'Becoming Lina': Approaching the constitution of girlhood in a 'post-socialist' area through empiricist commitment

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Abstract

The paper addresses a gap in the literature on childhood and/in post-socialism and uses everydayness as the conceptual means that links both themes. It presents a story of Lina, a seven-year old Roma girl from a deprived urban neighbourhood in Bratislava, and maps everyday encounters, practices and recognitions that imply what matters in Lina's life. The paper stresses importance of ungrounded empirical inquiry, and through identifying complex and heterogeneous associations in Lina's life, it highlights acknowledgment of both broader social situations (such as post-socialism), but also mundane and often unremarkable moments in children's lives. The notion of post-socialism is thus situated within the 'descaled' geographies of Lina's everyday life, rather than as an imposing social condition.

Key words: girlhood; urban neighbourhood; 'descaled' geographies; post-socialism; life history; Bratislava.

Resum. *'Esdevenint Lina': Construcció de la feminitat de les nenes en una àrea post-socialista a través d'un compromís empiricista*

L'article pretén omplir un buit en la literatura sobre infància i/en el post-socialisme i utilitza la vida quotidiana com a eina conceptual que relaciona ambdós temes. Es presenta la història de Lina, una nena gitana de set anys d'un barri pobre de Bratislava, i es registren els encontres, les pràctiques i els reconeixements que condicionen allò què és important a la vida de la Lina. L'article emfasitza la importància de la recerca empírica desconnectada, i a través de la identificació d'associacions complexes i heterogènies a la vida de la Lina, es subratlla tant el reconeixement de situacions socials importants (post-socialiste) com també moments trivials i sovint irrellevants en la vida dels infants. La noció de post-socialisme es situa dins les geografies 'aescalars' de la vida quotidiana de la Lina, més que no pas com una condició social imposada.

Paraules clau: feminitat; barri urbà; geografies 'aescalars'; post-socialisme; història de vida; Bratislava.

Resumen. *'Convertiendose Lina': Construcción de la feminidad de las niñas en una área post-socialista a través de un compromiso empiricista*

El artículo pretende llenar un vacío en la literatura sobre infancia y/en el post-socialismo, y utiliza la vida cotidiana como instrumento conceptual que relaciona ambos temas. Se presenta la historia de Lina, una niña gitana de siete años de un barrio pobre de Bratislava, y se registran los encuentros, las prácticas y los reconocimientos que condicionan lo que es importante en la vida de Lina. El artículo enfatiza la importancia de la investigación empírica desconectada, y a través de la identificación de asociaciones complejas y heterogéneas en la vida de Lina, se subraya tanto el reconocimiento de situaciones sociales importantes (post-socialismo) como también momentos triviales y a menudo irrelevantes en la vida de los niños y niñas. La noción de post-socialismo se sitúa dentro de las geografías 'aescalares' de la vida cotidiana de Lina, y no como una condición social impuesta.

Palabras clave: feminidad; barrio urbano; geografías 'aescalares'; post-socialismo; historia de vida; Bratislava.

Résumé. *Devenez Lina: Construction de la féminité des jeunes filles dans la zone post-socialiste à travers un engagement à l'empirisme*

L'article vise à combler une lacune dans la littérature sur l'enfance et / post-socialisme et utilise la vie quotidienne comme un outil conceptuel qui concerne les deux thèmes. Il présente l'histoire de Lina, une jeune gitane de sept ans d'un quartier pauvre de Bratislava, et se régistren les réunions, les pratiques et les examens qui déterminent ce qui est important dans la vie de Lina. L'article souligne l'importance de la surface empirique déconnecté et à travers de l'identification des associations complexes et hétérogènes dans la vie de Lina, souligne à la fois la reconnaissance de l'importance des situations sociales (post-socialisme) autant de fois futiles et souvent sans pertinence dans la vie des enfants. La notion de post-socialisme est situé au sein des géographies 'aéchelles' de la vie quotidienne de Lina, plutôt que comme une condition sociale imposée.

Mots clé: feminité; quartier urbain; geographies 'aéchellées'; post-socialisme; histoire de vie; Bratislava.

Summary

1. Introduction

This paper reflects on a gap in the literature on childhood in post-socialism by drawing on a research project which evolves around diverse conceptual and geographical scales. On the one hand questions of personal and private enquiry and often intimate details of children's lives are paramount to understanding

children's lives in post-socialist societies; on the other hand, wider issues of social, cultural, political and economic changes in the regions of East and Central Europe are of important consideration.

The question of scale that arises in these explorations and notably determines how links between different places are conceptualised and considered, is respectably discussed in the literature on scalar components of children's lives and on children's geographies of the relation between the 'global' and 'local' (Katz 1993, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006; Massey 1998; Aitken 2001; Nayak 2003; Ruddick 2003; Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005; Jeffrey and Dyson 2008). Drawing on recent discussions on the range and 'excess' (Horton and Kraftl 2006) in agenda of social studies of childhood, particularly taking inspiration from Lee's (2001) concept of 'immature sociology', this paper firstly evaluates usefulness of the concept of post-socialism for critical studies of children's everydayness. Secondly, the paper outlines possible strategies for intersection of the two themes.

2. Children and/in post-socialism – building an agenda

In the recent years, social studies of post-socialism have diverted their focus from transformation of political and economical institutions towards 'everyday experiences... the everyday, grounded emergent formations' (Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008, p. 317). Inspired particularly by anthropological literature (Verdery 1996; Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2002), geographers divided their attention between studies of transitions towards "capitalism and democracy" – and even here acknowledged complexity and indistinctness of these concepts (Bradshaw and Stenning 2004) – and how the changes of formal institutions are accompanied by changes of cultural patterns (Creed 1999) or life conditions (Hörschelmann 2004) – without necessarily expecting one determining the other (Smith and Swain 1998).

Critical geographies of post-socialist change (Timár 2003; Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008) also opened up space for considering economic displacements, political exclusions or cultural commodifications embedded within transformational processes. A special focus has been given to groups such as people with low income or in the risk of poverty (Smith 2002, Smith and Stenning 2006, Smith and Rochovská 2007, Stenning *et al.* 2007), women (Smith 1999, Van Hoven 2001, 2004, Hörschelmann and Van Hoven 2003) or Roma people (Sibley 1998). On the other hand, children, despite being frequently excluded, both within everyday and formal institutions and also from academic engagement (Dodman 2004; Aitken and Lund 2007), are notably absent from these accounts. With some exceptions in Hörschelmann and Schäfer's work on young people's daily lives in East Germany (Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005, 2007; Schäfer 2007; Hörschelmann 2008, 2009) or recent study of Belgrade children's coping with risk and safety (Tomanoví and Petroví 2010), geographers' attention to children in post-socialist regions, or more narrowly in terms of this paper, in East and Central Europe, has been

negligible. Even within broader area of social sciences, interest in childhood in East and Central Europe is mostly limited to studies at the macro-scale or to children as passive subjects in areas such as reproduction politics and attitudes, child care or other domestic family strategies (Blazek and Smith, forthcoming).

One of the reasons for this might be the focus on post-socialism as juxtaposed to the socialist era through a comparative analysis of historical, spatial and cultural changes (see Stenning 2005a, 2005b; Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008). Here, twenty years after changes in countries of East and Central Europe, the current generation of children often lack even indirect experiences or recognitions of the former era. This point thus poses a question that if 'post-socialism cannot be reduced to neoliberal economic restructuring, nor just to the legacies of socialism (and pre-socialism), nor indeed to the passage of "transition"' (Stenning 2005a, p. 124) and is 'rather all of these' (ibid.), what is the place of younger generation of citizens in post-socialist regions in post-socialist studies, and – is there any at all?

An answer to this dilemma needs to begin with figuring out how to approach the concepts of 'childhood' and 'everydayness' themselves. Compared to critical approaches to post-socialism discussed above, recent propositions in children's geographies (e.g. Freeman *et al.* 2003; Van Blerk and Kesby 2008; Barker 2008) seem to stress some similar issues– especially importance of the prior attention to children's everyday experiences and agency. On the other hand, there are some troubles in defining childhood itself: difficulties in defining its boundaries with adulthood (Valentine 2003); or the very destabilization of both concepts through thinking about the human subjects as constantly fluid and heterogeneous becoming (Lee 2001). Horton and Kraftl (2005) argue that complexity and messiness of the everyday life, including people's experiences and practices, massively exceed the agenda of social researchers that often stems from distinct and crystallized discussions about 'usefulness' or 'importance'. Against this, they call for scholar engagement that would be 'more-than-useful', i.e. would acknowledge the manifoldness and prolificacy of what matters in children's geographies, or, indeed, in children's lives (see also Horton and Kraftl 2006; Horton *et al.* 2008). They advocate 'pointless geographies... geographies that are still useful in some sense, but whose sense has not been defined *in advance* (with no pre-defined "point") as "useful"' (Horton and Kraftl 2005, p. 133, italics added), believing that 'usefulness arises in practice' (ibid.).

Although there is a critique of this approach, warning against 'empiricism for its own sake… little more than cultural voyeurism, a somewhat sterile play space which to occupy' (Matthews 2005, p. 271) and especially at the moment when 'children's geographies [are] beginning to reach out to those practitioners and professionals who work with children as their advocates and benefactors'(ibid.), there is a reason why this paper also advocates the empiricist (i.e. 'pointless') approach to post-socialist studies of childhood. My argument is that Matthews's point of critique is very much restricted to the context

of the UK (or maybe Western Europe / Anglo-Saxon areas), with a situation different from the context of East and Central Europe. As I argued above, there is a) absence of academic engagement with everyday lives of children in East and Central Europe and even more of transfusion of such engagement into social policy and practice; and b) certain neglect even in studies of everyday experiences of adults; and insufficient recognition of 'everyday, grounded emergent formations that the core is unable, or unwilling, to see' (Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008, p. 317). For the lack of such knowledge, I believe in carefulness of premature pronouncements of what is 'useful' and what should determine the agenda of research interest in children from East and Central Europe. Instead, this paper promotes relevance of ungrounded empirical inquiries, interested even in the 'ostensibly most everyday mundane, banal, unremarkable facets of lives led by children' (Philo and Swanson 2008, p. 201), and arising from a detailed and intensive engagement with everyday children's lives.

3. Research and method

The paper draws from research undertaken in a highly deprived neighbourhood[1] of Bratislava, the Slovak Capital. The research was completed through participation with the local Community Centre in the role of outreach youth worker. My engagement with the children through community work was developed through the policies of 'youth mobile work'. As such, the Centre firstly reached children in their own environment and settings, i.e. offering counselling services and leisure-time activities on the street, instead of in a formal space of the institution. Secondly, the Centre aimed to react to children's needs and requirements instead of fitting them into a pre-constructed framework of social policy. Finally, the Centre's goal was to minimize any demands and barriers that the clients could not meet so the services would be accessible to children and young people for whom common institutional services (clubs, leisure facilities etc.) were inaccessible (for a variety of financial, social, geographic or symbolic reasons).

The context and background of the research were significant in multiple ways. Firstly, the neighbourhood represented a dense, post-socialist urban landscape of large panel-block buildings established in the early 80's and typical for contemporary urban Slovakia. Secondly, the neighbourhood is home to an exceptionally high proportion of children and young people; this is a result of a decision of the City Council to choose the neighbourhood as the area for housing of people unable to pay for their rent elsewhere, and with a preference to families with young children. Thirdly, the neighbourhood as an area with one of the highest levels of deprivation in Bratislava also lacked any social facilities or services that children and young people could use, and at the same time

1. The identity of the neighbourhood is not revealed to help securing anonymity of the participants.

was detached from other parts of the city by railway, motorway and a nearby industrial zone. Finally, in terms of the methodology and access, the research was undertaken in an open environment of children's everyday lives (mostly on the street in the neighbourhood), following the rules and patterns of local children. This last contextual note bridged practices and background of the research and the conceptual/analytical framework of the study.

What follows, is a story of a seven-year old girl called Lina[2]. Lina was a Roma girl from the neighbourhood, who lived with her parents and five siblings in a lack of material welfare. The family had moved to the neighbourhood one year before the research commenced and lived in the social lodging house of the City Council with a temporary rental agreement. The first part of the analysis maps issues through encounters with which Lina developed practices of self-constitution. In other words, I am interested a) in the contexts of Lina's performance and daily practices and b) her understanding of these everyday encounters.

For understanding this wide range of issues, I have employed Nick Lee's concept of 'immature sociology' (Lee 1998, 2001) as the analytical tool. Lee turns the notions of agency and structure around in aim to break out from enclosed perspective of the autonomous and already-constituted human being/subject, focusing instead on the 'incompleteness, dependency, variety and flux of human life' (Lee 2001, p. 126, see also pp. 108-117). Agency, instead of based on an individual capability of *acting against convention* and thought through the principle of *independence and self-possession*, is thus reconsidered through the notions of *incompleteness and dependency*. Such a dependency should not be understood as the human-centred dependency, however. Instead, it is a positive form of need for encounter with issues as diverse and heterogeneous such as emotions, memories, physical objects, spaces – but also with people, social institutions, cultural patterns or bodies – in aim to be able to act, to leave traces of practical engagement. 'The more independently self-present [one] appears, the mode dependant that person is for [its] powers and identity as an agent on a network of extensions' (ibid., p. 129).

Further, Lee turns around the traditional view that 'social life is *governed* by convention' (ibid., p. 131, italics in original) and instead he asks: 'What if social life were conducted in search of convention rather than on the basis of conventions that are already known?' (ibid.). Social life would thus seem to be not as much governed by conventions than rather by an open-ended process of making sense and producing order as 'the result of temporary and local settlements among social participants of what conventions they should apply to themselves and to each other' (ibid.). For Lee, 'conventions, then, do not govern society from the "outside" but emerge alongside and receive strength from assemblages that they are consistent with. They do not create social order, but are part of social orders that are created. As an assemblage grows, so its accompanying conventions come to seem more and more reliable. They take

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2.   The name was changed to protect her identity.

on the appearance of truth. Truth regimes, then are built of materials and practices as well as ideas. But since assemblages are open-ended, they are never complete. Thus even though conventions are stable enough to be applied over time and across different places they are always open to change and replacement, on the condition that materials and persons are assembled in ways that are consistent with their change or replacement' (ibid., p. 133). Lee's approach to subjectivity as becoming thus creates a notion that is unfinished, immanent to social and individual practices, and not necessarily re-enacting the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Importantly, while children indeed are often confronted with pre-established institutional or discursive formations of childhood/adulthood, they still might encounter them in unexpected ways that do not conform to these discursive/practical fields and rather new and novel subjectivities might emerge (Derrida 1991).

The second part of the analysis then focuses on *interconnections* between some of the issues that come up in the process of the primary analysis. Using two complex examples of 'what matter' in Lina's life, the paper responds to the variety in how the notion post-socialism might be useful for studies of children's lives in East and Central Europe – but also shows limits of its adaptability and the need to recognize such relevance in situated manners. It thus links two areas of studies – post-socialism and childhood – both approached from the critical perspective of the everyday life.

4. 'Mapping' Lina

What follows is principally a mapping exercise. In the initial stage of analysis, my aim was to identify a set of issues that helped to recount "what mattered" in Lina's daily self-constitution. The following list illustrates heterogeneous relations of Lina's everyday life, her daily practices and recognitions:

— *Father* – a provider with strong impact on children; stories of the family life retold by Lina centred around father's activities (not mother's); about him buying things for children or taking them out; a rare model of male role in Lina's life; history of negative behaviour towards the children (alcohol, abusive behaviour?)...

— *Mother* – strong engagement of Lina, particularly through practical issues – mother performing everyday care for family through the routine domestic practices; the presence of mother more "obvious" and "unremarkable"; incivil behaviour (foul language) present at home and reproduced by Lina and her (even youngest) siblings...

— *Parents/family authorities* – examples of anxiety/indulgence when her father is about to come home/to be away for some purpose; of Lina ultimately "threatening" to "tell mother" when she tries to persuade her younger brother to do something; parents/older siblings never included in Lina's conflicts with other children (she does not use them as "asylums", deals with her troubles on her own)...

— *Confidence/Reliance* – lack of recourse at home/searching for it elsewhere; Lina's contact with the Community Centre traced by this; often dealing with issues/troubles on her own...
— *Spatial and social mobility* – basically none apart from her school – which is not a preferred social space for Lina, she does not like it there; even higher importance of the everyday life in the neighbourhood – the key area of Lina's experiences and practices; rare contacts even with the wider family...
— *Spatial imaginations* – expectations and imaginations about the wider world are minimal and "shrunk"; known spaces and issues often intersecting or present at other sites through associations (home, street, Centre, school)...
— *Peers* – very few social contacts with adults apart from people from the Centre; few close friends from the neighbourhood – those who were often moved away from the neighbourhood, Lina herself moved to the area only two years ago; most intensive (and lasting) contacts with her own siblings; often expulsed from a group of children – symbolical aspect of her Roma ethnicity as a common factor (mentioned by the other children); Lina being hard-nosed and confrontational either...
— *Embodiment* – Lina's ethnicity as a corporeal mark within often racist discourses in Slovakia; self-stylisation (e.g. avocation to shape her hair, or even doing make-up); Lina's enjoyment in physical activities (climbing trees or walls, jumping games, bodily contact when meetings staff from the Centre)...
— *Proximity* – physical contacts with people (Community Centre staff, siblings) where affinity is built – at least tapping on shoulders or leaning against; safe-zone towards others – avoiding other people from "safe" distance and looking for space for play that would be "her own"; differences within various roles – grabbing arm of her younger brother when she must care for him or staying besides in collective games...
— *Siblings* – caring for the younger ones, having the responsibility given by her mother; playing with them as with the closest friends; being cared for by the older ones in similar manner; helping her mother – with shopping, in care for the younger siblings, taking trash out...
— *"Childhood" (understanding of)* – identifying herself as a child, Lina wants/ requires to play; she is often slipshod and frisky; attempts to examine and explore the unknown, for example corners and places in the neighbourhood, crossing barriers established by adults...
— *School* – Lina reported being very good in a summer-preparation programme before she first went to school; however, very little progress in the school in her first year, she had to go over to a school for children with learning disabilities...
— *Attention* – asks for, rather than gives; the middle sibling in the family; learns progressively to work in the group without being necessarily the only one with attention...
— *Responsibility* – Lina able to act responsibly in her duties in the family; also very focused and serious maintenance of relationships that she cares about...

— *Seasonality* – different regulatory regimes from her parents in day and night – has to be back home sooner in the winter; broader spatial and temporary mobility in the summer than in the winter – goes to a swimming pool with her friends...

— *Play* – key aspect of her everydayness – both physical and intellectual activities; social contacts with other people; full of embodied conjunctions with other people; reiteration of tacit knowledge in games, not just enjoyment; effort to teach others the games that she already knows, especially those based on physical activities...

— *Things* – Lina likes to have things for her disposition, rather than of owns them; often steals things for the benefit of using them, but often just for the act of stealing itself; often returning them afterwards to the Centre to get attention; frequent use of the Community Centre's equipment; lack of her own properties; not very careful about things, often breaking or damaging them, including her clothes or some valuable possessions...

— *Rules* – able to understand; often negotiates them to achieve an alternative benefit...

— *Comprehension* – Lina tries to find sense of things around her, she is very curious; her willingness to ask depends on the particular contact – usually she just observes, with some people she asks very straightforwardly; when not asking, she makes up explanations on her own...

— *Ongoingness* – long-term engagements and confidence important for Lina; a routine of services offered by the Community Centre and harsh reactions when things go beyond the regular; very curious about new people, new activities...

— *Gender* – complex performances in different contexts; Lina's embodied practices and self-stylisation into a feminine role – through make-up, clothes, hairdo; having more duties in the household care helping her mother than her brother; very few male friends, mostly girls; suspicious of male adults...

— *Being a* 'Roma' – not often talking about herself as such; not speaking Roma language; her oldest sister, on the other hand, articulating her ethnicity more explicitly, through songs, language, stories; Lina often labelled as a Roma by others, often in negative connotations...

The list of "issues" above is not comprehensive, and at the same time neither of them should be apprehended in isolation. Thinking about Lina's father, for instance, means thinking about rules and discipline, emotions and reliance, other siblings, social (im)mobility etc. Thinking about embodiment requires considering a wide range of activities and events, some of them with co-presence of other people, others undertaken by Lina alone. The mapping exercise thus invokes principally wandering and searching for connections, attractions and triggerings of processes. Figures 1 and 2 thus illustrate connections between the "issues" that are related to one particular "nod" in Lina's life – her father and play, respectively.
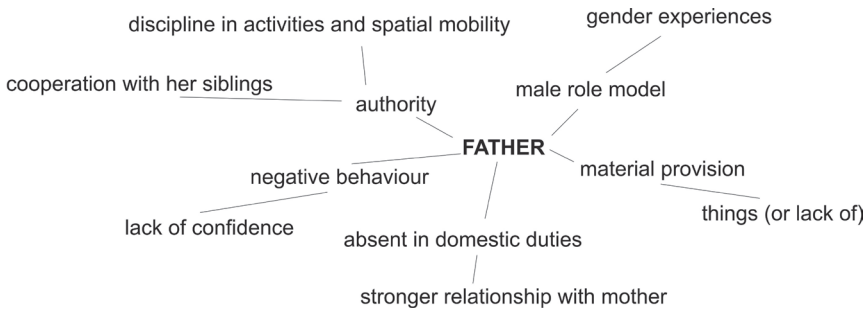
discipline in activities and spatial mobility   gender experiences

cooperation with her siblings   male role model

authority

FATHER

negative behaviour   material provision

lack of confidence   things (or lack of)

absent in domestic duties

stronger relationship with mother

Figure 1. 'Lina's everyday associations to her father'.

more outdoor games in the summer, 'less to do' in winter

seasonality   negotiation of rules, compromises

friends

creativity

embodied learning — tacit knowledge   use of things, spaces, Lina's own body

PLAY — freedom in activities

complex relationship of care and enjoyable sharing — siblings   proximity of others

gender performances   opposite of the school

"girls'" plays (skipping a rope) vs. "boys'" plays (climbing trees)   negotiating the spatial/social distance

Figure 2. 'Lina's everyday associations to play'.

The diagrams are not different in scale from the list above. A difference lies in the resolution and scope of focus – while in the list I aimed to identify a broad range of Lina's associations, the figures present Lina's life from the point of her connections with father or of the importance of play. Importantly, we can see several points of intersections between how Lina's father and play matter for her life– for example both provide different type of gender experiences and performances; both demonstrate the importance of material things; or the importance of Lina's siblings – all in diverse, though complementary manners.

The mapping strategy does not indicate absence of broader (even spatially) associations in Lina's life. In the next part of the paper, I follow two particular stories/events in Lina's life and indicate how often "unremarkable" issues intersect in more complex associations, ultimately taking the discussion back to the notion of post-socialism, and to the question what post-socialism can reveal about lives of children (and vice versa).

5. 'Understanding' Lina (Part One)

As mentioned in the list above, Lina's first year in school was not very "successful". Lina struggled with the basic curriculum and at the end of the year, she was suggested to go over to a school for children with learning difficulties.

While her results themselves and the recommendation to change the school were indisputable, such outcome was rather surprising for the Community Centre staff who had worked with Lina before. In the pre-school preparatory programme during the summer before Lina first went to school, she demonstrated very good effort and enthusiasm in learning, made some remarkable improvements, and while apparently falling short in some individual and social skills, her progress and interest in learning suggested that her establishing in school might be smooth. However, after Lina first went to school, her attitude seemed to change. She still enthusiastically attended the school tutorial programme ran regularly during the week by the Community Centre to help children with their school duties, but she refused to concentrate on her school duties and instead required the Community Centre staff to play with her, or to do other sorts of activities not relevant to her school work. Lina seemed to be unwilling and struggling to adapt to a new environment; while during the Community Centre activities, she worked in very small groups, or often individually with the Community Centre workers, in school, she had to adapt to be in a much bigger group and to much more routine and rigid rules and customs. Being used to be in the centre of attention, she failed to receive this in school and also struggled to cope with the programme more oriented on achievements rather than on process.

While this explanation/understanding of Lina's struggle in school seems to reflect very individual and particular circumstances of her life situation, there are other issues that link her story with broader social and economic processes in Slovakia. Firstly, Lina's contact with the Community Centre was her first experience with institutional educational (or leisure) services. While before 1989, kindergarten existed in sufficient number in Slovakia and they were available to all children – and without fees – recently their number dropped significantly after changes in policy and restrictions in funding, and it is very difficult to find a place. To do so requires sufficient orientation in the system of child care and intensive communication with the heads of kindergartens, a rather high demand and difficulty for Lina's parents. Even when there was a place available, this usually required payment, which caused problems for Lina's family which was not very affluent. Furthermore, even when there was a place available in kindergarten, other barriers emerged. When the Community Centre staff searched for a place for Lina's brother, for instance, they got a reply from one kindergarten where the headmistress was cautious about enrolling a 'Roma', expressing concerns about family background purely because of his ethnicity. Also, while kindergartens were located very densely during the socialist era, nowadays they are situated much more sparsely and parents often have to travel to take their children there. In Lina's case, her parents were unable to take her everyday to kindergarten as the care, almost exclusively given by the mother, had to be shared among all children and Lina's mother simply would not have time to take Lina to kindergarten – she refused to enrol Lina's older brother to kindergarten for this reason, even when the Community Centre staff found a place for him.

The lack of material resources and the social status partly based on her ethnicity were among the main reasons why Lina had had very little social skills and experiences when she entered school. Her story illustrates not only the social stratification in Slovakia after 1989 and the emergence of poverty, but also the decline in social services provided by the state even to the least affluent families. Moreover, the issue of ethnicity can also be understood partly within the context of social and cultural changes after socialism. While ethnical tensions and discrimination of the Roma in Slovakia were present also before 1989, the issue of their exclusion has become much more prominent in the last twenty years. In Lina's case, her admission to school was accompanied by her social status – as the girl from a poor Roma family – and her lack of social skills because of social isolation of her family before moving to the neighbourhood. These factors also contributed to her struggles in school. Furthermore, Slovak schools have been criticized for a high proportion of Roma children who are transferred from regular schools to schools for children with disabilities without appropriate examination, and for the lack of sensitive approach to different social and ethnical background that Roma (or other) children might come from. The stratification and tension in the Slovak society in transformation that determined Lina's history before entering school thus marked also her achievements there and contributed significantly to her transfer to the school with mostly children with mental disability, which was not the case of Lina. In other words, this story demonstrates how relevant issues in daily lives of children such as Lina can be complex assemblages of components some of which are very individual (Lina's personality, for example her drive for attention), but others have deeper and broader causes intrinsic to transformations of the whole society, though still expressed in often unnoticed everyday experiences of the children.
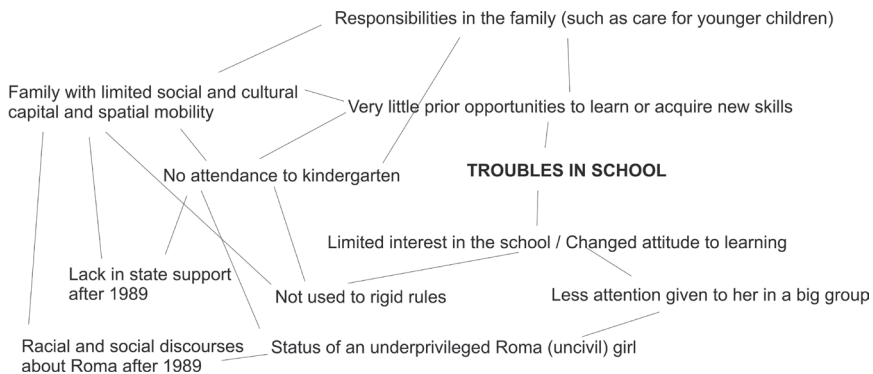

Figure 3. 'Mapping Lina's failure in the school'.

6. 'Understanding' Lina (Part Two)

The second example comes from my very initial contact with Lina in my role of community social worker. Since our first meeting Lina behaved aggressively towards me with a range of behaviours from verbal insults, to kicking or spitting. At that time, I was the only male worker in the Community Centre and Lina did not make any similar expressions of outrage, the will to dominate or drawing of attention, towards any of my other colleagues.

When I talked about these struggles to senior staff members in the Community Centre, I was given a possible explanation coming from Adlerian psychology, interpreting Lina's actions as striving for significance (i.e. for attention, being recognized) and superiority (i.e. for dominance, power over the other person). Moreover, an explanation through gender aspect was mentioned, emphasising how Lina's experiences with male adults were limited to her father whom she had known as a dominant authority that often behaved unpleasantly at home. Lina's attitude towards me was thus explained through the concept of 'displacement', i.e. 'discharg[ing] impulses by shifting from a threatening object to a "safer subject"' (Corey 2001, p. 72). The strategy I was advised to adopt was to challenge and tackle all three points mentioned above – striving for significance, for superiority, and the displacement in Lina's actions. In other words, I had to demonstrate to Lina and persuade her that a) I respected her as she was and she did not have to dominate over me to achieve this appreciation; b) she could benefit (be empowered) from a relationship based on mutual respect and collaboration rather than on tensions and duelling; c) I had a positive adult-male identity in relationship to her that would differ from her negative experiences with her father.

The negotiation of circumstances that affected Lina's behaviour and the progress of our relationship evolved from the points mentioned above and led to a successful "reconciliation". Without going into details of this process, I want to stress two moments relevant for the analysis of connections in Lina's life. Firstly, our encounters mattered to Lina, regardless if this remark would be based only on the effort she had to give to confront me at the beginning of our contact, or on the range and frequency of activities we shared after the relationship improved. Secondly, very little in this story can be explained by using post-socialism as the analytical framework. While certain family circumstances that had had impact on Lina's history were associated with broader social processes in Slovakia after 1989, entangled relationships and practices expressed through this story might have arguably emerged almost anywhere else and in any period. This clearly does not matter that they should be ignored in social analyses – as they can be highly relevant for everyday experiences and practices of children such as Lina. Neither should the personal nature of the second story stand in contrast with broader "social" explanations given in the first example – Lina's struggles in school were here also presented and analyzed through her very intimate experiences and actions. While in the first story the heterogeneous
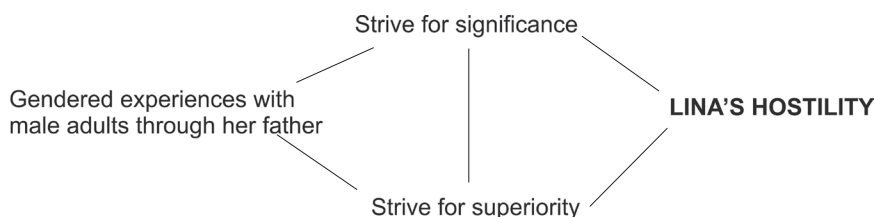
Figure 4. 'Mapping Lina's hostility'.

analysis of issues important in Lina's lives identified traces of associations to post-socialism, in the second example such associations were just minute and almost negligible, and reconstructed Lina's life as evolving beyond the post-socialist changes in the region.

The figure, while not exhaustive, also indicates associations to some other features not included in this diagram – particularly through the history of Lina's relationship to her father, as outlined in the previous section. It thus needs to be emphasized again, that any portrayal given in this analysis is neither isolated nor comprehensive. Instead, they represent only very situated scope of Lina's life. Also, no relationship between issues in the diagrams should be thought as stable and complete; they are dynamic and enacted through specific practices of Lina or people and institutions around her.

7. Conclusion

This paper has been motivated by the striking absence of children's everyday lives in social studies from East and Central Europe, or, more specifically, in studies of post-socialism. Despite the lacking analysis of children and/in post-socialism, I have argued that post-socialism as an analytical framework should not be necessarily a starting point for studying childhood in East and Central Europe. The approach, illustrated through the example of a young girl Lina, set out in the opposite direction – beginning with the everyday experiences, often mundane and unremarkable, and tracing the 'new maps of the subject' (Pile and Thrift 1995, p.50) where post-socialism might only possibly have a place. The story of Lina proved that post-socialist change, through transformation of social services, social stratification, or changes in discourses on ethnicity, civility and socio-economic status, indeed mattered for how Lina's everyday life evolved in the neighbourhood and beyond. Even in this perspective though, post-socialism mattered in Lina's life not as the institutional transition, i.e. a pre-constituted content, a specific 'constant... serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 116). Instead, it was enacted through particular situated practices that Lina encountered – as a girl from a poor family, or as a Roma; in the school or in the neighbourhood – and which 'preceded' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986)

the post-socialism conceptualized as the transition towards free market capitalism and representative democracy. Importantly, the interest in Lina outlined the everydayness through presentation of her practices, experiences or desires, while at the same time 'concentrate[d] on connections between the micro and the macro, and that it is very much in transitions from the one to the other' (Philo and Smith 2003, p.111).

On the other hand, the analysis uncovered that there is still much more in Lina's life than just connections and outputs of the societal transformation. Some issues that matter for her are deeply personal and adjoin to the 'excess' (Horton and Kraftl 2006) of complexity in Lina's life. The notion of post-socialism has thus proved to be an important but still not sufficient source for understanding of lives such as Lina's. Drawing from this analysis, I would like to conclude the paper by reemphasising Chris Philo's words that: 'Scholarship on the spaces of childhood must focus on more than just the specifics of particular sets of children in particular places... [and] must also look to the larger picture encompassing many different sets of children spread across many different places, and must accept the challenge as shaped by broad-brush political-economic and social-cultural transformations. It is indeed to stress the need to study *connections of all sorts, adopting a diversity of theoretical perspectives, in exposing the spaces of childhood to a critical scrutiny which might herald „real" changes in the conditions of existence for children* who are in poverty, being excluded, suffering abuse or simply enduring neglect' (Philo 2000a, p.253, italics added). An answer how to approach children's everyday lives in post-socialism thus might arise from a 'descaled' (Ansell 2009) perspective that smoothly connects mundane and conspicuous, and at the same time accompanies 'alertness to the complexities of space' with 'an equal sensitivity to the peculiarities of place' (Philo 2000b, p.12).

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