



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/147902/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Birch, J. (2019) Environment in the lives of children and families: perspectives from India and the UK. *Children's Geographies*, 18 (2). pp. 248-250. ISSN: 1473-3285

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1631057>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Children's Geographies* on 17/06/2019, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/14733285.2019.1631057>

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Note: Snapshot PDF is the proof copy of corrections marked in EditGenie, the layout would be different from typeset PDF and EditGenie editing view.

Author Queries & Comments:

null : No Queries

BOOK REVIEW

Recto running head : CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES

Verso running head : BOOK REVIEW

 Jo Birch

Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

joanna.birch@sheffield.ac.uk

Environment in the lives of children and families: perspectives from India and the UK, by Ann Phoenix, Janet Boddy, Catherine Walker and Uma Vennam, 2017, Bristol, Policy Press, 184 pp, (hardback) £36, ISBN 9781447339199 (hardback)/9781447339205 (ePub)

Copyright Line: © 2019 Jo Birch

Interlacing children's and adults' experiences of their daily living environments in India and the UK with research and contemporary discourse on the environment, climate change and childhood, this book makes a valuable addition to geographies of children, young people and families. A mild and descriptive title conceals this book's strong critique of climate change rhetoric and policy as over-simplified and ineffective. Readers are also presented with bold criticism of the 'responsibilisation' of children as portrayed by British and Indian media and environmental policy.

At the book's heart is the account of the authors' in-depth qualitative research exploring what families think about local environments, the interplay between 'big' and 'small' environmental issues and the gaps between environmental policy and everyday life for families in different countries. The book focuses on a study 'Family Lives and the Environment' which involved 24 families – 12 from India (Andhra Pradesh/Telangana) and 12 from the UK (Southern England) – diverse in their economic, cultural and demographic profiles. Sampling included rural and urban family experiences in four different locations but was not intended to be representative of Indian or British families in any way. The research involved participants in a range of in-depth interviews – one-to-one, family-group and child-group interviews both static in home and school, also mobile interviews around local areas. A few participants' photographs help tell of the research process and the family lives and environments. Twenty-four children participated in the study – all aged between 11 and 14 years. Children's own expression of their experiences are slightly overshadowed by adults' perspectives yet, through this, readers gain the sense that researchers may be reflecting the reality of children's (lesser) agency in families. Helpfully, the authors avoid dogged comparison of children's and adults' perspectives and oversimplified cross country comparisons are omitted. Instead, it is clear that research methods were framed to explore and reveal complexity, interconnectedness, the materiality and relationality of family lives.

Researchers working with children, young people and families, those interested in unpicking climate change discourses, in environmental education and in conducting international research will value a relatively detailed insight into study methodology – more than can be afforded in a research paper. Given this space, further researcher reflexivity around the challenges and nuances of research with families across two countries would have been welcome, to offer understandings that research with children, young people and families is rarely a linear and smooth running process.

Ann Phoenix and her colleagues write engagingly with thought-provoking and thematic rather than organisational chapter headings. The central three chapters present research findings and reflections. The first chapter presents a robust rationale for the study and the book; the second details the methodology and the final chapter concludes. Throughout, the book is rich in critical thinking with perhaps three ideas that are central.

One idea is that the Minority world and white-middle class knowledge dominate discourses around climate change problems and actions; the experiences storied by families in India and the UK serve to disrupt such knowledge and what the authors' call 'false

and moralising binaries' – 'nature' and 'culture', 'global' and 'local', 'concerned' and 'unconcerned' and 'selfish' or 'altruistic' (98). Reiteration of environmental affordance theory (Gibson 1979; Uzzell 2000) works well in illustrating what environments do and do not afford families in their different socioeconomic and material environments.

The need to challenge the political and academic reification of individual behaviour in addressing climate change forms another key theme within the book. The authors note how both Minority world and Majority world climate change policy focuses upon individual action – a positioning which persists in the face of challenge from environmental psychology, social practice theory and the human, non-human entanglements understood as part of 'common world' approaches (Latour 2004; Taylor 2013). This provides a firm basis for the researchers' passion for articulating families' quotidian experiences, not just their behaviours but their negotiations of their environments and environmental issues, especially attending to the intersectionality of socioeconomic resources, environmental affordances, gendered and generational concerns.

A third idea is one which, for me, stands out among the researchers' findings: the constraints upon children's agency in attending to climate change. The authors make clear their censures of over-simplified portrayals of children as 'our future' or as 'the next generation' found within climate change policy, and we are reminded that, whilst these framings seem to take children seriously, powerful and complex generational practices set by parents and other adults are at play. In both India and the UK, children show neither ignorance nor apathy around environmental issues yet the macro and micro level power structures of families serve to shape and constrain children's agency. Ways of 'doing family', relational commitments, parent narratives of family needs and risks to children, suggest the authors, are family care practices that cannot be bracketed from environmental action. This is a most valuable book for human geographers, adding to an aptly expanding body of work that attends to the everyday, the material and relational in climate discourses.

References

Gibson, J. J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Classic Edition. Hove: Psychology Press.

Latour, B. 2004. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring Science into Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, A. 2013. *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Uzzell, D. 2000. "The Psycho-Spatial Dimension of Global Environmental Problems". In *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 20 (4):307–318.