Monthly Seminar
Anthropology of Children
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, VU University Amsterdam

Thursday 15 April 2010 14.30-16.30
VU University Amsterdam, Metropolitan Building, room Z-113

THE CONTOURS OF BELONGING:
Legality, Race, Class and Generation in the US
Presentation by Dr. Irene Bloemraad, Sociology, University of California, Berkeley
and visiting research fellow, IMES, University of Amsterdam

Of the more than 38 million foreign-born residents of the United States, roughly a third are naturalized US citizens, a third are legal permanent residents and a third are undocumented migrants without legal papers. The children of these people, if born in the United States, are automatically US citizens. Traditional accounts of political socialization expect that these children will learn about politics and civic engagement from their parents. But what happens when parents are immigrants, especially when their legal status prevents direct participation in the formal political system? Do children become alienated and detached from the political and larger community, or do they compensate for their parents’ lack of voice by increasing attachment and engagement? This talk presents some early findings from over 200 interviews with teenage Americans and their Mexican, Vietnamese or Chinese-origin parents living in the San Francisco Bay area. It argues that even in the United States, we can distinguish “ethnic” and “civic” notions of membership linked to being “American” or being a US citizen. Legal institutions carry important cultural implications for feelings of belonging. Group illegality influenced notions of membership, even if individuals do not confront illegality personally, while birthplace citizenship offers an opening to challenge notions of “being American” predicated on race and economic privilege.

The Anthropology of Children Working Group (based at VU University, Amsterdam) brings together academics and practitioners engaged in research and work with children. Through monthly seminars, the Working Group promotes child-oriented theory, methodology, and research ethics. Besides, it serves as a platform for (interdisciplinary) academic research and it enhances dialogue with practitioners through joint research projects, publications and conferences.

Convenor / Dr Sandra J.T.M. Evers, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, VU University Amsterdam.

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