

To whom do children belong in the age of transnationalism?

INED presentation:

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Classically trained sociocultural anthropology: emphasis on social organization and cultural categories, perceptions, discourse.

- First project: Marriage in rural Liberia

increasingly began to work with demographers:

- Child fosterage in Sierra Leone
- Birth intervals and [Western] contraception in The Gambia (with Allan Hill and Fatou Banja)

Most recent (and ongoing):

- **transnational vital events – West Africans going to Western Europe**

Why is this topic important for demography?

Chinese immigrants in NY
fraudulent claims – abortion persecution

- Children sent; children left behind.
- What happens (for example) to undocumented children, as they make critical life transitions through adolescence & adulthood?
- “Acculturation dissonance” (psychologists, educationalists)

- populations usually seen as self-contained; analyzed separately.

Differences often attributed to culture.

A topic like this instead draws attention to:

- - changing definitions, laws, borders;
 - connections among countries in matters of reproduction.

My role, as I initially perceived it:

- trying to translate anthropology for demographers:
- refute assumptions that the power of social norms and cultural categories categorically determine behavior, (“people as prisoners of norms”)

Ie, describing the “norms” is not the end of the story; indeed, it is where the conversation should begin.

- eg: hierarchy, “non-pooling” households and kin groups

I arrived in demography in the mid 1980s: (at Penn) at the height of

- concerns about high fertility in the world,
- Paul Erlich's neomalthusian book, "The Population Bomb"
- Fertility was the undisputed master topic in demography – for numbers; far less for health.

For **Africa** and other 'underdeveloped' countries, concerns with: how numbers of children are produced. Hence:

- the "WFS"
- proximate determinants,
 - "KAP" (knowledge, attitude, practice")
 - contraceptives availability
 - Education vs traditionalism, Islam

My emphasis instead:

Questions about, disputes over child “ownership.”

Fatherhood,

belonging in one family or another,

claims of many ‘investors’, regardless of biological parenthood.

Expressed especially in ‘rights in persons’ described by classic British social anthropologists (many of them with legal training):

for children:

rights of family members (or other investors) in:

their labor and production, spouses; (hence, ‘wealth in people’)

In return: expectations of children’s loyalty, gratitude, and eventual reciprocity.

- A constant sense that I was one person with anthropologists, and another with demographers.
- apples and oranges

Example:

our collaborative *National Academy of Sciences* report –

“The Social Dynamics of Adolescent Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Bledsoe & Cohen et al 1993)

- tried to relook at “the problem” of adolescent fertility in Africa, as it had been described

Early – and hence **high** - fertility - **Why?**

in Africa, young women had been seen as:

- unable to make decisions for themselves. Dominated by:
- lineages, family elders, polygamous husbands (or men with deukiemes bureaux).
- economic interests in girls' marriage (esp. customs of "brideprice" – "dowry").
- Early marriage norms (despite health risks to girls);
- Geographic remoteness
- traditionalism, superstition, Islam, suspicion of education,
- irrationality.

The fertility results for young women:

Early entry into childbearing, and in societies with no obvious interests in controlling fertility, least of all through “effective” means (Western contraception).

Promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, early childbearing, loss of ability to finish school; hence, inability to succeed in the modern world;

All exacerbated by modernization, the cash economy, urbanization, desires for the ‘good life’ –

Also by separation from traditional familial controls on sex, and without proper education and receptivity to Western knowledge, an inability to avoid births premaritally.

Adolescent African girls and their families were creating a moral crisis.

Broken homes, massive societal breakdowns.

Hence, exacerbating societal underdevelopment.

The remedies?

Female education and work opportunities;

ESPECIALLY: family planning programs, access to modern contraception.

- Our report found, instead:
- Fertility had NOT changed by age. What *had* changed was marriage: delayed.
- Why? the desires of *both* girls and boys to attend and finish school, gain exposure to urban life: The very ideals of development ideology itself
- Results: premarital childbearing
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- . **The problem was thus not girls in local African societies:**
- It was instead the **contexts** in which marriage and first births were beginning to occur in Africa.

- My own evolution:
- Increasing emphasis on dynamism, adaptation, improvisation,
- Use of norms, rather than being imprisoned by them

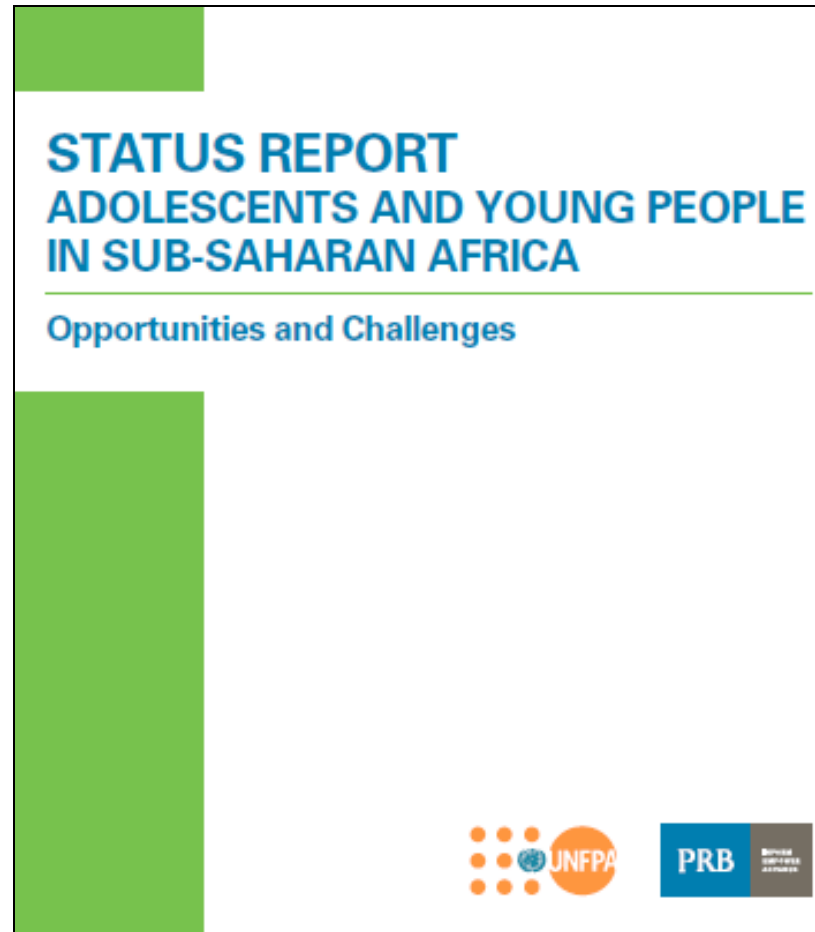
- But also:
- increasing appreciation for demography and the thinking it represents.

- It has permanently changed my anthropology.

- Still –
- A constant sense of disjuncture in my conversations with anthropologists vs. demographers.

Two decades later:

New report on adolescence in sub-Saharan Africa (2012):
by the Population Reference Bureau and UNFPA



- **Child Labour, Though Declining, Is Still Widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa**
- Harmful demands on children “*deprive children of their childhood and potential.*”
- [By contrast: “Investing in children’s sexual and reproductive health will...”]
- help young people make a healthy transition into adulthood,
- complete their education,
- prevent unintended pregnancy and HIV infection,
- accumulate skills that are relevant to the job market,
- start an independent livelihood
- positively engage in civil society.³
- make informed decisions about marriage and childbearing
- prepare them to become the next generation of parents.”

More recently, extending these notions of dynamism to geographical mobility:

- Project with MPIDR
- Transnational vital events

- Africans increasingly try to access Europe and other Western countries for:
 - Education
 - Work
 - Support families

- But:
- They are often accused of breaching borders; and not just in ways that are ‘illegal,’ moral.
- Blamed for exploiting the most vulnerable people and relationships for migration gain. Especially in “family reunification”:
 - Young women
 - Sham marriage
 - Children :
 - “Dependent” usually implying capabilities and legal minority:
 - assumption: children are vulnerable; lack both the authority and the maturity to make decisions in their best interests.

“unaccompanied minors”

- Nuria Empez - project in Catalonia:
- North African “unaccompanied minors” in Spain
 - “Age”
 - “Boys” vs “young men”

- For children: Assumption: Vulnerability in the host society (eg, children without parents)
- Why children, then, are put up for migration advantage?
- Their main asset: their legal age.



“Anchor babies”

Discordant legal status: children vs parents

Florida's birthright citizen children

- College tuition – “in-state” tuition for state residents less than for “out-of-state” non-residents
- In Florida, children may be ***citizens***, but, because of their parents’ undocumented status, they were also labelled ***non-residents*** of the state
- Which principle, then, takes precedence? Being a “citizen” or a “child”?
- ***Again, the context defines people as non-legitimate – But in this case, it even obliges them to distance themselves from their families.***

On what grounds can outsiders from be admitted?

- Asylum – Evidence of:
- Vulnerability back home (political dissidents, people who claim they face persecution back in their home country because of their membership in a particular group or class.

Chinese immigrants in NY
fraudulent claims – abortion persecution

“Asylum fraud in Chinatown: an industry of lies”

NY Times – 22 feb 2014

FBI agents outside a Chinatown law office (NY) accused of immigration fraud. [NYT, 2010]

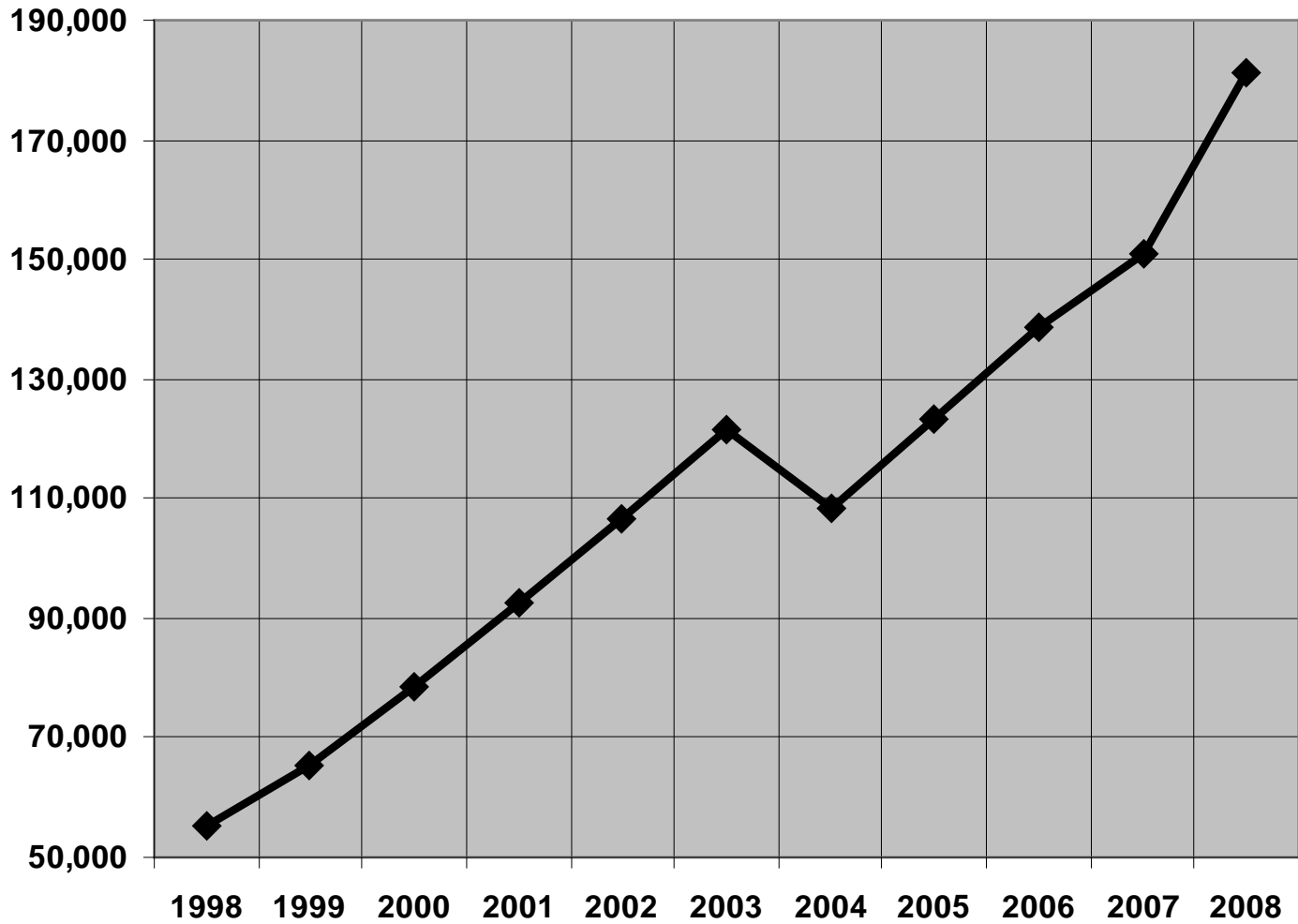


Prospect of Spanish Citizenship Appeals to Descendants of Jews Expelled in 1492; NYT – 13 Feb 2014



Germans in Spain - *"In flagrante delicto"* ?

German-born foreigners in Spain, 1998-07



- So –
- To whom do transnational African children belong?

“Illegal immigration from Senegal to Spain”

(video sponsored by the Institute of Migration):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gx24-cWFNw>

- Young mason back in Senegal after he tried to reach Spain:
 - “Migrating is easy but succeeding there is a different story.”
 - “Succeeding in life is very difficult.””
 - “I am the eldest son in my family. My father and other are poor.”
 - “Especially with the current economic situation in Senegal, all the youth here have one common goal. Leaving the country.
 - **Being responsible for a family is a very difficult position.**

Conclusion

Despite the original, well-intended purpose for which human rights doctrine was created – *[[or possibly because of it]]* and the good will of the signatory state in trying to follow it –

Families efforts to secure a foothold in Europe – and especially if other options are poor – may well bring about the opposite.

- there are [indeed] the unintended instrumentalization opportunities of border regimes
- [However...] states respond, attempting to impose a clarity that will in turn allow them to impose restrictions....
- [And just as surely], their efforts will inevitably create yet more loopholes and ambiguities of which people at the margins in turn will try to take advantage.
- U. Beck, 2007:697

- It is *still* the context that most matters –
- In this case, this is all about laws, economies, politics that are well beyond the confines of one's 'traditional' roots.

- Almost complete disjuncture between new studies of transnationalism and the visions of a contained, confined Africa that somehow continues to dominate thinking about African reproductive life.