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Circulation of Care and Intergenerational Solidarity. Transnational
Families in the Context of Emigration from Romania

Summary

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Content

INTRODUCTION	10
1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILIES AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS	19
INTRODUCTION	19
INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, STATE, ECONOMY AND SOCIAL NORMS	21
<i>Moral economy</i>	21
<i>From exchange relationships towards reciprocity and mutual support</i>	25
<i>Welfare state and family regimes</i>	28
<i>Intergenerational solidarity and conflict</i>	32
FAMILY HISTORY, PERSONAL BIOGRAPHIES AND FAMILY PRACTICES	38
<i>Life course perspective</i>	38
<i>Habitus, family, and family relationships</i>	40
<i>Family responsibilities and negotiated arrangements</i>	42
<i>Family practices</i>	44
<i>Personal networks and social capital</i>	48
TRANSNATIONALISM AND MULTISITED FAMILIES	50
<i>Introduction to transnationalism</i>	51
<i>Transnational families</i>	53
<i>Circulation of care and support</i>	56
<i>Innovation and reproduction of family practices in transnational context</i>	58
2. TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY LIFE AND DETERMINANT FACTORS	61
INTRODUCTION	61
TYPOLOGIES OF INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY PRACTICES	EROARE! MARCAJ ÎN DOCUMENT NEDEFINIT.
TRANSNATIONAL LIFE AND FAMILY PRACTICES	67
<i>Family relationships across borders</i>	67
<i>Transnational visits</i>	71
<i>Intergenerational support from a distance</i>	75
DETERMINANT FACTORS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY PRACTICES	77
GENDER INEQUALITIES	79
3. FREQUENCY AND VARIETY OF PRACTICES AMONG ROMANIAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES	85
INTRODUCTION	85
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	86

DATA AND METHODOLOGY.....	87
<i>Sample</i>	88
<i>The research instrument</i>	89
<i>Intergenerational solidarity items</i>	90
RESULTS.....	92
<i>Type and frequency of transnational contact</i>	92
<i>Practical support during visits</i>	96
<i>Support without physical copresence</i>	98
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	102
4. FORMS OF FAMILY SOLIDARITY IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT	105
INTRODUCTION	105
LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS.....	107
DATA AND METHODOLOGY.....	109
LATENT CLASS DESCRIPTION.....	112
EXPLANATORY FACTORS.....	115
DISCUSSION.....	120
CONCLUSIONS.....	121
5. REMITTANCES, SOLIDARITY AND FAMILY HISTORY	123
INTRODUCTION	123
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS	124
DATA AND METHODOLOGY.....	127
DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS.....	129
EXPLAINING REMITTANCES. MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS RESULTS	131
DISCUSSION.....	138
CONCLUSIONS.....	139
6. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DISSCUSION	142
PUBLIC IMPLICATIONS OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY	146
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	149
APPENDIX 1	166
APPENDIX 2	168
APPENDIX 3	170

Key words: transnational families, circulation of care, intergenerational solidarity, family practices, remittances, latent structures

Summary:

The present study is focused upon transnational relations between the extended kinship groups, namely, the relationship between non-migrant elder parents and emigrant adult children. Empirical data used throughout this study resulted from a national research project entitled “Intergenerational solidarity in the context of work migration abroad. The situation of elderly left at home”. The on-site activity pertaining to the research has taken place between June – December 2016, using a sample representative at a national level, comprising of individuals that were at least 60 years old and had, at the given moment, at least an adult child living abroad. The main objective of this research was to empirically study the elderly living in Romania and whose child/children have left the country seeking work abroad. Following this, the research aimed studying the way that intergenerational solidarity manifests across borders while accounting for the needs for care and support of non-migrant parents.

The intergenerational perspective of family relationships used throughout this study comes as a reaction to demographic changes experienced in the last decades in Romania. Romania and most of the European states, as well, are following a similar trend of increasing numbers of the elderly population segment and a decrease in the younger generation. Increasing life expectancy and very low fertility rates are leading factors in the emergence of demographic aging. The effects of population aging are also visible in the composition of the families. A lowering in the numbers of members of the same generation and a growth in the number of different consecutive generations help shape the vertical family. One of the results of this trend is that of increased opportunities for long lasting intergenerational family relationships.

Another visible demographic phenomenon in a Romanian context, beside a low fertility rates and increasing life expectancy, is provided by international/cross-border migration. At European level, Romania faces a high share of emigrants out of the country’s total official population. The Romanian socio-economic context after 1989 contributed significantly to Romanian citizens’ mass emigration. On one hand, neo-liberal policies during the transition period towards a market economy led to a growth of social inequalities and poverty risks. On the other hand, easing regulations to cross national borders, having access to a better paid labour market in other countries, joining the European Union and developing long distance transport infrastructure helped creating a transnational social field which is becoming ever more articulate. Nowadays, Romania sits at the top of countries of origin of Western migration, being one of the most important corridors of international mobility of individuals in Europe.

The analytical approach in this study considers several elements: social structure, structure of opportunities and needs, individual capabilities, and as well, personal choice. Thus, intergenerational family relationships are understood as a result of individual action in relation with kin relation, found under the influence of personal characteristics and greater social structures. I believe that social structures influence family configuration and the set of needs and opportunities all implied individuals/actors in mutual intergenerational support relationships. Bearing in mind the emotional and sentimental dimensions that link family members, I will also discuss about the different forms that interacting can take, that play an essential role in maintaining links and forms of affection. Notwithstanding, the implications that family history and intergenerational solidarity have over the life course are not be neglected.

The study comprises of six chapters, out of which two are theoretical, three are intended to present the study results and a chapter dedicated to conclusions. The Introduction opens a discussion about the importance of studying intergenerational family relationships in Romania while stating the main arguments of the present study. The first chapter focuses on specific literature that supports the arguments enounced in the introductory chapter. Out of the described concepts in the first part of the chapter, the following would be worth mentioning – moral economy, reciprocity, intergenerational solidarity, and intergenerational conflict and ambivalence. The second section of the chapter slowly detaches itself from the structuralist approaches and takes on various critical perspectives. I am therefore mentioning the theoretical perspective of life course analysis, the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu about the false opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, social action, family practices and personal networks. These theoretical perspectives blend elements from the social reasoning of critical structuralism and symbolic interactionism. The last section of the first chapter is focused toward the ‘new’ literature on transnationalism and transnational families. Both quantitative studies that include samples of individuals experiencing migration as well as multi-spatial ethnographic research fill in classic studies, proposing new concepts as well as a theoretical apparatus matching present-day context, characterised (also) by intense cross-border mobility.

The second chapter of the study resumes at presenting results of multiple qualitative and quantitative studies on transnational families. The chapter aims at offering empirical marks that will guide my own analytical process and provide prior knowledge for result explanation/evaluation. The third chapter opens the first discussions based on empirical data and describes my data source, the sampling technique and the instrument used for data collection. For the descriptive analysis, the chapter is guided by a series of research questions that explore the characteristics of intergenerational relations of Romanian transnational families. The main results highlight the diversity and frequency of transnational family practices between elder parents and emigrant adult children. In line with previous

results, data shows that support and care have within Romanian transnational families have a multidirectional nature. Both emigrant adult children as well as parents remaining at home offer cross-border support during visiting or from afar. Interactions vary from physical to virtual copresence as well as occasionally/irregularly/every now and then imply exchanging practical or material support.

The scope of the fourth chapter is to identify latent structures using transnational family practices and explaining them, considering several factors, as a starting point. The results were obtained by performing complex statistical analysis, such as latent class analysis or regression analysis using binary dependent variables. These provide understandings about the way that family practices create certain types of transnational relations and help identifying factors that explain the variation of intergenerational solidarity. Three latent classes have been obtained and they highlight the multidirectional and asymmetrical character of intergenerational support relations while at the same time they also highlight the importance of physical or technologically mediated contact required for maintaining family cohesion in the context of a transnational family life. Inspired by literature, I named the obtained transnational relations/latent classes as harmonious upward solidarity, contact solidarity and harmonious downward solidarity. For the factor analysis explaining the intergenerational relations types, the variables used vary from family practices prior to emigration and items that measure the needs and opportunities structures. Regression analyses presented in this chapter have shown a consistency in family practices throughout time. Even if family norms, gender or needs and opportunities structures significantly influence intergenerational relations arrangements, from a statistical point of view, family history provides better understanding to family practices types.

The fifth chapter provides an extended analysis of remittances, differentiating between cash and in-kind remittances, that the adult child provides to the non-migrant parents from Romania. The research presented in this section of my study is different from other research tackling on emigrant remittances to their home country due to the fact that it deals with cross-border transfers of cash and goods within the theoretical perspective of intergenerational solidarity and circulation of care. The decision to analyse remittances in a distinct chapter is based on the need to highlight that material support is not just an answer to the needs of non-migrants family members but it is an integral part of a complex web of interdependencies. Results show that the two types of remittances, cash, and goods, bears distinct significance. Compared to in-kind remittances, in-cash remittances are more likely to be conditioned by the structures of needs and opportunities of implied members. Monetary support is one-way and is usually provided by the adult emigrant child, while non-cash remittances are usually initiated both by the parents and the adult children. As is the case of cash remittances, the presence and regularity of material support from across-borders is strongly determined by family history and a blend between needs and opportunities of the implied family members.