

## Raport științific<sup>1</sup>

### Confronting the difference through transnational family practice

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The 2nd stage

Reporting period: 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

In this second stage of research the objectives were *Research of the themes*:

1. The approach in migrant discrimination in the transnational families
2. Children in transnational families
3. Mixt/ bi-national couples in transnational families

*Debating the theme*: 4. Transnational families in the Eastern European context

#### Collecting the data

I continued to develop the research fields. In this year we have approached in the country the small/medium urban area, therefore we have developed a more ample field in Drobeta Turnu Severin (with 24 participants) and as a supplement a mini fieldwork or exploring fieldwork in Brasov (10 participants). Furthermore because we had enough contacts and the time allowed we supplemented the interviews in the rural area with the village of Jidostita (10) (and in this way we had the rural area of Moldavia, Transilvania and the South). Another fieldwork took place in a big city outside of the country in London, Uk (22 participants). IN Belgium, the main field was developed in Mons (a small city with rural area around), but the newtork that we had locally also took us to a big city – Brussels (24 participants). Interviews were recorded audio but also some of them were video recorded. The virtual field, the interviews through Skype and video calls

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<sup>1</sup> O versiune electronică în limba engleză care nu va cuprinde decât punctări ale principalelor rezultate - deoarece o parte dintre cele ele au fost trimise spre publicare, altele urmează a fi trimise - va fi afișată pe site-ul proiectului:

<http://transnationalfamilies.ro>.

through Facebook continued in this year as well. I did individual interviews as well as couple interviews both on the field and online.

The fact that we managed to have perspectives in the rural area in three different parts of the country (at first the objective was only one area) enriched a lot the data we obtained and it gave us the chance to discover different faces of the ways transnational families are organized. Because of this we also made a proposition to supplement the cities (initially we only had a small/medium size one – which we attributed to Drobeta Turnu Severin and a big city in which we will develop the fieldwork in the next stage). Without previously planning the fieldwork that took place outside of the country brought new important distinction in discovering the differences that happen in the transnational families: the UK participants of the research were in the range of the people who have poorly qualified jobs, and the ones from Belgium were the highly skilled ones. This distinction is very useful because it brings new perspectives in analyzing the relationships that can exist in the transnational families and it opens new research lines.

### **Analyzing the data and the results of the research**

In this period the data have been analyzed by following especially the three research objectives of this stage, the results of this analysis will be briefly presented in the next paragraphs (them being already the object of academic presentation and a series of papers sent to publish by the team that have developed them throughout the year):

#### **(Objective nb.1 ). Approaching the migrant discrimination in the transnational families**

Family members live in several countries, those abroad being often **denigrated at home**, the family needing to confront these accusations, therefore in most cases family members at home have felt that they need to provide arguments in their interviews for the departure of their relatives, **linking it to the precarious economic situation of Romania**, as a sort of excuse. In her interview, Stela, mother of two adult children who managed to maintain their professional status after migrating to the UK, as pharmacists, still felt a need to justify the decision of her children to leave the country.

... before leaving to England, the older boy was in Bucharest. He said he would give it a try over there too, since this system of ours over here failed, it is

quite low now and they wanted it no matter what and they left to Bucharest. And that she should find a better *job* and stuff... What are you saying? He was really a chief at the pharmacy, at the Dona, so everything was very well... But it was almost insufficient (money)... So they were left with almost nothing, not to speak of the fact that they couldn't afford this and that: trips... holidays, shows... on the other hand, there you can afford to take him to all kinds of clubs, so that's quite a difference! ... this was actually a compulsory decision due to the situation....

(Stela, Romania)

Through migration, family members become a minority in the target country and often the family needs to confront **discriminating discourses against them**, similarly to other Eastern-Europeans (McGinnity – Gijssberts 2016),<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Italy, Great Britain, Spain etc.); Luiza, who is married to an American and lives in the US, while admitting to be at a disadvantage by being immediately spotted as a European due to her accent, even after 8 years spent in the US, still considers her situation to be better than that of her brother, Marian, who lives in France where all Romanians are viewed negatively.

Romanians here have a very good reputation, they are not like in Europe. They are considered very clever, very successful and there isn't this thing about ... (discrimination) ... as it happens in Europe

(Luiza, US)

The same feeling of a difference in what concerns acceptance is confirmed by Nelu, the brother of Luiza remaining in Romania, who never visited the US, but did go for visits in France and has felt looked upon with superiority.

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<sup>2</sup> McGinnity, F., Gijssberts, M.: "A threat in the air? Perceptions of group discrimination in the first years after migration: Comparing Polish Migrants in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland", *Ethnicities*, 2016, 16 (2), pp. 290–315.

If I were ever to leave, I would go together with my wife and daughter and I would rather go to Luiza in the States than to Marin in France, although it is harder to get there. (Nelu, Romania)

In what concerns the two target countries we did our research in, Romanians feel the most discriminated in the UK, even if, as Cristi shared with us, the English do not show their disappreciation directly.

The English... they are very proud. Unfortunately, a little too proud to me, if you ask me. (...) They don't like foreigners, it doesn't really matter where you're from. They just don't like you. (...) They have an aversion towards us. However, most of them, if you tell them that you're from Romania: 'Oh, yeah, nice, nice!' And then, obviously, there's another story when you turn around. When they talk to you they are actually ok.

(Cristi, UK)

Alina felt scared by the coming of Brexit and of what will happen to Romanians, especially since it seems that those of the English who appreciate her told her that they will vote for an exit from the EU, with the hope that their Romanian friends will not suffer.

That's right. Dear Alina, if the UK is to be separated from the EU, it will not affect you in any way, will it?

(Alina, UK)

We have encountered the most powerful impact of discrimination in the UK in the case of Sandu, who, having stayed for 12 years in London, has managed to access an good social position, and was much bothered by the recent wave of Romanian migrants and shared the views in the press concerning Romanians as inferior to others, wishing that the UK exits the EU in order for Romanians not to be able to come as easily and for him not to confront discrimination anymore.

### **(Objective nb. 3). Children in transnational families**

The departure of the parents is often followed by the departure of the children. Often the relocation of the child is well received by the family, since by migrating Westward, the children have access to a more modern education system compared to the Romanian one. Stela told us with enthusiasm how her granddaughter managed to be integrated relatively quickly in the UK.

Here she didn't get enrolled, here she needed to get into the zero grade, and there, since they start school at five, like that... they enrolled her directly into the first grade. (...) And now she is in the third. It is not simple, but she adapted very quickly.

School there is a little different from here, it is much closer to the pupil. Like this, and after they have the lunch break, for example, after they have the lunch break and the play break, since they play in the yard and eat there, after that there is an *assistant teacher*, one that handles four children, so it is a kind of *after*, to study there. They are not given any homework.

(Stela, Romania)

However, there are situations in which only the children migrate in order to go to school abroad. Maria told us how, since she had an adult child in France as well as several members of the extended family, she decided to send her 14-year-old child to study there in order to give the child the opportunity to access an education system superior to the Romanian one. Even if this was a success story, since the child grew to an adult meanwhile, managed to enter a leading position and makes part of a mixed couple with a French woman, Maria can never forget the sacrifice she made by being separated from her child so early.

Very painful! So, when I left him there it was very awful! So, I couldn't stop crying and I cried until Paris. I had the urge to tell the man: mister, stop, let me get back to take my child!

(Maria, Romania)

Situations are frequent where parents who have migrated together with their children decide to return home, but the parents' decision is not 100% shared by the children, especially

since they have difficulties in using the Romanian language. Flavia told us with emotion of her son's attempt to adapt, after which he returned to Italy.

He did the first grade there. In the beginning, he liked it, but he didn't want to... And it was very difficult for him at school... He was afraid since he didn't manage to speak well. And now, he still has a little difficulty in articulating words, but he speaks very well! I didn't expect it so quickly, since he has four months since he remained (in Romania)... (...) And he made his group of friends, he is an open type, he isn't one to get ashamed. He goes, he doesn't know, he goes and asks, he plays.

(Flavia, Romania)

Children with migrant parents or from bi-national marriages often have access to double citizenship, but we also encounter more interesting situations when these children are born in a third country, hence they will be able to access multiple citizenships. Cristi told us of her daughter Petronela's situation, born in the UK of Romanian and Czech parents.

*She is a resident of the U.K., she has a U.K. birth certificate and if we wanted British citizenship for her, first of all, one of us has to earn it..(Q: Is she Romanian then?) She is nothing yet! ...We applied for Czech citizenship, just because it lasts a few weeks shorter than our Romanian paperwork. There was the only choice. We are waiting for the papers. (...). We are going to apply for Romanian citizenship as well, both of these countries do allow dual citizenship, so why not? (Cristi, UK)*

Under the pressure of the extended family, it is especially the Romanian partners who impose their choice of religion, namely, the Orthodox rite (either in what concerns the couple's marriage ceremony, or the children's baptism).

*...my mother baptized him when we've sent him on vacation (...) did it without permission, and my sister was the godmother. And he was three years old. Since then he's very religious, he loves the Bible, at Easter and Christmas he goes to Church, he knows*

*“Our Heavenly Father” in both Romanian and English, he knows both Bibles but...no, he’s Orthodox!* (Virginia, UK)

These children, having access to multiple worlds, become actors of a cosmopolitan world with a vision different from that of the nation-state in which Romanians used to be educated (Telegdi-Csetri and Ducu, 2016)<sup>3</sup>.

### **(Objective nb. 3). Mixt/bi-national couples in transnational families**

The way in which bi-national couples (Brahic, 2013)<sup>4</sup> use language to communicate within the couple and with their children is a key part of the configuration of mixed families’ functioning. In our research, we have met the three communication strategies of mixed couples proposed by Gaspar (2010)<sup>5</sup>: assimilation, bi-national and peripatetic, but we also identified a fourth, “neutral” strategy: speaking to each other in a third language. In this way, beyond the classic situations in which either the minority partner is completely assimilated or the child does not learn the majority language, either in the house the language of the majority partner is the one that is spoken but the child also learns the language of the minority partner. Lately you find mixt couples where the partners do not speak the language of the other partner and they communicate in a third language. This neutral strategy offers the partners some sort of equality and it keeps the independence in the couple.

*(English) Yes, mostly. She understands Romanian very well, because she’s very good with languages. (...), but she doesn’t want to speak it because I’m very lazy to learn Bulgarian*

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<sup>3</sup> Telegdi-Csetri, Á., Ducu, V.: “Transnational Difference – Cosmopolitan Meaning”, in Ducu, V, Telegdi-Csetri, Á. (eds.): *Managing Difference in Eastern-European Transnational Families*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016 pp. 13-27.

<sup>4</sup> Brahic, B.: “The Politics of Bi-nationality in Couple Relationships: A Case Study of European Bi-national Couples in Manchester”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, XLIV, (6), 2013, pp 699 – 714.

<sup>5</sup> Gaspar, S.: “Family and social dynamics among European mixed couples”. *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, 9, (2), 2010, pp. 109–125.

*and she doesn't want to speak Romanian because I don't speak Bulgarian. (Tudor, Belgium)*

The practice of the transnational communication (Nedelcu and Wyss, 2016)<sup>6</sup> in a neutral language contributes to “doing family” (Morgan, 2011)<sup>7</sup> with the extended family members:

*Now I am talking with his mom on Facebook and how are we talking? I write in English and she is translating in Google everything and then, when she's writing me back, she's writing in English, but also using Google Translate. (Katarina, UK)*

In this way English becomes the language in which they communicate even if Katarina's mother in law does not speak this language.

Bi-national couples, especially the new formed ones are often confronted with a certain reticence from the part of the extended family members in which the Romanian partner is concerned. A very important aspect of it seems to be the religion in the life of these couples: the Romanian partner wanting to impose the orthodox religion.

Beyond these central research objectives that we have proposed in this year there were other themes analyzed as well: the role of women in transnational families; the meaning of home for the members of the transnational families ; family reunions ; the forming of the transnational couples.

Another important aspect was making the members of the team focus on developing the research methods: the role of the visual component (photo/video) in the field research ; online research.

### **The dissemination of the results**

For the debate of the theme Transnational families in the Eastern-European context (objective nb. 4) we had the initial objective the organisation of an international workshop. Not

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<sup>6</sup> Nedelcu, M., Wyss, M.: “‘Doing family’ through ICT-mediated ordinary co-presence: transnational communication practices of Romanian migrants in Switzerland”, *Global Networks* 16, 2, 2016, pp. 202–218.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, D.: *Rethinking Family Practices*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.



only did we manage to organize this workshop during a prestigious international conference abroad<sup>8</sup>, but we also continued the debate of the theme in an ample panel of discussion (composed of three sessions) during one of the biggest international conferences that is annually organized in Romania<sup>9</sup>, in this way the director of the project was a member in the Scientific Committee of organizing this conference. During the two academic debates the team had presented 6 papers and the first photo album was launched. On the basis of the debate and the international events we have published a volume edited at one of the prestigious publishing houses in the domain of social science<sup>10</sup> where the members of the team have participated with three chapters. Because of these events, debate and editorial situation, the members of the team have collaborated with expert researchers on the theme of transnational families from many countries (UK, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Italy, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Albania, Germany, Finland).

The other results that were not incorporated in the team of the debate presented above, obtained in this period were disseminated in this way : 4 presentations at international conferences, 4 presentations at a national conference, 4 articles sent to publish in scientific magazines, 2 chapters sent to publish in a volume edited at a foreign prestigious publishing house in the domain of social science, and with this the opportunity of two members of the team to collaborate at the same publication and editors as reviewers for other chapters of the book; organizing three open seminars, moderating a session at an international conference.

Furthermore alongside disseminating the results in the academic world, a great success of this year were the presentations of the results in artistic/cultural environments. In this way we had the opportunity to present in a culture camp and an art camp both with an international participation. The first photo exhibit was hosted in a photography festival of documentation photography and it had an international participation. Taking this opportunity we managed to organize a public debate of the results. We underline the fact that in Romania, this type of research in mixed teams, trans-disciplinary – in our case specialists in photo documentation/video documentation is only in its incipient phase.

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<sup>8</sup> The 18th Nordic Migration Conference, Oslo August 11-12 2016.

<sup>9</sup> The 4th International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society – Sibiu, 29th of September – 1st of October 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Conform listei propuse de UEFISCDI

Because of this there is almost always a lack of a reference in the methodological field- precisely the field we want to develop. Our team managed to find the solution to link the methodological field and the theoretic one that comes from the photo. There is the video documentation with the one that comes from the social research through the composite video. Furthermore the members of the team have presented the results of the project in radio and TV shows touching an extended group – the public audience.

Director proiect

Viorela Telegdi-Csetri