

# The Child in the World - Speakers

Saturday 9 November 2013 10.00-17.00

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

### The child in the world: violence and gendered transitions to adulthood

*Karen Wells (Birkbeck, University of London)*

This paper reflects on the role of violence in the lives of children. It is concerned with how the exercise of violence is used against and used by children to assemble their subjectivity as they transition to gendered adulthoods.

Violence is not an easy concept to define, neither in everyday life nor in the social sciences. This paper suggests that the term *structural violence* has shifted the attention of social scientists away from acts of bodily harm towards understanding the wider structural forces that define and limit lives as acts of violence. I argue that *corporeal violence* - defined as acts of bodily harm, regardless of whether those acts are culturally sanctioned - is a more effective concept for understanding the specific dynamics of the relationship between bodily harm and subjectivity that shapes children's entry into gendered adulthoods.

#### Biographical note

Karen Wells is Assistant Dean for the Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies at Birkbeck College. She is a Senior Lecturer in International Development with a specific focus on childhood and globalisation, and visual cultures of childhood. She is the author of *Childhood in a Global Perspective* (Polity, 2009) and has published widely on visual representation, and on the impacts of global structures and flows on children and childhood.

**The Child in the World Studentship One: ‘Children, Home and Empire 1870-1950’**

*Mary Guyatt, Queen Mary University London (QMUL) and the V&A Museum of Childhood*

This project examines the ways in which middle- and upper-class children living in Britain between c.1870-1950, engaged with the imperial world in their family settings. Whereas children’s association with Empire has been studied through the formal settings of school and youth organisations, this thesis considers children’s everyday lives in the home, through their play, leisure activities and material culture, and through their family networks. The research questions are:

1. Was the representation of the non-European world in children’s material culture, play and leisure activities framed around the British Empire or a more general foreignness?
2. Were there recurring themes and patterns within the representations of the non-European world and its people within children’s play, leisure activities and material culture?
3. How did children’s lived experiences of foreign places and foreign people inform their understanding of the world beyond their homes in Britain?
4. Did the objects and activities experienced in informal settings promote imperialistic values in British children?

The research uses multiple archival sources but it is underpinned by a focus on objects from the period preserved in the collection of the V&A Museum of Childhood. It is thus intended to demonstrate how museum collections can present ‘a unique and intriguing opportunity for examining objects related to childhood and children’ (Brookshaw, 2009), and to further explore the role of non-textual materials and everyday activities in the making of children’s imperial cultures (Norcia, 2004).

**Biographical note**

Mary Guyatt is in her third year working on an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award hosted by the School of Geography at Queen Mary and the V&A Museum of Childhood. She is examining associations with the non-European world in the everyday lives of children in Britain, 1870-1930. Previously Mary worked as a museum curator and studied the History of Design (MA, RCA) and Architecture (BA, Cantab).

**“Not for one nation, but for humanity”: Race, Empire, and Internationalism in the Girl Guide Movement’s Utopian Space**

*Kristine Alexander, Kent Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of History, University of Saskatchewan*

In a speech given at the 9<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts held in Stockholm in 1936, Miss M. Beley, Chair of the international Guide movement’s leader training sub-committee, insisted on the importance of personal contact to the movement’s official aims of sisterly tolerance and global understanding. “One realises,” she said, “that it is chiefly by knocking about among people of different races in their own countries that individuals can get their corners rubbed off and their prejudices melted.”<sup>1</sup> International travel and personal contact were central to the familial and utopian ideals of the twentieth-century Guide movement, as its leaders sought to highlight similarities of age and gender while encouraging girls and young women to disregard differences of culture, geography, religion and ‘race.’ Yet international and imperial Guide events were also contact zones, sites of encounter and interaction where girls and women with widely varying subject positions and experiences of the British imperial project came together in sometimes fruitful and sometimes uncomfortable ways.

This paper will examine the successes and shortcomings of the Girl Guide movement’s imperial, international, and interracial vision through an analysis of the utopian spaces of Guiding’s cross-border gatherings and international properties. By engaging with recent scholarship on globalisation and childhood, female imperialism, Commonwealth feminism, the history of the global ‘colour line,’ and cultural internationalism, this paper will add new depth to our largely separate understandings of twentieth-century girlhood, imperialism, and internationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Council Fire* XI, no. 4 (October 1936), 30.

**Biographical Note**

Kristine Alexander is the Elizabeth & Cecil Kent Postdoctoral Fellow in History at the University of Saskatchewan. Her doctoral dissertation (York University, 2010) analysed the Girl Guide movement in interwar England, Canada, and India. She has published a number of articles on the imperial and international history of Guiding, the history of childhood, and Canadian children during the First World War.

**‘Religious organizations and the moral purification of children: a cultural sociological perspective’**

*Gordon Lynch, University of Kent*

In late Victorian society, a gradual but significant shift took place in public attitudes and policy in which it became seen as increasingly acceptable to intervene in family life for the sake of the welfare of the child. Cutting against prevailing norms of parental rights over their children, the growing child rescue and protection movement sought to construct compelling moral narratives in which intervention in the life of the child was experienced as a moral necessity. Fusing together humanitarian sentiment and nationalist anxiety, such interventions became seen as necessary both to prevent child suffering and to build up the child as a ‘citizen in embryo’, ready to fulfil his or her proper place in the nation and empire.

Adopting an analytical approach drawn from the ‘strong programme’ of cultural sociology, this paper examines the ways in which these moral narratives created symbolic relationships between the sacred nation, profane parent and redeemable child, who lay precariously on the cusp of the sacred and profane. Noting the varying ways in which these symbolic boundaries were mapped on to actual social groups and fluctuated in their influence on public life, it follows Lydia Murdoch’s (2006) argument that one of the effects of this moral narrative was to obscure parents’ agency in caring for their children. It also gives support to Swain and Hillel’s (2010) argument that this moral narrative represented a cultural logic, supported by a trans-national network of individual philanthropists, voluntary and religious organizations and State structures, which underpinned a wide range of interventions in children’s lives. Whilst this movement gave rise to organisations that continue to play a central role in child welfare provision today, it also engaged in initiatives which have subsequently become deeply controversial and the focus of public inquiries, formal apologies and contested processes of redress. These include the UK child migration schemes to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Rhodesia, the Irish industrial school system, the native residential schools in Canada and the United States, the ‘stolen generation’ of Aboriginal children removed from their families in Australia and ‘Forgotten Australians’ placed in institutional care, and the American ‘orphan train’ schemes.

Catholic and Protestant organisations played a central role in the delivery of these initiatives. This was not simply because of the key role of religious organisations in nineteenth and early twentieth-century society, but because the process of redemption of the child was inseparable from a Christian religious imaginary. Whilst often practised along sectarian lines, the shared notion of the formation of the pious, obedient and industrious Christian citizen, redeemed from the corrupt ties of their former social environment, legitimised particular disciplinary forms of training of children's bodies, emotions and imaginations. By thinking about the role of materiality and emotion in the formation of religious subjectivities, it is possible to understand how the embodied practices and material environments to which children were exposed were laden with religious significance. In this context, it is argued that the abuse and neglect that children experienced in these contexts was not incidental to those forms of Christian imaginary, but can be understood as direct and indirect effects of its particular cultural logic.

#### **Biographical Note**

Gordon Lynch is Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent. His research explores the ways in which morally-charged distinctions between the sacred and the profane shape social life, and he has written about this most recently in 'The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach' (Oxford University Press, 2012) and 'On the Sacred' (Acumen, 2012). He is a Faculty Fellow at the Centre for Cultural Sociology at Yale University and was a steering committee member of the recently-completed AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society research programme.

**‘On their own: exploring the hidden history of Britain’s child migrants’**

*Kim Tao, Curator, Post-Federation Immigration, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney*

The Australian National Maritime Museum’s travelling exhibition *On their own – Britain’s child migrants* focuses on the ‘lost children of the empire’ – the more than 100,000 British children sent to Canada, Australia, Zimbabwe and New Zealand between 1869 and 1967 through child migration schemes. The exhibition, developed in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool UK, examines how the lives of generations of British children and their families were shaped by this significant global migration and empire-building movement.

*On their own* uses a mix of artefacts, photographs and oral testimonies to interpret children’s narratives of migration and the enduring legacy of childhood displacement on adult lives. It situates the compelling personal, individual and lived experiences of child migrants within a broader landscape of hidden transnational histories. In doing so, the exhibition gives a voice to those who were neither heard nor believed when they were powerless children, while also helping to validate their place in Commonwealth history.

This paper reflects on the power of personal stories to engage audiences and the challenges of representing contested childhood histories in museums. It explores questions relating to the complex historiography of child migration and changing perceptions of childhood and child welfare. How do we make sense of a major international migration movement and make it relevant and accessible to our audiences? How can museums connect with those who were silenced as children and empower them to share their stories? And what is the value and impact of presenting hidden childhood histories for both museums and audiences?

### **Biographical Note**

Kim Tao is the Curator of Post-Federation Immigration at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney. She is the curator of the international travelling exhibition *On their own - Britain's child migrants*. Kim has a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts in Museum Studies, both from the University of Sydney. Her research interests include migration history in museums, community engagement, and museums and national identity. In 2008 Kim was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study strategies for building sustainable partnerships between museums and culturally diverse communities in the UK, Canada and USA.

## **The Child in the World Studentship Studentship Two: ‘Children, Migration and Diasporas’**

*Eithne Nightingale, Queen Mary University London (QMUL) and the V&A Museum of Childhood*

The research focuses on migration of children in relation to the East End of London (local boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets) between the years 1930 – 2000. Experiences of migration and settlement will be explored in light of such factors as when and at what age children arrived in the UK; the reason for migration; who they came with if accompanied; their place of origin; gender; socio economic status and education. The research will also examine how factors such as the specific neighbourhood where they have settled; the network of support available; the friendships they have developed and the nature and extent of the relationship with the country or countries of origin have affected their transition and settlement.

The research will identify the extent of childhood agency in relation to migration and settlement; the strategies children have used to adapt to the new environment; the social and cultural practices of the East End or the UK that have influenced their lives; what they have retained from the country or countries of origin and their families and how this has changed over time. It will also examine the significance of both individual and collective memory, the use of material culture and technology in relation to notions of identity and belonging including in relation to the East End.

### **Biographical Note**

Eithne Nightingale is the former Head of Diversity and Equality at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She also has extensive experience of working in equal opportunities, community development, regeneration and education in inner London. Eithne has published several reports and articles on issues of diversity and equality particularly in relation to museums and heritage and coedited the book ‘Museums, Education and Social Justice’, (Routledge, 2012).

## Children's Narratives about Operation Pied Piper

*Lee A. Talley, Rowan University*

Operation Pied Piper, the government's WWII evacuation of over 3.5 million children from cities to the countryside and British dominions to protect them from German aerial bombing, helped shape a generation, and the experiences of travel, migration, and displacement forever changed the lives of evacuees (e.g. Foster & Steele, Lin, Macnicol, Titmuss, and Welshman). Whether children were separated from their parents for weeks, months, or years, they sustained their familial ties through letters. The population most immediately affected by evacuation thus left a rich, yet largely unexamined, written record of these extraordinarily events. Although two wartime studies of evacuees were conducted (Barnett House and Susan Isaacs), research on evacuation, regardless of discipline, has almost exclusively focused on adult recollections or on the perspectives of adult observers or caretakers. Few have considered how children were making sense of their migration. My distinctive methodology—juxtaposing child narratives with children's literature—thus repairs a major gap in the record and illuminates how the young used narrative in a distinctive form of self fashioning.

Children's letters reveal how young writers authored themselves epistolarily: they write themselves into, alter, or avoid roles offered by stories they were reading and propaganda campaigns (e.g. brave children "doing their bit" for the nation). Further, within letters families refer to children's literature as it helped shore up memories of home and provided them with an imaginative space where they could reunite beyond the geographical separation of war. Evacuees' letters profitably extend the work of historians contemplating epistolarity (Earle) and immigration (Gerber), as well as studies of British colonial children sent "home" to school from abroad (Buettner). Crucially, they add a missing dimension to other accounts of WWII that rely on adult recollections, amending a scholarly tradition that discounts the significance of children's experience and agency. They also intervene in literary representations of youth and evacuation to claim their own voices, as child writers transform the offerings of children's literature, a genre designed to teach young readers

about childhood as much as to delight or instruct them (e.g. Nodelman, Rose). Drawing upon unpublished archival materials, including letters, diaries, and a literary magazine created by child evacuees aboard a ship bound for Australia, my paper illuminates how children explained this extraordinary experience of national or global migration, remained connected with loved ones far away, and how even struggling or burgeoning writers were powerfully engaged in a unique form of self fashioning.

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### Biographical Note

Lee A. Talley is Associate Professor of English at Rowan University (New Jersey, USA). Today's talk is a portion of a book, tentatively titled *Operation Pied Piper: The World War II Evacuation of British Children and the Children's Literature it Inspired*. She has most recently published an essay in *The Lion and the Unicorn* about the wartime childhood depicted in Susan Cooper's *Dawn of Fear*. Other select publications include her edition of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (2009) as well as contributions to *Children's Literature* and Philip Nel and Lissa Paul's *Keywords for Children's Literature* (2011).

**“Our Wars” and other toys: Israel's first decades as seen in its toys**

*Marcella Simoni, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and NYU in Florence*

This paper stems from a visit at the Israel Museum, where in 2009 I visited a small exhibition of Israeli toys from the 1950s and 1960s on display in the “Youth and Art Education Wing”. This paper would like to investigate toys and illustrations in some children books as instruments of a broader educational strategy that favoured national pride among children and youth, and identification with the institutions and values of the newly established State in two crucial decades: the 1950s and 1960s. These have been defined as the time of the “nation in arms”(Ben-Eliezer, 1998), as the period of the “ingathering of the exiles”- the immigration of at least 600.000 Jews from Arab countries - as well as the decades (especially the 1950s) of the *mamlachtiyut* (statatism) (Troen and Lucas, 1995). The toys that I am going to show (through pictures) raise a number of points as to the extent to which they provided children with the standard Zionist narrative of national redemption through return/immigration and an emotional and moral framework that would turn them into nationalist or militarist adults. Where can one draw the line between the just pride at the construction of a young and vital State and the celebration of militarism through board games of soldiers and battles? And, on the other hand, haven't the latter ones always been part of the education of boys (and adults) all over the world, Risk being a case in point?

The paper is divided in three parts. In the first part I will consider toys connected to war, from the doll of Moshe Dayan to the strategic board-games *Our Wars* (*Milhamotenu*), from some illustrations in children books, to childish military decorations on drums and other instruments. In the second part, I will look at the so-called “ingathering of the exiles”, focusing on the representation of Israel (vis-à-vis the Diaspora) on children board-games, starting from an analysis of the spatial organization of the game and of the steps towards victory (i.e. immigration to Israel). Finally, I will look at how toys were also part of the process of strengthening *mamlachtiyut* through the education of its youngsters, from the depiction of father

figures like David Ben Gurion in children-books and toys to the dolls of boys and girls dressed in the uniforms of youth movements (mainly *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzeir* – The Young Guard), up to the maps for children which present an interesting pattern of in- and ex-clusiveness of 'Others'.

By looking at how the major political and national themes of the times are reflected in many toys for children, this paper would like to fill a gap in the existing historiography (Grossman 2004) discussing the role of toys and games in support of war- or peace-making. To this effect the conclusions of this paper will mention the activities with children of Abie Nathan, well-known Israeli pacifist, starting from the collective gatherings he organized, where children destroyed war toys.

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#### **Biographical Note**

Marcella Simoni, Ph.D. (London 2004), is Junior Lecturer at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Between 2004 and 2010 she has been teaching at New York University in Florence. She was research fellow at Brown University (1995; 1997), at the University of Oxford (1998), in Los Angeles (2001), at the Centre de Recherche Francais à Jerusalem (2009-2010), at INALCO, Paris (2010-2011), and received the Alessandro Vacaggio Prize of the Accademia dei Lincei. Marcella Simoni has published two books (*A Healthy Nation*, Cafoscarina 2010; *At the Margins of Conflict*, 2010) and has co-edited three books (with A. Marzano, *Quaranta anni dopo, Il Ponte*, Bologna 2007 and "Roma e Gerusalemme". *Israele nella vita politica e culturale italiana*, ECIg, Genova 2010; with A. Tonini, *Realtà e Memoria di una disfatta*, FUP, Firenze). She has published her articles in «Middle Eastern Studies», «Jewish History», «Passato e Presente» and others. She is currently working on the history of conscientious objection in Israel.

**‘Children in Poverty: views of beauty’**

*Joy Chalke and Claire Hollywell, Portsmouth University*

It is accepted practice for researchers to consider how they can gather children's views of their own lives (Greene and Hogan, 2005). Since the ideas behind the mosaic approach became established (Clarke and Moss, 2011) children have been encouraged to document their worlds as a way of offering insights to those adults that share them. Much of this has been done in the privileged west, however this project wanted to try and find ways of exploring the lives of children living in very different circumstances across the globe.

A collaborative project was born working with children who live in extreme poverty and war zones in Europe, and sub Saharan Africa. It started in Romania where aid workers shared how children are very aware of their poverty and are “ashamed of their parents and their homes” and emerged out of a Trust Greenbelt funded project, which was designed to bring opportunities for creative expression to children who had limited resources. Instead of the typical media images often used to elicit funding for children from deprived situations, the participants wanted the children to take photos of things they thought were beautiful in their lives as an opportunity to express their views of their world. It is a small ethnographic study attempting to portray a fresh insight into the lives of children who are often portrayed as being in need of being ‘saved’ (Hart 2006) and attempts to give them some agency, in order to discover a child’s eye view of the world they inhabit.

This project aimed to give the child the freedom to show what they see as beautiful without direction and asks the question; what does a child from an extreme background see as beautiful? In each location adult participants were asked to give ten children aged 5-10 a disposable camera (or access to a digital camera where it was a very remote or war-torn location) and asked each child to take up to 30 photographs of what they see as beautiful. The adults were instructed to simply give this instruction and a brief demonstration of how to use the camera but no further direction at all.

In each of the locations, the children's responses to the activity were very positive and a wealth of photographs have been collected and shared with the children. The adults involved believed the children's self-worth grew from participating as they had the opportunity to share their lives with interested others. The pictures they took were a unique insight into their world, and analysis of the picture content indicate some emerging patterns and themes occurring in the children's' lives that may relate to their specific environments and cultures.

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### **Biographical Note**

Joy Chalke (Bed, MA) is a principal lecturer in the School of Education and Continuing Studies at the University of Portsmouth, specialising in early childhood education. Research interests include the exploration of ideas around personal and professional identities and the way individuals situate themselves in a variety of contexts. A personal interest in photography as a means of expression, and a way of eliciting the child's voice lead to the collaboration for this piece of research.

Claire Hollywell is the founder and director of the Creative Arts and Prayer Centre in Brasov, Romania. As well as directing local arts based projects, painting hospitals and children's centres, Claire also leads international ventures such as the disposable camera project, aimed at giving children a voice, and promoting storytelling and global awareness of justice issues. Claire has worked in many different countries within Africa for charities caring for orphaned and disadvantaged children and currently lives in Romania. Claire is a photographer, artist and filmmaker as well as a registered nurse.

### **Children's political agency: The case of Programa Bolsa Família in Brazil**

*M.Sc. Christiane Rocha Falcão (University of Saint Andrews) and Dr. Flávia Ferreira Pires (University of Paraíba, Brazil)*

Conditional cash transfer programs have recently played a central role among public policies to help eliminating extreme poverty in many developing countries, such as South Africa, Chile, Mexico and Brazil. In Brazil, the Programa Bolsa Família (Family Grant Program), created in 2003, has benefited approximately 13 million poor Brazilians families living with a monthly income of R\$ 70,00 (US\$ 45.00) or less. For the next years, the Brazilian Government has addressed new guidelines for the program: to better assist the rural population, minorities and women in extreme poverty, and to eradicate childhood poverty and illiteracy. These guidelines are based on the 2010 census data collected and processed by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), and on socio-economical studies carried on by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA).

The access to the social payment by the families are conditional upon children's school attendance and medical and vaccinations appointments, as an effort of the Brazilian Government to concomitantly increase schooling, general health specially among children nursing and pregnancy women, besides the immediate alleviation of hunger and extreme poverty. For families, children's school attendance and vaccinations are now a priority, since it guarantees the monthly income. For children, the benefit reshapes their relation with the school and with the family, and reduces the risks of child labour and exploitation. The school is in charge of controlling student's attendance, especially of those who are beneficiaries of Bolsa Família, and in this sense the program constitutes school's everyday talks and activities.

The centrality of children in the Programa Bolsa Família's design contributes to new configurations of the child's place in family, school, and in everyday community lives. Bolsa Família Program defines its beneficiaries, and doing so it produces political

identities. In order to think of children as political agents we need to understand individual-state relations and how public policies, especially the Programa Bolsa Família engender political identities also for children and, how these identities structure their everyday experiences.

Children's accounts about the benefit entail acknowledging the social payment as their right. Within their families, children often negotiate their role as providers, since the attendance at school is the main condition upon family's monthly benefit. They acknowledge the important role they play as well as their parents. At school the Bolsa Família is a diacritic sign. The teachers and school staff often remind the children of their responsibility vis-a-vis attending school, or otherwise their families will lose the benefit. In this sense, to receive the benefit structures the lives of these children in different aspects, including schooling. We conclude by arguing on the child's political agency expressed in the claim of children to the right of access to the benefit's cash.

This essay discusses these processes from data collected during anthropological field research from the point of view of children in the township of Catingueira in the semi arid region of the state of Paraíba, north-eastern Brazil, using as research techniques participant observation, focus groups with children and children's drawings and writings.

#### **Biographical Note**

Dr. Flávia Ferreira Pires - Visiting Researcher, Centre for the Study of Childhood and Youth of the University of Sheffield; lecturer in the Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil

MSc Christiane Rocha Falcão – PhD candidate in Social Anthropology, University of Saint Andrews

### **The Child in the World Studentship Three: ‘Children and Global Citizenship’**

*Lamees Al Mubarak, Queen Mary University London (QMUL) and the V&A Museum of Childhood.*

Notions of ‘global citizenship’ are increasingly important in schools. These ideas connect geography and citizenship to locate children in the contemporary world in terms of their rights and responsibilities in relation to global issues such as sustainable development, social justice, cultural difference, interdependence, conflict and human rights. However, it is through the ongoing interaction between formal education and the spaces of everyday life that children learn about the world, understand their place within it, and develop a sense of ethics towards other people in other places. For children in contemporary London ‘global citizenship’ is as much a matter of negotiating the complex processes of living in a multicultural city made through its complex connections with other places, as it is of work in the classroom.

Directing the research programme towards the present and the future, and working closely with the Learning and Community team at Museum of Childhood this project asks the following questions:

- 1 - What understanding do children in contemporary East London have of the rest of the world? How have they gained this understanding?
- 2 - What are the geographies of children’s rights and responsibilities? How have they developed these ideas?
- 3 - What role do formal institutions such as global governance mechanisms, museums and school curriculums have in children’s practices of citizenship? Which other sources contribute to children’s practices of citizenship and in what way?

### **Biographical Note**

Lamees Al Mubarak is a second year PhD researcher undertaking a collaborative project at QMUL and the V&A Museum of Childhood. Her research is on 'Childhood and Global Citizenship' and she is working with children from two schools in Tower Hamlets, East London, to explore the scales and geographies of their rights and responsibilities. Lamees has a BA in Language and Culture (Spanish) from UCL. During her MSc at Birkbeck, University of London in Children, Youth and International Development, she conducted research with children at a football academy in Ghana on child migration and sport for international development. Before starting her PhD, Lamees worked in national fundraising and international campaigning roles for the welfare charity, Child Poverty Action Group, and the children's NGO, Plan International.

## LUNCHTIME FILM SCREENING

### **'Let's Get the Rhythm', a documentary film (53 minutes running time, split into chapters)**

*Irene Chagall*

LET'S GET THE RHYTHM is a documentary that chronicles girls' handclapping games on inner-city playgrounds, and around the world. An empowering force in the lives of women, this genre accentuates the beauty of the beat. "The body of literature, or orature and body-ature, that girls have created," notes participant Kyra Gaunt, author of *\*The Games Black Girls Play\**, "has not been honored, because it's in the public domain. It's not written down, it's by girls, and it's by children...We don't have an ESPN for girls' handclapping games, but women can claim ownership and authority of these texts created by and for women...In the look in the girls' eyes when they're playing, there's this hunger, this kind of commitment to getting it right, and doing it, and perfecting it. And there's this kind of competitiveness, the same kind of competition you see in the eyes of Olympians. Kind of like THIS IS IMPORTANT\*." *Let's Get the Rhythm\** highlights that intensity. Three eight-year-olds--Heaven Evans, from a household of four generations of African American women in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn; Eve Cook, from Montclair, New Jersey; and Sara Wright from East Harlem--are followed over a three-year period, showing them learning games, reflecting that some of them are "babyish" and eventually outgrowing them, or coming back to them with a more sophisticated perspective. In the process of telling this story, the documentary showcases archival footage of the games from around the world, including aboriginal contexts, ancient Egypt reliefs of girls' handclapping games, and footage shot by folklorists Alan Lomax and Laura Boulton\*. *\*Ellen Dissanayake takes an interdisciplinary approach by applying current theories in neuroscience and developmental psychology. The rhythm of the handclaps becomes the rhythm of the film. The film is edited to the rhythm of the games. As Dionne Kamara, early childhood movement specialist, puts it, "As human beings we have a natural inclination to rhythm and pulse and time and song. From there, you are able to express, when you feel that, feeling that inside, express thoughts and words and songs. And if you notice in all of the hand clapping games, there's a pulse, and a rhythm that you go to, constantly. So there's movement and music, it's all one."* The charm of the children is peppered with the comments of women ranging from Shawna Miller, 16, to Bess Hawes, 88, speaking to the power of the games as an empowering women-centered oral literature. The film is

an appeal to those whose sympathies resonate with the spontaneity of the young girls and their special form of social bonding, to encourage them to continue to engage in these games and sustain this genre for another generation, while adjusting to the challenge of technological changes. "As long as I see young girls still playing these games," Nekhena Evans comments in conclusion, "I know the world will be all right."

### **Biographical Note**

For thirty years Irene Chagall has nurtured the innate musicality of children, through singing, dancing and puppetry, at the San Francisco Community Music Center and many schools and organizations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. From 2006-9, she was appointed as a Research Associate with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage from 2006-09. Currently she is director and co-producer of \*Let's Get the Rhythm\*, a documentary on handclapping games, with City Lore and Public Art Films of New York. In 2005-6 the \*Children's Folklore Review\* published her paper "Let's Get the Rhythm". She is a graduate of University of California, Berkeley, studied classical guitar with Maestro José Tomás in Spain, and derives professional inspiration from the medieval minstrels.