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The Effects of Migration on Children's Rights

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Migration is defined by the oxford dictionary as the "Movement of people to [a] new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions" ("Migration" 2016). In the field of migration there are many types of migrants such as, refugees, internally displaced persons and economic migrants that can all be studied independently. For this paper the focus will be on children's migration and how it affects their rights. Within this particular field, the universal conception of childhood views children as adults' luggage (Dobson 2009) which means children have no say or control over where they migrate to. In opposition to this position, the critical conception of childhood view children as having agency according to which they can take control over their own migration. The children spoken of are generally in their later teen years, meaning they are able to critically analyze their surroundings and assess how they are impacted by their decisions (Boyde and Hart 2007). In Recognizing these competing points, this paper will argue that the critical approach provides greater understanding of child migrants' experience relative to the universal approach, with an exception for the mental health of a child migrant. This will be demonstrated through analyzing the gender dynamics, mental health challenges, and economic aspirations that influence child migrants. The universal perspective views gender as a stagnant role that a male and female must play, whereas the critical approach views gender roles as a concept that changes with your social context. A child refugee and a child economic migrant would have the same mental health effects according to the universal approach, as all children have basic needs that have to be met to develop positively. Furthermore, a universal approach views economic child migrant as dependent on the adult they accompany, whereas the critical approach would detail that the child has their own gain from the migration that is independent from the adults. Children often get overlooked when speaking on the topic of migration and this paper will explore the dynamic ways migration affects a child.

The universal approach looks at gender roles as being a stagnant process that can be applied for all child migrants, even when there is more to be assessed. South Asian women that immigrate to Canada often keep in the same gender roles that they held in their home country (Bakhshaei and Henderson 2016). Women coming from these South Asian countries tend to be placed in the private sphere of their society, as they are to be protected and controlled by their male counterparts (Bakhshaei and Henderson 2016). Migrating to Canada, these children are to go to school and come straight home whereas, a male that migrates to Canada can participate in society in the public or private sphere. For example, a male adolescent from Sri Lanka expressed the difference with boys and girls socializing. He stated that boys can go out and have the right to participate in society, however "with girls no way! They are controlled. It's right after school, at home! No hanging out!" (Bakhshaei and Henderson, 2016). This sentiment illustrates that adults and many other actors from this culture hold their values and carry them to the country they are migrating from and often this enforces boundaries on their children. This is an example of a universal approach as, even with a new social context these women and men are still bound by the same rules that they were once accustomed too. Moreover, if the females did not follow their gender roles punishment was quick to follow, such as honour killings (Bakhshaei and Henderson, 2016). With this strict discipline placed on the women in society, they are shown to attain higher achievements in school compared to their male counterparts (Bakhshaei and Henderson 2016). As their gender roles make them solely go to school and come home to study and take care of the household chores.

The critical approach looks at gender roles being dependent on their social context, which changes a child's behaviour during migration. Children often struggle with their identity when moving into a new society (Ni, Chui, Ji, Jordan, and Chan 2016). The documentary Syria:

Children on the Frontline, observes a family in the Syrian conflict under the Assad regime. After a couple years the family migrates to Germany to find peace and enhance their future away from conflict (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). In the documentary there are two children in the family around the same age, Helen and Mohammed. These two children represent integration identity through the renegotiation between their previous and current status in society (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). Mohammed has a strong connection to his father that continued to hold after migrating. He stated at the start of the film that he and his family supported his father in the battle against the despotic government. When Mohammed went to Germany he looked at it as an opportunity to receive an education to allow him to return to Syria and help his homeland (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). He understood the danger of staying home next to bombing and agreed to move to Germany with his family. In this way, Mohammed used his agency to assess the current situation and develop a plan for himself to improve his life. Mohammed, knowing his return to home soon after schooling, stayed close to his gender roles. He became the head of the household, watching over his family and ensuring that they have what they need to survive.

On the other hand, Helen struggled more with her social identity, because she lost her Syrian gender role when migrating to Germany. Her mother was not the same woman she once was, as she sunk into depression because of the isolation and lack of support she received (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). Helen did not see her cultural gender role as strong and secure anymore, especially not in the German society. Helen began to turn to the German woman's role in society more than the traditional Syrian woman. She began to wear makeup and chose not to wear her hijab. She began to socialize more on social media and became less family involved (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). However, Helen did make compromises with her identities, although she changed herself to fit into this particular social context, Helen still wants to return

to Syria after finishing her education. Much like Mohammed, she still practices her religion even without wearing her hijab (Mettelsiefen and Wonke 2014). These changes in Helen can simply be reversed when she returns back home to Syria, as she socially changes to protect herself from social exclusion. Showing that the social context changes the gender role a child must play in society.

Children's mental health can be seen as solely a universal perspective as, an economic child migrant and a child refugee have the same basic needs to feel secure when they are migrating. Children refugees are forced to move from their countries and are typically moving from conflict areas (Ornstein 2012). This adds on the stress of leaving family and friends in the conflict area while they escape. When seeking refuge, many children get separated from their guardian and are unsure of when they will see them again. As sated by Ornstein (2012), "children who were separated from their families and sent to the country were more severely traumatized then those in who remained in the city and survived the bombings in shelters with their families" (p 274). Showing that familial detachment is a leading cause for traumatizing children when migrating, whether or not from conflict. There are instances where a child is sent to live with another guardian, whether it be for economic reasons or for seeking refuge. When the child's guardians, are able to reunite with their child this creates a high level of stress for the child. The child now feels they are choosing between the family they were sent to and their parents, this agony is hard as they have built strong attachments to both families (Ornstein 2012). Again, this reinforces the child's need for familial support and care.

Children experience high levels of stress when dealing with their integration identity- this is occurs when a child's previous identity in their home country conflicts with the identity they need to take on post migration (Ni et al. 2016). Identity struggle is associated with low level

stressors such as discrimination stress, relational stress, isolation and social inferiority (Ni et al. 2016). Meaning these children are experiencing a very difficult time finding their place in a new society. Many children only have school and settlement agencies to help them, however children experience racism form their teachers (Bakhshaei and Henderson, 2016). This tended to be experienced and reported more by males than their female counterparts. Teachers presume migrant males will be harder to teach and assume an unfouned stubbornness in male students (Bakhshaei & Henderson, 2016). Meaning, if one of the institutions set in place for children migrants is resisting their integration, they have little space to develop a strong sense of self in their new community. Children migrants need the support from their families and their society to have a positive effect on their mental health. These support systems decrease a child's stress levels and increases satisfaction in their new homes.

The universal perspective looks at economic migrants as only an option adults are affected by as children rarely move for financial benefits. It is typically in this type of migrant that children are viewed as luggage (Dobson, 2009). Universal perspective views children migrants as luggage because the child is not consulted when the parent decides to migrate to a new country for job opportunities (Dobson, 2009). Watters (2007) historical-structuralist theory uses the inequalities between 'developed' and 'developing' countries to explain migration. Illustrating, someone who were to live in a developing country can enhance their lives by moving to a developed country to receive greater job opportunities. An adult from a developing country such as, Jamaica, would move to a developing country, such as, Canada to receive better employment opportunity as they seek a greater human capital (Watters, 2007). Adults believe their decision to move is beneficial for their children as well. Hence, adults do not consult the child since increasing their human capital will ultimately provide more for their child. Even

more, transnational theory (Watters, 2007) illustrates the need to migrate as a cause of cultural, economic or social linkages. For example, a family moving back to their home country to take care of an elderly relative. In these cases, the parents are the sole decision makers of if the family should return to take care of the grandparents and move temporarily until the grandparents or elderly relative recuperates or passes away. The universal approach does not divulge deeper into the migration process by not consulting the child about their own migration. It strictly looks into the adults decision-making process and what the adult believes is best for the child.

The critical approach illustrates that children have economic gains and losses when migrating. Children often heighten their learning opportunities through migration, which inherently increases their job opportunities. Meaning, when an adult decides to migrate to a new country the child is conscious of the educational effects this may have on their career. Children often also look to see if they will fit into the society they will be migrating to. This correlates with Watters (2007) migratory systems theory, which looks at the correlation between colonization and a migrant's decision on migrating to a certain country. A child may not understand colonization however, they will understand if there's a population of people that have the same culture as they do. The child migrant will have more support when arriving to the country, which will increase their chances of a successful integration (Ni et al. 2016). Thus, showing the child will be more inclined and willing to migrate to that country with their family. The transnational theory is used to show an adults decision-making process (Watters 2007). However, when speaking of returning to take care of family member, a child can decide if they want to return or not. The child will know how close the relative is to them and if they feel the need to spend the last moments with their grandparents, or if they need stay home. However, adults generally take this decision making process away from the child and decide for them.

Children are not given the agency and are constantly restricted from assessing and analyzing their situations.

When speaking about children in the field of migration we are typically speaking of children in their late teens. In some countries these children are head of the household and are the ones making the decision to migrate to another country (Imoh, 2012). Their decisions can range from deciding to live with relatives or to seek asylum as a refugee. However, children are often seen as a product of their surroundings, being forced by adults' decisions. The reasoning for this view is that "children understand and perform their bodies differently in ways often different from adults" (Prout, 2000, p. 2). When researchers study children they often overlook the way children are acting upon their agency because they are looking for the same actions that adults make. Children often express their decision making capability through the way they make connections with a variety of materials, such as bodies, representations, and technology (Prout 2000). The critical approach to children's rights and child migration demonstrates this capability in children and expressing their agency. When showing that children have agency, researchers can divulge deeper into the study of child migration and fully understand their participation in this complex study.

Furthermore, the universal approach does not take into consideration a child's resilience. Children are known to have a better integration experience when they have strong social support. When their peers are accepting of their culture and the migrant children are able to socialize with their new peers, this increases a child's satisfaction with their migration experience (Ni et al., 2016). Meaning, when a child is able to make friends and find a place in society they are able to connect more with their new community. Children are able to make a support system within themselves when there are no guardians to take care of them. A group of children that were taken

away from their parents and moved around together for the next three to four years developed dependence on each other (Ornstein, 2012). These children experienced no jealousy, envy or rivalry around each other and were capable of sharing everything evenly around the group, without having to be asked. When the children were taken away from each other they felt great stress and anxiety until they returned to the group. And vice versa, the groups felt the same stress and anxiety when someone was taken away (Ornstein, 2012). This group shows the resilience that children are capable of, as they formed a basis of stability when they were missing a guardian to make a stable environment for them. The universal perspective does not recognize a child's capability to recover and restore themselves during hardship. Children are able to assess their situations and adjust themselves to increase their satisfaction.

In conclusion, the critical approach better identifies children's struggles and resilience when it comes to child migrants. Children are often over looked and seen as luggage in the universal perspective, as they are not consulted or given a chance to express their opinions about migration (Dobson 2009). The universal approach views gender as stagnant roles that children take on. However, the critical approach views children's gender roles as constantly changing when they are migrating. Helen and Mohammed (Bakhshaei and Henderson 2016) explain that gender roles are always being assessed as they chose which society they want to influence their gender role in their community. The universal approach does not consider the choices of the child and solely looks at what the adult imposes on the child. Children's mental health is a universal perspective, as all children need stability and care in their lives. Children experience high levels of stress when they are separated from their families, even when the child is in safety away from conflict (Ornstein 2012). Economic migrant children re rarely consulted when it comes to economic migration. The reasoning for this is due to the economic migration usually

occurs when a parent gets a job opportunity, which is out of the child's control. However, a child can move for their own economic reasoning, such as to achieve a higher education. These migrants are assessing their own lives and increasing their human capital (Watters 2007). Children's agency is discussed frequently when assessing through a critical perspective, many children are able to assess and analyze their lives and make decisions that benefit them (Prout 2000). These children are often older than one thinks when speaking about children, meaning they have the mental capacity to make independent decisions. Children have high levels of resilience and they are able to find what they need to support themselves from a young age (Ni et al. 2016). Furthermore, at young ages they are able to take on the responsibility of an adult, if that is what is needed. The universal approach to assess children migration is overly simplified and does not consult the child in their process. Hence, the critical approach is far more superior as it takes into consideration of the child's gender, social context and reasoning for migration economic or refugee, through the lens of the child.

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