



Being a (Female) Child in Baku: Social Order and Understandings of Well-Being

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Abstract

What does it mean to be a (female) child in the city of Baku, Azerbaijan? How can we critically interpret the girls' understandings of well-being considering different forms of compliance with unequal social orders? What conclusions may be drawn from understandings of well-being about the nature of welfare state structures and there-in children's specific positioning? To answer this question, we conducted qualitative interviews with 13 girls during their various leisure activities. The study shows that parents and in particular mothers are children's key reference persons, while there are hardly any spaces the girls can explore or reference persons outside their immediate families. The article reconstructs how the 13 girls view the social practices of adults and how they relate these practices to their own perceptions of well-being. We inductively reconstruct different forms of compliance, i.e., the extent to which social practices are consistent with the symbolic representations (norms and values) of a specific social order and specific relations of power and hegemony. The analysis shows how girls make differentiations between adult social practices based on their knowledge orders: some practices they justify through a sort of complicity with adultist structures (competent compliance), others they must accept due to their own vulnerabilities as children (compliance and constitutive vulnerability), still others irritate, are rejected, or sabotaged (fragile compliance).

Keywords Azerbaijan · Baku · Childhood · children's understandings of well-being · Forms of compliance · Social order

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1 Introduction

The question of what is good and right for children as a central starting point of well-being research emphasizes the importance of the subjective perspective (Ben-Arieh, 2000; Ben-Arieh et al., 2014, p. 10) and thus the perception, evaluation, and expectations by the child herself. Less frequently, the question of how this “subjective” is configured from an epistemological perspective is thematized (see also Fattore et al., 2017; Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019). In the process, the social entanglement of the individual in the societal structure that forms it into a subject is often overlooked and analytically neglected in child well-being research. In principle, the discussion about the meaning of subjective versus objective well-being research takes up this question of the entanglement of the individual in its contextual and structural relations (Casas & Frones, 2020, p. 198; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016). However, the research that thinks and seeks to analytically reconstruct subjective assessments of well-being together with objective conditions is rather rare (Cohen-Kaminitz, 2020, p. 4).

The methodological approach we have chosen does not distinguish between subjective assessments and objective conditions but sees actors in this sense positioned in social orders, that their subjective assessments of well-being are always already permeated and co-determined by these (Winker & Degele, 2009; Ganz & Hausotter, 2020; Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019). Consequently, there are no “pure” subjective assessments of one’s own well-being, but only those that are an expression of the social relations in which the child is situated (Fattore et al., 2017). What is often called objective (e.g. socio-economic status) is merged with the subjective (one’s own view) and analytically the question arises how a reconstruction can look like, which can make social inequality relations, for example, which are merged with the subjective, visible (Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019) and thus can be processed on a socio-political level: e.g., in the sense of creating comparable starting conditions (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016; Veenhoven, 2001).

The aim of this paper is to show for a specific local context how the interconnectedness of social order and the relational relatedness of understandings of well-being is represented along the reconstruction of empirically collected interview data. With that, two epistemological gains are the focus of the paper: by interviewing eight- to twelve-year-old girls about their well-being in Baku, Azerbaijan, empirical findings on a local context where no research on child well-being has been conducted before. Second, an intersectional methodological perspective that makes visible the interconnectedness of subjective experience, of social order with the norms and values relevant to meaning (symbolic representations), and of social structures. With the background of our key findings, different questions can be posed to child well-being research, as they are made thematically significant in the context of this thematic issue, but also of general importance: How do generational and also gender relations in family and in school define children’s well-being? What does it entail for children and their agency to be situated in social orders that shape their ideas of subjective well-being in a specific way? What are the challenges for welfare state arrangements against the background of

the empirical findings presented here (Bradshaw, 2014; Veenhoven, 2001)? For example, what meaning can be attributed to subjective concepts of well-being if social relations of power and domination are affirmed and reproduced in them? This question gains relevance as such reproductions are rendered in our findings.

2 The Context in Azerbaijan: Social Order and the Relevance of Generation and Gender

In telling us what contributes to their well-being children emphasize the overall importance of family, underline the importance of listening to father and mother, of behaving well and of learning at school (not last to please parents and to correspond to their expectations). In this way, they relate their well-being to characteristic societal values as the family in Azerbaijani society is an important normative reference point and the most valued sociocultural form of living together (see also Hunner-Kreisel, 2013, 2016; Sayfutdinova, 2015; Heyat, 2002; Tohidi, 1997). Against the backdrop of a lack of a welfare state and corresponding care, there is also a high dependence of individual members of society on family and their social networks. The family not only has a high symbolic value, which is passed on from the older to the younger generation, but it is also in many respects a guarantee of survival. This notion reflects the role of the family in the constitution of Azerbaijan, in which the family is identified as the central societal provider of care, welfare and support. According to article 34, children are responsible for respecting their parents and taking care of them. Children who are over 18 and able to work must support their parents when they need support (see Sayfutdinova, 2015, p. 27). According to Sayfutdinova, in Azerbaijan the logic of the family as the main provider of welfare and support can make comparisons with other welfare regimes difficult. This role of the family has increased during the societal transformation following Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 and the end to a Soviet-style welfare model of lifelong care and support provided by the state (Polese et al., 2014; Sayfutdinova, 2015). According to Sayfutdinova, the family, now even more than during Soviet Azerbaijan, is an important provider of care who compensates for those supports that the welfare state used to provide (see *ibid.*). This includes the loss of state-sponsored activities outside of school such as extra-curricular activities and vacation programs provided in the past by the state's organizations for children and youth (Sayfutdinova, 2015, p. 26). The loss of these kinds of programs is similar to other countries that had Soviet welfare regimes in the past (see Pastułka & Ślusarczyk, 2016, in Piattoeva et al., 2016). This form of childhood or youth in terms of structured vacation and leisure time and supervised, extra-curricular activities is still a rarity in today's Baku.¹ For these reasons children spend a lot of time at home and with their mothers who are primarily responsible and are the key reference persons for child-rearing and house-keeping duties (see Habibov et al., 2017; Tohidi, 1997), and who are overloaded

¹ This information relates mainly to the capital city of Baku, where the children interviewed live, as well as one-third of Azerbaijan's nine million population.

with organizing the daily life. Against this background, one could argue that family, the parents, and the specific adult/mother-child relationship form a dominant framework for understanding the concepts of well-being of the interviewed children in Baku.

3 Method and Materials

The research we present in our article is related to the project “Children’s understanding of well-being: Global and local perspectives” (Fattore et al., 2019, 2021). This is a multinational, qualitative research project that is interested in concepts of well-being of children between the ages of eight and fourteen. The epistemological frame of the research project attempts to include the perspective the children themselves have on well-being via a participative approach, but what Hunner-Kreisel and Kuhn (2010) call the “perspective of the child” - considers structural issues as well. It engages in this respect, to consider the local contexts and investigate how situational experiences relate to national and local prerequisites on child well-being. For our research done in Baku/Azerbaijan we used the manual developed by Fattore et al. (2021). The manual includes three central guiding questions (about important persons, activities, and places) and provides suggestions for differentiating the guiding questions in the form of further questions; these have been sensibly adapted to our specific local contexts as well as to each interview situation and process to design the semi-structured interviews. The data we present in this article consists of six semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 13 girls aged 10 to 12 years, all of them living in Baku, the capital city of the Republic of Azerbaijan.² Four of the interviews were undertaken together by both authors in 2017; two interviews were conducted by one author alone. In five interviews, two girls participated at once, and in one interview three girls participated. The girls were either friends or sisters (Güldan & Selin, 10 and 12 years, sisters; Defo & Gözal, 12 and 10 years, sisters; Jamila & Khadija, 11 and 9 years, sisters; Elizabeth & Skipr, 10 years, friends; Aytaj & Gözal, 10 years, friends; Raqsana, Lala & Laman, 11 years, friends). In the recruitment of the participants, we used a convenience sample, its focus on female children is random. The girls chose their own pseudonyms. All girls and their mothers were asked for consent and were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. The data collection was carried out in accordance with the ethical standards set out in the German Society for Educational Sciences. The interviews included mapping activities and the girls were provided with drawing/painting and sculpting supplies and encouraged to draw or sculpt important places, activities, and persons. During the interviews these activities were used to elicit and support

² Since 1991 Azerbaijan is an independent country and together with Georgia and Armenia forms the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan is a secular Republic and is a Muslim-majority country, which sees itself as part of the Islamic world (Cornell, 2015; Baberowski, 2003). Azerbaijan has over ten million inhabitants. It is considered a post-Soviet, middle-income country (World Bank, 2010) with a high human development index (UNDP, 2022). The political system of Azerbaijan is considered authoritarian (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

children's narrations. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later translated into English.

The interviews took place in ethnographic settings, meaning in the context of full-day invitations and meetings (up to five persons each family; mother with kids), or the researchers visited the girls for several hours and had already known the girls for some time. The children loved the interview dates as they gave them opportunities to meet their friends and to play together. Besides that, in Azerbaijani language the so-called custom, "qonaq getmek", which means, to visit somebody and to be someone's guest is a social event, an occasion to dress and to beautify oneself. As such, the girls appreciated the interview situations very much. Thus, although the children voluntarily participated in the research and expressed pleasure in being asked, asymmetrical constellations emerged several times in the interviews. For instance, during the interview, Jamila & Khadija multiple times address the (Azerbaijani) interviewer as "teacher". It is likely, therefore, that the girls defined the interview situation in terms of a hierarchy of power; indeed, the interviews reveal such understandings of an asymmetrical, hierarchical social order. The interviewers tried to level the perceived hierarchy to some extent, for example by noting that the mapping activities would not be evaluated.

In terms of methodology, it should be noted that the girls were not interviewed individually but in pairs and, once, in a group of three. We did this to ameliorate the adultist generational order. However, these interview settings also had the - previously not considered, but methodologically obvious - consequence of discursive exchanges between the girls. For instance, one girl picks up and continues what her sister or friend has said. Thus, the interviews are revealed as spaces of conjunctive experience (i.e., collectively shared experiences, in the sense of Karl Mannheim; Bohnsack, 2004).

Regarding the analysis of the interviews, the data, in a first step, was coded using the grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). This evaluation method is an inductive procedure that aims to reconstruct central concepts and categories from the data and to form a data-based theory. In a further evaluation step, the inscription of structures of social order in the subjects as well as powerful symbolic representations that legitimize these structures were analyzed using the approach of intersectional multilevel analysis (Winker & Degele, 2009; Ganz & Hausotter, 2020). This method of analysis reconstructs social practices of the actors³ and analyses them for inscriptions in the form of symbolic representations (norms and values) as they are made significant or named by the interviewees. Thus, norms and values are inscribed in subjects through social discourses. This can be, for example, the

³ In order to be able to adequately include the relational relatedness and the structuredness of the world in our analysis, we draw on Reckwitz's (2004) understanding of social practices as the result of embodied social knowledge that acquires continuity through repetitive, performative practice (skillful performances, cf. Reckwitz, 2004, p. 45). Social knowledge is central to this understanding of social practices. Such knowledge emerges through the interplay of cognitive orders with practices grounded in material bodies and artefacts (Reckwitz, 2004, p. 43) and it is the practical knowledge that allows bodies to become actors. Further, we understand the social, which we call social order, as repeated performances that are situated locally, temporally, and in specific contexts (ibid.).

naming of respect and obedience towards elder persons. Furthermore, social practices are analyzed for structural aspects that may be implicit or explicit. For example, a structural category of generation can show up implicitly through practices of generational ordering, when the girls interviewed name respect and obedience towards elders or towards father and mother as a central value. Generation as a structural category also shows up in explicit form when respect of children towards their parents is enshrined in the Azerbaijani constitution (Sayfutdinova, 2015, p. 27). Of central methodological importance herewith is the analysis of the interactions of inscriptions in the individual, i.e., of structures and symbolic representations with social practices. This analysis of the unequal conditions of the subjects' positionality provides information about their possible agency. This assumption is epistemologically related to Butler's theory of subjectivation, that all subjects, including children, can only develop agency and recognition as social actors if they submit to the structures of a given social order (Butler, 1997) (see in detail on the intersectional, multilevel analysis in child well-being research in Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019).

From this methodological perspective we approach our data. We then reconstruct how the 13 girls position themselves towards the social practices of adults and how they make sense of these practices within the social orders and symbolic representations they encounter. We also examine how the girls implicitly relate these practices to their own concepts of well-being. We structure our findings along forms of compliance, a key concept we reconstructed inductively in our data. With that we aim to show how girls make differentiations between adult social practices: Which practices do the girls justify through a sort of complicity with adultist structures (competent compliance)? Which do they have to accept due to their own vulnerabilities as children in adultist structures (compliance due to constitutive vulnerability)? And which structures irritate or are rejected or sabotaged (fragile compliance)? These reconstructions make visible the unequal conditions under which the interviewed girls are situated in a social order and under which they are constituted as subjects as well as their "subjective" well-being concepts.

4 Family Based Generational Order and Competent Compliance

In particular, the narratives show how the girls position adults as "legitimate" others because they are adults and hold superior knowledge (see also Fangmeyer & Mierendorff, 2017). In this frame, the girls also integrate adult practices they don't like, such as being yelled at. Such practices are interpreted as adults trying to do their best for children. In a way, the girls "translate" such practices so that they make sense to them. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

Defo (in Defo & Nihan): "Mum always shouts at us. It happens. Mum says to me, don't do this. As soon as I do it, something happens to me. Now I tell Nihan, when mum says don't do this, it means something will happen to you. I always thought that because they don't love us, 'mamagil' [*gil* mum indicates belonging; in this case referring to the entire family; note from the authors] shout at us. Then I understood that she shouts at us for our own

good. For our own good, she tries. Nihan: I knew she shouted at us for our own good. Defo: Before I hated it when mum said, “you can’t.”

To be yelled at is legitimate when it is for one’s own good (“for our own good”). The mother is acknowledged to have the power to make decisions; her instructions need to be followed. If not, “something will happen” as Defo puts it. The interviews include numerous statements like this. When asked by the interviewer whether she can remember a situation where she felt very good or very bad, Güldan recounts how she was in the park with her grandfather, and how he told her and her sister not to run, or they would fall and hurt themselves. But they ran anyway, and they did fall. In conclusion, Güldan says that they often do not listen to the adults.

Int: “Do you remember a case when you felt very good and or very bad?” Güldan: “I once went to the park with my grandfather – my grandpa told me that when you run too much you will fall down and since I run a lot I fell down”. Selin: “When we were kids, we would hurt our knees very often”. Güldan: “[a]nd we often don’t listen to adults.”

The position of the parents is that of authority figures; they know better than the children, primarily because they are older. When asked whether the adults listen to them, Güldan responds: „Yes, when it is needed. We listen to each other. They do not do the things that we want but the things that are important.” Gözal answers the same question with a rhetorical question: “*Should you listen to a person who is young/a child?*” In the eyes of the girls, the principle of seniority legitimizes the social practices of the parents and constitutes the basis of their societal-generational status. The symbolic representation of parental status is not love but obedience and respect. Obedience and respect are intertwined; their power arises from a diffuse fear of what might happen – a fear associated with not being the parents’ equal but rather younger and thus less knowledgeable. When the Azerbaijani interviewer asks whether the girls would like to change their dads – because dads can be so strict – Aytaj says no. “*You love him as he is*”, the interviewer adds and Aytaj says: “*We are accustomed to him as he is.*” This turn of phrase – being accustomed to the father’s ways – reflects „the sense of one’s place“ (Bourdieu et al., 1997, pp. 24). This acceptance of their own asymmetric social positioning has the consequence that the girls neither question nor evaluate the father’s practices. Bühler-Niederberger uses Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of complicity (= competent compliance) to show how power and hegemony function in structures like the generational order (Bühler-Niederberger 2020, p. 238). Social actors internalize such structures; they accept them and, indeed, cooperate in their constant construction and reconstruction. They benefit from subjecting themselves to them. Bühler-Niederberger writes: “There are achievements that go beyond mere adapting, they consist in awareness of desired social arrangements, in taking on what seems to be one’s own part to play in them, and in “satisfaction” with arrangements thus made complete” (ibid.: 2020, p. 238). The following interview segment also concerns this satisfaction and well-being based on complicity (competent compliance) with social structures and one’s own positioning in them. When asked why it is important to respect adults, Aytaj

responds: *“Because they are our adults...If we didn’t respect them, we would feel bad...Why have we done it?”*

Feeling bad, as mentioned by Aytaj, is seen as the child’s failure to fulfill her moral and legal obligation to be respectful and obedient toward the adults (Güldan’s statement that they “often don’t listen to adults” can be interpreted in a similar way). What emerges here is the “part the child is meant to play”, in Bühler-Niederberger’s words. The children are aware of this and want to comply. The question “why would we do it?” reflects awareness of a moral failure, of breaking the rules. Correspondingly, “feeling good about oneself” (satisfaction/well-being) is associated with meeting obligations and adhering to rules (such as showing respect by listening to the parents). Güldan, too, associated listening to the parents with being happy when she says *“They [parents] give us happiness – they make us happy – and we have to listen to them.”* Parents – and on occasion the entire family – emerge as guarantors of well-being. This sometimes appears imperative, for instance when Elizaveta talks about her father and what he expects of her: *“My father never risks leaving me in a difficult situation. Never lets me feel strange [...] and he always makes sure that I feel good and never lets me feel bad. He always says that I’ve got to feel well and I always do feel well.”*

5 Family Based Generational Order, Irritations, and Compliance as Existential Dependency of the Child

Parents’ entitlement to respect and obedience is rarely questioned, even when the children recognize that parents make mistakes, and speak out about it. The interview with Raqsana and Lala revolves around the issue of whether parents listen to their children. Raqsana says: *“They do without listening to us (.). As if they don’t even think about our opinion. As if it’s enough that they have their opinion (.).”* Lala agrees and adds that children are not believed. When Raqsana then says that they are too little and don’t know anything yet, Lala seems to have enough and says abruptly to the interviewer that she does not want to talk about this or about her mother anymore. She adds that even if her mother treated her wrongly, she does not want to think about that now. When the interviewer asks whether it would not be nice to talk about her mother behind her back, Lala replies: *“I also never want to stay/to be left without my mum and dad.”* Lala’s retreat from this conversation is not surprising, given the specific vulnerability of children as generationally subordinate and dependent on adults for their societal and legal position (Andresen et al., 2001; Bühler-Niederberger, 2020, p. 244) and especially in a society where family is central and where there are hardly any alternatives to family for belonging and shelter (Hunner-Kreisel, 2013). The sudden remark of never wanting to lose mother or father reveals Lala’s fundamental fear of losing the one place of belonging she has in her life. This fear may be aggravated by Lala’s position as IDP⁴ and her experience

⁴ IDP refers to Internally Displaced Persons in Azerbaijan who fled to Baku during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the 1990s, which escalated again in 2020. At the time of the interviews in summer 2017, the conflict was freshly relevant for Lala and her family in so far that they had just moved out of a home for displaced persons.

of escape and displacement. Against this background, “speaking ill” of mother or parents is, for Lala, out of the question.

The interviews reveal further „irritations” that the girls experience in reaction to the social practices of their parents. Irritations in the sense that some social practices cannot be integrated into their own system of knowledge. Khadija, who had mentioned that her parents do not punish her for poor grades, is most irritated about an episode she witnessed at the place of relatives where a cousin was beaten by his mother. When asked why the aunt would beat the cousin like this, she replies that he had gotten poor grades at school. Khadija ends her story with the words: „*Sometimes I feel angry with some adults (...)*.” Lala also recounts an incident when the girls did not understand the adults. In that incident, the parents had taken down the swing in the garden because of a quarrel with the neighbors’ boy. The girls did not feel responsible because it had been the boy who had angered them and even thrown stones. Defo recounts seemingly arbitrary social practices by her mother and parents.⁵ In one case, this involved sunglasses that a doctor had recommended she should buy to protect her eyes from an allergic reaction. Yet, her mother took her sunglasses away and wore them instead.

We see that the girls do not agree with such social practices of their parents. Apparently, in these cases, respect and obedience are not sufficient as normative reference points. Lacking the necessary discourses, the girls cannot legitimize these parental practices. As a result, they are angry or, in the case of Defo, speechless and irritated. And what comes into play for Lala, as mentioned above, is an existential fear of losing her parents and the security associated with them. In these cases, there is no competent compliance. Instead, we need to consider a form of compliance that consists in the girls’ inability to act, which arises from the lack of alternatives and the fundamental, existential vulnerability of children (Brumlik, 2010, p. 207).

6 Gender-Specific Order as Generational Mother-Child-Order

There are differences in how the girls talk about mother and father. Except for Khadija & Jamila, references to fathers are quite different from references to mothers (Khadija describes her father as somebody who is like a mother). In two interviews the girls remark that fathers are accepted as they are; in all other interviews, fathers are mentioned as important, but they appear like a remote, rather nondescript member of the family. In about half of the interviews, fathers are mentioned as the ones with whom excursions outside of the household take place, such as to the park or to a restaurant.

According to the interviews, mothers have a very prominent position; they are the central reference point for all matters of daily life (see Habibov et al., 2017; Tohidi, 1997). The girls spend a lot of time with their mother at home, she helps them with

⁵ Defo & Nihan (line 622–624) also do not judge the willfully authoritarian practices of their father. They merely refer to him as a “person with character”: „My father has character. For example, he says we are going. After an hour he says we are not going. He changes his mind” (Defo, line 624).

their homework. Her status is sometimes ambivalent. While the girls often refer to their mother as their best friend and confidante, some interviews also reveal arbitrariness and violence on part of the mother. One wonders how voluntary the choice of mother as best friend really is, and how much mother as “best friend” reflects normative pressure. Normative clout and authority of the mother is particularly clear in Defo’s remark (line 612): *“Mum says that your best friend is your mum”*.

Khadija: “The most important person for me in my life is my mother.” Int: “Why is she important in your life?” Khadija: “For example, sometimes some problems happen at school. We cannot share it with our father, we cannot share it with anyone. But we can go and say this to our mother.”

Jamila: “Also our mother helps us when we don’t understand. [...]”

Güldan: “Mum understands us very well – usually she understands us.”

Interviewer: “And who do you share your secrets with?” Aytaj: “With my mother.”

Gözal: “...My best friend is my mother... and Gözal...like this.”

Defo: “Mum says that your best friend is your mum.” Nihan: “I also think so.”

Raqsana, Lala & Laman refer to their mothers as close and intimate reference person, while at the same time they are afraid of them and their harsh reactions and beating. This ambivalence also appears in the interview with Defo & Nihan.

Lala: “I wished that my mum wouldn’t do this to me [harsh reactions]. So that I’m not afraid of her when I say something and she [in turn] will do something to me.”

Raqsana: “I would change it so that my mum treats me even better, that she tells me good words and doesn’t beat me.” Interviewer: “What is a good thing about your mum during the day? The time that you feel good?” Raqsana: “I sometimes work, do a good job, I wash dishes, so that my mum tells me good words. Kisses me [...]”

Defo: “I would like to change [my mother]. She shouts at us when we do something.”

The reconstructed interviews show how the dilemma of asymmetrical power relations in generational orders is reflected in the girls’ relationship with their mother: the mother is a beloved figure and close confidante, while the girls, without much agency in these matters, depend on the mother and her central role in the family, regardless of how kind or harsh she may be. Referring to Bühler-Niederberger’s definition competent compliance can be partly observed here as well. It comes to an end with their mothers performing violence against them, which girls have to endure given their vulnerable position as minors dependent on their parents.

7 The Order of School as Part of the Generational Order

Azerbaijani society values achievement in school and good grades very highly (Hunner-Kreisel, 2016). The girls' stories reflect this. The central value of education, its high priority and the resulting educational aspirations affect parents and children and shape their social practices.

One important aspect in this is something like a generational expectation, even an obligation (*borc*), to get good grades; at least, this is what we found in other field-work. In an interview with adults about their understanding of the societal position of children and youth, Elchin, a teacher in Baku explained that there was no right of the child, but there was an obligation of the child (*borc*) toward his or her parents. It consisted of getting good grades and learning something in school, and thus of the "child" being obliged to the parents and expected to make his or her best effort at school and finish successfully.

In the present interviews, the girls say things that are consistent with Elchin's comments. Güldan's first words in their self-portrait (see beginning of this section) are: „What it's to be a kid in Azerbaijan. To study well, to be happy, to listen to mother and father.” In the actual interview she introduces herself like this: “I'm a student. [...] at the school 160. I like getting excellent grades. My name is Güldan [...]” Elsewhere in the interview, the interviewer asks Güldan why it is so important for her to get very good grades. In response, Güldan refers to the symbolic representation of being smart and to the intrinsic value of knowledge, which the teacher emphasized in a proverb: “*There is a proverb – studying is more valuable than gold (uchenie dorozhe zolota⁶) – our teacher once asked what this proverb means – we said that it is not important to earn a lot of money but being smart is important.*”

The girls also bring up the labor market; for entry into the labor market, graduating with good qualifications is essential.

Selin: “It's [good education] important for finding a good job and earning money”.

Besides the parental home, school is the most important, and often the only place, where the girls spend the day. For each of the 13 girls, school is important and is mentioned frequently in the interviews.

When Güldan says that she loves getting excellent grades, this is typical in the sense that the girls generate feelings of well-being from getting good grades, and thus fulfilling expectations in the generational order. Gözal, for example, states that she does not feel well “*When my marks are four*” and continues: “*If my marks were good, my life would change, because I would be a person who works, when I grow up (...) like this.*”

Even though on the grade scale a four is the second-best after a five, a four is considered a “poor” grade, and “poor” grades are associated with sanctions from the parents such as beatings or the denial of things the girls would like to have but won't

⁶ This quote was given in Russian. Otherwise, only Azerbaijani was spoken in the interviews.

get unless their grades are very good (a five). Therefore, the girls strive to get very good grades. Defo mentions that her mobile phone is broken and that she will get a new one only when she fulfills her parents' expectations and that includes grades no lower than five.

During her mapping activity Raqsana remarks that she wished to be able to fly as freely as a butterfly. When asked about this she explains "flying freely" in terms of being scolded about poor grades and not having an escape route out of this situation (Raqsana: "[...] to go wherever I want, whenever I want ... when I get bad marks at school..."). When asked who scolds her, Raqsana replies "my mum", and then her friend Lala takes over the conversation:

Interviewer: "That they don't quarrel with you?... who quarrels with you when you get bad marks?" Raqsana: "My mum."

Lala: "Once I hid from my mum that I had gotten bad marks. And then my teacher told my mother when we were on the bus. Then she beat me very badly. [...] I have even told her that I felt ashamed. Then I was going for private tutoring and told my teacher that I have got a 4. And then she beat me for that."

Lala's attempt to conceal her poor grade indicates that she perceives a moral responsibility to bring home good grades, and that she wants to fulfill this responsibility. This way, the generational order reproduces within the order of the school. The girls accept parental practices like scolding or beating, which emerge from the school-home context, as expressions of "necessary support". Aware of the societal significance of education and knowledge, and of being expected to do their duty of getting very good grades, the children are afraid of moral failure.

Güldan: "I don't like teachers, some of them even shout sometimes. [...] Once when I didn't bring my copybook [...] – she shouted, why didn't you bring your copybook – bring it now – why didn't you bring it – she was saying this with unpleasant words – like stup[id] ..."

Aytaj & Gözal also draw attention to the behavior of the teacher. When asked what she would change if she had a magic wand, Aytaj replies: "*Rude behavior*", and adds about a male teacher: „*If I had a magic stick, I could change his character too.*“ Similarly, Khadija remarks that the (female) teachers yell at and beat the children; she also makes critical comparisons among the teachers: "*Some teachers beat us, beat us. Beat girls. Boys also. They say bad words. But this teacher never told us bad words. Even when boys become naughty, he makes a flick on their ears. When they do it twice, he calls their mother; their parents [...]*“

These stories often express the (female) teachers' behaviors as unfair practices against which the girls have no recourse. This is due to the teachers' status, which is comparable to that of parents in a generational order that does not grant children the right to defend themselves. When they try nonetheless, the respective teachers will "*put them in their place*" within the school-generational order. A particularly clear example of the scope of opposition, and affirmation of hegemony by the teacher appears in the interview with Khadija and Jamila

(line 456–459). The teacher, who is related to some of the girls, allows these girls to correct mistakes during a test (and thus get better grades) by handing them a sheet with the correct answers. When other children request this “privilege” as well, the teacher “*puts them in their proper place*”. Khadija:

“[...] they correct them quickly. We asked her whether she can also give it [the solution sheet; author’s note] to us. So that we, too, can correct our mistakes. The teacher shouted at us, no, shut up, sit down to your places. We felt angry about that.” The parents of Khadija and Jamila seem to be a little different from the other parents because they do not punish the girls when they bring home poor grades according to Jamila, her mother comments this episode of preferential treatment like this: “*Also my mother says, that she [the teacher, authors’ note] corrects them, but when they will enroll at university they will know nothing.*” This reveals some detachment of the parents from the order of the school in so far as the mother “consoles” the sisters about this unfair treatment. Still, the mother apparently has no intention to intervene and talk with the teacher about her actions.

The girls appear as experts of the school related generational order in which they learn that they have no means to resist the teachers’ practices. However, to some extent school practices that cannot be negotiated may be evaded. For instance, Defo and Nihan talk about the strategies that “the boys” in class had developed to evade the prohibition on mobile phones and tablets at school. The boys would bring two devices to school, hand in one of them and keep the other to secretly use it. Another prohibition the girls mention in this context is against bringing prepared, store-bought food to school such as pizza, Kebab, or birthday cake, which in Baku usually is bought at a patisserie. The reason for this rule is that the food might be spoiled. The children in Defo and Nihan’s class evade the cake prohibition by secretly dividing the cake so that the teacher does not notice. The cake is divided and repacked (“put in things”) so that it is no longer recognizable in its original store-bought form but rather looks like home-made food brought from home.

Defo: And they don’t let us bring cake on birthdays. Nihan: A girl brought a cake, we distributed it secretly [...] The children gathered and hid there, and we quickly cut the cake, put it in things and distributed it, like it was little cakes [...].

In conclusion we can say that the girls’ compliance with social practices at school differs for teachers and parents. The social practices of parents and their expectations of very good grades (best one being 5) are considered legitimate and elicit respect and obedience. We could call this competent compliance. These legitimate parental practices are represented symbolically by the importance of education and knowledge, which are valuable in themselves and for the transition into the labor market, and thus elicit moral obligation toward the parents. Fulfilling these expectations is associated with well-being.

The social practices of teachers do not appear legitimate in this way. Quite the opposite. The girls distinguish between fair and unfair teacher practices.

However, because the girls cannot resist or re-negotiate practices that they deem unfair, they must comply with the school's social order even when they reject or condemn certain practices. Practices of evasion reveal the fragility of this social order, in particular those practices that the children find unfair.

Yet, at the same time, the generational order between parents and children, and the expectation of good grades reinforce the power relations at school. The example of Khadija's mother shows that the girl cannot expect support from the mother against the school because the mother does not question the social order of the school, at least not regarding the practices of the teacher. Instead, the mother "consoles" her daughter by pointing out that those students who received unfair preferential treatment from the teacher will later lack the knowledge they need to study at university – consolation which again symbolizes and enforces the central value of education and knowledge.

Thus, regarding unfair practices by teachers, the girls display fragile compliance. However, in contrast to compliance in the family and with parental demands, this fragile compliance at school is not related to children's existential dependence on their parents. Instead, this compliance reveals asymmetrical power relations to which the children have no choice but to submit. In this context, they cannot generate "Being Well" as one dimension of well-being; what dominates are feelings of rejection (*I don't like*), collective rage (*we feel angry*), shame and helplessness.

8 "Ways-out": Imaginations, Dreams and Wishes

The American writer Hustvedt and Aumüller (2006) describes dreams as an opportunity to do and live what the socio-cultural order in real life does not allow. The girls' phantasies confirm this. In the mapping activity Defo paints herself as walking outside in the moonshine, then sitting down alone, accompanied only by her imaginary dog.

Reconstruction of other interview passages shows that in this phantasy a social practice is indulged – walking alone, at night, in the moonshine, having a dog – that cannot be realized given the constraints of the social order in real life; the phantasy thus compensates for these constraints. Elsewhere, Defo and her sister talk about how they would like to have space for themselves in which they can move at leisure; their two-room apartment is very small, and the girls' room has no windows. They mention that they cannot go out without their father's permission and even then, only when their mother is with them. However, the mother works during the day, which means the girls cannot go out at all. Thus, the fantasy of walking with the dog in the moonshine reflects what is not possible in the socio-cultural order of Defo's real life. It is blocked by the general fear of parents, Azerbaijani parents in this case, to let children, especially girls, out alone and unaccompanied (see also Skelton, 2009); hence opportunities for moving around and going for a walk are left to imagination. Elsewhere in the interview this corresponds to comments in which the girls refer to restricted mobility and their wish for more freedom of movement. The wish for being alone or sitting just with the dog might be reflections of cramped quarters at home and of the desire to have something or somebody entirely to oneself, or

perhaps to be free like a dog (Robin & Ten Bensel, 1985). Because at home space is limited (about housing in Baku, see Roth, 2019 and Hunner-Kreisel et al., 2021) there is no room.



Picture by Defo

for being alone or having things to oneself: the girls' room primarily serves as storage for the mothers' things. Defo would like to be able to design "her" room according to her ideas; she wishes for storage space, different furniture, a different color and sunlight.

„I would change my room. [...] There is mum's stuff. I would like a big wardrobe in which you can put everything. A big one with lots of shelves. I would like to change it. The whole furniture of the room. Then ... the thing I love most is ... and our room doesn't get sun. So, I would swap pink with purple, everything purple" (Defo).

Further on in the *mapping activity* there is more evidence of these wishes. For instance, Defo paints a big house in Stalinka style (see also Roth, 2019, p. 62) and comments that she would like such a house when she is grown up and that each member of her family would have a floor to themselves where each could cook and work by themselves (in addition, each floor has an exercise room). The element of cooking points to the wish to have more space for self-determined action. In the interview, Defo explains that every day her mother asks her to cook, and that, in truth, she likes to cook only when it is a practice that she can decide herself. Her sister Nihan expands and adds: „We can do something like this when we grow up. We can do what we want." Being grown-up appears as the vanishing point of the imagination; when they are grown-up the girls – at last – can do what they like. This notion appears in other interviews as well: being grown-up means overcoming the socio-cultural order of being a child and all the limitations that go along with it.

These fantasies enable an escape from daily constraints to compensatory, imaginary locations as seen with Defo. At the same time, in the very wish to be an adult, the adultist social order is reproduced.

In the mapping activity, Raqsana stuck a note in the shape of a butterfly to the top of her painting and commented that she would like to fly freely like a butterfly (*“I also want to fly free like this butterfly”*). As already described in the section on the social order of school, the butterfly symbolizes an escape from the oppressive situation that she cannot resolve in real life. Besides the fantasy and the wish for a change in the social order, what is visible here is the impotence of the girl because realistic practices of non-compliance are not available.

9 Accomplished Compliance: Recognition as a Person, Self-Determination, and Participation

The interviews also show that there are some adult practices that require no legitimation by referring to symbolic representations and that do not irritate or elicit rejection from the girls. This includes the days when special attention is paid to a girl such as her birthday and by gifts or a cake, or even a surprise party. These days it is not only special attention but the social get-together of the family and an exemption from the usual restrictions. For instance, Raqsana explains that she likes her birthday so much because on that day everybody treats her well. In addition, the girls mention holidays like Novruz (Spring New Year celebrated in Middle East and Central Asia) as well as unusual events associated with special attention and presence of the adults, something the children value highly and mention again and again in the interviews as important for well-being and being happy. For example, Defo & Nihan recount a power outage during which the girls played a game (City-Country-River) with their mother by candlelight. Lala remembers a day on the coast, which she calls the best day of her life, when her uncle tried to teach her to swim by lifting her high up in the air and letting her drop into the water (*“This was one of the best moments in my life. I liked it there”*). It is positive esteem and personal attention that the girls value so much and associate with positive feelings. When asked why she likes to spend time with her mother, Güldan responds: *„Because she is very kind to me. When I’m with my mum we always do house chores, make clean and neat at home. [...] And afterwards my mum watches TV and then we sleep next to each other”*. The girls explicitly associate special attention from the adults, and lack thereof, with their own age. Lala and Aytaj emphasize that smaller children attract the adults’ attention. In contrast, “bigger” children, like the girls, are already so big that they cannot command such special attention anymore: *„Now we are big. My father comes back from home tired and cannot spend time with us. And my mum has things to do at home, she works. But when you are a kid, they play with kids (they cherish or flirt with kids). I want to be small (kid), (...) for myself”* (Lala). Similarly, Aytaj says that it depends on one’s age whether the adults listen because they do listen to the youngest. Gözal concurs and adds: *“When you grow up, they say: ‘Why do you want these like a baby? You are a big girl’”*.

The girls also talk about the issue of self-authorization and having a say in matters concerning them, as well as instances in which they could get their way with the adults or were listened to. When asked about a cherished memory, Raqsana recounts the family driving home together after visiting relatives. Along the way, Raqsana and her siblings ask permission to stop at a park that they will pass on their way home and in which they would like to play. The mother turns them down, saying that it was too late in the day. But the father eventually yielded, and the children could go to the park after all. Raqsana ends with the words: „[...] I was happy then. The thing that I wanted happened.”

According to our data, the girls do not need to actively legitimize those social practices of adults that acknowledge the children as individuals and grant them some authority and participation. We take this to mean that for the girls it is not necessary to become complicit with such practices. In terms of a consistency with the context-specific social order, we can speak of accomplished compliance. In our final considerations we explore the implications of such practices for notions of well-being.

10 Final Considerations: Social Order, Forms of Compliance and children's Understandings of Well-Being

From the interviews we reconstructed different forms of compliance. We found that there are no concrete practices through which the girls would have been able to position themselves outside the strictures of asymmetrical adultist power relations. Escape from these constraints is possible only in imaginary practices, and even in these phantasies escape is predicated on being a self-authorized adult – that is, in the very phantasies the adultist social order is reproduced.

In general, the girls we interviewed are quite willing to meet the expectations of the generational order. They try to understand, legitimize, and accept parental practices within the generational order and apply discursively available symbolic representations such as obedience and respect. Throughout the data we found a repeated and almost formulaic normative emphasis on obedience and respect, which reflects the importance of these representations. Thus, the girls display high competent compliance in terms of adapting to and reproducing generational orders (see Bühler-Niederberger, 2020). Such compliance can generate well-being, something the girls mention explicitly when they say that they feel bad when they don't meet their parents' expectations of respect and obedience, and that they feel good when they do. Within the welfare structures of Azerbaijani society (see Sayfutdinova, 2015), respect and obedience to parents seal the generational contract between parents and children at a normative level, while structurally it is anchored in the constitution; social practices as materialized knowledge order reproduce societal power relations (Reckwitz, 2004).

“Irritations” result when the girls can no longer legitimize parental practices and cannot understand them within the social order. However, compliance with this order is not questioned; the irritations just remain irritations. In asymmetrical, adultist structures children's compliance with these structures is closely associated with their “constitutional vulnerability” (Brumlik, 2010, p. 207). In a welfare state

perspective, this is particularly significant when there is no societal alternative to the family as *the* source of solidarity and support (see also Sayfutdinova, 2015). The existential fear reveals the dilemma of children in generational orders in which they are vulnerable, lack the means to fend for themselves, and depend on adults for care, protection and survival. The adults, in turn, due to their superior position in this order, have power over children, power that could be abused and exploited against which abuse children would have little to no recourse. Children are thus caught in a complex and intricate web of dependencies that influence their well-being. Welfare state structures that are supposed to enable the well-being of children and youth need to address the challenge of how to assert and realize their rights within such complex societal relationships.

Our analytical reconstructions show the societal gender relations that give rise to a powerful mother figure, related to women's role in the family as women are primarily responsible for care work (see also Habibov et al., 2017). This configuration of societal forces puts mothers in a position of considerable power over their children, which creates the potential for arbitrary rule and the abuse of power. Considering the girls' bodily and constitutional dependence on their parents, they have no means to resist such abuse. We see how closely entwined societal inequities are – in these cases it is inequality along the dimensions of gender and generation – and how important it is to analyze these complexities in an intersectional perspective.

Hegemony also unfolds in the relationship between teachers and students at school. The interviews show that the girls experience the teachers' power tactics as arbitrary; they reject and condemn them, and wish they were able to change them. This, however, is not within their means; the asymmetrical power relations at school are reinforced further by asymmetrical generational power relations reflected at the level of symbolic representations in the importance of knowledge and education. In this interplay of hegemonies, a fragile compliance emerges, in which the children question and try to evade the teachers' rule.

Positioned in an adultist, generational social order the girls display different forms of compliance associated with different notions of well-being. Thus, well-being depends on the practices of the adults. The girls describe successful well-being when accomplished or competent compliance with adult practices is possible. This is particularly the case with accomplished compliance. In such moments, the girls feel recognized as individuals and experience a degree of self-determination and social participation. However, those moments are rare and out of the ordinary as reflected in comments such as „The best moment in my life“. And even though well-being may be generated through competent compliance, this form of compliance implies a position of the girls as *othered*. To generate well-being through competent compliance, the girls need to position themselves as deficient compared to adults through lack of knowledge and education and are “ignorant, not-yet-adults” in a generational order in which symbolic representations like respect and obedience vis-à-vis the more knowledgeable adults are essential.

In connection with existential and fragile compliance, understandings of well-being are fragile or non-existent; school emerges as a hegemonial location where unfair social practices of the teachers generate rage, anger, helplessness, and fear in the girls.

According to Clarke (2004, p. 53), theories and models of the welfare state are insufficient when they understand people only as classed, and not also as “racialized, gendered, sexualized – embodied – subjects” (ibid.). To this we can add that individuals also are generationally embodied subjects. Welfare state structures that aim to support children’s well-being need to be analyzed in terms of the multiple, intersecting power relations that position children as dependents with little room for independent action. A theoretical analysis of what might constitute a good childhood (see also Alanen, 2007, p. 35) needs to consider the different forms of children’s compliance with adultist societal structures and associated notions of well-being. Given children’s constitutional vulnerabilities, their well-being cannot be guaranteed until children’s right to recognition, self-determination and participation is anchored in a formal legal framework – and this holds not only for the societal context of Azerbaijan.

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Declarations

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Research Involving Human Participants All ethical procedures of confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent were followed. Participants were involved in the study during their leisure time and with the consent of the immediate adult caretaker (parents).

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants and their parents / immediate caretakers involved in the study. The data collection was carried out in accordance with the ethical standards set out in the German Society for Educational Sciences (DGfE) https://www.dgfe.de/fileadmin/OrdnerRedakteure/Satzung_etc/Ethikkodex_2016.pdf.

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