

IN A DECISION TRAP – DEBATES AROUND CARING AND CARE PROVISIONS IN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES. THE UKRAINIAN CASE

KRYSTYNA ŚLANY
MAGDALENA ŚLUSARCZYK

Jagiellonian University

Both migration and parenthood, and – in particular – motherhood, belong to the central events in a human life, being both mutually entangled, and affecting the wider society. Transnational families become involved in a vivid discourse dedicated to a model of a perfect family, perfect woman, and perfect motherhood. Thus, an everyday life of transnational mothers assumes negotiations between geography, economy, social and family roles. New works on the topic forefront appreciation of both productive and reproductive female roles, which find a spectacular reflection in migrant family scholarship. Migration symptomatically reveals the diversity and the complexity of the women's social roles and the strategies of their fulfillment. In our paper we focus on the functioning of Ukrainian transnational families. By supplying narrations of the migrant women, we analyze their life trajectories, the manner in which a migration decision is taken, the stories of parenthood, performance of caretaking, maintenance of family ties (based on indirect rather than direct relations) and social ties.

Keywords: female migration, family migration, work and child-care, Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

As with other conceptual notions surrounding migration processes (e.g. integration), the difficulty with defining both the term of transnationality and that of transnational families generally stems from the differing understandings of those concepts. It is specifically related to a varying level of their wider

acceptance and determinants of usability (Anthias, Morokvasic-Müller, Kontos 2012). Both migration and parenthood, and – in particular – motherhood, belong to the central events in a human life, being both mutually entangled, and affecting the wider society. They are simultaneously private and public, personal and political. Transnational families become involved in a vivid discourse dedicated to a model of a perfect family, perfect woman, and perfect motherhood. Thus, an everyday life of transnational mothers assumes negotiations between geography, economy, social and family roles. Noteworthy, sustaining a family system, appropriate performance of parental care and meeting the demands of being a good mother are nowadays becoming more difficult than ever before. The burden of duties falling on women is constantly expanding, while the structural inequalities yielding poverty and unemployment grow. They impose new ways for women to adopt their roles to the changing reality, especially when the female family members additionally happen to be the sole bread-winners. Moreover, it should be noted that the modern-day ideal of a woman, remaining under the influence of an individualistic society and emphasizing the importance of personal development, does not converge with the ideal of motherhood (intensive motherhood) (Budrowska 2000, Badinter 2013).

Transnational families extend the discussions on a distinction between being a woman and being a mother. They propose framings in which a woman is entitled to assume different social roles, and where motherhood is embarked on by choice rather than by constraint. New works on the topic forefront appreciation of both productive and reproductive female roles, which find a spectacular reflection in migrant family scholarship. Migration symptomatically reveals the diversity and the complexity of the women's social roles and the strategies of their fulfillment. In our paper we focus on the functioning of Ukrainian transnational families. By supplying narrations of the migrant women¹, we analyze their

¹ The analysis is based on the results of the research conducted during from 2006 to 2008 in the framework of the project *FeMiPol: Integration of Female ImMigrants in Labour Market and Society. Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations* (A STREP Project of the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission Scientific Support to Policies SSP4 – Contract Number 022666). The completion of the entire project in Poland included 20 biographic-narrative interviews conducted with women representing 9 different nationalities: the majority of 9 – Ukrainian, but also women from Armenia, Russia, Belarus, Chechnya, Kazakhstan, Zambia, Georgia and Serbia. Most of those interviewed (13) were aged 30–49 years, 5 women were over 50, while 2 were below 30. Worth pointing out is the marital status of the participants – the dominating majority are single women (in the vast meaning of the term), i.e. divorced, widows, only then married women and single (never married). The majority were mothers with children (only two women were childless), supported first of all by their mothers in their country of origin. A large majority of those interviewed had either college/university (10) or high-school (6) level education which, as follows from our research, in most cases proved useless in Poland. The interviews were conducted by, among others, Katarzyna Gmaj and Karolina Krzystek. The primary objective of

life trajectories, the manner in which a migration decision is taken, the stories of parenthood, performance of caretaking, maintenance of family ties (based on indirect rather than direct relations) and social ties. We need to underline the fact that every culture, when determining its model of ideal motherhood/ideal woman, may create – and this is what is certainly evident in the case of Ukrainian women-migrants – contradictions, conflicts, and tensions. Those are not only impossible to solve, but also extremely hard to even mitigate. Whenever failing to comply with all of the requirements associated with direct concern and care over children, husband and other family members, women-migrants that are sole bread-winners break a certain socio-political and cultural gender contract. Although transnational families attempt to effectively organize their daily assignments, it is the society that attributes to them a certain ‘deficit’ and perceives them as the ones generating a range of social problems. Elizabeth Badinter (2013: 133–135) emphasizes that the abovementioned model of ideal motherhood, results from different factors, including those related to the state policy. She argues that ideal mother constructions affect all women, regardless of whether they are aware of the model or not. In other words, motherhood “may be questioned, negotiated or rejected, however, a position thereto needs to be taken” (Ibidem: 133). In addition, Heather Millman points out to the importance of the historical and cultural contexts which determine and shape the defined practices and behaviours – the components making up the mother’s social role. The model of motherhood and the practices stand a chance to be consistent. However, transnational families find themselves in a situation when: “these two modes of image and practice do not always function in absolute agreement, and as a result certain tensions arise for women who must mother from afar” (Millman 2013: 78).

the study was to research the effectiveness of the hitherto migration policy, regarding in particular the question of migrant women’s integration in the Polish labour market, and formulation recommendation towards increasing the level of social cohesion (Krzystek 2008). The biographic interviews conducted with women-migrants allowed for using their narratives to shed some light on the social and economic situations which affect or used to affect their life-decisions to migrate, specifics of their employment and its hierarchical dimension, as well as applicable dimensions of migration policy. Furthermore, the interviews create a chance to restate value and preferences, showing also the extent of freedom and individual choices in the broad context of a migration process. Additionally, they reveal the changes of values and life preferences over a longer time perspective (Kontos 2004). They demonstrate the processual character of women’s migration and their ability to secure and raise the living standard of their families.

DISCUSSIONS AROUND A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY CONCEPT

What does the notion of a transnational family mean? The basic definition of a transnational family is that it is “sustained ties of family members and kinship networks across the borders of multiple nation states” (McCarthy, Edwards 2011: 187), which includes diversified processes, practices, strategies and activities of a daily life. They are undertaken at an individual level (contacts with neighbours or local community), as well as on an institutional level. Hence, coming to the foreground is the processuality of a family, its ‘acting and presenting’. This is the perspective adopted by Janet Finch (2007) in her research on family life, where she starts with an assumption that the families of today appear not so much as ‘being’ a family, but are rather subject to a process of their constant ‘creation’ (‘doing a family’). It seems therefore unjustified to treat a family solely as an unchangeable structure. Instead, Finch postulates to replace this definition by understanding a family as ‘sets of activities’ that are called family practices. The researcher moves even further and creates a notion of ‘displaying’ a family which, aside of doing a family, is an equally essential process. A family is understood here in its broad sense, including not only parents and children, but also grandparents, and even siblings and more distant relatives. Thus, families are increasingly featured not as an institution, but as parenthood understood as caring for their offspring and those in need, perceived as physical, emotional and intellectual work – the work which is carried out due to the intermediation of the culture, economic conditions and the state policy (Hryciuk, Korolczuk 2015: 13–14). Further, Anna Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz (2015: 206) emphasises that “care is a broad term including both the physical care, also that devoid of any personal relation between the caretaker and the charge, and the emotional care, where such a relation is indispensable. This is a practice composed of various factors: time, money, knowledge and skills, as well as social relations and emotions. Care, as part of a broader network of relations over the entire lifespan, assumes reciprocity and co-relation. It is also a relational notion, which means that it is based on a family context, but within a broader social dimension as well, hence it constitutes a part of social tissue that is necessary for its development.”

A geographical distance modifies, and sometimes limits the capacity for offering support and care, which does not necessarily mean the rejection or negligence of care obligations. The key to clarification of a transnational family notion is viewing it “not only as a field of continuous struggle and separation, but also as a potential source of success and improvement of living standard for all of its members” (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 25, 63–82). Moreover, Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela also emphasise that, although family members spend

a substantial length or even a majority of time apart, there remains something they define as *familyhood*, a sense of unity and well-being at the level of the entire family (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002). A shift of accent has been underlined in recent years (Levitt, Jaworsky 2007), from the interest centred mainly on the material aspect and living conditions, financial matters and money shipments, to the experiences of parents, children and the elderly in multi-generational families, conducive in turn to placing more emphasis on a gendered division of social roles and its consequences (vide: Krzyżowski, Slany, Ślusarczyk 2014: 146).

Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo and Theresa Avila (1997), as well as Rhazel Parreñas (2005), put forward two main dimensions that affect the analysis and evaluation of transnational parenthood. The first one consists in sustaining family life in an international context, whereas the other – caretaking from afar. Compared to the Western standards concerning motherhood, the solutions and practices exercised migrant women from Ukraine (as well as from other countries generating female population outflows) might seem insufficient and incomplete. Discussions regarding transnational families rarely focus on men, who migrate as often as women. Instead the debates are essentially, in fact almost exclusively, centred on women. A family, its functioning, the strength of family ties, and care are all considered the domains of women. Traditional-conservative, nationalistic movements perceive migration as a threat to families, ignoring the indigenous structural, cultural, political and social determinants and constraints that restrict the living standard, oftentimes leading to a marginalisation of families. The factors including, among others: the duration of migration, the type of mobility, the family member to migrate first, the destination of the migration stream, the type of work obtained abroad or the subject entrusted to take care of the children, all influence the practices and family life (Tolstokorova 2009, Kyzyma 2006, Yarova 2006).

In Ukraine, women's migration is often referred to as 'extremely dangerous', 'causing derangement of family', 'conducive to men's alcoholism' (Montefusco 2008). Children of families affected by migration are called 'social orphans'², the actual age of such children considered immaterial, as many opponents of women's migration believe that even mothers of considerably older children are not released of their obligation to remain on location, available to children's needs (Molodikova 2008: 22). The debate, complete with the formulated accusations, continues in the absence of any coherent social and migration policy from the state/government authorities. The first attempts to formulate such a policy were

² Similarly to Poland, where such children are called Euro-orphans, and other countries of Central-Eastern Europe experiencing the phenomenon of mass migration.

initiated as late as in 2007, but the legislation projects got stuck at the parliament-reading stage of the process. It is rarely mentioned that migration is a strategy of survival in the face of unemployment and the lack of support from either the state or local administration (Fedyuk 2011), whereas it is often presented as a subject of national concern – especially in the context of a return to the vision of the pre-Soviet Ukraine, with its traditional values. The context also serves to idealise the traditional division of gender roles – posed in stark contrast to the times when Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union. The so-called “family value” is to constitute a component of the European character and specificity of modern Ukraine. One of the important symbols that has been revived is *Belehynja*, a Slavic goddess, patron and protector of family and women, an icon of mothers-caretakers, which simultaneously positions the father as the family’s sole bread-winner while stigmatising behaviours incompatible with the traditional scripts. Olena Fedyuk even cites examples of official government campaigns warning against migration and pointing out its negative consequences (2011: 94).

The stigmatization of migrant mothers and publicising the problem of leaving the children behind ‘unattended’ brings also some political advantages, as it allows to avoid a discussion on the lack of the government support for families, and to ignore the value of the effects of their work for the national economy (Fedyuk 2011: 99). Some of the critics contradict the migrant-women’s claims that their migration was the only solution to the problems experienced by the family; they argue that for most the decision to migrate was their free choice as “there are no war or disease or any disasters of the type” (Kotusenko 2007: 10). However, the *push*-type factors do exist, but their role is quickly diminishing, with a desire for life-improvement increasingly dominating, replacing the mere need to ensure survival. The memory of the 1995–1999 crisis is often recalled, but it is definitely over, and in our opinion, the life in Ukraine has substantially improved ever since. Some of the participants of the ongoing discourse, including the already-mentioned Victor Kotusenko, or Alyssa Tolstokorova and Irina Molodikova, go even further in their criticism, emphasising a destruction of the family and marital life (depriving men of their canonical role as family providers/bread-winners, increased number of divorces, etc., Molodikova 2008: 22) and strengthening the harmful materialistic attitudes in children and youth – as manifested in form of a telltale term of a ‘poisoned gift’ (Tolstokorova 2009). Questioning the proper performance pertains to the following functions: reproduction, socialising and social control (with a critical assessment of, in particular, the situation of the so-called ‘Italian children’, where both parents obtained long-term employment abroad, keep sending large amounts of money, while absent to provide direct, committed care to their children), as well as ensuring security and appropriate

recreation. Critics of migration invoke the notion of a family as a community essential for the upbringing, experiencing warmth, peace, love, propinquity and support, understanding the essence of home. It is being underlined that a family is a child's first, primary and irreplaceable environment (Gr, *Ethnos*), an environment characterised by special psycho-social, emotional and cognitive bonds. Further, parents are the first and most important educators (Gr, *Agos*) who mould and raise a child, and a family is the place of a child's subjective activity (Gr, *Auto_Agos*), through which a child manifests his/her own and unique individuality (Wilk 2002: 5–51). Therefore, a disintegration of a family, its disconnection while the children are still underage, undermines its initiative character, its unmatched quality for bonding, psychological and axiological-normative backbone formation, in addition to its comprehensive effect on, among others, a child's self-agency, motivation, emotions, absorption of knowledge regarding social, religious and cultural life, history and tradition.

WHY DO WOMEN MIGRATE?

In this section of the article we refer to the narratives of three of our women-respondents from Ukraine: Valentina (aged 41), Svetlana (32) and Nadia (51). Migration was not an easy choice for either of them, the decision to migrate made when they could not see any other option to support themselves and their children, nor a chance to provide material support to their parents. In addition, neither of them received any support or assistance from their husbands/ex-husbands or partners.

Valentina first came to Poland in 2001 when she was 35 years old and became a sex-worker. In Ukraine she obtained a degree in political sciences and worked as a school teacher. In Poland she found work soon after her arrival, so she continued her school job in Ukraine during the school-year and spent summer holidays working in Poland. She is a single mother – her son was 16 years old at the time of the interview, her husband had died. In Valentina's view, her migration to Poland was the last resort, she could not see any other escape from poverty:

We would have perished, I wouldn't have been able to survive all by myself in Moscow, at the time I lived in Moscow, and the child was small. (...) God forbid for you to ever experience (a situation when) you go shopping, your child asks for a 20 penny candy, and you do not have a single penny, I am not saying 20 penny, but one penny, I had no money, nothing... (Valentina).

Valentina believes that poverty is associated not only with material shortages, but also with social exclusion, and that was something she was determined to avoid at all cost. In her opinion, there was no other way out, the political situation in Russia, and then in Ukraine, offered no chance for a life in dignity, while migration brought only a partial improvement as she lacked the time for rest or personal development:

For it is not a normal state ... let me put it like this...I graduated from two faculties and I earn 100 dollars, 100 and seven to be exact, I work 8 hours a day because I have a Master ... not a Master... I can lecture in our country ... I don't know how to say it in Polish ... I lecture at a college, I have a big [teenage] child, so I need to have money for paper [writing materials], some materials, everything ... well, for myself, for the child. (...) I work all year round, in my home country summer vacations begin in May, I want to go to the seaside, elementary – isn't it? In your country, children, students, they can all afford it. And I work and can't afford it, during my vacation I have to leave for work ... how to put it ... I have to go on vacation to work so that I can be all right back at work... did I make myself clear? When I come to work, I need to copy something because those days when you could write something are gone, everything must be printed ..., for a computer, for paper ... and I can buy it myself instead of turning to my father or mother, because they are already retired, and asking: give me because I need it... [money] to buy a pen, I need money for ... ridiculous, right? I would like to travel, I would like to go somewhere and rest, I would like to go to another country and visit, tour ... See a different culture and life, [other] people (Valentina).

The case of Svetlana is a similar story – she is also a single mother (her husband left her when their son was 2 years old), except that in her case the life-changing decision was made by her entire family, that is by Svetlana and her parents who have been helping her since the divorce and promised to take care of her child. Her son cannot join her as the ex-husband objects to issuing a passport to him. Before she came to Poland, Svetlana worked in the Czech Republic, but she sees the experience as a failure. Svetlana has a college-level education, but she works as a cleaning lady in Poland. Svetlana's labour migration is not only the basis of livelihood for herself, her child and parents, but also a chance to realize a number of the whole family's plans, e.g. construction/repairs in the family apartment. Although she has been coming to Poland regularly for the past 4 years and nothing in her narrative indicates that she might want to change it, Svetlana believes herself to be a temporary migrant, rejecting any thought that she might consider permanent migration. Like in the previous case, migration to Poland and taking on a specific job resulted from having access to an informal contact network. The same is true about the choice of the city:

Yeah, it was sort of weird how it happened, as after I divorced my husband I was left alone with the child and I had to ... although I had a very good job there in Ukraine, but again, it started to be so in Ukraine that ... they paid very little money to us, and I simply could not survive on that with my child all by myself, to buy food, clothes, and so on. I simply ... didn't know what to do, but it happened so that God keeps watch over us all the time, and a friend of mine had a cleaning job then here in Poland and ... in Warsaw, and so she offered to replace her for a month as she had, for example, like something back at home ... some urgent business to tend to, and I would take her place in her cleaning job here in Warsaw. For a month, right? I had just come here for a month, and I cleaned. Right. And I just cleaned the family that I work for now. There is a boy, was a boy, he was 9 then, and I cleaned there and talked to that boy, and so on, and I don't know ... Then, the month came to an end, I went back home and that friend of mine calls to me and says: "Sveta, come here because you have that, you have a job". And I say "What job?" – „Ah – these employers want you be a baby-sitter, that this boy want you, he likes you, and he wants you to be his nanny, and they ask you that you come" ... so I came, and I have worked for them to that times, it is almost three years now (Svetlana).

As in the case of Valentina, migration is perceived as a necessity, last resort after all alternative courses of action have been exhausted, a solution that they would have never opted for if it had not been for the financial aspects. It was because of the economic benefits that Svetlana resigned from the job that offered certain potential for development (she is a radio-electronic engineer by profession, and even though she pursued a career in human resources/personnel department rather than in line with her profession, she nevertheless did like her job) for a better-paying, cleaning job in Poland, definitely much below her qualifications.

Yes, it was terribly hard for me, as I am generally the kind of person that it is very difficult for me to change my situation in life, because ... as I am. Once I got used to that job, then I spent 15 years practically doing the same work. And it was hard for me to decide, but it was because there is no other way out of it ... That ... my parents is retired and simply that I won't make it, and this is because there's no other way and I have to do so. Otherwise ... I would have never come to Poland, but maybe have a rest. I wouldn't go to work at all, not to Italy, for example. From here women go to [work in] Italy a lot, and so on, but I would not go unless ... Because I like my Ukraine, like it very much! I like Ukraine, I miss terribly the people, miss this animals and them all at home, but simply ... nothing make it there. Still, as yet. As yet (Svetlana).

The story of Nadia (51 years old, two children aged 20 and 16) bears high similarity. Both she and her husband had lost their jobs during the economic transformation, and they supported the family on the money earned doing odd jobs abroad. Her husband used to labour-migrate more frequently, while Nadia's sporadic trips abroad supplemented the income with additional earnings. After her husband died in 2004, Nadia had to take over as a sole family supporter – she became responsible for all of the household expenses, the cost of her son's school and her daughter's university (while her daughter is married, Nadia claims the husband does not earn enough to cover the cost), so Nadia works in Poland as a senior care assistant, taking three-month turns:

I am a widow, it's three years now since my husband died. It's 10 years I don't work, don't have a job. When my husband lived, I have a family, two children, [my] husband also took care, earned money. No matter to Czech or Germany, he went and earned moneys. When husband died, [my] daughter studies, I simply don't have work and I come here. I have higher education, an economist. I had good werk [work], worked in profession for 30 years, and when this independence in our country in the year ninety-one, everything was so turned and twisted, they covered [closed down] large enterprises and we landed in the street. I haven't worked ever since (...). My son-in-law has a job, he works but doesn't earn much – 600–700 hryvna. It's good that they live at my place, that they don't pay a rent and anything ... My son's-in-law mum has been in Italy for 5 years now, she bought them an apartment, so they own a 3-room apartment. But it needs everything, get furniture, equipment. That's why for now they live at my place. Yes, [my] daughter studies, she doesn't have a job (Nadia).

The common denominator, the one word that links together these and other stories of migrating women is 'necessity'. When one's family needs it, then the decision to migrate is not only understandable but also, to a degree, justified. Migration must be, however, adapted to suit the family's capabilities in order to also satisfy, at least in part, the emotional needs of the family members. In Nadia's case, this means limitation of the possible migration destinations to Poland alone, because this single geographic distance allows for possible frequent returns, even at the price of lower earnings:

Many of us women went to Italy, but I can't go to Italy. You go there, you need to leave [your] family for five years, and I can't do that. As it is, I leave for three months and feel bad about it. Right then soon sonny phones (Nadia).

It is worth emphasising that even when the dominating motive in the narration is economic, it is rarely a sole one, especially in the case of women's

migration when a decision to migrate requires a re-definition of the woman's care and concern obligations towards the loved ones (vide: Baldassar et al. 2007, 2008, Krzyżowski, Mucha 2014). Similarly to the migration analyses carried out for Polish women (vide: e.g. Garapich 2011, Slany 2008, White 2011, Dzięgielewski 2012, Ryan, Sales 2013), in the case of Ukrainian women, a wider context should be underlined, the one that is not exclusively associated with macroeconomic variables, pay-rate level or unemployment rate. The choice of migration destination and the length of separation period is not determined solely in terms of maximum material profits and minimum cost, but also in consideration of the possibility to practise, maintain and develop the family ties.

CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION – EVALUATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

In the narrations of migrant women, once their migration becomes a fact, it is – together with returns – inscribed into the everyday reality, not only theirs but also that of the entire family. Still, it is the migrating woman who is responsible for maintaining the family ties and minimizing the consequences of separation. As for Valentina, on the one hand she was able to meet some of the expectations imposed on her – she provides the upkeep of her child and his education, and continues to raise the economic status of the entire family.

And this intolerance... I prefer to be in a foreign country and work as ... excuse me, this and that [the respondent avoids using one of the colloquial terms to describe a sex-industry worker], but to go back home and give something to my mother or father, something to my child, and to be somebody in my own country. Really, when I went to Poland and earned something there, I'm not saying how, but I came back and they looked at me with different eyes.

On the other hand, migrant women are challenged with a requirement impossible to meet – that of ensuring propinquity and exercising a direct, personal care (vide: Finch, Mason 1993, Baldassar et al. 2007, Krzyżowski 2013, Goulbourne et al. 2010: 81–98). The mere fulfillment of the commitments regarding financial support, ensuring educational and personal development chances is not sufficient. What good is it that in most instances the family gave their consent to the migration or even – as in Svetlana's case – the family decided together who was going to migrate. Yet, it is her that is burdened with the obligation to care for the well-being and sustainability of the family, even

though all members of the family benefit from the migration profits; phone calls are not enough, even though such phone calls are made not only to the children but to other family as well, more distant relatives included. Moreover, a migrant woman is expected to focus rather on the family and social reality of Ukraine, and to depreciate her life abroad as some “empty time”, devoted only to work and yearning (Fedyuk 2011: 72) – she should not be happy away from her family / children or engage in any activity that is not associated with the relation of direct-care and concern. Furthermore, a migrant women is obligated to tend to the family matters, either during her returns home or from afar, e.g. supervising home repairs. In the case of Svetlana, it is not quite clear what was the ultimate stimulus towards migration: her divorce, earlier experience from her labour-trip to the Czech Republic or her friend’s encouragement. Her narrative indicates, however, that the whole family benefits from her work, and without the money sent by Svetlana her parents would find themselves in very difficult material circumstances:

– What about retirement pensions? Are they also so low?

Terribly so! My mom, my mom has a very small pension, dad too, though my dad was a welder and all his life, abroad and in Siberia, he always worked a welder. But all the same, now his pension is almost like my mom’s. He terribly ... terribly despairs about it, that he worked so hard all his life, and as a welder, too, and it’s such an unsafe job, he was first to retire ... but ... simply receives so little money!

Svetlana’s parents and her brother help her to raise her son. At the same time, however, through migration she imposed on herself certain obligations related to maintaining a proper living standard for the entire family. Svetlana decided against a return from migration although she was offered a job compatible with her level of education and profession, as the job failed to guarantee, with sufficient certainty, that she would be able to retain the status quo (employment continuity, earnings). When she returns home from Poland, she has to “make up” for the time of absence, in a way compensating to her family their efforts in taking care of her child, for example by supervising home repairs:

– And when you are back in Ukraine, do you have any time for yourself, or you also ...?

Well, I don’t have a day, I have an apartment, I bought one when it was much cheaper, and (...) and I just don’t have any time because I do repairs and [it] always requires, something to buy, something to choose, and all by myself, and there (...) construction workers so they do it all, a disaster, but I bring it all

back to order, step by step. (...) No, sure, I always bring something home, some food and ... anything that is needed at home, always so ... and when I'm there, I always get something (...) everything for home.

Nadia adjusts her work capability to the needs of her family, sets aside a portion of her earnings to keep in constant telephone contact. In addition, despite her migration, it was her duty to organize care and assistance for her mom for the time of her disability:

I call, well, every Saturday. And my sonny, when missing his mom, and my daughter calls, too, right. When they miss me a lot. Oh, when sonny was little, because I left also when he was little, he cried, daughter didn't cry. Cried, tears running down like this, he was not even ashamed. There, he is sixteen now, adult already. Me, I have good children, much good children they are. It all helps me in those situations. If had not such good children that don't understand ... (she sighs). They understand it all, that it's not easy for me here, for them there. For Christmas they were all alone, my mom was here, separately, right and so it is. That's how it is. (...) Yes, my mom spent 4 years bed-ridden, then I had a nurse-assistant for my mom, and myself – I travelled here.

In the light of our research study, none of our respondents who had children have ever rejected the model of an ideal mother. Essentially, they negotiated, reconstructed or constructed anew the family system, based in the majority of cases on their family of origin (Slany 2010). At the same time, they subordinated themselves to the dominating model of a perfect (ideal) mother, lashing out on themselves with harsh criticism regarding their own actions:

- Well, I'll return. I have also a son, I haven't seen my son [for] two years. I'm a stepmother. (...)*
- And a stepmother, how do you mean, why did you call yourself like this?*
- Well, stepmother, like she left her children...*

As already mentioned the restrictive family theories emphasize the significance of a direct (face-to-face) relation with one's family members, especially the children. Female migrations alter the definition of appropriateness within those close relationships in women's consciousness, as they also generate indirect relations of a different quality. A self-evaluation embedded in the myth of a bad step-mother is particularly evident. The attitudes and practices of caring manifested in the daily lives allow for depictions of subjectivity in relational bonds with others. These practices of care become indirect in the migration context,

which leads to their social diminishing and even devaluation. Many practices like sending money, managing a household, caring for children's upbringing and their education, fulfilment of emotional needs, or care for the elderly, are no longer executed directly but are rather assisted by other means. Some are quite successfully facilitated by the new communication technologies (texting/SMS, phone, email messaging, communicators; e.g. Madianou, Miller 2005, Parreñas 2005, Vertovec 2004). Drawing on Sara Ruddick's conceptualization (1989), it might be argued that migration strengthens maternalism, evident in the implications of certain forms of caring practices that she describes:

Maternal practice is a direct answer to a biological reality of a child in a given social world. Being a mother is to take on the responsibility over a child, treating it as a systematic and substantial part of one's everyday life (cf. Uliński 2012: 55).

In the respondents' narratives, the categories of family and motherhood become central; they dominate self-identifications and outline the goals of one's life. Migration makes supporting a family possible, enables independence, and shifts the burden of securing the basic aid for families from the state to individual families. Migrations illuminate the conditions of family relations, the degree of responsibility over others and for others, as well as the mutual entanglements of family members with the law and the society. It is crucial that even once the children have grown up, the mothers have trouble expressing their own, personal and self-orientated life-goals:

My dear, if Good Lord let me do so, but so far it has not come to be [answering a question about a possibility of a second marriage or forming a relationship]. Right now I want to help my children [...] To be depending on someone – this I cannot afford. So far, those are my plans, it is first important that my daughter finishes her studies. I want to help her as well. One has to pay bribes for good jobs. I hope my son finishes some studies as well and marries, because he will live at home, because my daughter has a flat. But he will stay because I have a large house. So to say so far, this is not even a consideration. I am good. I have children, I have someone to live for. Maybe someday... (Nadia).

Some feminists (Tronto 2011) postulate a differentiation between motherhood understood as a caring practice (mothering) and parenthood. Parenthood/motherhood is here to signify a biological bond with a child while mothering is neither tied to the biological kinship, nor with the gender of a care-provider. Mothering entails (1) safeguarding child's life, (2) caring for its development, (3) acceptance by the mother's social group of the closest proximity (Uliński

2012). Joan C. Tronto (2011) emphasizes that caring must be continuous, yield a formation of intersubjective and dynamic relation, which delineates a field of a moral practice. Ethics has to be beyond-gendered in its shape, moving away from the associations with femininity in general and maternalism in particular. Tronto understands care as ‘caring for’, a type of ‘activity which encompasses everything that we do in order to achieve a better life’. Such an approach can be restrictive, but it also brings in positive challenges to migrant mothers. Mother-migrants set out to conquer competitive foreign labour markets in hopes of transforming the socio-economic standing of their family and improving the collective well-being. It is known that women face tremendous costs of their journeys, as they secure mothering by altering it into parental caring, which can be shifted to other family members. It is therefore vital to analyse transnational families from a more nuanced perspective – not only through the lens of separation, conflicts and loss of direct contact, but also seeing it as a potential source of opportunities and family success (Bryceson, Vuorela, 2002: 25, 63–82). Despite all problems and often because of the lack of other alternatives, our respondents underline that they support themselves, their children, and elderly:

I can only hope that my health will let me, one wants it, but all depends on God's will. How it is going to turn out, yes. Perhaps I can simply manage to live like this longer. And when my daughter has a job, when she finishes university, and my son. Well maybe then I could be caring my grandchildren, sit at home [laughs]. But for now this is necessary, because I cannot make it, just can't make it. And it is not only me, there are thousands like me. Just so (Nadia).

CLOSING ARGUMENTS – GENDERED MIGRATION TRAP

Being a migrant member of the so called separated family is majorly excluded by the large array of caring theories offered by feminist thought – for instance the classic feminist care theories developed by Carol Gilligan (1982) or Nel Noddings (2002), which favour a direct relation as a basis of care ethics. Care begins when a specific problem gets noticed and put on the map, and that has been done by female migrants. They illustrate many issues, such as the family's hardship, the change of status experienced by children, the necessity to provide medical care for a family member, house remodelling, purchasing a flat, and so on. The earlier theories did not take the mass female migrations and their impact on the development of care ethnics and practising care into account. The visibility of migrant women foregrounds the theme of transnational parenting.

Numerous studies are concurrent with our results in showing that indirect relations do not decrease the maternal engagement in family lives. They do not hinder the effectuating of complex, diverse, effective and oftentimes innovative family practices. Geographical distance commonly seems to strengthen the depth and scope of mothers' involvement. Unfortunately the described efforts and practices do not solve the dilemma of the 'gendered migration trap'. In the light of the discourse found in Ukraine (as well as other countries of female emigration), women find themselves in a situation with no acceptable exit strategy. Every decision can be negatively evaluated – both when a woman is unable to economically provide for a family, and when this effort is successful yet signifies separation. The debates are led in the context of a state which is increasingly backing down from social welfare obligations and offers no real proposals, neither in the realm of alternative strategies of survival, nor in terms of supplementing care deficits.

Female migrations originate in the place of caring for others and take place in the climate of support received from many other family members. At the same time, migrant women work on the global labour markets, which often indicate that they take on jobs relating to care, requiring emotional engagement while remaining socially undervalued (nannies, carers, maids operate in the so called 'care industry', vide: Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz 2015). We can thus apply the concept of a 'double care and caring', which signifies that women are responsible for caring within their families, as well as in families of others, for whom they provide caring services (Uliński 2012). New strands in feminist theory (Philips 2009, Uliński 2012, Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz 2015) move away from deprecating indirect relationships and point out the urgency of securing institutional support for migrants. Furthermore, they suggest a politicization of caring, or, in other words, making care no longer private but public, especially since migrants' work is not solely beneficial for their families.

Rachel Parreñas notes that "a transnational family is a place of conflicted interests", which can only be successful when approached as a "family enterprise" (2001: 83). It raises a question about the kind of home which can be created in the migratory situation. Can it still be an ideal home? An ideal home realm comprises caring relations, reciprocity of care, recognizing the needs of oneself and others. A home is supposed to grant attentive love without ignoring or ridiculing anyone. While nobody should be exposed to harm at home, the place should reinforced the 'I am here, you can count on me' attitude, which can be extended to distant relatives and broader social relationships and networks (Noddings 2002, cf. Uliński 2012: 88–89).

Care and caring provided by migrants analyzed in the specific case of women from Ukraine depicts the complexity of mutual entanglements. Migrations

document the socio-economic inequalities across nation-states, but they also showcase the inner-inequalities within families and across them, the problems and ways of dealing with the separation hardships. The importance of indirect relations in the realm of care and caring as well as doing family need to be underscored and centralized, as they are the real consequence of migration. This should happen regardless of the findings presented in many research projects devoted to the consequences of mobility, which confirm that the migratory context is not ideal for the fulfilment of families' functions and provisioning of care and caring. The alternative approach would allow for the lower degree of the in-role conflicts, adding due value to the migrants' biographies, and perhaps it could pave way to finding a solution to a gendered trap created by the economic and socio-cultural matrix. A solution is possible and entails a strategy that facilitates the maintenance of ties and bonds in the family, its development and continuation. It is vital especially in Ukraine and wider Central and Eastern European regional and political contexts of countries in which nation-states do not offer viable alternatives in the area of social policies.

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