

Dirk Hoerder, Yvonne Hebert, and Irina Schmitt
Negotiating Transcultural Lives: Belongings and Social Capital among Youth in Comparative Perspective.

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Immigrant youth have been of increasing interest to social scientists in the last decade (Soysal 1999; Kaya 2001). It has been debated whether young immigrants and the children of immigrants live in-between two cultures, form hybrid identities, or “sit on a third chair” (Braidotti 1994; Bhabha 1994). Previous literature on immigrant youth culture has argued that such youth face an “identity crisis,” alienated from their parents’ culture but not fully immersed in the host country’s culture (Basgoz and Furniss 1985). Hoerder, Hebert, and Schmitt’s edited volume, *Negotiating Transcultural Lives: Belongings and Social Capital among Youth in Comparative Perspective*, analyzes the cultural belonging of such immigrant youth from a critical perspective.

How do social networks leap across geographical borders? How do young people translate, “negotiate and interpret social relations for their own social and political purposes?” (18) What is the significance of accumulating social capital in negotiating identities? How do young people challenge the nation-state defined by common territory, common language, common past and future, and a homogeneous racial and ethnic identity? The contributors to this volume attempt to answer these questions by comparing the lives and cultures of immigrant youth in Canada, Germany, the UK, and France. They explore intergenerational differences using case studies, focusing on both neighbourhoods and countries (Hoerder and Worbs). They interpret young people’s drawings (Hébert), listen to their music (Schmitt), and conduct interviews (Sackmann).

The editors argue that immigrant youth continually change, incorporating diverse cultural ways of life to form dynamic new ones. They use the term “transculturation” to explain this phenomenon. Transculturation is not simply forming “a new culture” through perpetual change: it is also a cultural *bricolage* (Kaya 2001; Caglar 1997). In other words, rather than assuming that people have clear national identities, Hoerder et al. argue that through transculturation, immigrant youth put together different aspects of varying cultures to form their own sense of identity.

The editors have chosen to look at transculturation in immigrant youth, since young people in general strive for a sense of control in their lives by assigning meanings to “acts, gestures, relationships, and events over time and space” (15). This point is underlined by Dirk Hoerder’s chapter “Cultural Transfer or Cultural Creation: A Case Study of Students ‘*issues de l’immigration*’” in Paris, which says that identities are defined according to “multiple interactive cultural practices in family, in local, regional community, or state-wide contexts” (147). Hoerder shows that belonging to a nation by birthplace is not the most frequent criterion for identification. In fact, these multiple interactive cultural practices form a significant challenge to mono-cultural nation-state discourse. Similarly, in “New Frontiers of Identity among Young adults of Salvadorian, Chilean, and Vietnamese Origin in Montreal,” Anne Laperrière, Sara LaTour, and Carlos Segura demonstrate how young people of Salvadorian, Chilean, and Vietnamese origin develop diverse identity references, expressing themselves in new identity spaces while maintaining links with their culture of origin. However, all transethnic identities are different, and the differences between groups indicate that transethnic identities “take different forms according to the social and cultural characteristics and the history of the specific groups” (99).

The editors also argue that on both individual and social levels the issues around belonging, adaptation, and inclusion/ exclusion are influenced by social capital, the ability to take advantage of available resources in order to facilitate social and economic integration. In “Focusing on Youth: Social Capital’s Role in Educational Outcomes in the Context of Immigration and Diversity,” Yvonne Hébert, Shirley Xiaohong Sun, and Eugene Kowch say that for immigrant youth, social capital is especially significant because it shapes their identity and their sense of place in the majority culture. The negotiated identities of young people require a sense of “embeddedness and belonging within a society,” which is facilitated by the accumulation of social capital (17). In her seminal contribution to the collection, “Transculturalism among Canadian Youth: Focus on Strategic Competence and Social Capital,” Yvonne Hébert notes that youth make use of social capital as a resource in order to “cope with the difficulties in new settings ... to ease anxiety and isolation” (125). She argues that social networks are used as adaptive strategies by immigrant youth in Canada, helping them make friends and improve their social status. When immigrant youth accumulate social capital through social networks in schools and neighbourhoods, social integration and self-identification with the host country is more likely to occur.

The German case in Susanne Worbs’ article, “Where do I belong? Integration Policy and Patterns of Identification among Migrant Youth in Three European Countries,” shows an interesting contrast to the Canadian case. When comparing patterns of socialization in Britain, France, and Germany, Worbs finds that immigrant youth in Germany experience the lowest levels of “national identification.” While noting the *Ausländerpolitik* has been one of the major factors preventing immigrants from integrating into the majority society in Germany, she demonstrates that in societies with a more integrative approach, immigrants are more likely to identify with the host country.

This book is an important attempt to understand immigrant youth culture in the global age. What makes this volume special is the richness of first-hand data obtained through a number of creative methods and taking a multi-country comparative approach. The diverse scholarly background of the contributors challenges the reader’s preconceptions: the theoretically-sophisticated arguments of academically-established scholars, such as Hoerder, Hébert, Sackmann, Worbs, Laperrière, Wahl, as well as Tariq Madood, are enriched by the critical perspectives of young scholars who are well-informed in subcultures, such as Irina Schmitt’s fascinating article about two youth groups in Germany, “BrothersKeepers/SistersKeepers and Kanak Attak.”

There is one major problem, however. The sociological terms used throughout the book may differ, as they refer to both the German and English-speaking social sciences. For example, youth with migration background is a common term in German social science, but an awkward term for English-speakers. Some standardization, without infringing the authenticity of the contributor’s work, would make this volume more coherent. Another technical problem is that there is no index at the end, making efficient scholarly use of the volume more difficult.

Despite its limitations, this is a must-read for scholars in the area of sociology of education, migration studies, or child and youth studies, on both sides of the Atlantic.

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