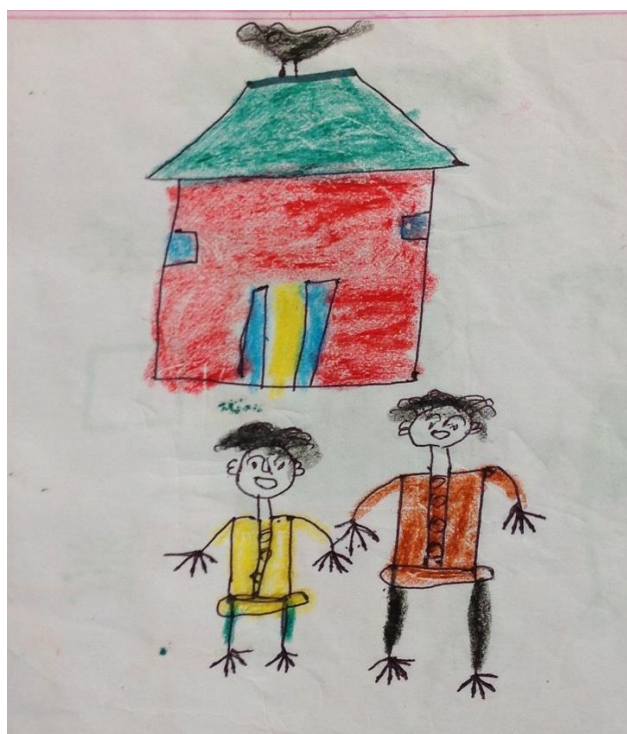
Romana, ♀, 5-6 years, Field Diaries, Sylhet, 2011

When they visited Romana's grandmother was close at hand but usually engaged in small tasks or sitting on a stool in the shade of her door chewing betel nut, with little intervention in Romana and her group's activities, unless they transgressed some norm. Thus it is not uncommon within the rural villages to see a young child, like Romana above, carrying, often with difficulty or discomfort, a baby or younger

child. It is normal to see older children quite adeptly supervising their younger siblings but not always intervening, only where necessary. A very young child, like Fa'zhan discussed above and indeed Romana's little sister Rumi, is thus introduced to the local 'culture' of childhood, and wider social networks, by an already 'initiated child', while adults are free to undertake their day-to-day activities, like Asif's example below.

*My mother is busy preparing food and looking after our baby sister. We [Asif and brother Asfak] often go to the bazaar like this, everyone knows us, our family. Some of my uncles have shops here so perhaps some days we might help them. My other uncle is coming from Khulna<sup>26</sup> to stay.*

Asif, ♂, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2010



*Asif: my brother and me going to the bazaar, Sylhet, 2010*

Women's and older girls of the household's lives are very busy with labour-intensive activities, so thus they are able to conduct their day to day domestic work around their house and *bari*, while older children may play a bridging role to the wider

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<sup>26</sup> In the south of Bangladesh.

village life. Within their depictions, children were specific about interaction with adults, usually family, in the context of helping with tasks, as Asif illustrates above. This may be due to the fact that children are immersed in settings where adults are generally apparent, although often working, women within the seclusion of homes and *baris*, men more publicly. The rural economy and associated work patterns mean that for many children, fathers and other working members of families may be busy close by, in the fields, artisan workshops, the bazaar or numerous small shops, which litter the rural landscape (Rigg, 2007; Nieuwenhuys, 1994) and often, in my experience, adults and children only returned home periodically, for nourishment.

### **Family sociality beyond the *Desh***

*We are moving into the other house now, my mum, dad and brothers. Our family from 'London' is coming and we stay in their house just now. We need to help make the house ready, paper decorations, food and things. It will be fun as we can play with the children, eat nice food. Everyone will be happy...*

Jamil, ♂, 7 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Children alluded to other family who may not be permanent residents in the *bari* but are still part of the children's experience in terms of spatial settlement and wider social interaction too, albeit intermittent. Kin may be predominantly living in the Diaspora but still large within the villagers' imaginations and at times, their day-to-day social lives too, something which Jamil, above, alluded to and enjoyed in terms of social opportunities, with tasks to undertake in advance but seemingly undertaken with good grace and anticipation of positive social experiences. Similarly, children often mentioned kin in 'London', many of whom they had not yet met, in the same vein as they might mention kin across the village.

*My little uncle is living in London and my Dad talks to him every day and we can too. He makes us laugh and tells us about his shop there and his children<sup>27</sup> who are coming here next year. We have seen some pictures of them too on the mobile. We will all eat and sleep together, my Dad will be happy and we will have new friends.*

Naveed, ♂, 6 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2010

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<sup>27</sup> Strikingly, children rarely mention mothers or women in this type of regard, just the men and children; in my experience men rarely mentioned their wives or close women kin either, in general day-to-day talk.

Much of the transnational or distant interaction and information that children mentioned is enabled by the use of print media and mobile technology which has changed the lives of villagers and their kin in the Diaspora enormously (Mahler, 2001). Children are clearly a part of this. Thus familial relationships are created, even with 'yet to meet' kin, and children are becoming knowledgeable on aspects of life in far-flung places. There has been much recent literature on this modern dimension of sociality, in terms of maintaining and strengthening bonds but also giving and receiving advice and support and keeping abreast of social dimensions across distant locales (cf Goulbourne et al, 2010; Katz, 2004; Trask, 2010; Osella & Gardner, 2004).

### **Gender divisions and accessibility of adults**

Although in early infancy children are predominantly with their mothers, other women and children, nonetheless male kin may also have a significant involvement. Many families contained adult men who were workless, or working in seasonal occupations (Gardner, 2008; White, 1992) with considerable numbers partially or wholly reliant on overseas remittances (Gardner, 2008, 2010; Garbin, 2005). Work structures do exist here but due to patterns of work, sharecropping and agricultural economic conditions, men's work opportunities are generally more seasonally dependent and may be more unpredictable than the norm in the urban North. For many children, fathers and other male kin were evident and accessible within the *bari* or local environs, the *bazaar* or *masjid*. Thus life exhibited more fluidity in the villages than is generally evident in urban settings in Scotland. In households where adult men have migrated to find employment or remarried, children also depicted 'other' adult men as present or intermittently so, in a supervisory fashion. I understood these men to be the children's father's kin, who may where available, assume the role of household head in such instances (Gardner, 2008, 2009; Jeffery, 1979). Indeed, Reynolds (2009: 21-22) asserts that in the absence of biological fathers, it is commonplace that the role may be played by the presence of other men, for example, uncles, grandfathers and older male siblings. Thus, as children go about their everyday lives, adults, often but not always kin, may appear as something of a constant in the children's lives, sometimes living a parallel existence and sometimes

a reality which overlaps, in terms of activities, as needs and nature dictate (Youniss, 1983; Stephens, 1995; Corsaro, 2005).

However, there were few images or verbal representations of women in the public domain. Children did allude to their mothers, *chachi* and *babis* ('aunties')<sup>28</sup> in relation to caring and specific tasks although they were never represented in their diary drawings and depictions, which suggests even at a young age, children have made the distinction between the public and private spaces of their existences, with women very firmly in the private domain as practices of *purdah* would demand. In daily life, although women are largely invisible within the public domain, adult women are encountered when out in the villages. Such women tend to be the disenfranchised, the destitute, who are largely dependent on charity from better off villagers and who, as if invisible (or unmentionable), did not feature at all in the children's depictions. Such vulnerability and marginalisation is a widespread phenomenon of South Asian life, particularly in rural communities (Jeffery & Basu, 1998a). One's status as woman or child is attached to the male - without this crucial relationship, whether with husbands, fathers, brothers or sons, women may become insubstantial or invisible in the *samaj* (society). Crucially, even with status through male kin, women may be vulnerable as the following excerpt shows.

*This is my Dadu's [paternal grandmother, in this example, widowed] house and I went with Ruxana [older sister] after her school, to take rice, as Dadu was ill. My uncle was away [elsewhere] in Bangladesh with auntie's [his wife's] family so there is no one there to care for her.*

Romana, ♀, 6 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2008

Romana's *Dadu* was reliant on the care of wider kin in her eldest son's absence and this is a role often played by children, acting as go-betweens amid the *baris*, as needs may dictate, so thus learning and practising, the important dimension of care for wider family, with the inherent relevant gender dimensions too.

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<sup>28</sup> Chachi' (pronounced saasii) or babi, 'auntie' (often the English is used by the children) is a generic term used in this locale, which may include adult women who are not strictly aunts but close family or friends. Differentiation between the two terms is linked to kinship, from which side of the family the auntie belongs although there are more terms too, too complex to note here for different placings within family, with auntie being named differently depending on the familial relationship.



*Romana and Ruxana returning from visiting their Dadu, Sylhet, 2008*

Romana's *Amma* (mother) was secluded within her homestead with her new infant son and her *Dadu* secluded elsewhere; as this narrative shows children are a key social link (Chapter 6) in such situations where in-house support is intermittent, lacking and men may not be available, or are too busy, to perform such a role.

Romana and her sister Ruxana, above, are returning to their *bari*, after visiting their grandmother, (*Dadu*), who is ill, which they do on a regular basis for their mother, but will cease to do as they mature and enter *pardah*, replaced by younger children.

### **Sylheti-heritage Childhoods in Urban Scotland**

In Scotland, children provided very rich descriptions of activities and social connections within their homes and wider environs. This section focuses on family and is supplemented by the narratives of some of the mothers. My research shows that in the context of life in urban Scotland, and the comparatively 'closed' social aspects, children are much more in the domain and company of the adults and remain so for longer, than was apparent and depicted in rural Sylhet. Fathers and other men were less apparent and available. Thus, mothers and young children may be more socially isolated, with less available family support around them, although work hard to create and participate in social opportunities. Food continues to be a key point of interaction, a symbol of sociability and nurture, as in village life. Visiting and being visited, as well as 'sleeping over', are featured as key dimensions of enriching social life.

Mothers and close family are the primary caregivers for babies and young children, but this may be experienced differently across the locales. Below, I include an excerpt from Lipa's narrative in inner city Scotland, quite typical amongst the new mothers I met. How much of this may be attributed to early stage in family formation is hard to tell but evidence shows over time adjustments transpire and life becomes less lonely (Sait, 2008; Ward, 2004). Indeed, Liem (1999:158), in her study of Chinese migrant mothers in Australia highlights that there is a 'vacuum of practical support' for recently arrived marriage-migrants whose social network has diminished or disappeared thus finding themselves living in relative isolation; an exceedingly difficult situation if they are used to an environment of community 'back home' where childrearing is a responsibility shared among members of the extended family and community. I visited Lipa frequently over the research period and as a mother myself, what she presented was quite stark compared with my early experiences of motherhood in Scotland, in a setting where I had family close by, friends who could freely visit me and access to the public domain. What follows are excerpts from her narrative on first meeting.

*Every day is just the same for me. I wake with the baby and attend to his needs, begin the laundry and cleaning. When he sleeps I usually cook, as I like to have something prepared for my husband and his brother when they wake up. My husband shops for all our food but I do the cooking for us. My days are long as I wait for my husband to return from work at night, to feed him after his work, although some times he eats at work. Still I wait up as that is what he likes me to do. My son is very difficult, does not sleep for long and always is crying. He may be hungry so I feed him often but he does not settle so I just sit with him in front of the TV. I wish I had sisters close by to talk to and to give me a rest.*

Lipa, Fieldnotes, Scotland, August, 2011

Lipa's life as a young urban mother is far-removed from the life and early motherhood she witnessed in rural Sylhet, where as a young girl, she helped within the *bari*, supporting women, their babies and small children. She lives with baby Th'amid, her husband and his brother, so has a weight of domestic responsibilities with which to contend. Brooker (2002: 39-40), relating to the wider concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990a), and in regard to Bangladeshi and Anglo parents in urban Britain, states that extended family networks and neighbourhood connections support and help some families to survive difficult times and this is relevant in this regard.

Within this research context, the kinsmen work shifts in a restaurant owned by senior family and are often sleeping by day, causing an additional constraint within the household and potentially, greater isolation. Other women who could support may be similarly constrained.

*I wish I had some family near by to talk to and help me with the child, someone to hand him to, although my husband does take him sometimes. When I was growing up in my village, I helped my brother's wives and children, talked with the women, helped with the housework, held the babies. I suppose I imagined the same for me but now I am far away. What looked easy at that time, in my family home, seems now very different and difficult. When my husband is not at work he is often away with the men, at the Mosque or the Samity<sup>29</sup>.*

Lipa and Th'amid, Fieldnotes, Scotland, 2011

Many young mothers echoed similar sentiments and partly what was difficult for the women was a shift from living in joint or extended family settings, with other women close by, in the rural villages, although a few women in the study did or had when first married; a few women mentioned this had been a source of support but not without tensions too.<sup>30</sup> Generally, where extended family existed, it seemed to consist of men giving shelter to other unmarried or 'displaced for work' men, as is the pattern for this migrant cohort, with an expectation that women would care for them all, based on prevailing gender norms. Some families had elderly kin residing with them too, often on a temporary basis<sup>31</sup>, which could provide company but also involve additional caring responsibilities and challenges. From my 'outsider' perspective it seemed that perhaps the older family members could play something of a supporting role, as evidence exists that some of the elders are isolated too (Milan, 2009) but this did not seem to prevail. In discussion with a local Minority Ethnic community health worker, the reason became clear.

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<sup>29</sup> *Samity* literally means community and in the urban settings the Bangladeshis had community spaces, often small shops, which seemed to serve both a social and political function, where men would gather to catch up and talk, use the internet, send remittances to the *Desh*, and rally for action in the wider political domain. I visited such a centre; it was wholly the domain of men and older boys, many of whom were sitting around, talking and drinking tea.

<sup>30</sup> Extended family homes is not what the migrants aspire to but may be a necessity; often men may defer marriage until they are in a position to afford to have their own dwelling, post-marriage.

<sup>31</sup> Sometimes elderly family circulated between the homes of younger kin, a departure from past practices where the norm was for them to reside in the eldest brother's home (Garbin, 2008). This adaption may reflect changing patterns of residence and work in the UK contexts, but women still bore most responsibility for this caring aspect.

Many of the seniors are suffering from health issues, not very fit to undertake much in the way of caring or supporting the mothers and children, although they may be present so provide a degree of companionship. They (the elderly) lead very sedentary lives and some have complex health concerns, with diabetes and coronary problems being the most prevalent issues. There is also a social expectation within this culture that in later life, one is cared for, rather than undertaking caring responsibilities for others, so the degree of companionship within the relationship with older kin, may well be overshadowed by the weight of responsibilities of caring for them.

Harris, personal communication, Field-diary, Rowanlee, 2012

Such aspects are much discussed in the wider academic literature on both South Asia and South Asian Diaspora (Parekh, 2008; JRF, 2007) and relevant in considering the wider needs of the families. Ansell and van Blerk (2007) emphasise that the emotional impacts of migration are often under-explored. They argue that 'getting used to' a new environment, in particular building familiarity and a sense of belonging, is facilitated by relationships with family and friends in the migrant destination (Punch, 2008: 102). Where younger, contemporary female kin did exist they may be geographically distant or in similar situations, with young children, so support may be scant, although there were exceptions where families lived proximally. Where women were unable to develop wider social relations, this factor became more extreme after the birth of children when mothers were even more constrained; inevitably, their children experienced the same isolation some to a greater, some to a lesser degree (JRF, 2007; Frost et al, 1996; De La Luz Reynoso and Tidwill, 1996; Davies, 1998; Barlow et al., 2004). Bell and Ribbons, (1994: 231) in relation to women's autonomy and social networks state that

Mothers' experiences of psychological and social isolation are important issues, and we must not overstate the case for women's network involvements, nor *understate* the importance of research which seeks to understand the complex interplay of factors which may contribute to an unwelcome sense of social isolation. Restricted access to resources, (whether a car, a telephone, or relatives living round the corner), recent geographical mobility (Tivers, 1985; Werbner, 1988, Mayall, 1990) and certain types of dwelling (Lopata, 1971; Tivers, 1985) may all make lack of social contacts more likely.

Some neighbourhoods are considered likely to be associated with social isolation due to factors of safety, familiarity and scant access to people with whom one has a

common bond (Garbarino and Sherman, 1980; Bunting, 1991). Consequently, most women worked hard to develop networks with other women, a departure from the more fluid ‘free-flowing’ nature of social and gender relations remembered from village life. By this, I do not wish to imply that in Sylhet, women did not strategise within their social relations, but more that this deliberate activity was more essential between the fragmented Sylheti households in Scotland.

### **The Centrality of Family**

Some families were fortunate to have kin close by, others not so, although it must not be assumed that kinship relations are easy, automatic or devoid of challenges. Nevertheless, they are recognized as important points of contact especially for newer-settled or more isolated community members (JRF, 2007; Hill, 2005). Children talked warmly of their close families and wider kin.

#### ‘For Us, Family is Everything’

*I live with my mum and dad and I got a little brother, whose name is Syam, he’s at home and I love him very much. My mum always looks after me and she is kind. My dad works in a restaurant and he is very kind. My mum always says I must be good and helpful. My family [uncles and their families] live close by too.*

Suhana, ♀, 7 years, Fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2010



*Suhana’s family, her Mum, Dad and Brother, Rowanlee, 2010*

*My uncle and auntie live in the next street, so we see them a lot, they come here and we go there, we play together, our mums can chat.*

Aisha, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Suhana and Aisha are cousins, with fathers who are brothers, Jadid arriving four years earlier than his younger brother Jamil. Jadid facilitated the residential settlement of Jamil and his family close by. He had also negotiated a more junior position in the family business for his brother. Place of settlement is significant within the small urban communities of my research (Gilligan 2000; Hill, 2005); there were distinct differences in children's social experiences based on the area of family settlement as follows. The children and their families, like Suhana and Aisha above, who were resident in Rowanlee experienced greater social opportunities than the families in Calder, based on factors (Chapter 3), pertaining to residence and 'community' formation. Significantly, Rowanlee children discussed wider social relationships, beyond home as illustrated above, with members of their wider 'community' living in the same streets and indeed apartment blocks too. This seemed akin to representations from the Sylhet villages, of a typical *bari* or *para*, where there are flexible and on-going social connections, which are very much taken for granted, so providing company and support where required.

Children in Rowanlee mentioned social opportunities in their immediate locale more frequently than children in Calder where there were fewer families from the *Desh*. In Calder, efforts were made by families to incorporate their children into schools within their wider ethnic community, even where this might entail a journey across the city. This is a common practice amongst migrant families, who often largely depend on longer-settled kin to make recommendations on such aspects (Brooker, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 1997) and more broadly attached to ideas on belonging and identity too. Certainly, Rowanlee School, situated in a disadvantaged urban neighbourhood, was identified, both by migrant families and the wider literature (Scottish Government, 2005), as being very inclusive of migrant families so many families made efforts to enrol their children despite the potential 'trials' of an urban journey to enable this.

As in Sylhet, 'home' is the domain in which lives are situated although in the Scottish setting, this is predominantly indoors and quite private, unlike the typical *bari* and *para* existence in the villages, where much of life is played out outdoors, kin are readily accessible and there is a casual fluidity of moving between individual residences and the spaces between too, for children at least.<sup>32</sup> Within both Rowanlee and Calder neighbourhoods, the Bangladeshi children predominantly lived in nuclear families (Chapter 4), although they often mentioned family visits, like Ali below:

*Sometimes after nursery or on the weekend we go to my auntie's house and my mum is happy and we all eat rice and mishti<sup>33</sup> and I can play with my friends while my mum gossips. We get to go if we are good. It's far away, we take a taxi and sometimes we stay there at night to sleep if it's dark; it's fun, we can stay up late and watch TV and eat and play around. Everyone is happy.*

Ali, ♂, 4 years, Child-diaries, Calder, 2011



*Ali's family in Calder, 2011, later relocated to Rowanlee, 2012*

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<sup>32</sup> Although, in Sylhet, this aspect diminishes over time especially for girls as they mature and enter the world of *purdah*.

<sup>33</sup> 'Eating rice' is just a general term for eating any savoury everyday meal, while '*mishti*' is often used to cover any sweets, desserts and such like.

Significantly, Ali mentions taking a taxi and family visiting, which it transpires is to Rowanlee neighbourhood, where eventually his family find housing. He highlights the aspect of sleeping over, staying up late, which emphasises the investment of time and potential for disruption that such get-togethers entail. Food is a key element of this too and such occasions are both greatly enjoyed and from Rugie's evidence anticipated and planned well in advance too.

*We sometimes go to see my aunties or they come to see us and then there are lots of children to play with and everyone can be together. But then my mum is very busy shopping and cooking, my aunties will bring things to share too. Ruxana, my sister helps with the cooking and we need to be quiet. Or we can take things to them....*

Rugie, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Apart from routine shopping, going to nursery and school, when outside their homes, children were usually socialising with family; children recounted this as the best part of their free time. Conversely, family may visit them and that was also described as 'fun', although mothers were often too busy before such an occasion making preparations; children felt, like Rugie above, required to be quiet, out of sight, although older girls often helped with food preparation and tidying. This is akin to Sylheti village life where there are usually plentiful female family members who can prepare foods together for guests but with the advantage of outside space for children to congregate and play, so not under their mother's feet.

*When we went to the village, everyday we saw other people and everyone eating [sic] rice together, children playing outside. My mum wants to go home again soon, back to the Desh, it's more fun really for playing, but too hot as well...*

Anjum, ♀, Child-diaries, Calder, 2012

Anjum's comment above is telling in terms of her perceptions from visiting kin in the rural villages, 'home' for her mother, in terms of more fluid social dimensions and dynamics, as well as the centrality of food. Other families, especially in Calder where few Bangladeshi people resided, were perhaps less endowed with social capital or familial connections so were less able to exploit kin relationships to enhance their social prospects, as Sharmila's narrative shows.

'My cat is my best friend' – 'Amar bilai, amar bondu(bi)...'

*My cat is always waiting for me. Khushi [the cat] is always happy when I come back from school and makes me happy too. That's what her name means – 'happy'. So, I spend my home time with her and my mum. Sometimes my uncle visits when my dad is away, with food, but sometimes it's just Khushi, mum and me.*

Sharmila, ♀, 6 years, Field-notes, Calder, 2012

Sharmila and her mum had few kin relations in Calder neighbourhood and were quite isolated, largely relying on male kin for help, although Anjum's family lived quite close by. The girls were not at school together, which could have been a bonding opportunity, had they been, as cited by several authors (cf. Brooker, 2002: Woods et al, 1999).



*Sharmila: my cat Khushi and me, Calder, 2012*

'We don't see anyone'....

*I really only see Sharmila and her mum with my mum and brother when we are coming back from school, but twice we went to Sharmila's house with my mum and her mum; sometime they will come to our house. Sharmila's mum does not like to go out when it's getting dark after school [the winter months in Scotland] so maybe we will do that in the summer. My mum said maybe we could all go to the park one day too, if it is sunny. Asif can take me to the park if I like.*

Anjum, Field-notes, Calder, 2012

Both Sharmila and Anjum's fathers worked away only returning periodically, which caused constraints for their mothers and there was additionally, a family feud between the men, too protracted to include here. Nevertheless, the mothers showed agency in rising above this tension to create social opportunities together, albeit

infrequent and covert. Anjum had a brother Asif in his teen years, who provided more help and security for Anjum and her mum. She was more fortunate than Sharmila in this social aspect, with Asif enabling opportunities to venture outside.

Thai (in Parrenas & Siu, 2007: 91), regarding Vietnamese migrants in the U.S., talks of the immigrant family as sites where ‘normative structures’ of indigenous life are enacted, so it may be that families are following the predominant structural models in the location in which they have become embedded, in terms of settlement. The nuclear family structure is portrayed as the norm for inner-city majority families<sup>34</sup>. Undoubtedly local housing types dictate the nature of family settlement, which may have more of an affect on household structure than following so-called ‘indigenous’ patterns, of which the migrants may have little experience. This model may prove easier for menfolk, as rarely at home, than their later-arrived wives and sisters who are used to living in more communal households or *baris*. What is perhaps pertinent is that many of the properties occupied were rented from older longer-settled male kin, so it was both expedient and inevitable that some families may reside within these, through kinship affiliations (Garbin, 2005; Gardner, 2003). Regardless of rationale or motive, the migrant families generally pursued the nuclear model thus proving potentially problematic where women are so dependent on males for public engagement activities. I do not, however, wish to imply that all women showed the level of dependency that Sharmila’s mother did, but certainly recently-migrated women, or women with menfolk working antisocial hours or away, were particularly at risk of isolation and dependency, with subsequent impacts on their children’s lives (Ramalingham, 2013; Garbin, 2005; Dwyer, 2007). Young children are largely dependent on the existing social relationships within the lives of their families (Rigg, 2011: 54); where families were physically dispersed, women may be isolated following marriage and migration, when compared with their childhood experiences from the *Desh*. Social networks depend on reciprocity although may be conflicting and unsupportive<sup>35</sup> as well as supportive. Parents who are not able to reciprocate,

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<sup>34</sup> This is a throw-back to idealized models of family and is no longer the reality for the majority of inner-city families and households in the Global North (Cohen, 2014; Klever, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Too broad a topic to discuss in depth here, it is important to highlight that where women did have kin for support, some alluded to conflicts, based on the nature of the kin ties, for example between

sometimes because of integration, personality or health problems, are often the ones most in need of company and support (Ghate & Hazel, 2002).

*Sometimes it's boring and I wish we could go to more places and see people. I love our house but wish we had a garden and then we could play outside more. It's not safe in our street. I see lots of people on my way to nursery but I don't know any of them.*

Tuhin, ♂, Field-notes, Rowanlee, 2011

However, 'isolation' is always a relative concept and although children described much of their childhood experience as appearing isolated, this is not necessarily how they perceived their lives. They knew no different, and many childhoods contain aspects of boredom within them. Brooker (2002: 52), in her research with Bangladeshi mothers, states that the mothers often depicted their children in their pre-school years as 'self-reliant if sometimes bored' and many mothers were not aware of *how* their children passed their time in the long hours at home, thus suggesting an element of independence from adults, much as observed in the villages, but often without the more extensive peer or sibling companionship experienced there (Chapter 6).

### **The extent of family relationships**

Key women, more confident, usually of senior status and longer standing within the urban settings, were instrumental in creating wider social opportunities in the absence of menfolk much as they may in their natal villages, based on their experience, social connections and greater social capital (Akter, 2013; Kindler, 2015). Amidst the relative isolation depicted by some children and their mothers, there existed some very rich social opportunities, to which I, as researcher, was sometimes invited and included. Such occasions typically comprised several women and their children, involved much forward planning in terms of persons and, importantly, foodstuffs, travel and sleeping arrangements. Men were never present at such gatherings, rarely alluded to and I often wondered where they were, although, I assumed, working. Male children were often present, up until around 10 to 13 years

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brother's sisters and brother's wives or husband's mothers and daughters-in-law. Women, thus, however isolated may choose to keep their issues to themselves or only for certain audiences.

of age, while still regarded as *shishu*. Beyond this age, boys seem to be subsumed within the domain of the men (Field, 2004, 2005; Khan & Lynch, 1997; Mandelbaum, 1988).

Aziz and Maloney (1985) state that Bangladeshi children, especially in rural areas, are socialized to assume their respective male and female roles well before puberty. Such gendered aspects of life, the norm in the villages of Sylhet, appeared transposed; patterns observed within the Scottish setting corresponded with this, although it may be that boys remain *shishu*, within the female domain longer, in the post-migration setting, due to the employment regimes of the men within the cash nexus and the fact of state education too. White (1992) and Blanchet (2001) discussed this in the context of social class in Bangladesh and this may be relevant here too; with greater social standing, as experienced by the migrant families, plus structural factors, childhood both as perceived and enacted may be longer in duration, so explaining the presence of the male youth. White (1992: 144) emphasises however, in regard to gender relations that ‘identity is worked out in society and is constantly under negotiation and review’, so this may be but one example of that in practice, contingent on needs in the family setting and other intersecting factors too. Boys, with English language proficiency and greater confidence in the public domains, could thus facilitate a bridging role to the wider society and its amenities too, as Momtaz mentions below in regard to her ‘big brother’ so representing safety for the families and helping facilitate inclusion.

#### ‘A Day Trip’

*We went to Berwick upon Tweed to see my aunties. My big brother helped but then he left. When we are there everyone will be [sic] kind, we can play and we have lots of cakes and rice and people to see, it's lots of fun but then we come back here and we're tired, it's very quiet... .. my mum, my sister and me.*

Momtaz, ♀, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, we went there too and came back home, all together on the train, then my mum and I were late for school the next day...*

Sharmila, Field-notes, Calder, 2011

Momtaz' and Sharmila's depiction above was fairly typical of children's social lives beyond their neighbourhoods; they clearly enjoyed such occasions, mixing with wider family, socializing, and having opportunities to travel together, play and share food.

'I love trains, too'

*We [mum, auntie, older brother and sisters] went to London [Oldham in fact] on a train to stay with my aunties and cousins. It was fun and everyone was kind, they gave us toys and nice things to eat. We got to sleep with our cousins and played until late, went to the park and on another big train journey. I've been there before... and then, other people came back to stay with us.*

Shafi, ♂, 4 years, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Shafi was absent from nursery for two weeks, assumed ill by staff who called the family home to enquire but got no response before realizing his brother Sadat was also absent, and surmised the family were probably away. He recounted the above story on his return. This aspect is important to document as such journeys represent a key positive dimension of the migrant family's lives, the sharing of time with kin, predominantly other women and children in the same situation, often geographically distant (McMichael & Manderson, 2004; di Leonardo, 1987; McCartney & Gill, 2007). Women mentioned such excursions and holidays and told of how they may 'grow' from how initially conceived, to include revisits at the end of visits, as Shafi mentions, 'other people came back to stay with us', so prolonging the pleasure for the families, in perhaps a spontaneous fashion. Such times may be situated around visits from wider kin from the *Desh*, who may visit in several far-flung family homes, as several mothers alluded to, or they may equally well comprise of more UK-situated kin enjoying extended time together. Indeed, such visiting, of kin coming together which may be protracted in duration, is the norm in many societies of the Global South and the sharing of time in this fashion was as I observed in the villages of the *Desh*. Relatives from other villages or areas arrived and stayed for (what appeared) indeterminate periods, usually precipitated by the arrival of *Londoni* kin or some family issue, for which solidarity or support was expected from and extended by the wider family. In this way children are learning responsibility to

family and kin; hospitality is encouraged and reciprocity is learnt through participation (Rogoff, 2003; Rigg, 2007). This represents the embedded socialization, which they undergo as they mature, much as they would in the *Desh*.

McMichael and Manderson (2004) state, in relation to Somali migrant women, that wellbeing is not just about contemporary social structures and activities, it is also affected by how women use the past to give meaning to the present. Thus, in my research I stress that women's understandings of contemporary social relations are given comparative meaning through their juxtaposition with memories of social worlds and interactions in rural Sylhet, from life experiences before marriage and migration and return visits as well, and also the people related to the past. This is an important factor for policy-makers and Family Support services to understand (Davis & Smith, 2012; Gilligan, 2000).

*Yes we go to London or Burnley, all my family, except my Dad as he will be working in the restaurant, but my mum, brother and sister, my auntie and cousins, we take the train, or one time my dad drove us there and then he came back. We sometimes stay for all the school holidays or longer. My mum is happy as she does not need to do much and we can play together. One time there was a new baby at my auntie's and everyone helped. That was lovely.*

Aisha, ♀, 6 years, Fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2011

Certainly, such trips were widely discussed by children, often with one narrative precipitating several more. In the context of permanent settlement, these sojourns were sometimes misunderstood or disapproved of by early years' providers and family services, in particular because families do not often give notice of such absences; rather children are just absent for often prolonged periods and then quietly reappear, which interrupts their engagement with their schooling and is regarded as disruptive to the wider class aims too (Reynolds, 2008; Aronowitz, 1984: 237-57). What is clear is that household composition is fluid and visitors very welcome, often from the local area or further afield, the wider UK or beyond, as Sharmila alludes to above; just as the children above, perhaps spent a weekend away in another city, so too might family arrive to stay with them. As well as providing social richness, these times also gave women valuable support through life issues as well as sometimes a rest from the day-to-day domestic chores, as Aisha alludes to above, stating her

‘mum does not need to do much’. This section continues in examining the transnational dimension of the children and family’s social lives.

### **Family in the The Desh**

Through local practices and complex social networks, in Scotland and across the UK, children are learning of interaction and responsibility to the wider kin group, beyond lived ‘home’. The networks stretch further afield back to the villages of Sylhet, *the Desh*, ‘home’ to the mothers (Gardner, 2009, 2010; Brooker, 2002) and more widely too, to other sites of Sylheti migrant settlement. What follows are examples of relationships across the Diaspora as elucidated by the children and some mothers.

*My mum talks to my Dadu every day and she came here when I was a baby but I don’t remember that. We are going next holidays to see her in the village - she is old and we miss her.*

Tabassum, ♀, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2012

Strikingly, Tabassum talks of missing her *Dadu* despite not having met her since infancy. The sense of missing far-flung kin was quite a common trope amongst the children, presumably absorbed and based on feelings from their wider family, especially their mothers and aunties who quite commonly expressed such sentiments, maintaining strong links with family and locations from before their marriage and migration.

*Yes, my mum and dad talk on the mobile to our family in the village most days and we are planning a visit too. It costs a lot of money and we take many gifts from here too. I don’t know what they are saying sometimes, although I try to talk. I have lost my Bangla [Bengali language aptitude] and mum wants me to go to Mrs Miah’s class<sup>36</sup> on Saturdays.*

Roson, ♂, 6 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2011

Tabassum’s and Roson’s remarks above were fairly typical and it was commonplace in visiting families to find one or several members talking on mobiles to kin in the *Desh*, often for prolonged periods of time, sometimes expressing great emotion.

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs Miah, from Kolkata, a grandmother long-settled in Rowanlee, ran Bengali language classes in a local community centre on Saturdays and many of the children attended, some reluctantly, but all realising it may be useful to their wider social lives and family visits to *The Desh*, as encouraged by their parents.

Family news was shared and, importantly, visits were planned in this fashion; this was organised to a large degree by the women, in the absence of the men when working. Strikingly, the women were predominantly maintaining ties with *their* natal kin, their husband's theirs, and when women referred to 'home' in the *Desh*, it was predominantly their childhood homes to which they referred, rather than their affinal ones, where their husbands maintained more contact. Much of this attachment pertains to experience and memory from 'the time before marriage and motherhood'; mothers sometimes spoke of this 'loss of close relations' as perceived after their migration journey. However, such loss also exists within the lives of women back home too, who generally relocated to the husband's village after marriage (Gardner, 2008; Jeffery et al, 1989; White, 1992), and may not see their kin for lengthy periods of time. Strikingly, mothers in the Diaspora are often better placed, in terms of possessing the technology and the comparative wealth to afford calls home, than their women-kin back home, to communicate on a daily basis with their natal families. Additionally, the migrant mothers also have relative autonomy to maintain these relations over distance as they wish, in the absence of the men, at work or sleeping by day, in many of the research cohort's lives. However, evidence exists of some women being denied access to mobiles and communications technology by older female affines (Mirza, 1992, 2012), but I did not hear of this in this study.

### **The role of technology**

*My big brother is helping me, and my mum, to learn the computer. There are classes in the library but my mum cannot understand the teachers. My brother has computers in school and we have them in the nursery too.*

Suhag, ♂, 4 years, child-diary, Rowanlee, 2011

Recent literature emphasises the vital place of technology in facilitating or maintaining social ties, especially across Diasporas (Garbin, 2004, 2005; Morad & Gombac, 2015). Mobile phone technology played a major role in this and all the families used mobile phones. Internet usage was scant amongst the women but facilitated often by older children, as a means to keep in touch, predominantly with other *urban* kin across the Diaspora. Few village homes had computers or computer-literate household members; electricity was only intermittently available too. Language issues are implicated here, in regard to transnational dimensions and

kinship networks; parents were generally keen for children to maintain their mother-tongue (or heritage language as was for some), due to expectations that links would remain strong between locations across the global spaces, where kin reside (Brooker, 2002).

Certainly a gift that was much appreciated in the villages was a pay-as-you-go mobile phone and this was something families would take from Scotland, both for their kin's benefit, but also their own, to maintain contact on their return to Scotland. The mothers regarded such contact as vital, as Lipa, misty-eyed, mentions.

*When I am alone and Th'amid is restless I call my mum and sister in my bari and it is almost like they are here in the room. My mum can advise me and give me company too. My little sister tells me all the news from the village, so when I go there I understand everything*

Lipa, fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2010

Lipa used her close women kin in the *Desh* as both a means of advice and support and also to keep up with the local news, thus maintaining a sense of village life, albeit from afar (Morad & Gombac, 2015). Such a phenomenon is widely documented in the transnational migration literature (Garbin, 2004, 2005; Eade & Garbin, 2005) and is a key means of maintaining, nurturing and strengthening kinship relations over distance, as well as being, for some migrants particularly in the earlier stages of resettlement, a vital source of emotional and psychological sustenance. Furthermore, the mothers regularly talked with kin who were closer-by.

*I am usually just in my home with my children and sometimes my sister will come with her children, if it is not raining, otherwise every day we chat on the mobile..... We do not have computer so do not know all about this. The kids like to talk on the mobile too.*

Solma, mother of two pre-school children, Fieldnotes, Calder, 2011

Solma had recently relocated to Calder from Newcastle and much to their delight her sister Suhana was in Rowanlee; they would visit when they could although Solma was not confident about crossing the city so relied largely on Suhana to visit her. Mobile contact was maintained daily, often several times as needs arose, indicating the vital role technology may play in the lives of the migrants, even where geographically close (JRF, 2007, 2011, 2014). Many younger women and their older

children had Facebook accounts so could share photos and wider media with their kin, even where separated by distance. Such technology, thus, is a major support for the families.

### **Interaction Within and Beyond Families**

I now discuss some significant aspects of socialisation pertaining to gender, showing signs of both continuity of practice and change between the rural and urban settings. As in all families, gendered patterns of behaviour and socialization have implications; what may be widespread and taken-for-granted in terms of gendered social dimensions for the mainstream population may not be applicable when considering this migrant community.

*I only get to see my Dad for a little time after school before he goes to the shop [family take-away] and when he comes back I am sleeping. He takes me to the park on weekends sometimes to play football, or the Mosque on Friday as well. He got me a football strip too.*

Salim, 7 years, Rowanlee, Fieldnotes, 2011

*Salim you are lucky, my Dad is in England and only comes here when he has holidays, but my uncles look in on my Mum and me and take Tuhin [big brother] to the Mosque and other places. I can't go with them.*

Tabassum, ♀, 6 years, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Within the migrant families, there appear very clear distinctions and boundaries between the men's worlds and those of women, in some ways mirroring patterns in rural Sylhet, in other ways different. Amongst the men, there is more constant, extensive and widespread social interaction, than that experienced by women. This is attributed to their time-structured lives within the urban cash nexus (Eade & Garbin, 2002), striking when viewed through the lens of Sylhet village life and livelihoods, which appeared more fluid and seasonally variable, less 'fixed' than in the global North. In the rural setting this may be attributed to agrarian lifestyles and the fact that many men were self-employed, where employed at all, or working in sharecropping or some such local enterprise (Gardner, 2008; Ghuman, 2003; Rozario, 2002).

In the Diaspora, due to patterns of migration, family resettlement, work and family business, many kinsmen are in daily contact. Historically, men have sponsored male

kin to migrate as economic migrants; increasingly this practice is less possible as legislation is tightened, conditions of entry change (Home Office, 2010, 2015), businesses may be struggling financially with the recent economic downturn (JRF, 2011; The Guardian, 2016) and fears over Brexit may also play a part. For males socializing is constant, further enabled and enhanced by their visits to the Mosque, the *Samity* and other social and political organisations,<sup>37</sup> domains inaccessible to their wives, and also by other possibilities presented when daily life frequently extends beyond the bounds of one's home, for example sports opportunities and more general socialising.

## **Conclusion**

In rural Sylhet, the early socialisation of babies and young children is for the most part facilitated within the female (private) domain as is also the case in Scotland. Within Sylhet, mothers enjoyed the company of other women and children to support and share care for infants and young children. This is something which is taken for granted in these locales. When this fact is recalled in the Scottish locales, it is highlighted as a source of isolation and sometimes stress for the marriage-migrant mothers, particularly where viewed through the lens of the norms in the villages, where company and support is taken for granted. Intensive female-centred care and social interaction tends to be the norm over a longer period of childhood in the urban settings in a way that it is not in the villages.

Husbands and fathers are more freely available in rural Sylhet due to patterns of work, whereas in Scotland men are less apparent and available in the women and children's day-to-day lives. Work is more formalised and lives more 'time-oriented' and regimented, as well as socially fragmented due to the settings of work, the physical separation between home and work, which may be local, close to home for

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<sup>37</sup> '*Samity*' organisations existed in several locations, which fulfilled an ambiguous social role, in that they dealt with such things as help with visas and travel arrangements, transfers of remittances (in some cases) and other social services, the nature of which I do not know. They seemed to be largely managed under the umbrella of the community leaders and none of the men were forthcoming in discussing their exact functions. Women were never present when I visited such sites and I never got the impression they were welcome either.

some men, but may also be located at a distance. This then means that men are not readily available to support their wives and children, although older boys may assume this role, where available.

Women assume responsibilities for the domestic domain in Scotland, as is the norm in Sylhet and within this often care for kin beyond their immediate family is required, but this transpires most generally within their family homes. This may entail caring for working male kin or elderly relatives too. This contrasts sharply with rural Sylhet, where families may not 'share hearths' but support is still readily available, usually facilitated by young children on their mother's behalfs, as required. Thus children experienced rich social opportunities, both within their natal homes, but further afield too in terms of social visits and visits from kin, but also in terms of supporting their wider kin network close to home.

In Scotland, children's social lives were very much based around what their mothers could facilitate for and with them although children also mentioned men and older boys played a role where they could, when available. In urban Scotland, women worked hard to create and maintain relationships across and beyond their neighbourhoods, but also further afield to other cities in the UK and indeed to their motherland, the *Desh*. Social opportunities often involved much strategizing and forward planning; women negotiated and arranged social occasions for themselves and their children, often encompassing sleeping over and prolonged visiting and revisiting too. Such occasions included much food preparation and sharing too. This was an element that both children and their mothers alluded to and which they greatly enjoyed. Thus, they and their children experienced rich social opportunities, albeit intermittently. Food sharing and sleeping over continue to be important and rich aspects of family life, often commented on by the children in their rich narratives.

Over time, in Scotland the social dimensions diverge along gender norms, with boys functioning in the domain of men, although still available to help support their family's social occasions where they could. Where men were absent, or no brothers

existed, girls like Tabassum, above, were more restricted and accessing male company more sporadically, especially when fathers worked away as was the case for her family, with no resident male. Thus she is assigned to the world of the women although more fluidity may come into play over immersion in education, as observed with the older girls, in terms of their helping tasks within this research and wider participation in the public events of the community.

It may be argued that migrant communities retain traditional values and norms more rigidly than the societies from where they originated, which may explain a rigid conservation of a specific set of gender norms (Goulbourne et al, 2010: 20; Bujis, 1993). The nucleated fashion of family living, patterns of built environments and housing therein and the weather, may keep families indoors and separate. These factors are implicated in patterns of socialising, as well as women's unfamiliarity with the city and wider social structures but I emphasise nevertheless children enjoy rich social lives. Mobile technology plays a key role in both family support and maintaining and developing social networks, both within the local networks but also transnationally.

Thus, we see how social structure interacts with individual and collective agency. Where shifts in patterns of sociability and gendered norms are examined, they are constrained by conditions in the areas of settlement. Nevertheless, aspects of 'home culture' and practice from the *desh* continue to inform daily life too.



Salim: *'football at the park with Bangladeshi & Scottish flag'*, Rowanlee, 2011

## Chapter 6 – Friendship and Play

Peer relationships and friendship, and their associated activities, are important aspects of childhood and well-being. In the early stages of my research in Scotland, my sense was that the Sylheti-heritage children's social relationships and activities were somewhat constrained in the urban locales, especially when viewed through the lens of the village childhoods, as described by their mothers and older siblings. Much of what they drew attention to is related to aspects of village life, physical features such as the openness of dwellings, accessible *baris* and the villages themselves, which are largely accessible to children's explorations and meanderings. Their social relationships are largely constructed and contained within these spaces (Chapter 4).

Peer cultures are worthy of documentation and study in their own right, as they are insightful in regard to ideas about personhood. In taking this approach I continue to draw Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecological model and the impact of children's immediate physical and social environments. I also draw on Youniss's (1999) critical views of much of children's peer-culture theory as being too based on adults' social networks and support models, whilst also acknowledging, in regard to challenging deficit models of children and families, both Hill's (2005) and Gilligan's (2000) emphasis on the importance of social networks in supporting children and families. Peer culture is the ongoing yet changing sets of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns 'that children produce and share in interaction with their peers' (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Corsaro, 2005: 2). Peer groups are collectives where children are members, which may be ethnicity, age, gender, interest and other intersecting factors contingent, with children collectively participating in producing peer culture. They may initially be supported by adults but largely becomes more autonomous over time and maturity. Peer cultures may be quite spontaneous in formation or result from placing cohorts of children together through parental investment and social mechanisms such as age differentiation, gender or interest groups, for extended periods of time. Indeed, children may produce and participate in a series of peer cultures affected by various factors, for example, groupings of children, locales; in my research – rural villages, inner city neighbourhoods, schools and others.

Although children produce their own culture, it is not entirely distinct, nor separate from adult culture. I do not seek to diminish the importance of the adult dimension and argue here that the adult intentions and initiatives, on behalf of children's social lives (Chapter 5), are of great value in the context of Scotland. They are key to facilitating wider local opportunities and indeed thus may be longer in duration than for longer settled and non-migrant communities who may be more familiar in their physical and social settings. This follows Qvortrup's (1991) argument regarding structure, with childhood constituting a particular structural form; childhood is exposed to the same societal forces as adulthood, with children themselves co-constructors of childhood and society. Morrow (1999) argues that children may appear part of several interlinked individual, neighbourhood and community networks, based on key sites in their domains, but also linked to adults' social networks. Some authors (cf James et al, 1998; Punch, 2003) refer to varying conceptualisations of children; the 'tribal child' or the 'minority group child' which focus on children's agency as markers of childhood 'difference', with the idea that some aspects of their lives exist independently from the adult world, and some in conjunction with the adult world. Thus children are both participating in and part of two cultures – children's and adult's, as Corsaro (2005; 2009) has argued (Chapter 4). James et al (2005: 75) suggest that children's culture emerges in and through 'the temporal, as well as spatial, interstices of adult social structures', so this aspect is important to consider; friendship may only flourish given the right cultural, spatial and temporal conditions.

Little attention has been devoted to cultural factors in the friendship literature and the scope of research remains large (Chen, et al, 2006). In our increasingly interlinked and culturally diverse world, it is thought-provoking to compare friendships across countries with differing values, for example individualism as opposed to collectivism. Scant comparison has been done with societies across different social fields. For example, in rural and urban societies within Sylhet, significant differences were discernable relating to social aspects, attached to many factors, not least of social class, economic factors, parental education and social capital (White, 1992; Gustavsson, 1991: 123; Blanchet, 1996: 177-185), as well as global effects of wider media, transnational contact and information sharing.

This then, raises questions concerning children who perhaps straddle two distinct societies, in terms of ethnic heritage and *where* they actually reside. Thus, I examine whether the Sylheti-heritage children, although living in an individualistic setting (Scotland), conduct friendships much as their more collectivist kin do in the ‘sending’ communities or is there a discernible shift in their behavior. I proceed, first, on the theme of ‘friendship’ in rural Sylhet, followed by in urban Scotland. The second half of the chapter explores children’s play activities in regard to their friendships in both places.

## Friendship

Village children had many descriptions of how they perceived friends.

*Friends make us happy and share. We are always playing together, in the land between our houses. We can walk to school, play in the bari, all around are friends...*  
Rayhan, ♂, 6 years,

*Everyone is [sic] our friends, or almost.*  
Tasneem, ♀, 6 years

*We have friends at home and all the village as well as far off places.*  
Ifraz, ♂, 7 years,

*Friends make sure you are safe.*  
Ahbab, ♂, 7 years

*Some look after you, like your Mum, some can play too.*  
Asma, ♀, 4 years,

(All from Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011)

Children highlight that they considered friendship based on who made them feel happy, safe, and with whom they shared their daily lives, as well as more widely in ‘far off places’. Much of the literature on the rural Southern world discusses the spontaneity and fluidity of children’s social relations (Chen et al, 2006; Rigg, 2007). It is clear that friends may also be kin and not necessarily all children. Friends and family are portrayed as interchangeable in childhood (Corsaro, 2005). Initially friendship may be based on relations of trust and safety. Commonalities include the importance of trust, affection, shared activities and common history, as well as place. All the children’s friendships incorporated children from the surrounding homes and

*baris*, and this is a factor which is explored in much literature on the Global South. Friendships were embedded in local social relations, within their *baris*, their wider *para* and village as well as ‘far-off places’. Spilsbury (2005: 81) emphasises how children’s ‘circulation’ within their home range is a transforming mechanism through which children interact with and learn about their home environment, themselves and others (cf Aitken, 1994; Matthews, 1992). This is important in regard to both research locales, in terms of social relations but also in regard to childhood preoccupations and responsibilities too (Chapter 7).



*Ifraz: my friends and cricket-game, Sylhet, 2011*

*Here I am playing with some of my friends and I can tell you who they are. There is Anil, there's Rayhan, Faisal, Ahbab and Utchash and some others whose names I don't know-we just say bhai<sup>38</sup>. Anil and Ahbab live in the house beside ours in the bari [he points to a house when he mentions*

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<sup>38</sup> Bhai is common parlance amongst Bangladeshi boys and men and literally means ‘brother’. People seldom called each other by their assigned names and often they may not be known; rather people may be called by association to their kinship group, eg ‘someone’s daughter/son/mother etc’.

*'bari']], but the others live away across the village. Utchash is new in our bari as his Dad is working with my Dad and Uncles. We take him through the village with us.*

Ifraz, ♂, 7 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Ifraz's depiction, above, shows his friends and himself playing on the periphery of his *bari*. Some of the friends he knows well (by name) and two are in fact close kin, (his cousins); others are more distant and it is not clear if they are kin. He does not comment on this aspect, which implies 'friends' may or may not be kin. Friendships are relationships touched by both equality and hierarchy. Kinship-hierarchies and inequalities of class, education and economic-status begin to surface with maturity (Kolenda, 1987), quarrels and divisions may arise (Beals & Eason, 1993). The tendency for friends to share fairly equal status does not prevent the formation of dominant and subordinate roles within the relationship, nor does it even preclude within friendship victimization, both verbal and physical, subtle and overt (Chapter 7).

Significantly, Ifraz mentions Utchash, who is Hindu, whose itinerant family have just moved into the village, his father working as a farm-hand for local families. This factor is striking as many families I met did not incorporate Hindus into their day-to-day lives. It does not seem problematic, but may be considered unusual, as referred to by Ifraz above. Thus friendship seems to be very open and incorporating at least in this cohort within the early years of village life. Through paying attention to what opportunities are available to children and which are discouraged, we can gain some insight into what is valued. Corsaro (2005) highlights how childhood patterns of friendships are related to wider social relations and beliefs in children's families and communities, reminding us of how peer and adult cultures are interrelated, but also dynamic. The first sign of differentiation in young children's peer cultures is increasing gender separation, which begins around 3-4 years of age when children begin to play more with same-sex peers. Friendships appear to be more stable and long-lasting for boys, although perhaps more superficial and less intense. Girls' friendships tend to be shorter and more intense in duration, perhaps as the need for more intimacy can also lead to more sensitivity and distress within the relationship (Poulin & Chan, 2010).



girls do; this may be frowned upon by knowing villagers, with misdemeanours reported back (Jeffery, 1989: 31) and indeed this was my experience within the fieldwork. Families work hard to keep their daughters close for physical and moral safety and this seemed to be the norm in the girl's descriptions of friends and social activities. Here, Asma's mother has given them an old red rug to sit on, which seems to delineate the boundary of their social world, akin to a 'den', and from which in my observations they did not roam far, but rather upon which they played make-believe games, often imagining and inventing pretend activities across the village, although rarely physically accessible to them (Chapters 4 & 7). The group of girls, who were cousins, frequently spent time together and were always close around one or other house within their homestead.

Young girls are called upon to help with tasks, particularly relating to childcare, like the inclusion of Adeel above, and food-related activities, in a way that boys are generally not. This fact parallels Gaskin's (1999) research with rural Mayan children, where there was differentiation along gender dimensions and caretaking duties may be incorporated into time which could also be designated as social or play time (Chapter 7). Thus peer relationships can be interrupted by or run parallel to helping tasks. Significantly within girls' peer relationships there is an element of adult surveillance, which is less overt in the lives of the boys, for example here in the designation of 'the red rug' as the foci or siting of interactions. This dimension becomes an overarching aspect of the life of women and girls in this society, with female members of society responsible for maintaining *izzat* over their life course (Rozario, 2001; White, 1992; Jeffery, 1989).

*Yes, I see Ifraz every day, and now we go to school together and he comes to my bari and I his, with the others, Faisal and all. We are always outside except in the Mosque and school.*

Ahbab, ♂, field-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Boys' friendships were depicted as more casual and free in terms of surveillance and where they may go, although structures within the wider society played a role too, like Mosque and school. Friendships for boys are quite broad-ranging, across the wider local area and out-of-doors which links to patterns of adult male behaviour. Boys are allowed the possibility of being spontaneous through having relative

autonomy, which does not exist for the girls. They are not watched over in the way that girls may be nor imbued with significance in relation to keeping the family honour or *izzat* intact (Blanchet, 2001) (Chapter 7). This leads some experts to talk of separate ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ worlds’ (Thorne, 1986: 167). All the relationships described by Ifraz and his friends were situated in the world of the boys and did not seem to include any girls, which is striking when considered in relation to descriptions from some girls, which were gender-mixed but often age-stratified too.

This is a facet of wider social relations amongst adults too, in the villages; men could be part of the world of close women and children, whereas women had little opportunity to access the wider world of men and older boys, beyond the domain of home. Boys and men can see who they like, go where they want - these are not options open to girls and women. Ahbab mentions the boys are predominantly out-of-doors so learning the structures and norms of their wider area in a way that is inaccessible to girls. Such restrictions in childhood can limit development of girl’s social networks, may decrease their sense of personal autonomy and ability to develop solid trusting relationships more widely (Garbarino et al, 1992; Groves, 1997), which again links to consideration of this aspect within Scotland.

Exceptions are when the children are in institutions, the Mosque and their school, where peer relationships may be different, due to structural organisation and additional criteria attached to maturity and social class (Chapter 7). Summarising, for girls, agency and empowerment in relation to friendships may be limited by the social and cultural context within which social reproduction is situated, but over time this may be evolving with a gradual reworking of local norms (Chapter 7). Girls’ social relationships and activities were more visible than those of boys who often seemed to be ‘elsewhere’, out of line of sight of parents and guardians, so avoiding helping tasks where they could.

## Friends from further afield

Commonly, children also mentioned friends who were not part of their on-going daily lives, from further afield, both within Bangladesh as well as the Bangladeshi diaspora.

*Sometimes we see friends who come from other places in Bangladesh, they stay, we play together and then they leave again....*

Anjum, ♀, 6 years

*Yes, sometimes my aunties visit with their children and then there are more friends around us. My mum took us to see them too and we went in a motor rickshaw. There were cats there too – we don't like cats. We chased them and had a lot of fun with our friends.*

Rabia, ♀, 6 years

*I never went to see anyone but some friends have come here with their mums and dads. All my bari has a party then, lots of rice, cakes, and we can play out-side, no-one cares what we do. My other friends [local] join in as well.*

Ifraz, ♂, 7 years

*Sometimes I can talk on the mobile to my friends too, when my mum is calling them. That's nice.*

Anjum, ♀, 6 years

(All child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011)

Many children had 'friends' who were in some way related to them, often their father's sisters' children, married and living in other villages or cities, who may arrive for visits periodically. Despite the geographical distance and long-distance contact, children seemed to slip easily into friendship and with the exception of the very young, did not display reticence of any sort. Children did not make any distinction in terms of their friendships, except the visiting friends would offer a component of excitement that was not encapsulated within their more daily friendships, including sharing of foods and sometimes gifts, not the norm for the village children. Aspects of language and culture from 'London' were shared too. Such occasions seemed to offer the village children more physical freedom than their norm, perhaps as adults were more preoccupied. Boys often played the role of

‘guide’ and protector to the visiting children and as such exerted some authority over the group (Chapter 7).

Friendships were maintained over distance by mobile phones (Brettell, 2006), which the children enjoyed, although this was not available to all children, as some less affluent families did not have on-going access to mobiles. These visits were a source of pleasure for the children. Often such visits comprised more women, girl children and young boys, and adult married sisters returning to their natal home (Jeffery et al, 1989). Older boys were more likely to remain at home, as patterns of patrilocality would mean they never need move, unless out of choice or economic necessity. Such ‘visiting’ friends were readily incorporated into the family and peer cohorts; for boys this may involve taking their cousins out and about in the *bari*, often with the chaperoning of girls as part of the task. These occasions could offer more physical freedom for some girls, as parents were too busy socialising to be watching over them, enjoying their visits from kin. Sometimes guests would stay overnight, other times not, depending on how far away the women’s affinal homes were.<sup>39</sup> Some girls talked about visiting elsewhere in this way too, but it was less common for the boys to mention this experience, as often older boys may be left behind in their natal villages. Again, this may be indicative of increased surveillance and control of girls’ lives, the need to keep them close.

The less affluent families did not seem to partake in such visits although kin would sometimes visit them with their children. These visits were less protracted, and did not involve such lavish sharing of foods, as incomes presumably could not stretch to this type of hospitality. Nevertheless, fruit, tea and biscuits would be served and children would happily incorporate their friends from beyond the village into their social lives. Occasionally children from other villages would be left behind at the end of the visits and in my experience these tended to be older girls, perhaps ‘lent’ to a

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<sup>39</sup> Within my research, some women had married men living quite close to their natal villages, within an hour’s drive or thereabouts, whereas others had marriage homes further afield. For example, I visited two women who were more distant from their natal homes, one in Khulna, the other in Chittagong (Kumar, 2012).

family in a helping capacity, or occasionally, older boys who might arrive to assist with a rice harvest or some such required activity (Chapter 7).

### **The Implications of Social Class for Friendship**

With such visitors, adults particularly women, appeared very happy despite having the burden of additional tasks to perform, including the need to produce huge quantities of foods on a regular basis. Impoverished village children, girls of landless families, would sometimes be drafted in to help on such occasions. This was one category of child who never seemed to be included in the cohort of friends, as Majeda's example (Chapter 7) will show. Such children were treated as servants rather than children or friends. From my experiences within the villages, there always appeared to be someone poorer who could fulfil helping tasks on family's behalves, usually merely in exchange for some sustenance, rice or old clothing. Thus friendship, as visible in other dimensions in the villages, was very contingent on aspects of social class and standing, with the poorest of children transitioning to some liminal space between childhood and adulthood much earlier in life. Thus their childhood and friendship opportunities were truncated (Blanchet, 2001; Rozario, 2001) (Chapter 7).

More generally, the effects of friendships across the Diaspora may have lasting and far-reaching impacts for the rural children. Certainly something that had entered the consciousness of even young children was the possibility that they too may be part of a shift from their natal homes, to other centres of Bangladeshi settlement in future times, or even further afield in the Diaspora, contingent on aspects of gender, morality, social capital and class. This will become more apparent in their narratives in Chapter 7, although not a main focus in this research. I turn my attention now to children's depictions of friendship in Scotland.

A close friendship is, for many children, the first non-familial intimate relationship that is freely chosen (Asher, et al, 2014: 170).

Asher's quote is based upon very Eurocentric concepts of friendship and I question whether it is pertinent to the village or Sylheti-heritage children in this study, although often taken for granted as the way that friendship may be perceived in Northern lives. Individualistic cultures are defined as stressing personal achievement, competition, and independence. They can be generalised as having members who form social relationships with many people, in many settings, and these relationships are more fluid and non-intimate and generally based on choice (Reis, Collins and Berscheid, 2000; Triandis, 1995; Triandis et al., 1988). In early childhood, it is hard to create a separation between those people who might be classified as 'family' and those who might be 'friends', with the roles appearing interchangeable in the lives of the children. They could, as Sharmila demonstrated in relation to her cat Khushi, also include pets. Sharmila stated that her family was also her best friends (Chapter 5), indicating further there is a very blurred boundary between categories.

Although a number of theorists emphasize the dynamic quality of peer relationships, most examine children's peer interaction as a static entity, which I deem problematic as friendships are constantly in flux, just as are other relationship types (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). As aforementioned, I chose not to reify age in my research, but I include children's ages at times when known, as the age and maturity difference was informative particularly in regard to the aspect of friendship dynamics. The concept of friends changed over the childhood course, as might be expected (Alderson, 1995), with children's increasing experience, access to more children and the effects of wider social structures and institutions in the North. For example, immersion in early years' settings or school *may* open up a new range of possibilities for friendship but the opposite may also occur, contingent on wider factors.

Alderson (2009: 74) asserts that there are distinct temporal dimensions, which play a part in structuring children's social experiences and friendships, which are 'neither a function of biological age or their social status'. Prout (1992) uses schooling as an example of this, the complex temporal schedules which by intersecting, impose structure on daily, weekly and yearly cycles, creating different spatial and temporal constraints. These seem to increase in complexity and responsibility (Chapter 7) over

childhood and thus may be marked as akin to the structures with which adults grapple in their day-to-days. Such structure is also observable in everyday family life through routines, with the imposition of mealtimes, bedtimes (for some children), religious observances and such like. Children's time is inextricably linked to the social space of childhood, and achieved through the setting of various age limits on various activities and their dominant domains, for example in relation to TV-viewing, school attendance and access to the wider local environs, to name but a few. Thus time is patterned and through this, children's access to and participation in a diversity of social arenas may be proscribed.

Based on children's wider activities (Chapter 7), one of the aspects considered quite closely within the diary-making and discussions was what constituted the idea of a 'friend' for the Sylheti-heritage children in terms of what this category meant and who, within their lives, could be considered as friends. Six pre-school children, boys and girls, plus older siblings who were present, participated in the following conversation regarding how they conceptualized friends and if there was, in fact, any difference between the two – family and friends. Strikingly, small children regarded everyone as friends whereas this altered over the childhood life course as illustrated by older participants.

### **Friendships in Urban Scotland**

#### Friends are nice, 'who I know' and 'see'

*Friends are who makes you happy and you can tell things to, all around us when we are small.*

Jasmin, ♀, 4 years

*Yes, you can't be friends with people who are not nice and kind.*

Shuhag, ♂, 4 years

*Friends are people who come to your house, with their mums or aunties. They share with you, you can play and have fun.*

Saba, ♀, 5 years

*Jakia was my friend but now she is just a sister.*

Jasmin, ♀, 4 years

(All from child-dairies Rowanlee, 2011)

With wider experience, Jakia's take on friendship was more nuanced, as follows.

*Yes, but this changes as you get older and you are not at home so much. You make new friends and lose some others. Sometimes you need to be friends with people you might not choose, like in school and places. We are still friends Jasmine but also sisters so that's like just one kind of friend but you can have others too, wait and see when you go to school.*

Jakia, Jasmin's sister, 9 years, Child-diary helper, Rowanlee, 2011

Strikingly, for all the young children, girls and boys, friendships were very similar in how imagined and defined, in terms of 'being nice', 'kind' and for 'having fun with'. Friendships were proximal, generally including siblings, child family members and neighbouring kin, those who were familiar, available, lived close by and thus accessible. For the younger children, this was more so; with maturity friendships seemed to widen beyond family as Jakia illustrates above. Peer contacts during the preschool years were typically in home, child-care, or arranged play settings (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Strikingly none of the younger children made any distinction between family and friends with each category amongst this cohort being interchangeable – friends were family and family were viewed as friends too, as Saba mentioned in the previous section, although younger children did not seem to have friends beyond the family and probably gave little thought to this facet of their lives. This may be attributed to the closeness of family bonds with young children always present, included in the daily life of the family, in the background without intensive focus, never separated or considered a distinct category as prevails in some families in the Global North. Perhaps it is simply that without experience of separation, such categorization is not conceivable. Children are privy to a variety of social norms and attitudes within their family homes; grouping and socialising of people based on age does not seem to prevail, although gender distinctions are apparent. Patterns within the adult cohort are also implicated in children's friendships, as few mothers and aunties had connections or friends beyond the ethnic community, although they socialized quite widely within their networks when they could; thus children had limited access to children whom they could call 'friends but not family'. Like their mothers and aunties, most of the people whom the children called friends were also kin of one sort or another as based on family patterns of arrival and settlement; they

were often readily available, more accessible, and the people they encountered regularly.

### **Friends in public domains**

It is not commonplace for young children within this ethnic cohort to be placed in nursery or with a child-minder before the statutory early years' provision. Indeed, some children did not even attend nurseries before beginning primary school (Brooker, 2002). However, based on comments from older peers, children, boys and girls alike, conceded that it was likely that they would, when immersed in nursery or primary school, probably make new friends there too, like Amin and Renvi, both in Primary 1:

*My friends are in my housing block, and also when I sometimes go to the park. When I'm at home I have Aisha and my family downstairs, Shafi and his little brother, but then I will have other school friends too. We will play football in the playground.*

Amin, ♂, 6 years

*I think my friends and my family are the same thing, although I will probably get more friends than family when I am older. That's because I can choose and I like everyone so I will have many friends and you meet more people in school; your friends from school can grow (in numbers) quicker than your family can. Our teachers like us to be friends with everyone.*

Renvi, ♀, 6 years

*Friends are the people you do what you want with. Family, sometimes you can do that, but there are more rules from the older people, mums and big brothers. But your family are your friends too, but in a different way. Your friends can't be family in the same way.*

Amin, ♂, 6 years

*But that's not really true Amin, cos [sic] you are my friend but also family, although you don't live in my house. Your dad and my dad are family so that means we are too. My mum says it's just different here [Scotland] because we live in different [separate] houses but maybe if we lived in Sylhet we would share a bigger house and have space outside to play together. Like family in Rajbari...*

Umar, ♂, 9 years

*For me, and my friends, we like everybody so everybody is our friends. I would choose everybody, be nice to them.*

Romana, ♀, 7 years

*Yes but we live here and we do it all a different way. If you lived with me, then my family would seem bigger, but then my friends would be less people, or you could be both, friend and family.*

Amin, ♂, 6 years

*Maybe not; some people have bigger families but it doesn't mean they can't have friends too. Your friends are people who you learn with, play with, but your family are usually much older or younger so not learning stuff the way you are. In a way your friends are who you choose to spend time with, but your family is always there, even before your friends, and after. They are company for you in a different way as they need to care for you too, and sometimes you have to care for them, like Karim did, for his Mum when his dad died. So, some things you share more with friends, some more with your family, some maybe with both.....*

Umar, ♂, 9 years,  
(All Child-diaries Rowanlee, 2011)

Within the children's discussions and descriptions above, children were able to verbalize the complexities of social classification, that family could be friends also, and vice versa. Family could be construed as friends but the children recognized that family roles and relationships were more hierarchical and subject to 'rules' than friend relationships, as illustrated above. Family relationships were taken for granted but could be harder work and also generally encompassed a 'sense of responsibility', which may result in a form of role reversal at times when adults needed care (Chapter 7). Strikingly, girls seemed to regard everybody as their friends, which may be attributed to wider gendered socialisation processes. In my experience girls were encouraged to be 'sweet', kind, passive in demeanour and accommodating of others (Burr, 1998: 38) as deemed appropriate in their culture and more widely too (Chapter 7). Contrastingly, boys seemed more discerning in friendships and cared less about pleasing others.

Friends, 'who you choose' outside family, were people who played a different role in social interaction and were often, as Umar verbalized, the people 'you learn with, play with'. Such friendships were more available as the children matured and had a 'wider pool' from which to choose their friends and share experiences. Strikingly boys had wider domains in which to encounter friends and also share company, as mentioned by Umar in relation to the park and the Mosque. Overall, friend relationships were conceptualized as more egalitarian, based on the fact that they

were usually reciprocal, built on cooperation and choice, rather than obligation as in the family relationships, where care was extended but also, at times required, as mentioned in the case of Karim above (Chapter 7).

### **Friends within the Bangladeshi community**

Many of the children alluded to seeing friends from their close family on a regular basis and few of the children mentioned any friendships beyond the ethnic boundary, with the exception of random encounters (predominantly for the boys) in the park, mosques, and family restaurants they sometimes frequented with their male kin. School playgrounds were also sites for wider friendships, but these ‘outwith ethnic cohort friends’ did not, in my observations nor within the children’s narratives, extend to their homes or weekends, except by chance encounters in the neighbourhood. Strikingly, even when in nursery or school, the children tended to remain in proximity to other Bangladeshi children, not mixing with their wider cohort, with the exception of when deliberately seated by staff for specific activities like snack or schooling.

*Yes, I have friends in school but they are different from my other friends as they do not know my family or any of that stuff.*

Renvi, ♀, 5 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2011

‘Any of that stuff’ for Renvi, referred to cultural details, such as dress and food habits as well as linguistic difference too (Timera, 2002). Many other Sylheti-heritage children made this distinction too (Chapter 7). They seemed to consider the school-class cohort as ‘friends’ but only friends they would see in school, not outside, so a different narrower type of friends than their kin associations. The following excerpt of field-notes, from Rowanlee nursery school, is a good example.

Shuhag has been very isolated within the nursery and does not make any attempt to play with other children, nor they with him. He spends all his morning playing in the brick corner unless staff can entice him elsewhere. This is facilitated by Mrs Miah, the Asian nursery assistant, who speaks Bengali. Shuhag does not interact with other staff, always gravitating to Mrs Miah, should he need anything. He does not yet speak English, although seems to understand some basic routinely-used words for example, ‘snack’, ‘outside play’ and ‘coats on’. This Monday sees a development in the form of

Shami, a newly-arrived Bangladeshi boy, who gravitates towards Shuhag in the brick area. They do not interact much verbally, only occasionally murmuring the odd word in Bangla, but play alongside each other, building and destroying various brick structures; there appears to be harmony and mutual understanding. Mrs Miah states that their families do not know each other but she believes the children are drawn towards each other on the basis of familiarity of appearance and once close, they realise there is a commonality of language too.

Snack is called and neither boy acknowledges this but when Mrs Miah approaches, saying 'Nasta, nasta' (snack, snack) and 'Tumra nasta horaire?' (You want to eat snack?), the boys make eye contact, speak some words I cannot decipher, knock down their brick creation, before getting to their feet and making their way to the snack table, where they sit side by side. Many other children are chattering around the large round table. Shuhag and Shami remain close together and silent, concentrating on helping themselves to fruit and crackers, as encouraged by Mrs Miah<sup>40</sup>, as if the other children do not exist. They are very resistant to the idea of washing-up their plates, a nursery rule after snacking, and Mrs Miah on this occasion does it for them, so supporting their gender norms, although *not* the rules of the nursery setting where independence is encouraged. They return to the bricks, squeezing in, completing ignoring a boy and a girl who are also playing in 'their corner' and continue with their brick creations.

Fieldwork notes, Rowanlee, 2011

The above pattern of interaction and play became the norm for the boys in this setting and they always waited anxiously for the appearance of each other in the mornings and where one or other was absent the remaining boy did not find a substitute friend and appeared quite isolated; they never transgressed the ethnic and language boundary, to play with other local children, in the months of my research. Friendships do not operate in a social vacuum and often develop between individuals who share similar characteristics, like race or ethnicity (Graham, Taylor and Ho, 2009). Significantly, even today, with greater ethnic diversity, cross-ethnicity friendships are less likely to occur than friendships among children of the same ethnicity. However, there is evidence that the cross-ethnicity friendships that form in highly diverse schools are of similar quality to the friendships of same-ethnicity peers (McDonald et al., 2013), but this may be contingent on wider availability of peers, of accessibility in the neighbourhood, parks and such childhood places, and

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<sup>40</sup> The boys were very reluctant to help themselves to food, unfamiliar and unaccustomed as they seem in this, expecting Mrs Miah to serve them, as their mothers and aunts would at home. Eventually they do as independence of this sort is encouraged and 'an ideal' within the nursery setting.

also parental experience and choice. Significantly, research done in the north of England by Holden, (2010), showed there was negligible contact or integration between Asian and White Northern children in play spaces. Maccoby (1998, pp. 22–23) suggests that the choice of playmates, in school and more widely, is a strategy for ensuring safety and predictability in an open setting as children seek out others with a recognizable play style. Such familiarity may provide a degree of assurance and comfort especially where children are aware they are in a minority. Affiliations may develop because minority children often experience discrimination and disadvantage due to their ethnicity, thus may pay greater attention to their own ethnic status and that of other children (Bigler & Hughes, 2009, cited in Leman et al, 2010: 135). Studies show that children are capable of becoming aware of environmental and societal perceptions of different identities early in their life. As they are more exposed to social influences about ethnic perception, they learn to differentiate and form personal preferences about people of different backgrounds. Several findings support that same-race favouritism and peer interaction become stronger as children grow older. Prejudicial behaviours start to develop among preschool children as young as 3-years-old and gradually increase with a greater display of prejudice among children in primary school (Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Kurtz-Costes, DeFrietas, Halle, & Kinlaw, 2011), with some children, who display visible differences, clearly marked as ‘outsiders’ by the majority; thus the minority children may seek safety and comfort from people familiar in some way to themselves (Karlsson & Karkara, 2003). At nursery and school, children realise their differences, their ‘foreignness’, in terms of disparity between the familial environment and the dominant society. The notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is thus instilled; children comprehend their way of doing things is at odds with what constitutes mainstream society.

Their country is elsewhere, that is, their parents’ country is elsewhere, the food they eat is different from that of the wider society and names, language, holiday and religious celebrations and observances, even table manners are different. Children soon realise people may be opposed to ‘others’, which can be interpreted as Africans, blacks, Muslims, visible immigrants or their descendants; clearly then the child recognizes themselves as ‘other’.

(Timera, in Bryceson & Vuorela (Eds.), 2002: 149)

If nurseries and playgroups fill a need for predictable play and interaction styles, they are also a potential site for the production and reproduction of this differentiation, as well as wider societal norms (O’Keffe, 2001; Rose et al, 1993, 1997). Importantly, evidence exists that the childcare choices of parents can determine opportunities for inter-ethnic contact for children and parents and with 87% of Bangladeshi 3 year-old children in the UK being cared for by family members this may be considered a factor for limited inter-ethnic contact (Integration Hub, 2016). Religion also plays a part in mixing and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups have the lowest probability of having white British friends with Muslim Bangladeshis having the lowest (SIC, 2014), which may be due to lack of familiarity and opportunities in the wider social milieu. The stage in the family formation in the host country may be a contributing factor; longer settled migrant families with greater experience and confidence in their neighbourhoods and society more generally, particularly the younger generations, are more likely to have inter-ethnic friendships and thus their children too. The probability increases with education and wider social opportunities, but declines with neighbourhood deprivation, which is a factor in both Rowanlee and Calder. Factors of racism and fear may be implicated too (JRF, 2014; The Scottish Government, 2009a/b).

Gender norms may be implicated in interactions and the ability to partake of friendships too as this example shows. Mina, a Bangladeshi girl with no English language, moved into Rowanlee nursery and was significantly isolated, receiving no attention from other children. She appeared shy, eyes, downcast, and reluctant to approach any of the children, which mirrored the demeanour of her mother in regard to the wider adult cohort. Despite pleas from Mrs Miah to this effect the boys never included her in their play or social activities, steadfastly ignoring her. This exclusion may be attributable to the strength of their existing friendship bond and to prevailing gender norms within the mainstream in the setting with a tendency for boys to play with boys and girls with girls. Within many South Asian Muslim families, children are actively discouraged from playing with friends and relatives of the opposite gender, based on social class and education, with the exception of during their very early years when they are indulged greatly (Hermansen & Khan, 252, in Ahmed-

Ghosh, 2015). I did not actually witness any such overt discouragement within the families, but this does not mean it does not prevail, which could account for the exclusion of Mina by the Bangladeshi boys in the nursery class. Certainly gender boundaries are overt in the world of the Bangladeshi adults so it may simply be that ideas and behaviours are absorbed by the children, through immersion rather than explicit guidance or express training (Grillo, 2008; Mand, 2004, 2005, 2006; McKie et al, 2004; Blanchet, 2001). It is certainly the case that children's relationships may be an enactment of their wider experience and can reflect prevailing societal hierarchy and inequalities.

It is clear from the above examples that friendship is about feeling safe and children find this safety and gravitate to what is understood and within their range of experience. Thus it would make sense for the children's friendships to emerge from within the realm of understanding and comprehension amongst their 'own' cohort and evidence from the children of gendered social interactions now follow.

### **Gendered dimensions of friendship**

During early childhood, children's lives did not seem to differ greatly from each other in friendship aspects, with most contained within the private sphere of the family, comprised of close kin: siblings and cousins, as well as adults. As they mature, and their domain extends beyond the family home, to more formal interaction with social structures, like nursery and primary school, the social world of the children is amplified, in terms of interactions and opportunities and children may enter looser ad hoc friendships within their wider circles. Over time, however, gender dimensions are apparent, with differences between the boys' and girls' engagement in the broader social fields. Boys' social behaviour appears more extensive in terms of *who* may be included than that of girls. This may be attributed to differences in the way that boys and girls engage in play as well as cultural effects, with girls being shown from early life to be amenable and accepting of all people, but within the bounds of their social norms.

Even amongst the younger children, a dimension of gender present was tolerance, from parents and elders, of boys within the wider public domains of neighbourhoods and less acceptance of girls venturing thus. Boys often alluded to outside activities and social opportunities in a way that girls did not. It seemed to be there was a social expectation that their world and its social aspects would widen, as a taken-for-granted way for things to be, based on what they had observed of their siblings and wider male kin.

*I have friends at home but usually that's my auntie's children and it gets boring. I like it when I go out with my big friends, the boys, to the park and places, sometimes the railway bridge. My mum lets me go to McDonalds too with my brother.*

Amin, ♂, 6 years, Rowanlee, Child-diary, 2011

Amin was in Primary 1 when he made this remark and was already discontented with the home-based social interactions with which he had grown accustomed, having seen and experienced a wider world beyond. He was fortunate to have Umar, his older cousin and Umar's friends who would sometimes include him in their outside play, much as he may have been included in rural Sylhet.

*Amin, you have all of us, in our houses here, but when you come to the Mosque more, you will have even more friends, like some of the boys from our school and those two we played with in the park the other day. As you grow up, you will meet many more people, like now I seem to have loads of friends, from school, Mosque, the park and when my dad takes me places, like to the restaurant. Some of my friends are Scottish as well.*

Umar, (Amin's cousin), ♂, 9 years, Rowanlee, 2011

Boys' lives as they mature may encompass friends beyond their ethnic community through schooling and wider access to public spaces, which would follow the norms for their future role within their families. Older, more experienced peers would facilitate this process. Thinking to the future, evidence (Crompton, 2008) suggests that social class and education may be implicated in children's future social interactions, with boys who grow up in families with greater social capital and prestige experiencing wider friendship networks and binds beyond their kin, than boys from families with less social advantages. Education may play a strong role here too with boys who continue in education experiencing greater opportunities beyond their own ethnic and social context, than boys who may leave school early

and enter employment within businesses run by Bangladeshi kin; such boys and young men may actually experience a shrinkage in social dimensions when compared with their earlier school lives. This would imply that boys who have on-going access to male kin have potentially greater social opportunities than boys residing only with women, as existed for some of my research cohort.

Amin and Umar had an expectation of friendship and experience growing over their life-course, including close family, but also beyond in school and the wider public domain, through opportunities in school settings, in outdoor play and accompanying their fathers. Friendship seemed quite broad-ranging and may encompass friends from beyond their own ethnic 'community', even if only sometimes fleetingly, within the public domain; such friendships may remain at best superficial or specifically linked to activities, like football, which some boys mentioned. James et al (1998) make the point that children and young people may have different interpretations of friendship, linked to temporal dimensions and different domains and so may be quite content to have transient social interactions, unlike older adults who may wish for something more trusting and stable. Childhood and youth friendships may be fleeting and impermanent resulting from the temporal structures within which they move, for example, schooling. Amit-Talai (1995: 145) argues that wider structures work to shape friendships, arguing that disjunction and distinction (which may be part of young people's friendships) are less the outcome of child and teenage peer relations than of *the conditions* in which youth cultures often develop. Thus conceived, friendships may only develop in the times, few and far between, when children are allowed or have opportunities to congregate in their peer group. For boys, peer groups extend over several 'fields' so they may experience greater or broader sociability than their girl kin, with more limited access to diverse 'fields' (Bourdieu, 1993).

For girls, friendships may be formed beyond the family sphere in school and other formal settings. However, with less physical freedom and access to public spaces, for girls, friendship formation and sustainability is less widespread than in the lives of the boys. Here, girls' experiences were similar to those of the boys in some dimensions, but different in others.

*Every year I have new friends. This is because I am getting older and each year new children come to our school and they become new friends. I have a special friend Jakia in my school class but then I also have others like Rushanara and Momita who are smaller [younger]. Their mums know my mum, so I see them in school, at play-breaks and sometimes they come to my house. I go to their houses, after school with my mum.*

Romana, (P.3) ♀, 7 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes I know Momita and Rushanara too as they come to my house - they are my friends and we see them in school too. I don't know Jakia - her family is from Dhaka and my mum does not see them.*

Renvi (P.1), ♀, 5 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee, 2011

For Romana and Renvi, school was an important site for developing friendships but these seemed exclusively played out within the more sheltered Bangladeshi group, which mirrors the experience of their mothers, with no mention of friends beyond in the mainstream cohort. Significantly, Renvi mentions she does not view Jakia as a friend as her mother does not socialise with the Dhaka families. This aspect was quite common amongst the families I talked to but beyond the scope of my research. Romana views Rushanara and Momita, although several years behind in school, amongst her friends and spends time with them in the school playground, rather than with her own non-Bangladeshi age cohort. These younger girls are also her cousins, their mothers being sisters-in-law. Thus it would appear that the gender dimensions of children's friendships echo the patterns that were visible within the rural villages; age does not seem to be an issue but kinship and culture may be. Strikingly girls' mention of friendship was largely contained within the domains of school and home and not within the wider neighbourhoods or sites where the boys ventured and socialised. Certainly, in discussion with parents, girls were safeguarded in a way that boys were not.

*We need to keep close eyes on our daughters. If people gossip our family is dishonoured. Even when they are young, community are looking, judging, for girls who may be suitable future marriage partners.*

Shamima, mother of two daughters, two sons, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*We cannot let our girls walk the neighbourhoods, even when young, they are not safe and may get habits from the Scottish girls. We see them chewing gum, drinking from bottles of Cola, wearing scanty clothes, such behaviours, even when quite young children.*

Afsana, mother of one daughter, three sons, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Families disapproved of some aspects of mainstream culture, regarding it as inferior and polluting, particularly regarding their girls, which were verbalised more frequently than in regard to the boys. Thus, girls were constrained, protected and sheltered, their behaviour subject to scrutiny (Chapter 7), whereas boys could behave much as they liked as they matured. Certainly the children with whom I engaged were, at a young age, performing the gender roles ascribed to them within the bounds of gender norms adhered to in *the Desh*, although as they mature the roles may diverge from the Bangladesh norm, due to structural factors such as compulsory education until 16 years. Nevertheless, gender norms and dynamics undoubtedly have an impact on friendship and social engagement, over the early years if not more so beyond, when children reach maturity and are consequently subject to closer scrutiny and control, particularly as regards marriage prospects, *izzat*, and concepts of family honour (Rosario, 2004; Blanchet, 2001; Garbin, 2009).

Consequently, the gendered nature of friendships diverges over time, with the boys' friendships broadening and perhaps being more superficial in some fields, the girls' friendships more firmly embedded within the kin networks and perhaps more in depth and long-lasting. This is at odds with the mainstream in Northern society where there is a tendency to differentiate between family (kin/hierarchy) and friends (chosen/egalitarian), with people in one's life assigned generally to one category or the other but rarely both. This is significant and can be attributed to the fact that children interacted with the children they met, and certainly in their more formative years, this would generally comprise of the children of kin, such are the social and kinship networks within the 'community'. Significantly, few children regarded children from outside their ethnic group as friends who would come home and none mentioned or named such children in detail, although a few boys did mention that they played in the playground or park with 'local' boys.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I use this term as this was a term used by several mothers over the course of this research. I realize this is potentially problematic as all the children in the study were 'local' although some clearly perceived as more 'local' than others. This label is probably attributed to the 'indigenous', or white Scottish children, rather than any visible minority ethnic children.

Boys made more mention of relationships established through institutions, primarily State institutions of nursery and school and also religious institutions of Mosque and possibly also encompassing Madrassas too. Girls never mentioned friendships beyond the bounds of the 'community'. This is an area that requires more research. I question whether children from such small 'closed' ethnic communities tend to remain within their ethnic cohort or do they diversify and socialize more widely as they mature. From what I have seen of the lives of Sylheti women, the Bangladeshis in Scotland for the most part seem to remain within their community but this can be attributed to many factors. These include the small size of the community, and minority ethnic groups more generally, when compared to the larger English cities, where more research has been situated. Additionally, a highly relevant feature is that families within the research comprise of recently-settled women, the children's mothers, who have not learnt English nor established any strong relationships out-with their families. These women have *joined* the community by virtue of marriage. Evidence from Tower Hamlets in England, (Gardner, 2010; Zeitlyn, 2012, 2013; Garbin, 2005; Eade, 1990), shows that as migrant communities are established and grow, newly arrived members are encompassed within them, where women tend to remain and may grow in status and social capital as time passes. Men may, over time, make links beyond the enclave, contingent on jobs and other affiliations, so gain social capital but this may be more widely dispersed. What is difficult to envisage is that the close friendships of the girls, if following traditional patterns, will be curtailed, or at best sporadic, if they are 'married out' and join other Bangladeshi communities in different cities, perhaps repeating the cycle the mothers have experienced.

### **Friendships from further afield**

Children in Sylhet mentioned friendships from out-with their immediate community, so did the children in Scotland. Kin would arrive for visits and some of the children would go on excursions to family in other UK locales. Children viewed the children in these places as friends too.

*My auntie's family in Oldham is my friends too, but we only see them sometimes, for a wedding or holiday.*

Aisha, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, same for my family, when we go to Berwick or London, they are far-away friends really. They come to our house too or stay with my aunties here and we go to visit.*

Momtaz, ♀, 4 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Many children said they had friends in the villages of the *Desh*. This aspect is similar to that shown above in regard to the village children. It is striking, as when asked, many children had not yet visited the motherland and few of their child kin from the *Desh* had visited them in Scotland. Nevertheless, such expeditions were discussed as part of grander family strategies and often much longed-for by the mothers. Much of this has already been evidenced in Chapter 5.

The evidence from the wider literature suggests that friend relationships, particularly within Muslim communities are usually contained 'within the community' (Hopkins, 2004; Kasinitz et al, 2008). This may be largely dependent on where children go to school, the proximity of kin, school subjects and future career choices and may be also contingent on gender norms within the culture (Jeffery, 1987; Rosario, 2004; Blanchet, 2001; Basu, 1998). It may also be contingent on the generational stage the family is at in the migration process. Garbin's (2009: 6) study of 'belonging' amongst young Bangladeshis in East London showed more adjustment to the mainstream and 'local community', encompassing friendships out-with the ethnic group in subsequent generations, than those where one parent had been raised in Bangladesh and outside the children's home location. This suggests that eventually the influence of pre-migration culture and influence is diminished and local factors and practices become more salient.

*Friendship can be reconceptualised as a culturally specific form of providing children with close daily social interaction with others, rather than a unique and presumed universal social construct.*

Gaskins (2006: 301)

Significantly, Gaskins (2006) notes that, particularly in rural areas, there is a need to adopt a wider view of friendship, encompassing mixed-age groups of siblings, kin and neighbours, as is often the norm within settings of the Global South (Rigg, 2007). This is more reflective of prevailing family and kin networks and more widely of communal and collectivist societies, particularly in rural locales. Such societies have been characterised as stressing harmony in interactions, obedience and conformity; members may be more likely to interact in small groups and form lasting and intimate relationships (Asher et al, 2014). Researchers typically assume that the individualistic pattern is more characteristic of Western industrialized societies and that collectivism is more prevalent in Asian cultures (Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier, 2002), but over time and transnational connections, these distinctions may be becoming blurred and less pronounced (Horschelmann & van Blerk, 2012). What is immediately apparent when viewing the migrant-heritage childhoods through the lens of Sylhet is that the nature of friendship is quite different from the age-related and extra-kin friendships of most children in the Global North.

## **Play**

Froebel (1887, 1896) believed that play was a necessary phase in educating the ‘whole’ child, enlisting all her (his) imaginative powers and physical movements in exploring interests. It is a means to explore, make sense of the world, the interrelatedness between the social, the environmental, the intellectual, the emotional and the psychological dimensions in which we are all embedded. These dimensions may to some degree vary, depending on time and location, but taking that as said, wherever located across geography and history, play enables children to learn and experience about their place in the world, the possibilities and challenges too. It may be fun, creative, innovative and reflective, a time out from responsibilities and challenges within the family and wider society and may help children to make choices, through learning to judge and discriminate, to explore. Life is often about making choices, sometimes difficult, and this skill may be first experienced through the negotiation of resources and relationships embedded within the experience of play. In this sense, play is a fundamental foundation for later learning and social interactions.

Many ideas regarding childhood are found within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 31 of the UNCRC formally enshrines the child's right to play and the right to engage in other recreational activities, including participation in cultural activities and the arts (UNICEF, 2016). However well-intentioned, the UNCRC may be problematic, interpreted differently in diverse contexts.

Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global North, particularly in urban settings, play is now removed from the public gaze or formalized, 'corralled' within distinct purpose-built settings, often subject to wider societal scrutiny (Rose et al, 2006). In most Global Southern rural settings children's play activities are visible due to the nature of homes and land usage (Chapter 4). This emphasises how children's play is an outcome of being a participant within a particular cultural or subcultural milieu (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994); play is culturally contextualized, thus reflecting wider social developments and changes. Play may be experienced differently depending on the society in which it emerges, the physical location, the social structures and prevailing belief systems, particularly regarding childhood and the place of children within the family and wider community, as well as implicating aspects of gender, education and social class. Play behaviors and cultural 'products' in general are formed from individual human traits and processes that are in turn influenced by overall societal structures. Play, as a dominant activity in all childhoods, thus conceived, is viewed to be both a *cause* and an *effect* of culture. Thus it may be possible, through exploration, to understand or 'read' something of the relationship between play and the larger cultural and social ecology in which it is embedded.

Play is an aspect of children's lives, which is often 'imagined' by adults as the quintessential 'quality of childhood' (Whitebread, 2012: 3) and contrasted with work activities. From some adults' perspectives this may be regarded as 'meaningless' thus trivialised; fun activities that make delineation between the immature and mature. Conversely, play is often described as the 'work' of childhood, particularly

in the Global North, often taking place in a spontaneous and unstructured fashion (Singer, 1992). Research shows that play is much more than this, having multiple meanings that cannot be studied without reference to wider socialization processes (Montgomery, 2009). This view of the place of play in childhood(s) is then problematic when we consider the world of children who both *work* and *play*, as in much of the Global South (Rigg, 2007; Katz, 2004; Boyden et al, 1991). I then question whether this renders children in such settings in the Global South less childlike.

In portrayals of children in the South, children who may play but also work are often regarded as in need of intervention or help, in order to be fulfilled in an ‘ideal’ childhood. Such visualisations and constructions of childhood do not take account of the place that children play in shaping, constructing and reconstructing society and the fact that they are agents in their own right, within their *local* context and more widely too, due to transnational connections and influences.

### **Play in Rural Sylhet**

Joint family life and proximity of kin eases village children into play with siblings and cousins (Sharma, 1989) as evidenced above. Additionally, family and village structure provides opportunities for adults to complete chores, with children often alongside both playing and working with adults and older peers (Chapter 7). Daily life, thus structured, is an educational process for much of the rural child population (Roopnarine et al, 1994). Within the diaries, childhood preoccupations were predominantly displayed as out-of-doors although there was occasional mention of indoor activities, which seemed more related to ‘work’, (Chapter 7). From the evidence, children’s activities seemed to be divided into two categories, informal or spontaneous play, free-flowing and child-centred and more formal structured activities, which could contain a dimension of play, but also work or wider responsibilities (Chapter 7), as demanded by family members or other adults. Roopnarine et al (1992) emphasise that, in accounts of developing societies of the Global South, most children’s play occurs in random groups but is rarely encouraged but neither discouraged, but rather ignored. Low-income and often illiterate parents,

as the majority in rural Sylhet, are extremely busy and not aware of the potential benefits of children's play. Globalisation, and the recent importation of early years' strategies and agendas (UNICEF, 2015) are shifting parents' attention to education as a priority too, thus play may be further downgraded in how considered by adults and regarded as irrelevant, a waste of time.

Sharma et al (1989) observe that in Global Southern locales parental beliefs about wider socialization and cooperation are intimately interwoven into childrearing practice. Play may thus be found in the 'spaces between responsibilities', especially as children mature (Chapter 7). Regardless, children seemed to incorporate elements of what may be termed 'playfulness into their workfulness' and conversely, 'workfulness into their playfulness' (Katz, 2004; Stephens, 1995) as evidenced below.

### **Informal activities and children's creativity**

Families in the rural setting tended to be small-scale agriculturalists and subsistence farmers, traders and artisans, financially and materially poor, with little obvious surplus in terms of home comforts or anything beyond the bare necessities for survival. The exception to this were *Londoni* families who may be present but who had generally lived in the Global North, the few who had retired back to the *Desh* after a lifetime of living elsewhere, who were symbolically affluent in terms of wealth and social capital and for the most part had adult children in the Diaspora.

Children's lives, their homes and wider environments were almost exclusively devoid of child-focused items, 'toys' and equipment as one is accustomed to seeing in more affluent Northern settings. Liberated from such potentially 'restrictive' aspects (Frost, 2009; Froebel, in Lilley, 1967; McMillan, 1919, 1930), the children displayed great creativity and both individual and collective agency, in their play. Rural children engaged in simple craftwork with items from nature and were inventive in constructing toys and play objects from diverse materials, clay or items gathered while foraging or accompanying elders to work in the fields or bazaars.

Whilst providing fun, such creative usage of materials requires resourcefulness and ingenuity, so may be beneficial to intellectual growth and enhance problem-solving as well as improving team play (Roopnarine et al, 1994). This aspects links to aspects of ‘Lose Parts’ play as alluded to earlier.

### The Den

*Yesterday I was in the yard with my brothers [Faisal, Asfak and Sibbir] and we made a house from all the sticks [branches] taken off the trees by the garden boy [child-servant]. We dragged them behind my house, by the stream, and we took stones from the water, big dry leaves from the ground, and my Dadu gave us old sari material. We made a shelter and my mum was making snacks so we took some to eat outside. Problem was when we did that two dogs came, so we had to use our stones to chase them away..... Then Jadid and Jamil [younger boys] came but we chased them off too, as there was not space for them in our house.*

Ziah, ♂, 6 years, Child-Diaries, Sylhet, 2011



*Ziah's marauding dog, Sylhet, 2011*

Without immersion in a world of manufactured and for the most-part gendered toys and games, as is the affluent Northern norm, children were highly creative and imaginative, predominantly appropriating materials for play from their natural environment, as well as situating pastimes amidst nature, depicting themselves in play amongst trees and foliage, livestock and beside streams and ponds of water. There, they would gather sticks and stones, build structures, models, drawing in the earth with their sticks, adding water, various artefacts and foliage for texture and embellishment. They would incorporate ‘found’ objects - household items, discarded broken pots and tools, parts of old carts and vehicles, plastic bottles and fabric from

cast-off garments, as Ziah mentions above. They were very resourceful in their sourcing of these items; waste objects are quickly removed from the landscape to be recycled and re-appropriated by near-destitute hawkers and recyclers (cf Katz, 2004; Rigg, 2007). Thus, the children had to have a keen eye and fast feet to appropriate these items first. Many of their ‘built’ structures appeared akin to larger structures within their villages; houses and vehicles or landscapes with rivers, bridges and plant life, as if re-creating their wider environment in miniature. Other activities may incorporate items or ideas from the children’s homes, as in Tasneem’s narrative.



*Tasneem: 'cooking with my sisters Taneem, Tabussum & brother Ta'hid too'  
Sylhet 2011*

'Cooking'

*Taneem and I are [playing at] cooking dinner for my grandma and mum.  
Here we have the rice [sand] and many vegetables [leaves, twigs, flowers]*

*and we are chopping them. She is mixing them all together. Here we have the pot and these branches are the fire. Ta'hid must not come close....*

Tasneem, ♀, 7 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Tasneem lived with her mother, her two sisters and an infant brother. The household was poor, their father living in Dubai as a construction worker, and only returning home every three to four years. Tasneem and her sister replicate much of what they see their mother Rahima do on a daily basis, with found objects from nature and an aged cracked pot, usually used for gathering beans from their garden, which Rahima has lent them. Like Ziah and his friends the sisters are displaying aspects of their wider experience within their play, in terms of providing and caring for others, their mother's main preoccupation, including keeping their brother Ta'hid safe from the 'hearth'. Ta'hid wanted to be included more actively in this play but was prevented by Tasneem on the pretext 'he may get burnt'.

*We sometimes help by fetching water.*

Tasneem, ♀, 7 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011



*Tasneem: 'fetching water with my sister', Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011*

Froebel and other authors (Bruce, 2012; Pestalozzi, 1977: 139-47) term this sort of play, described by both Ziah and Tasneem, as ‘symbolic play’ as it tends to represent aspects of everyday life, as seen, interpreted and reworked by the children in a creative fashion, whilst also involving an important social dimension. Creative aspects of play incorporated many opportunities for children to learn to negotiate, collaborate and share, to practice skills necessary for social life more widely whilst learning many of the norms of their society. Miller et al (2009) emphasise that there is a tendency for girls’ symbolic play to be more representative of the prevailing and stereotypical gendered social norms in their location, where boys play may be more fluid in terms of representation. This may be more pronounced in settings with very prescriptive social and gendered norms, such as rural Sylhet, as shown in Tasneem’s example above, in relation to cooking, helping and caring roles. This contrasts with Ziah’s depiction and narrative showing more autonomous and free-ranging activity which the boys may experience in their future lives.

Children were physically adventurous, liked to jump and climb, and often placed themselves on the roofs of outbuildings and up trees, swinging on gates and veranda railings, as this observation indicates.

The Ahmed children are climbing on the wrought iron bars on the front of their small brick house. The two older boys are up quite high, hanging by one arm, yelling and laughing, while rustling the bean bushes, which are growing around them. Their little brother Rudi tries to join in, climbing onto a lower rung of the structure, hands on the rails above. All is well until he removes one hand in imitation and looks up at them grinning, presumably for reassurance or admiration. This is disastrous for him as the minute his attention wanders, he slips and falls, dumped down into the dry earth below them. Wearing only some thin cotton shorts, his right side is crusted with earth, gravel and I can see a graze appearing on his elbow. He screams loudly but then is grabbed by his big sister, on-looking close by. She brushes him off, with grubby fingers, before squeezing his tear-stained cheeks in an attempt to distract, to make him laugh; before long he is climbing again.

Ahmed *bari*, Sylhet field-diaries, 2011

Children seemed to develop many skills in such spaces, in terms of learning to share, negotiate, test and ‘push’ their physicality, intellectual and problem-solving skills, and creativity to the limits, as well as growing confidence, courage and resilience (Crain, 2001; White, 2004). This play offers opportunity for social enrichments, for

example, in terms of placing trust or receiving care in sibling and peer relations (Bruce, 2012), whilst also partaking in the risk-sharing behaviour. Within these more dangerous aspects of daily life, children are imbued with knowledge of physical hazards and risk-taking, in a way they would not be if sheltered from these aspects, and may develop resilience as a result. Such physical activity was largely the domain of male children, although younger girls often participated too, with older girls who might be in a caring capacity, looking on sometimes wistfully<sup>41</sup>. Free-play of this kind can only occur when children create their own agenda, setting the pace, making decisions as they go, observing, interacting, reacting to others as they play. On occasions, children would fall and get hurt, like Rudi above, and their response was noteworthy. It was clear that at times they could be hurt, with grazes and scrapes, but rarely did I see much fuss after the initial incident. It was uncommon to see an adult intervene although sisters and cousins might tend the younger kin, much as a mother might. Children were all conspicuously physical in their treatment of each other, much as the mothers were with their young infants, in terms of giving comfort and reassurance. Touching, pushing, tickling and caressing were commonplace and reflecting back, I started to notice the absence of this uninhibited aspect in recent observations in the urban North, where tighter physical boundaries seem to now prevail.

Despite constraints girls would sometimes create opportunities to defy the local norms in terms of where and how they should play, as this excerpt shows.

*When my uncle is away, we sometimes go to play in the area behind the bari, before the paddy where there are trees. We play by the paddy where there are frogs and can climb the trees – we can pick the papaya and chase the birds here...*

Shukla, Romina & Tabassum, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012

As previously alluded to, the group of girls (Romina, Shukla & Tabassum, ♀, c. 5 years), play here on the village margins on a regular basis, significantly, as Shukla

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<sup>41</sup> Older girls may have wished to participate as well but on more than one occasion I witnessed girls of around 7 years being reprimanded by family members for playing in this 'rough' way (cf Blanchet, 2001; Rozario; 2001)

states, when her uncle, the household head is absent. They are playing in a damp and isolated environment, with potential dangers within the physical dimensions (the water, the trees) and also their social isolation – when squatting as they usually do, they are unseen, hidden from view, behind the growing rice crop. Thus children show how they are managing and gaining awareness of potential dangers, but also responsible in this wider natural world, when they can find the opportunity. They like to climb trees near the edge of the *bari*, before they get to the paddy fields and above is Shukla's depiction of this, embedded in wider nature. Such activity may be but a small 'window' of opportunity to venture into the wider environs, beyond the social conventions in this location, with all the inherent gender norms of female restriction and containment. Such 'hidden' physical activity may be short-lived in the lives of the girls and frowned upon by the wider family and society, if they knew.



*Shukla: 'climbing a tree, birds, mango & papaya' Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012*

Within their activities children seemed to negotiate and cooperate but they would sometimes fight:

Th'amid and Tuhin (♂s) were clashing sticks together in the yard to the front of their house when their older sister Tasneem [♀] and cousin Fa'had [♂]

appeared. Fa'had was younger, around three years old, and tried to grab Th'amid's stick, presumably to join in the game. Th'amid reacted angrily, shouting, kicking Fa'had, who started wailing. Tasneem then kicked her brother in the thigh before scooping up her younger cousin. Th'amid spat on the ground, before grabbing his stick and stalking off followed by Tuhin. Fa'had continued to yelp but was quickly placated by Tasneem, who distracted him pointing to some young chickens, who were scrabbling around in the dirt. Throughout this stramash, no adults appeared or intervened. Later that afternoon, Tasneem was playing quite happily alongside both Th'amid and Tuhin, while Fa'had was sleeping indoors.

Excerpt, field-diaries, Sylhet, 2012

Children's pastimes and interactions were not always harmonious. Although they would generally cooperate quite amenablely, there were tensions and regular fall-outs and children could be quite violent to each other, as Th'amid was to the younger Fa'had, above, both physically and verbally. Elements of the wider norms of social status and hierarchy would surface (Miller et al, 2006). Again, such incidents rarely seemed to result in the intervention of an adult but rather was resolved from within the childhood cohort, through argument and negotiation, with 'order' restored eventually and social relations appearing positive. In this way children both developed and displayed great resilience and social intelligence, which would prove useful not only in relation to the world of childhood and play, but also for their future, in adult life. Such rough and tumble is regarded as a vital element of children's play (Jarvis, 2006; Orobio de Castro, Veerman, Koops, Bosch and Manhowwer 2002; Pellegrini, 1993a; Pellegrini, 1993b; Sax, 2005), through which children acquire skills and learn to 'self-police', a creative process vital to developing wider life skills. As Jarvis (2006: 271), states, 'the activity creates valuable practice scenarios for complex social interactions that creatures need to undertake in order to become competent, socially mature adults'. Importantly, this behavior may be acceptable amongst close friends and kin in a way it may not be accepted by the wider world, so providing a chance to test boundaries and practice for wider social relations.

Importantly, through their diverse activities, the children were also able to take risks and challenge themselves in many dimensions, physically, socially, intellectually, emotionally, psychologically and both individually and collectively take responsibility

for decision-making, negotiation and co-creating ‘culture’ in the here and now (Katz, 2004; Stephens, 1995). Many of the spaces where children played in the rural villages of the *Desh* appeared distinctly unfriendly and potentially dangerous for young children (Ball & Wahedi, 2010: 369). Accidents do occur and many reports exist of young children drowning in village ponds and killed on roads; local NGOs have set agendas to educate parents on such aspects (BRAC, 1989; SUCCEED, 2006), linked to wider agendas on Children’s Rights (UNCRC, article 19, in UNICEF, 2010) and from the globalisation of childhood too. Most parents appeared fatalistic in this regard and the responsibility for young children, beyond infancy, was largely in the domain of elder siblings due to work pressures on adults. Children were largely unsupervised or where supervised, usually this was by an older peer, who had undoubtedly engaged in similar activities and interactions in the past. Thus children learn responsibility through interaction and play in an embedded fashion, with some peer hierarchies apparent. Through such preoccupations children’s agency is widely expressed, across the age ranges, in their movements through and engagements within their localities, negotiations both with friends and the wider surrounding environments and materials therein.

### **Age and Gender in Play**

Although children displayed agency and creativity, it was still contingent on village social norms, regarding gender and maturity. Older children were ‘in charge’ with a gender dimension to this; boys assuming superiority over girls and bigger children over smaller children. Grieshaber & McArdle, (2010: 75) state ‘such play reproduces the status quo’; certainly here the dynamics of relations of power within the society could be viewed. Over time, with maturity, the balance shifted for girls from play to domestic and caring roles. Elements of gender and age intersected in what were regarded as appropriate behavior. Thus, girls did not have parity with boys in terms of sustaining play activities due to domestic commitments including care of younger children (Delap, 2000; fao.org, 2005.; Kabeer, 2004; Care Bangladesh, 2011). Tasks of this type may be protracted in duration, over a day or more extended over months or years (Chapter 7). Boys do have tasks to perform but, in my experience, there was

more evidence of boys engaged in play and peer-centred social activities within the villages than girls.

Hierarchies of gender and seniority were apparent in small ways within the children's play lives.

Tasneem, Taneem, Anjum and Romana were creating a 'village' from sticks and stones, mud, leaves and debris. The boys appeared - Th'amid, Asfak, Asif, Foisal and Jamil - who kicked a football around the dry ground close by, clearly aware of the girls' activity and threatening the tranquility. Several times in the space of thirty minutes the ball would encroach on the girl's play, sometimes glancing off their crouched bodies, sometimes partially obliterating their carefully balanced structure. The girls would whine and complain, as they patiently rebuilt the damaged areas. The boys laughed, shrugged and continued with their game. Eventually the girls moved off to a more secluded location, arms full of building 'materials', the boys fully aware, but appearing oblivious to this.

Field-notes, Sylhet, 2011

As above, the boys had more power and control in the public domain and girls, although sometimes visibly annoyed, would always defer to the boys, allowing them and their activities to dominate, as if the girls' activities were in some way secondary to deeds in which the boys were engaged. As they matured and became increasingly aware or instructed of gender boundaries, play seemed to be more formalised and fragmented, with distinct activities contained within gender-separate groups. Boys would tend to play with boys, men would often fleetingly participate too, but girls would play with girls, or often on the sidelines, on the periphery of the boys' activities, with younger kin to care for; the women never participated. Pastimes, for the girls, would over time become 'helping tasks' which would be the real-life equivalents of much they had performed in their playtimes. Here we see that, as Blanchet (2004) highlights, childhood is contingent on prevailing social structures and one's place within the wider order. Just as the lower classes, the poor and uneducated might be consigned to shorter childhoods so I argue may girls more generally, unless from very privileged and educated families. This theme is revisited in regard to various other dimensions (Chapter 7).

## The formalisation of play

Many of my observations showed older boys participating in organized ‘intentioned’ games, for example, cricket or football, or hide and seek. Over time, these activities replaced the more random and ingenious creative play of the younger children. With the exception of hide and seek, girls did not play in this fashion although they might appear on the periphery, as onlookers, and predominantly as carers for younger children. In boys’ activities they sometimes used items, which could be categorised as ‘toys’, cricket bats, footballs, but which are essentially sports equipment. From their perspective and that of the men, they are essential to the culture of ‘male’ in this setting. Adults overwhelmingly emphasised that children did not need toys, nor could they be readily afforded; many regarded it as ‘against Islam’ for children to have playthings, as it might ‘spoil them’ (personal communication, male household head, Miah *bari*, Sylhet, 2011). Somehow, the boys’ equipment fell into a different category strongly associated with constructions of male identity, ‘being male’, of which adults approved, rather than regarded as ‘toys to spoil them’.

Older girls played activities that seemed increasingly gendered in content as they matured, usually including younger children, often girls.

*Here, this is what you do. Mash up the leaves with the stone, a little hot water and lemon juice, keep mashing until it becomes like a paste, leave it for a while, we can now use this with a stick to make patterns. You need to find a stick, which is quite small and make it sort of pointed at the end, a twig like a pencil.*

Anjum, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Taslima and Nahar continue by applying a very rudimentary *mehendi* [henna Paste] to each other’s fingernails and hands with the help of their older cousin Anjum. Prior to this, Anjum had shown them how to source and gather leaves from a common bush in the locale of their homestead. As in many activities an element of nature is incorporated.

Fieldwork observation, Sylhet 2011



*Rayhan: 'football', Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012*

Anjum is showing some younger girls how to process leaves to make a henna paste, widely used in this setting to apply patterns to the skin, particularly for special occasions like weddings and Eid (al-Jawziyya, 1998). This is an example of the cousins 'doing gender' as they have learned. It is something that comprises an element of 'fun through adornment' too and much cheaper than the bought equivalent, widely available in every bazaar but beyond their means, very much related to the world of women and girls. Nevertheless, some fun activities emerged from the girls' diaries, like these girls engaged in hide and seek amongst the trees, a covert and rare occurrence for them.



*Tabassum: 'hide'n'seek', Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011*

In this research, girls appeared to be less able to focus exclusively on play than boys as involved in caring tasks for mothers and other female kin. This may be due to the fact that as they mature, they are more in proximity to their homes so readily called upon to assist in day-to-day tasks. Boys, by contrast, moved into formal games or seemed to be less visible, which may have been a deliberate strategy on their part to avoid adults and thus avoid being asked to help or they may be helping more widely across the village (Rigg, 2007). They could experience some autonomy from the family, not a choice for older girls, to play spontaneously with their friends and range quite freely, the norm for adult men in this locale.

### **Play in Scotland**

In many parts of the world, particularly the Global North, the structural organization of families and the emphasis on early childhood education have resulted in extensive peer-contact very early in many children's lives. Thus young children not only experience the family tradition and cultural mores, but may also be exposed to extra-familial agents (teachers, wider peers, media). This may acquaint them with cultural variations, and teach children about cultural differences and distinctions as well as other modes of play. Such experience is usually the norm for children in the North but the Sylheti-heritage children may be viewed as living within 'culturally discontinuous contexts'. Their families may be disenfranchised from the mainstream dominant majority society, and thus best described as 'residing and participating in

‘continuous but unassimilated’ cultural or subcultural contexts’ (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994: 5). Becoming culturally assimilated into the wider neighbourhood and society may not be possible or deemed desirable anyway, for some families. Such factors may have implications for children’s play as illustrated below.

*My best plaything is drawing and I like to do threading with beads, make jewels to dress up in and give to my Mum. But sometimes when I do beads my cat plays with the threads and then they get messed up so I have to put them away until she is sleeping. My mum and I watch TV a bit, Bangla films not English.*

Renvi, ♀, 6 years, Calder, Child-diary, 2011

Unsurprisingly, Renvi alludes to her mother in regard to her play; she was living alone with her mother during the research phase and depicts herself playing in a very self-contained fashion with small creative materials, often sold in the bazaars of Sylhet, but used there for decoration of garments rather than play, and very much attached to cultural ideas on adornment and femininity. Thus Renvi is learning gender roles, albeit in solitude, with purchased items rather than found in nature (McRobbie, 2005). Such solitary play was not observed or present in the villages of Sylhet, nor was the incorporation of purchased items. Generally, when engaged in such focused activity children seemed to be solitary or within same-gender interaction, although this may be contingent on household composition. Siblings may be present but involved in their own ‘parallel’ pastimes too. Significantly, Renvi includes watching TV within her play narrative, which was quite common in Scotland amongst the Sylheti-heritage children.

#### After school

*Usually, I just watch TV or play with my cars when I am at home, but it is good when my brother Asiz is here. He is at big [secondary] school. Sometimes he does drawing or helps me with my words and reading [early literacy practice/homework] but sometimes that annoys him. He is usually away playing with his older friends, or at the Mosque. Sometimes he helps my dad in the shop [take-away curry business]. My other brother is at school [Bradford Madrassah] far away, so I don’t see him and he never plays with me.*

Asfak, ♂, 5 years, Rowanlee, Child-diary, 2011

Like Renvi, Asfak shows, the immediate family is ‘what’, and ‘who’ springs to mind

when I asked the children *how* they spent time, what they did or liked to play. In my experience, this is a point of diversion from the norms of Northern-based urban children who are more likely to talk about toys, games and activities first, rather than allude to the social components in this way.

*My sister and I thread these big beads and strings into necklaces. See. Sometimes we fight as we don't really have enough beads to share but my mum might get us some more. We can do this quietly as sometimes my dad is sleeping and if we run around we wake him. Sometimes we draw too.*

Masuma, ♀, 6 years, Child-dairies, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, my mum makes me be quiet at weekends if my Dad and Uncle are home, otherwise they get grumpy. Sometimes Momtaz shrieks and my Mum is angry.*

Ziah, ♂, 4 years, Child-dairies, Rowanlee, 2011

Many children stated they liked to do quiet activities, draw or engage in other creative past-times, such as beading and simple sewing for girls, and drawing, building bricks and blocks for boys. How much this type of quiet play was encouraged in order not to disturb sleeping men, who may have worked late into the evenings, was hard to tell but was alluded to by some children and relates to earlier themes (Chapter 4).

### **Creativity and agency**

The children were resourceful and creative in regard to their play activities and at times, incorporated wider items from their homes into their imaginary play, much as the village children appropriated found items from outdoors.

#### Visiting Asfak and Aisha

When I visited their home, I could not see Asfak, and Aisha, or Zia and Momtaz, their cousins from down the street, but I could hear their muffled voices chatting in English, interspersed with Sylheti, and much giggling. The children's mother Minu, nodded and signaled with her eyes to the bedroom. They were buried under a tent of blankets suspended between two beds and a chair. They had a towel on the ground, were eating a packet of biscuits, drinking small cartons of mango juice and seemed to be playing some game with their hands and interlocking fingers, a bit like cat's cradle.

Field-notes, Rowanlee, 2011

Often children played within the bedrooms, constructing hide-aways, especially

when they had playmates with them. Quite a few children displayed examples of play similar to my observation above and were content in their activities, away from the world of the grown-ups. Such play seems akin to what children were doing in the rural villages, in terms of symbolic play, appropriating items from their surrounding world to incorporate into their structures and play-spaces. Younger siblings may be included as well, but often reluctantly, from older children's perspectives, as discussed by some girls.

*I played on the weekend with my brother and my auntie's boy. We played with the bedcovers, made a hide-out but then it became a boat. My mum let us take biscuits in but not juice. Then my baby brother spoilt it by crying and my mum said we should let him play but he just breaks all our games.*

Rugie, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, my mum lets us do this too, we can make dens and we take things from the kitchen, so it is like 'a house'. She likes me to help with my little sister and let her in our games. Sometimes my mum complains, as she needs the kitchen things for her cooking and can't find them because we have them. I like to play at cooking and sometimes I help my mum, not in the den but in the real kitchen.*

Yasmin, ♀, 6 years, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Much of what the children depicted was 'free play' involving imagination and creativity with household items, rather than toys as such, although small toys were sometimes incorporated in to the games. Free play seemed to be more fluid in terms of what children did and with whom; often boys and girls shared activities in a less gendered fashion than in the villages but this may be attributed to the scantiness of playmates in some households and locales. Much of the free play took place within the living room or bedrooms of their homes and incorporated items of furniture and other household items. Children were often playing in this fashion when I was invited to their homes, utilising what was available for imaginative play. Such unstructured play seemed more akin to the play observed and depicted in the villages of Sylhet, but was distinctive as it took place indoors, within their homes, as opposed to outside as in the villages. It was focused on creative activity and sharing and devoid of individualized material possessions beyond household items, comprising of relatively few obvious toys or playthings (Brooker, 2002).

Children did at times mention toys and purchased items in their play descriptions but

these were more the exception than the norm and I did not see lots of toys as one is used to seeing in most Northern-located children's homes and wider settings.

*I have some action figures, which I have collected from MacDonalds and my dad bought me Action Man when he came back from seeing his family [Sylhet]. I play with them in my den and when my friends come they bring theirs too. They are my favourite things, but I like to play in the park too.*

Habib, ♂, 8 years, Child-diary, Rowanlee

*This is a picture of me in my dressing up stuff, my sister helped me make it [the picture]. I like dressing up and sometimes my mum lets me wear her bangles, play with her saris.*

Farzhana, ♀, 5 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

Where children depicted play items and toys they seemed to be very gender specific with girls playing predominantly with dolls and dressing up activities or household accessories (pots and pans, cooking and cleaning sets) (McRobbie, 1991; Driscoll, 2008) whereas boys had action figures, vehicles and sometimes guns. Gender roles in play prevail across all societies (Poulin & Chan, 2010) and authors allude to Global Northern children's play examples, which have a similar gender component; for example, girls playing with Barbie dolls, dressing them up, boys playing with guns and swords, as encouraged by the toy manufacturers and accepted in general by the mainstream. Gender-differentiation of play materials may be a result of wider influences from early years and school settings although it is difficult to be certain. What was clear was that the children were very much following similar patterns to their non-Sylheti-heritage peers as observed in early years' settings in Scotland and within shopping centres and the wider media too.

### **Adult involvement in play**

*My mum is always busy with the housework and my baby so I do not play with her and sometimes she gets cross with me.*

Aisha Ali, ♀, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, I do cooking too but I have to play with my baby brother when my mum has a shower or is praying. Usually I like this but sometimes he cries, then it's boring.*

Urma, ♀, Child-dairies, Rowanlee, 2011

Strikingly, children did not seem to engage in 'play' and interactive activities

instigated by or with adults as might be observed and encouraged more widely in the Global North; there is increased emphasis on early childhood years and the role of parents therein, both in academic and policy circles, as well as more widely in the media. This has caused an increased focus and encouragement on ‘quality time with one’s child’ within families, accentuated as positive and closely linked to wider ‘parenting’ agendas, which have been widely criticized as perpetuating deficit models of children and families (Hill, 2005; Gilligan, 2000), although sold by some as ‘essential for the best start in life’ within the academic literature, particularly in the field of neuroscience and early brain development (Dellafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2013) and current policy agendas (GIRFEC, Scottish Government, 2016). Indeed, parents who do not engage thus with their children are in danger of being cast as deficient at best and negligent by some (Anderson, 2016). Wider agendas in the UK context are very focused on early years as a period in childhood when specific and focused inputs are vital, without which children may grow up ‘deficient’ in certain aspects or attributes, vital for success in adult life. All of this is linked to wider notions of child development, which have gained ground over decades in the Global North, from the early psychological experimentation of academics like Piaget (1969) to the more recent explosion of parenting manuals and online helplines on ‘how to parent’, now subject to critique (cf. Furedi, 2001). None of this is familiar to the majority of Sylheti parents, who have no experience or knowledge of this aspect of family life, much like their working class neighbours who share their local communities. Thus aspects of ethnicity are intersected with dimensions of social class, education and social capital. However, such knowledge and practice has gained ground in more affluent and educated echelons of migrant society and also in urban Bangladesh too, amongst the upper classes.

Children did spend time watching TV with adults, usually attuned to Bangla channels as mothers could relate to this, both linguistically and culturally. This time appeared to be close, relaxed and comfortable for all. Children did participate in play activities, which ran in parallel to adults’ preoccupations and activities, so overall considerable time was spent in adult company. With increased recent emphasis on ‘free-play’ (Scottish Government, 2017), this factor of ‘quality time with adults’ may

wane, no longer regarded as vital. Significantly, children have shown their skills in amusing themselves and being creative, alone or with friends.

### **Conclusion – Friendship and Play**

Across the two locales we can see aspects of continuity and change, between those of the village children and the urban-based children, in terms of the rich friendships experienced by the children. In Sylhet, these encompassed people more widely and publicly across the homesteads and beyond (Chapter 4). Strikingly, all the play activities alluded to in Scotland were conducted indoors, predominantly in children's homes or those of kin, with other children from their won ethnic cohort. Children, usually boys, occasionally mentioned small trips to the local park with older boys or men but this was all. 'Resilience' is a now common conception Scottish policy circles (cf Scottish Government, 2017; GIRFEC, 2016) but rarely defined. In the Global North, it is hard for the average child to attain true resilience given the over-regulation of childhood spaces and activities (Christensen & James, 2000; Rose et al, 2006), and the prevailing culture of over-surveillance (Rose et al, 2001) accompanied by a plethora of health and safety initiatives. This is exacerbated for the Sylheti-heritage children who, although creative and relatively autonomous in their play, are lacking in spontaneous and free-flowing outdoor unsupervised play opportunities. Recent developments in early years theorizing and policy emphasise free and outdoor play; Scotland has launched its Play Strategy with the following mission statement:

#### **OUR VISION:**

We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up. A nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people; in their homes, nurseries, schools and communities.

(Scottish Government, 2013: 3)

The introduction of Forest Schools (Blackwell, 2015) are another example and there is evidence of the huge benefits to children of being in natural environments. There is also a strategy to include innovative use of everyday materials 'Loose Parts' (Maxwell et al., 2008), rather than manufactured and often gendered 'toys' as playthings. These new strategies are akin to models from where children are

spending time, what they are doing and utilizing in the Sylhet villages. The ideas also hark back to a time before childhood was so based on consumption and bought toys (Kilbourne, 2004; Monbiot, 2013; Kasser et al., 2014), which has been linked to pressures on childhood and on parents, and fuelled debates about ‘childhood in crisis’ (Piachaud, 2007: 20) and the ‘Disappearance of Childhood’ (Postman, 1994). Additionally, these initiatives are positive; in 2007 the UK was voted worst in the child-well-being league, although since has improved slightly (UNICEF, 2010).

In both settings encompassed many found or adapted objects with little focus on the materiality so prevalent more widely in the North. Children were creative and imaginative in how they utilised items they incorporated. With the exception of the occasional sporting interaction, there was no evidence of adults engaging in play in either locale.



*Aisha: I am Bangladeshi and Scottish  
(following 'identity' discussion in school. Rowanlee, 2012)*

## **Chapter 7 – Childhood Preoccupations**

This chapter is focused on childhood preoccupations, activities that may occupy children's time, and is sub-divided into themes of 'Responsibilities and Work' and 'Morality and Religion'. In Scotland the idea of 'work' does not sit easily with mainstream conceptualisations of childhood (Whitebread et al., 2012). Where work and helping tasks are encountered or mentioned in the children's narratives, they are generally quite separate from the wider childhood of play and social interactions. Like Lancy (1977, 1996), who studied childhood in rural Liberia, I show that in the context of rural Sylhet, children make little separation between what may be described as leisure, work and responsibilities. Katz (2004), from her research in both Sudan and New York city with Sudanese migrants, states that we have to be cautious not to idealise play as 'an oppositional moment to work'. Nieuwenhuys (2007) points out that arguments against children's work, applied from the Global North to the Global South, do not take into account complex dynamics of familial social relations and labour in the household, and rely on an image of 'a global childhood, which universalizes children's experiences and also suggests what all children must and should be' (Nieuwenhuys, 2007: 150).

The taken for granted norms of life in the villages, in terms of children's role within the wider whole, show dramatic shifts when life is situated in Scotland. Some aspects, although present, become 'diluted' in the urban context, as a result of urban living, the built environment and limited environmental access and experience; some aspects, manifest in the villages, disappear from the urban childhoods. Nevertheless, much of what is 'played out' in terms of the day to day lives of the migrant-heritage children continues to be informed from childhoods past, those of the mother's in their own upbringings in Sylhet. In addition to this, Northern-domiciled children and their families must contend and comply with local structures and norms, in terms of school attendance and the structuring of days, thus while some responsibilities may disappear they are replaced with others.

## Responsibilities and Work – Learning through work

‘They [children] do not want the easy occupations, but the hard work which demands strength and exertion ...’ (Froebel, cited by Lilley, 1967: 124).



Sabia, *‘the paddy, her brothers, the bird, ball, water bottle’*, Sylhet, 2010

Sabia described her depiction thus:

*See here are my brothers, in the paddy and there’s **those birds again** [Sabia’s voice raises in volume and pitch to emphasise]. There’s me with the ball....’*

Sabia, ♀, 4-5 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Sabia drew the paddy fields, with herself and her brothers working. This was the second harvest in which she had helped; previously she had been too young. She had watched her mother and Dadu at the *bari* with cleaning, sorting and separating the rice. Sabia’s brothers Shuhan and Shujoy were cutting the rice plants in order to harvest but were plagued with problems from birds. Sabia was helping by chasing

the birds, throwing a ball at them. She said there was a particular problem with 'howouah', a large crow-like bird, noisy and common in rural Sylhet, appearing quite fearless of humans and foraging freely. Sabia was proud that she had managed to keep these birds from the paddy as previously they were stealing the crop while her brothers' backs were turned. She was also picking out water lilies 'shapla' but she could not explain what she was doing with the flowers, just that she was removing them from where they grew amongst the paddy. Her picture depicts her and her two brothers with a crow-like bird 'howouah', grains of rice 'bhat', a water bottle 'phani buttal', a flower 'shapla' and a ball 'bol'.

In village life, children are often tasked with simple chores to help their family. Sabia is learning by immersion in the environmental setting, working alongside her older brothers, who at some previous rice harvest undertook the role that is now Sabia's responsibility. Sabia's engagement ensures not only that she is supervised in the task she is doing but is also discovering and learning about future tasks; those that her brothers are undertaking, in relation to rice, their staple crop, learning about managing the nature around her and gaining confidence through playing her part in a wider enterprise. However, Sabia will probably never<sup>42</sup> undertake the tasks her brothers did, having entered the secluded world of the older girls and women. Nevertheless, she gains understanding of the wider locale and the need for cooperation and sharing.

Shami was unusual in that he commented on the process of making his drawing below. Regardless of whether the children were widely or moderately free-ranging in the villages, they were all very aware and knowledgeable of their natural environment and were engaged from a very young age in both play and what 'social reproduction, cultural and livelihood strategies' within their locale (Stephens, 1995; Rigg, 2007).

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<sup>42</sup> Unless economic conditions deteriorate (Rozario, 2001) for her family and wider community.



Shami: 'fishing', Sylhet, 2010

*This is one of the days I went to catch fish with my uncle and brother, you can see I'm on the boat in the river and there are lots of fish. It was very hot this day and I was tired, I made this picture on Friday, after prayers. I like to draw the fish and I think the shape of the boat is easy to draw, a bit like the fish. My aunt cooked fish for lunch when we went home [uncle's house], and we bought lemons in the bazaar She fried them, my favourite. Later I took some [fish] to my bari.*

Shami, ♂, 6 years, Child-diary, Sylhet, 2010

All their depictions included aspects of their wider rural world and nature, a repetitive theme across their diaries. Children never made a distinction between what could be regarded as 'play' activities and what might be termed 'helping' or 'work', perhaps reflecting a more integrated and embedded structure to daily life with such aspects often intermingled and overlapping, the 'playfulness within workfulness' and 'workfulness within playfulness' (cf Katz, 2004).

Children regularly depicted themselves as helping with tasks around the home and land, for example collecting water or tending rice as well as social activities with friends and kin. Most depictions contained both dimensions and their drawings often

depicted several distinct aspects from one day on one page, thus distinctive beside to the ‘norm’ of children’s drawings in the Global North, which seem to generally display one dimension of ‘life’, ‘day’ or ‘theme’ in a single picture (Chapter 2). Although beyond the scope of this research, the fact the distinctive phases within day are displayed thus in Sylhet, suggests no separation in the minds of the children between their different roles and responsibilities.

Over time, children are subject to increasing levels of responsibility, both in caring for younger siblings but also in performing other tasks, which may be construed as ‘work’, particularly when viewed from the North (Nieuwenhuys, 2014). Responsibility is also increasingly attached to something less overt, behaviour and ‘understanding’, particularly in a moral sense which I discuss later. Blanchet (1996, 2001) states there is not an expressed age and stage at which children acquire greater responsibilities and tasks within their family, household, *bari* and wider *gram*<sup>43</sup> (cf. Katz, 2004: 65). Numerous intersecting aspects may be implicated in regard to children’s tasks and wider preoccupations, relating to wider social structures, social class, ethnicity and religious beliefs, family composition and birth-order, gender, and family education too.

‘Helping’ type activities and tasks are introduced in a very free-flowing fashion, in the day-to-day of village and household lives. In my experience children were rarely asked directly to participate, although may as they matured, but rather participated through being in proximity to the activities, often in play as Rana shows.

*Here are the mangoes I helped my brother cut from the tree, near where we play hide and seek. My mum and I are preparing fruit to eat. We made roti too. I do that most days.*

Rana, ♀, 5 years, child-diaries, Sylhet, 2010

Rana helped her mother in routine daily activities; she has drawn both these activities in her diary. She was happy discussing this and did not differentiate between these types of activity and apparently ‘play’ activities, such as hide-and-seek, with her peers, also represented. What was clear was that everything was embedded in the social, playing with kin and wider friends *and* helping with commonplace tasks

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<sup>43</sup> *Gram*, in this rural context, refers to the village, within which one’s *bari* is situated.

within her family and *bari*. Regarding rural living in the Global South, Katz (2004) argues that environmental knowledge is practical knowledge. Even amongst young children, in Rana's *bari* and the wider neighbourhood, children acquired knowledge of the local terrain, resources, land-use practices and environmental processes fundamental to production and reproduction. Like all knowledge it was learnt within a community of practice, which may not always be intentional (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through verbal instruction, stories, riddles, demonstration, guided practice and the sharing of activities, often in a repetitive fashion, adults ensured that their deep and evolving store of knowledge about the environment, both physical and social, vital to the fundamentals of life in this area, was transmitted as a routine part of everyday life (Katz, 2004: 60).

### **Freedom – Responsibilities but not ‘work’**

As well as learning about the wider ‘work’ of the environment, children are learning their place within the broader social order, in social reproduction strategies, many of which were linked to gender dimensions of wider society, evidenced in the girls’ work closer to home, with boys work more likely to be dispersed across locales, both public and private.

There often seemed to be a sequential aspect to the tasks undertaken, with the first task the simplest, so laying ‘the foundations’ for future tasks, both in imagination and in practice. For example, like Sabia and her brothers above, who are now involved in a later phase of the rice production, its distribution and marketing. Thus children, through immersion and family or community sharing of activities and skills, become aware of the life cycle of tasks but also, crucially, of the wider society. It was often the case that they may have mastered the simpler aspects of their task and were developing more complex skills, learning other dimensions of the job and how it may be connected to further activities within their locales. Children thus were learning by immersion in wide family and community settings, through watching, doing and receiving support from more knowledgeable peers, siblings or elders, with some more specialised tasks being formally taught by adults as children matured, or were deemed ready. Overall, most tasks were learnt through being embedded in

everyday settings where most people, with the exception of the very young and the elderly, were contributing and cooperating together.



Anil: *Helping in the paddy*, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

As the young children negotiated their way around their immediate environs, exploring, working and playing, they received ‘education’, knowledge and information, about their environment from older children and adults, often displaying great curiosity in objects, dimensions, and practices, they observed in their day-to-day lives. Such details and knowledge were transmitted informally, as people conducted their daily lives, so over time, the children were building up a large store of indigenous knowledge, essential for life in this setting. Religious doctrine filters in too:

*How will our children be when we are gone, how will they care for their kin, the environment and make a good life? This is something we all need to learn*

*and what better way than through the sharing with other people? Then a child can know their place within the greater scheme of things and follow Allah’s guidance....*  
Rural Mullah, Sylhet, 2011

In settings such as rural Sylhet, indigenous knowledge is regarded as vital for the maintenance of livelihoods and secure sustainable futures for families, as emphasised by the *Mullah*, above. It is interesting to explore and consider this aspect of indigenous knowledge, which may be in tension with the place of formal knowledge and learning when it subsumes a portion of the children's daily lives, within their early years and school hours.

### **Gender differentiation in aspects of everyday helping and working-restrictions**

As childhood progresses, the child becomes viewed very much in terms of gender, as 'male' or 'female', and is assigned very definite roles and positioning within the social hierarchy and in terms of task, in line with norms within a rural agricultural economy. Jeffery's (1979) study, of a respected Muslim community in Delhi, although urban, is insightful. She argues that practices relating to *purdah*, although attributed exclusively to Islam, are in fact more ubiquitous and widespread in South Asia and beyond. They exhibit many and varied regional forms and are more a symbol of status and wealth and ideas of *izzat*, than religious affiliation per se (cf. Sariola, 2010). Thus, generally girls' tasks were performed within the homestead, as would be the norm for most women, with the exception of the poorest, during adulthood. Contrastingly, boys' tasks may be carried out over a wider public area, as was usual for adult men. Boys seemed to be regularly granted free time in a way the girls were not or were able to make themselves scarce beyond their homesteads. Jobs were relatively simple and varied. For girls they included such activities as childcare, helping with simple vegetable harvesting, food preparation and taking food to older kin within the *bari* as well as readying the house for guests alongside the women. For boys, there were no depictions of them engaged in food production or distribution and certainly it was rare to see adult men in a kitchen or participating in 'food work'<sup>44</sup>, beyond food shopping in the bazaar, a male-dominated activity in this region, attributed to the strictures of *purdah*, for women and girls. Additionally, for boys gathering firewood, helping with sowing and harvesting vegetables and rice,

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<sup>44</sup> I did however witness men (from elsewhere) very publicly preparing and cooking vast quantities of food for large gatherings, for example, weddings or holy days.

loading baskets and small handcarts for market, fishing and basic animal husbandry were the norm. These tasks were largely considered ‘children’s work’. Nevertheless, the children displayed confidence and emerging competence in mastering the skills and knowledge required to carry them out.

Gender distinctions, social class dynamics and various roles feature from early childhood and seemed to be transmitted through families from older children to younger, from mother or sister to daughter, father or uncle to son.

### **Responsibilities of Childhood – Family and Friends**

Within the drawings smaller children often appeared central to the children’s activities, usually depicted somewhere in proximity to their carer. This supervision added another structural dimension, a responsibility, to their activities. This was frequently a gendered responsibility, especially so for young girls, who up until around seven years<sup>45</sup> were often to be seen in the *baris* and wider villages caring for a baby or a toddler, and chaperoning younger children, often several at one time.



Rugie: *'Helping', with food & younger children, Sylhet, 2011*

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<sup>45</sup> Beyond this age range, girls seemed to disappear completely from the wider public domain although would still conduct such activity, but secluded within the boundary walls of homes and *baris* (Jeffery, dates; Blanchet, 1996, 2001; Abebe, 2007; Robson, 2003).

Although defined by adults as *shishukal* (a state of non-reason during infancy and preschool, between approximately 0-5 years of age), young children displayed a high degree of confidence, both social and physical, from an early age. They were not dependent on care from specific adults, but rather from older peers and the community in general. Younger children were largely ignored or quite roughly treated by older children and often appeared in physical danger, wandering dangerously close to deep pools of water and sharp implements, amidst all sorts of dirt and animal waste and close to busy roads. I rarely witnessed accidents and the toddlers seemed happy to trail along behind their elder peers, resilient and rarely complaining. Correspondingly, mothers seemed to be relaxed about their young children's activities and did not display the anxiety regarding children's physical safety and resilience, which is increasingly regarded as normal in the North (Brussoni et al., 2012). This may in reality be attributed to the fact that children are cared for by older children who absorb the responsibility for their care. Older children were not anxious about their young charges and nothing appeared very 'spoken through' or directed in advance but just transpired and free-flowed within the wider activities of the day. This may be related to increasing chastisement, sanctions and punishment for older children if they are perceived to behave in an irresponsible or undesirable fashion, which I witnessed on several occasions (de Zoysa et al, 2007). This responsibility is part of life and imbibed early, taken-for-granted (Blanchet, 2012) by the children as are sanctions and punishments for disobedience.

In recent years, the fact that children have been largely left unsupervised by adults and treated as competent has been highlighted within early years and ECCE programs, more and more apparent in the rural locations. This has resulted in a new emphasis being placed on child physical safety within the rural settings, probably as a result of the high incidence of child mortality in such locations (Iqbal et al., 2007)<sup>46</sup>, However, there is more concern in terms of danger in a moral sense, which

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<sup>46</sup> For example, Iqbal et al. (2007) research found that in Bangladesh drowning rates are 10-20% more than those in other developing countries.

becomes more marked over time, but is evident in terms of gender from birth onwards, which is discussed in the next section.

Aziz and Maloney (1985) stated that in reality *shishu* does not refer to mere age or perception of ‘development’ of the child, nor does it distinguish gender, but is contingent on social circumstances, regarding aspects such as social class, education of the family and the child’s position within their family (cf. Behera, 1998, 2007; Roopnarine et al, 1994). For example, in rural settings the eldest child may be required to take responsibility for younger siblings or land-related activities and act with maturity and understanding, so their *shishukal* is shortened. Contrastingly, a more middle class urban child of educated parents may be cared and provided for by adults or indeed by a poorer village girl, so sheltered from wider responsibilities so can remain *shishu* up to around 12 years of age, although this term is never used to describe a child beyond puberty. Thus *shishu* represents an ideal of an innocent, protected, dependent child, perhaps more akin to traditional Northern archetypes, not a knowing responsible child.

While it may take a village to raise a child, in rural Sylhet, so it may take a child to help sustain a village, or at least a lineage, within a village. Children also extend care to other members of the family or wider community@

*Here, we are taking rice to our Dadu who is alone today and cannot cook.*  
Sana & Rumi, ♀, 5/6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012.

*My auntie is sick today and we are helping with the chickens, feeding them and their chicks. Look, this is what we saw. There’s mangoes, flowers, birds.*  
Karima, ♀, 6 years, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2012

Such narratives and depictions were common in the diaries, particularly in the girls’ drawings, as below, and it was a common sight to see children carrying tiffin tins around the *para*<sup>47</sup> taking food to wider family who may require support, or to observe quite young children helping with simple livestock tasks as Karima and her younger siblings do to help their aunt who has a young baby. Care is a responsibility

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<sup>47</sup> *Para* in this context means neighbourhood, a region within a village-gram.

across the wider kin group, very flexible and responsive to what is needed and largely the domain of women and young children, with women facilitating and producing (food for example) and children often acting as messengers and intermediaries between households.



Karima's depiction, 'journey to aunties', Sylhet, 2012

### **Morality and Islam**

*Everywhere reference is made to a threshold, which separates a stage of innocence and ignorance from a stage of knowledge, responsible behaviour and the possibility of guilt and punishment.*

Blanchet, 2001: 60-61

Blanchet (2001: 60) states that in the context of Bangladesh, childhood may be variable in duration and quality depending on social status and this affects aspects such as assuming responsibilities. Responsibility is attached to enabling a sense of understanding in the child, which is believed to develop and increase with maturity.

It is also one of the reasons that very small children in this society are treated with great leniency, as they are believed to be in a state of ‘non-understanding’. The inculcation of responsibility is a gradual process and may be context dependent, in terms of both social and physical location and family structure, as well as wider social networks. The learning of responsibility may incorporate people beyond the child’s immediate kin, as shown in relation to gaining knowledge of life, the wider society and environment, through a ‘community of practice’. Thus the concept of ‘maturity’ is fluid and not attached to a particular set of conditions such as biological age and ideas of stage in development, as influenced by Western child psychology<sup>48</sup>; the child will reach a ‘state of understanding’ when they are recognized as doing so, which will vary from child to child, depending on their disposition. This fact is pertinent to consider in regard to the Sylheti-heritage children raised in the North, with great emphasis on stage and age-related structure and associated practices too, which families, particularly the marriage migrant mothers may struggle to comprehend.

*‘Children must gain a sense of place within the collective.’*

Personal communication, Abu Miah, Sylhet 2010.

Wider reading (cf. Behera, 2007; Dyson, 2007; Nieuwenhuys, 1994) and my observations and interactions in Sylhet led me to conclude that children are invested with considerable importance and value, although encouragement of individuality is not part of the dominant culture, with individualistic and non-conforming behaviour frowned upon, especially for girls. Rather the ‘collective’ or community nature of existence is what carries importance. Value is attached to personal morality, honour and social positioning within the family and in relation to the wider village structure and work or helping is certainly a dimension of this.

Parents and guardians have extensive power and authority and are recognized as knowing *what is best* for children, and entitled to make decisions on their behalf. Children are then duty bound to follow the instructions and advice of their elders.

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<sup>48</sup> As can still prevail in the Global North and increasingly beyond (Alipio, et al, 2015: 256; others).

This is not to say that agency and resistance is absent, but perhaps just less overt than can sometimes be apparent amongst Northern children and their parents. It may manifest itself in differing forms, and was certainly a dimension of the children's autonomous activities, as children highlighted in previous chapters, for example in relation to 'spaces' for play and friendship, ideally far removed from the wider village gaze<sup>49</sup>. This was evidenced in Romina and friends' depiction, (Chapter 6), relating to the paddy fields, catching frogs, climbing trees; spaces and activity they enjoyed while they could. Authority and control were never far away. This was most clear in regard to girls and women's subordination in the wider society.

### **Children as carriers of social norms**

The theme of subordination is closely linked to that of *izzat* and in particular being the carrier of family honour and obeying the cultural rules of family hierarchy. Such overarching influence and regulation is not merely related to the child as an individual but rather in relation to others with the child perceived as part of the greater family unit, than as an independent person. Thus, if one deviated from acceptable norms, one's deeds could have serious consequences for oneself and one's kin. Conversely, one's positive actions and behaviours may enhance the status and prestige of the wider kin group. Whilst increasingly regarded as physically competent and able as time passes, children are constrained too as, with impending maturity, they may be increasingly viewed as being potentially 'vulnerable' in a moral sense, of having the potential to disrupt or destroy the social order (Blanchet, 2001). This may be somewhat the reverse of childhood conceptualisations in the North, where vulnerability is more closely related to infancy, but also to ideas of innocence and more widely to the idea of physical dependency on adults for protection, (Aries, 1963, cited in Jenks, 2005), which is believed in the minds of most adults to diminish over maturity. Patriarchy plays a pivotal role in maintaining and policing the social order in Bangladesh (Abdullah & Zeidenstein, 1982: 68). Within South Asia generally, much emphasis is placed on moral conduct and the

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<sup>49</sup> This was certainly the case for boys, who frequently mentioned they liked to be out of sight of elders, although less so for girls who are more subject to control from a younger stage in development and more connected to the household rather than the public domain.

place of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) in the regulation of both individual and collective behaviour. This is inculcated from an early age, particularly for girls and it is a woman's responsibility to uphold, particularly in relation to their own demeanour and also the conduct and actions of their children. Women, thus, may be viewed as carriers of family honour, group identity and boundary markers. Indeed, for women, 'from puberty (and through adulthood too) mobility beyond the domestic arena is closely monitored' (Jeffery et al., 1989: 25) and for some female children and young women actively discouraged. This factor then has implications for the Sylheti-heritage children, particularly girls, and their families in the cities of the North and also for those who care about child and family well-being, in policy and practice, in terms of the construction of deficit discourses when girls are not fully participating or families fail to attend and interact within some public arenas.

However, Rozario (2001: 85) highlights that honour, a positive quality, although regulated largely by women is seen primarily 'as a male virtue, in their relations with one another', which may be vulnerable and is dependent on the honour of women. *Purdah* thus conceived is one effective means of preventing the damage to or dissolution of male honour.' The fear of bringing dishonour to others (the family and wider lineage) inhibits many forms of behaviour, including individual agency. Kassam (1997: 117-119) in her collection of personal stories of young Asian women's experiences reports 'the worth of an Asian girl is defined by how she conducts herself and who her family is'. Also, 'I did not want to be a target for gossip and stick my neck out at the expense of my family's *izzat* . . . Asian girls have to shoulder this responsibility, however unfair it may seem'.

Sanghera (2009: 25) comments on *izzat* as,

'the cornerstone of the Asian community and since the beginning of time it's been the job of girls and women to keep it polished. And that's really hard because so many things can tarnish it'.

This then explains the increasing sanctions and surveillance in the lives of young girls and the requirement to keep them close to home. Much of this is based on very 'future-oriented' constructions of childhood, as well as changes that are transpiring, regarding gender in the rural areas and further afield too. The following discussion,

and example regarding Rimi, exemplifies this.

Although largely socialized to the norms and mores of their locale, many families, particularly those who already had kin in the North, were envisaging a different future for some of their children from that which they had themselves experienced. This may entail transnational relocation, for work or for marriage, as described below by Ali Azad, head of his lineage in rural Sylhet. Such prospects were not envisaged for all children and certainly obedience and observance of cultural norms of behavior were ideals that were sought as desirable and likely to enhance the potential for such opportunities.

*‘It may be in the future that some of the wider family may go to London too, if we can make good marriages for them or there is opportunity to work in a business.’*  
Ali Azad, Field-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

Such chances would only be available to a select few children in their futures and was something many families aspired to make possible, which was regarded as having the potential to benefit not just the migrating individual but the wider kin group too. This is exemplified in the status conferred on families relating to their ‘*Londoni*’ kin. Their assumed success and wealth may possibly assign both prestige and other symbolic and material benefits to the kin who remain behind in the *Desh*. Thus, the child may be viewed as both containing and potentially conveying their wider kin group’s status and prestige, as an extension of their parents’. This would require certain standards of conduct to be maintained, attached to social positioning. Individual conduct and demeanour could encompass both positive and negative effects. This may include the opportunity to migrate, following a suitable transnational marriage (Charsley, 2005a/b, 2012), viewed by families as the most positive outcome.

Alternative prospects may include being sponsored to work in the business of a kinsman, although recent legislation makes this scenario less likely now (Toynbeehall.org, 2015; Financial Times, 2016). I observed this employment outcome frequently in Scotland, the life-dream of many young men in rural Sylhet, but not a possibility for girls and women, without extensive wealth or education. In recent years with increasing wealth in the villages of Sylhet, wider opportunities and

educational emphasis, it may be anticipated that a child is invested with a power to *enhance and elevate* a family's social positioning. This was a component of some parents' thoughts in relation to their children, which although often positively imagined and intentioned from the adults' perspectives, could result in greater control and surveillance of children, a negative effect. The end result of migration for marriage or work was thus envisaged as a means to continue a practice already well-established in some families. Over time this has led to great disparities in the rural villages, between families and households with kin overseas who have the potential to accumulate surplus and become more financially stable as well as elevate their social standing. Conversely, families who do not have transnational connections, who were in general much poorer with less security, were less able to enhance their social capital and standing within their local environs. Over time, through this means, the economic and social capital gulf has widened (Gardner, 2009, 2010; Garbin, 2008, 2009).

Thus great emphasis is placed on the behavior of children, particularly girls. In discussion with Rimi and Renvi's *Dadu*, she was very frank regarding her female grandchildren, stating the following,

*'Rimi is both beautiful and clever so she may remain in school and hopefully make a good marriage. Oh, but Renvi, she is but a khalla fouri, [dark skinned girl] and will no doubt be married to a rickshaw-wallah by the age of twelve. Rimi must behave very well, must not do anything that may spoil her life. Or our family.*

Madhur, Fieldnotes, Sylhet 2011

Some children were invested with greater care and opportunities than others within the same family, as demonstrated by their grandmother's impression of them and her future aspirations in this regard. Disturbingly, from my perspective, Rimi was imbued with more possibilities, and regarded as *more beautiful* than her younger sister, as her kin perceived she had fairer skin, whereas her sister, was merely a 'black girl' of no great worth or investment to the family. The aspect of lighter or

‘fair’ skin<sup>50</sup> is both a social and political issue (Stoler, 1997: 14), too complex to discuss here in detail, but nevertheless noteworthy. Some children may be endowed with more ‘value’ than others. Further to this, the excerpt below from my fieldnotes shows how this may affect childhood(s) in practice.

I was helping the family to prepare for a large gathering of kin and some of the younger children were fractious and under the women’s feet. As a distraction I decided to take them to the bazaar, to buy some biscuits and sweet treats. We were walking through the main thoroughfare, when suddenly we were subjected to a loud and sharp utterance from a stallholder. It was Rimi and Renvi’s uncle Foisal who appeared very angry, waving a bamboo cane and shouting at the girls, who promptly about turned and disappeared back to the *bari*, leaving me confused and flustered with some younger children, who seemed oblivious.

Fieldnotes, Sylhet, 2011

It was only on return to Scotland after this fieldwork phase that I was made aware of why this event unfolded as it did. Foisal’s younger brother lived in Scotland and, after I recounted the tale, he said the girls could not be in the bazaar, as this was not a ‘suitable’ place for them to be seen. Only ‘bad girls’, as he called them, would be present in such a locale. Behera, (2007: 19) argues that ‘public images of childhood’ often exist to serve the interests of the dominant in society. Thus, vulnerable children, like street children and the poor, or perceived ‘bad girls’ are often used as examples and scapegoated, to the positive benefits of the advantaged and wealthier, who may be better-placed to keep their daughters in purity and eventually *pardah*. The implication of this is far-reaching but clearly such appearances in a very public arena have potential negative effects for the children, which could then affect the honour of the wider kin-group; people would gossip and the girls could be deemed unsuitable and less desirable as future wives and mothers. In the villages and more widely, these aspects seem to affect childhood for girls from quite a tender age, again emphasizing the very gendered inequalities, which prevail.

As the girls’ grandmother demonstrates above, inequality may exist in how children are perceived and thus invested in or otherwise. In this example, the family regard

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<sup>50</sup> Whilst conducting this research, my skin colour was often an issue, commented upon, but also encouraging women and girls to pull me out of any available sunlight, lest I ‘darken’.

Rimi as having more prospects for the future; thus her moral behaviour will be very closely scrutinized and ‘policed’ in order she may reach her ‘potential’, so ensuring that a return may be forthcoming on the family’s investment in her.

Renvi is swinging on the railings on the front of her verandah with her little brother, trying to somersault on a bar. She has been told to desist by her mother Momtaz but continues to hang there, legs akimbo, head down, hair obscuring her face, shalwar kameez all awry. Momtaz loses patience and wades in grabbing Renvi by her skinny arm, causing her to fall quite suddenly off the bar, onto the rough ground. Renvi screams and kicks while Momtaz waves a thin bamboo switch over her head. Renvi stumbles to her feet, hands in tight fists, directly confronting her mother with angry and tearful eyes...

Fieldnote observations, Sylhet, 2011

Here we see the consequences of the pressure to conform, in this locale, for both Renvi and her mother. Of the two girls the younger Renvi was livelier, attention-seeking and displayed more outwardly assertive behavior<sup>51</sup>, challenging her mother, for which she was sometimes chastised quite harshly, often appearing with bruises and weals on her arms, from where she had been harshly grabbed or swiped with the bamboo cane. At other times she seemed largely ignored and neglected which seemed to result in more confrontational and then punishable behavior. Usually referred to as ‘*khalla fouri*’ (black girl) she did not receive the same level of physical care as her older sister and was often the last in the family to be fed, frequently receiving just left-over scraps.

*Renvi must also behave appropriately as if not, the whole reputation of our family could be damaged and this would make consequences for the others, in particular Rimi.*

Momtaz, Fieldnotes, Sylhet 2010

The family did not hold high aspirations for Renvi as an individual, as her *Dadu* discussed above, but more in regard to her effect on the collective and the kin group’s *izzat*. Bangladesh’s socio-cultural environment contains pervasive gender discrimination, so girls and women face many obstacles to their development. Abrejo

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<sup>51</sup> It is regarded as impolite for children particularly girls in this setting to make eye contact with their elders and this may be even more problematic where the child has already been reprimanded as Renvi was above.

et al. (2009) and Bhuiya et al. (2001) argue that in many Asian societies women and girls are discriminated against with regard to education, health, food and security, which may start even before their birth. Girls are often considered to be financial burdens on their family, and from the time of birth, they receive less investment in their health, care and education (Abrejo et al, 2009; Bhuiya et al, 2001). I highlight this aspect here as it may have relevance for the women who migrate to Scotland, in terms of wider well-being and self-esteem, as well as their ability to integrate in their neighbourhood communities.

With the advent of puberty, differences in the ways that adolescent girls and boys are treated become much more pronounced. Adolescence is not viewed as a distinct phase of life; instead the onset of physical maturity is seen as an abrupt shift from childhood to adulthood. At puberty, girls' mobility is often further restricted, which limits their access to livelihood, learning and recreational and social activities (Sanghera, 2009). Girls such as Renvi may be strategically 'married off' as is expedient to do so to protect her vulnerability and the family's *izzat*. Wider investment can be made in her perceived more desirable and marriageable sister, who meets the ideals prevailing in the society, both local and transnational. Children who are dutiful are likely to be praised by parents and receive compliments from their society. Conversely, children who reject their parents' advice and education and the conventions of the society (*samaj*) are likely to be labelled as 'spoiled' and this could result in the child being ostracized or socially excluded. Parents talked about this in an abstract fashion, of children who offended the norms of acceptable behaviour and much of this was based on local narratives as well as reports and opinions from visiting *Londoni* kin. Thus, such knowledge transcends the local and is shared more widely. This explains why families, particularly mothers, are tasked with guarding their daughters at quite an early age, with greater emphasis on girls for socially acceptable and responsible behaviour (Whiting and Edwards, 1992).



*Renvi: Rimi, 'in the beautiful dress', my brother and me. Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2010*

Renvi (Sylhet, 2010) drew the picture above on a day when she was ostracized following chastisement for running wild in the *bari*. It is quite telling:

*That's my sister, in the beautiful dress, my little brother and me [on right of image]. See my clothes are old and dirty. Renvi, Sylhet, 2010.*

Thus, we see how Renvi is clearly aware of the social injustice, which prevails, in regard to her status and care, subject to close scrutiny and sanctions where deemed necessary. In this way, when compared with Rimi, Renvi's childhood may be considered harsher in experience. This is not to say that Rimi does not have considerable pressure and responsibilities too, but different in content and how experienced.

### **Morality and Social Class**

Much of the wider literature shows how social class has implications regarding individual behaviour and ideas on morality. In the villages, in order to maintain *pardah*, one has to have a certain wealth (Jeffery, 1979; White, 1992; Rozario, 2001). Women and girls who perhaps due to circumstance need to gain personal and economic independence run the risk of social marginality (Rozario, 2001: 96), which

will not only affect them but also their children. This is evidenced here in the following vignette.

Majeda was a very slight village woman who was employed over the summer to help in the *Zia bari* while some *Londoni* kin were visiting. Her duties involved cooking and cleaning and at times she also helped with the personal care of the *Londoni* children while their mother rested. Majeda had a small boy with her, her son around 6 years old, who never made eye contact or spoke and largely just remained on his own in a small store-room at the back of the house, lying on a pile of grubby jute sacks while his mother worked. I never saw him play or interact with the children of the *bari*, nor learnt his name and he was never referred to nor engaged with by the wider *Zia* family, merely receiving scraps of food from his mother after she had cleared up family mealtimes.

Field-diary observations, Sylhet, 2011

Condemnation of children can vary with socio-economic class and gender. Children of poorer families and especially girls are more likely to suffer disapproval and rejection than middle-class children and boys and this may be established through one's own conduct but also attached to the conduct of the wider family. Although being viewed as an extension of one's kin group may confer status and personhood, the opposite is also possible, resulting in shame and lack of personhood, as could be observed in the case of the (unmarried) servant girl Majeda and her son, who seemed to be largely invisible to the *samaj* except in the sense her labours could be used (Nashid & Olsson, 2007). Bosch (2005) states that for girls, maturity may be marked by the first menstruation and a time when girls may be viewed as particularly at risk, both physically and morally, as was Majeda's experience, highlighted here from my field-diary.

I was told Majeda did not have a father or brothers to care for her, nor a husband, but the Miah household offered her help as they could, where other households refused this support...

Field-diary, Sylhet, 2011

Women and girls with low socioeconomic status have to accept any work they may be offered, have little role in decision-making processes and may struggle to find or express agency (Abrejo et al., 2009; Bhuiya et al., 2001). Even if Majeda wanted to affirm her own and her son's status and identity, this would be very difficult in such

a male-dominated society, given her own status as woman, ‘outsider’ and marginalized<sup>52</sup> due to her ‘impurity’ and lack of compliance to, or opportunity to fulfill social norms, in this case marriage. Overall her (necessary) economic autonomy and independence have made her an outcast according to the values of the rural community thus leaving her with little social status (Abdullah & Zeidenstein, 1982: 81). Often young boys of the *bari*, would be abusive to Majeda; I once witnessed one of them, aged around 11, shouting and kicking her. Here we can see how gender, status and social class may impact - the boy, although in full view of elders, was not reprimanded.

I use this example to show how any deviance from the norms of the *samaj* has serious and lasting implications for the individual and the wider family. Thus the demeanour and conduct of children, particularly girls, is closely policed as they reach an age of perceived responsibility for their own protection and more importantly the honour and symbolic, social and economic capital of the entire family (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). Rozario (2001: 45) explains this aspect of life through the concept of shared blood, which is seen as the basis for a common code of conduct within the family. Thus, the whole *gushti*’s (lineage’s) reputation may be endangered by a member’s shameful or less than desirable behavior.

### **Religious Practice and Teaching**

Islam, the dominant religion, shaped the worldview of the villagers, ‘providing a social glue, binding the community together – the men in the mosque, the women in purdah, the children in the *madrassahs*’, (Hartmann & Boyce, 1983: 217). This was not an aspect the children devoted much time to in their diary-making but requires discussion. From my perspective, religion seemed to filter into all of everyday life as

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<sup>52</sup> Like Blanchet and Rozario, I use the term marginal in a cultural sense, not in a structural sense as structurally (economically) unmarried women may be sometimes better placed than their married counterparts (Blanchet, 2001; Rozario, 2001: 163). This shows how economic structure and gender ideologies are in conflict in Bangladesh-while the economic situation has been undergoing huge changes, in the case of women the value system (culture) has hardly changed (Rozario, 2001: 162). The categorisation of certain women as ‘marginal’ or impure by the use of certain traditional cultural values, ensures that the dominant class can continue to exert power over the dominated classes even where the latter start to improve their economic condition, thus maintaining the status quo (Rozario, 2001: 162). Such marginalisation may also serve as a lesson to younger members of the *samaj*, a poor example of how to live one’s life.

this field-note shows.

I was drinking tea with the women and younger children of the Ahmed *bari*, when suddenly an older boy, Asfak, arrived, out of breath, conveying a message I did not comprehend before departing. Immediately the women sprang to their feet and covered their heads with their ulnas, drew the curtain which partitioned the back of the house from the front, before insisting I cover my hair too as some holy-men were about to visit. Small children clung to their mothers in a somewhat awed fashion and older children adopted a serious demeanour, eyes averted. The boy returned and called the three young boys who were present to the front of the house, beyond the curtain. It was time for their instruction in Arabic and Qur'anic recitation with two Mullahs from the local Mosque. What followed was approximately two hours of loud chanting, recitation of the Qur'an with much repetition-children learn this by rote in a almost 'musical fashion' in this setting.

Field-diary observations, Sylhet, 2011

Clearly, as this example shows, the religious dimension is extremely important, even with the need for respectful compliance from an outsider, as living in the family homestead. Presumably, any deviation from the norm, by myself, may have effects for the reputation of the family. Banu (1992) states that in rural Bangladesh the family in both formal and informal ways is playing a significant role in Islamic socialization, with large numbers of children in rural areas receiving early Islamic education comprising learning of the Qur'an, Hadith, Namaz, Roza and other Islamic principles from their parents and other relatives. This is then formalized, particularly for boys, around five to six years of age when boys may start spending time in Islamic instruction in their local Madrasah or Mosque or be visited in the home as illustrated above within the Ahmed *bari*. Indeed, I did on occasion hear women recite Qur'anic verses while nursing their babies or tending their needs. In this way children may grow up immersed in this aspect of life, as taken for granted, and may partially learn by osmosis before receiving formal instruction. Children quite simply may not have considered religious aspects within their wider lives or their diary-making, as it is omnipresent in this local. They had little opportunity to experience anything different, with which to compare (Moore et al., 2016; Boyatzis, 2012), although I previously recounted a boy's narrative (Chapter 6), which included a Hindu friend. The thematic thread now focuses on rural Scotland

## Scotland: Education, migrant identity and morality

Childhood preoccupations and responsibilities are generally quite distinct, for the Sylheti-heritage children in Scotland, from the responsibilities assigned to children in rural Sylhet. They manifest themselves differently within the urban setting due to patterns of family settlement, the built environment, distinctions of culture and ethnic affiliation, as well as the wider social structures such as education and factors of difference and marginalisation. Education, both early years and primary is emphasized as a serious responsibility in childhood, both for children and their mothers. Several other factors are highlighted in terms of responsibility for the children too, in regard to the acquisition of family culture; namely the responsibility the children carry in relation to their Muslim identity and associated practices, their Bangladeshi/Sylheti ethnicity and their identity as a part of a very small but distinct migrant group. Inculcation of a strong moral duty to care for and help one's family is also important, regarded as a parental duty to convey and instruct, particularly for mothers, as carriers of family culture and *izzat* too. I consider and evidence these aspects separately here.

A significant dimension of importance in terms of childhood responsibility for the migrant children and their families was education and pre-school<sup>53</sup>, including gaining a sense of 'readiness' for school. This was an aspect I often discussed with the migrant mothers who had high hopes for their children, particularly their daughters. Despite having had little educational opportunity themselves, this was a key concern for parents (Brooker, 2008):

*I do not want my daughters to have the life I have. Education is key to change for them.*

Ruxana, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Ruxana had five children, three boys and two girls, and the youngest one Mina was just about to begin school. Ruxana was not literate in Bengali and had very limited English, and for her this was a source of shame. She recounted how she had to look

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<sup>53</sup> Not all children in this research went to pre-school.

after siblings, in her home village, and rarely attended school after 4 years of intermittent presence. Nevertheless, she could see the importance of education for her children, particularly as migrants in the North, and worked hard to support them, in a limited fashion.

*We live near the library and I have always gone there after school, even though I can't read the books, my children do. I encourage them to do their homework. In the past we had a tutor but now the older ones help the little ones. I buy them pens and notebooks, anything really they need to help their studies.*

Ruxana, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Ruxana, like other mothers I met, was extremely dedicated and diligent in supporting her children's learning, as she was able, despite her lack of experience. Although married, she had remained behind in rural Sylhet, while her husband migrated to Scotland to work in a kinsman's restaurant, arriving with her two sons at a later stage, when the oldest went straight into primary school. She was aware there was a 'mismatch' or discontinuity experienced by her children on entry to school and this was an area she had found hardest to rectify, neither speaking English nor having familiarity with education practices in Scotland or elsewhere. She had more confidence in Mina's entry to nursery as she had her older children to help her, as well as the experience from their transition times.

*Mohammed and Mohibur are very good, they have told Mina many good things about her nursery and we are lucky as Mrs Miah is there, who speaks Bangla. I think Mina is quite excited to go.*

Ruxana, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

*Already I know all my ABC and can count too. Mo and Mo [her brothers] have shown me. They say there will be many fun things when I begin my nursery after the summer.*

Mina, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Mina's older brothers were thus playing a significant bridging role for their younger sister, which is a usual strategy amongst migrant communities (Rashid & Gregory, 1997; Volk, 1998). Certainly, stage in family formation or reunification and the number of children plays a role too:

*When my eldest, Mohammed, started school, he did not speak any English and we had no friends to help us in Calder. This was a difficult time for me - he did not like school at first, seemed alone and overwhelmed, but after some months he began to settle and make friends in the playground too. It's much better though now we live in Rowanlee, where there are more migrant families, generally, and certainly quite a few Bangladeshis. This helps the children and other mothers helped me.*

Ruxana, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Here, Ruxana emphasised the power of social networks for the children and their parents in terms of sharing information and offering support, particularly on this more formal part of urban Scottish life. Some schools were very experienced in terms of settling children from diverse communities and others not so.

### **Schools and early years**

*We are celebrating the end of Ramadan here in our school, on Wednesday. I am helping the little ones with making some decorations for the hall, and look [points to corner of the room], there is the flag of Bangladesh. We always have such celebrations in this school, which are important for all the children to learn and know about. We will have nice food which our mothers will send and Mr Ross [the headteacher] will wear a Panjabi<sup>54</sup> which Urma's family gave him from Bangladesh.*

Amin, ♂, 8 years, child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010

Rowanlee school has been oft-praised in Scottish Government literature on supporting Minority Ethnic children and their families, and employed some great strategies to support and encourage the children. Children worked hard at 'being Bangladeshi' (Sylheti/Dhakaiyai) within the context of Rowanlee School although this was not a factor that children mentioned within Calder. What was different between the two settings was that the Rowanlee children were positively 'different' being Bangladeshi, which can be attributed to the fact it is a setting comprising of children of around fifty different ethnicities and languages, viewed as a cause for celebration and pride. Different events marking significant dates in the lives of the various ethnic and linguistic communities are celebrated, as Amin pointed out above.

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<sup>54</sup> Punjabi kurta (or kurta pajama) is a long short-like tunic worn by men, often with matching trousers, which may be simple cotton for everyday or ornate (Sherwani) for wear on special occasions.

Such strategies are important as will become apparent beyond considering children's education but in regard to wider issues of social identity too. Some schools were more insular in their approach, and minority ethnic families were not so welcome.

*We don't do any special celebrations at nursery or school here, except for Christmas and the Easter Bunny, but I usually just stay at home when Santa comes.*

Ta'hid, ♂, Primary 1, Child-diaries, Calder, 2011

*There is no special emphasis on different festivals here in Calder. Our families come from a range of different backgrounds and it's simpler to just focus on the mainstream as that is when the school holidays fall, when we have traditionally done things. Additionally, there is a danger that we could 'get it wrong' with families and their individual beliefs. Consensus here is just to avoid them all, in case we cause offence...*

Senior teacher, Field-diaries, Calder Nursery and School, 2011

When I asked about Christmas and Easter I was informed that these celebrations were 'about secular society rather than Christianity per se' (Teacher, Calder School, 2011). Little effort made to be inclusive of other beliefs, practices or significant religio-cultural events and this was justified in the belief that all children should be treated 'the same'. The result of this was that some children were more included than others, which may have negative implications, if children were part of a minority group of any kind, whether a religious, ethnic or language minority, with some children significantly disadvantaged. Within Calder 'difference' was something that was viewed negatively: children were isolated, did not seem to 'fit' the norm and teachers characterised them in terms of 'difference' or under-attainment:

*We invite all the families to our cheese and wine 'Welcome Evenings' and some, especially the ethnics, do not come. The Bangladeshi families make no effort to learn English. We even have the invites and other information printed in their 'community languages' but that does not make any difference. I just feel parents are not interested in their children's education.*

Headteacher, Calder Nursery and School, 2011

This account demonstrates how a strategy of avoidance in fact causes significant offence. I had to point out to the head-teacher that families who were Muslim would struggle to attend mixed-gender events and especially where alcohol was served. I also highlighted the fact that many parents have no experience of education or

‘Welcome Evenings’ but *do* hold high aspirations for their children. They may not be literate in their mother-tongue either, so leaflets may not support their understanding or engagement. What would be inclusive for such families would be to find alternative strategies to help the parents in supporting their children and part of this may be acknowledging the differences and disadvantages which may prevail (Brooker, 2002) as well as finding means to convey information and create more inclusive events suitable for all parents and children.

The Sylheti-heritage children did not seem to feel proud of their distinctiveness in Calder, but rather burdened by it, as in the main did their teachers, which could have been addressed if the school had adopted strengths-based approaches instead of embracing deficit models as they did and ‘one-size fits all’ strategies too, known to be ineffectual in terms of social inclusion (Gilligan, 2000; Hill, 2005). Lack of positive self-identity is in itself a factor, which weighs heavily on emotional and social aspects of daily life, and on children’s self-esteem in terms of education and learning as well as social identity (Brooker & Woodhead, 2004). Thus, children’s experiences were variable - some were encouraged to be proud of their ethnic heritage within a setting where everyone possessed and celebrated ethnic identity (Rowanlee) in contrast to a setting (Calder) where only the minority ethnic children seemed to be regarded as bearing markers of ‘ethnicity’, while at the same time being viewed as ‘all the same’ from the perspective of their school Head-teacher.

Transitioning to Early Years or school is quite often fraught with misunderstandings (Barratt, 1986), with ethnographic studies highlighting the additional difficulties experienced by children from minority ethnic backgrounds (Gregory and Barnes, 1994; Woods et al. 1999). Individual children can have highly differentiated experiences in their pre-school lives and in home-school transitions. Additionally, Bennet et al (1997) argue that in Early Years and school settings professional practices of staff are closely entwined with their perceptions of childhood and their developmental expectations of young children. Teacher expectations and stratifications of children account for many of the classroom practices associated with children’s differential achievement, with social background and ethnicity

particularly implicated in teachers' unconscious and unintentional stratification of children's learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 1989; Biggs and Edwards, 1992). This may be compounded by families' lack of home resources appropriate to 'matching' the teaching environment, which may result from lack of knowledge and experience of education or household poverty. Gender may also play a role with gendered behaviour and gender expectations impacting on teachers' practices and children's outcomes (Tizard et al, 1988), but what is clear amongst the children's parents is that they do hold high aspirations for their children and particularly for the girls, who will encounter a very different education from that which many of their mothers encountered, in terms of duration and experience.

Including parents in classrooms and welcoming them is a very positive strategy. This transpired in Rowanlee, with benefits beyond the children's education, in terms of building community within the ethnic cohorts but also beyond, as this short field-diary fragment shows.

Rowanlee's Head-teacher Mr Ross has invited me to participate in a series of events to support isolated migrant mothers which were facilitated by a local organization, named Saheliya, whose remit is to work on mental health and wellbeing issues amongst Black and Minority Ethnic women. Week 1 - we are having a 20-minute yoga session, and some individual head massage, which the mothers enjoy. The focus is on relaxation and 'time out for oneself'. Afterwards there is a half hour to have tea and cake before the younger children have to be collected from nursery for the day. Mothers from many ethnic and language groups attend and although initially nervous, soon start to relax and share stories and laughter. This session will run fortnightly and mothers are encouraged to state what kind of activities they may enjoy for future days. I attended for several sessions and it was not long before friendships were flourishing and ideas for social activities beyond the school were being suggested, for example, community gardening and cookery-sharing. Through this, mothers made social links and this filtered through the children's lives too.

Field-notes, Rowanlee, 2009

Mr Ross was proactive in making contacts with wider services in the city, who could work within his setting, to help support and educate all the migrant families, who were the majority of families in his school, with the aim of ensuring social inclusion.

This he had done for many years and successfully integrated countless families, at least into the school, if not the wider neighborhood.

Several authors (Ali, 2008; Dhama & Sheikh, 2000; Weedon, 2008; others) have commented on the ‘inward focus’ within some migrant communities, which may be attributed to aspects like language and religious beliefs but is also maintained by cultural practices such as marrying from within their kinship groups, in this context within the *Desh*, the motherland. This reinforces ties and cultural practices and renders the community less likely to see or *have opportunities* to integrate with the mainstream, or indeed have any need or desire to do so.<sup>55</sup>

Parents and siblings were always welcome in Rowanlee School and its entrance hall was adorned with flags, which represented all the language ‘communities’ in the school. A large poster read: ‘ROWANLEE – ONE NATION, MANY CLANS’. Such strategies were key to the closeness of the migrant families within this locale and explained why dispersed families would consider transversing what often seemed like hostile and unknown terrain, geographically and socially, to facilitate their children’s attendance in this school. Children within this setting displayed a keen and positive sense of who they were in relation to the wider society.

### **Identity – Sameness and difference**

The Bangladeshi families worked hard to imbue a sense of responsibility and understanding in their children, particularly regarding cultural practices and processes. In many ways this happened, as if by osmosis, as children were ever-present in the day-to-day of family life and the *desh* was a continuing dimension of the adults’ consciousness, so thus for children too. Cultural dimensions may be harder to sustain in a small community, predominantly disconnected from the wider whole, where children eventually increasingly spent time in cultural and social

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<sup>55</sup> I digress here by saying this contrasted with children and families from other migrant groups whom I encountered over the course of the research, who although relatively insular, seemed to be connected to a broader group of residents and groups, perhaps through work, religious or sports affiliations.

settings distinctly different from that of the adults, within nursery and school. However, I do not wish here to reify culture, either migrant or mainstream, or suggest there is anything fixed or static in either, or that ‘difference’ is all that prevails. Children participated in discussions about Scotland and Bangladesh and expressed knowledge of life in the villages of the *Desh* in comparison to their life in Scotland, as well as their sense of ‘difference’ as this excerpt from a conversation between five children shows:

*‘Some of my family are here, some are far away.’* (Momtaz, ♀, 5 years)

*‘A lot of what we do here is the same as there, food and clothes and things, but there are differences too, like the weather and our houses and maybe also things like our TVs and things that our family there don’t have, probably cars and things as well.’* (Shaminara, ♀, 7 years)

*Yes, but then we don’t have rickshas and swimming ponds by our houses here, so each place is in some ways the same but also different.* (Rayhan, ♂, 6 years)

*Things like the weather make a lot of the difference.* (Momtaz, ♀, 5 years)

*But then are we different from the children there because we have different weather and things?* (Sharminara, ♀, 7 years)

*I don’t know, as they can understand us and we can understand them so not SO different.* (Jadid, ♂, 6 years)

*But that’s just language – I don’t know if we’re the same or different from people there, and also here, we’re more different from here, food and stuff.* (Mohibur, ♂, 7 years)

*People can’t understand us, speak Bangla, and many of our Mums don’t speak good English.* (Momtaz, ♀, 5 years)

*Depends who we are with, whether we are different or not. When I go to Bangladesh it’s the same, no I don’t mean the same as here, but the same in feeling ‘different’ from them, our big family [in Sylhet]. Maybe you just feel the same as the people you are comfortable to be with, so it’s more about knowing them well. Difference may get smaller over time.* (Mohibur, ♂, 7 years)

*I suppose we are lucky because we live in two places, and belong to both.*  
(Sharminara, ♀, 7 years)

*Maybe everyone feels different somewhere.* (Jadid, ♂, 6 years)

(Conversation amongst a group of children (aged 4-7 years),  
Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2010)

Strikingly, the young children in Scotland portrayed a developed awareness of relationships between Scotland and Sylhet; just as the rural Sylheti children were interested in their UK-settled kin and keen to know details from there, or wanted to be ‘connected’ to the UK, so the Sylheti-heritage children questioned aspects of their ethnic and cultural heritage, from the homeland of their mothers and fathers (albeit generally more distant in time for fathers) and ‘who they were’ in relation to it all. As seen, cultural knowledge was conveyed by immersion in their Scotland-settled families, additionally supplemented through larger family occasions like holidays (Chapter 4), weddings and community events as well as TV. Families also welcomed kin from far afield and children regularly spoke with family members, sometimes as yet unmet. Family, albeit at a distance, was envisioned as ‘close family’; for many children in a place imagined, but yet to be physically encountered. Sharminara perceived the duality of family residence as a part of her ethnic status and identity in a very positive light, in terms of ‘being lucky’, fortunate to be ‘living in two places’.

#### **Feeling different – ‘Who am I? Who are you?’**

*I have never met a Scottish person before except for the teachers and people we see on buses. We don’t have anyone like you who comes to see us and who talks with our mothers, eats our food.*

Renvi, ♀, 6 years, Rowanlee, 2012

A topic covered in Rowanlee Nursery and School was called, ‘Who am I? Who are You? The Head-teacher, in considering his pupil cohort and ideas about identity, instigated this. I was invited to participate as Mr Ross thought it would be relevant to my research (Chapter 3). He thought that it could prove insightful when thinking about the children’s social relationships and networks, and the factors which may enhance social relationships (James, 1993; Brooker, 2002) and those that might

impede socialisation. Trask (2009: 76) asserts that cultural identity formation is a significant aspect of the migration experience. Brooker and Woodhead (2008) concur, stating it is more widely an important aspect of any discussion on globalisation and family life, because identity formation, at least in the formative years, has been traditionally linked to familial relationships. Identity is best described as constructed, co-constructed and reconstructed by the child through his or her interactions with parents, teachers, peers and others. These dynamic processes include imitation and identification in shared activities, including imaginative role-play (Göncü, 1999). Developing personal identity is dynamic in other respects too. From the beginning, children are social actors with personal agency, with an awareness of 'self as subject' or 'I'. This is complemented by a sense of 'self as object' (or 'me') which is more gradually emergent, changing and reflective (Miell, 1990). Identity encompasses both 'I' and 'me'. In the words of Nsamenang, (2004: 5):

Identity is an agentic core of personality by which humans learn to increasingly differentiate and master themselves and the world. It gives meaning and purpose to life and perspective to human efforts. Through it, individuals come to situate themselves, for instance, as belonging to a distinct 'race', place, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or culture'.

Another dynamic surrounds 'personal' versus 'social' identity. Personal identity refers to children's subjective feelings about their *distinctiveness* from others, their sense of uniqueness, of individuality. Social identity refers, on the other hand, to the ways in which they feel they are (or would like to be) the *same* as others, typically through identification with family and/or peer culture. Identity thus covers simultaneously two core human motives: the need to belong and the need to be unique (Schaffer, 1996, p. 80)

*I like it when the big ones [older children] are here as they can help us explain some things...*

Aisha, ♀, 5 years, Rowanlee, 2011

Throughout the research I have tried to create and maintain a sense of belonging for the child participants, regardless of setting (Chapter 3). Brooker and Woodhead (2008: 42) emphasise that social identities are usually not developed in isolation but tend to be constructed by reference to others. Children will therefore define

themselves not only by reference to the things they share in common with others in their own group but also by emphasising how they are different from those outside their group. MacNaughton (2006: v, 3) states that ‘we know with relative certainty that children are culturally and racially aware by the age of three years’; they can display both positive and negative attitudes towards racial and ethnic diversity (see also Connolly, 1998; Hirschfeld, 1995a, b; Lawrence, 1991). While social identities can have positive effects for some children, by enabling inclusion, it is important to recognise that they can also have negative effects for others, through possibly excluding them.

Children talked about feeling ‘different’ in relation to the people around them in their experience of the wider community. I discuss one aspect here, (food), based on the children’s topic choices, in relation to the children’s lives and proximal social worlds.

#### Am I what I eat?

*When my mum wants to buy food we sometimes go to a shop called ‘Accha’ which is not far from here, they have all the things from home. We can also buy things from the supermarket but only if they are Halal. The man in Accha sometimes sends a message to my dad when he has special things, like dried fish, mangoes or pickles. Then all the families go there.*

Renvi, ♀, 6 years, Rowanlee, 2011

Renvi refers to ‘Accha’ as selling ‘things from home’, which is significant as she has grown up in Scotland and ‘Accha’ sells typically Bengali and wider South Asian food items. This indicated that in the initial stages of identity formation, the concept of home is wider than ‘where you live’, and is also attached to the *Desh*. Children talked frequently about food as a marker of difference, ‘what I eat - what you eat’, something that separated them from the wider population and it was significant that Renvi mentioned me in this regard, as someone who had successfully breached some food divide, which kept people apart. I attribute the separation, in Renvi’s discussion, to the fact that many children were educated on the strictures of eating in regard to Islam, of certain non-Halal elements they must avoid beyond their ‘safe to eat’ home environments.

Food can, as Avakian (1997) asserts, be a practical and mundane way of knowing a new culture and part of an integration programme too. This was something Mr Ross in Rowanlee was keenly aware of in his cookery sessions within the school, that , food is a key element which brings humans together.

Dolphijn (2004: 8) uses the concept ‘foodscape: how food functions in immanent structures that are always in a process of change...how food affects and is affected... how we live our lives with food, according to food, and through food and what happens between the eating and the eater’ (cf. Johansson et al, 2008). These are useful concepts to think about regarding the children’s eating and wider society and their emergent social identities. Brembeck (in Linday & Maher, (Eds.), 2009: 75) talks of this meeting place as ‘frontiering foodscape’, the border zone, where immigrant children, in her research context, Sweden, meet Swedish food.

Like the young children in Brembeck’s study (2009: 133), the children in my research cohort were generally at home before entering early years and school, so had little firsthand knowledge of the ‘foodscape’ outside of home, beyond their trips to KFC and MacDonalDs. Food preference is one of the key features to which the category of ‘difference’ is ascribed and for many migrant children only becomes salient when they become embedded in nursery and school, where they encounter something out-with their ‘foodscape’ norms. The local children may be eating quite different foods from my research cohort as well as each other. However, for the Sylheti Muslims, and other groups, religious food observances must be adhered to and should be met by local authorities. This is important, particularly amongst people for whom food is both a key symbol of the religious, and indeed wider social relations, and where several distinct cultural and religious food preferences and restrictions exist (Chowdhury et al., 2000; Baumann, 1996).

The wider literature on migration and family emphasises that food as well as being important to the collective social aspects of life, is usually one of the key means for expressing and reinforcing culture (Carsten, 1977; Chowdhury et al., 2000). It is a

key aspect that binds people together within their family or wider social group and may become imbued with greater significance once one is far from 'home'. Thus it may only become salient as a marker of difference when one encounters people who have different food cultures and choices such as myself, as researcher, and the wider culture of children within the nursery and school settings.

*I have always told my children not to eat when in nursery and school, unless it's food I have sent. I never know what they [the staff] give them and if it's suitable.*

Ruxana, mother of three, Rowanlee, 2012.

In my experience this aspect of 'food observance' is not perceived as important or largely ignored in Scottish local authority settings, with families providing their own food or telling children not to eat when at school, which may result in some children feeling excluded from mainstream activity, social space and sharing. This aspect is one of many, that children recognised as contributing to their perceptions of 'difference' and could have been easily addressed in the various settings.

#### 'Ami nasta hortam, ni' – I do not eat snack'

*I never have snack when I am here [in nursery] because my mum says it might not be suitable for me or I might not like it. Amin doesn't have it either. The other children are sometimes bad, when we can't eat anything, [they] laugh at us. Sometimes Mrs. Miah is here [part-time Bengali nursery worker] and then I can have snack because she knows what we can eat and is my mum's friend too. Or I can eat the fruit any time.*

Suhel, ♂, 4 years, Rowanlee, 2012

*That's just silly, my mum says I can have everything and your Mum should tell you the same. You tell her!*

Amanda, ♀, 4 years, Rowanlee, 2012

At snack-time, children would sit at a round table and could participate as they chose within a set time-frame. The snack table was always a source of rich conversation and socialising, while the children, ate, drank and washed up their dishes. Beyond the fact that they looked and sounded different Suhel and Amin, above, were regarded by other children as 'different' as unwilling to participate in the daily nursery snack. The nursery children, like Amanda

above, displayed impatience with the Bangladeshi children's reticence and inability to participate in snack.

For some children, transition to school or nursery could be lonely, with aspects of 'difference' being continually reinforced:

*I do not have anyone at nursery to play with as everyone is different and they can understand each other. Sometimes Amina talks to me when she is not in class but I can't leave my nursery room so unless she sees me I don't see or talk to anyone. I never have snack or a drink and the others [children] do not speak to me.*

Sabia, ♀, 4 years, Calder

Sabia had not had access to English language-learning prior to commencing nursery and consequently, at this transition, was excluded in multiple ways. She was largely dependent on her cousin Amina in Primary 5, but as she says, she cannot access Amina when she might need her, but is reliant on Amina just looking in at random times when she is free from class. Sabia was described as 'electively mute' within Calder, but I challenged this on the basis that her 'muteness' was because she did not have anyone with whom to share language on a regular basis and was not mute in her mother-tongue, when given someone with whom to talk. Amina could have played a bridging role for her, had the school considered this sensitively, but had to a large degree, already written off this cohort of children, as shown earlier, with deficit discourses and unwillingness to understand on the parts of the service-providers. This may have been compounded by parents' lack of ability to engage, as inexperienced or lacking in shared language in which to do so. Such examples were common within the research but too lengthy to continue to discuss here. Much of what the children described and documented was based on a sense of 'difference', which emanated both from *within* their families and communities, as well as from *without*, as evidenced within Calder Nursery, who could have made more positive efforts to include Sabia. Difference was also reinforced from the outside, as Renvi mentions below, on wider contact with diversity and the mainstream, but children could express this at a very early age, like Sabia above, when they had not had much exposure to the wider community.

### **Childhood ‘work’ – ‘being Sylheti-heritage’**

Within families there was a strong sense of doing the right thing for the honour of one’s family and also for one’s future position in society, which parallels what was found in the rural villages. Children were encouraged to develop a sense of national pride and being more attached to being Bangladeshi, . Children were taught that they were representatives of their parents’ heritage, had a duty to at all times behave appropriately and especially for girls, with modesty and decorum. This is comparable to the issue of *izzat* as discussed in the previous section, and may become even more salient within this small and distinctive ‘community’ in Scotland. Thus distinctiveness, in one’s identity and ethnicity, was a double-edged sword for the children, both a source of pride and an encumbrance if one had to appear to live up to the ideals of one’s family and wider society, as a visible migrant.

Families were proud of their ethnic heritage with parents emphasising this to their children, through social dimensions, language, cultural activities and food-sharing. Increasingly, once embedded in nursery and school, children learnt of and seemed to embrace aspects of their Scottish heritage too. As mentioned above, some children seemed abler to bring to the fore aspects of their various identities, facilitated by older peers and encouraging schools. Where these were absent, children were reticent and seemed more fixed in ‘being Bangladeshi’, which I attributed to a deficit of close people to play a ‘bridging role’ within the school or nursery setting, like Sabia above. Bangladesh *samity* also played a pivotal role in enriching and maintaining cultural dimensions within the community in Scotland, although this seemed to be largely instigated by the community leaders and a few key businessmen, some of whom seemed to have political as well as economic interests in the cultural aspects.

*I think it is really important that we as families and community leaders try to maintain and revitalise connections with Bangladesh - many families are worried that children are losing their cultural values. This seems to be more prevalent amongst the children as they grow up, engage with the mainstream more and freely mix with Scottish youth. It is not enough that we take our*

*children there every three to four years - there must be other ways of strengthening links.*

(Habib, Bangladeshi Community Leader, Scotland in discussion with British Council Representatives from Dhaka, May, 2012, Britannia Spice Restaurant, Edinburgh)

Children were participating in activities pertaining to their identities and ethnic heritage and parents worked hard to encourage this aspect:

*I go to Bengali class after school on Fridays, I've just started with my cousin Saba, then I have a lot of homework to do. I always write the Bengali words and soon will be able to read them well. This is difficult when I learn English reading and writing too. This is important my Dad and Mum say, as it's who I am; one day I may live in Bangladesh.*

Suhana, 6 years. Rowanlee, 2012

Mrs Miah, multilingual and long-standing in the Bengali<sup>56</sup> community in Scotland ran several Bengali classes in the city, which were funded by the local authority after discussions with the Bangladeshi community-leaders. Language was emphasised as a responsibility for the children also and many children were coping with mastering three languages; Sylheti, English and Bengali, or four if Arabic is included. Children consequently spent much of their free time involved in self-development activities, attached to their ethnic, religious and cultural-linguistic heritage. This, then is part of the work of the Sylheti-heritage children, and is very much encouraged by parents and the wider Bangladeshi community. In this way, children are learning 'to be Sylheti-Bangladeshi' in a formal sense, which is no doubt reinforced by association

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<sup>56</sup> I use Bengali here as Mrs Miah was in fact from Kolkata, to the West of the border with Bangladesh and was born 1961, self-defining (correctly) as Bengali, rather than Bangladeshi.

predominantly with children and adults from their own ethnic community. Such activities were a source of pride for the children.

*I go to Bengali dance classes with my cousins.*

Suhana, Field-dairies, Rowanlee, 2012

*Yes, me too and we get to dance sometimes at Independence Day. Our Mums get us lovely new shalwar kameez. Sometimes we wear make-up too.*

Rugie, Calder, Field-dairies, 2012

*And henna on our hands and arms!*

Suhana, Field-dairies, Rowanlee, 2011

This was one of the few opportunities the younger girls got to ‘do Bangladeshi’ and ‘do gender’ more widely and publicly, apart from dressing up for weddings and such occasions. The families generally participated in the *Mela*, one of the multi-cultural celebrations, which took place annually, in the city an effort on the part of the Local Authority to promote ethnic minorities and bring about understanding and integration. Much effort went into this event, with Bangladeshi families getting together from all over the UK. Clothing is an important as part of ethnic identity and the children and the women were usually resplendent in bright coloured textiles and sequins, with many South Asian mobile sari shops arrived for the weekend in case anyone wanted to replenish their wardrobes. Food is central to these occasions and more widely in Bangladeshi culture as previously shown. Such events are a good meeting point for the various communities and mainstream population too who get to view aspects of wider cultures, sharing space and food, enjoying the dance and musical entertainments as well as the shopping opportunities. Such events were one of the few occasions when I witnessed the women and children mixing with the wider population to any great extent.

*My family comes from Bradford and they have a restaurant; they bring a take-away one here. We all get to eat fresh bhaji, rice, mishti, all things. It’s really great and all the community can enjoy it.*

Amin, ♂, 7 years, Child-diaries, 2012.

Amin was very proud of the fact his extended family, from Bradford, brought their mobile food take-away business to the Mela as he mentions above. In this way, links

between dispersed kin are maintained and allegiances forged within the wider 'community'

### **Children as carriers of social norms**

For some children their identity was a source of pride, but for others it was also viewed as 'hard work' especially older children, like Hozanara below.

#### 'Bangladesh [sic] is Who I am'

*I think it is good we feel special in 'who' we are but I prefer not to think about it. Sometimes our families have to remind us and it's always in a bad way [pauses for thought] attached to bad behaviour and things like that so we feel like we carry the [Bangladeshi] flag on our jumpers.*

Hozanara, ♀, 7 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2011

*Yes, everywhere I go, my mum says people will see me and I need to be judged well, good, and not be spoilt.*

Sana, ♀, 5 years, Rowanlee, 2012

I asked Sana what she meant.

*If I am bad, people will see, my family would have a bad reputation and no-one would like us. Also I would not find a good husband when I am older. As I am Bangladeshi this is VERY [raises voice] important.*

Sana, ♀, 7 years, Rowanlee, 2012

Social norms and expectations were an aspect, which seemed to have greater affect on the girls in the study cohort. Boys were not so concerned, which reflects wider aspects of gender norms and morality attached to *izzat*, as also viewed in the village settings and is again very future-oriented. This may well be another factor, which creates pressure as girls mature in Scotland, the fact that they stand out as a visible

minority, with no unrestricted space<sup>57</sup>. Boys certainly were more relaxed in some facets of childhood and freer too, as these 10 year-old boys show.

*I don't think my family pays much attention to me, but I'm usually well-behaved anyway.*

Naveed, Calder, 2012

*Ha, not sometimes when we get to play football with the bigger boys. You're not so good or well-behaved then, swearing and stuff!*

Usaid, Rowanlee, 2012

The boys laughed and did not seem to take the discussion too seriously.

### **Being a Muslim Minority in a Non-Muslim Setting**

Religion is also a major responsibility for them and a significant factor which contributes to feelings of 'difference' in Scotland. Children were reticent to engage in discussion or pictorial representation specifically about their religious identity, which mirrors the village cohort of children. However, they did allude to several aspects and responsibilities regarding this, particularly when we were discussing out-of-school activities and their weekend arrangements.

Although the very young nursery children were not formally involved, many of the children from six years onwards were receiving religious instruction of some sort. This may take place within the family home with a visit from a Mullah or holy man or may be situated in a more formal class within the Mosque (Masjid), again similar to what I documented within the Sylhet villages. Younger children were however often present at *Namaz* (daily prayers) adherence, whether in the family home or the Mosque, so were initially learning by immersion alongside their mothers or sisters, rather than deliberate instruction. Older children stated that it was important for their religious learning that they participated in learning Arabic, in order to read the Qu'ran and also that they became confident in reciting from the Qu'ran, through the practice of *Tajweed*, which is essentially the practice of recitation with emphasis on

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<sup>57</sup> Girls were much more visible as an ethnic minority and Muslim by virtue of their distinctive attire, especially as they matured.

articulation and the correct pronunciation, which involves much repetition (Sarhan Rashid, parent, personal communication, Scotland, 2011).

Although young children were not formally involved in such instruction and activity, they were aware of it and that it would be something that would become part of their lives over time. Generally, children began to participate informally in *Namaz*, around the age of three to four years and adults viewed taking their children to the *Masjid* as a good introduction to the religious dimension of life. An Imam from the Central Mosque told me this:

*'Children might be encouraged to pray or imitate the movements associated with praying, even if not repeating the words of prayers softly alongside a participating adult or older child, at a much younger age, around two years old, the benefits of which are two-fold. Firstly, to help the child to understand that they must as Muslims make Namaz five times a day whilst also helping children learn the physical movements of the Namaz. The next step is for the child to begin to recite the al-Fatihah.'*

Imam, Field-diaries, Scotland, 2011

Several adult informants stated recitation is difficult for young children and often the task of instruction may be assigned to an *Imam* or *Mullah*. Parents found the disciplining of children challenging as Ruma illustrates.

*'It is difficult with my son Rafi [4 years] to keep his attention when I try to teach him from the Qu'ran; the physical act of Namaz is fine, he will kneel as I do, and has done since he was just standing but he does not have the concentration to learn from the Arabic, but can copy [repeat] alongside me as I recite. Families here usually send their children to special classes. Back home it is simpler, there are more elders who can undertake this role, living in or visiting the bari, from the village Mosque or whatever. Children are present too more as some are not in school as we need to do here'*

Ruma, Fieldnotes, Rowanlee, 2011

Where possible, families in Scotland arranged for someone to visit their homes to support this learning, as this may be the norm in the *Desh*, particularly when children

were very young. However, in Scotland this activity was more formally arranged due to a shortage of suitable teachers as Issa and Aamon illustrate.

*When I come in from school, my mum is sometimes angry with me as I feel tired but I have to do my Namaz reading. I don't like doing this, as I want to watch TV. Now we have someone, an old man, who comes to teach us, so my mum is not so cross, but he can be.*

Issa, ♂, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

*Yes, my dad makes me do this too, but when he's not at home, sometimes I don't bother, but then when he asks me, I don't know it, so then I may be in trouble. It's better to do at the Mosque with my friends, although the teachers there are very grumpy and if you can't remember it they are angry. I often go there after school.'*

Aamon, ♂, 6 years, Child-diaries, Rowanlee, 2012

The Qu'ranic learning and recitation was an aspect of daily life with which young children struggled as it involved self-sacrifice and discipline and encroached greatly on their free time. Some children were practising their *Tajweed*, and this involved much hard work and concentration. Children alluded to this within their diaries but were not generally explicit as to their emotions regarding it beyond saying it was something that got in the way of doing what they wanted to do, particularly on their weekends. There were several aspects of life that school children knew about which

they felt were related to Islam as this small excerpt from a Primary 1 class, after a holiday weekend, shows.

*Welcome back children, how was the weekend? Did anyone do anything nice?*

Teacher, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2013

*I went to the cinema with my big sister. We saw Mr Bean and some cartoons.*

Sarah, P1 pupil, Rowanlee, 2013

*I could never do that!!*

Saba, P1 pupil, Rowanlee, 2013

*Me neither, I would be in trouble from my Dad.*

Rudi, P1 pupil, Rowanlee, 2013

All the Sylheti-heritage children were adamant that cinemas were a no-go area for families and I was only able to understand this from the perspective of adults, such as Sharminara, below.

*I don't like to say but in my culture only 'bad people' would visit a cinema. It is not something that Islam would like and I never knew of such a thing before I came here.*

Sharminara, mother of three, Field-diaries, Rowanlee, 2013

Sharminara's comment was typical of many I heard over the course of the research, particularly from women, although many of them could not say 'how they knew what they knew', just that it was inappropriate or 'wrong' for them to participate. This led me to question if my research cohort were more devout than average persons in Sylhet, or whether merely more socially isolated and sheltered than was the wider norm, for example, the urban population from the same region (Hoek, personal communication, Scotland, 2010). One of the community elders stated,

*You must understand there are many shades of Muslim amongst us, from 100% to maybe just 30% I would say, and every hue in between. There are many ways to see a stone...*

Roson Ali, Field-dairies, Scotland, 2012

This made sense and helped me to understand the various complexities highlighting the diversity of thought and practice within. Even within a relatively small and

insular 'community' heterogeneity prevailed, which may be attached to length of experience within the North, gender, social class and other factors too. Certainly the community leaders seemed to perpetuate a 'don't do as I do, do as I say' approach to their wider community. There existed visible tensions within the relationships, based on paternalistic attitudes and approaches from them, linked to dimensions of social class and standing within the 'community', too complex to engage with at any length here, but salient in regard to the less-advantaged families and their ability to be autonomous within such leadership.

## **Conclusion**

In village life, the diaries remained full of the more socially embedded dimensions of childhood, of which indigenous knowledge as education was a key part. Children as young as five years old possessed extensive knowledge of their local area, their neighbourhood and beyond, and could readily identify many flora and fauna and associated practices and processes of land use. They were also experienced in aspects of the day to day running of their homes and *baris*, of the economic and social strategies and interactions prevailing. Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to the acquisition of such knowledge as being inculcated through 'a community of practice', which means through immersion in the setting (situated learning) and learning through various means, for example through observation and 'peripheral participation', from older children and adults. Knowledge is shared with the children, often unconsciously in the course of daily life, or more deliberately as children receive instruction in how to perform basic tasks, to contribute to everyday activities and livelihoods (Whiting & Pope Edwards, 1988: 40). Such instruction may be oral, or through sharing of activities, guided practice, demonstrations or apprenticeship to an older child or group. This may be envisaged as knowledge gained through a set of relationships over time. In this way environmental knowledge and competence become accepted as a 'routine' part of life; learning is as much about understanding how to behave as what to do and these are key elements of childhood responsibility in this region.

Examples were common within the children's diaries, indicating that 'work' or

'helping' were as integral a part of how children spent their time as play. Although children were engaged in work and helping tasks, play was the main medium within which they learnt the social and cultural mores of their locale, as well as acquiring, internalising and integrating environmental knowledge (Katz, 2004: 63). Play offered a means to practice their environmental knowledge and skills, whilst also providing a creative dimension, within which they could act out what they were learning, imagine different scenarios and outcomes and adapt these to encompass their social relationships and have fun. Children were active agents in some dimensions and both boys and girls were sometimes able to conduct themselves in ways not concurrent with local norms, often enabled by taking themselves out of the adult view. However, such aspects may be short-lived, as local structures and gender norms begin to be imposed. Young rural Sylheti children have a lot of physical freedom but then gendered responsibility gradually infiltrates their lives, unless they are from a sufficiently affluent social class where such responsibility is passed onto servants and less advantaged children and they can remain in a more innocent and immature state, concentrating wholly on play and education. Most children were involved in some helping and caring tasks from a young age and over time these became more gendered in nature and location, with girls' physical domains shrinking considerably. Gender norms were linked to aspects of morality; these played a role, particularly in the lives of the girls, as carriers of family honour, with close scrutiny of their behavior and wider demeanour. There was less regard for this dimension and more leniency visible in the lives of the boys, who generally managed to maintain their free-ranging lifestyle. Religious aspects also featured in the general life of the villages but this was an aspect more mentioned by boys, less so girls and in my observations, boys seemed to be more involved in the more formal and public dimensions of this. Overall, childhood seemed shorter for the rural girls, although some girls were more cherished than others, some treated more harshly, with less investments. They were all however bearing a plethora of responsibilities when compared to the boys, with more distinct responsibilities visible and to which they alluded. For both girls and boys, beyond very early childhood, their lives could be construed overall as very future-oriented in terms of learning tasks and responsibilities, in line with their future roles in society and perhaps for some,

trajectories which would take them beyond the bounds of the motherland, to become transnational migrants as some of their kin had previously done.

What was apparent in Scotland was that children did help their families with small tasks, as observed within my ethnographic observations, but this was seldom discussed in the children's diaries and narratives. Where alluded to it was usually presented in terms of helping to care for siblings alongside or helping their mothers. An aspect which was highlighted in terms of their preoccupations were in regard to education, the transition from home to school and the way the wider family could support this, often with older siblings playing a helping and bridging role. Parents, particularly mothers, were often not experienced to support children in this way so one's place in the family may have an affect on how much support one may receive from older siblings and wider overall family experience. All the families expressed a desire for their children to do well in education although this was more expressed in regard to daughters than sons, with mothers wishing their girls a better and longer education than that which some of them had received. Neighbourhood effects were apparent in education in terms of welcoming and not welcoming schools; where schools had a larger cohort of children from the same ethnic and linguistic community, children thrived and experienced more positive self-esteem in terms of their identity, as in Rowanlee. This setting was active in creating and maintaining relationships with families, asking for children's participation and views too, vital to the well-being of children but also their kin, particularly their mothers. The converse was visible in schools and nurseries where children were isolated, like Calder, where little effort was made to include the isolated minority ethnic children and where, also, amongst some staff, deficit attitudes towards the children and families still prevailed. Evidence existed of gaps where 'bonds or bridges' could have been developed between settings and families but these seemed to be opportunities missed based on aspects of ignorance of cultural norms or background information on the realities of migrant life. Little opportunities existed for the children to express their needs within this setting, which seemed to be run in a very 'top-down' fashion, at the time of my research visits.

Engagement beyond the bounds of home meant that children became more aware of aspects of identity and difference, which children expressed in terms of their appearance, clothing and eating habits too. Children bore responsibility, or so some expressed, in terms of these distinctions, of being visibly different which then had effects on their public behavior and demeanour, with an expectation that they would behave well at all times as representing their community. This was gendered with girls shouldering more of this aspect than boys, in terms of aspects of family honour, *izzat*, and affected the girls engagement in the public domain over time. Their Muslim status also caused constraints in terms of religious practices, and for boys as they matured an obligation to attend the Mosque although within this, rich social experiences and friendships were also embedded, denied to the girls. In both settings the richness of family life and sociability continue to be central to the children and families.



Romina: *my friends and me*, Rowanlee, 2011

## Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The central aim of this research was to engage with the everyday lives of young Muslim migrant-heritage children – children born in Scotland to marriage-migrant mothers from Sylhet, rural Northern Bangladesh. The project emerged out of my own knowledge of the social exclusion which some migrant families and their children experience in Scotland. Despite the fact that there is significant policy concern around issues of immigration and social cohesion (Migrationobservatory, 2017), research shows that policy and politics tend to ignore the specific cultural and social contexts of people's lives and operates instead on very normative ideals. While the current policy focus has shifted to considering inclusion, integration, equality and anti-racism as the best way to promote social cohesion and social justice too (Scottish Government, 2016, 2018), nevertheless, many Muslim families continue to face particular challenges, from lack of understanding of their culture, including their approach to childhood and child-rearing, as well as overt racism. My research focused on exploring the realities of daily life for a specific Muslim migrant community in Scotland. Despite the fact that Scotland strives to be inclusive of all its population (Scottish Government, 2018) and 'the best place for children to grow up' (Scottish Government, 2013, 2017), I argue that provisions and services that do exist are often inadequate precisely because assumptions are made concerning what a family may comprise and how families and children should be spending their time, how they should be, what specific activities and regimes should be apparent, to 'fit' with the prevailing norms.

Using a range of creative methods, this study captured the experiences of young children (3-8 years approximately) on aspects of their everyday lives in two distinct settings, urban Scotland and rural Sylhet, as well as including narratives from wider family and impressions formed from extensive ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation. This complex and extended approach is, I argue. crucial for understanding the lives of young Sylheti-heritage children in Scotland, especially as family migration has 'remained a blind-spot in migration studies' (Bonjor and Kraler, 2015: 3). Distinctively in my research, I do not read these young lives through the lens of normative family lives in the UK, but rather foreground how

these young children and their parents understand their lives through the lens of family life in the villages of Sylhet district, rural Northern Bangladesh. What is evident in this research, is that *the context* of family life requires examination if we are to fully understand and support needs where they may exist or arise. Evidence shows that the ‘home effects’ may wane over time but are very salient and necessary for migrants in the early stages of family formation (Bhugra & Becker, 2005) and may also be contingent on other aspects for example, family proximity, geographical settlement and local support available. Thus, understanding the ‘situatedness’ of the family is vital, in terms of lived context, past and present, as well as what social dimensions are salient, what may constrain and what may enrich their lives.

The Scottish Government has recognised that migration within Scotland cannot really be compared with elsewhere in the UK (Scottish Government, 2018), not least due to differences such as later settlement of Sylhetis in Scotland, when compared to larger communities in the South, thus at a later stage in family formation, and then lacking appropriate services. Yet the experiences of migrants in Scotland remains significantly underexplored, especially with regard to family and childhood research (Jamieson & Kidd, 2011).

This kind of research is crucial, particularly when the globalisation of childhood has involved the homogenisation of ideas (and practices too) regarding ‘what’ a proper childhood should be, largely premised on very Northern notions of childhood. For example, this entails the idea that children should be in school and not at work (White, 1996), while in reality when we examine the historical record, many children have always been involved in work of some kind or another. The Sylheti migrant-mothers I worked with are very aware of negative discourses and attitudes about their culture, beliefs, and family lives. Their early advice to me, ‘to go there and then you will see’, was a plea for understanding of the complexities of context and culture in regard to migration and relocation. Importantly, my research has evidenced a version of childhood in rural Sylhet, which is little known about nor regarded in the mainstream north, but continues to be salient for the mothers and their families. This research gave the migrant-mothers a unique avenue to ‘show their lives’ precisely

because they met a researcher who listened, who did indeed ‘go there and see’, which has been both a complex and lengthy process.

While daily life now in rural Sylhet may have changed from the mothers own childhood, nonetheless both continuities and discontinuities are evident, with childhood memories informing mothers’ practices in Scotland, as well as the effects of ongoing contact and visits because the migrants live in transnational family contexts, (Aitken et al, 2009). When women migrate post-marriage, their previous experiences continue to resonate in their life in Scotland, influencing their parenting, as well as their broader orientation to understanding ‘the local’ too.

From my research, I emphasise that rural life continues to bear relevance to the families and children in Scotland. We have seen very rich descriptions of the physical domains of childhood within the rural villages, which are quite diverse in terms of housing type and show aspects of social class, connectedness to the North, as well as the potential for physical freedom of early childhood. Between the two settings there is a disjunction between open-ness (the rural) and closed-ness (the urban). Home is imagined in both places as where close kin are, not necessarily one’s own home, but attached more to ideas of belonging and familiarity. Home within the *Desh* is about something wider than house encompassing outdoor areas, which are accessible to all in the early years of life but less accessible with maturity especially for girls. Within Scotland home is imagined and lived within the house with occasional forays to the wider outdoors, but this is planned and not spontaneous. Despite living in Scotland, the Sylheti-heritage children are keenly aware of the prevailing conditions back home, and some express a sense of longing for something more, to be part of a wider world, somehow beyond their grasp in the realm of Scotland, but imagined and for some, experienced, in regard to Sylhet, kept alive through the narratives of kin, as well as frequent visits between the two locales.

In village life it is clear that the social is key to successful living within the *baris* and across the wider neighbourhoods. The *bari* and village provides the setting in which social relationships are propagated and nurtured. A practice of sharing and helping

extends enabled by the open-ness of the physical features, which when viewed from Scotland makes the migrant life look very bleak and also hard work to maintain. This aspect is key to consider as here we see a huge shift from spontaneous social relations on a daily basis (village) to something more formal, organised and quite hard work, the necessity to build avenues and opportunities for socialisation in Scotland. My research also highlights the important role than children play in relation to the needs of the family, in terms of interacting and caring from siblings and close other children too, as well as the role they play in regard to the needs of other kin, within their local social spheres and transnationally too.

Yet looking at the Sylheti childhoods, we see a richness of experience in the South, which for many Northern domiciled children and families has been eroded or abandoned. Legislation and policy, presumed to be ‘in the best interests of the child’ (UNCRC, dates) has resulted in a very narrow and prescriptive childhood, for many, with over-emphasis on education and very futures-oriented. Children are invested in much time and thought as ‘becomings’, based on the conflation between what is good for a child and what is good for a nation (Skelton, 2008; Kjørholt, 2008), with both contextualised within a very narrow, linear concept of development (Aitken 2003; Punch, 2003), thus largely ignoring a vision for childhood in the here and now, in terms of quality of daily life and well-being.

Accompanying this has been increased control and surveillance of children and families, which feeds into deficit discourses, justifying interventions and negative attentions to children and their families who do not ‘fit’ the Northern ideal. More widely, the increase in state initiatives has led to a narrowing of childhood culture for all children who live in the Global North. However, significantly, renewed interest amongst academics and childhood practitioners is beginning to influence ideas here too (cf The Play Strategy – Scottish Government. 2013), which may signal a reversion to more free-flowing and spontaneous opportunities. Whether these opportunities will *appropriately* incorporate the Muslim migrant children is questionable.

What the evidence shows is that *context* matters greatly in terms of migrant settlement, in terms of social support particularly. For example, children showed many examples of relatively flexible social opportunities in Rowanlee, which did not exist within the neighbourhood of Calder, where maintaining sociability was more fraught both for mothers and children alike. In Calder school, migrant children may be viewed as ‘boring’ or ‘too passive’, and thus not worthy of attention. Where I examine such a deficits-focused setting, it highlights how the school staff seem to write both parents and their children off as disinterested, while also critical of the fact that families and children do not participate in the wider life of the school, e.g. the cheese and wine evening, without considering how this may not be possible, or indeed how easily it *could* have been made possible. This kind of deficit approach does not do the children and their families, in particular, their mothers and older siblings, the justice they deserve. Families with migrant heritage may appear and behave differently, but this does not need to imply they are deficient in some way, but rather implies difference in terms of past experience and also access to information and services. The starting point for this research was my perception of the isolation of many of the mothers, including their knowledge and experience of schooling. What I witnessed within the families was a strong commitment to support the children to make the most of the opportunities presented but for some families this is difficult without the available resources. I have highlighted the difficulties in this regard if as a mother you have no long-term experience of education yourself, if perhaps within your generational cohort you were like the small girls in this study, and were required to partially forgo education to support your family in childcare and domestic tasks. I have shown the level of care and support available to mothers in rural village life, inaccessible for many after migration to Scotland. I have also shown the level of care and interest that mothers and wider kin, including young people, focus on the young children in the ethnic minority community. This is not deficit in any way but constrained by, at times inhospitable, social structures.

Contrastingly, this research has shown the difference a neighbourhood with more extensive kinship ties can have, not only on early years and schooling, but also on wider family well-being. Rowanlee exemplifies this well. What is shown here is that

while constraints do not magically disappear, life is transformed and becomes more manageable when close kin are in proximity. Adult social and child play opportunities could be facilitated by close living, in a way unavailable within Calder. For example, in Rowanlee school, children's identities, language and ethnic dimensions were celebrated and acknowledged as contributing richness to the setting and the wider neighbourhood too. While children did not engage greatly in sharing their feelings, Rowanlee was acknowledged as was one site where strengths could be found. This is attributed to strength of leadership within the setting and empathy towards the children and families and a recognition of the uniqueness of all their experiences and past contexts too. What the head-teacher engineered here was a 'whole family approach', akin to that which must prevail in research with families more widely. This links back to ecological approaches discussed in earlier chapters, which although having some limits, at least recognise that we are all embedded in social relationships and wider society. Many mothers and children within this study highlighted their sense of isolation, but in regard to Rowanlee, they felt included. Such institutions under visionary leadership can then be a valuable resource and play at role in community cohesion and well-being and thus I emphasise are key sites of societal change and flourishing.

A key aspect within this research has been the gendered nature of family existence across the locales for the women and, over time, for the children. With increasing maturity within the villages, life becomes more gendered and delineated along public (male) and private (female) lines. Associated work and helping tasks are gendered too, attached to prevailing norms in the area. An intersectional approach has been considered in regard to this and this is important as what prevails is not about patriarchy and Islam, as often assumed although these aspects are implicated, but concerns wider prevailing economic and cultural conditions within the areas where gendered practices become normalised. Within rural Sylhet, as they grow older, women, unless disenfranchised and lacking a 'significant' male, in effect, disappear from the 'public' landscape. While *pardah* is commonly linked with Islamic societies, it exists more widely, and has been attributed to rurality, the invention of the plough and changing conditions of social class too. Such practice, then has

consequences for women in Sylhet and the marriage-migrant women in Scotland too. Constraints concerning access to public domains may become exacerbated due to lack of familiarity in the urban settings and well as fear of the wider society and racism too. This is evidenced in the fact that until 9/11/2001 many of the Bangladeshi women did not veil themselves in *burqas* but now they do. This is a political response to the surveillance and threats they feel as Muslims, and provides a modicum of safety in anonymity (Nahar, personal communication, Rowanlee, 2013) as well as asserting Muslim affiliation, thus cannot be interpreted merely an archaic practice attached to patriarchy, as often imagined.

In Scotland, girls are supported in schooling in a way not feasible for many in the rural villages. This has contributed to shifts in the perceived ‘worth’ of daughters in both locales. Within Sylhet, girls are perceived as potential conduits to wider family sociability and affluence through the possibility of transnational marriage, and thus increased wealth and prestige. This has become more strategic over time, and plays on aspects of childhood surveillance and aspects of *izzat* more strenuously than before. The gulf between rich and poor in the Sylhet region has widened, for example in regard to *pucca* houses or the status of poor villagers as servants for *Londoni* families.

Within Scotland gender is salient in regard to perceptions of futures for both boys and girls, with emphasis on boys’ futures within the family businesses, while girls are viewed as possible future wives for Sylheti village boys, who would then expand the Scottish- Bangladeshi workforce too. However, this second aspect may be conditional, both on a girl’s compliance with this subversion of patrilocal marriage norms and significantly, marrying a man who may be less educated and worldly than herself. Additionally, the increasingly stringent conditions of immigration imposed between the Indian subcontinent and the UK may close down choices for immigration to Scotland as workers so marriage may prove to be the only option, although this is subject to change too. With greater emphasis on education in Scotland, this has clearly had impacts on children’s visions for their future and this is most striking in regard to change for the girls in terms of education, career choices

and life beyond the bounds of the family home. Education is also implicated within Sylhet and contributes to family migration strategies, whilst also unfortunately, imposing a very Northern version of childhood – and knowledge and learning, on village children, through UN-led education interventions such as Early Childhood Education and care programs. While Scottish childhood policy (cf Scottish Government, GIRFEC, 2017; Curriculum for Excellence, 2017) is focused on transitioning beyond deficit approaches to strength-based models, accompanied by early intervention where deemed appropriate, as well as an emphasis on ‘a positive ethos and vision of the school as community’ (The Scottish Government, 2008), some settings or staff still approach their responsibilities from a ‘one size fits all’ perspective, with little care for the realities of recent settlement or cultural and linguistic difference, which may produce complexities across and between cohorts of children and families and seem to result in perceptions of lack of engagement.

What the research has highlighted throughout is that young children are very knowledgeable on their lives and very able at providing narratives of their day-to-day existences. What the children have exposed is the richness of some dimensions of their lives, their close and secure attachments within their kin groups, the responsibilities, which they undertake, their creativity and their resilience. Children have also alluded to structural and cultural conditions, which may serve to benefit them but may also act as constraints. For example, the children’s lives show richness due to the fact that they are embedded within very deep social fields, although in Scotland they are more fragmented and often harder to access, due to factors of migration, but also physical and social structures in the North. Life when viewed from the lens of Sylhet, is less flexible and more intentioned, which can be hard for their mothers to negotiate. The strength of social networks shows however that children play a contributing role in family well-being in the North and bridge to the wider public domains in a way that their mothers cannot.

While the research and the data presented have provided rich material on childhoods across Diaspora, there are also limitations to this mainly child-centred research approach. From the initial knowledge which informed this research idea, I had

intended foregrounding the voices of the marriage-migrant mothers in my research, but for complex reasons of conflicts in academic supervision and key gatekeepers over time, this did not prove possible. I allude to these aspects here to show that what we intend to undertake may not be possible for a plethora of reasons, but it does not necessarily mean the research has failed, but rather that the journey and consequent outcome is somewhat different from that imagined at the outset. What has been achieved here is adequate 'for what it is' but I also wish to briefly address the shortcomings and future directions for research.

This leads back to the 'whole family approach' or two-generation pathway (MPI, 2016) I advocated in the Introduction. Previous research (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Mand, 2013) has highlighted the differing requirements for types and intensity of services, which may be required between immigrant and non-immigrant families, based on matters of relocation, unfamiliarity and religious and cultural difference too. I have evidenced throughout what the children chose to share and at times this is compelling, as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) on their lives. What is missing is greater depth and the experience required to express what the meanings are that are attached to much of the descriptions gathered and shared. Children have richly described aspects, but have not engaged in analysis of what the day to day means to them, in any great depth. This is attributable to the fact that I was not explicit in demanding this aspect be included, but rather grateful for what they chose to share. I did not want to become one of those 'and how did this feel to you?' persons, nor did I want the research to cause emotional distress. Additionally, I was not sure if the children and I shared enough bonds of trust for them to engage in this type of sharing. At junctures this writing has included the voices and views of adults, particularly the children's mothers and older siblings who help to paint a more in depth perspective on the family lives. This is enabled through their sharing from a point of greater maturity and experience, the ability to see the here and now through the lens of 'before' whether that is situated in Scotland more recently or from village life prior to migration or on journeys back home. Thus multiple perspectives can help to elucidate, from many stances and viewpoints, so thus contribute to greater understanding overall.

Using the Sylheti-heritage children and their families as a model *for development*, the evidence within this thesis shows that supporting the mothers, aunties and all the women in the community, as well as the young people is key to supporting the children and wider community well-being. As long as migrant communities such as this one remain, for the most part, under the radar of services and wider support, it is likely that little will change in terms of prevailing public attitudes, provisions for well-being and wider engagement. Language learning is crucial, too, for both the women and their young children, so that they may have the opportunity for wider societal participation if they desire it.

Scotland has a unique opportunity in terms of its children, ‘in making Scotland the best place to grow up’ (Scottish Government, 2013, 2017), but in order to make this goal achievable, more evidence is required from the bottom up, on the realities of living in Scotland. Evidence shows that there are many who live in relative disadvantage, but still lead rich and fulfilling lives in Scotland, but overall their stories are not known. Often families and their children are the subject of deficit discourses based on ‘perceived differences’, which can lead to isolation and lack of engagement too. Muslim families are particularly at risk in these regards.

My fundamental and final contention is that very young children, often ignored in research agendas, are in a unique position to tell their lives. If we take seriously the current focus on the need for whole family perspectives, it is important that this also includes very young children. Qvortrup (1996: 29) suggests any study of childhood can combine insights about childhoods simultaneously unique and generalizable. As well as telling us about childhood now, as Buhler-Niederberger argues (2010: 369), studying childhood also ‘allows new perspectives which provide a more comprehensive picture of processes of social change and society today’, and I suggest, in the future. Thus, this research also provides a rich record of diverse cultures and places, offering insight into changing conditions and social connections transnationally.



Anjum: *bari*, Child-diaries, Sylhet, 2011

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