Mapping Emotions, Building Belonging: How Children with Different Immigration Backgrounds Experience and Picture their Parisian and Berliner Neighbourhoods

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Recent migration and mobility studies have emphasized the diversity of migrants’ experiences. This paper compares experiences of children with different types of immigration backgrounds: first-generation immigrants who have recently arrived to Paris or Berlin; second-generation immigrants, and finally, children coming from expatriate, transnational families. On the whole, 12 school classes from 8 city areas took part in the study. Children’s perception and representation of their neighbourhoods was explored with the help of subjective maps, which they marked with specially designed “emoticons”. The paper argues that the interplay of different immigration backgrounds with the phenomenon of residential and educational segregation can actually produce a variety of children’s emotional geographies. Emotional attitudes to particular parts of the city area where children lead their everyday lives create a very “local” sense of belonging. At the same time, children’s maps and commentaries also reflect multiple identifications, such as with their country of origin.

Key words: first and second-generation migrant children, subjective maps, segregation, activity, belonging

Introduction

This article is an attempt to explore the sense of belonging of immigrant children living in Paris and Berlin. More in particular, this research aims to find out what relationships with their urban area are being developed by children and young people; what kinds of experiences they have had in their localities. It does so by means of analyzing these children’s drawings of their living area and their everyday trajectory “school-home”.

According to Schama and Tilley:

[B]elonging is… fundamentally defined through a sense of experience, a phenomenology of locality which serves to create, mould and reflect perceived ideals surrounding place.
That is, people develop relationships with their locality – with the immediate geographical environment where their everyday lives evolve, and such relationships contribute to their sense of belonging. Both migration studies and a relatively new, but growing field of mobility studies have recently focused on the “importance of grounded attachments, geographies of belonging… both within particular places and over transnational space” (Blunt 2007: 687). In migration studies and children’s geographies, the importance of considering “the impact of ‘place’ both migrated from and migrated to” was underlined, in particular, by van Blerk and Ansell (2006: 270) in their study of drawings done by children in South Africa. In addition, a number of scholars have been interested in the social-psychological construction of place, which is closely linked to the establishment of human belonging: in the process by which landscapes, imbued with human action and particular meanings for human sociality and identity, become places (Bender 1993; Cresswell 2004; Hirsch 1995; Lovell 1998; Tilley 1994).

Following Kiryaki Tsoukala (2001, 2007), my analysis of children’s drawings is inspired by activity theory, which took its origin in the Soviet Union in the 1920s in the works of Lev Vygotsky (see e.g. 1962) and was developed, in particular, by Alexey Leontiev (see e.g. 1975, 1979). According to this theory, the human consciousness is developed through activity, which is object- and goal-oriented, and can be internal (mental) or external. Human activity is
profoundly social, so that, even when a person is not engaged in an activity with anybody else at a given moment, his or her activity is mediated by the society’s symbolical tools (e.g. language). For our analysis, this implies that children choose to draw this or that object on the subjective map because they have had a certain experience with it. Let us take, for example, the most frequently-drawn object on the children’s maps – a park, a public garden, or another green space. According to the children’s questionnaires, most of them like such places because they play there or “just” hang out and communicate with their peers. Even if they like the place because of its aesthetic values, that means that they have been engaged in an activity – that of mental comparison of shapes, colours and symbols, for example. The character of activity will give us information about the character of children’s sense of belonging to their locality – the attachments they have developed with their area.

As migration and mobility studies have shown, migrants’ experiences are far from being homogeneous (see Blunt 2007) and it is therefore necessary to study specific groups of migrant children (Rutter 2008). This paper distinguishes between three types of immigration backgrounds of children who participated in my research in the two European capitals. Those types are first-generation immigrants, who, moreover, have arrived to Paris and Berlin very recently and attend special “adaptation”, or “reception” classes; second-generation immigrants, and, finally, children from expatriate or binational families. I further aggregate the school classes that took part in the research into groups
according to the city area. Below, I describe the research methodology and groups of participants in a more detail, followed by a discussion of the results.

**Research methodology**

To study children’s relationships with their living area, I relied on maps drawn by them. Children’s cognitive, or mental, maps were found to be useful not only in revealing a child’s environmental competence (see Matthews 1992), but also in determining what places are important to children (e.g. Halseth & Doddridge 2000; Tsoukala 2001, 2007). Moreover, the choice of map-drawing for this study was inspired by the on-going discussions on child-centered and “child-friendly” research methodologies (e.g. Barker & Weller 2003), and in particular, visual methods and task-oriented methods that are based on children’s skills (Punch 2002).

In our study, children were asked to draw their way home from school and all the objects that attracted their attention on this way. They were also asked to mark on their resulting map places that they like, and those that they dislike or fear. To mark places of their preferences, children were asked to use a symbol of a heart; a big dot to mark places where they spend a lot of time; a cross inside a circle to mark disliked areas, and finally, a square to mark places they fear. The drawings were made on a piece of standard A4 paper as a part of a questionnaire. On the next page of the questionnaire, children were asked to explain why they liked, disliked or feared places, which they had marked on
their maps. Verbal explanation proved very useful to understand the exact meaning and function of objects pictured on children’s maps. The questionnaires were in French, German, English or Russian, depending on the official language of the class. Children attending a bilingual class could choose to fill in the questionnaire in either of the languages (for example, children in bilingual classes in Berlin could choose between German and Russian, or German and English). Children’s answers, quoted in the results, were either translated into English by myself or originally given in English.

The questionnaires were incorporated into a broader ethnographic work, which included observations in the urban areas and in the schools, as well as talking to pupils, teachers, and some parents.

**Selection of groups**

The research was carried out in 2005-06 in 12 school classes from 8 different urban areas. On the whole, 233 children took part in the study (118 in Paris and 115 in Berlin). All the children attended state schools, free of tuition fees. The access to the research participants was gained through the contact with the head-teachers, teachers and, in Paris, through the organisation responsible for placing newly-arrived children into state schools (*CASNAV*).

A typology of children’s fears and dislikes, associated with their immediate geographical environment, was elaborated on basis of the whole sample and published earlier (see Nikitina-den Besten, 2008). The current paper tries to
construct a picture of children’s experiences in general by presenting and describing the most salient features of drawings in five distinct groups. The majority of children who participated in the study (around 85%) were between 10 and 13 years old at the time when the research was carried out. There was almost equal number of girls and boys within each group.

**Group 1. First-generation migrant children, 15th district, Paris**

This group consists of a class from a secondary school situated in a largely bourgeois 15th district in the south-west of Paris (Figure 1). The class is the only class in the school where children focus specifically on learning French language and culture. As the students progress in French, they gradually join mainstream classes in accordance with their age group. This is a multi-age class: at the time when the research was carried out, the students’ age ranged from 11 to 15. It is called “classe d’accueil” (“reception class”) and is destined for children, recently arrived to Paris. Children get a place in such a class through a state-funded organisation called CASNAV (*Centre Académique pour la Scolarisation des Nouveaux Arrivants et les enfants du Voyage*). According to their own statistics, CASNAV deals each year with more than 3,500 new children of school age arriving to Paris (see CASNAV).
Group 2. Second-generation migrant children, Bagnolet and Villetaneuse, Parisian suburbs

The group consists of three classes from two different schools in the northern and north-eastern suburbs of Paris. These are the so-called “red banlieues”, the suburbs, traditionally voting largely for the communist in municipal elections (see Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 2004: 80). One of the schools, a primary school, is situated just outside of Parisian ring road, in a suburb called Bagnolet; the other, a secondary school, is in the more northern suburb Villetaneuse, situated further from the ring road. The architectural landscape in both suburbs is dominated by tall grey blocks of flats – the so-called HLM and other types of social housing (see Figure 2). Both have a large immigrant population and are
characterized by lower price of housing compared to districts and suburbs in the south-west of Paris, and much lower number of residents of white-collar professions or employees at medium or top management levels (see Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 2004). The secondary school in Villetaneuse is a part of the ZEP (Zones d’Éducation Prioritaires) – a policy launched by the French Ministry for National Education in 1981 to fight academic and disciplinary failure in schools in socially disadvantaged areas by providing them with additional resources and encouraging new teaching projects (see e.g. Bénabou et al. 2005).

Figure 2. Bagnolet, a Parisian suburb. Source: author.

**Group 3. First-generation migrant children, Marzahn, Berlin**

This group consists of a multi-age class from a secondary school in Marzahn, a remote district on the east of Berlin where impersonal blocks of social housing
dominate the landscape. Its social characteristics are similar to Kreuzberg’s, the location of another group, which is described below. The class is an “adaptation class” for recent immigrants, coming mostly from Russia and former Soviet republics. The class is taught by a retired German woman who does it on a voluntary basis. She speaks Russian and encourages the children to share things about the places where they came from and at the same time explains German cultural phenomena to them.

**Group 4. Second-generation migrant children, Kreuzberg, Berlin**

The group consists of two classes from a primary school and a secondary school situated in Wrangelkiez of Kreuzberg. Both micro-areas in Kreuzberg and Marzahn (from group 3) where the research was carried score poorly on indicators of social well-being such as unemployment rate, poverty level, life expectancy rate, level of education, and others (Sozialstrukturatlas Berlin 2004). These areas have been also targeted by the “District with Special Development Needs – the Socially Integrative City” programme initiated by the Department of Urban Development of the Senate of Berlin (see Socially Integrative City programme).

There is a high proportion of immigrants in the areas under study (*ibid*). The pupil population of the schools in Kreuzberg where the study was held is predominantly (up to 100%) of foreign origin, mostly from Turkey, but also (about 15%) from Arabic countries, according to the school statistics provided
by the head teachers (see also Beckmann 2004). Both secondary schools (in Marzahn and in Kreuzberg) are *Oberschule*, one of the disadvantaged types of schools in Berlin. Both areas, Wrangelkiez in Kreuzberg and Marzahn are often associated in the press with incidents of violence and conflicts between delinquent immigrant youth, on the one hand, and other local population as well as the police, on the other (see e.g. Kopietz 2006, Plarre 2006, Soboszynski 2006).

**Group 5. Children from expatriate or binational families, Zehlendorf, Berlin**

This group consists of three classes (two of which are the last year of the primary school, and one – first year of secondary school) from a bilingual school in a Berliner district of Zehlendorf. According to the school’s statistics, 57% of pupils in the school are German citizens, 33% American, and the other 10% come from various countries. Languages of instruction in the school are both German and English, and the school is of a university-preparatory type (*Gymnasium*), opposite to the *Oberschule* type in the previously described groups. Most of the children come from families who live in their own rather large houses, and according to the questionnaire, a prevailing majority of children have their own room, as opposed to the children in Kreuzberg and Marzahn.

**Results and discussion**
The drawing of two types of elements distinguishes group 1, made up of first-generation migrants in Paris, from most other groups. First, more than a third of these children and young people (more than in any other group) draw pictures of specialized shops: those that sell toys, games, cheese, and popcorn; there are also pictures of a bookshop, a pharmacy, a butcher, an optician, a “baby’s world”, and clothing stores. For example, a newly-arrived to Paris teenage girl from Bielorussia pictured Rue de Commerce in the 15th district, with all boutiques for youth clothes shopping (Figure 3). This centrality of shops and their positive emotional colouring in the children’s drawings can be indicative of the fact that for the newly-arrived children, consumption plays a significant symbolic role in their adaptation to and their exploration of the new environment.

Second, almost a half of pupils in this group draw various Parisians landmarks (landmarks are also mentioned by first-generation migrants in Marzahn). The
Eiffel Tower is the most popular of them, and this is perhaps unsurprising: it is geographically very close to the school and is in the area where many pupils live. However, some pupils’ drawings are evolving around the Eiffel Tower: it is placed in the very centre of a child’s subjective territory. One pupil, for example, made a very detailed drawing of the tower, with the people queueing at its basis and the tag indicating the price of the ticket (Figure 4). Besides, pupils have drawn other landmarks, such as the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs-Elysées, the Obelisk, the Galérie Lafayette, the Opéra, the Montparnasse Tower, and others. Such landmarks are important as symbols of Paris, of collective memory of its inhabitants and visitors (cf. Tsoukala 2001: 130-1). The particular attention of pupils from this class to the city’s landmarks can be explained by the nature of their instruction in the “reception class”: observations in class and conversations with the teacher have shown that it very much focuses on (in particular) French culture and the children’s cultural discoveries are encouraged.

Figure 4.
As opposed to the previous group, for the children from the suburban communities Bagnolet and Villetaneuse (group 2) Parisian landmarks seem totally insignificant. Neither do they picture any cafés or specialized shops in their local area. Instead, tall and plain blocks of flats feature in these children’s and young people’s drawings, and this seems quite natural as this is the dominant architectural type of buildings in the area. However, buildings that may seem uniform and impersonal for a visitor, are emotionally coloured for children who live in the area: they mark out the buildings they live in as their favourite. Moreover, cités – groups of 2-4 such buildings – appear as independent entities in the children’s drawings. For these children, courtyards formed and shielded by these buildings are a major place for their motor activities – playing in the playground, playing team games, riding a bike, etc. – and of gathering with friends (Figure 5). Thus, the infamous cités, which appear

Figure 5.
in press as the concentration of poverty, substance use and violence (see e.g. Bernard & Herzberg 2006), are first and foremost places of socialising for the children, towards which they feel warmly. However, it takes very little for the notion of the “other” to be constructed: some pupils from this group live in private houses (pavillons, in French) and they mark the cités by the “emoticons” of dislike or fear in their drawings (Figure 6). In the questionnaire, these children explain such feelings by the presence of “many mean people” and “many dangerous youngsters” in cités. This dislike or fear of the cités can be explained by the generally bad reputation of the cités in the society, as well as by parental restrictions arising from reported incidents of crime and violence in such residential areas (Burton & Jarrett 2000; Furstenberg 1993; Spilsbury2005; O’Brien et al., 2000).
Figure 6.

The analysis of drawings done by the young first-generation migrants living in Marzahn in Berlin (group 3), has identified a certain street in their area where the young people like to meet up and spend their leisure time. This street is near a Russian shop nostalgically called “Retro”, which they like because they “can buy alcohol there”, according to one boy’s questionnaire. The street has become a meeting-place of local Russian-speaking youth. This place is treasured for its ability to symbolically re-create the homeland left behind; it is a place where the young people can temporally forget about restrictions imposed on them in the
new country, as “everything is allowed there [in this street]”, according to another boy’s answer. Similarly, in group 4, the alleged absence of restrictions in the country of origin is revealed in a boy’s answer to the question “What place do you like and why?” - “I like Turkey, because there one can do what one wants”.

While girls in the group from Marzahn also draw certain local places – for example, a bench outside – where they usually meet up and chat, they show more appreciation of cultural-architectural symbols of Berlin. A Russian girl writes that she likes the “centre of Berlin, [because] it’s very beautiful” and she also likes the “many sights” there; another girl from a war-devastated Chechnya lists Alexanderplatz, Reichstag and Brandenburger Tor as her favourite places.

As in the group with the first-generation migrants in Paris, I would argue that the children and young people’s awareness of cultural sights in the city centre in reinforced by the character of their instruction in the “special classes”, which puts an emphasis on both their cultures of origin and the culture of their new country/city.

Drawings of children from Kreuzberg (group 4) reveal a theme of conflict which lies in the absence of places where children would be able to engage in age-appropriate activities. A 13-year-old girl of Turkish origin writes that she does not like the Mariannenplatz square “because there are a lot of small children”. However, the fact that the square does not “belong” to her, that it is “occupied” by someone else, must be quite irritating, as she still makes a rather detailed
drawing of the square: she obviously knows the place quite well and would actually like to spend time there (Figure 7). The decision to draw a place, which, according to the girl, she dislikes is indicative of the fact that there is no other public place in her living area where a girl of her age can and wants to spend her free time. Similarly, a 12-year-old boy of Turkish origin says that he does not like a disco and a nightclub in his area because he is not allowed in.

Figure 7.

The drawings done by children in the Kreuzberg group feature a type of element, which does not appear anywhere else – a “Jugendklub” (youth club). In the questionnaire, 12- and 13-year-olds from Kreuzberg write that in youth clubs, they can hang out during their out-of-school time, play table tennis and table football, and talk to each other. The importance of public youth clubs for
immigrant youth in Berlin was underlined by previous research (Ren 2006). By drawing a youth club or an Internet cafe, these children certainly mean particular places, but they are pictured as if they were in the middle of nowhere. What is characteristic of such drawings is that the function of these places is clear once you look at them, the more so because often they also picture instruments of activity like swings, computers, a video play station, etcetera. Colin Ward called such places “islands of activity” (Ward 1990: 29), similar to Helga Zeiher’s “islands on the map of the city” (Zeih: 66).

Contrary to the children from Kreuzberg, the children from a bilingual school in Zehlendorf (group 5) draw designated places for specialized after-class learning activities, like a music school, a skate park, a tennis centre, and a horse-riding ground (Figure 8). This can be explained by the fact that children indeed engage in various extracurricular activities, as their parents consider this important and have financial possibilities to provide their children with supplementary learning.

A new element, which appears only on the maps of the children in Zehlendorf (on the maps of more than a fifth of them), is the drawing of their own garden. Indeed as families of these children live in private houses, gardens are a very safe and enjoyable place to play for the children. One girl wrote that she likes her garden because “it’s overgrown and adventurous”. This allows not only for the imaginative use of space, but also for the imaginative changing of the environment: “tree houses” that the children built in their gardens, also feature
in the drawings. Moreover, as the children’s drawings and questionnaires have shown, the environment outside of private family space in Zehlendorf is also favourable for the unrestrained children’s exploration. One girl draws “little posts perfect for leapfrogging” on her way to the playground; another girl - a “Womping Willow – a large tree good for climbing”; and a boy draws a “fort we built” in the neighbouring wood.

Another element, which is present on the maps of one fifth of children in Zehlendorf, unlike other groups, is a friend’s house (Figure 8). Some draw several friends’ houses, which makes a picture of a dense social network that these children have.

Figure 8.
Throughout the groups, drawings and written commentaries of a few children reflect an identification with their country of origin. In this, they “transcend” the task to write about places they like or dislike in their living area and write instead that they like “Samsun, because in Samsun there is my grandpa, my uncle, and I like the sea” (a Turkish boy in Kreuzberg) or “San Francisco, because half of my family lives there” (a German-American girl in Zehlendorf). One boy in Bagnolet, whose parents are from China, pictured a contour of China as a drawing of his “subjective territory”.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the differences in subjective maps and hence in experiences of children with different immigration backgrounds. However, the groups reviewed were selected not only on the basis of whether these are first-generation, second-generation immigrant children, or children from expatriate families. They were also selected on the basis of difference between urban areas, where the children live. The urban areas chosen for the study differ from each other in their socio-economic characteristics, which, because of residential segregation, go hand in hand with their demographic characteristics and thus coincide with certain type of immigration or other background. The areas in Paris and Berlin where the children-research participants live are also significantly different in an architectural sense, which is inevitably reflected in children’s drawings of their area. So significantly that it would not be correct to
only compare drawings of children in Paris with those in Berlin, because the difference within one city can be more important. Thus, both children’s experience and representation of their city areas are influenced by a complex interplay of factors: not only by age and gender, which are more often taken into account, but also by the length of time the child has lived in the area, social infrastructure of the area, architectural and urban planning structure, type of school that the child attends and other educational opportunities present, and others.

In the analysis, I have focused on elements of children’s drawings – the representation of objects that children encounter in their area. The children chose to put these objects on their maps and even mark them with this or that “emoticon”. The objects reflect children’s experience, a certain activity associated with it; they are “anchors” of their belonging to their city area, which for some children is new and yet to be explored. Moreover, they reveal the social structure in the given geographical area, and the opportunities for the children in this area. For example, as we have seen, while children from expatriate or German-American families in the Berliner district of Zehlendorf are engaged in extracurricular learning (including such sports, as horseback riding), second-generation children of mostly Turkish origin living in Kreuzberg struggle to find a place for an activity that would be interesting enough. The paper has also highlighted the role of special “adaptation” classes for the newly-arrived, first-generation immigrant children. The nature of instruction in such
classes in Paris and Berlin values both the culture of a child’s country of origin and the culture of a host country and helps the children discover and appreciate the variety of their new place of living.

Further and a more detailed research of the topic, which would make use not only of subjective maps, but also of other methods, for example, interviews, diaries and “ethnographical walks” with children in their areas, would allow for the development of recommendations for urban planners and policy-makers as to what kind of infrastructure is lacking in the area, from the children’s point of view, and what is especially important for immigrant children.

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