

Multifarious families as catalysts of social transformation

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The speedy and emphatic social changes that have propagated in global relations during the last 30 years are increasingly reflected in recent research. The impact of the proliferation of international political agreements - from general ones such as children's rights to very specific ones such as those between two schools in different countries -, of technological changes, of unprecedented communication possibilities - online applications, mobile telephony etc. - and especially of the mobility of persons has produced major changes in Romanian society that determined sociologists to adapt their research agenda in order to grasp them. In my research, I had the main objective to analyse multifarious relationships in families determined by these changes.

Thus, continuing research done at the doctoral stage of studies over transnational motherhood, I have channeled my interest over these multifarious families, especially over ethnically mixed and transnational families. Until recently, the emphasis of my research, as the present work tells, have been family practices through which members (adults, elderly and children) confront differences and differences that their special status provokes. My recent research interests develop in the direction of understanding family not just as a recipient of social change, but also as a unit of change in the social context, an active factor.

The structure of the paper at hand is: a review of research activities and of the main results of the research; presentation of three large dimensions of my scientific activities: methodological development in family studies; ethnically mixed and transnational families; crayoning future research results around these families that produce social change through the way they adapt to the new way of life, for example, by incorporating children's rights or using the mobility of some family members as a resource for innovation, hence an advantage instead of a disadvantage.

In order to better understand the way these families function, I have developed qualitative data collection methods, namely, couple interviews and multi-generational interviews (adults, elderly, children), face-to-face as well as mediated through various virtual communication methods, audio as well as video recorded.

Thus, departing from my PhD thesis, where I succeeded in showing that the functioning of transnational motherhood is the responsibility of all family members,

not only of migrant mothers, through developing an explanatory theoretical model for care in transnational motherhood that is based on the theoretical concept of displaying, I continued the theoretical application of this concept in my research done on ethnically mixed couples from Transylvania. There, I have shown that manifesting ethnicity is not an intermittent process, but its display is continuous, however it is not always perceived outside the family, even if family members live it permanently. Moreover, this displaying, although it appears as a response to a real or perceived resistance, often becomes a way of life and assumed as such. Through this research I have extended the boundaries of the concept of displaying families, from reaction against opposition to a coherent and steady conduct. Continuing the results of this research, I have analysed the situation of bi-national couples in a European context, both those living abroad as well as those in Romania. In this analysis I have developed the concept of displaying family that is much present within these families especially in the context of the discrimination of the Romanian member by the extended family of the non-Romanian partner, especially in the case of couples formed after the great wave of Romanian migrants towards Western Europe. Moreover, I have developed the model of communication strategies concerning family practices for use in doing families within mixed families, adding a fourth, neutral strategy to the existing three – namely, using a language that is not native to either partner. I have developed another theoretical application of the concept of displaying in order to explore the transnational practices unfolded by Romanian grandparents in transnational families in order to fulfil their role towards their grandchildren in the difficult context of distances determined by borders, or more, in order to tackle the fact that these grandchildren belong to another culture, sometimes not having as much as a common communication language with their grandparents.

The theoretical concept of family practices is used in the sociology of the family in order to explain especially how family is “done”, theorists highlighting that more important than being a family member is acting together with other family members as a family. This theoretical difference is very important and makes the shift from defining family as a legal membership and social expectations of what it means to be a family, to that through the everyday reality of its members. This conceptual framework is highly relevant since especially for the families I studied since they confront the social expectations of what a “good” family is - either they have members of a different ethnicity or nationality, or ones who live in another country, or

both. Using the two concepts mentioned above, I researched various aspects of transnational families including the impact of accommodation type upon life strategies; understudied elements in transnational relationships; gender roles in transnational communication; multinational relationships; the role of polymedia in the formation of couples; and the lives of the children of Romanian transnational families: addressed what it means for these children to live in global families and the strategies of families with children born abroad - hybrid children - who have the chance to access the citizenship of their country of birth in the future but who are for various reasons brought to Romania. My research aimed, beside those who have left, also to the effects that belonging to a transnational family has upon those remaining at home and the intergenerational solidarity between adults who left for work abroad and the elderly parents at home. Recent preoccupation with the way these families not only undergo, but also produce social change, is also manifest in my interest given to the research topic Intergenerational Transnational Cultural Transmission. One of the applications of these themes is upon the way transnational families adapt to the global requirement of observing children's rights, a topic I have recently begun to study and one that I want to develop in the immediate future. Also among my future plans I would mention my interest for an intersectional analysis of the ways these families function, one that will allow me to grasp as adequately as possible the multitude of contexts this is situated within.