Check for updates

Received: 23 July 2023 | Revised: 22 September 2023 | Accepted: 28 September 2023

DOI: 10.1111/hic3.12792

ARTICLE

WILEY

Moving subjects: Directions and methodological challenges in the historical study of migrant children and youth

Ella Fratantuono[1] | **Alyssa Martin**[1,2]

[1]Department of History, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

[2]Department of History, University of California Irvine, Irvine, California, USA

Correspondence
Ella Fratantuono.
Email: efratant@charlotte.edu

Abstract

Over the last decade and a half, scholars have demonstrated increased interest in studying the history of young people, as signalled by an expanding presence of relevant societies and journals. Though children and young people comprise a significant number of the world's current migrant population, young migrants in the past are not often the central focus of historical research. This article aims to encourage historians of migration and forced migration to increase their engagement with the histories of children, youth, and childhood. Young migrants are moving subjects: they traverse space and time, and their portrayal often encourages compassion. Since the 18th century, they have frequently inhabited social 'categories of exception,' and as such have lent meaning to the category of 'adult' and 'citizen' and to normative expectations of families, communities, and society at large. With this in mind, we suggest that integrating histories of child and youth migration and mobility offers opportunities to reassess historiographical, methodological, and conceptual questions in the field of migration studies, including the relationship of policy to research, the creation of typologies, and the temporality of labels.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2023 The Authors. History Compass published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

KEYWORDS
analytic categories, children, childhood, historiography, migration, mobility, youth

1 | INTRODUCTION

Young migrants are moving subjects: they traverse space and time, and their portrayal often encourages compassion. Children and young people comprise a significant number of the world's current migrant population. In 2020, nearly 13% of all international migrants were under the age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2021). In 2022, individuals under the age of 17 accounted for 41% of forcibly displaced people around the world (UNHCR, 2022, June 16). Historically, as they do today, young people participated in the migration. Nevertheless, children and youth do not often figure as the main subjects of migration histories. Rather than a comprehensive overview of the field, in this article, we identify a recent increase in scholarship on the subject and consider potential questions historians might explore as they further establish this field. Migrant children and youth inhabit social 'categories of exception,' and as such they lend meaning to the social and legal status of 'the citizen' and to normative expectations of families, communities, and society at large. We argue that focusing on child and youth migrants raises productive questions for the field of migration studies, including the relationship between policy and research, the creation of typologies, and the temporality embedded in analytical categories.

2 | A COALESCING FIELD

In the last 15 years, the emergence of new societies and new publication venues have signalled a growing interest in the history of young people (Sandin, 2020). The US-based Society for the History of Children and Youth was founded in 2001, and scholars founded the UK-based Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past six years later. Each established a journal: *Childhood in the Past*, in 2007, and *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (*JHCY*) in 2008. The emergence of historical societies and journals echoed growing interdisciplinary interest: *Boyhood Studies* and *Girlhood Studies* were likewise established in 2007–2008. In the past decade, organisations such as the Childhood in Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and Russia Working Group, the Association for Middle East Children and Youth Studies, and the Childhood and Youth Network of the Social Science History Association have sponsored panels and meetings in conjunction with large area studies and interdisciplinary conferences. As organisations and publications have reshaped the field, so too have new approaches.

The study of children, youth, and childhood in the past is an expansive and interdisciplinary endeavour. In conversation with sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines, historians have sought to write histories of children and childhood that recognise 'childhood' as a social construction, that interrogate how adults' ideas about children influence social change, and that approach children as autonomous and self-aware individuals. The extent to which 'histories *of* children,' which tend to elevate young people as social actors and to understand their experiences by uncovering their voices, and 'histories *through* children,' which consider the social construction of childhood and the figure(s) of 'the child' along intersectional axes of race, class, and gender and within specific historical moments, are distinct endeavours remains crucial to the field (Maza, 2020). Indeed, in the inaugural issue of *JHCY*, Peter Stearns identified historians' reliance on 'adult filters' and depictions of what adults 'were doing and saying' as the most immediate concern within the field's development (2008, p. 36). Joseph Hawes and Ray Hiner similarly asserted that the study of childhood and the study of children should not be separated, as they are 'interconnected' and 'vital for each other' (2008, p. 45). More recently, Steven Mintz has argued that the integration of histories *of* and *through* children is a driving project of the field (2020).

The history of children and childhood is significant for its own sake, yet historians of young people note that the field provides insight into methods and frameworks within the discipline of history as a whole, including the

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

meaning and utility of 'historical agency' as an analytical device. In her contribution to the inaugural issue of the *JHCY*, Mary Jo Maynes encouraged historians to consider how children's history, like histories of other subaltern groups, challenged prevailing understandings of agency reliant on rational choice, defined as the action taken in the public sphere, or embedded solely in 'the expression of subjectivity' preserved in archival documents (2008, p. 118). The question of agency and its utility is crucial to and embedded in the intertwining of histories of and through children, and over the past 15 years, historians of children and youth have indeed debated the meaning and limitations of agency—such that the historians who contributed to a 2020 '*AHR Exchange*' on children's history grappled with this very question (*American Historical Review*, 125, no. 4). Are children more significant for their actions as political subjects or for their symbolic power (Dubinsky, 2012)? Are children so malleable and dependent on adults that their words and actions are simply a product of socialisation and mimicry, or is agency embedded within compliance as well as defiance (Miller, 2016)? Might 'performance,' allow for a more productive investigation of children in the past, their contributions to culture, and the power their depictions can exercise within society (Maza, 2020)? Does performance adequately capture children's actions and moments of autonomy, their emotional responses, their capacity to communicate and collaborate, and evidence of their political action and assertion of rights as children (Chapdelaine, 2020; Mintz, 2020; Sandin, 2020)? Karen Vallgarda, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen propose an alternative to agency drawn from the insights of the history of emotions. Rather than placing young people within a framework of agency rooted in the expectation of autonomous individuals, historians might examine 'emotional formations'—defined as patterns of emotional structures and processes of learning and practicing emotional codes—and children's experiences of crossing the 'frontiers' between emotional formations. Children 'are especially charged with' having to 'traverse various emotional frontiers', a position from which they 'may question what has so far been taken for granted' and 'become agents of change' (2015, p. 22, 25; 2018).

Critical investigation of the histories of young migrants can generate similarly productive conversations regarding methodology and terminology within the fields of migration studies and forced migration studies. One might expect historians to have spearheaded the study of young migrants. Indeed, young people are not absent from classic or notable works in the field of migration history. As migration historians aligned with the New Social History of the 1960s–1980s, families, women, gender, and labour became integral to historical narratives of migration. These narratives in turn brought children into view. Nevertheless, offhand mention of 'children,' 'girls,' or 'boys' does not necessarily reflect scholars' attention to the shifting significance of chronological age, the construction of childhood within specific contexts, or the meaning of those labels for historical actors. The fields did not clearly overlap during the first decade of the 21st century. For example, despite her own contributions to immigration history, Paula Fass's *Encyclopaedia of Children and Childhood* (2004) includes no stand-alone entries on migration, immigration, or refugees. The work's index identifies only a handful of entries for 'immigration' across its three volumes. Nor do the terms 'child,' 'children,' 'youth,' or 'adolescent' occur in the index of Harzig, Hoerder, and Gabbacia's *What is Migration History* (2009).[1]

Intriguingly, there is evidence to suggest that in the last decade, scholars from multiple disciplines have become more invested in the study of young people on the move. The *Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies* (Gold and Nawyn, 2013) and *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014) both include chapters on children. Trends in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (*JEMS*), consistently among the highest-ranked journals in the field of migration studies, suggest that researchers have increasingly focused on young migrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* published special issues on transnational migration, children, and childhood in 2011 (vol. 37, no. 8) and 2012 (vol. 38, no. 6). Since 1998, the percentage of articles per year that mention 'child/ren,' 'youth,' or 'adolescent' in *JEMS* has generally hovered between 75 and 85%(Figure 1), but the proportion of articles that include those terms within titles, abstracts, and keywords has, with some fluctuation, grown over time (Figure 2).

These same search terms are present in many articles published in the *Journal of Migration History* (*JMH*), the sole peer-reviewed journal devoted to the historical study of migration. Out of 119 articles published in the journal between 2015 and 2022, 103 include the words 'child/ren,' 'youth, or 'adolescent.'[2] Only five of these articles include

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

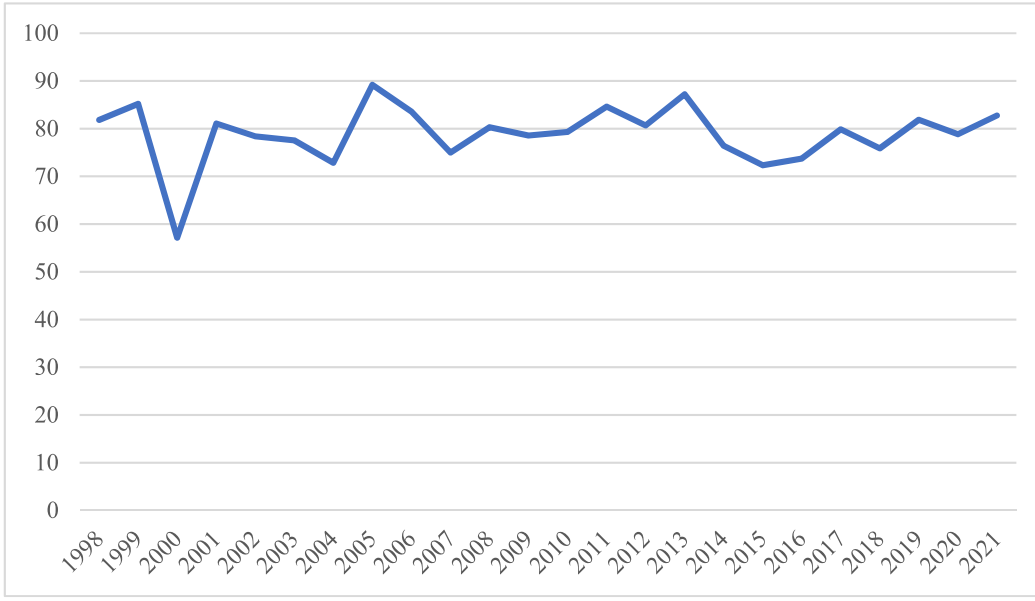

FIGURE 1 Percentage of articles that include search terms 'child,' 'children,' 'youth,' or 'adolescent' per year in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS)*, 1998–2021. Data generated from Taylor & Francis Online.

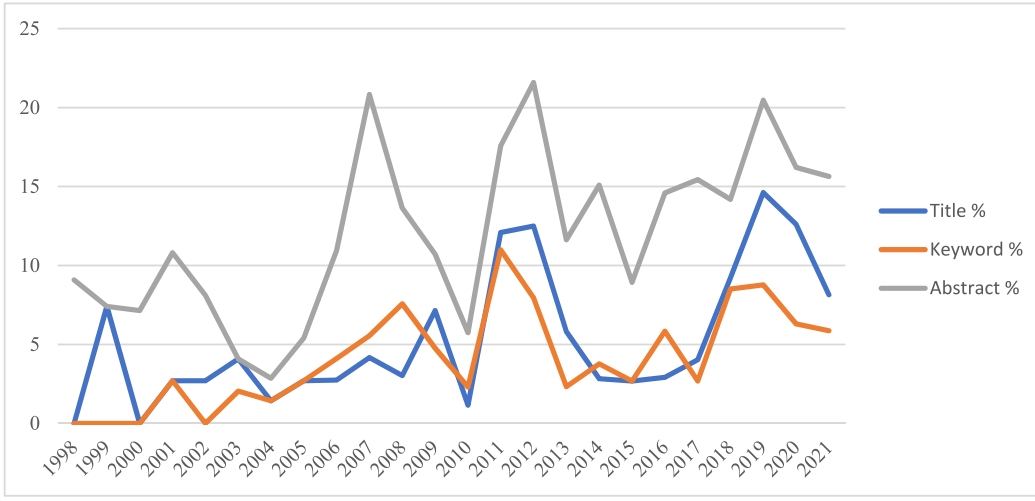

FIGURE 2 Percentage of articles that include the search terms 'child,' 'children,' 'youth,' or 'adolescent' in keywords, title, or abstract per year in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS)*, 1998–2021.

one of those terms within their abstracts, and reading through the full search results reveals that by and large the 103 articles merely mention young people. That is, children and youth show up in nearly every piece contributed to the journal, yet they rarely receive sustained focus. Children are simultaneously omni-present and marginalised in the pages of *JMH*. We reference these numbers not to critique the *JMH* or its contributors, but rather as evidence of exciting opportunities for historians to further consider how young people participate in, experience, and influence movement and mobility.

Historians have already significantly contributed to the interdisciplinary study of migrant youth and children. By using historical ethnographic sources, employing the tools of a history of emotions, carefully considering memory

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

documents, and unearthing other traces left by children in the past, scholars have shown that it is indeed possible to write histories *of* and *through* children whose lives were affected by human mobility in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries (Clark, 2012; Maksudyan, 2022; Reed, 2021). For scholars of migration, these histories have implications beyond themselves. Migration and travel experiences in childhood and adolescence, including the migration of family or community members, foster cultures of migration and encourage mobility later in life.

Historians studying the migration of young people find that their research lies at the intersection of two broad fields. There are many types of migration, and there are many ways to define children and youth. The field beckons in its capaciousness and allows historians to re-approach sources and to consider how to write of and through individuals that, in the past and in contemporary situations, participated in and contributed to patterns and outcomes of human mobility. As we describe below, mobile children's tendency to inhabit social categories of exception vis-à-vis adults, autonomous citizens, and normative expectations of family relationships and kin-based networks generates provocative and productive questions for historians of migration and mobility.

3 | CHILDHOOD, MIGRATION, AND CATEGORIES OF EXCEPTION

Scholars of migration and forced migration have noted that the social and legal category of 'the citizen' accrues meaning through opposition to categories of exception, such as immigrants, refugees, and enslaved individuals (Soğuk, 1999). Like 'the migrant,' 'the child,' can similarly function as a category of exception, serving as a figure whose presumed characteristics give shape to normative attributes of a majority group. For example, assumptions of the dependence, physical and mental malleability, and innocence of children and youth shape and bound expectations of 'the adult' and the autonomous citizen.

What is gained in recognizing 'the child' or 'the migrant' as a potential category of exception? In her interdisciplinary edited volume, *Children and Slavery Before and After Emancipation*, Anna Mae Duane considers the significance of the rhetorical and epistemological intertwining of 'child' and 'enslaved person.' Historically, the imagined child's dependency and vulnerability long functioned to rationalize enslavement and to deny full social and political rights to certain individuals and groups. A similar conviction of a unique vulnerability and innocence of children appears in some contemporary anti-slavery rhetoric, which positions coercion and exploitation as the very opposite of an idealized childhood. Researchers, activists, and policy-makers often approach child enslavement as a distinct and separate form of enslavement—for instance, Duane highlights a disconnect between the statistics published by the Global Slavery Index and UNICEF—and in so doing side-step issues of consent and ownership made more complex by children's social status. For example, this conceptual separation between exploitation and childhood overlooks how within capitalist systems, children 'are largely considered the property of their parents' (2017, p. 8). In contrast, attention to the mutual constitution of the categories of 'child' and 'enslaved person' and to children's experiences of enslavement encourages scholars to ask 'when is a child a slave' and thus, 'when [is] *anyone* in the modern world a slave'? (p. 2) Rather than an exercise in muddying political projects that seek the freedom of all people, these questions ask readers to consider how depictions of childhood perpetuate unequal power relations, contribute to the persistence of slavery in the modern world, and function in the constitution of political subjects. Such questions are as significant in migration studies as they are in the study of historical and contemporary enslavement.

Historians have considered how chronological age, legal dependency, and geographically and historically specific expectations of children, adults, and families contribute to developments in migration and citizenship regimes. Within the modernising states in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, regulating mobility and addressing social welfare became an integral component of governance. During the 'long transition' 'from a regime in which children were viewed as producers and labourers to one in which they were considered future citizens,' children, migrants, and the family drew the attention of administrators, politicians, experts, and activists (Zahra, 2011, p. 13). As administrators sought to cultivate more productive and loyal subjects and citizens, children served as 'symbols and instruments of social renewal and regeneration' while also embodying 'the potential for destabilisation and degeneration'

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

(Baron, 2017, p. 6). This two-pronged status of social benefit and social threat was one often shared by migrants, a reality that positioned the mobile child and the migrant family at the nexus of developing policies of state oversight.

Legal and social definitions of childhood and youth directly contributed to the constitution of subjects and citizens and normative expectations of family and gender roles. In the case of Argentina, for example, Juandrea Bates has shown that the legal status of young migrants, who comprised one-third of immigrants during Argentina's 19th century migration boom, helped to constitute regimes of exclusion. Argentine immigration law offered rights and protections to foreign-born residents, yet immigrants under the age of 22 were legal minors. As such, they were unable to represent themselves in courts, and instead had to be represented by their fathers. Since fathers living across the ocean could rarely advocate for their children in person, young immigrants could neither enforce contracts nor enter legal marriage. By denying those below the age of 22 the right to represent themselves in court, Argentina's patriarchal legal framework drew boundaries between 'citizens' and 'alien' based on age. The practice of the law reproduced inequality between middle-class children with normative family structures and immigrant and working-class families and individuals. Age, migration experiences, and the law influenced the life courses of those who took advantage of Argentina's liberal immigration laws (2022).

4 | POLICY, TYPOLOGY, AND TEMPORALITY IN STUDIES OF MIGRATION

Incorporating young people into studies of migration offers paths for historians to consider or reconsider patterns, experiences, and regimes of mobility from the 18th through 21st centuries. Centring children and youth in the study of migration also raises questions that are historiographical and methodological in nature. Here, we describe three clusters of questions related to (1) policy-driven/policy-adjacent research, (2) typologies of movement, and (3) the temporality of analytical categories. Rather than offering answers, our goal is to pose questions, some of them related to existing debates in the field, for historians to consider as they further contribute to scholarship at the intersection of histories of migration, mobility, children, youth, and childhood.

Our first cluster of questions considers the relationship between policy, advocacy, and research. Childhood studies and migration studies share a common origin story as interdisciplinary fields initially grounded in policy concerns (Banko et al., 2022; Beatty & Grant, 2010; Fass, 2008; Harzig et al., 2009). Within childhood studies and migration studies (particularly forced migration studies), scholars implicitly and explicitly engage with contemporary political and social concerns (Gibney, 2013). Those who do so weigh their interest in understanding the lives of migrants or children in the past with a desire to improve social conditions in the present and future. Certainly, historians of children and childhood are well aware of how definitions of 'child' and 'childhood' are socially specific and require theorization; nevertheless, an idealized expectation of what childhood 'is' or 'should be' can creep into the most critical or careful takes (Pande, 2013). Reproaches from those intent on extirpating even a whiff of the universal challenge scholars' participation in political projects and undermine the justification of the field to various audiences, other researchers included.[3] Likewise, within migration studies, the established critique of policy-derived labels in the study of human displacement has encouraged close attention to the utility and applicability of labels such as 'refugee,' Internally Displaced Person, and asylum seeker (e.g. Bakewell, 2008; Hamlin, 2021). What categories and assumptions might historians further interrogate as they incorporate young people into their studies of migration? Children receive more focused attention from states, reformers, social workers, child advocates, and the public when they signal that something is amiss within the social order. Like 'the refugee,' children on the move and those affected by the migration of a parent often attract attention as 'exceptions,' whether to expectations of the autonomous, rights-bearing citizen or to the ideal of the nuclear family unit.

Historians of migration are well-poised to consider how children on the move are pressed into service in the creation and maintenance of the category of childhood itself. Some of the most developed areas in the historical study of child and youth migrants are those that recognise movements definitionally tied to child dependence. Historians' extensive engagement with evacuation, deportation, settlement programs (e.g., Boucher, 2014; Gordon, 1999; Moss

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

et al., 2021),[4] the Kindertransport and other moments of humanitarian 'child rescue' (e.g., Dekel, 2019; Qualls, 2020; Watenpaugh, 2015) child-theft and boarding schools (e,g, Baron, 2014; Heynssens, 2016; Lynch, 2016), and international adoption (e.g. Balcolm, 2011; Graves, 2020; Jacobs, 2009; Jacobs, 2014; Thomas, 2021; Varzally, 2017) have generated insights into how young people and depictions of young people contributed to the formation of hegemonic expectations of the family, the community, and the citizen in nation-states, settler-colonial societies, and other imperial formations. Designations such as orphan, foster child, adoptee, student at an assimilative residential school, and 'unaccompanied minor' emphasize children's removal from their families and communities. In this way, their portrayal as victims of the rupture of normative family structures reinforces an idealised notion of childhood—free from trauma and embedded within certain familial, kin-based, and communal networks—through gesturing to its opposite.

How might historians write compassionately about young migrants and forms of child mobility without uncritically applying policy frameworks or reproducing norms and values? For one, they can provide answers to an essential question within historiography itself: how and why our questions, guiding assumptions, and methods change over time. Of course, scholars' questions are influenced by the world around us. Though ephemeral within the long scope of history, events, spectacles, and political slogans are perhaps significant in explaining the dynamics of the past 2 decades of the study of child and youth migration. For US-based scholars, a short list of relevant events populating national news cycles in the last 10 years includes the DREAMers movement of 2012, a 'crisis' of youth migration in 2014, the heart-rending photo of Alan Kurdi in 2015, and the 'kids in cages' rhetoric levied by critics of the Trump administration beginning in 2018 (child separation and detainment continues under the Biden administration, though far less within the public eye). The migrant child is a 'moving subject,' caught in a web of concern and of expectations of what childhood should be. To what extent have and will such events contribute to the crafting of research questions?

Our second set of questions centre on typologies and comparisons. Children and youth move for a variety of reasons, sometimes in ways that align with 'adult' migration patterns, and sometimes in ways unique to their legal, social, and physical capacity within specific places, regimes, and moments. Certainly, they move over long distances, temporarily and permanently, within family units or not accompanied by legal guardians. They move as orphans, adoptees, and 'rescued' children. They travel for educational and cultural experiences, such as the Grand Tour, Erasmus/Socrates programs, and Birth Right. They leave home as musicians, artists, dancers, international athletes, and competitors. They engage in humanitarian or religiously-motivated movements as participants of youth programs, as missionaries, and as pilgrims. How does this range of child and youth movement fit within or challenge existing typologies of migration? What benefits might derive from considering a typology of child-specific forms of migration, and what further questions and challenges might emerge from such a typology?

Creating a typology of child/youth-specific migration requires that scholars carefully consider how normative expectations of childhood and family already figure in distinctions among 'types' of movement. Are scouting, study abroad, or the international migration of a family unit inherently and irreducibly distinct from temporary displacement, adoption, and residential Indian schools? Unevaluated epistemological separation among such modes of movement reproduces expectations of subjecthood, citizenship, childhood, and certain familial structures. Alternatively, direct and critical comparisons of young people's mobility—in cases in which they are designated as refugees, asylum seekers, Internally Displaced People, and/or victims of trafficking and in cases in which they are not—may offer a more precise vocabulary or new methods in the study of migration experiences, transnational families, the relationship between migration and citizenship, and the influences of life stage and kinship on individuals' journeys.

A consideration of typology also encourages scholars to engage with epistemological borders within forced migration studies. Young migrants may tend to exercise less control over the terms and destinations of their trajectories than adults; young people certainly at times identify a family move or a trip to summer camp as 'coerced' and against their wishes or best interest. It would surely be misguided to portray all young migrants as akin to 'coerced migrants.' Such characterization draws attention away from cases in which individuals are compelled to move for reasons of persecution, conflict, human rights violations, or insecurity. Moreover, such a characterization assumes an ontology of childhood as a life stage inherently defined by specific dependencies, and it nearly reduces all relationships between caretaker and child to ones based on 'coercion.' Nevertheless, the consideration of how coercion functions as a factor in young

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

people's mobility draws attention once more to the normative framework scholars use in the development of analytical categories and epistemological boundaries. As Matthew Gibney has noted, the category of forced migration is descriptive but also evaluative. Scholars' distinction between 'legitimate' versus 'illegitimate' force, often tied to the normative framework of the liberal-statist world system, renders certain forms of movement, such as deportation, outside the field of forced migration studies (2013). More recently, Samuel Ritholtz has argued that 'queer-and-trans youth homelessness [is] a form of displacement.' In doing so, Ritholtz identified 'cisheteronormative' limitations embedded in the definitions employed within refugee studies—'gaps in the discipline's epistemology in relation to how more elusive processes of forced displacement are understood, and how, or even whether, they come to our attention' (2023, p. 1863).

Our final set of questions emerges from considering how evaluating the category of 'childhood' encourages reflection on temporality and analytic categories within migration studies. That childhood is a social construct is fundamental to historians' study of young people in the past. Nevertheless, scholars have struggled to fully discard certain assumptions embedded in the concept of 'childhood,' generating what Ishita Pande characterises as 'a tension between the understanding of children as creatures of biology and as subjects of history,' and enduring 'faith in the epistemic universality—even the biological basis'—of childhood. As Pande notes, even leading voices in the field maintain a type of 'epistemic universality' (2020, p. 1301). This universality is expressed in the expectation that 'childhood is a vanishing act,' (Maza, 2020, p. 1271) and that children are unique 'because of the inevitably transient nature of their defining characteristic—youth' (Crawford and Lewis, 2009, p. 6).

Whereas the assumption of transience influences scholarship on children and youth, scholars of migration may consider when and in what ways 'the migrant' or 'the refugee' does not generate a similar assumption. Labels derived from migration and displacement persist in how individuals are identified and how they identify themselves, yet when does the labelling of migrants as such become temporally flattening? When do scholars' use of those labels reinforce an expectation of stasis, rather than mobility, as the norm (Hamlin, 2021; Malkki, 1995; Nail, 2015; Soğuk, 1999)? When is migration something an individual *does*, and when does migration define what an individual *is*? Socially, legally, epistemologically, and for some young migrants themselves, the category of 'immigrant' or 'refugee' has presumed persistence that 'child' does not. Such is the case for those who age out of the protections offered by policies such as the US's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme or for those who must prove and perform their status as children to become eligible for asylum (Crawly, 2011; McLaughlin, 2018). The presumed transitory nature of childhood and youth thus invites scholars to consider how temporality features in the categories they use to shape research agendas.

The presumed transience of childhood brings forth another intriguing set of questions for historians: what is the relationship between early-life experiences and individuals' desires and behaviours in subsequent years? What concepts and tools might scholars use to approach that question? Within the United States, research in trauma studies and epigenetics is reshaping popular understandings of the relationship between childhood experiences and individual identity. In the face of an increasingly popular (though disputed) reading of epigenetics, trauma, and attachment theory, life experiences and those of previous generations are baked into the expression of our genes (Michel Dubois & Guaspare, 2020). Should historians engage with this assumption? When, why, and to what extent might historians attribute significance to certain experiences of migration or displacement within the lived experiences and self-understanding of those about whom they write? Do interdisciplinary terminologies, such as 'rupture' (Cati Coe et al., 2011) or 'adverse childhood experiences' (Gonzalez et al., 2021), allow historians to answer those questions? As a buzzword, trauma commands attention and provides a terminology to render research relevant to potential funders and wider audiences. However, when undertheorized, the designation of 'trauma' or 'rupture' to describe the experiences of historical subjects risks prioritizing historians' experience of 'rupture' when confronting evidence of childhoods far removed from their idealized expectations.

5 | CONCLUSION

These are but a few questions for historians to consider as, we hope, they take a prominent place in the study of child and youth migration. Such questions are not entirely new, but they are crucial to the study of human mobility.

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Historians' diachronic perspectives can encourage self-reflection among scholars, policy-makers, activists, and the wider public about young people's experiences, societal definitions of childhood, and the question of how to understand those issues over time and in the present. Children and youth already earn mention in much of migration historians' work, but making young people the focus of such histories offers new directions and opportunities for migration scholarship. Like migration studies, studies of children, youth, and childhood lend themselves to policy considerations; they are also fields that encourage scholars to participate in politics of care among the populations we research. Through historicising childhood, scholars can advocate for the rights of others while remaining critical of normative expectations attached to 'childhood' and 'migrant' within past societies, among historians, and by our readers.

ORCID

Ella Fratantuono https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4371-5498

ENDNOTES

[1] Though terms for children do not appear in the index, the authors do discuss children within the context of gender and transnational families (Harzig et al., 2009, pp. 120–126).

[2] Data compiled from the *Journal of Migration History (JMH)*, https://brill.com/view/journals/jmh/jmh-overview.xml, accessed 11 August 2022.

[3] As one example, in a book forum in the *Journal of Genocide Research* on Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding*, Noam Peleg critiqued Shalhoub-Kevorkian's concept of 'unchilding'—that settler-colonial violence in Israel denies the childhood of Palestinian children—for its assumption of 'the existence of a natural, intrinsic, and essentialist understanding of childhood,' despite his sympathy for her overall project (2021, p. 472).

[4] Sumita Mukherjee notes that existing scholarship on "childhood, migration, and the British Empire" focuses on white children (2021).

REFERENCES

Bakewell, O. (2008). Research beyond the categories: The importance of policy irrelevant research into forced migration. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *21*(4), 432–453. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen042

Balcolm, K. A. (2011). *The traffic in babies: Cross-border adoption and baby-selling between the United States and Canada, 1930-1972*. University of Toronto Press.

Banko, L., Nowak, K., & Gatrell, P. (2022). What is refugee history, now? *Journal of Global History*, *17*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022821000243

Barajas-Gonzalez, R. G., Ayon, C., Brabeck, K., Rojas-Flores, L., & Valdez, C. R. (2021). An ecological expansion of the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) framework to include threat and deprivation associated with U.S. immigration policies and enforcement practices: An examination of the Latinx immigrant experience. *Social Science & Medicine*, *282*(2021), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114126

Baron, B. (2014). *The orphan scandal: Christian missionaries and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood*. Stanford University Press.

Baron, N. (2017). Placing the child in twentieth-century history: Contexts and framework. In N. Baron (Ed.), *Displaced children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915-1923: Ideologies, identities, experiences* (pp. 1–39). Brill.

Bates, J. M. (2022). Unaccompanied minors and fraudulent fathers: Civil law in the unmaking of the immigrant family in Buenos Aires, 1869-1920. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, *102*(1), 95–126. https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-9497213

Beatty, B., & Grant, J. (2010). Entering into the fray: Historians of childhood and public policy. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *3*(1), 107–126. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.0.0078

Boucher, E. (2014). *Empire's children: Child Emigration, welfare, and the decline of the British world* (pp. 1869–1967). Cambridge University Press.

Chapdelaine, R. P. (2020). Little voices: The importance and limitations of children's histories. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(4), 1296–1299. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa377

Clark, J. (2012). Treasured memories: Growing up German-Russian on the northern plains. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *5*(2), 260–282. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2012.0019

Coe, C., Reynolds, R. R., & Boehm, D. A. (Eds.) (2011)., *Everyday ruptures: Children, youth, and migration in global perspective*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Crawford, S., & Carenza, L. (2009). Childhood studies and the society for the study of childhood in the past. *Childhood in the Past*, *1*(1), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1179/cip.2009.1.1.5

Crawley, H. (2011). Asexual, apolitical beings': The interpretation of children's identities and experiences in the UK asylum system. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *37*(8), 1171–1184. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.590645

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Dekel, M. (2019). *Tehran children: A holocaust refugee odyssey*. W.W. Norton & Company.
Duane, A. M. (2017). Introduction: When is a child a slave? In A. M. Duane (Ed.), *Child slavery before and after emancipation: An argument for child-centered slavery studies* (pp. 1–22). Cambridge University Press.
Dubinsky, K. (2012). Children, ideology, and iconography: How babies rule the world. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *5*(1), 5–13. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2012.0009
Fass, P. (2004). *Encyclopedia of children and childhood: In history and society*. Macmillan Reference.
Fass, P. (2008). The world is at our door: Why historians of children and childhood should open up. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *1*(1), 11–31. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2008.0016
Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., Loescher, G., Long, K., & Sigona, N. (Eds.) (2014)., *The Oxford handbook of refugee & forced migration studies*. Oxford University Press.
Gibney, M. J. (2013). Is deportation a form of forced migration? *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, *32*(2), 116–129. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdt003
Gold, S. & Nawyn, S. (Eds.) (2013)., *The Routledge International handbook of migration studies*. Routledge.
Gordon, L. (1999). *The great Arizona orphan abduction*. Harvard University Press.
Graves, K. (2020). *A war born family: African American adoption in the wake of the Korean War*. New York University Press.
Hamlin, R. (2021). *Crossing: How we label and react to people on the move*. Stanford University Press.
Harzig, C., Hoerder, D., & Gabbacia, D. (2009). *What is migration history?* Polity.
Hawes, J. M., & Hiner, R. N. (2008). Hidden in plain view: The history of children (and childhood) in the twenty-first century. *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *1*(1), 43–49. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2008.0002
Heynssens, S. (2016). Practices of displacement: Forced migration of mixed-race children from colonial Ruanda-Urundi to Belgium. *Journal of Migration History*, *2*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1163/23519924-00201001
Jacobs, M. D. (2009). *White mother to a dark race: Settler colonialism, maternalism, and the removal of indigenous children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940*. University of Nebraska Press.
Jacobs, M. D. (2014). *A generation removed: The fostering and adoption of indigenous children in the postwar world*. University of Nebraska Press.
Lynch, G. (2016). *Remembering child migration: Faith, nation-building and the wounds of charity*. Bloomsbury Academic.
Maksudyan, N. (2022). 'Revolution is the equality of children and adults': Yaşar Kemal interviews street children, 1975. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *54*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074382100088X
Malkki, L. H. (1995). Refugees and exile: From 'refugee studies' to the national order of things. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*(1), 495–523. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002431
Maynes, M. J. (2008). Age as a category of historical analysis: History, agency, and narratives of childhood. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *1*(1), 114–124. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2008.0001
Maza, S. (2020). The kids aren't all right: Historians and the problem of childhood. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(4), 1261–1285. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa380
McLaughlin, C. (2018). 'They don't look like children: Child asylum-seekers, the Dubs amendment and the politics of childhood. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(11), 1757–1773. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1417027
Michel Dubois, M., & Guaspare, C. (2020). From cellular memory to the memory of trauma: Social epigenetics and its public circulation. *Social Science Information*, *59*(1), 144–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018419897600
Miller, S. (2016). Assent as agency in the early years of the children of the American Revolution. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *9*(1), 48–65. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2016.0022
Mintz, S. (2020). Children's history matters. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(4), 1286–1292. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa382
Moss, E., Wildman, C., & Lamont, R. (2021). Reintegrating agency, regulation, and the economy into histories of child emigration from North West England to Canada, 1860-1930. *History Compass*, *19*(1), e12642. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12642
Mukherjee, S. (2021). Indian child migration in the British Empire. *History Compass*, *19*(8), e12687. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12687
Nail, T. (2015). *The figure of the migrant*. Stanford University Press.
Pande, I. (2013). 'Listen to the child': Law, sex, and the child wife in Indian historiography. *History Compass*, *11*(9), 687–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12077
Pande, I. (2020). Is the history of childhood ready for the world? A response to 'the kids aren't all right. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(4), 1300–1305. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa383
Peleg, N. (2021). Victimizing children and the manifestations of childhood. *Journal of Genocide Research*, *23*(3), 472–477. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1829837
Qualls, K. D. (2020). *Stalin's niños: Educating Spanish civil war refugee children in the soviet union, 1937-1951*. University of Toronto Press.
Reed, K. (2021). Commemoration of the living: A graffiti fragment from Ellis Island. *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *14*(1), 9–24. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2021.0010

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Ritholtz, S. (2023). Is queer-and-trans youth homelessness a form of displacement? A queer epistemological review of refugee studies' theoretical borders. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *46*(9), 1854–1876. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2099747

Sandin, B. (2020). History of children and childhood – being and becoming, dependent and independent. *The American Historical Review*, *125*(4), 1306–1316. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa369

Soğuk, N. (1999). *States and strangers: Refugees and displacements of statecraft*. University of Minnesota Press.

Stearns, P. (2008). Challenges in the history of childhood. *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *1*(1), 35–42. https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2008.0000

Thomas, S. (2021). *Scars of war: The politics of paternity and responsibility for the Amerasians of Vietnam*. University of Nebraska Press.

UNHCR. (2022). Figures at a glance. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

UNICEF. (2021). Child migration. Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/

Vallgarda, K., Alexander, K., & Olsen, S. (2015). Emotions and the global politics of childhood. In S. Olsen (Ed.), *Childhood, youth, and emotions in modern history: National, colonial, and global perspectives* (pp. 12–34). Palgrave Macmillan.

Vallgarda, K., Alexander, K., & Olsen, S. (2018). *Against agency*. Society for the History of Children and Youth. Retrieved from https://www.shcy.org/features/commentaries/against-agency/

Varzally, A. (2017). *Children of reunion: Vietnamese adoptions and the politics of family migrations*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Watenpaugh, K. (2015). *Bread from stones: The Middle East and the making of modern humanitarianism*. University of California Press.

Zahra, T. (2011). *The lost children: Reconstructing Europe's families after World War II*. Harvard University Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ella Fratantuono is an Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, USA. Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Genocide Research* and *Border Criminologies*. Her first book, *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire*, is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press.

Alyssa Martin is a doctoral student of history at the University of California, Irvine, Irvine, USA. She researches environmentally-driven migration in the United States. She is a former Rachel Carson Council Fellow. She received her MA degree in History from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

How to cite this article: Fratantuono, E., & Martin, A. (2023). Moving subjects: Directions and methodological challenges in the historical study of migrant children and youth. *History Compass*, e12792. https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12792

14780542, 0, Downloaded from https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12792, Wiley Online Library on [05/11/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License