

ZSE

**Zeitschrift für Soziologie
der Erziehung und Sozialisation**

**Journal for Sociology
of Education and Socialization**

■ Schwerpunkt

Editorial: Bildungsbezogener Rechtspopulismus/-extremismus

Vereinnahmungen von Kindern und Kindheiten

Kind-Bilder in rechtspopulistischen und/oder wissenschaftsfeindlichen Narrativen im Kontext der Covid-19-Pandemie

Wissenschaftsbezogener Rechtspopulismus/-extremismus an Hochschulen – eine Feldexploration und Herausforderungen in der Lehre

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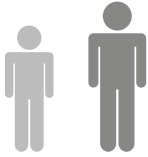
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Tagungsbericht

Living Apart Together: Growing Up in Transnational Families

Report on the “Living Apart Together: Growing Up in Transnational Families” Conference from April 27 to April 29, 2023 at the Unperfekthaus Essen, Germany

There are roughly 280 million international migrants worldwide. As a result, an increasing number of people are part of a *transnational family* – where family members live in two or more different countries. To explore the conditions faced by transnational families, *Jessica Schwitek* and *Alexandra König* (Duisburg-Essen) convened the three-day conference, *Living Apart Together: Growing Up in Transnational Families*. This conference is part of the DoDzi project and was sponsored by the German Research Foundation (abbreviation in German: DFG). The 13 conference papers featured case studies of transnationally mobile families in Brazil, Cyprus, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Moldova, Morocco, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Somalia, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and the USA. In addition, the conference included two keynote addresses. A link to the project’s homepage – where you can access more information, including the two keynote presentations – is provided at the end of this conference report.

Doris Bühler-Niederberger (Wuppertal) and *Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik* (Warsaw) delivered the keynote addresses. Through their presentations they argued that outmoded notions of what makes a good childhood circumscribe our understanding of transnational families. Rather than remaining beholden to these antiquated ideas, they invite scholars to move beyond

normative understandings to uncover the realities and heterogeneities of life for transnationally mobile families. Both keynotes provide insight into the challenges facing contemporary understandings of how transnational mobility affects family life, raise incisive questions, and provide a road map for researchers interested in investigating phenomena related to international migration, families, and the experiences of children and youth.

In her keynote presentation on the first day of the conference, *Bühler-Niederberger* argued that contemporary middle-class parenting practices have their roots in the childhoods of the 18th and 19th century European bourgeoisie. Unlike the nobility, who inherited their status from birth, the bourgeoisie earned their status through education. As a result, the bourgeoisie’s educational path tended to be long and characterized by close parental supervision, structure, and expert guidance. The goal of this type of childhood was to cultivate an elite – as determined by their competence – capable of attaining the relatively scarce, highly coveted positions in society. Echoes of these notions of a good childhood are evidenced in contemporary intensive parenting practices that have become normalized among middle-class families within Europe and around the world (e.g., Atterberry, 2022). According to *Rembowska-Pluciennik*, these normative ideas about childhood based on historic understandings of middle-class, European family life are also present within Polish young adult literature. A segment of young adult literature on transnational families promulgates the idea that a good childhood includes a residential, immobile nuclear family that provides direct care for their children and is detached from global processes and changes. These traditional notions of childhood and family life are conveyed through how young adult novels depict migrant parents. As told through the perspective of a child, these novels portray

migrant parents' efforts to care for their children from afar as chaotic, unsuccessful, and ineffective. The absence of mothers is depicted as especially destructive for the child's wellbeing.

An even more troubling aspect of *Rembowska-Pluciennik's* findings concerns how far removed these fictional stories are from the realities of migrants' lives, which, for instance, is symbolized in the hard work that goes into learning about a country of destination, preparing for the migration experience, and planning for reunification. As a result, she argues, these novels ultimately provide a one-dimensional image of transnational family life as inherently problematic and, thus, reinforce conservative discourses about migration.

While her analysis speaks to the problems within fictional portrayals of transnational families, *Rembowska-Pluciennik* remains optimistic that literature geared towards children can move beyond sensationalistic tropes and, instead, prepare young readers for the global and local changes that they will likely encounter as adults. Her optimism stems from writers such as Astrid Lindgren who, through the character of Pippi Longstocking, invites readers to imagine a model of a child that is not a victim of their circumstances but rather an agent capable of fighting for their own rights and their ability to be themselves. Through the work of writers such as Lindgren, *Rembowska-Pluciennik* believes fiction can provide children with the chance to grapple with the challenges and opportunities of contemporary life.

Meanwhile, *Bühler-Niederberger* suggests that the path to casting off the shackles of 18th and 19th century notions of a good childhood and family life will require more research. Through conducting additional studies on transnational families and, specifically, how children experience being part of these families, social scientists can uncover the heterogeneities of what it means to have a good childhood and family life. Some of the questions that may guide this research include the following: What makes a good childhood? How may transnational mobility affect our understanding of what makes a good childhood? What is the relationship between a good childhood and children's wellbeing? How may chil-

dren's wellbeing be affected by migrating parents? According to *Bühler-Niederberger*, in addressing these questions, scholars must be attentive to the emotional and social costs that children in transnationally mobile families experience. They should avoid evaluating childhood based on the norms of any particular social group. And, perhaps most importantly, scholars should be sure to include children's perspectives and voices in their research.

In many ways, the work of the 22 scholars whose papers were included in the conference are a demonstration of *Bühler-Niederberger's* suggestion in action. In their own unique way, each paper addressed the question: What does it mean to be part of a transnational family in contemporary times? Through their papers, the presenters addressed a range of topics. The presenters discussed matters related to the experiences of children and youth in transnationally mobile families, intergenerational relationships, parenting across borders, and how gender, social class, and citizenship status affect how migrants experience transnational mobility. Their presentations focused on issues such as the lives of left-behind children in the Philippines (*Elizer Jay de los Reyes*) and in Brazil (*Diane Portuguesis*), parenting practices in Somali transnational families (*Jiayin Li-Gottwald, Manuela Westphal, and Franziska Korn*), and among return migrants in India (*Adrienne Lee Atterberry*). The various functions of financial remittances and other support strategies to promote intergenerational solidarity were discussed for families in Morocco (*Abdallah Zouhairi*) and in Turkish-Polish transnational spaces (*Anzhela Popyk*). Meanwhile, two papers delved into how the Russian invasion of Ukraine affects women's roles in their families and how their perspectives of staying or returning evolve over time (*Maria Leybensov and Claire Maxwell; Larissa Kokonowskyj*). Several papers foregrounded children and young people's perspectives on transnational mobility, for example regarding circulation of care or "care triangles" as *Charlotte Melander* and her co-authors termed it (see also Melander et al., 2020), or on family reunification in the country of destination (*Pataya Ruenkaew*). *Fränze Seidel's* paper revealed how children in Moldova deal with

the stigmatization of being “left behind” and *Viorela Ducu* discussed how Moldovan and Ukrainian children actively shape transnational family relationships, communication practices and care arrangements.

Considering the rejection of bourgeois family norms discussed as part of the two keynote addresses, the 13 presentations examined how transnational families encounter these normative expectations and explored the potential insights their experiences could offer in redefining the conventional family model. By doing so, the conference revealed three important, overlooked aspects of transnational family life. First, the presentations highlighted the work that goes into maintaining a family across borders, the social determinants of the outcomes of migration, and how families use transnational migration as a tool to secure their upward social mobility. In doing so, the conference moved beyond normative notions of family life to unveil the diverse and dynamic ways families use transnational mobility to pragmatically respond to pressing concerns. Second, the presentations demonstrated that a comparative analysis of the different forms of transnational family life is extremely difficult because the conditions that lead to the formation of a transnational family vary greatly. Consequently, the variation that exists in transnational family formation also affects how we understand what it means to have a good childhood. Nevertheless, engaging an international perspective on both topics is extremely important, as it allows us to understand family and childhood as social constructions, recognize their variability, and grasp the precarity of transnational family life. Third, the conference highlighted the urgent need to study the perspectives of the children in transnational families. In transnational families, children typically occupy the most vulnerable positions, while also making relevant and consequential contributions to family life. Therefore, learning more about their perspective will provide important insights into the reality of transnational families.

The keynote addresses and paper presentations featured in the three-day conference, discussed the conditions that produce transnational families, and how families experience transnational mobility. The content

of all the presentations would be useful to those with an interest in international migration, family studies, and children and youth. Given their geographic diversity, these presentations would also benefit those with an area studies interest in South and Southeast Asia, Europe, South America, and North Africa.

Conference website: https://www.uni-due.de/biwi/koenig/dodzi/international_workshop.php

Adrienne Lee Atterberry, Union College

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Relational Perspectives of the Life Course

Report on the 3rd International and Transdisciplinary Doing transitions conference “Relational Perspectives of the Life Course” from May 10 to May 12, 2023 at Goethe University Frankfurt

“Relational Perspectives of the Life Course” conference opened a joint space to discuss reflexive and relational transition research. The conference was organized by the *Doing transitions* research and training program (funded by the German Research Foundation, abbreviated DFG in German) for young researchers implemented in collaboration with Goethe University Frankfurt and University of Tübingen. The program is coordinated by Professors Andreas Walther and Barbara Stauber. The *Doing transitions* program consists of three cohorts of young researchers. The present third conference served as a platform for presenting the