

**'I can't do anything but wait':  
The experiences of 'left behind' children in Lombok, Indonesia**

Harriot Beazley

In contemporary Indonesia neoliberal economic forces have led to a rise in transnational labour and rural to urban migration, with an accompanying surge in family fragmentation. In this era of intensified geographical mobility, however, there have also been increased and sustained experiences of immobility. In particular, children and young people who have been 'left behind' by their migrating parents are expected to wait for them to return home, sometimes for years at a time. The fact that children have to wait, often with no contact, has become an acceptable and necessary fact of life in many communities.

This paper draws on the results of child-focussed research with children and young people in rural Lombok, Eastern Indonesia. The research reveals the unpredictability of the temporality of migration, especially for parents who follow informal transnational flows. Children explained how their parents migrated with a plan for a specific time away and a scheduled return. Once gone, however, the time was often extended beyond initial expectations. Short-term seasonal migration became long term, or a regular occurrence instead of a one-time occasion, while longer term stays became indefinite or permanent. From a temporal perspective, therefore, parents are postponing their family's happiness now in preference for a better life in the future, purchased with the money they hope to earn. Drawing on qualitative data the paper focusses on the deep feelings children articulate about their parent's sustained absence for unspecified periods of time. A prominent issue that emerged was the feeling of continual waiting, where children described that they were in some sort of limbo, not belonging anywhere. They were waiting for something to happen, which included waiting until they were old enough to migrate themselves. By concentrating on children's own views and experiences, the paper contributes to debates about the temporal and affective implications of migration in the Southeast Asia region.

Biography

Dr Harriot Beazley is a human geographer and community development practitioner with a passion for rights-based research with children and young people in Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia). She is Program Coordinator (International Development) and Senior Lecturer (Human Geography) at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. Harriot's PhD (ANU) research was focussed on the geographies and identities of street children in Indonesia. Since then has conducted research and published widely on the physical and emotional punishment of children in Vietnam and Cambodia (Save the Children), child labour and the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Indonesia (UNICEF), children's experiences in orphanages after the tsunami (Save the Children), and the impact of

transnational migration on children in Lombok, Indonesia (SSHRC, Canada). She is Commissioning Editor (Pacific) for the Journal *Children's Geographies*.