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Abstract

The paper presents some key findings of qualitative research with older primary school children in Wales on their attachments to places and cultures. There is discussion of children's perspectives on the global, national and local arenas. We argue both that there are continuities with adult perspectives and that the children's views on place and identity need to be understood in the context of the social location of middle childhood. The study shows children making relatively little use of culturally-filled categories of local, national and global place-identifications. The differences they articulate are largely framed in terms of divisions between groups of people rather than in the characteristics of place, and generally related back to the self.

Keywords:

Children, middle childhood, national identity, locality, globalization, Wales

In this paper, we discuss some of the findings of a qualitative research project on the identification of 8-11 year old children in Wales with place and space. This stage of the life course is seen by some developmental psychologists as a definable stage of development – 'middle childhood' when typically children move into the 'concrete operational stage' of cognitive functioning (Piaget, 2001 [1962]). Some of the authors of this paper have argued elsewhere that the tendency within the sociology of childhood to reject developmental psychology out of hand is misplaced, since a refusal to consider the influence of cognitive development, for example, will limit our understanding of social identities in children (Scourfield et al. 2006). Yet we also argue here that children's spatial identifications should not be seen primarily as developmental effects. Instead, we show how children imagine quite clear kinds of socio-spatial boundary, but that these are not necessarily specific to middle childhood or even childhood in general.

In what follows, we discuss aspects of the children's perspectives in relation to global, national and local arenas. This is based on our conviction, derived both from the literature and backed up in our data-analysis, that a sense of place is produced through one's identification of symbolic *boundaries* operating at different levels (Chan and McIntyre 2002; Newman and Paasi 1998). In other words, in order to understand how a person relates to the place in which they live, it is also necessary to understand how they imagine *other* places. Hence, we draw on the idea that a subjective sense of place is constructed largely in relational terms: for example, through inhabitants' grasp of the relationships between key symbolic indices such as 'here' and 'there', 'home' and 'away'; 'us' and 'them' (Cohen 1985). In this sense, as Cohen's classic study maintains, the task is to discover *what are* the symbolic boundaries that are salient for particular social groups –

in our case children in Wales. Crucially, as Cohen's work recognizes, not all members of a co-residing group will operate with the same sense of boundary. Whilst we would not seek to explain such variation in terms of straightforward variables such as class or gender, we accept Massey's (1995) argument that the drawing of boundaries always expresses power relations of one kind or another. In our case, we found that children attending school in the more economically deprived localities we studied pictured boundaries rather differently from the children living in more prosperous ones. We return to this issue below.

A topic long neglected, children's relationship with place and space is now receiving increasing interest from sociologists of childhood (see, for example, James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Holloway and Valentine (2000a) argue that the new social studies of childhood need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of spatiality. In particular, they recommend Massey's work (1994) on developing a progressive sense of place. Amongst other things, Massey argues that places do not have single, unique 'identities', but different kinds of boundaries operating at various levels (Massey 1994: 155-6). She sees each place as a terrain crossed through with a distinctive *mixture* of wider and more local social relations, with this very mixture producing effects that are specific to that particular locality. Yet, Massey's approach takes it as axiomatic that the various boundaries of locally-situated life-conditions do indeed add up to *place*, something that can be studied as an observable complex whole. Whilst we accept the general thrust of this argument, in this paper we are less concerned with the objective realities of place than with a phenomenology of situated boundaries – in this case, in relation to children's sense of 'home' and 'away'.

There is clearly a range of factors that may help explain how *adults* come to form a sense of place or community identity. However, two in particular stand out from the

literature on place, space and community. The first is that our experience of our home locality is inevitably a social one, arising out of our interactions with others around us. Some time ago, Bott (1957) demonstrated how people's experience of community is defined by their location within social networks rather than in objectively identifiable places-with-cultures. More recently (but similarly, in our view), it has been argued (e.g. by Albrow 1997) that space rather than place is the most useful way of characterizing (grown-up) people's identifications with where they live. In this perspective, different groups' horizons and networks constitute different social spaces, overlapping within, but not defined by, the geographical area they share. Inhabitants may reside in the same physical place but their salient points of self-identification are provided by their location within particular social, family and friendship contexts. Secondly, a number of studies have also pointed to the ways in which people's sense of 'their' place depends on how they relate to the particular cultural meanings that have become attached to it. Rose (1995), for example, argues that the ways in which a place is defined by different groups is bound up with how that place has been represented in public discourse. In short, different places accumulate over time specific sets of cultural markers that give them their distinctive 'symbolic shape' (Paasi 1991; see also Shields 1991). Both these dimensions of an individual's subjective experience of place need to be kept in view: location within a particular social network and within wider public discourses that help classify and distinguish places from each other. One of the questions that arises, then, is the extent to which different groups within a locality do or do not internalize and/or identify with the cultural place-connotations the locality has accrued, and how this might be related to the social networks in which they move. Children, in particular, might be thought to have a less elaborated sense of these

cultural 'scripts', and indeed – as we discuss in what follows – our study suggests this may well be the case.

Another concept that has been central to theorists' attempts to understand the subjective experience of place is that of identity. Identity is necessarily a social psychological topic of study. Understanding social identities requires attention both to individual and collective dimensions; what Jenkins (1996) refers to as the 'internal-external dialectic of identification'. Hence, understanding how people come to identify with places, especially their home 'community', requires thinking about the psychological determinants (of emotion, biography, personality, etc.) of the ways in which they experience their social networks, their wider social, cultural and economic positionings and indeed the cultural scripts in circulation. That said, our points of reference in this paper, given the scope of the *BJS*, are primarily sociological. When we use the terms 'identity' and 'identification' in the paper we are referring to the strength and character of emotional attachment to place and space.

The paper is structured according to different levels of spatial domain: global, national and local. This is not because we see these as clearly identifiable, or indeed, neatly divided. Instead, we will attempt to show that these domains help constitute the boundaries through which places become significant for children. We show how different levels of space are experienced in different ways by the children we spoke to, precisely – but not only – because of the social location of middle childhood. We suggest that children at this age will tend (though this depends on their particular life experiences) to see place primarily in terms of people and categorizations of people. This is also the case, though in a different way, with national identifications. Other people, our study suggests, are seen by

children in relation to the self. We tentatively suggest the default position is that others are 'the same as me'; the exceptions occur where, as in national identifications (including language) and certain other salient social divisions, discussed below, they have been specifically differentiated through wider cultural discourses. Our study suggests that children are indeed positioned *within* these wider discourses of place-identity (rather than differently located altogether as in strict developmentalism), but that it is the boundary, rather than cultural difference *per se*, which defines their sense of spatial relations.

Research design

The qualitative research project aimed to explore the identification of children in Wales with places, and in particular with national identities. The age group targeted was children from 8-11 drawn from a purposive sample of primary schools. This strategy meant of course that any discussion we had with the children had to be understood in the context of their expectations of acceptable discourse within the school. We chose a range of schools across Wales to provide some diversity of social class, language use, ethnicity and region. We chose three English medium schools and three Welsh medium schools, a sample which over-represents the Welsh medium sector, since only 20 per cent of primary school pupils in Wales had, at the time, at least part of their curriculum delivered through the medium of Welsh. This decision was based in part on the centrality of the language to debates about Welshness past and present. For children from monolingual English-speaking homes in particular, schooling in the Welsh medium throws up interesting identity choices. Our sample was of course not intended to be wholly representative of life in Wales: rather it was

settled upon in order to take account of regional differences within Wales whilst simultaneously offering us the opportunity to explore diverse, marginalized and contested identities. It should be noted that the population of Wales was 97.9 per cent white at the time of the 2001 census and only one of the schools in our sample (Highfields) in any way reflects the kind of ethnic diversity found in many English metropolitan areas. The regional spread of schools is significant in terms of voting results during the 1997 Welsh devolution referendum; three being in areas which voted 'yes' and three in areas which voted 'no'. (Our data collection took place in 2001). Obviously, given that the research was conducted in one country with a particular history, we cannot seek to universalize about identities in middle childhood. However, some of Wales's features, for example its bilingualism and the rurality of much of the country, are comparable with many other places, at least in Europe. The schools are described in Table I below.

Table 1 about here

We spoke to a total of 105 children, via 18 focus groups (3 in each school) and 54 interviews. The sample divided 50-50 between boys and girls and those who spoke Welsh and those who did not. There was an equal spread of ages according to school year, so one third of the children in the sample were in year 4, a third in year 5 and a third in year 6. All children's, schools' and local place names in the paper are pseudonyms. All interviews and focus groups were conducted by Andrew Davies and were tape-recorded and transcribed. There was a choice of language medium for the children - English or Welsh - and about a quarter of the data set is in the Welsh language. In keeping with what has become

established practice in research with children, we used a variety of media for prompts: a video clip, postcards, maps, sentence completion and card sorting. The following sections of the paper, which present some of our research findings, are structured according to the children's perspectives on global, national and local arenas.

The global

The children involved in the study live in a globalized world. They consume goods that are increasingly made in developing countries by multi-national companies and marketed internationally. Consumption is an important part of who these children are (Zelizer 2002). Children's media are in some respects increasingly global, although in fact the television programmes the children spoke of as their favourites were as likely to be British programmes as American. There was the occasional Australian or Japanese programme but never one from Wales or in the Welsh language despite half the children being fluent in Welsh[i]. Some of the preoccupations that emerge from the data are connected with globalized media and globalized childhood consumption. Premier league football is a predominant topic, and of interest to many of the girls as well as the boys, although it is still considerably masculinized within the children's talk. The premier league is of course now a global business, though in Britain, at any rate, its dominance of boys' playground culture arguably pre-dates its global expansion.

The children's knowledge of other places and other countries varies considerably. It is inevitably limited by their personal experience of other countries (see also Rutland 1998). For example, some of the minority ethnic children were very familiar with other countries

they had visited, and with which they had strong family connections. Although the global dimension was less of an overt focus of our research than the national and local, we asked the children questions about their views of other European countries. The data offer some support for Hengst (1997) and Holloway and Valentine (2000b), who found (with reference to Germany, Britain and New Zealand) children identifying with other affluent Western countries. When asked to take an imagined journey across Western Europe, a dominant view among these children was to see people as 'just the same' and marked as different mainly by language, but with occasional mentions of dress, diet and comparative wealth/poverty.

Andrew (researcher): And then down into Italy. What are people like in Italy?

Joanna: They're nice but you still wouldn't be able to know what they're saying

Andrew: Are they different from people in Wales and Britain?

Joanna: No, just different languages.

(Interview with Joanna, year 6, Petersfield School)

Andrew: Pa fath o bobl sy'n byw yn y wlad 'ma te?

What kind of people live in this country then [Italy] ?

Hannah: Fwy fel ni

More like us

(Interview with Hannah, year 5, Ysgol y Waun)

In the second of these excerpts, Hannah sees Italians as ‘more like us’ than Germans. A minority of children expressed negative views about Germany, related to the Second World War, football violence or specific incidents their parents had related about encounters with Germans. We might suggest that Germany is perhaps marking the boundary between self and non-self.

A majority of the children saw themselves moving away from their local area as adults, often mentioning ‘glamorous’, leisure-based locations such as Florida and European holiday resorts.

> Mewn deng mlynedd, hoffwn i fod yn byw yn Sbaen achos mae yn braf yna a mae llawer o bethau da yna.
> *In ten years time, I would like to be living in Spain because it’s fine there and there are lots of good things there.*
> (sentence completion exercise written by Llyr, year 5, Ysgol y Porth)

> In ten years time, I would like to be living in Disneyland Paris. There have been so many adverts about it. They just look so cool.
> (sentence completion exercise written by Ann, year 4, Ysgol Maes Garw)

In the sentence completion exercise we specifically asked children to consider where they might be living in ten years time. That the future is frequently envisaged in countries like the USA, which are viewed positively (as ‘glamorous’, for instance), suggests not so much an awareness of global cultural diversity, as an ability to see these places as part of their

own social worlds, albeit ones awaiting them in the future. In other words, when asked to think about moving away, children mentioned those Western, developed countries which allowed them to see continuities between their own selves and the people who lived there. This suggests a routinized familiarity with media images of certain high-status locations. Such places may be physically distant, yet communicatively close to the children's own domestic experience. This familiarity, it would seem, allows them to see such places as self, rather than other. We return to discuss the significance of the global dimension later in the paper.

The national

Children's national identities have attracted some interest from researchers in various disciplines in recent years (see for example Stephens 1997; Meek 2001; Barrett 2005). National identities were the primary focus of our research project and are therefore discussed in more detail elsewhere (Scourfield et al. 2006). When the question of national differences was explicitly introduced to them, the children were keen to express a strong sense of national identity; usually of Welshness but sometimes a dual or multiple nationality ('Half-English, half-Welsh'; 'quarter Italian, quarter Welsh, half English'). This was usually, but not always, based on their parents' places of birth.

National identities did not emerge so clearly, however, in more general talk about attachment to places. When we asked them what they would miss if they had to move to Australia almost all the children answered that they would miss their friends and Siôn expressed this in especially strong terms.

> My friends, definitely my friends. They are part of my life really, my friends. I can't live without them, most of the time.
> (Interview with Siôn, year 6, Highfields School).

Whilst these responses might have been an artefact of this particular question, we used a variety of strategies to explore the issue of place identity and across the data set the children showed relatively little attachment to particular places. Julia makes it clear that she prioritizes people over places.

> Andrew: Is it important where you live to you?
> Julia: I'm happy any place as long as I've got people around me that are nice to me, and as long as my family are with me.
> (From year 4 focus group in Highfields School)

Although when asked directly about Wales, many of the children responded that being Welsh was important to them, there was little talk of anything as abstract as Welsh 'culture', or, indeed, any other kind of national culture. Apart from a few mentions of the lack of Welsh language, there was a general sense that life would be much the same in another English-speaking country, but that particular people left behind would be missed. The scenario of moving 'there' is seen primarily in terms of not being 'here' (rather than living a different life over there).

We conducted a two-stage card-sorting exercise in the focus groups. Firstly the children were asked to keep only the one most important card from a batch that included various nationalities, gender, local identity, colour (white/black), religion and a choice card. Following this initial choice, they were then given back all cards and asked to add in something else that was important to them, such as a person, pet or hobby, and to choose between the entire set of cards which was the most important of all. There was a range of responses, but the most common was to prioritize the additional second round card over the first round choice. This second-round, free-choice card was often a family member. Sixty out of the 108 children switched from an ethnic, national, religious or local identity choice in round one to a person (family or friend) or a pet in round two and a further eleven abandoned an initial identification with place or culture to choose a hobby instead. Only fifteen children chose an ethnic, national, local or religious identity card in round two.

Ostensibly, this finding could be seen to support our general impression of the over-riding importance of known and significant others in children's sense of identity (see also Morrow 2001). However, it is important to recognize methodological effects and to acknowledge that a different research strategy may potentially have resulted in rather different results. Firstly, there is the issue of group interaction. Whilst we billed this exercise as a private choice, in practice some children did confer. Secondly, we should note that national identity is more likely to be de-emphasized in a context of relative ethnic homogeneity (which there was in five of our six schools). Children may well be less likely to prioritize an identification with place or culture when they are part of a taken-for-granted ethnic majority. Hengst (1997), for example, found that the Turkish-origin children he

interviewed in Germany were much more likely to chose a national/ethnic label as their principle identity than were the white German or English children in his study.

The boundary-label of Britain/Britishness was not mentioned by many of the children, but the English/Wales boundary was frequently highlighted. This was not to signal a clear set of cultural distinctions between the two countries, but rather a perceived class difference, in which England, and London in particular, were described as 'posher' than Wales. This refers to a long-established cultural script that positions Wales as the 'underdog' in relation to its more powerful neighbour. But overall the children saw little difference between people within the UK. Where they did see differences, these were mainly seen in terms of accent and the ability to speak the Welsh language. Ways of speaking were the most frequently mentioned boundary markers of national difference.

Andrew: No, OK? And what about Wales then what would I find different about Wales coming from London do you think?

Kathryn: We've got a different accent to English people

Andrew: Yeah, anything else can you tell me about the people here?

Kathryn: They speak Welsh

(Interview with Kathryn, year 5, from Ysgol Maes Garw)

Andrew: What about if you went this way then travelling from France over into Germany. What are people like there then?

Siân: Like the people in France but different because they have different accents and language.

(Interview with Siân, year 5, from Petersfield School)

Any Welsh/English distinction that was identified (references to Scotland and Ireland were rare) was not expressed through culturally 'filled' categories – such as 'what they do' or 'who they are' – but through an awareness of 'how they speak'. The boundary is defined in communicational terms rather than in what we might call anthropological terms. This is a thinner and more one-dimensional definition of national difference than the term 'identity' would, perhaps, merit. We do not suggest that the Welsh/English language issue is unimportant, but that it is virtually the only boundary that is salient to the children we interviewed. The Welsh/English boundary is not signalled by reference to other elaborated cultural scripts. Indeed, when we asked if there was any difference between those attending Welsh-medium and English-medium schools, children from all schools tended to assert that children in both types of schooling were 'just the same'.

This suggests that these children were tending to employ a restricted set of salient national identity markers (Bechhofer et al. 1999). Place of birth was the dominant marker of nationality for the children. They were aware that it was possible to 'feel' Welsh, for example, by living in Wales, even if not born there, and a few gave examples of their own feelings, or those of their parents, as having come to feel Welsh through living in Wales. However, there was a general tendency for them to prioritize country of origin when referring to technical nationality, either referencing their own birthplace or that of their parents. This apart, there was little in the way of distinctive cultural content for the category of 'being Welsh'. Rugby was frequently mentioned as a signifier of Welshness, yet nearly

all the children said they supported both a Welsh national rugby team and an English premier football team – typically, Manchester United.

The most concrete cultural content of the category 'Wales' was, on the whole, not defined by attributes at the nation boundary (i.e. what distinguishes one nation from another). Instead, significantly, it was filled by reference to the children's impression of their immediate environment: the local/non-local boundary. In other words, the children constructed the Welsh/English distinction largely in terms of the only boundary they experientially 'knew': the markers distinguishing their neighbourhood or locality from others. So for Siôn, from Highfields School in inner-city Cardiff, 'Wales is tightly packed', whereas for Jenny from Llwynirfon in Powys (rural market town), Wales has 'loads and loads of hills and landscapes and things like that'. For these children, 'Wales' was part of the same imaginary as that which defined their locality. It was not located at some higher level of abstraction, nor at some higher level of organization. Rather, it *was* the environment in which they found themselves living. This brings us to the local dimension of place identity.

The local

As might be expected, when talking about the immediate area in which they live, the children offer a child's-eye view of their locality, highlighting facilities and features that circumscribe their own daily pathways, rather then those that might be identified by a generalizing gaze. Questions tend to be answered from the perspective of the self:

Melissa: I would show them like we used to have a park behind my house but they knocked it down. But we might be having a new one. And I would show them like, the big field we have got, we have got one, one side and then the other side and then I would show them how naughty the kids were.

Andrew: How naughty the kids were. Okay what's bad about the kids?

Carly: They draw on your garage and post stuff, run around opening your doors and things.

(From year 6 focus group in Petersfield school)

This comment is typical both because the speakers define where they live in terms of the presence, location and absence of areas to play in and because they single out some children as 'naughty'. Significantly, there was a prevalent distinction made between 'nasty' people, or bullies, and 'nice' people. There were examples from most of the schools of children complaining about criminals or bullies in their local area, and also of people in their locality being generally nice and friendly. Whilst noise, crime and danger from drunken adults were more of an urban preoccupation, many of the children in the more rural schools also had rather divided images of the local community. They defined the locality where they lived by the people they encountered within it, whom they thought of in terms of the nice and the nasty.

This distinction made between the nice and the nasty is articulated explicitly to the children's perception of local crime levels. This perception varied among the schools we studied, and specifically in relation to their class-identity. Children in Petersfield School (Eastern valleys) and Highfields School (Cardiff) in particular consistently referred to

crime when discussing their affiliations to their local areas. Bahira, from Cardiff, said that 'there is loads of murderers… because people take drugs and stuff'. In the case of Petersfield in particular, a school on the edge of a profoundly deprived council estate, concern about crime had a serious impact on their identification with the place. This echoes research by Reay (2000) and Morrow (2001). Reay's study shows how working-class children's confidence in and freedom to move around and about their local area is considerably more restricted than their middle-class peers. 'Horizons', she comments, echoing our focus on boundaries, 'are configured very differently if you are working-class' (Reay 2000: 155). We also found that children from the working-class schools were more localized than the other children in their points of reference. Although they said they liked where they lived, they wished it was a 'nicer place'. There was both a generalized description of the area as 'rough' and a distinction made between the respectability of people in particular streets:

> David: It is quite a rough place. It is quite poor so you have rough places as well so you know not to go there.
> Andrew: Yeah?
> David: Like Y Fan and Telford Close.
> (Interview with David, year 6, from Petersfield School)

> In some of the streets the children are really naughty but in some other streets of Petersfield, they are really good and kind, and make friends.
> (Interview with Joanna, year 6, from Petersfield School)

This finding was marked in Petersfield. In each of the six schools, children referred to specific problem areas in their localities, but these tended to be *outside* of their own communities, whereas on the Petersfield estate, the children distinguished the safety and respectability of particular streets. The process of boundary-drawing is common to all schools, but in Petersfield, it takes place on a much more local level. Skeggs, amongst others, has noted that notions of respectability are intrinsic to working-class identity, with respectability usually being 'the concern of those who are not seen to have it' (Skeggs, 1997: 1). It is interesting to note that the Petersfield children we interviewed were all keen to distance themselves from these 'bad' areas and 'nasty' people. They saw themselves in the category of the respectable and well-behaved, as did the children living on a 'sink' estate in inner London in Reay's research. She comments that:

> The working class children have their own tactics for fighting free of negative emplacement. They are creating their own dis-identifications, constructing divisions between themselves and pathological others. (Reay 2000: 157)

Our working-class children, too, made clear distinctions between themselves and the 'nasty,' 'naughty' or 'rough' others. We can see at work here children's dual location, as discussed at the beginning of this paper, both in social networks (in this case, ones which restrict their mobility to the localized domain) but also in cultural discourses that are familiar to them precisely because of those locations (in this case, received ideas about the reputations of particular streets). In this sense, the nature of the place-imagery with which

children are familiar is clearly linked to the horizons of their local social networks. There is plenty of evidence from other research about the impact of the reputation of specific neighbourhoods on people who live there. Lupton (2001), for example, notes that living in a stigmatized neighbourhood leads to three distinct kinds of problems: poor housing demand, experience of discrimination and negative effects on confidence and self-esteem.

These data which reveal interesting aspects of social class and respectability further suggest that the children's sense of place and space tends to be social and relational. So far, we have been demonstrating how the children's talk about places tended to reframe this topic in terms of their feelings about people – the people they know and the people they don't know; the people like them and the people not like them; the people who are nice and the people who are nasty. This brings us directly to the question of home and family. For many of the children, attachment to place was discussed in relation to other attachments, especially family relationships. An example of where people and place can be intimately connected is where separated families mean a more complex identification with place for children who live in more than one.

> Rwy'n hoffi byw yn dau ty oherwydd mae Mami gyda boyfriend a nawr mae Dad gyda girlfriend'
>
> *I like living in two houses because my Mum has got a boyfriend and now my Dad's got a girlfriend.*
>
> (Nerys in year 4 focus group, Ysgol Maesgarw)

Andrew: So what about these then [*cards with identity labels on*], did anybody find it difficult to choose one?

Clive: It was bit for me because my mum and dad are split up, but I still go and see him every weekend and his home town is in Newtown.

Andrew: Right.

Clive: And I was just trying to take him into account as well because they are split up. I miss him.

(Year 5 focus group in Llwynirfon School)

Family, for many of these children, is not a unitary location, but another divided one. Clive, above, feels the need to 'take [his father] into account', as though aware of having a dual responsibility in stating his familial identifications. In interview, another child said:

My dad, because we live up there and they lives in Swansea he makes fun of us and says we're up with the sheep, and makes jokes about us. And he says we're, like, sheep speak Welsh and that, but I don't see my other Dad much because he always makes fun of us up here.

(Interview with Mandy, year 4, Ysgol Maesgarw)

This example highlights the ready availability of sterotyped national imagery as a language for *adults* to use in characterizing their own fractured family relations. In the separation from her Dad, Mandy has become familiar with it too. In recalling the stereotyped place-markers her Dad uses, she is able to use these, perhaps, to make sense of her Dad's distance

from herself. Again, this extract shows the inter-relation of cultural scripts (e.g. stereotyped place-imagery) and biographical networks (e.g. an absent father) in children's sense of which place boundaries are salient to them.

Discussion

Our study shows these particular children making relatively little use of culturally-elaborated categories of local, national and global place-identifications. The categorizations they utilize are quite different. These children are becoming aware of being members of a social order which is fundamentally divided into the known and the unknown; the nice and the nasty; friends and non-friends. They do not seem to feel, on the whole, part of secure or homogeneous places or communities. Instead, what are perhaps uppermost in their imaginaries of their worlds are networks of *people* – particularly their friends and families. And other people are often seen in relation to the self – they are assumed to be the same as the self except where the children have access to a language of cultural distinctions which they use to mark others out as different. On the local level, this difference is framed by nasty/nice divisions coded in terms of class boundaries of respectability and the underclass; on the national/regional level by language, accent and, on occasion and at least implicitly, by class too. On the global level, the predominant sense tends to be of a world 'just like us', though there are exceptions (e.g. Germany). We hypothesize that the nice/nasty division in the immediate locality is the one that is the most concrete and clear to the children, while the language/accent division is utilized when they are asked to consider the more abstract boundary of nation and region. On a global level, there is relatively little sense of

boundaries, apart from a vague idea that some countries might not be as nice as others. An important question arises as to how much of our findings are explained by the social (or developmental) location of middle childhood itself, and how much by what we know of adult forms of place-identifications. To what extent can the place of middle childhood help explain how children in middle childhood understand place? We cannot offer a comprehensive answer to this, as our study was small in scope and based in one country. But we are able to offer some general observations about the extent to which the categorizations of place-identity we have described appear to display continuities with what is known about adults.

Our study suggests that there is very little that can be seen as overt place-identifiers in the children's discourse. This does not appear to vary with either their class or rural/urban social locations. They identify with people *as* people (nice and nasty, known and unknown, friends and non-friends), but not, on the whole, with places *as* places – i.e. not in the sense of fleshed out, elaborated geo-cultural entities. Instead, places are defined according to what the children have picked up about their 'reputations' or received identities, which is in turn powerfully conditioned by children's location in local social networks. So, in Petersfield, children confined largely to their own estate had a clear sense of nice and nasty people, which they mapped on to nice and nasty areas of the estate. It could be argued that to appreciate one's social location in terms of overt and elaborated place-categorizations requires, almost by definition, some experience or knowledge of *other* places. It also requires, logically, a facility with the language of the general characteristics of places: their comparable amenities, attractions, landscape features, and so forth. In this sense, it is the social settings of typical middle childhood – constrained

mobility, limited social networks and a restricted vocabulary of comparison – which appear to be key to explaining the kind of place-identifications that children make.

At first glance, it might seem common sense to conclude that children are necessarily more local in their outlook and disposition than adults. Yet these same constraints – of mobility, vocabulary and network – have also been widely noted in adults. In particular, they have been discussed in terms of the global/local debate and the well-rehearsed distinction between 'locals' and 'cosmopolitans' (Merton 1957; Hannerz 1990). In Hannerz' insightful discussion, the cosmopolitan is not necessarily the person who travels, but the person who is 'willing to engage with the Other' and is 'open towards divergent cultural experiences' – as opposed to the person who seeks to assimilate what is foreign into meaning-structures which are fundamentally local (Hannerz 1990: 239). It is also the person who is competent in the language of comparative cultural meanings. Therefore, someone may travel continuously, but still remain 'local' in outlook and orientation, whereas the cosmopolitan disposition can be practised equally well at home or away. As Tomlinson (1999) points out, the cosmopolitan so constituted is a relatively rare breed; most people are locals, both of the travelling and stay-at-home variety.

In our study, children displayed an open-ness to the *idea* of global travel when this was presented to them. Our study explicitly asked them to consider living elsewhere in the future, so we cannot make conclusions about how 'cosmopolitan' or 'local' our children were. What their responses do suggest is a kind of routinized familiarity with global media images of high-profile and high-status places. This suggests that, via their daily media consumption, the children have a routine sense of what Thompson (1995: 175) calls 'symbolic distance' – the awareness of other places largely through exposure to symbols

and imagery via the media rather than any direct experience of them. Yet this distance is not really between self and Other, for there tends to be a taken-for-granted assumption that everywhere else is pretty much the same as 'here'. There is little sense of closed-off horizons, as in classic statements of localism or community. Nor is there evidence of defensiveness about the home locality and its identity (as might be the case in places which are war-torn or less settled). Above all, there is little elaborated sense of 'anywhere else' at all, and this, in its turn, rather undermines the possibility of a strong sense of 'here'. This, it seems to us, is likely to be as much a feature of many adult lives as it is of children's.

We have also argued that children's identifications with place do not, so our evidence suggests, have much to do with place as commonly conceptualized in sociological and anthropological writing (we are thinking here of work on the importance of a 'sense of place' to identity – see Massey 1995; Augé 1995 and the corresponding arguments about the loss of that sense – e.g. Meyrowitz 1985). Although the nation does appear as a significant boundary in children's talk, it is largely a one-dimensional category, confined to linguistic and sporting markers. As mentioned above, this suggests that national identity is seen in terms of 'how people speak' (rather than 'what they do' or 'how they look') – a finding that chimes with Castells's (2003: 56) hypothesis that language is 'the refuge of identifiable meaning' in a world in which other kinds of cultural marker are becoming increasingly diluted, or at least more contested. This would suggest that the reliance on linguistic markers is not confined to children, but a more general feature of assertions of self-identity with regard to global/local imaginaries.

Yet our study also shows up the inescapable limits on the experiential horizons of children in middle childhood. It is undisputable that most children at the ages of 8-11,

because they have not been alive so long, have had less chance to assimilate a language of national identity, composed of visual images, literature, music, cultural stereotypes and so on, than have most adults. The more elaborated, symbolic content of nation is flagged in the children's classroom displays, songs, project-work and celebrations, but it does not figure much in their talk about Welshness or other national identities. This may be explainable by the above-mentioned tendency for the children to make categorizations invariably in relation to the self (what is like me/not like me). Welshness as a linguistic category may be something they can straightforwardly claim to have or not to have; more elaborated imagery, perhaps, seems more tricky either to appropriate in relation to the self or, indeed, to assign to others.

It is fairly obvious that mobility in middle childhood is restricted, and that this affects their sense of place. Few of us at whatever age move freely, but children's mobility is especially limited by their lack of freedom to roam independently. So although middle childhood sees an increase in independent movement around local areas in comparison with early childhood, there has in fact been a decrease in the independent use of public space for 10-11 year olds in recent decades (O'Brien et al., 2000) and a climate of risk anxiety has come to pervade adult perceptions of children's movement (Scott, Jackson and Backett-Milburn 1998). In our sample, this awareness of risk and danger manifested itself in the nice/nasty people division discussed above, which was common to all localities. However, there was considerable diversity amongst our sample of children according to their perception of their immediate environment. These perceptions of risk and quality of life were strongly class-related. This is no doubt partly explained by the class-based stigma of poorer areas (Reay 2000), but it also reflects stark differences in recorded crime rates

between different regions of Wales. The children's constructions of quality of life in particular places do undoubtedly have some material basis, not least in the fact that children living in poorer areas are more restricted in their mobility and hence perhaps more likely to perceive boundaries at the street rather than locality level.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have suggested a number of dimensions to consider in relation to the question of how children conceptualize those aspects of their identity – locality, nationality, globality – which might be associated with various levels of place-identification. Our small-scale study indicates that children do not, on the whole, operate with ideas of boundary that are culturally-elaborated. This does not mean that the boundaries they utilize in making sense of their worlds are weak or indistinct. On the contrary, our research suggests that where place-boundaries do emerge in children's talk, they are quite clearly stated. In relation to national distinctions, these are primarily the 'thinner' differences of accent and language rather than 'thicker', more anthropological ones with clear cultural content. In relation to locality, the differences that were articulated were largely framed in terms of divisions in groups of people rather than in the characteristics of place, and always related back to the self (nice/nasty; friends/non-friends, etc.). This was also the case when different countries were mentioned, although here there was a weaker sense of boundaries. At this global level, children projected a sense of their own selves onto other, distant places, rather than seeing them as culturally Other.

Whilst acknowledging the small scale of our evidence base, we suggest that children's sense of the boundaries between their own selves and these different levels of place are a mixture of childhood-specific and more general culture-wide kinds of identifications. The nature and scope of children's immediate social networks will influence what kinds of cultural classifications they become aware of and pick up on. The finding that spaces and places are in some respects understood in social and relational terms is an interesting one, which might have developmental implications. It should also be recognized, however, that for adults too, imagined geographies are of course connected to their own location in social networks and their own sense of the salience of particular distinctions (such as respectability). The lack of elaborated images of cultural difference in the children's talk – even in the context of their immersion in symbol-rich Welsh classroom environments – is, plausibly, one effect of their location in middle childhood. In this, we concur with developmental perspectives which indicate a less developed facility with abstract thinking and a language of comparison at this age, and also with common sense perceptions of children's more limited experience of other places. The children seemed to have little difficulty imagining themselves living in other places, however. This facility could, indeed, be seen as an effect of their lack of a language of cultural difference. Since they have little idea of what would constitute cultural differences, they perceive the world largely in terms of the self. Yet this also chimes with discussions of so-called 'localism' in the vast majority of adults. The difference between children and adults as far as place-identifications are concerned, might be less, we suggest, about differently-perceived boundaries (for plausibly these may well be the same) and more about the availability of the language to describe them in a culturally fleshed-out way. Boundaries do emerge

clearly in children's talk, and these do have to do with the *relations* of space (here/there, as in the nice/nasty people 'here', and the people like me /not like me 'there'). So it might not be, arguably, that children have undeveloped senses of space and its relations, but rather that these have not (yet?) been fleshed out into the comparative language of place-identity.

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Table I: The research sites*

Highfields School	An English medium inner city Cardiff school with a multi-ethnic intake. The free school meals quota was close to the Welsh average.
Petersfield School	English medium, and serving a socially deprived council estate in the Eastern Valleys of South Wales. More than half of the children in this school receive free school meals.
Llwynirfon School	English medium, in a bilingual area of Powys (mid-Wales) where between 20 and 35% of the population are able to speak Welsh (1991 census). This school has a very low proportion of children who receive free school meals.
Ysgol y Waun	Welsh medium and not deprived (in terms of children receiving free school meals) in a largely anglophone area of North East Wales.
Ysgol y Porth	Welsh medium in an area of rural Gwynedd where over 80% of the local population speak Welsh. This school has a low proportion of children receiving free school meals.
Ysgol Maesgarw	In a deprived area of the Western Valleys of South Wales where large numbers and a significant proportion of the population are able to speak Welsh. The proportion of children on free school meals was well above the Welsh average.

*The names of schools and locations have been replaced by pseudonyms

[i] Of course, the proportion of programmes available in Welsh, in comparison with those in English (from whatever country of origin), is very small.