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**“New Migration” and New Forms of
Integration: Families in Geographical
Itinerancy**

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New forms of mobility concern not only adult, but also children. It is especially the case in families in “geographic itinerancy”– in which the professional expertise of at least one adult demands frequent relocation. Formerly a minority, these families are likely to become more numerous in Switzerland, where policies encourage highly skilled migration. Who are they, what is their experience, how do they adjust, and how does their environments adapt? Studying this extreme case of migration, the project tackles the social and cultural psychological aspects of mobility.

Research Questions

This project aims to document a reality, which is often overlooked in migration studies and psychology of migration: The experience of frequently moving families. On the one hand, the project will give an overview of the situation of such families in Switzerland – a new and more frequent reality linked to the changing migration regime. We will document the lives of these families, their insertions in social networks or institutions in the host country, and the dynamics of integration thereby generated. On the other hand, these families offer an extreme case for studying more general sociocultural phenomena (Märtsin and Mahmoud 2012; Zittoun et al. 2013): How do people experience repeated relocation at different ages? How are family dynamics affected by them? What resources do people and families use to support these dynamics of mobility?

More specifically, the project will examine four sets of questions.

Mapping Geographical Itinerant Families (Team)

This is the descriptive part of the project. Who are these families, and if possible, how many are they? What are geographical itinerants’ lives about – in Switzerland and

beyond? What are the spheres of experiences and social networks of the family members? What institutions and networks provide them with support at the local level?

Experiences of “Itinerancy” (Déborah Levitan)

The second set of questions examines the sociocultural psychological reality of these families. How do members of these families experience repeated migration? How do they make sense of it, that is, maintain a sense of self continuity and elaborate the emotions raised by these moves? What resources can they use for it (Gyger Gaspoz 2013; Greco Morasso and Zittoun 2014)? How do they adjust to the demands they face? And how are these experiences shared and supported in the family?

Boundaries and Categorization Processes (Flavia Cangia)

The third set of questions adopts a more socio-anthropological perspective to document the possible integration of these families in their host country as well as their transnational belonging (for example Fechter 2014). What boundary work do they and their environment engage in? How are these families perceived, how do they feel as a transnational minority, how does the environment react to them?

Families on the Move (Team)

This fourth set of questions aims at identifying more general family and mobility dynamics through an integration of the three other sets of analysis. How do families integrate the diverse experiences of their members? How does repeated migration change families? How does the reality of these families question the legal and social notions of “integration”?

Methodology

As an interdisciplinary project aiming at analyzing different levels of the psychosocial reality, our project demands a mixed methodology consisting of (online) surveys, desk research, interviews, and observation. Some data sets will primarily concern specific questions. However, as a whole, all will be useful for each set of questions. The population is constituted of members of frequent moving families: Professionals, partners, and children of either gender. The families are either nuclear, extended or recomposed families with at least one school-age child (6–18).

- 1 An overall NCCR survey will include some specific questions allowing for identifying the number of families and their location at the national level (in preparation).
- 2 A more qualitatively-oriented online questionnaire aims at describing the origin, networks and experiences of international mobility and relocation in Switzerland of these families in geographical itinerancy.
- 3 In addition, we will conduct in-depth interviews with family members at two occasions in contrasting regions in Switzerland; contrasting as regards the numbers of international families (for example Geneva vs. Neuchâtel). Ideally we would conduct interviews with two members of a given family for a total of 30 families.
- 4 Besides, we will observe daily interactions within and around families and their sociocultural environment (networks, associations), supported by various on-the-move technologies (diaries, hand cameras), in the same contrasting regions in Switzerland.

Preliminary Findings

New modalities of geographical itinerancy

To identify families in geographical itinerancy, the team approached organizations and networks offering support to these families. This allowed to interview experts and to do first exploratory interviews with family members. Furthermore, an online questionnaire was diffused through these networks so as to access families in Switzerland. Preliminary results concern the new face of these families (compared to what was so far documented in the literature), and specific challenges the families are facing. In the past, families were often following a male professional. Nowadays, there is a growing proportion of women professionals traveling with their families, which challenges family dynamics and local integration. Second, it seems that in the past, these families lived in Switzerland with

higher financial capacity than the average population and often benefited from support in settling in. These privileges seem to have been reduced due to the increased number of these families and the strength of the Swiss franc. As a consequence, a new body of relocation specialists is emerging (Levitan, Zittoun and Cangia, in prep.). In addition, this may have implications in terms of housing (not so privileged urban area anymore) and schooling (public vs private schools). Third, preliminary interviews also suggest that frequent relocation might cause specific distress, which still needs to be documented.

Publications

- Levitan, Déborah, Zittoun, Tania, and Flavia Cangia. “On Relocation – Resources and Experts [tentative title].” In *Cultural Psychology of Intervention in the Globalized World* edited by Pina Marsico, Sanna Schlieve, and Nandita Chaudhary. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Book Series Advances in Cultural Psychology, in preparation.
- Cangia, Flavia, Levitan, Déborah, and Tania Zittoun. *When Expatriation is a Matter of Family: Geographical Itinerants and their Families in Switzerland and Beyond*. Heidelberg and Rotterdam: Springer, IMISCOE Research Series, in preparation.

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- Fechter, Meike. “Living in a Bubble: Expatriates’ Transnational Spaces.” In *Going First Class?: New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement* edited by Vered Amit. 33–52. New York: Berghahn, 2007.
- Greco Morasso, Sara, and Tania Zittoun. “The Trajectory of Food as a Symbolic Resource for International Migrants.” *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2014): 28–48.
- Gyger Gaspoz, Deniz. *Une jeunesse au souffle de la mobilité internationale répétée* (doctoral thesis). Université de Neuchâtel, 17 April 2013.
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