The summer of 2018 has provided us with a special encounter with the volume ‘Translocal Childhoods and Family Mobility in East and North Europe,’ coordinated by Assmuth et al., published by Palgrave Macmillan, a part of Springer Nature.

I have followed the book with the joy of a fascinating read offered by ethnographic research; with the enthusiasm for a topic of such importance that has not yet been sufficiently covered, that of children growing up under the impact of mobility between their families’ country of origin and the one they live in, as well as with the curiosity awakened by the new perspectives the authoresses chose in analysing the experiences of these children - such as the role of social and material infrastructure; the active role of these children in their own personal existence and development, the authors highlighting children’s agency therein, as well as other focal points through which childhood is presented as an embodiment process: materiality; name; food etc.

For researchers interested in the topic of children under the impact of migration, the book offers reflections on the issue beyond the classical paradigm of care towards these children - the one that most research is focused on.

The contributing authors- Laura Assmuth (University of Eastern Finland), Marta Balode (independent researcher, Riga), Agnese Bankovska (University of Helsinki), Anca Enache (University of Helsinki), Marina Hakkarainen (European University at St. Petersburg), Aija Lulle (Loughborough University), Airi Markkanen (independent researcher, Helsinki) and Pihla Maria Siim (University of Tartu) present in the book at hand their results mainly based on four research projects, unfolded/unfolding during 2012-2019, which reflected on mobility among various origin and destination countries: ‘from Estonia and Latvia to Finland; from Latvia to the UK; from Russia to Finland, and cyclical mobility by the Roma between Romania and Finland’ (p.14).
Through selecting these multiple directions of mobility, the authors offer us the opportunity to encounter, within a single read, a variety in geographical positioning, such as Finland as a destination country for migrants from different countries, and Latvia as a country of origin for migrants in various countries.

Through expounding the researchers’ own personal experiences with fieldwork, the text becomes more emotionally laden and carries a warmth that few academic works do.

The book is structured into five parts, part I constituting an introductory chapter signed by the editors, and part V, a concluding chapter signed by the majority of the chapters’ authors. The unusually close collaboration among the researchers whose results the book presents can be clearly felt throughout the entire book. The remaining three parts are centred around three key concepts of the book: Embodiment (Part II: chapters 2, 3, 4), Infrastructure (Part III: chapters 5, 6, 7) and Agency (Part IV: chapters 8, 9, 10).

In what follows, I will briefly highlight several interesting features from each chapter in order to stir up even more the interest of potential readers in this book.

The introductory chapter 1: “Children in Translocal Families” by Assmuth, Hakkarainen, Lulle and Siim draws attention to a new tendency in recent research on families and migration, namely, that of using the term of “translocal” instead of “transnational”: “a translocal approach does not oppose internal and international migration/mobility and analyses everyday practices as experienced and narrated by both mobile and immobile family members” (p. 7). Translocality tries to avoid the trap that transnationality fell into, especially in transnational family research, being extensively used to grasp only the relations between nuclear family members departed from one specific country to another, and those at home, hence slipping into a methodological nationalism and seemingly forgetting the classical definitions of transnational families that did include members in a number of countries.

Chapter 2: “And so the Journey Begins: An Embodied Approach to Children’s Translocal Materialities” (Bankovska and Siim) presents an important aspect from the life of children in these mobile families: the summer holiday trips the children make to the countries of origin of these mobile families. The authors capture all the ritual surrounding these journeys, from the long voyage by car, ship or plane, the play of the changing landscape, up to the different taste of food, associated by the children with their being in one country or another.
Chapter 3: “Doing Translocal Families through Children’s Names” (Balode and Lulle) deals with a topic that is entirely novel within the study of family practices under the impact of migration, namely, the name-giving toward children born ‘abroad’. The topic is often used in the analysis of mixed/bi-national families in the national context or associated with migration, the choice of children’s names being an essential element in displaying or masking the difference in identity in the case of these families. Indeed, as the authors show in the case of ethnically homogeneous families as well, the practices of name giving for children become a challenge when these children are born and raised in the context of their families’ international mobility.

Chapter 4: “Sensitive Ethnography: A Researcher’s Journey with Translocal Roma Families” (Markkanen) tells us “a Roma family story” in Finland and back home in Romania using novel research tools, such as participative ethnography engaged in by the researcher and art as a mediator between researchers and children sharing no common language.

Chapter 5: “Summer Spaces: Infrastructures, People and Animals in the Baltic Summers” (Lulle and Siim) brings us again into the context of summer vacations of these families’ children. In this chapter, beside the importance of materialities, the authors highlight the role played by social infrastructure within these vacations, emphasizing the idea of “people as infrastructure” (p. 125), such as “summer friends” and extended family as they appear in the summer experiences of these children. Here she reminds us that domestic animals also play an important role in these experiences, as well as that we often encounter situations of “multidirectional summer spaces”, the children of these families spending their summer vacations not only in different geographical areas in the countries of origin (where different family members live), but even in different countries where the members of the extended family live.

Chapter 6: “Experiencing Inequality: Children Shaping Their Economic Worlds in a Translocal Context” (Hakkarainen) pictures the special impact that moving into a new, superior economic space as compared to the one they come from, has upon the children. They often feel the new world to be “festival-like”, but they also feel the pressure of economic integration into that society and that of not being left out in what concerns consumption practices (e.g. food consumed; celebrating Christmas together at the same time with others - even for families coming from Russia) and the desire to achieve material success in life.
Chapter 7: “School as Institution and as Symbol in Estonian Migrant Families’ Lives in Finland” (Assmuth and Siim) presents an interesting comparison between the perception of the Finnish and Estonian educational systems by the Estonian mothers-children dyad in Finland. The competitive and high-performance educational system becomes a symbol of Estonian pride for these families, when compared with the more relaxed Finnish school system. Nonetheless, many families admit the advantages of the latter, and extend their stay in Finland in order to allow the children to finish school, since they would not be able to adapt to the former, more competitive system anymore.

Chapter 8: “Children’s Agency in Translocal Roma Families” (Enache) shows us, through multiple research methods, how Roma children participate in translocal family practices in Finland and Romania. Here, we can also discover aspects less known by the larger audience, such as the central role of girls in raising younger brothers, and the fact that when they go to Finland, Roma families tend to leave younger children at home, due to fear of social assistance services.

Chapter 9: “‘Becoming Better’ Through Education: Russian-Speaking Youngsters Narrate Their Childhood Agency in Finland” (Hakkarainen) brings us once again a comparison between two educational systems: the Finnish and the Russian, but now as seen through the memories of young adults concerning the way they were detached from the Russian educational system and managed to integrate into the Finnish. In the article, the authors show that the educational system is a point of interaction among mobile families, cultures and states, and that children caught in the process of mobility project their futures depending on the impact that moving among these systems has upon them.

Chapter 10: “Age Matters: Encountering the Dynamism of a Child’s Agency from Cradle to Emerging Adulthood” (Lulle) presents, through examples from various age groups, how the temporality of growth along childhood influences the way the experience of mobility is perceived.

The conclusive Chapter 11: “The Journey Continues” (Assmuth, Enache, Hakkarainen, Lulle, Markkanen and Siim) shows how the authors of the book, even though granting the perspective of children an important role, orient their research to respond to the expectation of de-centric children’s perspective and present how “the broader realms of materiality; the natural world, animals and infrastructures matter in children’s lives across borders” (p. 261).
Translocal Childhoods and Family Mobility in East and North Europe includes many innovative analyses, with most interesting results - ranging from the details of participants’ experiences to important conceptual developments - that place it among the inevitable reads for researchers wishing to develop their studies on mobility, childhood and families.

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