Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of a transnational network of care workers between Brazil and Germany

Sara Fürstenau

Ingrid Gogolin
Kai Maaz (Hrsg.)

Migration und Bildungserfolg

Herausforderungen und Potenziale

Zeitschrift für
ZfE Erziehungs-
wissenschaft

SONDERHEFT 34 | 2019

Springer VS

Springer

Springer

ZfE

Check for updates

Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of a transnational network of care workers between Brazil and Germany

Sara Fürstenau

Abstract The theoretical framework of the paper consists of concepts from transnational migration research. With a focus on social practices in the domain of education, the aim is to show how migrants actively take part in the construction of transnational educational spaces. A transnational family network is the point of departure for a multisited ethnographic case study. The case study provides insights into the particular significance of education for female "care workers" from Brazil in Germany. It further shows how informal social protection, especially from social network sources, is important for the educational career paths of transnational migrants from disadvantaged social backgrounds.

Keywords Gender · Transnational education · Transnational migration

Transnationale Migration und Bildung. Eine ethnographische Fallstudie zwischen Brasilien und Deutschland

Zusammenfassung Der theoretische Rahmen des Beitrags besteht aus Konzepten der transnationalen Migrationsforschung. Mit Blick auf soziale Praktiken im Bildungsbereich, soll gezeigt werden, wie Migrantinnen aktiv an der Konstruktion transnationaler Bildungsräume mitwirken. Ein transnationales Familiennetzwerk ist der Ausgangspunkt für eine ethnographische Fallstudie an verschiedenen Orten (multi-sited). Die Fallstudie führt zu Erkenntnissen über die besondere Bedeutung von Bildung im Kontext von Migration aus der Sicht von Pflegearbeiterinnen (care workers) aus Brasilien in Deutschland. Sie zeigt weiterhin, wie wichtig informelle soziale Absicherung, insbesondere in Form von sozialen Netzwerken, für die

Prof. Dr. S. Fürstenau (✉)
Fakultät für Erziehungswissenschaft, Universität Hamburg, Von-Melle-Park 8, 20146 Hamburg, Germany
E-Mail: sara.fuerstenau@uni-hamburg.de

(Aus-)Bildungslaufbahnen von sozial benachteiligten transnationalen Migrantinnen ist.

Schlüsselwörter Gender · Transnationale Bildung · Transnationale Migration

1 Introduction

At the age of 24, Daiane migrated from Brazil to Germany to work as an au pair in a family for a year. After that year, Daiane wanted to stay in Germany and succeeded in training as a geriatric nurse. Today she has secure residential status in Germany working in this profession. Cases like Daiane's have gained attention in migration studies as part of the international feminization of migration due to care work. Daiane comes from an underprivileged Brazilian family; research perceives migration from her social strata as poverty-driven and categorizes it as migration for economic reasons. The aim of this paper is to analyse Daiane's case from a different perspective by focusing on educational orientations and aspirations. The explorative case study of Daiane's network draws attention to a phenomenon which has hardly been investigated so far, i.e., the significance of education for migration decisions among young women from underprivileged social strata. The case study will show that educational aspirations can be a reason to migrate for those who feel excluded from educational opportunities in the place they live. It further shows that to many of them education means more than a simple means for attaining a better income. For most of the young women who belong to Daiane's transnational social network, education is associated with self-development and with expanding options in life. For some of them, their ambition to gain access to higher education leads to the decision to migrate. For underprivileged young women, it is mostly care work that provides the opportunity to migrate, and many of them migrate as part of the global female work force in the care sector. At the same time, though, they may follow educational aspirations in the course of migration. This paper aims to show, through a detailed reconstruction of Daiane's educational and migration trajectory as well as of her transnational social network, the significance of educational orientations for migration decisions in low-income social strata. The thesis of my paper is that young women from disadvantaged social backgrounds actively take part in the construction of transnational educational spaces.

The case study is taken from an ongoing research project—*Transnational education and social positioning between Brazil and Europe*—which investigates connections between migration decisions, educational strategies and transnational family organization. Migration from Brazil has been a significant social phenomenon since the 1980s. According to the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, there were 113,716 Brazilians living in Germany in 2014, but these numbers are not reliable because of undocumented migration. The migration flows from Brazil are characterised by a great diversity of underlying social conditions (Assis 2011, p. 27). Since the 1980s, poverty and social inequality in Brazilian society have been important reasons for migration, but student mobility as well as labour migration of qualified employees and professionals from social elites are also prevalent (Evans et al. 2013). In 2014,

approximately 27% of all migrants from Brazil lived in Europe (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2015), and around 75% of migrants from Brazil living in Europe are women (Evans et al. 2013).

This paper will introduce first the theoretical framework and relevant state of the art (Sect. 2 and 3) and then outline shortly the educational environments in Brazil and Germany, which form the context of the case study (Sect. 4). After setting out my procedure of ethnographic research (Sect. 5), I will present and discuss the case study (Sect. 6 and 7).

2 Transnational education and social inequalities

The concept of transnational education is shaped by very different research perspectives in various disciplines, and there is no consistent definition. UNESCO defined transnational education as "the mobility of education programs and providers between countries" (UNESCO and Council of Europe 2001). This definition, which focuses on transnational education programmes, does not take the educational orientations of migrants in non-formal and informal settings into account. It seems to be in line, however, with the present research status, since most studies on transnational education still focus on student mobility in the context of higher education programmes and there is evidence for the growing importance of education providers on a globalized education market (Bilecen and Van Mol 2017; Adick 2018). The highest number of international students worldwide move from East Asian countries to Anglophone countries (Brooks and Waters 2011, p. 18), and correspondingly the East Asian region is a focus of research on transnational education. Recently not only university students, but also school-aged students and their families who move for educational purposes are investigated (Waters 2015 for an overview). Mothers (and less frequently fathers) of the "middle and upper-middle classes" (Waters 2015, p. 282) migrate with their children, mostly to Anglophone countries, to follow educational trajectories. Their educational orientations are analysed as a strategy for the acquisition of cultural capital (Waters 2015, p. 283 ff). Summarising the research status, Waters (2015) holds that parents of the East Asian "cosmopolitan middle-class" do not only seek "*international* credentials" for their children, but in some cases also the opportunity to learn in a "less stressful, less pressured environment", to acquire English language skills or even "comportment and sense of humour" (Waters 2015, p. 284 f). According to the author, transnational education experience "indicates a degree of privilege and exclusivity" (p. 287) and is apt to open access to the best East Asian universities.

From a sociological perspective, the transnationalisation of education contributes to a "redefinition of educational advantage" (van Zanten et al. 2015). Transnational education seems to foster new social inequalities between those that do and those that do not have access to the transnational education market. Advantages of students from privileged families who command the resources necessary to attend international private schools, to participate in student exchange programmes and to take international university courses are enhanced by the acquisition of social and cultural capital in transnational contexts (Brooks and Waters 2011, p. 10). In scientific

discourse, international mobility is classified as an *educational strategy* in elite and middle-class contexts. In contrast, educational strategies of socially underprivileged migrants have not been studied in any depth as yet. There is a discourse about *international student mobility and transnational education* on the one hand, and there is a discourse about *transnational migration* on the other hand—but both discourses rarely overlap or even refer to each other. The concept of transnational migration was developed in the 1980s to capture the living conditions of underprivileged migrants who became part of the workforce in global capitalism (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Since it was difficult for these migrants to "construct secure cultural, social or economic bases within their new settings", they "would construct a transnational existence" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, p. 9). Their transnational social practices and networks contribute to the development of transnational social spaces (Faist et al. 2013).

Findings from our own research on migration between Brazil and Europe indicate that educational orientations and aspirations may very well be an important reason for migration decisions of underprivileged migrants, especially if related to educational upward mobility (Carnicer 2018, 2019). Education may thus be important to migrants who do not have access to the transnational education market but who rely on other resources, especially on informal support structures, to follow educational aspirations in the course of migration. In order to understand the importance of education for underprivileged migrants, it is beneficial to investigate their orientations, practices and networks. According to Kesper-Biermann (2016), educational spaces *(Bildungsräume)* "are not priori fixed units [...], but they emerge and consolidate themselves by relations, interactions and perceptions" (p. 93). This conception of educational spaces emphasizes the actors' practices and their social networks.

3 A gendered approach to transnational social networks

Migration has always been a phenomenon that concerned both women and men, of course, even though scientific research had a male bias until the end of the 20th century and paid little attention to the experiences of migrant women, classifying them sweepingly as victims or as their husbands' passive appendages (Lutz 2010, p. 1647 f.). In the early 1990s, migration was declared to be "feminised" on a statistical basis, because in worldwide numbers female migrants had outnumbered male migrants (Lutz 2010, p. 1651). In response to this, social sciences developed a gendered approach to migration studies, which called attention to the diversity of gender roles in the course of migrations and in the social contexts of the countries of origin and destination. Gendered labour markets became a research focus, which frequently observed low wages and precarious employment conditions in the case of feminised markets. This applies especially to the domain of domestic and care work, which is often located in private spheres. Across the world, migration by women is increasing; they usually leave their families behind in their country of origin to take on domestic work and care work for children or the elderly in the Global North (Faist 2017, p. 24). Au pairing can be viewed as a specific type of care work: Even though being an au pair relies on the concept of "cultural exchange"

rather than "work", many au pairs carry out the same tasks as domestic and care workers (Cox 2014, p. 1). Findings from our own research indicate that becoming an au pair is a gendered migration strategy: it offers young women from Brazil a way to enter Germany, to learn the language and to look for further opportunities. This is not an individual strategy, but socially mediated among friends and family, and it represents a "socially institutionalized transnational career" (Fürstenau 2004). Based on the results of an earlier study on the school-to-work transition of young transnational migrants between Germany and Portugal, I suggested that "socially institutionalized transnational careers [...] function as an orientation" in transnational migrant networks and inform new migrants about "opportune transitions" between state school systems and national labour markets (Fürstenau 2005, p. 380).

There is consensus within migration studies on the significance of informative and supportive social networks in the course of migration. Transnational social networks enable and facilitate new migration and function as providers of social capital (Faist et al. 2013, p. 27 ff). Members of transnational networks, be they mobile or sedentary, are provided with support. Mutual support may be "heavily gendered" (Faist 2017, p. 26), and therefore a gendered approach to the study of transnational social networks is instructive. Assis (2011) studied migration chains between a Brazilian city and the USA with a focus on gender differences. Scrutinizing social networking in the case of Brazilian domestic workers in the USA, Assis comes to the conclusion that female networks transform the migration project into a "*projeto de autonomia*" (project of autonomy) for many women involved (Assis 2011, p. 304). In feminist discourses in Brazil, the concept of "*sororidade*" (sisterliness) perceives special solidarity among disadvantaged women (Moutinho et al. 2016). With regard to the feminization of migration—which is evident in the case of migration from Brazil to Europe—sisterliness seems to be an important aspect for the construction of transnational social networks.

4 Educational environments in Brazil and Germany

Although social policies in Brazil from 2003 to 2016 (when the PT, *Partido Trabalhista*, was in government) supported the development of a new 'middle class', Brazilian society today is characterized by enormous social inequity. This inequity is reproduced in the education system, which is divided into a public-state and a private sector. Access to high quality education is very much dependent on economic resources. The Brazilian school system is composed of the primary level (*Ensino Fundamental*, Years 1–9) and the secondary level (*Ensino Médio*, Years 10–12). At the *Ensino Fundamental* and *Ensino Médio* levels the quality of the public schools varies greatly across the country. Arboleya et al. (2015, p. 11) apply the term "institutional racism" to the differences between the center and the periphery, because the majority of pupils at the periphery are black children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged families, and their access to higher education is blocked by poor educational provision at school. There is no final exam at the end of Year 12 that qualifies students to go on to further education. Instead, the universities set entrance exams. Access to the public—and best—universities is regulated via

the ENEM (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*). For graduates of ordinary public schools it is very difficult to obtain a place in the public, free-tuition universities. Graduates of expensive private schools[1] have clear advantages, because they are well prepared to pass the entrance examinations. There are fee-paying private universities, for which the entrance exams are less demanding. For some time now, Brazilian state universities have been developing access policies intended to facilitate access for students from disadvantaged families, including quotas and grants for certain groups (Nierotka and Trevisol 2016).

Compared to Brazil, private schools have played a minor role in Germany to date. In our study this difference proved to be highly significant for the orientation of transnational families. Many of them express the opinion that public accountability for equality in education and public funding of good schools and professional training are important reasons to send their children to school in Germany and to organize their families' (re-)migration accordingly (Fürstenau 2015, p. 82 ff.). This attitude is adopted by migrant families who consider themselves excluded from the private school sector in Brazil and commend the high quality of German state schools in comparison with Brazilian state schools. On the other hand, the German school system has gained notoriety for disadvantaging students from migrant families (Fürstenau 2015). So the optimism expressed in many interviews in our study is at odds with what we know about educational inequality within German schools. An issue that plays an important role for our sample is that of access to German universities for Brazilians. Whilst students from Brazilian universities benefit from exchange programs and grants, for others the German *Studienkolleg* offers an opportunity to study in Germany. The *Studienkolleg* is a course of two semesters that prepares foreign students and entitles them to study at a university in Germany. In the overall sample of our study, various young migrants from Brazil passed the entrance exam for the *Studienkolleg*; in average, they needed a period of two years in Germany to prepare for it and to learn the German language (Carnicer 2018, p. 11).

5 Methodological procedure: an ethnographic case study

First access to the field was gained in the year 2013 through a Brazilian migrant association in Germany and several educational institutions. However, the most important starting points for the field research were the interviewees' social networks, on the basis of which we outlined transnational research fields. Following a Multi-Sited-Ethnography approach (Marcus 1995), three field trips to Brazil (2014, 2016 and 2017) allowed us to collect data in both the regions of origin and destination regions of transnational families. We were able to compile a "matched sample" that corresponds to our network approach: "networks of people linked to each other across national boundaries are the unit of analysis" (Mazzucato 2008, p. 72). With the object of conducting research in a variety of social fields, we composed a sample of transnational families from different social strata. The sample includes migrants

---

[1] In the private sector schools vary greatly in respect of prices and quality. In the cities private school can cost up to three minimum wages a month.

in search for a "better life" as well as members of transnational social elites. We are using several qualitative research methods: participative observation, guided and narrative interviews, egocentric network cards and family trees (Carnicer 2018). As of October 2017, we have conducted more than 50 interviews. We note our observations in field journals and protocols, make audio recordings of the interviews and transcribe the whole recording. In the following example, the case of Daiane, I outline how we conduct the field research and define a transnational social network as a unit of analysis.

I first met Daiane in 2015 at a social event organized by a Brazilian migrant association in a German city with a population of around 270,000, which I will call *Grünstadt*. The association is a meeting place for many of the participants in our research project, but Daiane only occasionally takes part in the activities, and after the first time, we met at other private or public places in Grünstadt. Daiane and I get on well, we meet regularly and have many informal conversations. We usually speak Portuguese, but mixtures of German and Portuguese play a large part in our communications. Daiane lives in shared accommodation in Grünstadt with up to seven other people in a small, old house. Left-wing political activists, students and migrants from all over the world meet here.

Daiane grew up in a town in the north east of Brazil, about 30 km from the nearest city, which I will call *Morro do Amendoim*. Daiane's family lives in a large settlement that over the years has developed into an urban district with paved streets, schools, churches and banks. The family lives in No 8 Street, one of the many numbered streets in Brazil that are not to be found on any map and even taxi drivers struggle to find. The residents of such peripheral settlements in the north of Brazil are for the most part black and have only a low income or no regular income at all (Oliveira and Portes 2014; Arboleya et al. 2015). In many families the income is not sufficient to pay for children's daily bus journeys to schools and other educational institutions. Daiane's father built the family's home himself, first from wood and clay, later of brick. Since Daiane has been living in Germany she has been financing the completion of the interior of the house. When I visited the family in August 2017 the house was home to two of Daiane's sisters and their families. Other siblings live nearby and visited to meet me. Daiane almost never talks about her brothers, but speaks constantly of her sisters, with whom she communicates daily from Grünstadt via WhatsApp.

Daiane's close friend Luciana ("like a sister") also lives in the shared house in Grünstadt. Luciana grew up in a *favela* in a metropolis in the south east of Brazil, which I will call *Campo Roxo*. Despite of a distance of more than 2000 km between the two Brazilian cities where Daiane and Luciana come from, they have already visited each other's families. In 2015, Luciana's younger sister Anita needed an operation in Campo Roxo, and Luciana wanted to go to Brazil. However this was not possible. So Daiane went instead, and looked after the convalescent Anita for a week after her operation. Daiane gets on very well with Luciana's mother Angela, whom she now also refers to as "mother".

Data that I collected between 06/2015 and 10/2017 within Daiane's network in Grünstadt, in Morro do Amendoim and in Campo Roxo form the basis for the case study presented in this paper (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 Field research case study at a glance

June 2015	I first meet Daiane at a social event of the Brazilian migrant association in Grünstadt, she gives me her cell phone number
Autumn 2015	I text Daiane, she answers that she is going to be in Brazil for three months
January 2016	I contact Daiane again; we meet for an informal conversation (not recorded)
February–June 2016	Regular meetings and informal conversations with Daiane
May 2016	I visit Daiane's shared house, meet her housemates and her boyfriend
09 Jun 2016	Recorded interview with Daiane
30 Aug 2016	Visit to Daiane's home in Grünstadt
June 2017	Dinner with Daiane in a restaurant in Grünstadt
July 2017	Daiane spends three days with me in Hamburg to plan my research visit to Brazil
28–31 Aug 2017	Visit to Daiane's family in Morro do Amendoim
29 Aug 2017	Visit to small private schools with Daiane's nephews; meetings with *Coordenadoras* (comparable with deputy school directors)
30 Aug 2017	Visit to an *Escola Municipal* with Heloisa, teacher and *confidante* of Daiane's family
31 Aug 2017	Visit to a larger private school with acquaintances of Daiane's family
05–10 Sep 2017	Visit to the family of Luciana (Daiane's closest friend) in Campo Roxo, diverse school visits
08 Oct 2017	Telephone conversation with Daiane about the case study

In preparing an ethnographic case study we aimed to reconstruct the experiences, orientations and interpretive patterns of the actors in a particular field of research and to explain human social behavior as symbolic action: "The underlying purpose of ethnography research [...] is to describe what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process" (Wolcott 1999, p. 68). According to Wolcott, the "two major fieldwork components" are "experiencing and enquiring" (Wolcott 1999, p. 68). Owing to the close involvement of the ethnographer in the research field, processes of data collection and evaluation, observation and interpretation tend to overlap. Geertz's concept of "ethnography" as "thick description" emphasizes the importance of "interpretive activity" (Geertz 1973, p. 314), because "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (ibid.). Hence subjective impressions are not avoided, but reflected on and utilized for the interpretation. Wolcott (1999) underscores "the idea that ethnography is *a* way of seeing" (p. 73), implying that it is not the only way and that different ethnographers may see in different ways—not least because they pose different questions and are familiar with different theoretical concepts. One demand of ethnographic writing is therefore to describe interpreted observations in such a way that the reader can follow the interpretation. A thin description, restricted to observable processes, does not increase our understanding of symbolic actions. Thick description includes thorough contextualization of the social practices described and interpreted in the field of research. This contextualization then helps explain the symbolic meaning

Author's personal copy

Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of...   193

Table 2 Overview of interviews in the case study, chronological order

Date	Place	Interviewee	Relationship with Daiane
09 Jun 2016	Gs	Daiane	–
10 Jul 2015	Gs	Luciana	Closest friend and housemate
16 Aug 2016	Gs	Olga	Housemate
30 Aug 2016	Gs	Tim	Boyfriend
30 Aug 2016	Gs	Aline	Niece
16 Jan 2017	Gs	Luciana, Anita, Nicole	Closest friend, friend's sisters
28 Aug 2017	MdA	Antonieta	Sister, seven years older
29 Aug 2017	MdA	Regina	Friend and neighbor
30 Aug 2017	MdA	Gabriela	Sister, four years older
30 Aug 2017	MdA	Natália	Sister, two years younger
30 Aug 2017	MdA	Irene	Sister, six years older
05 Sep 2017	CR	Angela	Luciana's mother
07 Sep 2017	CR	Angela, Nicole	Luciana's mother, Luciana's sister
07 Sep 2017	CR	Nelson	Luciana's father

Gs Grünstadt, *MdA* Morro do Amendoim, *CR* Campo Roxo

of the observed human social behavior. In this sense, the following case study is a representation that comprises both description and interpretation.

6 Case Study: Daiane and her social network

Daiane was born in Morro do Amendoim in 1987. She is the second youngest child in her family, having five sisters and two brothers. Her mother left the family when Daiane was very young. Her father, who had worked hard all his life, mainly in construction, died at the age of 47 when Daiane was 12 years old. The second oldest sister, Antonieta, took on the role of mother to her younger sisters and brothers. The older ones had to start earning money early in order to contribute to the household income. Besides going to school, indeed sometimes instead of going to school, the older girls did domestic work for other families. One of them, Gabriela, sums up her experiences with domestic work as follows: "There is a lot of exploitation, very little money, and your work is not recognized".[2]

Daiane is the only one of the siblings who did not drop out of school before finishing the *Ensino Médio* either to work or to found her own family. But she too worked as a nanny during her time at school. After finishing *Ensino Médio*, Daiane's wish was to study medicine, one of the most difficult courses to get into in Brazilian universities. Those who can afford it take private tuition in order to prepare for the university entrance exams. Daiane studied on her own at home for the *ENEM* (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*). She did not feel, though, that lessons in the last three years at school had prepared her sufficiently for the exam. At the *Escola Municipal* in her neighbourhood, which she attended consistently, she

---

[2] All quotations from interviews were translated from Portuguese.

initially learned a lot and admired her teachers. Towards the end of her schooling, however, conditions had deteriorated significantly: "There were not enough teachers. Sometimes I came to school and had to go back home. And there were many strikes, so we did not have classes for two or three months". Whilst Daiane did not obtain one of the fiercely contested places at a public university, she did get one at a private university in a city 30 km away. But she was not able to take up her studies there because of the university fees and travelling expenses. Daiane found work in the accounts department of a company that offered computer services. She worked six days a week from 8:00 to 18:00 and earned a minimum wage.[3] This enabled her to contribute to the household income for some years, and at first, she hoped to be able to save money to finance her studies.

Daiane changed her plans when a friend told her of her positive experiences as an au pair with a family in Germany. Daiane searched for more information on the Internet and saved for a year to afford the plane tickets and the necessary health insurance. She found a family she liked: "The mother was studying medicine, and I thought it was good that she was studying medicine. There was this affinity". In early 2011, at the age of 24, Daiane travelled to Germany, the first of her family to migrate to another country. She hoped that if she could not continue her education in Brazil, then she might pursue her aspirations abroad. The position as au pair was an opportunity to travel abroad without it "costing a lot". However, the sisters mention the emotional costs, in particular the separation from the family, that Daiane had to accept. At the same time, the sisters judge Daiane's decision to migrate as a step towards personal fulfilment.

Children will only grow if they fly

Daiane has always been very intelligent. In a family of eight, there is always one who wants to better herself, who wants to hit it bigger. That's good, isn't it? Someone who looks for the best, who looks for something better. Now I use a proverb […] "Children will only grow if they fly." Well, Daiane has always been a very intelligent person. […] I think she is courageous. […] And she has always been looking around to improve herself. Learn the language, learn … and she always wanted to work. […] She is a very good person. She is very intelligent and above all, she is courageous, isn't she. (Antonieta (Daiane's sister))

Antonieta contends that migration suits Daiane's personality and "intelligence". For her sister, Daiane is a person that is eager to learn and to expand her horizon by migration, looking for opportunities to "grow". This perception goes far beyond explaining the decision to migrate by economic reasons and the wish to earn money. To grow in the course of migration, according to Antonieta, includes being "courageous", learning new things and striving for individual development.

As an au pair, Daiane had a 12-month visa. After eight months, she finished her German course and started looking for other options to extend her stay in Germany.

---

[3] In the summer of 2017, the minimum monthly wage in Brazil was 937 Reais (249 €). In the statistics of the Brazilian universities, "low-income students" are those whose families earn up to three minimum wages per month (Nierotka and Trevisol 2016, p. 30).

Author's personal copy

Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of... 195

She had come to the conclusion that there were "more possibilities" for her in Germany than in Brazil. During this time, she took the German-language entrance exam for the *Studienkolleg* that could gain her access to German universities. But her knowledge of German was not sufficient to pass the exam. A friend from the German course had undertaken to do a voluntary year *(Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr (FSJ))* in a residential care home for the elderly and explained to Daiane that she could do the same. In the interview, Daiane gives two reasons for considering this option: first "I would have a visa to stay in Germany for another year" and second "I would improve my German language skills". But Daiane doubted whether the social work in a residential care home would advance her personal development and sought the advice of her host mother, who had always supported her: "because what I really wanted was to study". With a lack of alternatives, Daiane decided to try the *FSJ*. She cancelled her au pair contract, obtained another 12-month visa for her voluntary year and received 380 Euros a month. Daiane stayed in the home of her host family and continued to take the child to nursery school in the morning and pick it up in the afternoon after work. She evidently did well at the *FSJ*, because she was offered a three-year apprenticeship as a geriatric nurse in the care home after six months. In the interview, Daiane says that she didn't immediately say "no", but talked to her host mother again, because she was not sure what she should do. "What I really wanted to do was study. But then I thought, it's a chance to get another visa. I'm learning a skill. And I can always study later, if I want to".

Daiane did her training as carer at a training centre run by the Protestant Church and obtained a residence permit for a further three years. Training proved to be rewarding but also challenging. Daiane had enough income to live on in Germany, rented a room in a shared house and visited her family in Brazil once a year. She coped with the theoretical part of the training, although she was still learning German. Daiane says she was the only "foreigner" in her classroom and had been extremely worried about not passing the final examinations. But in 2015, she passed the final exam after three years of training. She told me proudly how she had given a presentation about Alzheimer's for the oral part of the exam. At the age of 28, Daiane became a qualified carer for the elderly in Germany.

Daiane helped other migrants she met in Germany to get into an *FSJ* and to start training in a care home—including Luciana, whom she calls her sister. Luciana too was a very good pupil in Brazil. As a *favela* resident in a south-eastern city, she obtained grants for private schools—a rare exception—but was also unable to take up her studies in Brazil for financial reasons. Their educational aspirations form a bond between Daiane and Luciana, and neither of them considers the carer training to be the end of her formal education. Daiane speaks for both of them when she says that they decided to go for the training "because we would then have a guaranteed job, a profession. And if we wanted to do something else in the future, like studying or other things, we already have a basis." On completing her training, Daiane was offered a permanent position at the place where she trained and accepted it, thus consolidating her legal status in Germany. Before starting in her new position in early 2016, Daiane spent three months in Brazil. Every time she visits Brazil, she observes how limited her options would be there. In Brazil, she would have had to pay for occupational training (*Curso Técnico*), whereas in Germany she was able

to acquire skills and earn money at the same time. Daiane has friends who work as fully trained nurses in the care sector in Brazil with whom she compares notes intensively. She came to the conclusion that with her qualifications she would earn in Brazil less than half of what she earns in Germany and would have to take on two or three jobs at once to achieve a similar standard of living.

With the aim of continuing her education and in order to have time for her studies, Daiane didn't work full time in the home for the elderly in Grünstadt at first, but only 30 h a week. She found out that her vocational qualifications allow her to study health and social sciences at a university of applied sciences. An alternative that she considered was fee-based training in the care sector, e.g. wound management or geriatric psychiatry. But then, Daiane began to take care of her niece Aline's future and took on an additional job as carer in shared accommodation for dementia patients in order to earn more money. The prospects for her own future were not her only concern any more. In May 2016, Daiane brought her eldest niece, Aline, to Germany. Seventeen-year-old Aline had finished her *Ensino Médio* in Morro do Amendoim in December 2015, at the same school as Daiane, but under even more difficult conditions, Daiane says: "It has become much worse, it is very difficult, they don't teach any more. Education in Brazil is very precarious, I think. Very precarious". Daiane thinks that Aline wants to learn and to make something of her life. She wants to help her, because she, Daiane, is the only one in her family in a position to do so.

She can see other things to change her way of thinking

In Brazil, she would have no opportunity to study, absolutely none [...] so I thought—as she is finishing school, as she is still young—she can come here, can get to know a different place, can see another culture, see other things to change her way of thinking. But she wants to study. She really wants to study. (Daiane about her niece Aline)

In Daiane's perception, Aline's migration is not about material security and not even about formal education only. Daiane sees it as an opportunity to enable Aline to gain new experiences and to expand her horizon by living in another country. Aline has been expecting to follow her aunt throughout the time she's been in Germany: "She [Daiane] has always wanted to bring me here, because, she said, here it was easier", and "I have always known that I would want to come here to study". On finishing school, Aline tried in vain to find work in Brazil as a sales assistant, in order to earn money for the journey. She applied to all sorts of places and went to two job interviews, accompanied by her aunt Daiane, who was visiting Brazil in December 2015, but she did not find a job. This experience strengthened her resolve to seek openings abroad. Her mother Antonieta, who is missing her daughter back in Brazil, says: "She has all the opportunities I never had". Aline wants to use these opportunities, to realize her career dreams: "the only thing I know for sure is that I want to study physiotherapy, nobody will change this. Nobody." Daiane is already searching for suitable courses in the vicinity of Grünstadt.

Aline came to Germany on a three-month tourist visa. Daiane put her niece up in her room in the shared house and paid 300 euros a month for her German course.

Author's personal copy

Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of...   197

Daiane's plan was that Aline should initially work as an au pair for a year, to learn German well and to have a place to stay. Later she could take the entrance exam for the *Studienkolleg*. But the search for a place as an au pair in Grünstadt wasn't successful, and Daiane didn't want to send her niece to a distant town. Just before Aline's tourist visa ran out, they moved to Plan B: In August 2016, Aline started a *Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr (FSJ)* in a home for the elderly. She was given a 12-month visa and 380 euros a month. She continued to live in Daiane's shared house, and Daiane started looking for a cheaper German course for her. In June 2017, Aline decided to stay in Germany. Daiane continued to give Aline board and lodgings and told me with a grin that she has now taken on the role of strict aunt, to give Aline the best support she can. Of the 380 euros Aline received for the *FSJ* each month, she had to pay 180 euros for a German course; Daiane gave her 50 euros pocket money and the rest she saved for her niece's future. Since the *FSJ* was due to finish in July 2017, the search for a place as an au pair started again in spring. In October 2017, Aline was due to take the B1 level test in German, and Daiane wanted to register her for the entrance exam for the *Studienkolleg* in November 2017. An acquaintance that had already passed this exam was engaged to prepare Aline for it. At the last minute, the care home—unusually—extended the contract for the *FSJ* from 12 to 18 months, making it possible to extend the visa and secure Aline's residence in Germany. Daiane is determined to make sure that her niece Aline will be the first in her family to choose any education and career path she wants.

In August 2017, Anita, a younger sister of Daiane's housemate and closest friend Luciana, came to Grünstadt, moved into her sister's room in the shared house and started an *FSJ* in the residential care home. Besides all this, Daiane and Luciana are supporting their families in Brazil. Since February 2017, Daiane has been financing a small private school for two nephews in Morro do Amendoim. Daiane pays 120 euros a month for the two boys—not a lot for a private school in Brazil. In this private school, there are up to 20 pupils in a class, whereas classes at the *Escola Municipal* in Morro do Amendoim have up to 50 children. And, even more important, there are no strikes at the private schools. Since 2014, due to the economic recession and to current political and economic developments in Brazil, many people in Brazil are losing their jobs (Carnicer 2019). This includes Antonieta, Daiane's eldest sister and Aline's mother, who used to work in the canteen of an oil refinery. In 2015, she was affected by mass redundancies from the oil company Petrobrás, which had been involved in corruption scandals. When she lost her job, Antonieta not only lost her income but also her health insurance. After Daiane had spent a month in Brazil in May 2017, she told me worriedly that the situation had deteriorated even further. To what extend Daiane values her opportunities as a migrant becomes clear when she compares her own possibilities to that of her sisters' situation in Morro do Amendoim.

My sisters don't have any opportunities and never learned anything

> I feel a little sad when I look at my sisters. And see that they don't have any opportunities, like—to work. [...] All of them have children and never learned anything. [...] Antonieta, Aline's mother, never learned, like—a profession. [...]

They keep living their same old lives and nothing ever changes. [...] Because whenever I go home, I can see that really nothing has changed. Everything stays the same, really. People live the same way. The schools all stay the same. Everything the same. And I don't think anything will change too soon. (Daiane)

From Daiane's point of view, the way her sisters live in Brazil is severely restricted because their socioeconomic context does not allow them to learn a profession, to earn money and to develop visions for their own life. Against this background, the various steps Daiane has already taken in the course of migration—learning the German language, organizing long-term perspectives of legal residence in Germany, constructing a transnational network of mutual support, meeting the requirements of vocational training etc.—appear emancipatory.

For the young people close to Daiane's family who are finishing school in Morro do Amendoim, prospects are poor. This was confirmed by Regina, a friend and neighbour of Daiane and Aline, in the summer of 2017. Regina, who had completed her *Ensino Médio* four years previously, was attending a German course, with the aim of taking the A1-level language exam in May 2018 and joining Daiane and Aline in Germany afterwards. There she intends to work as an au pair or to do a voluntary year (*FSJ*) initially, before starting to train as a carer for the elderly. Regina knows exactly what's involved, because she is in daily communication with Aline via WhatsApp. Daiane declares that she would be prepared to take Regina into her room in the shared accommodation in Grünstadt because she is in a particularly difficult situation. Just like Luciana, Aline, Anita and some other young women not mentioned here, Regina profits from the informal support structures Daiane has developed in the course of her trajectory. Luciana, Daiane's housemate, best friend and "sister", calls Daiane "family":

We are changing our lives together. We are family

I also don't want to move away because Daiane will stay in Grünstadt, won't she. The thing is, Daiane—we became a family here in Germany. Because we started together and we do many things together and we—we are changing our lives together, you know? I keep thinking it was much easier to leave my family than to leave her now. Because we—we are family for each other. (Luciana)

For Luciana, Daiane became "family" because of their common project of "changing" their "lives together". Luciana admits that Daiane has become even more important to her than her natural family and traces their connectedness back to the search for new opportunities in life.

In September 2017, Daiane is 30 years old. She is working as a carer for the elderly in Grünstadt, where she would like to stay. She has not forgotten her own desire to study medicine, but points out that studying or further training would mean reducing her hours of work and therefore her income. It would not be possible to maintain the level of support that she has been giving the others in her transnational network. Daiane speaks with admiration of her own occupation as a carer for the elderly and makes it clear that she feels her work to be worthwhile—"and I can always study later, if I want to".

7 Discussion

At first sight, Daiane may be described and categorized as a typical female care worker, linked into an international care chain that connects a place in the Global South to a place in the Global North (Lutz 2010; Faist 2017, p. 24). Daiane, who had already worked as a nanny while at school in Brazil, was able to migrate to Germany and work as an au pair because of the need for care workers; subsequently she could stay in Germany as a carer for the elderly. But categorizing her as a care worker who migrated to earn money on the global labour market does not do full justice to Daiane's migration project. Analysis of her case makes it clear that educational aspirations are an important factor in her decision to migrate. Daiane was determined not to spend her life as an unskilled worker in the Brazilian periphery working for the minimum wage. She wanted to learn something and ideally wanted to study medicine. After a short time in Germany, she succeeded in completing a three-year training in a medical field. And she plans to expand her medical knowledge by studying nursing science at a university of applied sciences or by going through further training and professional development.

Studies in educational sociology confirm that access to higher, vocational and further education in Brazil is extremely limited for young women like Daiane—black women who come from low-wage families and attended public schools (Arboleya et al. 2015). Daiane is one of the innumerable cases in which the Brazilian state fails to be a source of support in the field of education due to the low quality of state schools in the periphery of big cities (Leão 2006, p. 47). Such cases are a focus of UNESCO's regular reporting on children and young people's barred access to education worldwide; specific disadvantages of girls are regularly highlighted (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission 2017). Studies on "transnational social protection" assume that informal support structures—especially social networks—gain importance when formal support structures are missing (Levitt et al. 2017; Faist 2017). Correspondingly, the transnational social network that Daiane and others are developing to enable young women's migration and education trajectories represents an informal strategy of "transnational social protection" (Levitt et al. 2017, p. 11).

This network is also an example of a migrant network that "operate[s] in gendered ways, with [...] female migrants helping other women" (Faist 2017, p. 26) and an example of special solidarity among disadvantaged women which is called *sororidade* (sisterliness) in feminist discourses in Brazil (Moutinho et al. 2016). The network offers the women that are willing to migrate not only career orientation, but also accommodation and contacts with a care home for the elderly in Germany that is happy to employ women from Brazil. Given the lack of opportunities and resources to develop their own life plans in Brazil, the women involved in the network clearly perceive migration as an emancipatory step. As Daiane's friend Luciana puts it, the young women are able to take this step, because they are "family" for each other and have the common project of "changing their lives together". The networks' resources and support structures increase with time. Whilst the course of Daiane's own migration project was open at the beginning, we can call the migration project of Daiane's niece Aline a rigorously planned education and training project. An important part of the project consists of opening up access to formal resources in

Germany, which involves Aline completing the *Studienkolleg* in order to be able to apply for a place at a state college of higher education or university of her choice. To pursue this path, Aline is dependent on the informal resources that her aunt provides for her.

Educational trajectories of underprivileged young women have not found attention in research on transnational education so far, because the research focus is on the transnational education market and on higher education. The young women presented in this paper do not have access to these realms and follow their educational aspirations in the role of migrant workers. As migrants from a non-EU state, they exploit a niche that is open to them because the chosen occupation is quite low in the "hierarchies of value": "As a rule, domestic and care work is associated with low-skilled, gender specific employment" (Faist 2017, p. 26). The perspectives that Daiane and other young care workers develop for their education and future lives are subject to the gender regimes, care regimes and migration regimes in Germany (Lutz 2010). Even so, I perceive their migration as an *educational strategy* and "a strategy for the acquisition of cultural capital"—just as in the case of East Asian middle class families that migrate for educational purposes (Waters 2015, p. 283). An important difference, of course, is that care workers have to confront far more social and political barriers and gain far less "privilege and exclusivity" than the East Asian families of the middle classes (Waters 2015, p. 287). The young women from socially disadvantaged families feel excluded from opportunities for upward educational mobility in Brazil. For them, migration becomes a strategy to search such opportunities in another place. In the overall sample of our study, the strategy to migrate for *educational upward mobility* was not limited to the network of care workers presented in this paper. Carnicer (2018, p. 6) analyses a "socioeconomically diverse network" of a large family that spans various places between Brazil, Germany and other countries. In this network, the search for "better educational opportunities" is also a "central reason to migrate" (Carnicer 2018, p. 8). All in all, the findings of our research indicate that there are various social contexts in which migration functions as an educational strategy. In line with the academic discourses introduced in this paper, we can differentiate roughly between those who are classified as *transnational migrants* in migration research and those who are classified as *international students* in research about transnational education. In the first case, migration as an *educational strategy* has mostly been overlooked, and in the second case, the educational strategy is usually called *mobility* rather than *migration*. Whereas transnational migrants from underprivileged social contexts hope to attain educational upward mobility in the course of migration, the majority of international students come from families who already have a high degree of formal education and are mobile to attain social distinction (Waters 2015).

At the same time, there seem to be similarities in the way young people from different social strata perceive the connectedness between migration and education. In the overall sample of our study, some of the interviewees might be classified as transnational migrants, others as international students. Nonetheless, all interviews indicate that education in the course of migration (or "mobility") is not only perceived as formal education, but also as self-development. In the presented case study of care workers, it became clear that the young women see migration as a path to in-

Author's personal copy

Educational aspirations of underprivileged female migrants. An ethnographic case study of...   201

dividual change. They frequently describe migration as a means to grow (*"crescer"*) and to open the migrant's mind to new thoughts and ideas (*"mudar o pensamento"*). This wording does not relate to formal education and career trajectories, but to the opportunity of making new experiences and widening the horizon by getting to know new ways of living and learning a new language. It may be connected to a concept of general education (German: *Bildung*) in the wider sense. We find similar indications and even the same wording in the interviews with international students. Both young care workers and international students who study at universities in Brazil and Germany are convinced that they will "grow" in the course of migration.

The ethnographic approach of the study presented in this paper allows a detailed reconstruction of orientations, perceptions and interpretative patterns during field research. The study therefore provides insights into the particular significance of education for young women who, according to the concept of migration studies, are likely to be classified as care workers. It reveals that the same young women may also be classified as educational migrants. Such a qualitative case study does not collect data about the prevalence of educational orientations and strategies among underprivileged migrants. Instead, it raises questions for investigation in larger scales and in different regional and social contexts. To name just a couple of them: What is the significance of education among underprivileged young men who migrate to work in transnational masculinized labour markets, like gastronomy or construction? Do they also create opportunities to follow their educational aspirations? Proceeding from a wide concept of educational spaces (Kesper-Biermann 2016) and including the case study of care workers, I argue that underprivileged migrants *do* actively participate in the construction of transnational educational spaces. It is a task for future research to explore different varieties of migrants' activities in the broad field of transnational education.

References

Adick, C. (2018). Transnational education in schools, universities, and beyond: Definitions and research areas. *Transnational Social Review*, *11*(2), 1–15.

Arboleya, A., Ciello, F., Meucci, S. (2015). "Educação para uma vida melhor": trajetórias sociais de docentes negros. *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, *45*(158), 882–914.

Assis, G. O. (2011). *De Criciúma para o mundo. Rearranjos familiares dos novos migrantes brasileiros*. Santa Catarina: Editora Mulheres.

Bilecen, B., Van Mol, C. (2017). Introduction: international academic mobility and inequalities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *43*(8), 1241–1255.

Brooks, R., Waters, J. (2011). *Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carnicer, J. A. (2018). Transnational family and educational trajectories. *Transnational Social Review*, *11*(2), 1–15.

Carnicer, J. A. (2019). Transnational migration and educational opportunities. A case study between Brazil and Germany. *London Review of Education*, *17*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.17.1.02.

Cox, R. (2014). Domestic workers and au pairs. In B. Anderson M. Keith (Eds.), *Migration: the COMPAS anthology* (p. 51). Oxford: Centre on Migration Policy and Society.

Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission (2017). Weltbildungsbericht 2017/18: Verantwortung für Bildung: Unsere Verpflichtungen erfüllen. https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-01/UNESCO_ Weltbildungsbericht_2017-2018_FINAL_01.pdf. Accessed: 29 May 2018.

Evans, Y., Tonhati, T., Souza, A. (2013). Female Brazilian migrants around the world. http://geblondon. files.wordpress.com/2013/12/imigrantes-brasileiras-pelo-mundo-2013-1.pdf. Accessed: 17 Feb 2014.

Faist, T. (2017). Transnational social protection in Europe: a social inequality perspective. *Oxford Development Studies*, *45*(1), 20–32.

Faist, T., Fauser, M., Reisenauer, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Transnational migration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fürstenau, S. (2004). Transnationale (Aus-)Bildungs- und Zukunftsorientierungen. Ergebnisse einer Untersuchung unter zugewanderten Jugendlichen portugiesischer Herkunft. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, *7*(1), 33–57.

Fürstenau, S. (2005). Migrants' resources: multilingualism and transnational mobility: a study on learning paths and school to job transition of young Portuguese migrants. *European Educational Research Journal*, *4*(4), 369–381.

Fürstenau, S. (2015). Educação transnacional e posicionamento social entre o Brasil e a Europa. Um estudo qualitativo com famílias migrantes. In J. Bahia M. Santos (Eds.), *Migraçoes, redes e trajétorias entre a Alemanha e o Brasil* (pp. 69–86). Porto Alegre: Letra e Vida.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism. A new analytic framework for understanding migration. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *645*(1), 1–24.

Kesper-Biermann, S. (2016). Putting the Nation in Perspective: Educational Spaces—a Concept for the Historiography of Education. *Bildungsgeschichte*, *6*(1), 92–95.

Levitt, P., Viterna, J., Mueller, A., Lloyd, C. (2017). Transnational social protection: setting the agenda. *Oxford Development Studies*, *45*(1), 2–19.

Leão, G. M. P. (2006). Experiências da desigualdade: os sentidos da escolarização elaborados por jovens pobres. *Educação E Pesquisa*, *32*(1), 31–48.

Lutz, H. (2010). Gender in the migratory process. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *36*(10), 1647–1663.

Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*, 95–117.

Mazzucato, V. (2008). Simultaneity and networks in transnational migration: lessons learned from a simultaneous-matched sample methodology. In J. DeWind J. Holdaway (Eds.), *Migration and development within and across borders: research and policy perspectives on internal and international migration* (p. 69). Geneva: International Organization for Migration.

Ministério das Relações Exteriores (2015). *Brasileiros no mundo: Estimativas populacionais das comunidades*. Brasília: Ministério das Relações Exteriores. http://www.brasileirosnomundo.itamaraty.gov. br/a-comunidade/estimativas-populacionais-das-comunidades. Accessed: 02 June 2019.

Moutinho, L., Alves, V., Mateuzi, M. (2016). "Quanto Mais Você Me Nega, Mais Eu Me Reafirmo": Visibilidade e Afetos na Cena Negra Periférica Paulistana. *Tomo*, *28*, 266–291.

Nierotka, R. L., Trevisol, J. V. (2016). Os jovens das camadas populares na universidade pública: acesso e permanência. *Katálysis*, *19*(1), 22–32.

de Oliveira, L. F., Portes, É. A. (2014). Ascensão e distanciamento na trajetória social, escolar e profissional de um jovem das camadas populares. *Perspectiva*, *32*(3), 1145–1164.

UNESCO and Council of Europe (2001). Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting, Riga, 6 June 2001). http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/highlights/global_forum/reference/ riga.doc. Accessed: 29 May 2018.

Waters, J. (2015). Educational imperatives and the compulsion for credentials: family migration and children's education in East Asia. *Children's Geographies*, *13*(3), 280–293.

Wolcott, H. F. (1999). *Ethnography: a way of seeing*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

van Zanten, A., Ball, S. J., Darchy-Koechlin, B. (Eds.). (2015). *Elites, privilege and excellence: the national and global redefinition of educational advantage*. World Yearbook of Education 2015. London: Routledge.