

## **Anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking Europe**

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**Abstract:** The article describes central developments and themes in anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking countries and how it is related to research in neighboring disciplines. It argues that interest in childhood and adolescence as subjects of anthropological research and theory formation has grown considerably in these countries since the 1980s. However, anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in the German-speaking countries still has no firm institutional base.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, childhood, children, youth, adolescence, German-speaking countries

**Résumé :** Cet article décrit les développements et thèmes essentiels des recherches anthropologiques sur l'enfance et l'adolescence dans les pays germanophones et montre les liens de l'anthropologie avec la recherche dans les disciplines voisines. Il défend l'argument selon lequel l'intérêt pour l'enfance et l'adolescence comme sujets de la recherche anthropologique et de la formation théorique s'est considérablement développé dans ces pays depuis les années 1980. Cependant, la recherche anthropologique sur l'enfance et l'adolescence dans les pays germanophones ne dispose pas encore d'une assise institutionnelle solide.

**Mots-clés :** Anthropologie, enfance, enfants, jeunesse, adolescence, pays germanophones

### **Introduction**

At the end of the 1990s, during a job interview, a colleague of mine told the anthropologists who were interviewing her that she had become interested in the practice of child fosterage as a research topic. One of the interviewers reacted by asking the following question: "Do you seriously want to bother with such kids' stuff?". I have often thought about this story and asked myself whether this was just the personal opinion of an anthropologist who considered other research topics more important, or whether his reaction was symptomatic of the value attached to anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking<sup>1</sup> countries. In this article I describe some of the central themes and developments in anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German anthropology<sup>2</sup>. In this article I describe some of the central themes and developments in anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking Europe. How and where can research fields be localized within the sphere of academic research and teaching? What central developments can be identified in respect of questions asked, theoretical orientations and methods used? How does anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking

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<sup>1</sup> When talking of German speaking Europe I refer to those countries where German is the or one of the national languages: Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

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Europe relate to research on childhood in neighbouring social science disciplines? In attempting to answer these questions, I have set certain restrictions and narrowed my focus to particular areas. Firstly, I consider only anthropological contributions to research on childhood and adolescence. I did not take into account the contributions by scholars of *Volkskunde* (European ethnography) or related disciplines, as well as any existing studies of childhood by ethnographers in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) because I am not familiar with this corpus of literature and also because this would go beyond the scope of this article. Secondly, I focus on anthropological publications in German. Of course, German-speaking anthropologists also publish in other languages, and some even habitually do so. However, in order to give those readers who do not understand German some idea of work that has been published in this language, only this is discussed in detail (some references to studies published in English are indicated by giving the year of publication in italics). I chiefly consider anthropological studies that are based on substantial periods of fieldwork. In addition, I also discuss some important studies based on secondary sources. In view of the fact that this subject area has become very broad, I lay no claim to completeness. I will attempt only to outline important thematic aspects.

The constitution and development of childhood and adolescence as a research topic in German departments of anthropology can be described as a curve that has slowly risen since the establishment of anthropology as a university discipline. With regard to the number of publications in this field, there has been a marked increase in recent decades, especially since the 1990s. The aim of my contribution is to show the changes in the research objects, aims, theoretical orientations and methodological approaches in German speaking anthropological research on childhood and adolescence. In accordance with the spirit of the times, there has been a shift towards actor-oriented analyses and approaches inspired by action-theory, as well as towards viewing childhood and adolescence as cultural constructs also in these countries. These new approaches to studying childhood and adolescence have usefully complemented existing approaches based on individual theory, learning theory or socialization theory. However, I will argue that anthropological research on childhood and adolescence still has no firm institutional base in German-speaking Europe.

The term anthropology as used in the title requires some comment, in the light of the history of this discipline in the German context. Anthropology originated in Germany in the 16th century as the study of man as a physical and spiritual being. Unlike in the United States, a special development took place in Germany around 1930: anthropology became a part of biology, and the study of man as a cultural being became the exclusive domain of *Völkerkunde*, or *Ethnologie* (ethnology) as it is usually called today (Fischer 1998: 7f.)<sup>3</sup>. Since the end of the Second World War, a wide range of topics and theoretical approaches has been developed in the German-speaking countries (see Gingrich 2005). I use the term “anthropology” in this article as a cover term for all these thematic and theoretical orientations.

In the course of the developments which I will describe now, four phases can be distinguished.

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<sup>3</sup> A special historical case is the development of “*Volkskunde*” (European ethnography) which became established as an independent academic discipline in the German-speaking countries in the 19th century, parallel to “*Völkerkunde*”.

## The discovery of education among ‘primitive peoples’

The first phase starts in the Wilhelmine era in Germany, the second half of the 19th century with its new evolutionary worldview, its reports of foreign peoples brought back by explorers and missionaries. This general atmosphere of the discovery of “the other(s)”, accompanied by the progressive education movement in the first decades of the 20th century, came along with a lively interest in methods of socialization among “primitive peoples” in academia and beyond (Becker-Pfleiderer 1975: 3). The first comprehensive work on children and childhood from an anthropological perspective was written by a medical doctor, Hermann Heinrich Ploss. His work “*Das Kind in Brauch und Sitte der Völker* [The Child in the Customs and Traditions of Different Peoples]” (1876) was so popular that it was soon followed by a second edition, and in 1911 by a much expanded third edition (Ploss & Renz 1911). It is a collection of ethnographical and historical information about the socialization of children in different cultures, arranged in thematically ordered sections. The interested reader is offered a description of traditions and customs relating to birth and childhood, whether among living or past, “lower” or “higher” peoples. The encyclopedic information gives a vivid picture of foreign ideas and of the state of European knowledge at that time. Other authors from this period who published ethnographic information about educational methods in use among peoples at different “levels of development” were Sebald Rudolf Steinmetz ([1898]2002) and Alfred Knabenhans (1918).

Children and young adults are frequently mentioned in descriptions of “primitive peoples” dating from the decades before and after the turn of the century, in different contexts and following different purposes and lines of thought. Thus, in the course of his extensive travels between 1904 and 1935, Leo Frobenius collected not only numerous cultural objects and folktales, but also information about childhood and adolescence in different African societies. The anthropologist and historian Heinrich Schurtz used ethnographical information on initiation rites from different parts of the world to support his thesis concerning the role of men's societies (Schurtz 1902, esp. pp. 95ff.). On the other hand, a manuscript by Karl Weule, entitled “*Negerpädagogik* [Native Education]” (1928, in: Müller & Treml 2002: 95-103), can be placed in the genre of colonial prose (Müller & Treml 2002: 25). Socialization practices among primitive peoples were also used as confirmation of own methods of education. Thus, the theologian and anthropologist Leopold Walk, for instance, wrote in the mid 1930s: “*For thousands of years education in primitive societies has formed people who are capable of meeting life's challenges; it produced earnest and strongly disciplined characters*” (Walk 1934: 41, after Becker-Pfleiderer 1975: 4).

In sum, it can be said that German-speaking anthropologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often guided by macro-theoretical approaches, were interested in the socialization of children within the framework of their own theoretical backgrounds. Whether they believed in *Völkerpsychologie* (national psychology), *Kulturkreislehre* (the culture circle theory), the *Wiener kulturhistorische Schule* (Vienna culture historical school), *Ethnosozologie* (ethnosociology), or didn't feel attached to any theoretical school, the anthropologists of this era repeatedly concerned themselves with the children of “primitive peoples”, more or less intensively and with different epistemological interests. What unites these representatives of different theoretical schools is their special interest in education and their ideas about collective coming of age.

## The swamps of National Socialism

In considering anthropological research on childhood during the National Socialist (Nazi) period, it must be remembered that anthropologists were involved in the political system, and that social Darwinist ideas of racial and national struggle were predominant (Rössler 2007: 20). The consequences of such involvement are made evident by the case of Eva Justin (1909-1966) who offered a scientific legitimacy to state organised mass murders. Justin was a trained nurse, a former psychology student, and a research assistant at the “Racial Hygiene Institute” in Berlin. In 1943, she submitted a doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin entitled “*Lebensschicksale artfremd erzogener Zigeunerkinde und ihrer Nachkommen* [How gipsy children and their descendants develop when brought up in a foreign environment]”. In this dissertation, she enquired into the development of Sinti children who were brought up in a children's home or in German foster families. For her “anthropological fieldwork” (R.Thurnwald, after Gilsenbach 1988: 115) she spent six weeks in 1942 studying forty Sinti children aged between 7 and 16 who had been placed in a Catholic children's home (Gilsenbach 1988: 117). In her dissertation which aimed at demonstrating the secondary role of environment in regard of the deterministic role of race, Justin comes to the conclusion that despite all efforts to educate them, the children had remained “gipsies” or “gipsy bastards” (Gilsenbach 1988: 112, 117), and she therefore proposed sterilization as a “racial hygiene solution” (Gilsenbach 1988: 112, 117). The dissertation was supervised by Eugen Fischer, an emeritus eugenicist, and assessed by Richard Thurnwald as “very good”; it was accepted by the university in 1943 for a doctoral degree. (115) In May 1944, only two months after the publication of Justin’s dissertation, thirty-nine of these children were deported to Auschwitz. Thirty-five of them were killed in the gas chambers there (118.). Anthropological research on childhood under the Nazi regime is a subject that still needs to be examined as part of the history of the discipline<sup>4</sup>.

## Childhood and adolescence in the light of developmental psychology, socialization theory and modernization theory

In the post-war decades, studies of childhood and adolescence by German-speaking anthropologists essentially followed the paradigms of individual development, socialization and modernization. Questions were asked such as: How does a child become an adult? How are children educated in “traditional” societies and with what aims in view? How are “traditional” education systems transformed by “modern” influences? As studies that are representative of such a perspective, we may mention those by Eno Beuchelt (1961), Dieter B. Kapp (1978) and Gudrun Ludwar (1974). These authors are particularly interested in modes of socialization and enculturation. As later critics pointed out, children are seen here above all as recipients, as not-yet-adults; it is not the lifeworlds of children that are of interest, but their “path to becoming adult” (Bräunlein & Lauser 1994: I).

In a comparative study, Johannes W. Raum (1978) argues that different styles of education can be explained by different ecological and economic conditions. This author, who is the son of Otto F. Raum (“Chagga Childhood”), bases his argument on a comparative analysis of ethnographic data from six “tribal societies”. According to Raum, the predominant style of education and the status of children and adolescents in different societies depend on the

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<sup>4</sup> For a critical discussion of the role of anthropology under the Nazi regime, see for instance Hauschild (1987, 1995) and Gingrich (2005: 111-136).

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ecological and economic conditions. Raum discusses the ethnographic material under different headings (such as “Stages of development and initiation rites”, “Integration in economic activities”, “Training methods”), but these topics were selected for the purpose of demonstrating that the style of education and the resulting status of the children is determined by the ecological and economic conditions (Raum 1978: 181). Unlike the members of the culture and personality school, Raum explains educational patterns in specific societies not as “cultural patterns”, but as being due to the influence of the ecological and economic environment. He does not consider the children themselves, their actions or their children's culture.

Childhood and adolescence were not considered as independent research topics until the 1980s. This is reflected, for instance, in the number of publications relating to this field in the most important anthropological journals: “*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*” (ZfE)<sup>5</sup>, “*Anthropos*”<sup>6</sup>, “*Sociologus*”<sup>7</sup> and “*Paideuma*”<sup>8</sup>, of which I have searched the first three for titles (without book reviews) suggesting that the articles are devoted to the topics of childhood/adolescence or children/adolescents. In the ZfE, not a single article meeting this criterion was published from its beginning until the mid 1970s. In “*Anthropos*”, nine articles were published in the period from 1906, most of which are early studies of initiation rites. In fifteen annual volumes (1925 to 1933 and 1951 to 1956) of “*Sociologus*”, there were three relevant articles by psychologists but none by an anthropologist. In the three subsequent decades (1957 to 1987), only four articles by German-speaking anthropologists relating to the fields of childhood/adolescence were published (Rüdiger Schott [1957] on “*Ahn und Enkel bei Naturvölkern*” [Ancestors and grandchildren in primitive societies], Gustav Jahoda [1958] on “Boys' Images of Marriage Partners and Girls' Self-Images in Ghana”, Eno Beuchelt [1961] on “*Traditionelle und moderne Jugendziehung im West-Sudan*” [Traditional and modern youth education in Western Sudan] and Rita Wiesinger [1965] on parent-daughter relations in Hindu society). After this long phase, during which children and adolescents were an under-represented group (Weiss 1995: 139f.), things began to change at the beginning of the 1980s.

### **The constitution of childhood and adolescence as an independent research area**

The paradigm shift in research on childhood, which essentially took place as a result of studies by British and North European scholars, also had a deep influence on anthropologists in German-speaking Europe. An increasing number began to be interested in issues relating to childhood and adolescence, and to a certain extent this was also reflected in academic teaching<sup>9</sup>. There has also been an increasing internationalization of anthropological research on childhood<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The ZfE was first published in 1869. All volumes were examined, from the first issue up to 2011.

<sup>6</sup> “*Sociologus*”, founded in 1925 by Richard Thurnwald, is a journal in the border area between anthropology, sociology and neighbouring disciplines. Between 1934 and 1950 the publication of the journal was ceased.

<sup>7</sup> “*Anthropos*” (founded 1906) is published by the Anthropos Institute in Vienna. The volumes from 1906 to 2011 were examined by searching the index for the terms “children”, “childhood”, “youth”, “socialization” and “initiation”.

<sup>8</sup> “*Paideuma*”, founded by Leo Frobenius, first appeared in 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Field research projects as training for students were carried out in 1999 by Ute Luig on street children in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), in 2002 by Erdmute Alber on childhood in Benin, and in 2004 by Thomas Hüsken (all FU Berlin) on urban youth in Egypt (see Hüsken 2007). Werner M. Egli has supervised several masters' theses based on student fieldwork (see Egli / Kersten 2010).

<sup>10</sup> In 1999, at a conference organized by the EASA (European Association for Social Anthropology), there was for the first time since the foundation of EASA a panel on Anthropology of Childhood, organized by two AnthroChildren, 2012, 1, Martin: <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/AnthroChildren/document.php?id=693> & <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/AnthroChildren/document.php?id=702>

With regard to anthropological research on childhood in the German-speaking countries, an important milestone in the constructivist turn is the dissertation by Florence Weiss: “*Kinder schildern ihren Alltag. Die Stellung des Kindes im ökonomischen System einer Dorfgemeinschaft in Papua New Guinea (Palimbei, Iatmul, Mittelsepik)* [Children describe their everyday life. The status of the child in the economic system of a village community in Papua New Guinea (Palimbei, Iatmul, Mittelsepik)]” (1981). In her dissertation, Weiss studies the everyday life of children, and investigates their role in the subsistence economy of the Iatmul. Weiss emphasizes their independence and autonomy. In what she calls “autonomous children's groups”, where even small children spend much of their time, children make their own decisions, for instance with regard to the procurement of food or when they carry out their own rituals. Weiss considers the autonomy of the Iatmul children to be the result of an economic system in which children and adolescents have free access to resources such as water, land and raw materials (e.g. wood), and can use them for their own purposes independently of the will of their parents (366). The children learn early on to carry out various work processes on their own (365). At the same time children have a lot of free time, or they work for themselves; Weiss does not see this as an expression of the parents' magnanimity, but as a consequence of the economic system (368). Weiss distances herself expressly from the methods and theoretical approaches of the culture and personality school, especially from the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the Iatmul.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a growing interest among anthropologists in topics relating to childhood and adolescence. Thus, four edited volumes, a special issue of “*kea- Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft*”, and a special issue of “*Journal Ethnologie*”<sup>11</sup> on childhood and/or adolescence have been published within twelve years (1993 to 2005), all in German. The editors of these publications are agreed in their rejection of the once predominant view of children and adolescents which is summed up by Marie-José van de Loo and Margarete Reinhart as follows:

“Children are acted upon, they don't act themselves, they are observed and rarely asked, they are talked about, they don't talk themselves, and no one makes any effort to understand their own special forms of expression.” (1993: 8). Critics of the older schools of thought object to the more or less passive role that was attributed to children and adolescents as pure recipients of culture in the socialization process” (Dracklé, Ed., 1996: 8).

Instead they emphasize dependence on the social context, for instance by referring to the importance of social power relations in the construction of childhood and adolescence (Dracklé 1996: 15). It is recognized that children and adolescents play an active role in the socialization process, they are seen as “creators of culture” (van de Loo & Reinhart 1993: 8), even in a context of unequal power relations. Great merit is due to the volume of articles edited by van de Loo and Reinhart (1993) for being the first to make accessible to a German-speaking public selected texts from recent anthropological research on childhood in English and German. In addition to offering German translations of important texts that were written in English (for instance by Edith Thurner, Paul Riesman, Unni Wikan and Charlotte Hardman), the volume gives a good impression of work carried out by German-speaking anthropologists: Florence Weiss (1993) discusses methodological questions relating to her research among the Iatmul from a retrospective perspective. Ingrid Kummels describes the everyday life of children among the Rarámuri, a group of Indians living in Mexiko. She shows how independent they are, for instance when *kuchi* (toddlers) find additional food for themselves, and seven-year-olds make far-reaching decisions affecting their own lives, for

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anthropologists from Germany, Gabriele Alex and Erdmute Alber. Alex had studied in Great Britain and written a PhDs thesis at Brunel University on “Children and Childhood in Rural Tamil Nadu”.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.journal-ethnologie.de>

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instance with respect to attending school (Kummels 1993). That socialization theory is not totally rejected in what is considered as the new approach to anthropological research on childhood is evident in the articles by Gerhard Kubik and Eva M. Rauter, which analyse initiation rites for boys or girls in societies in southern Africa (Kubik 1993, Rauter 1993).

Only one year later, the “*kea- Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft*” published a special issue on “*Kinderwelten* [Children's worlds]”, reflecting current research in German-speaking countries. The authors are united by their constructivist view of childhood and adolescence, and by their focus on actors and agency. The volume of articles entitled “*Jung und wild* [Young and wild]”, edited by Dorle Dracklé (1996, Ed.), contains articles by anthropologists and other social scientists. Its subtitle indicates its theoretical programme: “*Zur kulturellen Konstruktion von Kindheit und Jugend* [On the cultural construction of childhood and adolescence]”. In this volume, Dracklé expressly rejects any romantic glorification of childhood and adolescence – here and in other places – as well as a sociobiological perspective. (Dracklé Ed., 1996: 14) At the same time she demands that researchers should not restrict their attention exclusively to youth cultures, but should also consider adolescence in the context of issues affecting the whole of society, such as gender, ethnicity or the media (38). The articles in the volume edited by Ute Luig und Jochen Seebode entitled “*Ethnologie der Jugend. Soziale Praxis, moralische Diskurse und inszenierte Körperlichkeit* [Anthropology of adolescence. Social practice, moral discourses and staged corporeality]” (2003) present adolescent lifeworlds and forms of representation. The editors understand “adolescence” as a social construction, but one which nevertheless cannot be completely separated from age and phase of life. (Luig & Seebode 2003: 11) The articles describe the world of adolescents in different cultural and social, mainly urban contexts (for instance in Georgia, Turkey, Germany, Brazil and Malawi), taking into account the insider view of the young actors. They emphasize the variety and inner differentiations that are disguised by the blanket term “adolescence” (12).

Another volume entitled “*Beiträge zur Ethnologie der Kindheit* [Contributions to the anthropology of childhood]” (Egli & Krebs 2004) contains the proceedings of an interdisciplinary conference held at the Ethnological Seminar in Zurich (Switzerland). This book is a collection of articles by anthropologists and specialists in education relating to cross-cultural research on childhood in the German-speaking countries. Egli himself writes about childhood in a society in eastern Nepal from the rather neglected perspective of legal anthropology. He shows that as a result of local inheritance rules, the life course of boys is largely predetermined by their birth (Egli 2004). Thus, first born sons are given a plot of land upon their marriage, and a voice among the village elders. As land has become a scarce resource, the second and next born sons often migrate forever, or are sent to join the army as soldiers. However, last born sons stay with their parents after marriage, and are expected to care for them; they inherit the parent’s house after the father’s death, but remain subordinated for the whole of their life (136ff.).

Recent anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in the German-speaking countries is mainly devoted to the following topics:

- Working and learning among children and adolescents

How children gain different kinds of knowledge and skills has been studied by anthropologists in German-speaking countries in various contexts. Barbara Polak (1998, 2003) and Georg Klute (1996) have carried out research in this field in a West African peasant society and in a nomad herding society respectively. On the basis of observations and video recordings, Iris Köhler analyses how children in northern Ivory Coast learn how to make pottery (Köhler *forthcoming*). A theoretically and methodologically innovative study on children's work from an anthropological perspective has been written by Ulrike Bieker (2009). She asks what significance children's work has from the point of view of working

children. In different social contexts (including “on the street”) she carried out field research among children living in a town in southern Chile. In a critical discussion of Western discourses on child labour and resulting forms of organization (see Bieker 2009: 13, 229-245), she paints a differentiated picture of the children, their life worlds and their work in the various contexts, and she shows clearly what their work means to the children.

Further studies of the way children and adolescents work and learn in different cultural and social contexts have been published by Gabriele Alex (2004, 2007) and Arnd-Michael Nohl (2003). On the subject of childhood or adolescence spent on the streets in large cities, the anthropological studies by Markus Wiencke on street children in Dar es Salaam (Wiencke 2007), by Ute Metje on street children in Hamburg (Metje 2005), and by Lena Zimmer (2009) on children working as beggars on the border between Thailand and Myanmar are worth mentioning.

#### - Childhood and adolescence in the context of kinship norms and practices

A number of anthropological studies in German-speaking countries have dealt with the question of how children's lives are affected by different conceptions of parenthood and childhood. Erdmute Alber (2004) describes the patterns of child fostering among the Baatombu in northern Benin. In a study of foster and exchange relationships in East Timor, Judith Bovensiepen (2010) shows how closely kin relationships are linked to economic factors, and how strongly children's lifeworlds are shaped by local social hierarchies. The aims and action strategies of children and adolescents living with foster parents in rural Northern Benin, and the question of how much power to act they have, is analysed by Jeannett Martin (submitted). She further discusses the relationship between kinship roles norms and lived practice based on an analysis of the live stories of fostered children and adults (Martin, *forthcoming*). Ursula Atto has published a study of childhood that is at the interface between the fields of work-learning and kin relations: “... *et tout le reste pour les filles*”: *Zur Hausarbeit von Kindern in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire* [“... *et tout le reste pour les filles*”: Children and domestic work in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire]” (1996). Atto looks at school children fostered by relatives in the Ivorian capital, and enquires into their understanding of domestic work. She shows that their views of domestic work are highly differentiated, and that they do not regard it purely as a necessary evil or as a burden. More studies of the connection between childhood/adolescence and kinship norms and practices have been published in the collection of articles “*Mutterbruder und Kreuzcousine. Einblicke in das Familienleben fremder Kulturen* [Mother's brother and cross-cousin. Aspects of family life in foreign cultures]” edited by Ursula Bertels et al. (1997).

#### - Childhood and adolescence in the context of migration

Childhood or adolescence and migration is a growing area of anthropological research. Studies of the lifeworlds of children and adolescents in Germany or other countries in the context of emigration, immigration and remigration have been published for instance by Cordula Weissköppel (2001), Heike Drotbohm (2007) and Heike Niedrig et al. (2003), Christine Mansfeld (2007), Christian Ungruhe (2010) and Jaqueline Knörr (2005).

#### - Transitions between childhood and adulthood

With regard to this area of research, we can mention some new studies of initiation rites, including a contribution to a revision of this concept (Kubik 1993, Rauters 1993, Baudler 2004). But there has also been interest in the question of how children become adult in a society that is poor in rituals (Bräunlein & Lauser 1996). Christian Ungruhe (2011) looks at the way adolescent migrants to southern Ghana from the north of the country become adults. The role played by clothing in the process of becoming adult is discussed by Kerstin Bauer in

a study of adolescents in Ivory Coast (Bauer 2006). Other important topics of anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in German-speaking countries are:

- Children's and youth cultures: e.g. Maybaum (2003), Groeger (2003)
- Childhood and adolescence in (post) conflict areas: e.g. on adolescent life worlds in the Columbian civil war (Oldenburg 2009), and on adolescents belonging to the Eritrean *warsay* generation (Treiber 2005)
- The performative practice of adolescents: e.g. Seebode (2003, 2007), Weller (2003), Boesen (1999, pp.171-243)
- Adolescence and sexuality: e.g. Bochow (2010)
- Social constructions of childhood(s): e.g. Egli (2002), Bieker (2002)

Luig and Seebode justifiably complain that in anthropology youth culture frequently means only boys' culture (1993: 7). Studies that focus exclusively or primarily on the childhood and adolescence of girls have been published for instance by Rauter (1993), Mansfeld (2007) and Ungruhe (2011).

### **Methodological implications**

The paradigm shift away from evolutionist, structuralist and socialization theories of society and a perspective that is biased by adultism, also had methodological consequences. In recent research on childhood, participant observation is usually considered to be the ideal method (Egli 2010: 11). But anthropologists also use and experiment with a whole range of methods, often in combination. In the above-mentioned study by Florence Weiss, the research was based on participant observation and everyday conversations. Seven children in a household that the author was familiar with told her all about their everyday activities, individually and in detail, over a period of several days. The children's accounts fill about one hundred pages of the book, and are unusual, not only with regard to their length. Above all they create a vivid picture of the children's everyday life, their relationships with adults, and the way they fill their daily routines and their lives with meaning (Weiss 1981: 109-206).

While in the early days of anthropology, scholars chiefly based their work on secondary sources such as explorers' travel accounts, representatives of the new anthropology of childhood generally analyse material they have collected themselves on the basis of participant observation, interviews, detailed case studies and situation analysis. Statistical surveys are sometimes also used (e.g. Alber 2004, Martin 2007). In some cases, the object of analysis is discourses or discourse practices by and on adolescents (Dilger 2003, Mansfeld 2007), their performative practices (Weller 2003, Fritzsche 2003), and sometimes children's games, stories or drawings (e.g. Schlosser 1977, Unger-Heitsch 2001). Some studies are based on a systematic comparison of ethnographical data (Raum 1978, Egli 2002, Bieker 2002, Hug 2007). Anthropological research on childhood and adolescence is carried out today at a great variety of different sites. These range from the classic context of village lifeworlds (e.g. Polak 1998, Martin 2007), to the life worlds of children and adolescents in large cities or small towns, including "the street" (see Bieker 2005: 36ff.). In some cases, the research design is determined by the physical mobility of the protagonists (e.g. Klute 1996 on children's work among cattle herding nomads, Boesen 2008 on young Woodaabe dancers, Ungruhe 2010 on young male migrants in Ghana), or the researcher receives them at their place of arrival (e.g. Niedrig et al. 2003, Drotbohm 2007).

The custom of talking about children that was criticized by representatives of the new anthropology of childhood has largely been replaced by talking with children and adolescents. Moreover, an increasing tendency towards reflection can be observed in respect of the role of the researcher – with or without children of their own – in the research process (Lydall 1993, Hirmer 1994, Krauss and Dracklé 1994). Florence Weiss has also significantly contributed to the methodological debate with her concept of “double foreignness” – a problem that can be tackled only by being fully aware of it and through critical reflection on one's own role in the research process (Weiss 1993: 99, Bieker 2009: 21).

### **Areas of overlap with neighboring disciplines in the social sciences**

Since its establishment as an academic discipline, anthropology, including the field of childhood and adolescence, has always been subject to the influence of ideas and models developed in neighbouring disciplines. But these ideas and models have also been more or less influenced by anthropological research. Today, many educationalists, psychologists and sociologists carry out cross-cultural research (e.g. Trommsdorff & Behnken 1989, Rippl & Seipel 2008, Krebs 2001), and frequently refer to the work of anthropologists. These neighbouring disciplines also often use the “ethnographic method”, while the meaning of this term varies. So what is the difference between the (new) anthropological approaches to research on childhood and adolescence in the German-speaking countries and approaches followed in the other social sciences? I regard the following points as important in this respect:

Firstly, anthropologists have a special awareness of the variety of cultural phenomena, which enables them to attain a greater understanding of the cultural lifeworlds of children and adolescents, their knowledge, their cultural practices and symbolic forms of expression. In some cases this kind of approach is also used by representatives of other social science disciplines (see Heinzel 2000: 32), but in anthropology it is at the core of the discipline. Secondly, most anthropologists in the German-speaking countries still believe that proper appreciation of a foreign cultural context is not possible without spending relatively long periods of time in the field, participating closely in the everyday life of the people, learning the local language(s) and building up close, long-term social relationships with the people. Thirdly, anthropological approaches to childhood and adolescence can be distinguished from many psychological, educational or sociological approaches with respect to theory formation. The aim of research is not to set up and test hypotheses, but to generate theoretical categories on the basis of what is observed in the field.

In what follows I will restrict my remarks to research on childhood and adolescence in the educational sciences, psychology and sociology and their relationship to anthropological research, because it seems to me that the overlaps and mutual influences are greatest in these disciplines.

### ***Educational sciences***

Anthropology shares with the educational sciences an interest in the socialization and education of children, as well as an interest in cross-cultural studies. Since Ariès' book, which was published in German in 1975 and had a lasting influence on education, the level of interest in cross-cultural studies in the educational sciences has increased. This led to the formation of sub-disciplines such as *Kulturvergleichende Erziehungswissenschaften*

(comparative education) (see Adick 2008) and *Ethnopedagogik* (ethno-education) (see Müller & Treml 1992). A number of years ago, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde* (German Anthropological Association) founded a working group called *Ethnopedagogik* (ethno-education; today the name has been changed to *Ethnologische Bildung*), which sees itself as a link between anthropology and education. Several initiatives by educationalists and/or anthropologists involving interdisciplinary cooperation in the area of cross-cultural research on childhood have resulted in joint publications (e.g. Egli & Krebs 2004, Müller & Treml 1992, 2002, Renner & Kemper 1995, Renner 1997, 1999).

Overlapping fields of research include for instance the topic of children's work. Here, we should mention particularly the studies by Manfred Liebel, who argues in favour of a subject-oriented approach to children's work (Liebel 2001, 2005). The author also makes reference to research carried out by anthropologists on work performed by children in different societies.

### ***Psychology***

With regard to research on children and adolescence, there were and still are close links between anthropological and psychological research, and the two disciplines have mutually influenced each other. Towards the end of the 19th century and around the turn of the century, anthropological thought in the German-speaking countries was shaped by the founder of psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, and his conception of *Völkerpsychologie* (national psychology) (see Petermann 2004: 531f.). Later on, theories developed by psychologists, and primarily the ideas of Sigmund Freud, influenced American cultural anthropology, of which the culture and personality school influenced both anthropological and psychological research (see Becker-Pfleiderer 1975: 141-158, Petermann 2004: 689ff.). Interested in finding out the range of application of their theories, psychoanalysts also began to study foreign cultures. Theodor Reik, and later Bruno Bettelheim, concerned themselves with initiation rites in traditional societies from a psychoanalytical perspective (Erdheim 2010: 71ff.). In the 1960s in Switzerland, Paul Parin, Fritz Morgenthaler and Goldy Parin-Matthèy ([1963]2006) developed the method of ethno-psychoanalysis on the basis of research carried out among the Dogon and Agni. Their students are currently trying to link anthropological, sociological and psychoanalytical perspectives, for instance in the area of “ethno-psychoanalytical adolescent research” (Erdheim 2010: 75). Besides approaches based on individual psychology in cross-cultural psychological research on childhood and adolescence, approaches based on socialization theory are also used (e.g. Trommsdorff & Behnken 1989, Trommsdorff 1995).

### ***Sociology***

In research on childhood and adolescence, there was an established division of work between anthropology and sociology for a long time: anthropologists were responsible for “traditional” cultures, while sociologists studied “modern” Western societies. However, this dichotomization has been challenged as it became increasingly difficult to justify it against the backdrop of global processes of migration, the exchange of information and the global spread of “modern” ideas and institutions.

In respect of research on childhood and adolescence, anthropology can no longer claim to be alone responsible for non-European societies. This is illustrated by the fact that in one of the newest and most comprehensive German manuals on research into childhood and adolescence in the social sciences, the articles on “Childhood and adolescence in Latin America”,

“Childhood and adolescence in Africa” and “Childhood and adolescence in Asia” were not written by anthropologists but by teachers, psychologists or sociologists working cross-culturally (see Krüger & Grunert 2010). Conversely, anthropologists, e.g. Weissköppel (2001), Drotbohm (2007) and Knörr (2005), also transgress the boundaries. Weissköppel and Drotbohm look at the children of immigrants in Western societies, and Knörr at so-called Third Culture Kids, meaning children who have grown up in a foreign country and then returned to their country of origin. In the field of migration studies or studies of transnationalism, I see a big potential for combining theories and methods from anthropology and sociology, which can usefully profit from each other. In the area of adolescent research, anthropologists have adopted sociological approaches in the concept of “youth culture” or “youth subcultures” (see Luig & Seebode 2003: 12-15).

### *Poor institutional base*

Among anthropologists in the German-speaking countries, the choice of childhood(s) and adolescence(s) as a topic in teaching and research is still a purely individual matter. Although a small number of centres (Zurich, Berlin, Bayreuth) with child/youth focused research have developed, research training, cross-cultural and cross-generational studies, long-term studies or re-studies of childhood and adolescence are still the exception rather than the rule. A centre of anthropological research on childhood and adolescence, such as the Centre for Child-focused Anthropological Research at Brunel University in London, does not exist in the German-speaking Europe. As a consequence, there is no anthropological series of publications devoted to research on childhood and adolescence. There is no manual in German devoted to this field, and no methodology handbook.

This poor institutional base is however surprising. On the one hand, in the societies traditionally studied by anthropologists children and adolescents often constitute the majority with regard to chronological age – unlike Western countries, where in Germany for instance children and adolescents under 20 represent just 19% of the population and this figure will further decline in the coming years (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009: 5)<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, in Germany around 20% of the population – including predominantly children and adolescents – has a so-called “migrant background” (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010: 14)<sup>13</sup>. The heated debates on immigration, “integration” and “multiculturalism” would certainly benefit from anthropological expertise.

### **Conclusion**

Today, a disdainful remark such as the one cited at the beginning of this article, in which the anthropological study of childhood and adolescence is denigrated as “kids’ stuff”, would not go undisputed. As I have tried to show, anthropological research on childhood and adolescence has undergone a remarkable change in the German-speaking countries in the past few decades. A fast-growing interest among anthropologists in the subject of childhood has been accompanied by a theoretical reorientation, following the general paradigm shift in the social sciences away from adultism and towards an actor-centred perspective.

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Presse/pk/2009/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere\\_\\_bevoelkerungsentwicklung2009,property=file.pdf](http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Presse/pk/2009/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere__bevoelkerungsentwicklung2009,property=file.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Presse/pk/2009/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere\\_\\_bevoelkerungsentwicklung2009,property=file.pdf](http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Presse/pk/2009/Bevoelkerung/pressebroschuere__bevoelkerungsentwicklung2009,property=file.pdf)

AnthropoChildren, 2012, 1, Martin: <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/AnthropoChildren/document.php?id=693>  
& <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/AnthropoChildren/document.php?id=702>

Anthropological research in German-speaking countries relating to childhood and adolescence has developed a diversified range of topics, using different theoretical and methodological approaches.

A “childhood-youth-informed” anthropology, an anthropological perspective where the category of social age (including childhood and adolescence) is automatically considered, is currently emerging. Nevertheless, a stronger networking and institutionalization of anthropological research on childhood and adolescence in the German-speaking countries would be an advantage. An analysis of this research field using innovative research, and its gradual institutionalization, would also help to provide a greater visibility and legitimacy to the anthropological study of childhood and adolescence.

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