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Strategies of Transnational Motherhood: The Case of Romanian Women

- PhD thesis summary -

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Keywords: transnational motherhood, transfer of care, transnational caregiving, defamation of migrant mothers, transnational communication, empowerment of women

Introduction

I have started off this research wishing to offer an argued answer to the accusations of „abandonment of children left home", allegedly exercised by migrant women, and naturally, I asked myself how migrant mothers in Romania succeed to fulfill their role as mothers transnationally. Specifically, I have formulated the main research question in the following way: „What are the strategies of transnational motherhood in the case of Romanian migrant women?". The very question implicitly assumes a positive response, meaning that transnational motherhood actually works. I have allowed myself to believe it to be unfair to speak of „mass abandonment" in the case of so many women (statistics on migration are still unstable, the last circulated number being 2 million migrants, out of which 50% are women, many of them transnational mothers). The number estimated by researchers in 2008 was of 350 000 (doubling the figures advanced in 2007) children with at least one parent working abroad, about 8% of children in Romania (Gallup, UNICEF, 2008)

I. Theoretical perspectives on transnational family relationships

I.1. The transnationalism of migration as a theoretical stance

Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) noticed that migrants subject to their research developed transnational practices not addressed by migration theories at the time (migration theories served the nation-state and treated the migrants as either exit groups – emigrants – or as entry groups – immigrants). Thus the theory of transnationalism emerged within migration: the theory of processes through which migrants build and maintain multiple social relationships linking their society of origin to the one hosting them (Levitt & Sørensen, 2005). Migrants and their descendents remain active in their country of origin, while they integrate into the host country in multiple ways: social, economical, religious, political and cultural (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

I. 2 The concept of transnational families

Bryceson şi Vuorela (2002, p.3) define transnational families as „*families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as the feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely family-hood even across national borders.*"

Whereas traditionally the household meant a number of people living together and participating in the fulfillment of basic reproductive and productive duties, researchers in the field of transnational families reassess the idea of a household based on cohabitation and take into consideration the spatial separation of its members. For example, in a transnational family one or more adults (parents or grown-up children) produce income abroad, whereas other family members are responsible for the reproductive, social and consumption duties in the home country. This collaboration to the life of the household exists without the active members' living together.

Beyond studies aimed at direct research of transnational families, there also exist subfields of this topic. Thus, within the framework of research on transnational families, the following subfields can be listed: research on transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Erel, 2002, LARG, 2005, Parreňas, 2001, 2005; Raijman et al., 2003), which focuses on strategies of mothers to exercise their motherhood in relation to their children left in the country; transnational childhood research (Orellana et al, 2001, Dreby, 2007), focusing on children involved in migration; transnational fatherhood research (Pribilsky, 2004), on strategies of fathers to exercise their role as parents in relation with the children left behind; transnational couple-relationships (Pribilsky, 2004 Sørensen, 2005), analyzing the implications of transnationalism on the couple.

The 90's brought two major perspectives in migration studies: gender and transnationalism (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). As a direct consequence of the two approaches transnational families studies has intensified, many publications being issued on the topic that try to treat the subject through multiple perspectives, most often focusing upon the functioning and daily practice within such families. One of the interpretive trends stresses the rupture and disintegration of families in the transnational setting, the difficulties they encounter, the negative effects the family members undergo due to their separate lives. Another, more recent trend focuses upon the fact that transnational families in fact do manage building their own identity and maintaining their functionality (Baldassar, et al., 2007). The forces binding these families may be

stronger than those physical and legal forces that separate them (Herrera Lima, 2001, Vourela, 2002). Through emotional and financial bonds they succeed in building a social space that allows them to maintain unity, especially through modern technological means of communication that help keep a common direction between two worlds. Transnational families studies, although much centered on the close family (husband-wife-children or father-mother-children relationships), also take into consideration the boarder family (encompassing grandparents, brothers, sisters, inlaws, grandchildren, nephews and neices, uncles and aunts). The way in which migrants manage to keep in touch with the elderly at home, providing them financial and emotional support and care is also stressed.

The link between the feminisation of migration and the development of transnational families studies (Sørensen, 2005) appears mostly in terms of engendering of household and family relationships.Migrant women manage to provide financial resources for the family and hence are more liable to redefine traditional power relationships within the couple or even to free themselves from dominating relationships (Morokvasick, 1984, 2004, 2007).

Pribilsky (2004) stresses that not only women's migration leads to redefining gender relations. Migrant men abroad need to cope with tasks that, before their migration, have been the duties of women: shopping, cooking, cleaning, etc.. Women left behind must also take over the tasks otherwise done by men (engaging in temporary work to produce money).

I. 3. Understanding transnational motherhood

The spatial and temporal separation between women and their families that remain in their country of origin has led to the emergence of what Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) called "transnational motherhood": the maternal strategies used by these women for maintaining a relationship with their children at home. The author lays emphasis not on the physical circuit of migration, but on that of affection, care and financial support that breaches national borders.

Studies having mothers left to work as subjects have identified a redefinition of the concept of mother, with a shift of emphasis from direct care towards material support, towards ensuring opportunities for children in the long run.

Raijman R., Schammah-Gesser S. and Kemp A. (2003) have identified a rhetoric specific for transnational motherhood, that places economical responsabilities

towards the children at the same level or even higher than a daily presence with them. Women try to impose this new kind of definition of motherhood even at home, where their absence could be negatively judged. "Milk, shoes and schooling" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997) are the desiderata of transnational motherhood: maintanance and protection for the children, preparing them for the future

In the period of work abroad of the mothers, the caregiving role for the children is taken over by another woman, relatives (grandmothers, sisters, mothers, mothers-in-law, aunts, older daughters, sisters-in-law, cousins etc.) or by female friends, in some cases even persons who are less close: neighbours, mothers of the children's schoolmates.There are cases when men from the family (husband, father, brother, uncle) take over the caregiving role..

We can talk about a motherhood "shared" with the husband (Moon, 2003) or about a motherhood transferred between "natural" mothers and "surrogate" ones. Mothers always try to ensure that the person with whom the children remain at home will provide them the attention and care they need, and will not jeopardize the safety of the children (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997), and in most cases they prefer the grandmothers (LARG, 2005). Lamentably, there are cases in which the choices for the person who should take care of the children is not well made, and they even suffer persecution in the absence of their mothers (Sandu et al., 2008)

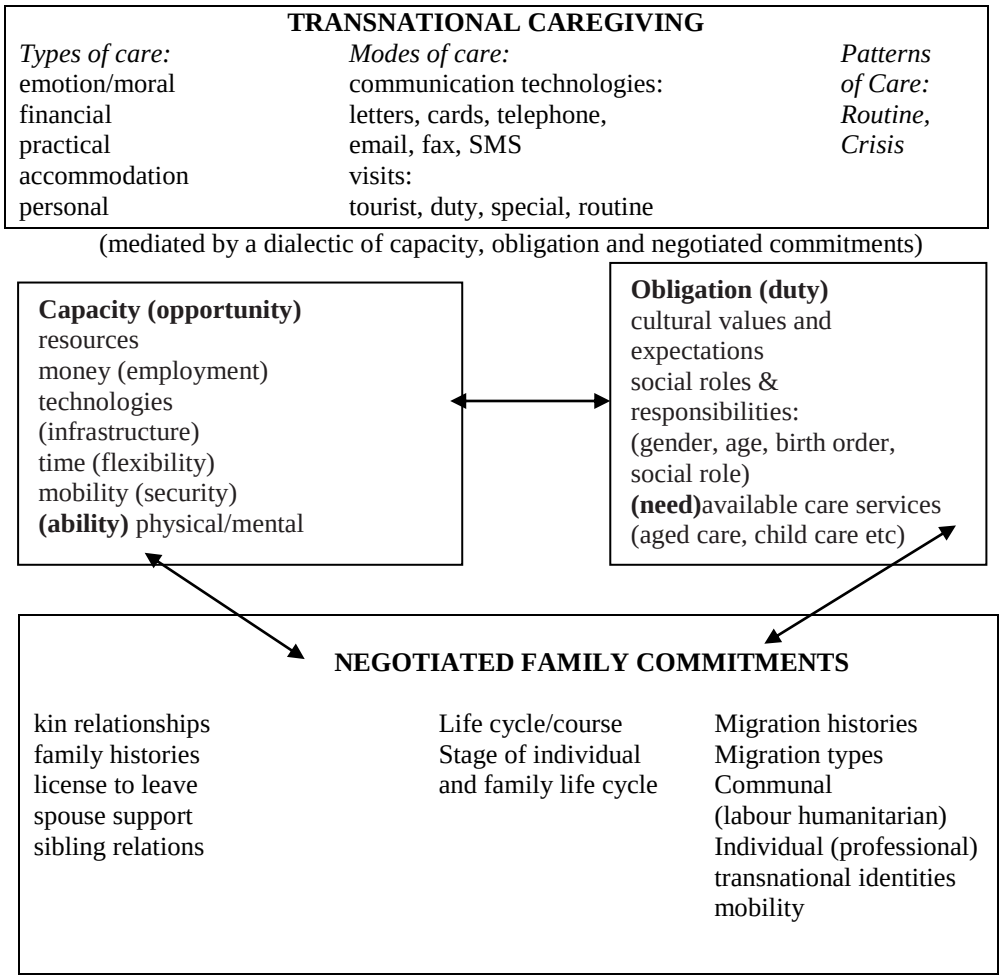
The greatest fear of mothers who are abroad is that the affection of the children towards the direct caregiver will overshadow the one towards them. In the case of older children also often appear blaming attitudes towards the mothers who have been left in the care of others (Schmalzbauer, 2004). Parental authority becomes quite questionable in these cases since the relationships between children and adults is somewhat unclear and unsure (Sandu et al., 2008). On the one hand, children are taught to love and respect their mothers who are not at home, but on the other, most of the direct decisions concerning their lives are taken by those at home.

I I. 4. The phenomenon of displaying transnational families

Finch (2007) defined and argued the importance of „displaying" within the existence of families. She argues that family practices should be recognized as such by others, and by the families themselves as well, in order to make sense, *this is sharing of family practices constituting the way of „displaying" of the family*. According to Finch (2007, 2008), displaying is essential in a social context where family relationships are

becoming more diverse and fluid. The critical factor is that *observers* should recognize an action as constitutive for displaying the family in order for this to be validated as such. This is potentially problematic, insofar as certain relationships can be considered by observers to be so far from their preconceived notions about family life, that they might refuse to recognize certain acts as constitutive displaying of the family, regardless of the intention of actors. Almack's example (2008) is an illustrative case, showing many lesbian mothers in her study who argue that parents have refused to recognize their partners as co-parents on an equal footing with the partners of their heterosexual children who had babies in their turn. Similarly, transnational family practices may seem so contrary to preconceived notions about family life, that they may also be rejected by observers as legitimate family displaying. (Heath et al., 2009).

I. 5. The model of transnational caregiving



The authors have presented ways in which migrants negotiate their family relationships (Figure 1) and engage in negotiation of family and care responsibilities

through space and time, as well as through various stages of the life process. Their research revealed many examples of mutual exchange of support between family members across borders. Reciprocity is very important because many studies have highlighted the support that migrants offer for those at home, without considering the role of other members in the functioning of transnational families.

Transnational caregiving model (Baldassar et al., 2007, p.205) (Figure nr. 1)

This model illustrates the complex mix of motivations that articulates the *exchange* of care practices transnational flowing in both directions – from migrants to their country of origin and vice versa.

II. Research methodology

II. 1. Argumenting the methodological approach of the research

My *research objective* was to understand how women manage to make transnational motherhood functional. More specifically, I wanted to hear – and make heard – the voices of these women, their and their families' story concerning the episode of migration in their lives. My research chooses an approach of a feminist character, being born from the urge to respond to discrimination against migrant mothers observed in the media, trying to bring forth life experiences of migrant mothers as a primary purpose.

Based on the theoretical concepts presented in the first part of the work (transnational motherhood, functioning and displaying of transnational families), I have generated the research questions, as they appear below.

The main research question: What are Romanian women's strategies of transnational motherhood?

Secondary questions, inferred from the main question:

1. What are the effects of women's migration on their role as women in transnational families?

2. How are transnational relationships exercised between migrant women and members of transnational families at home?

3. How do migrant women succeed to stay connected in order to provide care, in a transnational manner, for other members of their families?

II. 2. Description of the fieldwork

Participants in this research were mostly from seven rural communities: four villages of the commune of Mociu, Cluj County, and the villages Dumitra, Parva and Feldru of Bistriţa-Năsăud County. To these add some transnational family members whom I met in another context (Cluj-Napoca) and on air travel routes of migrants, who agreed to give me interviews

My research has been carried out during the summer, the holiday period for migrants. Due to the newly built houses and foreign plate cars, especially in Bistriţa-Năsăud, I felt like I was in Spain itself. These communities are heavily impregnated with the phenomenon of migration, but not only because from the money earned abroad many new homes have been built, but also because all the members of the community are directly or indirectly involved in the phenomenon, having relatives and friends among the migrants; hence a great part of discussions during summertime focus on what is going on ‚there'.

3. II. 3. Participants in the research

Participants include respondents – transnational family members – as well as key persons – representatives of the local administration, of NGOs, teaching staff.

Table 1. List of participants in the research

37 Participants in the research	
7 Transnational community members	
	5 Key persons: Auntie Viorica (retired school-teacher), Mălina (school-teacher), Vasilica (NGO representative), Lia and mister Pavelescu (representatives of local authorities)
	2 Neighbor women: Rica, Mioara's neighbor; and Vera's neighbor (herself a member of a transnational family)
8 Members of transnational families	
	4 Husbands: Ieana's husband, Silvia's husband, Vera's husband, Ioana's husband
	4 migrants' children (1 teenager Radu, 1 teenager Ionela and 2 young adults, Tania's and Matilda's daughters)
22 Women from transnational families	
	6 non-migrant women Daria's mother, Nora's mother-in-law, Sanda, Lăcrămioara, Mariana, Maria's mother
	16 migrant women: Mirela, Cristina, Augusta, Paula, Lola,Mia, Vera, Ani, Felicia, Carmen, Maria, Emilia, Cumnata Verei, (3 without children as yet:) Monica, Viki, Flora

The respondents have been identified via the key persons: a representative of an NGO in Mociu, a retired school-teacher in Dumitra and a young school-teacher in Parva. At times, the snowball method has been used as well, through indicating of possible respondents by others.

II. 4. Data collection methods

This work is based on 34 open, individual interviews, with questions grouped around the research questions presented above. Three of the participants took part in the group interviews: Maria's mother, Vera's husband, and Vera's neighbor.

Group interviews: 1. Flora, her husband, Mălina in the last part. 2. Mirela, her teenage daughters and Vasilica; 3. Vera's husband and Vera's brother-in-law; 4. Vera. Mălina and Vera's neighbor; 5. Lia and Vasilica; 6. Maria and Maria's mother

At the group interviews, I enjoyed the participation of more community members, especially women (migrant mothers, women providing care for children at home, female key persons, female neighbors). In these discussions I perceived migrant women's need to be heard, to be understood, to defend themselves from the guilt their society throws upon them, allegedly for leaving their homes and destroying their families. The opportunity to talk to an important woman of their community about these issues was very much valued by them. My presence there, the interest they received from me directly, through my research, and indirectly, through the women in my company, all meant an opportunity for them to signal: they are aware of the accusations, and they want a chance to defend themselves. The length of the interviews measured 50 minutes on the average. All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

II. 5. Data processing

The coding of the protocols of transcribed interviews has been done using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA 2007. For the narrative analysis, preparing the protocols consisted in reconstructing narratives based on the interviews. The main character of each narrative has been the migrant mother, whereas the narrators have either been themselves or a secondary character (in the case of interviews with family members, who reported about a migrant mother), or yet multiple narrators (secondary characters who told about the migration of the mother, or simply re-told a story that they knew from other sources). The main theme of the narratives was migration,

whereas the subject of each narrative was the relationship of the main character, the migrant woman, with her family.

..

II. 6. Data analysis

Thematic analysis: Based on the codes that have been defined and systematizing them, I finally had six main themes:

1. Transnational communities, having the subcategories *Money* and *The contact between Romanians abroad*

2. Empowerment, having the subcategories *Savings, Positive awareness of being a migrant, Employment in the country after returning, Migrant women's education, Career opportunities, Partnership*

3. Educational support, having the subcategories *Education, Children's migration, Language*

4. The transfer of care, having the subcategories *The transfer of care, Problems with the transfer of care*

5. Transnational relationships, having the subcategories *Remittances, Telephone, Internet, Packs, Presents, Visits*

6. Defamation, having the subcategories *Discrimination, Accusations in the family*

For each of these themes a separate research report was generated, these can be found in the third part of the work.

Narrative Analysis: Due to the nature of my questions aimed at the life experiences – personal or other people's migration experiences –, some characters came to the foreground in several narratives on their personal migration or that of another woman. My narrative analysis focused on the content of narratives, not on their structure. Narratives have as a usual blueprint a story about the mother who migrates for money to support her children at home or abroad, transferring care to other women in the family, using the means of transnational relationships. I have generated 21 narratives of migrant mothers.

III. Research reports

In this part of the work I performed analysis and interpretation of research data. For data analysis I have used the themes and *narratives presented in the second part of the work. The six central themes, namely, transnational communities, defamation,*

empowerment, educational support, transfer of care and transnational relations, were discussed in separate chapters. To illustrate my argument, I used excerpts from interviews that formed the basis of the thematic analysis and selections from the narratives generated by the narrative analysis. For the interpretation of the data I have used theoretical guidelines described in the first part of this paper.

III. 1. Migrants in the lives of transnational communities

III. 1. 1. „Losses" produced by the migration of the members_of transnational communities

There has been much talk about the "losses" produced by migration – labors shortages, the children left home alone, the negative image of Romania created by the "crimes" of migrants, but little has been spoken of the "gains". I am not referring here to the direct earnings, of each migrant and of his/her family, earnings that are to a certain extent, implied and assumed as part of a migration project, but to the "gains" of the communities of departure, as well as those of Romania. This is due to the fact that, apart from the money sent home by migrants that is spent in the country, driving the economy, there are other positive effects of this social phenomenon in migrants' communities of origin, directly influencing the modernization of these.

III. 1. 2. Migrant networks of transnational communities

In the villages where the research was conducted, there could be observed two types of networks, as follows. First, more often used in circular migration, where migrants spend shorter periods of time ("seasons" or "stages") in the destination country, is a type of network focused on areas of activities: care, cleaning, construction, agriculture etc. These networks are *genderized*, as are the fields, too, and usually offer direct solutions: available workplace, work period, the amount of money collected, sometimes even accommodation. The second type of network, more often observed in the case of migrants who spend long periods (many years) abroad, is based on the family relationships of the migrants. In recent years, women have begun to be pioneers, because they can find work quickly and easily.

. **III. 1. 3. The impact of migration on the development of transnational communities**

The present research has revealed how multiple worlds meet starting worlds in the communities of origin, worlds in which both the migrants and those left behind live. Thus, in one community, one may feel the direct influence of several destination countries – Spain, Italy, England, Ireland – which requires a complex way of relating to several countries. This mix of multiple destinations reflects beyond transnational families, also upon the communities, from the services developed in the direction of maintaining these multiple links, such as international transport companies, to the lifestyle of those at home, who organize their households "like the ones in Spain", "the ones in Italy" "or "as in England" etc. Even families without migrants borrow from the lifestyle of neighbors, in the symbolic sense – receiving as gifts certain items of foreign origin, or buying them – or in the practical one, by managing their own household after the received models. Moreover, until recently, marriages in villages in Romania have been done based on spatial proximity, whereas now we can observe marriages with Romanians from other corners of the country, whom they have met abroad.

III. 2. Defaming migrant mothers

III. 2. 1. "Little Ciurea" and the accusations against Romanian migrant women (macro level)

In Romania, through the intensifying migration for work abroad, the number of transnational families has been greatly increasing. Usually, the most active family members migrate, leaving the children, the elderly and the sick at home. There are cases when only one active member of the family migrates, mostly the husband, but due to the increase in work offers for migrant women, ever more often we meet cases in Romania when only the women migrate. The migrants try to support dependent family members from. Romanian press has presented the departure of parents negatively, especially in the case of mothers. Migrant parents have been accused of "abandonment", and their children considered "victims". Thus, on the 3rd of October 2007 one of the newspapers (Evenimentul Zilei) highlights the "drama" by reference to the cases of suicide among these children. "A boy only 12 of age has committed suicide on Monday, the 1st of October, due to his longing for his mother who was going to return for work to Italy. It is only one of a long list of dramatic situations within the last

years… A child aged 12 hung himself to escape loneliness. Andrei Ciurea, a boy only 12 of age, from the commune Valea Danului in Argeş County, hung himself after learning that his mother is going to leave for work again to Italy, in order to be able to raise her three children."

Moreover, in February 2009, the international press (The New York Times) described the "dramatic" situation of children at home, presenting the (presumably identical) case of the little Ciurea, who committed suicide two years earlier. In this article the child appears under the name of Ştefan Ciurea, the Evenimentul Zilei had presented him two years earlier as Andrei Ciurea. His goodbye letter presented in the two cases is approximately the same.

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2009), mentioning the article from the New York Times, draws attention upon the unfairness in accusing migrant mothers from Romania of neglecting their children at home, similarly to migrant mothers from the Philippines and Poland. She lists Romania with Poland and the Ukraine as Eastern European countries with predominantly female migration where children are left at home. Transnational families are considered in the Philippines, Poland and Romania as being „the wrong kind of families", endangering the life of children, proposing a nuclear family model instead – in a quite absurd manner, because these societies being based on income from migration, the existence of transnational families is not a choice but rather a necessity

III. 2. 2. Discrimination of migrant women in their home communities (meso level)

In their communities migrant women are viewed with suspicion and accused to jeopardize their own family lives. In communities where I carried out my research, I faced the same attitude concerning transnational families with a female migrant. Mothers remaining in the country, even those with their husbands abroad declare they cannot understand how these women sacrifice their children for money. They admit these children have more material support, but maintain that education provided by others instead of the mothers themselves isn't adequate. The departure of the husband is accepted as a way of financial support for the family, even if he breaks relationships with the family. An exemplary situation in this sense occurred in a group interview in which a migrant woman was accused of neglecting her daughter, by a woman whose husband has been migrating to Spain for years. The migrant man entered a partner

relationship with a migrant woman from the same village, the relationship being accepted by the wife since the husband was sending money for the children, and during his rare visits in the country, came to live with her and the children. Even if the children learned from the village about the father's relationship with the other woman and were suffering because of this, the mother claimed that the children's pain was far smaller than that of the young girl whose mother migrated together with her husband and who was left in the care of her maternal grandparents. In other words, this woman argued that the presence of the mother beside the children was more important than the integrity of the father role.

Representatives of local NGOs, local administration social workers, teaching staff, all of them females, who participated in our research, showed the same blaming attitude, especially towards migrant mothers, for the situation of their families. One line of accusations was the deviant behavior of children at home without motherly supervision that was supposed to lead to delinquency. In the moment in which I asked them to exemplify this by cases in the community and to shift from general opinion to substantive talk, they didn't manage to identify cases of this sort in their community. „Such things do not happen at us, but haven't you seen them on TV?" (Lia). The influence of the media impacts directly on the opinions of those from the community, even if the reality they live in contradicts the received message.

III. 2. 3. Discrimination of migrant women within their families (micro level)

Radu and Ioana are only two of the teenagers who, in the first minutes of the interviews with them, insisted to emphasize that although gone for work abroad, their mothers love them very much and keep providing them care from a distance. It is interesting that in their case the fathers were also abroad, but they wanted to ensure that I do not accuse their mothers for migrating. These children always need to confront the "compassion" of their mates, teachers, neighbors and relatives who do not understand "what kind of a heart these mothers who leave them have". As a consequence, the children are forced either to take position or defend their mothers, or to get in line with the discrimination and also start accusing them.

The situation is very delicate, especially in the case of younger children who don't manage to form their own image about the relationship with their parents and who are much more receptive to persons who raise them in a direct sense. This is the case

with Vera, a migrant mother who needed to return home since her daughter, in the first form, had difficulties at school, and both the school-teacher and the grandparents who were raising the child considered that the absence of the mother was the cause of her lack of success.

Vera had the opinion that in fact her mother, the girl's grandmother was to blame first of all, spoiling her and not imposing her to study since "the poor child has problems anyway, and she hasn't even got a mom", an idea she has also inoculated to the girl. Vera said she would get sick herself if someone repeated endlessly to her that she was: "*The grandparents have made a mistake; they told her that her mother is gone and that she cannot study out of her longing for her mother.*" (Vera)

III. 3. Empowering migrant women

III. 3.1. Narratives of migrant women's empowerment

Nora's husband has left to Spain in 2003. After 2 years, under the pressure of suspicions that her husband might be cheating her, on advice of her husband's mother, her mother-in-law, who gave her the money for the trip, she left to Spain to try saving her marriage. Her husband was not doing well in Spain, having debts even with his rent, and Nora decided to help him. She works as a housekeeper at 10 families and earns „herself more than him". For 3 years she has been working with her husband in Spain, and being more attentive with expenses, they have managed to raise some money: „the last year they have brought in the country one billion two hundred and fifty million lei... money you couldn't make in a lifetime over here" [about 35000 euro].

Maria had not only made money in Italy, but also managed to build a professional career. She worked in typography where she was promoted to be a team leader. She was one of the few migrants in the company and managed to integrate well. Since the child who didn't want to live only with the grandparents anymore, her return home didn't only mean the separation from her husband, who remained to continue work for the family, but also giving up her professional status. In Romania, the chance to re-integrate professionally is quite distant. Even thus, she learned from her migration experience that one can manage professionally and hopes that from the money raised she could open a small business in Romania together with other family members.

Mia has left for five years to Spain following her husband. She worked for two years at a cleaning company, and due to her dedication she received a job offer at

typography. She is 38 and would have great difficulties finding a similar workplace at this age her problem seems to be that she needed to choose between her work and her role as a mother. Her daughter was left home alone in Romania from the age of 10. But since she has no work opportunity in Romania, she is determined to continue work until a total of 10 years in order to receive a pension there.

III. 3. 2. Redefining motherhood

These women are their families' breadwinners, and their reason to migrate was the family's financial need. All of the above respondents, and others too in my research chose to migrate due to the lack of money: for a more decent home, in order to raise their children and support them in their studies. Tania had two student children she needed to support. Daria was a lone mother and needed to raise a child. Augusta left since she and her husband had two children and they shared one room and a kitchen. Mirela was forced to migrate since her husband, who initially wanted to migrate to Portugal took a mortgage loan from a bank, mortgaged their house and was cheated by somebody who took the money.

III. 3. 3. Empowerment through access to employment

Women in Cluj County usually migrate *alone*, when leaving for short periods of time. They find employment through employment agents or through a network – other women or relatives. Sometimes they are followed by husbands. Their migration is rather a cyclic one (3-4 months of work abroad, 2-3 months at home). In many cases they keep their workplace through „shifting" with another migrant woman from their family. Resorting to this type of migration is motivated by them through their incapability to stay away from their families for a long period of time. This type of migration seems to be associated with one target country, Italy. The women extend their period of migration when another family member starts to accompany them (husbands, sisters, cousins). In the same community, men migrate alone (irrespective of the target country); they spend much more time away from the family. Although the time spent with their family at home is much longer compared to men, migrant women are seen negatively by the community. Thus, it is preferable in the community that men migrate who also bring back more money, due to their better paid work types and the longer time spent at work. Families having the female members who migrate are considered families with a high risk of disintegration. Women are ignored by the

community as primary breadwinners and this role is not directly recognized by their own families. The priority of women's roles as direct caregivers against breadwinning is reinforced by the migrant women themselves: „I need to do this for the money, but being here with them, giving them care is all I really wish for" (Augusta).

III. 3. 4. Empowerment through the establishment of partnership with their husbands within migration

Women from Bistriţa-Năsăud migrate mostly following their husbands. Sometimes the couple migrates together, but women mostly leave a few months or years after the husbands' migrating. In these communities, there are large numbers of kin migration networks, men from the family being the first to leave. Migrant women manage to get involved as equal partners in the couple through migration, participating in equal manner to the incomes and decisions in the family or even becoming the leader of the couple. The situation is overturned since the husband often loses his professional and social status through migration and becomes disoriented. In this situation, women take control. I underline that women in my study have left from Romanian villages, where, under communism, even if they had a workplace in the neighboring city and were relatively educated – due to the nature of social administration that expected every youth to study at least up to professional schooling or high-school, being then placed at a mandatory workplace – they were still generally subordinated to men. They lacked the power to decide in the family and were responsible mostly with caring for the children and the elderly, without a real emancipation resulting from an understanding of their status, having only a formal one. After communism, due to the high unemployment caused by the closure of large state enterprises these women used to work together with their husbands and the families have remained mostly without an income. This phenomenon has lead to increased alcoholism among men and subsequently to a growing violence against women. Thus, migration for these people became the sole means of survival, and for women, a chance to gain a status within the family and trust in their own powers (Morokvasik, 1984. 2007).

For women, sharing the role of the family's financial supporter with their husbands through migration is much more than a simple project to work abroad. It entails involvement in the couple as equal partners, sometimes even the coordination of the couple for common goals.

III. 3. 5. Educational and professional emancipation of migrant women

Beyond material benefits, migration offers these women other gains as well: self-confidence as a result of bringing money to the family, followed by the wish for and the success in professional advancement.

For women, this kind of participation in breadwinning through migration together with their husbands or alone is more than a simple work-abroad project. It presupposes their involvement in the couple as equal partners, sometimes even the management of the couple's life for shared purposes (either at home or abroad). Moreover, they need to slide between work and children, sometimes giving up their professional goals for the sake of children, or accepting separation from the children in order to keep their job.

A major impact of the experience of migration on women concerns their trust in their own capacity for educational progress. Mirela, in the period she was working as a housekeeper in Italy, has also graduated from the faculty of economics at a university in Romania and at the moment of returning to the country, she received employment at the only bank office in her village; Emilia and Lola also wish to pursue their studies (Emilia wants to visit the courses of a faculty of economics in Spain, Lola, after stopping migration, wishes to receive a diploma at a faculty of pedagogy in Romania in order to become a teacher at a primary school in her village). Thus, we may speak of an emancipation of these women migrating from Romanian villages where they had no such perspective and where they never experienced success.

III. 4. Strategies of educational support towards the children

III. 4. 1. Education as an argument for migration

Most respondents have placed material support of children’s education as the main argument for migration. They wish to ensure a future for the children, a better one than their own. Those who don’t take the children with them argue that in Romania it is easier for them to continue their studies. At the extreme, I met cases in which women gave up their migration project, since their children encountered difficulties at school and at home. Vera and Mirela have been put in the situation to choose between work abroad and the wellbeing of their children, and chose to return home

III. 4. 2. The education of migrant children

I also meet contrary situations, in which mothers do not come back to the country, even if they would like to, since the children they took along already entered the educational system abroad and it would be difficult for them to reintegrate in Romania. Lola left to Spain with her two children in 2000, a few months after her husband did. She works as a cleaning person, independently, since she needs a flexible schedule in order to manage with the children's education. Unfortunately, the children have not learned to read and write in Romanian and the parents cannot come home until after the children finish their studies, including university, and are able to manage on their own in Spain. There are situations when the mothers accompanied by the children make extra efforts to prepare them for a possible return to the country, and their integration in the educational system here. Emilia tried to teach her child in her free hours to write and read Romanian, since there was no Romanian teaching available in their area in Spain. Parents there have difficulties teaching their children Romanian, mostly because children do not see the reason for this: „is it not enough I have learned Spanish?" Women like Emilia have the task of maintaining their children's Romanian identity. Thus, besides participating in the family's breadwinning, they also handle the education of children following their parents as migrants

At the extreme, I met cases in which women gave up their migration project, since their children encountered difficulties at school and at home. Vera and Mirela have been put in the situation to choose between work abroad and the wellbeing of their children, and chose to return home.

III. 4. 3. The impact of transnationalism on the vocational choices of children

Emotional and educational support children need is provided by migrant mothers through the strategies described above. In turn, through these data, I underlined another phenomenon: migrant parent's children's wish not to continue their studies and to launch in money-earning activities as soon as possible. In most cases, they wish to follow their parents' example. This data are different from that obtained in other areas where children at home manage to continue their studies and get above their migrant parents in social status (Schmalzbauer, 2008). Radu, who had just turned 18, finishing his high-school by time of the interview, had already been hired at a car workshop, and wanted firmly to follow his parents to Italy and to find a job there. He wasn't sure if his

plan was going to succeed, because his parents had the opposite idea: that they should return in the country definitively (after 8 years of absence), to build a house and to support Radu in his studies at a university. Here we witness a conflict between the parents' expectations for the children's future, who should be more educated and have an easier life than theirs, and children's wish to earn quick material benefits.

Moreover, even if the parents are in the country, but other members of the family have migrated, there exists the tendency in children to give up their studies and migrate. The interviews with transnational community members highlighted that especially young people after high-school – even having no migrant parents – tend to migrate. Living in a transnational family, in which life is split between Romania and migrants' target countries, young people develop a transnational way of life even if they haven't migrated yet, through the connections with their migrant friends, the objects sliding between worlds they come in contact with, populating their life-world. Thus, migration is a way of life for them, the easiest to conceive and the most graspable. To study and to build a professional career in the country is not an example they could perceive in their immediate community.

On the other hand, choosing higher education fields by migrant parents' children depends on the migrant workforce market. For Ileana's older daughter, her mother's migration project is a life-example to her. Even though she could have gone to college, she chose to study to be a nurse, since she would get an employment contract abroad easily after a two-years practice at home.

III. 5. Strategies of transfer of care within transnational families

III. 5. 1. Traditions from the rural milieu concerning the transfer of child care

In Romanian villages, caregiving towards dependent persons – children, the sick and the elderly – used to be, even under communism, and remained thereafter the main responsibility of women in the family. Neither before, nor after the fall of communism did the mothers afford to be full time mothers, since they also needed to participate in the family's breadwinning – compulsorily before, out of need after; families' income has been on the decline because of extensive post-communist restructuring of workforce (Pasti, 2003). Moreover, in villages there was and is no adequate institutional care system for children (kindergartens, where present, have only 4 hours

schedules). Thus, in caring for the children, but also for other family members, these women always called for help: the children and the sick went under the responsibility of grandparents or other women, mostly from within the family, but also woman neighbors, who took over the task because they were at home. Diverse forms of the transfer of care are therefore an old practice in Romanian villages. Still, in spite of this tradition, when talking about migrant women who use transfer of care, the public becomes critical concerning this as a strategy of transnational motherhood.

III. 5. 2. People responsible for care at home

Children, especially when very young, remain mostly in the care of grandmothers, preferably on the mother's side. This is the case with Maria's child, too, who remained in her grandmother's care from the age of four months to that of four years.

I only met three cases when migrant women have been helped by paid women: Mia paid a woman to take care of her daughter at home; Vera and Maria paid a young woman to come in Spain and provide care for children there. These situations are very rare and migrant women choose them as a last of strategies in providing care for the children or other dependant members, because they want to save money.

There are very few cases when males take over women's caregiving roles after their departure. I only met one case where the husband was directly responsible for providing care: Ileana's husband has been „both mother and father" for their two teenage daughters. In most cases, even if they are at home, another woman from the family takes over these tasks. This is a way for men to keep power within the couple even if the woman becomes the main family breadwinner (Pasti, 2003). The situation is similar to that observed in other societies where migration became strongly feminized (see Parreñas 2006, 2009 for the Philippines, Tolstokorova, 2008, 2009 for the Ukraine).

III. 5. 3. Migraţion of people responsible for care

Migrant women also request help from those who migrate together with them. Besides work-related migration of women, we meet the migration of other women for supporting the family, from within or from outside, for payment: grandmothers, sisters, nieces or young women from the home village. There is very little or no talk about the role of these Romanian women, both at home and abroad, who take over the tasks of caregiving from migrant women engaged in money-earning activities. In turn, through their work, even if not paid, they participate indirectly in raising the incomes of the family, making other women's migration possible. Most of the women who take over caregiving are mothers or sisters of migrant women.

Lăcrămioara, at home with one child after her husband has left to work abroad, takes care of one nephew, too, the older son of her sister who has migrated to Spain with two younger children. Besides the fact that she tends the children in the country, she also goes to Spain for three months a year to take care of the children of her two sisters there, since she is too sick to work for money and in this way she feels like participating in the support of her large family.

III. 5. 4. Difficulties with the transfer of care

Women also encounter problems with the transfer of care. Those left in their stead do not always manage to cope with the task, special events occur that require the presence of the children's legal representatives, and sometimes excessive protection turns back on the children.

Mirela gave up working abroad since her husband, who was supposed to take care of their two teenage daughters, developed an alcohol problem. The girls have desperately contacted their mother and asked her to come back and stay. Mioara lived a true nightmare when her son, left in the care of two women, a neighbor and a friend, needed to undergo an urgent surgery. The women took the child to the hospital and stayed with him, but when needed to sign for his complete anesthesia, everybody panicked since both parents were away and there was no legal tutor for the child in the country. Mioara talked to the doctor on the phone and gave him her verbal consent, then sent him an SMS declaring this again. In most cases, when parents are away, there is no legal empowerment of the person who provides care for the child, although in late years a law has been enacted requesting parents to announce the caregiver's identity to the authorities. The representatives of authorities understand from this law that through

parents' declarations they will be able to figure which children to erase from social care lists, given that their parents now have an income. Parents perceive this law as an abusive control of the state against their lives, not feeling in any way helped by it.

III. 6. Relationships within transnational families

III. 6. 1. Using new technologies and of communication rituals

Women in my research maintain family "intimacy virtually", communicating regularly in a transnational way (Parreñas, 2005b, Wilding, 2006; Vertovec, 2004, 2009) with those at home (from daily in most cases, to weekly in least). Thus, migrant women assign tasks from a distance, check their fulfillment and offer rewards, mostly material. The phone is the most used, but I have met three cases where the internet was used, in order that the women maintain an active relationship with those at home, that entails, beside mutual affective support, the involvement of migrants in decisions taken together. Maria and Cristi, who left their newborn baby in the care of Maria's parents, have installed a computer in their village home with internet access. Using the webcam, they could have periodical visual contact with their child as well. The communication followed certain rules. At the agreed hour, each night, the mother and the father went online in Italy. At home, at the same time, in front of the computer, the grandparents and the children gathered. It seemed impressing for me how they placed the computer in the middle of the nursery, full of toys. The little one knows how to start the computer by himself, the Messenger being automatically started. The grandparents don't know how to use the computer for other purposes. They don't even know how to write. They only use the audio and video functions of the messenger in order to communicate with Maria and Cristi.

Using the Internet in Romanian villages is rare, only migrant families and the few intellectual families use it. However, due to the good offers of Internet providers in the period of economic crisis, it becomes ever more popular even in villages. Thus, transnational communication via the Internet is extending among this category of migrants, as well. The example of migrant families in having an Internet connection is taken over by other families in the village, too, migrants thus participating in the technological advancement of villages in an indirect way.

Beyond regular communication that becomes like a ritual in the family – exact hours and / or days for communication – the mobile phone is a compulsory accessory of

those at home and of migrant women. Moreover, SMS-s, being cheap, are often sent just to communicate (quite often, several of them are exchanged between mothers and children). During the interviews, two of my respondents received SMS-s from their family members in Italy, respectively Spain: Radu received and SMS from his mother "…the third one that day" (so he said – and it was only 11.10 am), and Daria's mother from Daria who was telling her about the present she had bought for one of her sisters at home. Otherwise, the two were among the few whose family members hadn't arrived home yet, being expected for the following days.

Whereas a few years ago, the cheapest way to communicate was to call by phone from abroad, and not vice versa, in the last period, under the pressure of EU communication regulations, but also as a reaction to the economic crisis that affected their incomes, telecommunication companies in Romania offer acceptable prices for international telephony. On a short look on the prices of Romania's main telephony providers, I noticed that the countries cheapest to call are roughly those with the most Romanian migrants – certain EU states, the US and Canada (as low as 0.07/0.09 Euros per minute).

III. 6. 2. Means of transportation and the rise of mobility

Due to regular mass transport schedules developed lately between origin and target communities, there is a constant flux of material objects that ensure an indirect contact between those abroad and those at home. Thus, through monthly or weekly packages, gifts are sent, even food and daily use products, but mostly pictures and video recordings (Zontini, 2004). Money often gets to the country through these packages, or even more often through fast money transfer services or common access to bank accounts. The way in which money is spent by the recipients at home is decided in most cases by the whole family, indeed the money is spent for things agreed upon in advance. In most cases, these are invested in enhancing the house and buying electronic gadgets – the direct motive of adults' migration: a better life. The older daughter of Mirela has direct access to her mother's bank account, and she buys objects for the house after deciding together with her mother on phone. Augusta and her husband negotiate through the internet what should be bought for the money she sends. We also witness the material rewards migrants offer to those at home, especially to children, having previously established criteria that need to be met for money to be received, to be spent as the child wishes: a motorbike for Robert if he enters highschool.

In Romania we can also observe mutual visits, especially between women and children, much more frequently than in other countries: for example, in the Ukraine (Piperno, 2007), in the Philippines (Parreñas, 2005) or in Honduras (Schmalzbauer, 2005), these visits are extremely rare and very seldom. Migrant women from Romania return at least once a year (especially in Bistriţa-Năsăud), mostly during the summer vacation, and they spend 2-3 months at home, and/or return for Christmas and Easter as well (in Cluj the visits are more frequent). In the case when the women do not return to the country, the children and other transnational family members from Romania visit them during these holidays in the target country.

These mutual visits are due to the status of legal migrants that Romanians possess (Piperno, 2007) and most of all, to cheap transportation. During the last few years, low-cost airlines have started operating in Romania. Wizz Air and Blue Air have taken the lead among these, because of their policy to connect the main home cities with the destination cities of migrants.

Irrespective of the target country and the duration of the leave, the bond with those at home, especially in the case of migrant women, plays an important role in the life of transnational families. Migrant women manage, through transnational relationships, to offer their children the emotional and educational support they need, even when these remain in the country.

III. 7. The exercise of transnational motherhood

III. 7. 1. The model of caregiving in transnational motherhood

In interpreting the research results, I have followed the proposals of Baldassar et al. (2007) within the description of the transnational caregiving In my analysis, the characteristics specific to the migration of women from Romania are emphasized. Unlike Baldassar and her colleagues, in the research of whom migrants are responsible for care-providing for the elderly at home, I am presenting mothers who need to ensure care for their children at home, and in many cases, for children who accompany them in migration. Since they cannot manage on their own working and providing care for the children abroad, migrant women need to ask for the help of their transnational families in order to receive support while migrating.

Care in Transnational Motherhood		
Types of care: Financial (**redefinition of motherhood)** Emotional/moral: reciprocal between migrant women and other members **Educaţional support of children** Accomodation: ensures lodging in both countries **Transfer of care practical/personal:** „non-migrant" women from the family take care of the children at home and abroad	*Modes of care:* Technological communication: **phonecalls, SMS, internet: on-line audio/video communication, e-mail is very little used** **Mutual visits:** *tourist:* "non-migrani" family members, especially children on holidays visits: for providing care, in both countries special: special events in the family *routine*: holidays and vacations are spent together	*Patterns of care:* Routine: women who take over childcare duties are responsible for routine situations. Any **more important decision is negotiated withthe mother**. Crisis: there exist limit situations that necessitate the **presence of a legal representative** of the child, and become difficult especially when both parents are away

(mediated by a dialectic of negotiated capacities, obligations and commitments)

capacity (opportunity)

Resources, money (migration offers the chance to earn money for mothers)

Technology, (infrastructure): cheap telephony provided for migrants, internet, regular coach lines between destination and departure areas, low-cost airlines

Time (flexibility): **"non- migrant" women have more time and travel between the two countries in order to ensure care for the children**

Mobility: being **EU members, there is freedom of movement**

(skill) physical / mental: when caregivers are overwhelmed by the responsibility to set up a different arrangement of care

Displaying transnational families

Care in transnatio

obligation (duty)

Mothers are made responsible for childcare in the mentality in Romanian villages; and they take on themselves the **discrimination**

Still, another women is accepted as caregiver, since **there exist practices of help in raising children received by mothers from women relatives**

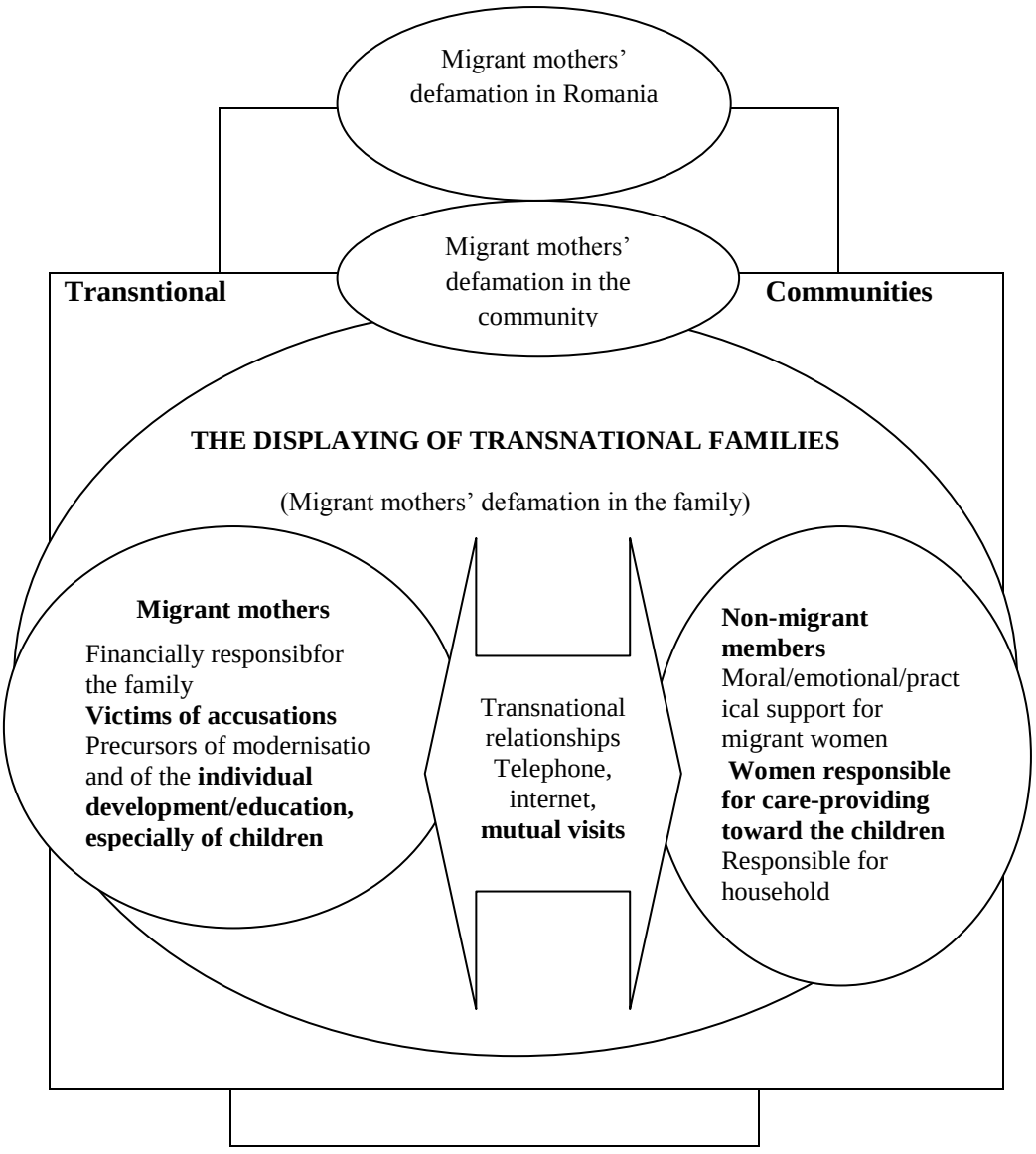
Needs: children left home are usually young, young women usually being the ones who migrate, whereas in Romanian villages there are no childcare services

Negotiation of family arrangements		
Kin relationship Women in Romania have a history in the transfer of childcare Women receive the licence to leave since they bring money to the family and because they live in transnational communities where transnational motherhood is becoming a common way of existence. The support of „non-migrant" women from the family Relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters, sisters-in-law, within the transfer of care	*Life cycle/ life course* Mostly adult women migrate, who are able to earn money, alone or together with the husbands, leaving small children at home. Old women, women less capable to work, or young women become involved in childcare, either at home or abroad. Children grow and relate directly with the migrant mother	*The history of migration:* Migrant mothers are from the first generation of migrants, but we see the emergence of the second generation of migrants. *Types:* I have met two types of migration: cyclic and long-time *Individual (professional) :* We can mostly speak about migration for money, but sometimes migrant women encounter professional opportunities abroad and ever more of them want to be developed through continuing their studies Living in transn. communities, women develop transn. identities, bonding with the home country, remaining open to mobility

III. 7.2 The model of functioning of transnational motherhood

To the way of functioning of transnational motherhood in the case of women from Romania, who need to confront a defamatory discourse, I have deemed it necessary to add the idea of displaying, recently introduced in the study of families (Fisch, 2007) and more recently to that of transnational families (Heath et al. 2009, Kim 2008). This idea underlines that for families, the way they are displayed, presented as a family towards their members, but also towards the public, is important.

The diagram representing transnational motherhood in Romania (graphic nr. 1) shows that when we are speaking about migrant mothers, we need to have a broad vision in order to understand this phenomenon.



The model of functioning of Romanian migrant women's transnational motherhood (Graphic 1)

First of all, these women are exposed to a defamatory discourse at the macro, meso, micro levels: that of the country, of the transnational community and even the family. Transnational families live within transnational communities which they strongly influence by their impact on their modernization and the growth of the desire to migrate of the members of the respective communities, whom they even help in fulfilling this desire. We notice that transnational families surpass the boundaries of transnational communities and of the country, having a strong need to display their functionality both within the family, the community, but also abroad. For the families having migrant mothers it is important that the mothers manage in fulfilling their mother-role, in order to be displayed as a family. Therefore, migrant mothers are supported by the non-migrant members of the families in fulfilling their motherly duties, but also by public discourses aimed to demonstrate their success both as migrant women and mothers.

For the success of the functionality of the transnational family, the non-migrant members offer moral/emotional/practical support for migrant women and become responsible with the household in the country. Non-migrant women become responsible for care-providing towards the children. Migrant mothers are the financial responsible for the family's well-being, and although victims of a defamatory discourse, they manage to find in migration a source of personal empowerment, obtaining thus a partner role in the couple. Their own and their children's education becomes the main goal of these transnational mothers. Transnational mothers and non-migrant family members relate transnational through transnational communication (telephone, internet), and through the often seen mutual visits.

Transnational families are ever more numerous, due to globalization and the cosmopolitan way of life towards which people are tending, still they are not yet accepted socially as a „right" way of functioning. They share the fate of other „new" ways of family organization: lone parents, families with internationally adopted children (especially when the child is of another race), homosexual families, ethnically mixed families etc. Within transnational families there are differences of public acceptance depending on the expectations and the mentality of the communities, on the different forms of organization of these families. Thus, the easiest type to accept and the least debated is the type of transnational family where an adult son or daughter migrates – since it has become self-understood, at least in Romania, that children create

their own life during adulthood. Similarly, in the case of the migration of the parents, it is easier to accept that a father leaves in order to provide for his family, but if the migration of a mother is at issue, tolerance decreases

IV. Conclusions

IV. 1. Research summary

In my approach, I have relied on based on the theoretical framework of transnationalism in migration, a relatively recent approach, dating in the early 90s (migration studies having started in the 20s). More recent studies (from the last 7-5 years), as a consequence of transnational studies, highlight the effects of migration on the country of origin. Therefore, my research focuses on migrant family members at their „home", i.e., Romania.

Within theories of transnational migration, I have dedicated my attention to the field of transnational families, within which I have, again, delimited the sub-field of transnational motherhood. By connecting the field of transnational motherhood to that of transnational families I have been able to use the model of active transnational relationships as explanatory model for theorizing active relationships within transnational motherhood, and based on the graphic representation of results, I have generated the model of functioning of transnational motherhood for Romanian women. I have introduced the theoretical concept of displaying of the families as an „engine" of their functioning.

In the qualitative methodological approach that I have used, in the part on data analysis, I have combined thematic analysis and narrative analysis. Under the narrative analysis, I have generated narratives of migrant mothers, having them and other narrators as the subjects of interviews. Through the analysis of those told by the 37 participants in my research, I have carried out 7 research reports.

IV. 2. Limits of the research

My research is concerns transnational motherhood of mothers who migrate for work abroad. Although there also exist common patterns, this paper says nothing about the migration of highly qualified professional Romanian women who are also mothers. It is limited to women from Romanian villages the migration of whom is – at least at in purpose – temporary. They do not wish, even if it often happens, to settle in the

destination countries: all the energy and resources are invested in the project of returning, which is repeatedly delayed, until the day when they believe to have earned enough to be able to return and reintegrate in their own country.

I have not addressed the way these women adapt to the demands abroad, the work they do there, how they integrate in the host countries, or the problems they face.

The four children of migrants participating in this research have been were adolescents and young people. The viewpoint of younger children is missing, but given that I should have used different data collection methods with them, I couldn't provide them a place within this paper.

IV. 3. Recommendations for social policies

Social policies and action programs focused on these categories of children need to stimulate and develop the functioning of these families and to give up accusing the parents, and implicitly victimizing the children, this being painful both for migrant mothers and children at home, but also for the other members of transnational families, who undergo together a profound discrimination through the present stance of Romanian society.

IV. 4. New research directions for transnational families

Based on my research, I would suggest two new directions towards which research on transnational families in Romania should proceed. As a first proposal, I consider that the role played by other women within transnational families, and in the success of transnational motherhood is worth studying. The second new direction should focus on the shifting of the children between home and destination country, often accompanied by their shifting between different educational systems worth studying. I managed to address these issues only partially, given that they were not the central objectives of my research.

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