

A Sociocultural Approach to Mobile Families: A Case Study

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This paper proposes a sociocultural perspective of mobility, of which migration is only one case, with a focus on mobile families. Consistent with mobility studies, sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse proposes to study both the sociocultural conditions of mobility, and the perspective of mobile people. In addition, in this article, we consider interrelated lives in mobility. We discuss the specific case of one family documented as part of a larger research project on repeated geographical mobility, and highlight the specificities of the context, the experiences of each family member, and some of their overlapping spheres of experiences. We thus hope to document the life of such families, but also to provide theoretical directions for the psychological study of mobility.

Public Significance Statement

This study examines the interrelated lives in families who move frequently internationally for professional reasons. It invites to pay a closer attention to the various members' distinct experiences of repeated mobility, and especially children's specific experiences. It also highlights the role of joint, transportable activities that may support a feeling of continuity and "home" for family members "on the move".

Keywords: mobility, sociocultural psychology, family, lifecourse, spheres of experience

As this special issue argues, there is a need to renew psychological approaches to study mobility and migration. This paper does so by proposing a sociocultural lifecourse perspective to mobile families. We highlight the specificities of this approach: First, it attempts to understand both sociocultural dynamics and the perspective of people; second, it examines not only the single person, but also interrelated lives. This double proposition is built around the specific case of a family living in international repeated geographical mobility, namely, a family relocating to another country every few years because of the professional expertise of at least one family member. We therefore build our argument in order to account for repeated mobility with family, and then highlight the possible contribution of a psychology of migration and mobility.

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First, we briefly highlight the terms in which repeated mobility has been addressed in migration and mobility literature, before turning to the relatively limited psychological literature on the topic. Afterward, we draw on a sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse to explore family mobility, and propose to study sociogenetic, ontogenetic, and microgenetic dynamics. We then focus on one case study, that of the international Ulrich-Mann family living temporarily in a Swiss village. We finally highlight the contributions of this paper.

Repeated Geographical Mobility

A general paradigm change in social sciences consists in addressing mobility at large, so that what is traditionally considered

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as migration becomes just one form of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). A specific case of mobility is that of “repeated geographical mobility,” designating persons, families, or groups regularly or repeatedly relocating their housing and often occupational arrangements geographically, usually across countries. Repeated mobility is often seen as a contemporary, elite phenomenon, different from more “traditional” country-to-country migration. However, we argue, repeated mobility does not radically differ from traditional migration; both are cases of mobility. Repeated mobility is an old phenomenon, traditionally associated with nomadic lives, or in the Occident with the lives of religious people, or, since the 19th century, with a certain intelligentsia who could afford to circulate mainly in Europe and North America. With a larger awareness of the lives of forced displaced persons on the one hand, and the globalization of the market with its associated delocalization of workplaces and professional expertise on the other, various forms of repeated mobility have come to the fore in mobility and migration studies.

In the social sciences, repeated mobility has long been addressed as the mobility of the “expats,” through a look at the specific experiences of diplomats or managers and their families. Recently, the literature on mobility has widened its scope by addressing highly skilled migrants, or other persons engaged in repeated migration, alone or in couples. This literature shows that repeated mobility is not a simple and smooth phenomenon, in contrast with unqualified or forced migration; difficulties can affect the main mover but also his or her close relationships (Schaer, Dahinden, & Toader, 2017; van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015). More generally, with the transformation of migration regimes in Europe, of the economy, and of the structure and regulation of the labor market on the one side, and with the recent development of transnational studies and networks analysis on the other side, the clear-cut differences between “cosmopolitan” mobile persons (easy-moving across countries) and “traditional” migrants (moving from a home country to settle in a host country) tends to fade out (Ryan, 2011). More critical approaches in these fields argue for a de-nationalization of the discussion on migration, and de-essentialization in the analysis of people on the move (i.e., beyond categories defined by national or ethnic belonging [Dahinden, 2016]). These critical studies also acknowledge the swiftly evolving and even shifting boundary dynamics by which mobile people or communities are mutually defined. Finally, some scholarship in the social sciences has called for a move from analyses limited to general policies and group movements, to more case-based and person-specific analyses, thus giving a “human face” to mobility (Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2007).

In psychology, little literature is devoted to the question of repeated mobility, especially in the case of families.¹ Classical approaches to migration have usually focused on people aiming at long-term residency in a new country, and mainly addressed issues of acculturation, integration, cultural identity, language acquisition, schooling, or psychosocial distress linked to the experience of leaving one home to reconstruct another one. Regarding repeated geographical mobility, some authors have addressed the specific problems of military families (Ender, 2002). Yet most peer reviewed literature on the topic proposes models or factors explaining, often from a psychopathological perspective or in organizational terms, the difficulties of adjustment or copying in the case of individuals or families frequently moving. A limited number of peer-reviewed papers address the case of “third culture kids,”² a term commonly used in management and

intercultural studies literature to designate children of frequently moving families. However, these papers tend to be static and normative—they aim to render people efficient in the globalized market, using standardized tests at times developed for other purposes, and focus on possible outcomes or causes of well-being. They scarcely take into account the social and cultural conditions of these moves, and do not explore the trajectories of people frequently moving, the experience of repeated displacement, or the process through which these moves are handled. Hence, also in psychology, paradoxically, the “human face” of mobility tends to be missing.

Sociocultural approaches have however expanded the enquiry on migration and mobility in interesting directions, by taking into account sociocultural, relational, and psychological dynamics (de Abreu & Hale, 2011; Gillespie, Kadianaki, & O’Sullivan-Lago, 2012; Hale & de Abreu, 2010; Kadianaki, 2014a; Märtsin, 2010; Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012). However, repeated mobility only starts to be addressed by such approaches, which try to account both for sociocultural dynamics and the more subjective experience of mobile families (Adams & Fleer, 2016; Schlieuwe, 2017). This article hence pursues a comparable effort.

Toward a Sociocultural Psychology of Family Mobility

Sociocultural psychology examines the mutual constitution of persons, seen as unique, and their social and cultural environment, in a dynamic understanding (Valsiner, 2013). Together with dialogical or critical approaches in psychology, it opens the possibility of a more comprehensive, dynamic, person-centered, yet socially and culturally aware approach to mobility and especially repeated mobility. To sketch a sociocultural psychology of mobile families, we need first to discuss some general sociocultural principles, such as the interdependence of cultural and personal dynamics, and the primacy of time—that is, change and development (Valsiner, 2014; Zittoun et al., 2013). In order to do so, we will draw on the distinction between sociogenetic, microgenetic, and ontogenetic dynamics—the study of sociohistorical changes, that of interactions and society and people in the making, and that of psychological change at the level of the lifecourse; the three are of course interrelated, but the analytical distinction allows precisely to highlight the interplay between the personal and the societal, enacted in situated interactions and activities (Duveen, 1997/2013; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Valsiner, 2014). More specifically, when studying families on the move, we have to consider, at the sociogenetic level, the evolution of transnational, national, and local regulations, political and economic situations, social representations and ideologies, and so forth, creating the conditions for everyday life (Strasser, Kraler, Bonjour, & Bilger, 2009). Second, in order to account for ontogenetic dynamics, we borrow notions and principles from the psychology of the lifecourse, namely, the notions of “transition” and “spheres of experiences,” and the principle of interrelated lives. Lifecourses are unique unfoldings of life trajectories in their social and cultural world. It has been acknowledged that the study of transitions offers a rich analyzer for the study of the lifecourse (Levy, Ghisletta, Le Goff, Spini, & Widmer, 2005), and these have been largely explored by psycho-

¹ About 200 occurrences in PsycArticles for keywords such as repeated mobility/expats/geographical mobility & family in July 2016.

² Eight occurrences in PsycArticles in July 2016.

sociocultural studies of migration and repeated mobility (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013; Kadianaki, 2014b; Morasso & Zittoun, 2014). The notion of “sphere of experience” designates situations, partly socially given, yet phenomenologically experienced, that feel relatively “the same” for a given person. A “sphere of experience” includes certain ways of doing, routines, aspects of identity, emotional qualities, and personal sense and orientation (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). For a child, spheres of experience include, for instance, family dinners—it might be a relatively stable experience for a child, even though food and kitchen are different—learning mathematics, or playing football with friends. Over a day, people move through spheres of experience, and over time, some spheres disappear and others have to be created—which often implies experience of ruptures and associated transitions, until a new taken-for-granted experience is installed. In addition, we have proposed to distinguish “proximal spheres of experience,” which are supported by the actual, present social and material reality (e.g., playing football with friends), from “distal spheres of experiences,” which are enabled by imagination, that is, are liberated from here-and-now social and material constraints. Hence, the memory of one’s childhood football matches, watching a movie, or imagining how one’s next home will be are examples of distal experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). Transitions thus typically demand the reconfiguration of spheres of experiences: Some proximal experiences will disappear, new ones will be created, and some will become distal experiences, as has been shown in the case of geographical mobility (Zittoun, 2012; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). Finally, the principle of interrelated lives is one of the axioms of lifecourse studies (Elder & Giele, 2009), and it claims that people living in a close relationship mutually enable and constrain each other’s lifecourse—per extension, people with kinship or family ties.³ Adopting comparable principles, sociocultural studies of mobility suggest that mobile people, including those moving with their families, have to establish a sense of “home” on the move, however challenging it may be (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012), as well a sense of self-continuity (Märtsin, 2010; O’Sullivan-Lago & de Abreu, 2010). In order to do so, people engaged in repeated mobility develop a mobile “know-how,” or a reflexive stance over repeated transitions: People develop moving routines, are aware of the objects to take first with them, learn how to cultivate friends both abroad and in a new temporary home, use various symbolic resources (including food) to facilitate their move, find support in relocation agencies, or learn to maintain transnational bonds (Adams & Fler, 2015; Morasso & Zittoun, 2014; Levitan, Zittoun, & Cangia, in press).

However, the role of interrelated lives has been little addressed when it comes to the relationships between parents and their children on the move. In her study on repeated mobility of adolescents in “geographic itinerancy” (whose parents work in consulates or international companies), Deniz Gyger Gaspoz (2013) shows that young people use various resources to maintain a sense of continuity, such as objects (taken with, left behind) and places. She also alluded to, but does not explore further, the role of the family moving with and around these adolescents, and only partly sharing these youngsters’ experiences. On their side, Adams and Fler interestingly show how parents actively regulate their small children’s relation to objects when in repeated mobility (Adams & Fler, 2015). But are adults and children’s experiences of the move “the same”? How can we understand the differentiated experiences

of children, for whom a move might be half a life, and those of their parents?

In order to address interrelated lives in families, we propose to expand the reflection on spheres of experiences in a sociocultural lifecourse perspective. Although spheres of experiences are identified from the perspective of each single person, we can say that some may take place in the same social and material setting. In that sense, from a third person’s perspective, these spheres “overlap.” Consequently, different persons’ experiences may affect each other; also, the experience of “sharing” or intimacy might be seen as related to the experience of sharing these spheres of experience. Consequently, the following question can be raised: How are interrelated lives in a family affected by repeated mobility, and how can these support people’s experience of mobility? In what respects can frequently moving family members share a lifestyle or a feeling of home, and in what conditions can they support each other in their spheres of experiences? Hence, we propose to contribute to a sociocultural psychology of mobility by exploring the spheres of experiences of members of families in repeated mobility, their possible overlaps and divergences, the tensions created, and their resolutions.

A Case Study: A Mobile Family in a Swiss Village

To demonstrate and illustrate the relevance of a sociocultural approach to repeated mobility, with a focus on interrelated lives in family, we present the case study of one family, which we call Ulrich-Mann, documented as part of a research project on “Families in Geographic Itinerancy.”⁴ The goal of the research is to describe and to analyze the experiences of families in mobility because of the professional expertise of at least one adult. The target families needed to have a trajectory of repeated mobility, residing in Switzerland for a limited period, and have at least one child of school age. As a consequence, the adults tend to have achieved higher education (which reflect the sociogenetic forces at play—see below).

Methodologically, the project includes three parts: (i) an online questionnaire circulated through various networks and filled by mobile people ($N = 56$); (ii) a large scale survey on mobility in Switzerland ($N = 5973$)⁵; and (iii) interviews with members of families in repeated mobility—at times with only one member, at times with two adults and children (29 families for a total of 42 interviews). For the present analysis we selected a case in which

³ We work here with a consensual definition of family, such as “A family system is a set of people related by blood or intention. That they are ‘related’ means that they are affected by each other—a change in one sets off changes in the others that in turn feedback and affect the member that originally changed” (Pinsof, 1992, p. 436).

⁴ This research was supported by the “nccr—on the move” and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Designed to develop new perspectives on the changing migratory reality in Switzerland, “nccr—on the move” brings together different research projects in an interdisciplinary framework. This article is based on part of our fieldwork research for the project, “*New Migration and New Forms of Integration: Families in Geographical Itinerancy*,” which aims at understanding the experience of frequently moving families living temporarily in Switzerland.

⁵ *Migration-Mobility Survey Report* (2017), internal document. The Migration-Mobility Survey is an initiative of the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) - On the Move.

we were able to interview all members from the nuclear family; the dynamics highlighted, however, are recurrent in the interviews data. The family Ulrich-Mann was contacted through informal networks and met twice at their place by one of us (DL), who conducted a life-narrative and a problem-focused interview with each family member as well as a couple interview, and observed the family house. The first interviews were conducted in July 2016; 7 months later, a second round of interviews took place. The life-narrative and problem-focused interviews were carried out with the aid of visual methods, which included a Google Maps/Earth based series of questions. Parts of interviews were translated from a Latin language into English by one of us. Other parts, where members spoke to each other in English during the interview, were maintained in the original. The original interview was listened many times by one of us, transcribed, and discussed with the team members, and ad hoc sequences were translated. The set of interview transcripts contained approximately 46,440 words. Data was anonymized. The analysis focused on the notions put forward for this article, with, as theoretical background, equivalent analysis in other fieldworks (e.g., Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

First, we have identified the different “spheres of experiences” of each family member. For this, we mapped the activities, places, or experiences that appear as recurrent for one given person. The Google task was very useful for this, as it brought about places, experiences, and activities that were particularly important for people through their mobility. Indeed, people were asked to identify places where they felt “local,” and they often replied in terms of “feeling at home,” highlighting the affective dimension of certain spheres of experience. After that, we singled out every time each participant described an activity or experience in which at least two family members were engaged, as well as when they refer to other members’ experiences or activities. Initially, we also focused in coding how one member of the family supports the other. As a way to discriminate which spheres of experiences were most relevant, we triangulated people’s descriptions with observations we conducted in their home. “Overlapping spheres” have been then identified as activities or experiences in which family members were recurrently jointly engaged. Experiences of “home” have been identified either because they have been identified as an answer to the Google task, or because of their qualities of “togetherness” or comfort. Interpretations have been checked by the triangulations of interviews and team members’ perspectives.

In what follows, we quickly introduce the sociocultural situation of the family, then focus on each member’s spheres of experiences, before showing their possible overlaps; we then synthesize the case study.

Living as an International Mobile Family in a Swiss Village

To be consistent with the approach proposed above, we first need to sketch the sociocultural and politico-legal context within which the Ulrich-Mann family’s mobility takes place. Switzerland has a restrictive migration policy, which however tends to privilege “highly skilled migrants.” Through the “internationalization” of its business environment along with the increase of multinational companies and international organizations, Switzerland has recently come to be viewed as an attractive destination for “expatriation,” in terms of job market, salary and career opportunities, as

well as an appealing place for families, due to the quality of life-standard (e.g., transportation, health care, education; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2013). In addition, standard expatriation packages offered by employers can include salary supplements, as well as expenses for family arrangements (e.g., assistance for accommodation, professional training, children’s education, as well as support in spouses’ job search). Over the last years, however, many companies and organizations have reduced their budget for overseas assignments and therefore relocation support in response to the global economic crisis (Levitan et al., in press).

On a legal level, relatives and partners of EU/EFTA highly skilled migrants temporarily residing in Switzerland for work (stays longer than three months) can enter in Switzerland regardless of their nationality and receive a permit (L short-term or B residence permit, Ci permit for members of foreign representations and family members of intergovernmental organizations). Family members of non-EU/EFTA highly skilled migrants temporarily residing in Switzerland can be granted special permission from local cantonal authorities as part of the family reunification program. Hence, compared to other forms of migration, “highly-skilled” or expert mobility occurs under facilitated legal conditions.

The move to Switzerland confronts mobile families with typical issues: In main urban centers, for example, where the number of “internationals” is larger, housing conditions can be difficult, scarce, and expensive. Some families rather choose to live in smaller localities and villages, for reasons including workplace and childrens’ school location. These, in contrast with mobile families residing in urban centers town, may be confronted by an apparent “closeness” of these villages’ inhabitants (Hercog & Tejada, 2013). Also, in general, the high cost of living in Switzerland and the fact that many companies have stopped offering relocation packages makes highly mobile families, often a financially privileged group in many countries, become economically “average.” This means, for example, that the cost of private international schools cannot always be afforded. Frequently mobile families in Switzerland thus are typically confronted with the experience of having lost some privileges and of feeling boundaries separating them from the local population, and tend to look for networks of people sharing their mobile experience (Levitan et al., in press). The family we study faces a similar situation, living in a village and sending their children to the local public school.

Four Family Members’ Spheres of Experiences

At the time of the interview, the Ulrich-Mann family, composed of Helena, her husband Emilio, and their two sons Eduardo, 13 years old, and Arthur, age 9, live in a small Swiss German-speaking village. Helena was born in Argentina, but grew up as a child in repeated international mobility because of her father’s profession. She first moved age 3 to the U.S., where the family relocated to several states and she spent most of her childhood, before finishing her university studies in Argentina. There, she married Emilio, also an Argentinian citizen. It is only as a married adult, with two children, that she and her own family became mobile again, and moved first to the U.S. and then to Switzerland, because of her husband’s professional expertise. Although she was working in Argentina, she stopped during their U.S. stay. Her first period in Switzerland was difficult; while she speaks Spanish and

English, not speaking German gave her the impression of not being able to manage everyday life and of losing her independency—she had indeed to wait for her husband’s return from work to handle various situations. She was distressed by this experience and went to see a psychologist in Switzerland. She recently took a job in Switzerland in a German-speaking company, arguing that this is also to force her to learn German. She also wished not to move anymore to places that would demand learning a new language. Finally, asked to find on Google Maps where she feels a “local,” Helena replied directly and abruptly, “I am not. I can’t find a place at Google Maps in which I am, that is, my home. ‘Home is where the heart is’ is literal to me.” However, later, she mentions the importance of creating an “at home” feeling by cooking a nice meal anywhere she moves in, having her pans ready for it.

Unlike Helena, Emilio grew up as a sedentary child on a farm in a small town on the Argentinian border. There, they spoke some variation of German; later, he did a 3-month internship in Germany. The first time he actually lived abroad was when he was sent to the U.S. by his employer, a South American multinational, with Helena and their children; his job as electrical engineer continues to be relatively the same, and in Switzerland he works all day long. Moving to the U.S. and afterward to Switzerland had, however, what he refers as “the cost of ignorance”—for instance when confronted with the new health or educational system. When asked about the places where he is a “local,” first he chose the university where he studied in Argentina; for him, studies made a huge difference in his life, granting him social mobility and the opportunity to move out of poverty. He also chose his parents’ house in Argentina, followed by the Swiss village where his family lives, the first house where he lived with Helena and the kids in Argentina, and the city where they lived in the U.S.

The children go to a public local school. The parents decided not to send them to an international school, where friendship bonds could be insufficient because of students’ turnover. They wanted their children to have what they consider a proper experience of childhood and a “Swiss experience,” as expressed by Helena: “We want them to learn German, we want, you know, a complete socialization, we want to experience Switzerland”. The children have rapidly picked up the educational system.

According to Helena, the eldest son, Eduardo, has difficulties with the teacher, although he is perceived as “cool” by the other children. Two weeks after their arrival, he was invited to join the local football team. He has many friends among all the foreigners from the neighborhood, mostly from the Balkans, of which some are refugees. The mother thus thinks that this proximity to foreigners can be recognized through his accent: “The way he speaks German is Albanese. . . . His accent is Albanian.” Asked directly to locate five places where he feels a local using Google Maps, he responded: the village where the family currently lives, the Pepsi Cola factory in the U.S.; the Cailler chocolate factory in Switzerland; his grandmothers’ house in Argentina; and his friends’ houses in their street in Switzerland. Regarding the Pepsi Cola and the chocolate factories, the mother comments how much soda they used to drink and, and that chocolate is important in their family (she served a home-made chocolate cake to the interviewer). Asked about where he feels more at home, he replied the same town where his grandmothers’ house is, and asked why, he explained by bringing the temporal dimension: “Mhm I was there for the first five, basically first five years of my life . . . and my uncle

and my grandma were there as well.” It is important to note that Eduardo’s distal relevant spheres of experience are not shared by his mother; when she understood that he had mentioned the Pepsi factory during the interview, the mother laughed: “Strange is saying that you like the Pepsi factory as a place that you call home!”

The youngest son started his life “on the move” age 1 year when the family moved to the U.S., the reason for which he mastered English and German better than Spanish. He does not consider his school the most suitable for him, as he sometimes feels the victim of bullying. He plays football on the school team and recently started playing drums. He mentions that he also learned guitar because of his dad. When asked to locate five places where he feels a local on Google Earth, he replied in the following order: his grandparents’ city in Argentina, where his uncle also lives; his room in their house in Switzerland—he says he feels at home there because he sleeps a lot; the other grandparents’ house in the countryside of Argentina, where he plays with the dogs; “mommy’s father” house also in Argentina; and finally, the city in Argentina where his brother’s friend lives. He explains that he feels home and a local where his family is, and that he is considering moving back to Argentina when he is older: “Because when I’m older and my mom and dad are probably going to live in Argentina so it’s easier to visit. If I lived, like, in Russia it would be very hard to visit.”

At first view, then, these four family members seem to have quite different experiences of the move. Emilio’s professional and domestic proximal spheres of experience seem relatively stable across moves, while Helena experienced a radical disruption of daily spheres of experiences when moving to Switzerland. The children build their own daily proximal spheres of experiences at school and in leisure and at their friends’ places, and the personal sense of their distal experiences (e.g., the chocolate factory) is not always understood by their parents. With regards to the more subjective “feeling at home,” the children and Emilio associate this feeling to their house in the Swiss village, their most proximal spheres of experience, while Helena’s “home” seems transportable around her kitchen, now circumscribed in their Swiss house. Emilio and the children seem to share an experience of “home” in the distal experience of the grand-parents’ house in South-America—a typical “anchor” place for mobile children (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013). Given their relative different experiences of mobility—as a life-trajectory or as a recent experience, where the larger portions of lives are, proportionally, lived in different countries—what do these family members then share on the move?

The Family’s Overlapping Spheres of Experiences

To better understand interrelated lives in repeated mobility, we propose next to examine the overlapping spheres of experiences of the Ulrich-Mann’s family. Based on the family members’ discourses and practices, we try to retrace their daily spheres of experiences at a microgenetic level, and their possible overlaps.

On a daily basis, Helena and her children speak in English with each other; this creates for each of them an English-speaking home sphere of experience distinct from other ones taking place in their German-speaking environment, and these overlap in that sense. Then, although school is the place that children attend, Helena tries

to take part in their spheres of experience. It took her some time to understand the educational system, yet she seems quite involved:

I am part of the “parents and teachers” at their school, which is comic, since I do not understand anything they say. Swiss German. I occupy a chair at the “parents and teachers,” literally.

She went to meet the teacher of her older son, and confronted the children that bullied the youngest. She also monitors which friends of Eduardo can and cannot come to their house: “I cannot say to them ‘no, do not be friends with this boy.’ But I can tell him ‘this boy doesn’t step in our house anymore, because he has beaten your youngest brother.’”

For the children, spheres of experience did change a lot over time, and Eduardo’s feeling at home, for example, relates to three different countries. As mentioned, their grandmothers’ house seems to be a relevant distal experience. Similarly, the memory of the Pepsi Cola factory, evoked for its emotional quality, seems to summarize or designate the whole experience of living in a country, a distal experience significant for Eduardo but not for his mother. The proximal spheres of experiences for both brothers include the school and the football team. For Eduardo, it also includes his local friends, whereas for Arthur these are centered in the family. It is interesting to note that Eduardo chose to join other children with a migratory background, which suggested that the community creates a boundary between “Swiss” and foreign children, rather than a nationality, class, or religion based boundary.

For the two adults, the first period in Switzerland was difficult; they helped each other much in the shared experience of intimacy. Although Helena is an experienced mobile person, she felt a rupture that affected many of her spheres of experience, partly because of the language, spoken in the neighborhood, shops, doctors, school, and work. Emilio could use his professional linguistic skills to help Helena in these daily spheres of experiences where German was needed. Hence, for this relocation, Emilio needs to be engaged in daily life to support his wife, whereas previously in the United States it is Helena who played a major role in supporting daily life, as it was his first experience of mobility and he had more difficulties.

Another event brought the family members to look for each other, a few years after their arrival in Switzerland. Helena had a health problem; a diagnostic mistake forced her to stay one month at the hospital. During this period, Emilio had to reduce his engagement in his professional sphere of experience to share more time with his wife at the hospital and with the children—playing football with them, giving them support—an experience that he describes as emotionally intense and demanding. Two members of Helena’s close family also came from Argentina to Switzerland to help the family at home. Hence, a dramatic event affecting one family member brought a reorganization of the other members’ spheres of experience; the rupture caused by the illness redistributed spheres of experiences and created occasions for more overlapping and possibly shared spheres of experiences.

Such overlapping dynamics even seem to be the resource used by this family to address ruptures, including the very ones created by the repeated mobility. This can be seen in two different ways. First, talking about whole-family overlapping experiences that constitute “home,” Helena mentions food, as well as her husband’s guitar and family games:

Another thing that defines our house is the guitar. Since I was pregnant with the children, my husband has been playing the guitar to them at night for them to sleep. So when my husband is traveling, this is something that they miss, so it is something that sort of defines the structure of the BED for them. There is the guitar, there is the kitchen and another thing we do a lot is . . . family game nights, which is to sit and play, any game, but it is the action of sitting together, without mobile, without tablet, . . . but doing home activities, at home, TOGETHER. I think those things define more or less our home.

D And could you do it everywhere?

H Yes, yeah, because they do not depend upon physical structure necessarily, you know. It is more of a routine, a custom we have than having something. You do not need a table to play games, having a “Uno” is enough. So it is something that is possible to do anywhere, it is something that we do anywhere, including Argentina, we do when we are at my mom’s house, we do. . . .

Second, when asked if she could leave behind some of their belongings when moving, Helena replies,

I could leave all these things behind; I wouldn’t like to, because I like them. . . . No, for us. I think it has strengthened after what happened last year at the hospital, the only thing that is important for us is *us*. . . . We only make decisions that are good for the family UNITY, if it is good for one, but not to the other, it will not happen. . . . What really matters is the family well-being.

Hence, it seems that the capacity of the family to tie its own relationships, by bringing together different members’ spheres of experience, and reinforcing their togetherness around specific experiences—food and music—is precisely the strategy used to fight against the ruptures generated by repeated mobility.

Discussion: Interrelated Lives and Mobility

A family is a system in which people’s lives are mutually dependent. However, in their own trajectories, each person moves daily through a variety of spheres of experience. Some of these are highly personal and refer to various proximal and distal spheres of experiences; some others take place in settings in which they meet other members of the family and interact with them. On the one hand, these experiences differ, first, because of members’ relative ages: One move in a repeated mobility life for a parent is experienced by a child as a half-life rupture. Second, members of the same family have to deal with different daily issues, and approach the same situation with different perspectives—such as the school or the neighborhood children. On the other hand, overlapping spheres of experience create what their members call “family” or “home.” Such overlapping experiences appear in three cases: as a resource in the emergency case of an incident affecting the whole family system (illness), as a stable anchor point in a distal experience (such as the grandparents’ home), or built around simple, emotionally laden transportable matters—food (Morasso & Zittoun, 2014), games, and music.

On the basis of this case study, we can highlight three aspects that deserve further attention in the study of families in repeated mobility: First, the contrast between the expert-working parent and the accompanying spouse needs to be further understood, the accompanying partner usually dealing with more rupturing

spheres of experience in the course of the relocation and settling-in process (e.g., job-quitting, taking care of children's education, and everyday administrative life; Cangia & Levitan, 2015; Ravasi et al., 2013). Second, close attention should be given to children, who experience temporality differently than adults, and who actively build rich networks of proximal and distal spheres of experience, which can present different qualities of home-ness (Adams & Fleer, 2015). Hence, children might be very attached to apparently anecdotic objects or places that become powerful symbolic resources (e.g., a chocolate factory, a toy) with an anchor function (Gyger Gaspoz, 2013); their development might be supported by a clear attention to these.

Third, an emerging core proposition is that the possibility of creating overlapping spheres of experiences might precisely constitute, through emotional and relational support, transportable "homes," enabling to smoothen the difficulties found in mobility as well as to potentially provide a sense of continuity between different places for family members in repeated mobility.

Conclusions

Psychology of migration has long been limited to a discourse on acculturation and integration, and divided between studies of movement and settlement. This discourse cannot be held anymore, in light of the general paradigm shift to mobility studies in the social sciences. In that theoretical context, sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse can bring an original contribution. In this article, we have applied two principles of this approach to the case of families in repeated mobility.

First, a *sociocultural* psychology assumes that the social and cultural environment creates the guiding conditions for people's lives, by constraining and mediating life trajectories, but also by offering people cultural elements that can be used as resources. Here, we have therefore paid a special attention to the sociogenetic condition of people in repeated mobility, including the evolution of migration policies in Switzerland, and specific social, material, and economic living conditions for such families. It is clear that the experiences of members of a "highly-skilled" family differ from these from a family in repeated mobility in a trajectory of political refugees, whose daily experiences may entail compulsory language classes, or interactions with administration in order to obtain residency rights (Zittoun, 2017). Conversely, families such as the one we studied here experience specific dynamics of boundaries making and crossing with the local population, dynamics that appear to be very different if compared to those of families in "expat bubbles" living in an economic condition superior to that of the wider population (e.g., Schlieve, 2017). More generally, one cannot develop a psychology of mobility, that is, an understanding of experiences of moving and their related ruptures, without understanding their causes, their meaning in a given social environment and in various groups, and the sense these have for a specific person.

Second, a sociocultural psychology of the *lifecourse* pays a specific attention to the unfolding of lives, which we have done with the use of concepts of ruptures, transitions, and spheres of experiences, and also to the *interrelated* nature of lives. If the

first aspect has been quite explored, the new proposition here is to consider *overlapping* spheres of experiences. In effect, kinship and families start to be studied in migration and mobility research, among others, through the lens of transnational ties (Dahinden, 2012). Yet the question of overlapping spheres of experience allows highlighting precisely the subjective, experiential, and intersubjective nature of the experience of what remains "family" or "home" when the rest moves (Märtsin & Mahmoud, 2012)—questions at the heart of the psychological enquiry.

What, then, can be generalized from our proposition for the psychology of migration and mobility? Some aspects of our studies—the nature of people's everyday life, their goals and experiences—are specific to the case of families in repeated mobility, with certain facilitated conditions. One has however to bear in mind that current EU policies and the demands of the market might increase the frequency of this type of mobility, yet without their classically associated privileges.

However, beyond the specific case of this subgroup of mobile people, we believe that the two theoretical propositions made here can become more generally relevant for a psychology of mobility.

First, as mentioned, a sociocultural approach invites to consider the social, cultural and political construction of any case of mobility, drawing on studies in broader social sciences. Hence, one cannot simply consider "migrants" in a country, without questioning the modality of mobility and its political status in a given context (e.g., repeated, circular, unique, etc.; acknowledged as refugee, family reunification, illegal, etc.). This invites to consider the sociogenetic conditions in which any specific case of mobility can be apprehended. These afford and shape the experience of mobility, the challenges to self-continuity and family ties, and the daily challenges and the possibilities to draw on significant resources.

Second, a sociocultural psychology of the lifecourse invites to consider, first, the perspective of the person, that is, ontogenesis, but also, and specifically in the case of mobility, the fact that lives are always interrelated. In any form of mobility, people do not move alone: People have family members, friends, and social networks; these can move with them, or not; these can establish transnational networks, support exchanges of goods, provide people with proximal and distal interactions, and thus support or challenge their experiences of mobility—as transnational studies show. Here, in the particular case of mobile families, we have concentrated on the microgenetic dynamics of interrelated lives, which we have proposed to understand as "overlapping spheres of experiences." That notion has been proposed to explore family life, and may of course be used to describe sedentary families, or perhaps even other configurations of interrelated lives. The point here is that the notion allows precisely capturing some daily dynamics of the experience of mobility, which are central for the construction of mobile family life.

As a whole, then, we hope to have not only given a glimpse of the life of families in repeated mobility, but also, by drawing on current debates in the social sciences, to make two propositions for the psychological study of mobility: the need to articulate sociocultural dimensions and the person's perspec-

tive; and a particular care for interrelated lives in the study of mobility.

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