

CLAUDIA MOCK

FIGURATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

MIDDLE-CLASS TOPOLOGIES
IN NAIROBI AND BERLIN

Worldwide neoliberal urban planning and securitisation create childhoods marked by segregation, confinement and isolation. Especially in middle- and upper-class milieus, childhood appears as a spatial crisis in which children are patronised and disempowered in the name of protection. Claudia Mock draws on intergenerational biographies and mental maps from Nairobi and Berlin to reveal how security discourses intertwine with bourgeois values and architectures, reshaping childhoods in these cities in surprisingly similar ways since 1960. By identifying bourgeois lifestyles and adultism as integral to anthropocentric urban crises, she calls for cities to be reimagined through intergenerational spatial justice.

RE-FIGURATION OF SPACES

[transcript]

Claudia Mock
Figurations of Childhood

Claudia Mock is a Research Fellow at the Georg-Simmel Centre for Urban Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where she lectures in the Department of Social Sciences. Between 2018 and 2025, she held several positions at the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Centre 'Re-Figuration of Space' (CRC 1265) at Technische Universität Berlin, where she completed her PhD in Sociology. In 2018, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, collaborating with scholars at the University of Nairobi. Her research focuses on the sociology of space, children's geographies and global urban inequalities.

Claudia Mock

Figurations of Childhood

Middle-Class Topologies in Nairobi and Berlin

[transcript]

This project was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) – project number 290045248 – SFB 1265 and by a six-month scholarship (PAS) from the Office for Women's Advancement and Gender Equality of the Technical University of Berlin.

This publication was supported by the Open Access Publication Fund of the Technical University of Berlin.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License BY 4.0. For the full license terms, please visit the URL <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

2026 © Claudia Mock

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover concept: Studio Gretzinger

Cover illustration: Collage of a mental map (by a research participant) and a photograph by Claudia Mock

Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen

Proofreading: Sarah Taylor and David Heyde

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839441763>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7964-9 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-4176-3

ISSN of series: 2748-5714 | eISSN of series: 2749-2028

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

*For all those
who shared their childhood stories with me:*

*Amina, Analia, Anne, Ben, Caroline, Chola, Eddah, Eliah, Elliot, Fabian, Falak, Fergusson,
Gathi, Henry, Ijhanya, James, Kili, Lale, Lana, Lisa, Makena, Martha, Matthew, Mercy, Milo,
Mildred, Morris, Neo, Nuhu, Paula, Pele, Pierre, Raphael, Rebecca, Rehema, Ruby, Rose-Ann, Rosi,
Stella, Steph, Sya, Steve, Said, Stephan, Tatiana & Yao.*

Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Narrative Assemblage Part I	11
Auto-Ethnographic Notes	13
Preface	17

PART I

Childhood, Space, and Class

1. From Human Being(s) to Spatial Becoming(s)	27
1.1 Childhood as Spatial Order and Period of Spatial Crisis	28
1.2 Figures of the Bourgeois Child in the Anthropocene	32
2. Invisible Childhoods – Invisible Globalities	39
2.1 Age, Social Reproduction, and Globalisation	40
2.2 Children in the Global Middle-Class Discourse	45

PART II

Methodology and Spatial Theory

3. Countertopological Figurations	59
3.1 Countertopology of Situated Globalities	59
3.2 Collaborating for Space in String Figures	61
3.3 String Figure Play: Towards a Theory of Spatial Becoming	64
3.4 Figuration	99

PART III

Who Speaks? *How*, for What, and to Whom?

4. Position(ality)	115
4.1 Who Speaks?	117
4.2 The Speakers	119
4.3 On Sharing	124
5. Methodical Careful-Mess	131
5.1 Biographical Topo-Storytelling and -Mapping	132
5.2 Architectural Ethnography: Home	145
6. From 'Mess' to Re-Figuring	151
6.1 Topologies of (Un)Belonging	151
6.2 Four Steps of Analysis	152

PART IV

Fluid Subjectivities, Territorialised Housing, and Avoidant Mobilities

7. Narrative Assemblage Part II	161
7.1 Subject and Body: Fluid Subjectivities	161
7.2 Home: Territorialised Housing	194
7.3 City: Avoidant Mobilities	256
8. Ambivalent Hopes	295
8.1 The Classed Persistence of the Three Scales	295
8.2 Fluids, Territories, and Voids	297
8.3 Middle-Class Children as the Bearers of Hope?	302

Attachment

List of Figures	313
List of Tables	317
Bibliography	319