FOCUS TOPIC ARTICLE

Transnational family and educational trajectories

Javier A. Carnicer

Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft Arbeitsgruppe Interkulturelle Erziehungswissenschaft, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Münster, Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of transnational family networks for migration and educational trajectories between Brazil and Germany. The affiliation network and migration chain of a transnational family was reconstructed in order to analyze the influence of bonds and social networks within the extended family. Analysis and comparison of individual educational and migration trajectories provide insights into the support and influence of the transnational family network, as well as into orientations and reasons for migration. In most of the cases analyzed here, educational opportunities were an important element of the motivation to migrate. The discussion of the results illustrates how they could contribute to a concept of transnational education.

From a transnational research perspective, studies on migration focus on border-crossing social practices of migrants and non-mobile persons as important contributions to the “transnationalization of the social world” (Pries, 2008). Social practices in the field of education have seldom featured as a subject of analysis in this research context, although there is evidence that educational choices do influence the migration decisions of families and young people (Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001, p. 584). Moreover, on a more abstract level, it may be assumed that education plays an important role in the consolidation of social structures like transnational social spaces.

Conversely, a transnational research perspective is still new to educational science. Studies in the field of “transnational education” (TNE) have interpreted this term in accordance with the UNESCO definition as “the mobility of education programs and providers between countries” (Knight, 2016; UNESCO, & Council of Europe, 2001). They focus mainly on higher education, with some interest in private international schools. The institutions and offerings in this area can be seen as part of a globalized educational market, primarily accessible to socially and economically privileged groups (Adick, 2005; Hayden, 2011). In recent years international student mobility has begun to be examined through the lens of transnational migration research (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Gargano, 2009; King & Findlay, 2012; King & Raghuram, 2013; Waters & Brooks, 2012). These studies point to the increased importance of transnational educational strategies among the middle-classes, showing that studying
abroad is not necessarily only a privilege of social elites. At the same time, they have shed some light on the specific role that social networks and families play in educational strategies and decisions to study abroad (Bilecen, 2014; Brooks, Fuller, & Waters, 2012, pp. 30–31).

The essential role of social networks, especially family networks, in the “cumulative causation” of migration flows is an older topic in migration research (Massey, 1988, 396). The decision to migrate is usually a family decision, shaped by the resources of the household and by the culture and norms transmitted in the family. Families can be considered as migratory units. They migrate together or send individual members out in preparation for the migration of further relatives. The geographical dispersion of the family leads to transnational kinship networks that serve as channels for information and assistance. The transnational research perspective draws attention to the durability of family networks and their lasting impact in communities on both sides of the migration flows. In the past two decades, several studies have emerged which focus on the ways in which transnational families maintain a household unit and cope with central functions such as caregiving across borders (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Parreñas, 2001). Thus, we know that children (and with them, it may be assumed, educational issues) play an important role in the establishment and lasting maintenance of transnational family arrangements. A considerable amount of research has been conducted on family migration for the purpose of children’s and young people’s education in the context of East Asia. These are families who adopt a transnational family pattern to provide the children with education in an English-speaking country (mostly in the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand) and who are relatively affluent and able to draw on substantial economic and cultural resources (Huang & Yeoh, 2005, 2011; Lee & Koo, 2006; Lee & Johnstone, 2017; Waters, 2006, 2012, 2015; Zhou, 1998). Outside of this geographical area, however, we know little about how educational aspirations and strategies influence families’ and young people’s decisions to migrate, especially in underprivileged contexts, and how this might impact on transnational social spaces (Fürstenau, 2015b).

The research presented here is part of a larger exploratory study on the connections between migration decisions, educational strategies and the organization of transnational families in different social contexts. This paper presents some reflections on the role of transnational family networks in migration and educational strategies between Brazil and Germany. The analysis is based on a reconstruction of the affiliation network and the migration chain of one extended transnational family with members in Brazil, Germany and other countries. After briefly outlining the context and the conceptual framework of the study, I describe the genealogical method used for the data collection. The analysis of the results obtained and the interpretation of qualitative interviews with family members provide insights into the support and influence of the transnational family network, as well as into orientations and reasons for migration. In most of the cases analyzed here, educational opportunities were an important motivation to migrate. The discussion of the results illustrates how they could contribute to a concept of transnational education.

### 1. Education and emigration in Brazil

The migration flows between Brazil and Europe are of particular relevance for our research because of the diversity of the social conditions underlying them. Since the 1980s, poverty and social inequality in Brazilian society have been important reasons for emigration, but labor migration of qualified employees as well as professionals from social elites is also
prevalent (Evans, Tonhati, & Souza, 2013). In 2014, approximately 27 percent of all migrants from Brazil lived in Europe (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2015). However, statistical data are not very reliable due to a considerable amount of undocumented migration. In the case of Germany, at least, Brazilian immigration is highly feminized. Here, 75 percent of the registered Brazilian migrants are women (Hamburgisches Welt Wirtschafts Institut (HWWI), 2008, p. 6). This can be seen as a reflection of the increased demand for labor in the service sector, particularly in care work. Marriage migration of women is also very common in Germany (Büttner & Stichs, 2014; Stelzig, 2005).

We know very little about the influence of education on these migration flows. Some studies, including our own preliminary research, point to the high costs of a quality education in Brazil as a reason to stay in the destination countries (DeBiaggi, 2002; Fürstenau, 2015a). The Brazilian school system is characterized by a paradoxical divide between the public and the private sector. It is very difficult for graduates of public schools to obtain a place in one of the public, tuition-free universities. Graduates of expensive private schools have clear advantages, as they are better prepared to pass the entrance examinations (Pfeiffer, 2015). Policies intended to facilitate access for disadvantaged groups, such as quotas and grants, have contributed to an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at public universities, yet extreme educational inequality prevails. Additionally, in Brazil, as in other countries, educational expansion since the end of the twentieth century has driven privileged groups to new ways of legitimizing social privileges through education. Skills such as fluency in English and other foreign languages, experiences and studies abroad as well as the corresponding certificates constitute a cultural capital that helps to attain or legitimate privileged positions, but which is very difficult to acquire in public schools (Aguíar & Nogueira, 2012; Almeida, 2015). In this way, the internationalization of education contributes to a “redefinition of educational advantage” (van Zanten, Ball, & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015), since access to the global educational market requires resources that only socially privileged families possess.

2. Transnational family and education

The own ongoing research is revealing that educational opportunities and particularly the opportunity to study at a university abroad did indeed influence the migration decisions of many of the Brazilian interviewees in Germany. Most of them attended public schools in Brazil and did not have the economic resources and the cultural capital (e.g. certificates, language skills) required to access university in Germany at the outset. This lack of resources had to be compensated through informal support structures that can be found in social networks.

Family networks deserve special attention here due to their general importance in migration processes. Additionally, education is, to a significant extent, a function of the family. Families can be seen as “constituted by relational ties that aim at welfare and mutual support” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 7) and migration is a way to contribute to this mutual welfare. The geographical dispersion of the family leads to transnational kinship networks that serve as channels for information and support while simultaneously creating a setting in which other family members view migration as a more plausible option. All of this contributes to an institutionalization of migration. To understand these mechanisms, families must be regarded as much wider structures than the typical (from a “Western” perspective) domestic
units of two generations. Further kinship relationships (e.g. distant cousins and uncles) as well as additional generations (e.g. grandparents and grandchildren) should be taken into account in addition to parent–child relationships (cf. Pries, 2010; pp. 35–40). Moreover, the relations that constitute family and kinship can vary according to social, cultural and economic conditions and are not necessarily based on blood, marriage or adoption. They are also the product of shared norms, ideas and beliefs. In this sense, families like ethnicities and nations, are “imagined communities” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 10). Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) speak of “relativizing” as the continuous effort to keep family ties alive and renew the sense of belonging and togetherness (p. 14). Morgan (2011) refers to “family practices” and “doing family”, making clear “that family is something that people “do”” (p. 177) and that has to be created and recreated. Many of these family practices, for example care, education or parenting, have to do with intergenerational support. Family can be seen as an institution that is based on intergenerational solidarity. This solidarity relies not only on shared norms, values and ideas about belonging, but also on reciprocity. Family relations tend to be based on generalized reciprocity (i.e. without expectations of concrete returns), but balanced reciprocity (with a more or less immediate return) is practiced as well. Both forms depend on feelings of obligation and trust and create opportunities as well as constraints for the individual. The term “balanced,” however, should not obscure the asymmetries in status and power that underlie family relations. These rest on gender and economic differences and can lead to relationships of exploitation.

To sum up, considering the influence of transnational family networks on the educational orientations and strategies of socially disadvantaged migrants entails looking not only at the resources that these networks may provide but also at the way in which individuals are involved in reciprocity and solidarity relations and affected by the corresponding power and status asymmetries.

Additionally, transnational educational careers are influenced by migration regimes in a decisive way (e.g. laws and regulations about legal entry and residence conditions) as well as by the educational systems of the countries of origin and destination. Together, migration and education regimes intertwine to determine the possibilities of residence, study and work. The knowledge of these possibilities can be difficult to acquire and migrants often rely on advice to realize their plans. In most cases, this advice is supplied by social networks. Social networks provide information about the available opportunities as well as support to realize them. Both are often based on previous experiences of the participants of the network. In this way, the social network may shape typical trajectories, which in turn can function as an orientation for newcomers. It can be said that the social network institutionalizes certain paths. In the analysis presented in this paper, I draw on this concept of socially institutionalized transnational careers (Fürstenau, 2005, pp. 378, 380) to explore the interplay between social networks, migration regimes and educational institutions.

3. Methods

The study focuses on educational trajectories and the corresponding strategies and orientations of transnational families from different social and economic contexts between Brazil and Europe. The subject of analysis is transnational families and their social networks. Access to the field for ethnographic research (participant observation and interviews) was gained through migrant communities in a city in Germany and in a large Brazilian city. The research
is being conducted in different social fields: The sample includes migrants in search of a “better life” as well as members of transnational social elites. Two different methods are employed to capture the networks of selected transnational families and young people: the genealogical method, which is the focus of this paper, and an ego-centered network analysis (Herz & Olivier, 2012). The data are being collected in various locations, mostly big cities in Germany and Brazil. Particular educational institutions that turn out to be important for the interviewees are included in the data collection through participant observation and interviews with representatives. The data corpus currently consists of 50 in-depth interviews as well as observation protocols, transnational family trees, and ego-centered network maps. The work presented here is based on a particular segment of this data corpus: Eleven qualitative interviews were conducted with nine different members of an extended transnational family network spanning various locations in Germany, Brazil and other countries. In order to understand the role of the family network for the individual trajectories, it was necessary to reconstruct the affiliation network and the migration chain of the extended family. We used the genealogical method to collect the relevant data.

The genealogical method is a way of collecting, representing and analyzing data on kinship relationships. Interviewees are asked to name their relatives and to specify the kinship link (mother, brother, aunt, etc.). Typically, a family tree is sketched during the interview and used as a guide for the conversation (Fischer, 1996).

The initial purpose of employing this method was to identify the relatives that could be of special importance for the interviewee, whether due to their influence on the migration and educational trajectory or because of their current relationship. Given the design of the study as multi-sited research about transnational families, the intention was to systematically reconstruct the family network, with the further aim of establishing who else should be interviewed. The first findings revealed a surprisingly wide family network with a long history of migration within Brazil, Germany and other countries. This raised new questions about the role of kinship relations and the relations of power and reciprocity that underpinned the mutual support within the network, and called for a more intensive use of the method.

The interview procedure shares central aspects with the works of Drotbohm (2010) and de Pina Cabral and Pedroso de Lima (2005). Essentially, it is a combination of the genealogical method and the narrative interview. Initially the interviewees are asked to describe their own migration project and to talk about their educational experiences, strategies and orientations. The goal is not necessarily to reconstruct a complete biography but to record a “narrative.” Educational decisions, strategies and orientations as well as other projects of the interviewee can best be understood in the context of the story that the interviewee produces, because this story is the backdrop against which these orientations and strategies appear personally meaningful for the interviewee (Carnicer, 2017, pp. 61–85). The genealogical method comes into play in the second part of the interview. The interviewee is asked to name relatives, specifying the kinship link as well as other details, and sketch their family tree. For each relative we ask for some essential data (name, occupation, present place of residence) and about “the story” associated with that person, in particular their migration trajectory and their relationship with the interviewee. Ultimately, what emerge from these interviews is not only the trajectories of the individuals, but the story of the family. The interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the interviewees (mostly Portuguese, in some cases German), and transcribed and analyzed in this language.
The initial analysis and interpretation of the data aims at reconstructing the individual trajectories of the interviewees. In the context of this study, the trajectory includes the course of migration, the educational career, and the successive social positionings of the individual, as well as the interconnections between the three. The corresponding strategies and motivations are also reconstructed, followed by a comparison of the resulting individual cases with each other and with the data gathered using the genealogical method. Information about other members of the network that could be derived from the individual reports were also taken into account. The goal of the analysis is to capture not only the individual trajectories and the leading orientations and strategies, but also the structures and networks that made them possible, through social support as well as through shared norms, values, ideas and knowledge.

4. A transnational family network

Figure 1 shows the genealogical family tree of João. It reveals a wide family network that stretches mainly between Germany and different Brazilian cities, with some members in the USA, Australia and other European countries. The black symbols in the Figure represent persons who have migrated. Some of them have already returned to their places of origin or migrated to a new destination. Among those who do not have any experience of migration are the children of migrants who were born and are living in the destination countries (mostly Germany). The network instantiates a well-known pattern of kinship bonds acting as the main channel of migration (Boyd, 1989). According to the interviews, many of the migrants have helped other relatives to migrate. In some cases, these people were previously unknown to them, yet only in a few rare exceptions were non-relatives supported. Almost all of the Brazilian-born family members are originally from a small town in the Brazilian interior and had moved to bigger Brazilian cities at some point. Emigration from Brazil was in all cases preceded by internal migration.

Sandra has to be seen as the pioneer of the network. She had studied Fine Arts in a large Brazilian city and was working as an interpreter when she met her husband, a wealthy entrepreneur from Germany. When they married, in the late 1970s, Sandra moved to Germany. She says that there were no Brazilians in the German city where she lived, and that she began to “bring Brazilians over” so as not to be alone. At the same time, she thought that migration to Germany gave her relatives good opportunities to gain experience and learn new things. Sandra then “brought over” three of her sisters and her younger cousin Paulo. Sandra studied Art at the local university and after seven years – her husband had died some time before – she left Germany. Working as an artist, she now splits her time between the United States and Brazil.

The family constitutes a socioeconomically diverse network, even though the migrants within the network share some common traits. Sandra, who lives a mobile life, sharing her time between two big cities and a small town in Brazil and the USA, can be regarded as an example of a privileged transnational existence. Cynthia, Sofia, Enzo and Marta, who rely on cleaning, catering and care work, represent almost the opposite, more populated, extreme. In between, we find different kinds of entrepreneurs with differing revenues as well as physicians, manual laborers and employees with diverse qualifications. In many cases, migration has helped these people to achieve better living conditions and some kind of upward mobility. Yet socioeconomic differences existed prior to migration. For example, Sandra and Sonia,
Figure 1. Kinship tree of João (incomplete). Black symbols represent persons who have migrated.
as well as some of their sisters, had studied at university in Brazil before they moved to Germany, while others were working in lower skilled jobs. In most cases, however, the qualifications earned in Brazil were of little use in the German labor market and most of the relatives depended, at least temporarily, on lower skilled jobs. This is a circumstance that appears to be well known (and accepted) in the network, as can be heard in Sofia’s statement: “I worked as a cleaning lady, at the beginning, like almost all other Brazilians do.”

A constant throughout the network is the importance of education in the migration process. Educational aspirations within the network are high, regardless of the social background. For most of the interviewees, as well as for most of the trajectories reconstructed through indirect accounts, education in one form or another was the main reason for migration. Five of our nine interviewees reported that they came to Germany with the intention to study at university. Three others did not mention university as a reason to migrate, but attempted to access to a university study during the first four years of their stay in Germany. Overall, five attended a university in Germany; two of them completed their studies successfully and one more was still studying at the time of the interview. Ronaldo, who lived with his mother in Brazil until the age of 16, moved to Germany to live with his father and attend school in Germany because he did not want to attend a public school in Brazil.

5. Education as a reason to migrate

To understand the interconnections between migration and education that were at play in the network analyzed, three different dimensions that emerged from the interpretation of the interviews can be considered.5

(1) Seeking better educational opportunities appears to be the central reason to migrate. Some of the interviewees wanted to improve their qualifications or to complement studies already initiated or completed in Brazil (e.g., Sonia, Enzo). Others went to Germany to study because they did not see any opportunities to access higher education in Brazil.

(2) A further relevant aspect pertains to the way migration and educational strategies are related to family relations.

(3) Finally, since access to higher education in Germany both requires and assists in achieving legal immigration status, we wanted to analyze the interplay between migration and education regimes.

5.1. Educational opportunities

As explained above, access to education in Brazil is very much dependent on economic resources. Many of the interviewees state that it was impossible for them to gain access to university there, whereas Germany provided opportunities – even if not all of them could realize these opportunities. Their migration can be seen as an educational strategy, as a mean to attain the upward educational mobility from which they sensed they were excluded in Brazil. In the cases considered in this paper, this strategy is encouraged by their transnational family network. The network not only offers support structures and information backed by experience, but, perhaps more importantly, the idea itself. The network offers a tangible opportunity that can be taken into consideration when planning one’s educational career.
This became particularly apparent in the younger generations: Enzo (born 1983) says he would have come to Germany two years earlier, but then he got a place at a university in Brazil. The two years of study in Brazil allowed Enzo to enter university in Germany without visiting a Studienkolleg first, which would have required him to pass an entrance examination. Sofia (born 1989) wanted to study in Germany from the outset and did not even apply for university in Brazil. Both Enzo and Sofia developed a transnational orientation through (likely sporadic) contact with their aunts and uncles in Europe.

Educational opportunities also influence “remigration” decisions. For families with children living in Germany, the high cost of quality education in Brazil is a reason to stay, even if they liked to return otherwise. Marta and Irma, both with children of school age in Germany, describe their decision in similar terms: In Brazil, only private schools would approximate the quality of German state schools, and the family would not be able to afford such schools. A similar position is also adopted by Ronaldo (João’s son and Marta’s stepson), who had to leave a private school in Brazil and started attending a German state school at the age of 16. The optimistic evaluation of German schools outlined here can be understood as part of a transnational orientation. It is based on the comparison of educational opportunities in the countries of origin and destination and seems to ignore the inequalities within the German school system.

5.2. Education and family relations

As an extended family, the network analyzed here spans different generations. Figure 1 is somewhat misleading, since age differences can be very large within one generation. Sandra is 25 years older than Irma, but in the genealogical tree they appear in the same generation. These age differences are of some importance. In most cases, migration support is provided from more or less established adults to younger relatives: to younger siblings and younger cousins as well as nieces and nephews and, in some cases, from parents to children. The assistance given within the network can be interpreted as a form of intergenerational support and a way of “doing family.” This intergenerational component is sometimes explicit in the interviews, as when Sandra explains that she acted like a mother to Paulo: “He was very young as he came, but I protected and helped him, a bit like a mother.”

A recurrent pattern in the network is that a younger relative is supported to migrate and, in return, she cares for the children of the family in Germany. Such was the case with Irma and Sonia, who came to care for Paulo’s children, as well as with Cynthia and Sofia, who cared for Irma’s children. Care is in this case related to the cultivation of the heritage language, since speaking to the children in Portuguese and teaching them the language is one of the stated goals of this arrangement. The Brazilian mothers interviewed reported that their children’s Portuguese language skills are a concern in Germany because the children tend to use German in their daily lives and the “heritage language programs” offered by the public schools in Germany are seen as inadequate. This is not only a question of identity: Some of the mothers want their children to be prepared to live and study in Brazil. In this case the heritage language appears to function as a condition for a further transnational career, perhaps not only as a prerequisite for access to educational institutions, but also as the lingua franca that allows to communicate in the transnational family and benefit from the experiences and the support of the social network. (Carnicer, 2016).
Childcare, the cultivation of the heritage language and identity are thus linked to the educational careers of young Brazilian relatives through reciprocal relations. Education and care are central functions of the family and, as part of an intergenerational commitment, they are closely related. Maintaining this intergenerational commitment across borders can be seen as a way of transnationally “doing family.”

The practice of supporting younger relatives from Brazil to study in Germany can be seen as a family tradition. Sofia, whose migration was supported by her aunt, explains:

“So the plan was, my aunt was brought over and then she brought my other aunt over and I should bring someone else over because...uh...my aunt was studying and had no money, so my other aunt brought me over, and when I have money, if someone wants to come – because you never know if someone will want to come – and I have the money, then I would bring my cousin.” (Sofia, 26 years, in Germany for nine years)

Because her aunt was “brought over” by someone (Paulo) and this aunt had in turn helped her to come to Germany, Sofia feels obliged to support a younger cousin to study at a university in Germany. Sofia’s reasoning is based on a generalized reciprocity typical within families: The “return” for the help of her aunt is not offered to the aunt but to some other member of the family.

This reciprocal arrangement was in some cases affected by differences of power and status underlying the family relations. Paulo was in a position to persuade his younger sister, Sonia, and his cousin, Irma, to come to Germany to care for his children. In her interview, Sonia said she already had an air ticket and a family with whom she wanted to stay as an au pair in the USA when Paulo induced her mother to persuade her to fly to Germany instead. Sonia lived with her brother for ten months and cared for his child. Afterwards, she decided she wanted to learn German, so she stayed and later studied Romance languages and literature at university. She returned to Brazil, although not to her place of origin, after 25 years in Germany. Irma arrived in Germany about ten years after Sonia, at the age of 27. She hardly knew her older cousin, Paulo, when he asked her to come to Germany to teach Portuguese to his children. In our interview, Irma admits that it had not really been her wish to emigrate. However, her father had very much wanted for one of his children to be in Europe because, at the time, his brother already had three children there. “Europe”, not necessarily Germany, represents here upward social mobility. According to her account, Irma was very much dependent on her cousin at first, as her stay was unregulated. This likely represents a typical case: Lacking knowledge of the language and implicit norms of the destination country, and especially, as in the case of Irma, lacking a permit to stay and work legally, newcomers are at first in a dependent position.

The role of differences of power and status within the family is a sensitive subject that has yet to be explored. Irma’s and Sonia’s decision to migrate was strongly influenced by their parents; Paulo’s persuasion relied on a mix of age, wealth and gender. What becomes clear is that the decisions to migrate were not individual, but rather family decisions.

5.3. Migration and educational regimes

The comparison of the different trajectories reveals a sequence of migration stages that seems to be typical within the network, particularly among the women. The migration occurs through the support, and sometimes on the initiative, of a relative in Germany, often in a kind of informal au pair agreement. The “host” helps the relative to find language courses
and, at some point, paid work, mostly as a cleaner. An unregulated stay for some time seems to be common, since most of the migrants enter Germany on a three-month tourist visa. After this period, two options are available to them in order to legalize their further residence in Germany: they can either obtain a student residence permit or marry somebody with a German passport or permanent resident status. To obtain a student residence permit they need a financial guarantee, which some manage with the support of relatives who have already been in Germany for a while, whereas others rely on boyfriends or fiancés. For most of the interviewees, marriage was the only way to obtain a permanent residence permit in Germany, even if they were studying.

Legal entry and residence status, as well as the resources and social support offered by the network, shape the trajectories reconstructed in our study. Migration and educational regimes are in this case intertwined: a specific permit is required to study in Germany. Conversely, being admitted to university or vocational training leads to a longer residence permit than would be available otherwise. In some cases, the question as to what was more important from the interviewees’ point of view – the opportunity to study or the possibility of obtaining a residence permit through studying – remained unanswered in the interview texts. But usually, as we have seen, the intention to study in Germany was the main motive for migrating. Only a few, however, reach university level and manage to complete their studies successfully. Their educational careers usually last considerably longer than average, since, in contrast to graduates of international schools, they posses neither the required certificates nor the German language skills necessary to access university in Germany at the outset. Typically, the participants of the study needed a period of two years in Germany to qualify for a Studienkolleg. Their status as workers (mostly as cleaners, domestic servants or care workers) determines their migration and life trajectory more than their status as students.

Central elements of the typical trajectory outlined here were found in other networks, as well as in the trajectories of individuals who could not rely on an extended and long-established network. Educational opportunities are consistently named as the motivation to migrate among the cases analyzed in the study, and au pair stays (outside of the network studied here and formally arranged through an au pair agency) are often the first step in the course of migration. In most cases, care work plays an important role for the further trajectory, either as a way of financing studies or because interviewees choose it as a vocational training path. Educational institutions also play a role in shaping typical trajectories. Most of our interviewees mention a particular Studienkolleg, which presents itself as Brazilian-Portuguese and seems to favor students from Brazil and South America. Administered by the Catholic Church, it is one of two tuition-free Studienkollegs in a large region. The family network described here shares a knowledge of the entrance conditions and the course of study in this Studienkolleg, and this knowledge functions as an orientation for newcomers. The pattern outlined here can be viewed as a socially institutionalized trajectory (Fürstenau, 2005). It is shaped by migration and educational regimes as well as by social structures and institutions, which together determine a social field that channels individual decisions and strategies. In the context analyzed in this study, care work plays a crucial role, and therefore the strategies encountered are mostly gendered strategies. It is to assume that trajectories in more economically privileged settings are far less dependent on familial and informal networks and less constrained by migration regimes. How they are channeled through social conditions remains an open question. It is important to note, however, that the transnational family
network analyzed here offers educational opportunities that would not exist otherwise. In this sense, the network itself constitutes a factor of social inequality (cf. Faist, 2016).

6. Conclusions

Except in socially privileged contexts, migration has seldom been analyzed as an educational strategy. For most of the young migrants considered in this paper, however, migration represented a means of accessing educational opportunities from which they felt they were excluded in their country of origin. The analysis presented here provides some insights into how their trajectories were influenced by the transnational family network. The influence of the extended family on educational decisions and careers is another topic that is rarely considered. When looking at the family, educational research has taken into account typical (middle-European) households consisting of parents and children and has felt no need to develop methods to take broader family structures into account. In this study, the genealogical method has proved to be a promising approach to capturing the network of relationships in which the interviewees are embedded. In this way, individual trajectories can be analyzed in the context of the social network that made them possible, through both social support and shared norms, values, ideas and knowledge. In the present case, the transnational family network represents social capital that helps to enable social and educational mobility. However, this capital is not simply an “asset” that the individual can “invest” based on his or her own decisions. It depends on intergenerational solidarity and reciprocal relations, whose functions are to be seen in the context of family continuity.

Both the work presented in this paper and the ongoing study of transnational educational trajectories between Brazil and Europe aim to help close the gaps between the research on transnational migration and the transnational family on the one hand and transnational education on the other. The analysis and interpretation presented here outline three dimensions of transnational education:

• Educational opportunities are a reason to migrate, and educational inequalities can therefore be viewed as a push factor for migration as well as for a transnationalization of education.
• Family networks like the one analyzed here can be seen as pull factors, as they contribute to the institutionalization of educational trajectories. However, family relations also have a deeper influence on transnational education because they shape educational trajectories.
• Finally, the interplay of migration and educational regimes can be seen as a further factor that channels certain educational strategies related to transnational mobility.

These dimensions cannot claim to cover the full scope of a transnational education concept, but they represent areas of research, which can contribute to understand the role of migrants and social networks in the transnationalization of education.

Notes

1. The title of the study is Transnational education and social positioning between Brazil and Europe. It is being conducted together with Sara Fürstenau (University of Hamburg) and is funded by the German Research Foundation.
2. This is not only due to the generally lower quality of the public schools, especially in the teaching of foreign languages, but also to the prestige and credibility associated with certificates of international schools (like the German Schools Abroad) and of educational institutions in other countries.

3. An important part of the continuous, multi-sited research has been made possible through field trips and cooperation with Joana Bahia (State University of Rio de Janeiro).

4. Names have been changed to protect the participants’ identities.

5. There was one further dimension which we were not able to analyze in this paper: Education can be seen as a means of individual change and self-development (as in the German “Bildung”, see Laros, Fuhr, & Taylor, 2017). The analysis revealed that education in this sense clearly figured among the motives for migration as well as among the criteria by which the interviewees evaluate their own migration. Gaining new experiences, learning new languages and discovering other cultures were often mentioned as reasons for migrating (even if not the most important), not only among the most privileged migrants.

6. The Studienkolleg is a two-semester-long course that prepares and enables foreign students without a recognized high school diploma to study at a university in Germany.

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ORCID

Javier A. Carnicer http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6657-3176

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