

Scientific report¹

Dealing with difference by means of translational families practices

Contract: 246/2015, Submission code: PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2087

Phase no. 1

Reporting period: 01/10/2015 – 31/12/2015

Research on transnational families has intensified in the last 5 years, as authors Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Ida Marie Vammen remarked in 2014², by the synthesis study prepared where they noted that these studies are focused on dichotomy:

„Our results highlight the tendency to think in binary oppositions - women against men, adults against children, those left against those who migrate, to stay connected against breaking family relationships - when dealing with transnational families" (Sørensen and Vammen, 2014 , page 99).

We tried to overcome this dichotomy when we approached the goal of our research from this period, **Practices in transnational families**, trying to see that the way in which these families work makes the dichotomy "those who left" and "those who stayed" lose its meaning and for a new vision of migration to be imposed as a shared family experience, not as an individual one, of the migrant actor.

Data collection and analysis

One of the main activities undertaken by the members of the mentioned team was conducting the first research field in rural area in Romania: around Cozanesti village from Dorna Arinii commune (Suceava) and Prundu Bargaului (Bistrita Nasaud County). We chose this border area between the counties because it is one of the most intense areas of migration from Romania. We managed to collect 27 interviews recorded audio and partially video. Meanwhile, we started the online research gathering data through Skype, audio / video recorded through Pamela software. Data were transcribed based on the audio size of all interviews, coded and analyzed thematically in a primary manner.

¹ An electronic version in English will be published on the project website: <http://transnationalfamilies.ro>

² Sørensen N.N., Vammen, I.M., (2014): „Who Cares? Transnational Families in Debates on Migration and Development”, *New Diversities* Vol. 16, 2, 89-107.

Dissemination of results

The results obtained by analyzing the data and research from this period were disseminated as follows: a presentation at an international conference; two articles submitted for publication in a conference volume; the organization of a seminar open to master students from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance of "Babes-Bolyai" University. In parallel, our postdoctoral researcher, specialist in visual research, reviewed in an article, the role of the documentary film in anthropological research, because our approach of video recording aims to target in this direction during the research project.

Research findings

Next we will briefly point out the main scientific conclusions of the research undertaken by the team during this period, results already disseminated by the results mentioned above.

Transnational co-presences and co-absences

About the role of prolonged visits within transnational families, they studied especially in terms of the care by the adult migrants for the elderly left at home (Baldassarre et al, 2007 Baldassare, 2008) ³, in this direction as well, of care, they highlighted the temporary co-migration of family members, especially of women, to help raise children abroad (Ducu, 2013) ⁴. In this part of the research we put emphasis on short visits, either those made in times of crisis, when the family who left passes through difficult situations and needs support in an acute manner, or leisure visits, short trips or spending holidays abroad at their dear ones. These co-presences, although short, and often overlooked by researchers, have a significant contribution in sharing the experiences of migration with the departed, the loved ones being involved by means of their physical presence in the country of destination / "adoption" of migrants.

However, when talking about migration, the feeling of separation, of breakage is analyzed from the perspective of the departed ones, or possibly from the perspective of the children left

³ Baldassar, L., Baldock, C. and Wilding, R. (2007): *Families Caring Across Borders. Migration, Ageing and Transnational Caregiving*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan Press.

Baldassar, L. (2008): *Debating Culture across Distance: Transnational families and The Obligation to Care* in Grillo R. (ed.) *The Family in Question: Immigrant and Ethnic Minorities in Multicultural Europe*, Amsterdam University Press.

⁴ Ducu, V.(2013): *Strategii ale maternității transnaționale: cazul femeilor din România (Strategies of transnational motherhood: the case of women in Romania)*, Argonaut Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca.

behind (Bezzi, 2013)⁵, being little analyzed in terms of the fact that the departure has an effect on the adults remaining home, making them redefine their life and live with some of the cognitive-emotional everyday existence abroad. Thus, migration is not an individual experience, it is a family one.

Multiple transnational existences

Even though in 2002⁶, when they released the already famous definition of transnational families, the classic example for such a family was a family with members spread across several countries, most studies conducted on transnational families took into consideration the bi-national relations between the members of these families, due to the type of migration developed in certain contexts: for example, from a community of the home country in another community in the destination country, with transnational communities often on the network. This type of migration was quite common, remaining specific to for many communities in Romania. But what we noticed was an increasingly increased diversification of destination countries within a community, and even within the same family, so that families with members spread over more countries became increasingly numerous for Romania as well.

These types of transnational existence complicates the practices of operation of families: for example, we encountered situations where for the family the physical meeting of all members spread in several countries has become a sacred moment for its members, a key moment that must be immortalized, hard to be achieved along the years. Moreover, by the online research, we began to identify more and more Romanian families that increasingly leave behind the country because most members are scattered across several countries in the world, and increasingly fewer remain in the country: either by death of the elderly, or by the fact that at a time, the migrant adults decide to move their elderly family members abroad: thus, these families work in a transnational manner, but the relationship with the country of origin, Romania, decreases up to disappearance, especially along with the growth of the younger generation who feel increasingly

⁵ Bezzi C. (2013): Romanian “Left Behind” Children? Experiences of Transnational Childhood and Families in Europe. In *Remembering Childhood*, *Martor*, 18, 57-74.

⁶ Bryceson, D. and Vuorela, U. (eds), (2002): *The Transnational Family. New European frontiers and global networks*, Oxford: Berg Press.

alienated from the country of origin of their parents / parent, despite the latter's efforts to keep their identity.

Transnational communication⁷

Transnational communication not only provides information exchange between "the ones who leave" from the family and those who "are left here". It is a way of life, a practice that makes the two parties merge, each living permanently something from the reality of the other. Studies on the role of communication through communication technology (ICT) have intensified in the last 5 years (Nedelcu, 2012; Madianou and Miller, 2011; Pearce, Slater and Ahmad, 2013; Francisco, 2013; Vancea and Boso, 2014) researchers in the field of transnational families stressing that this type of communication is the key of operation of this type of family.

Our research confirmed of course of this type of communication (whether fixed, mobile, phones, software applications by means of which calls are made at a cheap cost or online video communication). Furthermore, we tried to analyze how these communication strategies develop: who sounds who more often. Who is responsible for the funding of this communication, and we noticed that not only migrants are mainly the ones responsible for this type of communication, but also the family members in the country, sometimes the elderly, invest in this communication: they buy tablets, pay their own internet subscription, they pay subscriptions to physical or mobile networks that give them a chance to communicate with the departed in a very much cheaper manner than if the others would call. This happens because mobile operators in Romania have adapted quickly to the demand and made special offers for the communication with overseas.

⁷ Francisco V., (2013): „The Internet is Magic': Technology, Intimacy and Transnational Families”, *Critical Sociology* 0(0), 1–18.

Madianou M., Miller, D., (2011): „Mobile phone parenting: Reconfiguring relationships between Filipina migrant mothers and their left-behind children”, *New Media Society*, 13(3) 457–470.

Nedelcu. M., (2012): „Migrants' New Transnational Habitus: Rethinking Migration Through a Cosmopolitan Lens in the Digital Age”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1-18.

Pearce K. E., Slater, J. S., Ahmad N., (2013): „Transnational Families in Armenia and Information Communication Technology Use”, *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 2128–2156.

Vancea M., Boso À. (2013): Connected Immigrants? Four Methodological Challenges for the Analysis of *ICT* Use through Survey Data, *Migraciones Internacionales*, vol. 7, 3, 44 – 72.

Co-presence of co-absence; multiple transnational existences and transnational communication - these modes of operation of transnational families lead to a new perspective on migration: we can no longer see it as an individual phenomenon, it is a family experience.

Visual products in qualitative research

Claudia Mitchell (2011)⁸ developed the concept of *composite video*, “[a] particular kind: a video research, a research tool, a communication tool that is more than a simple video (or images recorded in a video). This is a self-contained production, with a beginning, a middle and an end. It includes a story (told either through voices belonging to a narrator or by titles, captions, or other texts), fragments of visual data (photos, participatory videos, drawings), contextualized with data in the form of frames shot during the research and often using some musical excerpts on some of its parts. What is important is to achieve a product that allows the different layers of fieldwork / research intertwine in the form of a composite.”⁹

Our team has taken over this theoretical concept and uses it in the analysis of the visual data (photos, videos on the field and video recording of online interviews), being a theoretical and methodological useful tool for the visual documentation of our project.

Project Manager
Viorela Telegdi-Csetri

⁸ Claudia Mitchell (2011): What can a visual researcher do with a camera? In Claudia Mitchell, *Doing Visual Research*. Sage Publications Ltd, Londra, pp. 159-176.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.