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TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES ACROSS  
POLAND AND FINLAND

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This thesis explores the transnational family life of Polish migrants in Finland in the context of the changing political regime of the Polish nation–state after World War II. It looks at the fundamental practices through which kinfolks have strived to stay together despite separation, family connections and ruptures emerging across borders. The analysis is carried out with regard to three historical periods: the era of communist regime in Poland, the post-1989 transformation and the period after Poland joined the European Union in 2004. The research results are based on an ethnographic study I conducted in 2006—2007 across Southern Finland among the Polish migrants who have in various family configurations moved to Finland since the 1960s. The ethnography encompassed interviews and participant observation. The rituals of communication and visits were among the most important means of staying in contact. Their regular enactment ensured a sense of stability and security of family ties, but the development of new ICT technologies also facilitated their role as a means of control and surveillance. Being separated by national borders did not mean a stop to practical, emotional and material family support and care. They were (re)negotiated and adjusted to the transnational context, changing political circumstances and family dynamics. Both emotional labour and the provisioning of economic support were pursued by family members “here” and “there” with an awareness of the specificity of the transnational separation, and especially the time after 1989 necessitated a subtle navigation between a need for individualism and family collectivity. One of the crucial family relationships across the borders which the migrants in this research had was with their parents. The intergenerational transnational support was particularly salient at two stages of family life: the upbringing of the migrants’ dependent children and the end of the elderly parents’ life. How the final moments of the parents’ life would unfold, and whether the migrants would be able to ensure the parents’ “good death” was of great significance for the cumulative evaluation of their filial/parental relationship. The study showed that a transnational family is a dynamic and changeable formation, and that neither family duties nor family borders are clearly given and fixed. A family in a transnational space is rather a product of everyday and mundane efforts and of careful balancing of emotional and economic power. Longitudinal and multi-sited studies are needed to further explore the consequences of migration and transnational separation for the family in general, and for Polish families in particular.

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## Introduction

Danuta Mostwin, who is one of the well-established scholars and novelists who deal with Polish migration in the U.S., stated in an interview in *The Polish Monthly Magazine* in 2006<sup>1</sup> unequivocally: “emigration” is an all-human drama and the life of an emigrant “a chain of one crisis after another.” Emigrants treasure and long for a world they have left behind but “there is no coming back.” “The path to the home has already been covered with thick grass.” And even if a return is possible, an emigrant is bound to feel alien among the people and places he/she has once abandoned.

The above interview, although outdated in its theoretical remarks, well represents the notion of migration prevailing in the popular discourse and, still to some extent, in Polish academic writing. Mostwin suggests to her potential readers, by designating mostly (e)migrants themselves,<sup>2</sup> a certain tragic and inevitable nature of their biographies. Migration, she implies, is a clear-cut movement from the country of origin to the country of destination. It leads to an estrangement from the homeland and from the people one has left behind.

This thesis takes a different theoretical stance. It is guided by the paradigm of transnationalism. It argues that migration is indeed a change but it is also a continuity. It shows that the possibility of a definite return may be questionable. This is because of the very notion of leaving as a one-directional movement accompanied by the termination of ties is today put to question. In multiple ways many migrants never abandon their communities of outflow. They remain linked to them through various forms of social and cultural ties. At the same time though they also develop new links and new attachments to the people and places to which they came to. As opposed to the conventional model of migration and assimilation, transnationalism thus implies a disruption of the contiguousness between particular societal and geographical spaces. New formations are created which are not bounded by the territory of the nation-states. A specific focus of this thesis is placed on the families which, starting from the post-war period, have lived across Poland and Finland.

This thesis is a result of an intensive ethnographic research which I began at the end of 2006 and continued throughout 2007. Although the study is physically limited to the interviews

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<sup>1</sup> The Montreal-based is targeted at Polish people living abroad.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis the term emigrant is avoided because of the final nature of migration it suggests, is avoided. Instead I use the more open-ended term “migrant.”

and participant observations conducted in Southern Finland, thematically the study reaches beyond the Finnish national borders, encompassing Poland and other places to which the researched people reported to have social and cultural attachments. In my analysis I look at the Polish migrants<sup>3</sup> (and their non-migrating relatives) as members of potentially transnational families who, through the maintenance of kinship links, contribute to the creation of social spaces spanning the nation-states they inhabit. I follow the migrants' tangible and intangible ties to the loved ones who "stayed behind." I ask does being abroad, as some Polish scholars claim, signify being outside the family? What changes and what remains the same as a consequence of cross-border mobility? What are the means the family members use to counter the distance and transnational separation?

The research topic has not been arbitrarily chosen – it is underpinned by the idea, stemming from both international and Polish empirical findings, that the family (understood as a dynamic community of genealogical and social relatives), whether locally or transnationally, continues to be of great relevance for individual sense of belonging, identity and biographical projects. If and how this is relevant to the studied situation is carefully explored. Correspondingly, my investigation was not based on the presumption of transnational ties. I did not conceive transnationalism as a feature taken-for-granted in the migrants' (and their "non-migrant" counterparts') socio-cultural reality. I rather looked for its traces, both in the tangible and imagined form; in people's everyday and not-so-everyday lives.

Because the dynamics of contemporary Polish West-bound mobility, and the transnational spaces accordingly, are molded by sharp political and economic changes, including Poland's shifting position on the geopolitical and ideological map of Europe, due attention is given to the families' life historical context. I consider the temporal situatedness as an interviewing factor, setting "the 'dynamic limits' of the possible and the impossible within which people act" (Morawska 2001). I differentiate three distinct contextual periods: 1945-1989, 1989-2004 and post-2004.

The first four decades after the end of World War II were marked by the communist rule in Poland; in 1989 a shift to a democratic and capitalist system took place; in 2004 Poland joined

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<sup>3</sup> With the term Pole/Polish migrant I refer here to a person who originated from Poland and came to Finland as an adult. Being aware of the risk of reification of national/ethnic identity, the term is here used strictly analytically and does not refer to the migrants' current nationality and self-identification.

the European Union. All the periods had a significant and different political, economical and sociocultural impact on the Polish society. Here I am interested in finding out to what extent they resonated within the families transnationally, that is, across the Finnish and Polish space of the nation state.

The thesis encompasses a theoretical and an ethnographic part. Firstly I discuss the basic ideas and concepts of the transnational perspective. I trace their emergence and authors. I also give a brief account of the critical approach they quickly induced. I dwell in more detail on the concept of transnational family, the theoretical cornerstone of this thesis. A transnational family is defined, after Bryceson and Vuorela (2002), as a fluid and imagined community of close and distant relatives who manage to stay together despite separation across national borders. I emphasize that the family is a key setting for studying transnational practices and a prime reason for the development and maintenance of intimate transnational ties. The subject of family emerges inevitably, although in various degrees, in nearly all analyses of bottom-up transnationalism, spanning from intimate gender relations to economic activities. Because migrant links between Poland and Finland are still relatively uninstitutionalised, especially here the family is the main site of transnational engagements.

To set a historical background for the studied transnational activities, in the second chapter I give a brief outline of the changes within Polish families in general, as well as of the dynamics of contemporary (post-War) Polish West-bound mobility. The role of the family in the development of the latter has been more than salient. However, there are still considerable gaps in the studies on the subject. As the thesis aims to address these shortcomings at least partly, I also present a critical account of the existing literature alongside the historical outline. I refer to works which to various extent link to the issues of families, mobility and maintenance (or severance) of transnational ties.

The subsequent chapter presents in more detail the research problems, methods and ethical issues I have encountered during the fieldwork. I discuss my situatedness in the study, foremost my Polish origins. This is followed by a short description of the key features of the Polish migrant group in Finland. This chapter is treated as an introduction to the ethnographic part of my study. The empirical results are presented according to the research problems/areas posed in the methodological chapter. They look at the different dimensions of the studied

families' life across borders. These dimensions could be described in a nutshell as a "how" and "what" of transnational family engagements.

The first two ethnographic chapters deal with the most common - in the studied cases and more generally - means of staying in touch, namely communication and visits. I show how the family members applied these tools transnationally at various historical moments. I conceptualize them in terms of the rituals, which are intimate and informal, but vital for the maintenance of the contact. The more specific question of their content is analyzed in the subsequent chapters. I focus on the exchange of material and emotional support which, although at the everyday level intertwined, is here dealt with separately. Because of the prominence of parental relations held in the migrants' adult lives, chapter eight is solely devoted to this theme. It encompasses the issues of childrearing (meaning inevitably the rearing of the "second," potentially transnational, generation) and care at the parents' end of life. I discuss their relation to the construction of "Polishness." The concluding remarks constitute the final part of the thesis. Here I present the links between the study and the overall theoretical framework, the shortages of the study, the scope for future research and potential improvements.

This thesis is the first study of Polish-Finnish mobility applying the transnational perspective. It is also the first study investigating to such an extent the transnational life of families from a Polish perspective.

## **Chapter 1 Theoretical background: a selected review of literature on transnationalism**

### **The emergence of the transnational paradigm**

As I mentioned already at the outset, it is nowadays hardly common to conceive the phenomenon of migration as following the classical unilinear assimilation model, as a one-way movement from the country of origin to the country of destination with the consequent assumption of the gradual loss of the pre-migration social, cultural and economic connections. The final step of migration was supposed to be a full incorporation in the mainstream homogenous society. Among the recent theoretical approaches, which to various degrees bring to halt this reductionist representation, are the new assimilation theory (Alba and Nee, 1999) and the segmented assimilation theory of the “second generation” (Zhou, 1997; Portes, 2001). A third potential perspective is offered by transnational migration studies (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). They go the furthest in rejecting the classical model.

The transnational paradigm has its roots - according to Foner (2000) non-accidentally - in anthropological inquiry and anthropologists’ bottom-up experience of the sending societies. The first major transnational work *Nations unbound* was published in 1994 in the United States. Its authors Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Black, argued for the inadequacy of the prevailing one-dimensional theories of assimilation to the lived experience of people they studied: Caribbean migrants to the United States, instead of losing contact, sustained enduring connections to the people and places they left from. The concept of transnationalism was coined to theoretically grasp theirs (and others’) multiple national and cultural anchorages. It was defined as the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.” (1995.p.7). The actors involved were called “transmigrants,” i.e. persons who “take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (ibid.).

The subsequent years brought about a bulk of empirical and theoretical works aimed at further development of the novel paradigm. Transnational migration studies emerge today as a vast multidisciplinary field. It addresses the cross-border activities in political, economic and socio-cultural areas. The investigation of North America-bound migration (for instance Chamberlain, 2006; Smith, 2005; Espiritu, 2003; Levitt, 2001; Guranizo, 1997) is



increasingly complemented by cases from the other parts of the world. This includes the study of migration to Europe (Sorensen, 2005; Salih, 2003; Parrenas, 2003; Gardner, 2002; Al-Ali and Koser, 2001) and within Europe (Burrell, 2006; Ackers, 2004; Al-Ali, 2002). Anthropologists along with ethnography-inclined sociologists still play a major role in setting the paradigm's theoretical and empirical ground. Kearney (2005.p.71) writes: "because anthropology comes to the study of migration from the periphery, it has a sensibility and dispositions different from those of the other social sciences which are more focused on the core, i.e. on the concerns of the 'receiving' nations such as, for example, immigrant impact and incorporation research." By the same token "in contrast to these inherently bi-polar, nation-centric orientations towards international migration, anthropologists are more disposed to conceptualize migration as transnational [...]"(ibid.)<sup>4</sup>

The configurations generated by cross-border activities undermine the conventional, contiguous relations between the societal and the spatial. Spanning multiple national containers, the spaces of societal relations of *the* nation, *the* community and *the* family cease to be demarcated into bounded geographical terrain (Pries, 2005). At least at the theoretical level, transnationalism brings about the freeing of the spatially "incarcerated" (Appadurai, 1992) individual and collective actors. The emerging formations are conceptualised as transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Basch et al., 1995), transnational social spaces (Pries, 2001, 2005; Faist, 2000) or transterritorial social formations (Guarnizo, 1997). The common thread of these concepts is the break from methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002) and a look upon migration as a two-way, continuous and fluctuating process of tangible and non-tangible exchange (of people, remittances, ideas, cultural artefacts and symbols etc.) linking migrants and non-migrants across national borders.

Through the disruption of the absolute dichotomies of "here" vs. "there," "emigrant" vs. "immigrant," "permanent" vs. "temporary" migration, "sending" vs. "receiving" society, the beyond-national lenses allow seeing the mutual embeddedness of those who left and those who stayed behind in a common social milieu. The economic and social remittances, generated by transnational mobility and circulating within families and communities (Levitt,

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise I would suggest that the lack of anthropological bottom-up investigation into migration is one of the reasons why this paradigm is still underdeveloped in the (communist and post-communist) Polish context. The same goes for studies of family dominated by conventional sociological inquiry. .

2001), transform the life projects and expand the socio-cultural habitat of the people who have never moved as much as they affect the lives of the migrants themselves.

The above mode of “perceptual” transformation is sometimes called a transnational habitus. As Vertovec (2003) indicates, it is a fruitful approach allowing scholars to appreciate how dual orientations are produced and acted upon by the first generation of transnationals and possibly transmitted to their children. The concept draws on Bourdieu’s definition of habitus and in the transnational setting it relates to the multiply-rooted set of dispositions and practices that emerge as an effect of interaction of pre-migration values and meanings with those encountered in the destination place. These are subsequently transferred through embodied and disembodied channels to the place of the outflow (see also Guarnizo, 1997). A transnational habitus thus involves a dual frame of reference. Transnational actors, while in the destination place, constantly (re)evaluate its norms and rules through the lenses of their culture of origin. Upon return visits, on the other hand, the rules of “the homeland” are constantly confronted with those learnt in “the host society.” The constant reference-switching following the trajectories of mobility points to the persistence of transnational habitus (ibid.). A similar phenomenon is entailed in Rouse’s concept of “bifocality”: “the capacity to see the world alternatively through quite different kinds of lenses” (1992.p.41, after Mahler 1998.p.77).

The extent to which the transnational migrants’ cultural patterns will change varies. One of the main determinants is the migrants’ contact with the ‘host society’. Drawing on her study of the transnational village spanning Boston and the Dominican Republic Levitt (2001.pp. 56-59) indicated three heuristic types of transnational migrants: migrants as the recipient observers, instrumental adapters and purposeful innovators. The first ones have little or no personal contact with the “host” society, and thus their cultural repertoire remains largely unaltered. The second ones add up new skills so as to face the challenges of the public life. The change here is for purely instrumental reasons. The third ones have the most transformative and open attitude towards new values and practices, “they are like sponges who aggressively seek out, select, and absorb new things.” (ibid..p.57). The content of the transformed resources is remitted accordingly.

Interlinked with the idea of a dual/multiple orientation are transformations regarding the creation and reproduction of identity and home: concepts that conventionally conflated with

the bounded spatial containers inevitably necessitate redefinition. In the world of movement both become fluid, ambiguous and contested categories (Rapport and Dawson, 1998).

Subjects situated in the transnational space/field (re)construct and negotiate their gender, ethnic and racial identities drawing upon multi-local repositories of values, norms and practices and political, legal and economic standards. The negotiation takes place within divergent (in the destination society usually discriminatory) social hierarchies and power configurations, identity politics and representations (for instance Sorensen, 1998; Basch et al., 1995; Guarnizo, 1994). “These identities play out and position individuals in the course of their everyday lives within and across each of their places of attachment or perceived belongings.” (Vertovec, 2001.p.578). They are selectively activated, depending upon the given spatial and situational context (Mahler, 1998.p.93).

Because a predominant number of transnational migration studies is on the migrants from the ”South,” who in the ideologically ”white” Euro-American societies occupy the racially and ethnically disadvantaged positions, transnational identities are oftentimes read as reactionary. It entails a building of positive or even superior identifications against the ”mainstream” and the formation and maintenance of high social status in the economically less developed sending community. In this sense transnationalism is read as subversive towards and (to some extent) liberatory from the oppressive power structures and dominant identity politics. By the same token it is a strategy also compelling for the migrants’ children who, similarly to their parents, are often at the bottom of the ethnic and racial hierarchy (see for instance Louie, 2006; Smith, 2005; Espiritu, 2003; Levitt, 2001; Landolt, 2001; Guarnizo, 1994; Sorensen, 1998).

The process of (re)creation and negotiation of social identity is also often read in terms of home-building. For home is as much a physical place as it is a cognitive space of belonging: home is where one knows oneself the most (Rapport and Dawson, 1998.p.9). In the global division of labour transnational migration emerges increasingly as a phenomenon of “displacement”; the mobility is intended as temporary, built upon the idea (even if never realized) of eventual return back “home.” Migrants are “here, but really there” (Grillo, 2007.p.201; see also Riccio, 2001; Olwig, 1999). Transnational engagement may also bring a more ambiguous feeling of “living in a limbo,” being at home neither “there” nor “here” (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002.p.xii; see also Grillo, 2007; Salih, 2003.pp.53-80). It is a “home” which

emerges as a result of tensions and contradictions between different localities (Salih, 2003.pp.1-14), not to little extent created by the discriminatory politics of the receiving nation-states. The most difficult to achieve is the creation of positive, multiple affiliations. The transnational symbolic and tangible movement is then a movement between different cognitive and physical homes, mutually intertwined and complementary. Home is “here” and “there” at the same time. It is the mode of transnationalism which can be regarded as the most emancipatory and freeing from hegemonic national constructions. It often involves a gradual rooting in the place of destination, the creation of a “home away from home” (Olwig, 1999.p.73).

The latter trend is increasingly recognized in transnational migration scholarship. My thesis follows this idea. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (2003.pp.317-318) argue, the initial transnational studies overemphasized the ephemerality of the migrants’ movement and underestimated the tendency towards more permanent settlement. By the same token, although invariably departing from the canonical assimilation perspective, a number of authors call for the study of transnationalism not as separated but in relation to the integration and assimilation processes (for instance Smith, 2005; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005, 2002; Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Morawska, 2003; Levitt, 2003, 2001). The empirical data indicate that these processes are not only concurrent and intertwined but often mutually reinforcing. Above all, the acquisition of legal rights and economic advancement enrich the resources with which to engage in formal and informal transnational activities (Portes, Escobar and Arana, 2007; Najib, 2007; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; 2002; Morawska, 2003; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003; Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller, 2002; Dorai, 2001). In turn, such underpinned transnational networks encourage “positive assimilation” (Smith, 2005.p.8).

### **Transnationalism and its discontents: further attempts at defining the phenomenon**

Transnationalism which was initially accepted with enthusiasm as a novel and innovative paradigm, inevitably soon gained its critiques. A critical reappraisal referred foremost to the lack of clarity on what kind of phenomena should actually be included under the term ‘transnational’, and what makes the transnational migrant/transmigrant a category that is distinct from that of the (im)migrant in the first place. Along with the introduction of new

viewpoints and an expansion of empirical data, new literature introduced “theoretical ambiguity and analytical confusion” (Guarnizo et al., 2003.p.1212).

One of the reasons for this ambiguity was supposedly the building of the paradigm almost exclusively on the basis of case studies. Since their pre-selection drew attention to those who engaged in transnational practices, it was common that those who did not were left aside. Questions of the actual size, scope and motives of transnational engagements were thus not clearly answered (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004; Dahiden, 2005; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Portes, 2003; Portes et al., 2002). It was likewise unclear who and in what way actually benefits from the transnational way of life. Al-Ali and Koser (2002.p.1) accused earlier works for essentialisation.

Other critical comments considered the novelty and the actual significance of the paradigm. According to Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004.p.1187) transnational scholars made the ill-assumed claim for a discontinuity between “now and then” and in so doing “effectively dehistoricized the present.” The endurance of transnational processes was also met with skepticism. Scholars argued that there was little evidence of transnationalism being inter-generationally transferrable. For the most part, “the second generation” is bound to assimilate into the country they came to with their parents or in which they were already born (for instance Lucassen, 2006.p.12-13; Portes, 2001).

The further theoretical and empirical developments addressed many of these issues. Some critical arguments were dismissed as wide off the mark (see for instance the response of Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2006 to Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). The existence of transnational migration phenomena in the past was commonly acknowledged but it was also emphasized that by no means was this to undermine its ongoing theoretical relevance. Quite contrary, the transnational paradigm allows to uncover what was previously either obscured or documented but regarded as problematic and thus without influence on the dominant paradigm (Schiller Glick & Levitt, 2006; Portes et al., 2002). Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002.p.302) write: “the value of studying transnational communities and migration is not to discover ‘something new’ [...] but to have contributed to this shift of perspective away from methodological nationalism.” And further: “Looking back may help us to identify the paths that will bring us right back to where we now stand.” (ibid., p.325).

Addressing the representative shortages, probably the most comprehensive to date survey of transnational political, economic and socio-cultural practices was conducted in 1996—1998, in the United States and six cities outside the U.S. (on the results see Portes, 2003; Portes et al., 2002; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005, 2002). The surveyed groups were Dominicans, Salvadorans and Colombians. The authors concluded that the case studies largely misrepresented the scale of the phenomena, as only a minority (from 10 to 15 per cent) engaged in regular transnational activities. Also the argument on transnationalism as a tool of the lower-class migrants' resistance was largely exaggerated. According to the survey, those who were politically and economically active across the borders were usually those better off and well educated. The ultimate argument was that transnationalism rather reproduces than undermines the existing power inequalities. A closer look at the determinants of the limited manifestations of the phenomena was also taken by Europe-based scholars (Dahiden, 2005; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002).

Another major topic of critique (although not always deserved) was the overly static approach to transnationalism. Addressing this shortcoming, Grillo called for the analytical conceptualization of transnational migration (for which he uses the less popular term transmigration) in terms of “a trajectory:”

“As instance of ‘transmigration’ is a cross-section through time of an evolving phenomenon, though it may not be obvious towards what it is evolving. Whether what we observe is perceived as a transitional, long-term or permanent condition, may well depend on the historical moment when the observation was made. Transmigration is, however, not just *a* trajectory but a multiplicity of potential trajectories [...] which are often unstable, always likely to become something else.” (2007.p.200)

A similar theme, taken up in this thesis, was also present in the work of Chamberlain (2006), Pries (2005), Morawska (2005), Smith (2005), Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) and Gardner (2002). In this view the transnational formations are constantly reconstructed in line with external political and economic circumstances, the individual and family life cycle and personal and professional biographies.

Finally a critique against the theoretical confusion brought about by numerous typologies of both forms and practices enacted across borders. They aimed at specifying what was previously discussed in general and indefinite terms. All pointed to a diversity of transnationalism regarding its scope, frequency, fixedness, level and institutionalization. Particularly important for this thesis is the differentiation between the inclusive vs. exclusive reading of the phenomena. In the exclusive approach, applied for instance in the

aforementioned survey, “regular” and “habitual” tangible activities sustained across borders over time lie at “the core” of transnationalism (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Portes et al., 1999; Guarnizo, 1997). It reflects what Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2002.p.770) called narrow transnationalism, i.e. “institutionalized and continuous participation in transnational activities and organizations.” Their embodiment would be transnational businesses, membership in political parties and other associations linked to the country of origin, electoral participation, sponsorship of the sending community’s development and regular transnational physical mobility. Those who engage in transnational activities more intermittently strengthen but do not constitute the essence of the transnational spaces/fields.

The above perspective did not find many followers among anthropologists, especially those interested in family relations. My research also supports a more inclusive approach. It argues for the inclusion as fully-fledged transnational of also more intimate, not always regularly enacted practices. As was already indicated, the trajectory of transnationalism is often dependent upon small-time shifts in family and individual biographies, making the (tangible) transnational activities necessarily uneven. Furthermore the emphasis on what is objective and measurable does not capture the more nuanced and often non-quantifiable subjective expressions of transnationalism. Many scholars agree that emotions, dreams, works of the imagination, “the cognitive agency”, although non-quantifiable, should be considered a “real” part of the transnational existence, with equally “real” consequences (Pessar and Mahler, 2003.p.818, see also Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Espiritu, 2003). Appadurai – a scholar habitually referred to when it comes to the role of the imagination and modernity - argues compellingly:

“The imagination [...] has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise. Fantasy can dissipate [...] but the imagination, especially when collective, can become fuel for action. It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action and not only for escape.” (1996.p.7)

In a similar vein Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) make a distinction between “ways of belonging” and “ways of being” within the transnational social field. The first concept refers to the actual transnational practices, the second to the conscious identification with the country of origin or specific ethnic group, to the very cognitive existence in a transnational space. Those two do not necessarily have to exist simultaneously. There is a high probability

though that the transnational way of belonging induces at some point a transnational way of being.

The attention paid to the symbolic transnationalism/transnational way of being clearly allows for understanding more fully the strength of the transnational connection regardless of material and technological resources. It gives agency to those lower-strata migrants who at different times have a limited economic, legal, temporal and educational capacity to engage in the embodied transnational practices. Still they may connect to their ancestral homeland and retain a sense of commonality with those who stay behind through thought and imagination. To reiterate this approach is particularly relevant for family life. On the one hand family relations are imbued with affect and emotional feelings and their role cannot be obscured. On the other, the lack of constant tangible contact by no means precludes the working of a family as a safety net, even transnationally.

Apart from the above, other categorical distinctions worth mentioning are:

- “transnationalism from above” (multinational institutions) and from “below” (local and grassroots activities across borders) (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998),
- “great” (at the level of the nation-state and economy) and “little” transnationalism (the family and household level) (Gardner, 2002),
- “linear” (aimed at the preservation of interpersonal links), “resource-based” (linked with the availability of economic resources) and “reactive transnationalism” (a reaction to the discrimination) (Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002),
- regarding the level of institutionalization: “transnational communities” (ethnic, national, religious or other transnational groups upheld by the norm of solidarity and shared beliefs), “transnational circuits” (circulation and exchange of goods, people and information), “transnational kinship groups” (transnational ties within the family that rest upon a symbolic capital of reciprocity) (Faist, 2000).

My study, focusing on the family (or else a transnational kinship group, kinship meaning the general connection between kin, whereas family is a more organizationally specified unit, Strathern 2005) is therefore necessarily situated within the area of “little” transnationalism, transnationalism from below and “linear” transnationalism. The cases of “resource-based” and “reactive” type of transnationalism are also present in the study.



## **Transnational family**

The transnational paradigm, bringing about an epistemic shift in looking at the link between national and spatial, drew also an increased attention to what seemed neither novel nor surprising from the everyday perspective: that migration across borders, even if undertaken individually, is always embedded in the wider network of social relations. These relations are primarily of a kinship kind.

The territorialized family has been customarily a vital ideological element in the process of the reproduction of the ostensibly natural relationship between particular people (natives) and places (territories they are bound to inhabit). It can be argued that the cultural and biological function of “spatially incarcerated” (Appadurai, 1992) and homogenized families has been to produce “incarcerated” (and equally homogenized) nations and “properly” socialized national subjects. Transnationalism saliently uncovers and deconstructs these inherently essentialized constructions. The family becomes a prime context within which the migration trajectory is shaped and intimate practices across borders occur. It is the “everyday provenance of most migrant transnationalism” (Vertovec, 2004), and as Herrera Lima (2001) argues, a buffer that smoothens what otherwise could be experienced, by migrants and non-migrants alike, as a radical divide between separate worlds.

The significance of family has been noticed from the very outset. Already in their pioneering work Bash et al. argued:

“The family is a matrix from which a complexly layered transnational social life is constructed and elaborated. Almost ubiquitously at the social center of this transnational field, the family facilitates the survival of its members, serving as a buffer against the intrusiveness of individual state policies; it fosters the social reproduction of its members, their class formation and mobility; and as the repository of cultural practices and ideology shaped in the home society, it mediates identity formation in the new setting as it socializes its members into a transnational way of life.” (1995.p.79)

Investigation of the spatially scattered “transnational family” is therefore one of the crucial keys in understanding the motives and nature of transnational engagements. In defining transnational family two approaches are generally pursued. In the narrow definition it is limited, quite conventionally, to the transnational household, i.e. a household in which at least one of the core family members is abroad. His/her migration is usually a part of the family strategy of economic reproduction. The focus here is put on the reconfiguration of the conjugal and parent-children relationships and the restructuring of the household organization, including the management of the remittance-based household budget. Such

interpretation appears in the work of Parrenas (2001) and Guarnizo (1997) among others. However, I regard this definition as too limited as it does not adequately capture the volatility and shifting boundaries of any kinship group, the Polish included. As Chamberlain argues:

“in understanding families [...] it seems more fruitful to focus not on one time frame or one set of relationships [...] but on multiple destinations. Any one individual will relate to family members through a fluid set of relationships. In the life of the family, different relationships become dominant or subordinate at any time while the roles any one individual will perform in a family are multifarious and multifaceted.” (2006.p.63)

This is the reason the second, more inclusive delineation is applied here. I follow Bryceson and Vuorela (2002.p.3) who define “transnational families” as families which for shorter or longer periods of time live separated from each other by national borders, yet manage to hold together, maintaining what the authors called a sense of “familyhood,” i.e. a feeling of unity and collective welfare. They constitute imagined communities that are united through the work of the imagination, meetings and a mutual transfer of commodities, support and ideas.

Because in a transnational family (as in any other for that matter) there is a constant process of truncating or actively pursuing familial connections, a “relativizing” of the family borders takes place (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002.p.14) which allows the conceptualizing of anybody at a given time as a family member, from the perspective of the given person considered as such, regardless of their factual biological or marriage relations. Also no restriction of the time-span of transnational separation in the above definition works well for the Polish Europe-bound migration context. As I already mentioned, after 1989, and in the case of migration to Finland after 2004, a more transient mode of mobility (return every two-three months) started to dominate. According to Morokvasic (2004) the exclusion of this type of movement from the phenomena of transnationalism (here specifically of transnational families) would obscure a large portion of, indeed inherently transnational, contemporary Polish mobility.

Bryceson’s & Vuorela’s conceptualization corresponds to the major post-Schneiderian shift in anthropological theories of kinship. They cease to render the family as “a monolithic unit,” an unchangeable entity with clear-cut boundaries, fixed role division and interfamilial relations rooted in nature and biology (Thorne, 1982.pp.2-7). Familial solidarity, love, mutual care and emotional support are no longer perceived as ‘naturally’ granted by the very fact of the biogenetic connection, but rather prone to change and negotiation. The family becomes something to “fight for,” a matter of choice, creation and enduring effort, a process rather than structure (Carsten, 2004, 2000; Stone, 2001; Weston, 1991). It has been shown that not only

non-Western but also Euro-American kinship<sup>5</sup> ties are constructed and negotiated through an ongoing process of exclusion and inclusion, “the interdigitation “of biological and social ties (Strathern and Edwards, 2000, pp 158-161). By reckoning who does and does not ‘belong’ to a family, kinfolks themselves are mediators and creators of their own families, the prime agents in delimiting the boundaries and content of the family unit.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the family still has not got its due attention in literature on transnational migration. More often than not analysis of the family emerges as a sort of a spin-off of the investigation of transnational social fields/spaces or incorporation modes: it is dealt with in a section, a chapter, or as interweaved with other dimensions. It is one of the institutions seen as more or less fundamental, but addressed among the many (see for instance Voigt-Graf, 2005; Smith, 2005; Levitt, 2001; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Guarnizo, 1997). One reason for its “subsumed” presence is arguably what has already been noted that it is hardly possible to discuss transnational social spaces (as well as many other migration-relevant subjects, including gender, identity, ethnicity and home) without referring to the family. In most cases the role family plays is crucial from the moment mobility is embarked upon. “Without them, I would not be here” says Georges, a Haitian transmigrant to U.S. from the study he and Glick Schiller co-authored (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001). His words reflect the experience of countless of others who would never have left if not for the access to family-based migration networks<sup>6</sup>, but also if not for the needs of the very family. The symbolic capital of solidarity and reciprocity resting on kinship ties encourages and facilitates the transnational journey (often sponsored by relatives “here” or “there”), and, by providing accommodation and work-related assistance, smoothens the process of adaptation. The wider the family linkages, the more resources can be accessed transnationally and within the country of origin.

In most of the discussed cases, when movement is undertaken from the South to the North, from economically less to more developed countries, a transnational lifestyle is in the strictest sense family related: it is a part of the family’s “mobile livelihood” (Sorensen and Olwig, 2002), aimed at the family’s economic betterment, or rather economic survival. It has, as

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately in anthropological literature the phrase “Euro-American” is still often tantamount to the “Western” ideology of kinship. The post-communist countries, with their possibly divergent kinship patterns, remain grossly disregarded and understudied.

<sup>6</sup> This theme has been developed in more detail within the migration network theory (Boyd, 1989; Massey, 1999).

Tamagno (2002) argued with regard to the Peruvian-Italian case, less to do with the crossing of political and national borders and more with looking for opportunities to provision material wellbeing for those who stay put. Here the remittances are both the purpose of mobility and the prime manifestation of family solidarity. Similar moral mechanisms are at work when a transnational family constitutes a backdrop for economically more formalised, business-related activity. Then the mutual family support moulds not only the spatial and intimate, but also the occupational trajectories of its members (Lima, 2001; Landolt, 2001).

Still one has to remember that however important in the stimulation and maintenance of transnational ties, family responsibilities and obligations are not absolute. They are not only culturally variable but also negotiable (as much as the family is not only about connections but also about the far less often mentioned disconnections, Carsten, 2001). Studies indicate that the failure in family provisioning across borders does occur, and as showed for instance in Glick-Schiller's and Fouron's (2001.pp.80-81) account, this may result in feelings of anger and enduring resentment on the part of those who stayed. The latter are in the most obvious way a dependant party in the transnational family hierarchy. The concepts of "normative guidelines" and "negotiated commitments" developed by Finch (1989), and Finch and Mason (1993) are useful here. The authors suggest that the moral rules and norms indeed affect the family obligations. Yet they serve less as strict rules saying what one should do and more as "normative guidelines" or principles providing criteria for what kind of action would be the most appropriate in a given situation. What is crucial here is the process of negotiating commitments which assumes that adult individuals accumulate commitments to particular family members over time: "gradually an understanding emerges between two people that there are certain things which they would do for each other if necessary" (Finch, 1989.p.180). An understanding is reached through an implicit and explicit negotiation. These concepts were introduced by Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding (2007) to transnational migration studies. They also aptly illuminate the results of my ethnography.

Worth mentioning are also the motives of staying connected with family members, which may go against the actuality of the above. Firstly, migrants from the South often rely on those who stayed behind in securing the newly acquired and sent back possessions so as to secure their own return. Without properly nourished transnational family ties, even if no affection or emotional commitment is present, coming back is often very difficult. Secondly, remittances bring status and respect for the remitter. Thus they are a powerful form of compensation for

the downward mobility which many labouring migrants from the South experience in the country of destination – a type of reactive transnationalism as distinguished by Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002). Here the ultimate goal of transnational practices lies beyond kinship welfare only (even if contributes to it indirectly).

Another significant site where the theme of family emerges, perhaps in the last years most frequently, is the gender perspective on transnationalism. This is inevitably due to the at present commonly accepted thesis of the mutual constitution of kinship and gender. Examples of works on gender and transnationalism encompass Parrenas's (2001) study of Philipino migrant women in Italy and the U.S., Salih's (2003) study of Moroccan migrant women in Italy, Alicea's (1997) study of Puerto Rican women and Aranda's (2003) of Puerto-Rican men and women in the U.S., Morokvasic's (2004) work on Central and Eastern European migrants in Europe, Sorensen's (2005) analysis of transnational family life of Dominican and Colombian migrants in Europe, Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) investigation of Mexican migrants to the U.S (on Mexican women in the U.S. see also Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Hirsch, 2003), Panagakos's (2004) work on Greek Canadian women and Gardner's (2002) study on Bangladeshi women in London. One of the central features of these works is the importance ascribed to the female experience of transnationalism. This is, unsurprisingly, mainly kinship-related. According to Alicea (1997.p.598): "Since women have traditionally served as the main caretakers of families, a study that does not focus on women's role in the creation of transnational social fields is necessarily limited." Both women who have left and those who have stayed behind have been researched, although the recent feminisation of migration stimulates focus on the former.

The potential reconfiguration of feminine and masculine representations, care-giving practices and the gendered power hierarchies within the conjugal unit are discussed within the transnational setting. We now know that the impact of transnational life on female emancipation is limited and that the female gender is usually a factor constraining the desired development of individual biographies. Even across borders women are expected to do most of the kin work, face the necessity to negotiate between competing family responsibilities (nuclear vs. extended families) as well as the family and professional careers (staying abroad vs. coming back to provide care). These tasks, although also a source of women's power, personal pleasure and fulfilment, are said to be continuously unequally divided between the genders. Also when women stay put and become the managers of household remittances, the

economic dependency on their husbands working abroad constrains the possibility of their empowerment (Mahler, 2001; Guarnizo, 1997).

In this context considerable space is also devoted to transnational motherhood. Authors such as Parrenas (2001) and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (2003) indicate the female migrants' redefinition of mothering to incorporate their physical absence and struggle to provide their children left behind not only with economical but also affective care-giving. The great emotional strain the women experience is simultaneously emphasized. The pain of maternal separation and the "care drain" in the peripheral countries of the outflow become the main cost of capitalist division of labour in the so called "global chains of care" (Hochschild, 2000). Their emergence is a direct consequence of the demand for service and domestic work (nannies, carers of elderly people) in the countries of the centre.

Although women's importance for transnational formations in general and transnational families in particular, is undeniable, any study that prioritises the female perspective over the other is in a sense limited. The family is obviously not exclusively a women's domain, but constructed out of a myriad standpoints of the different family members. An investigation of transnational family entails thus a consideration of kin variously gendered, anchored in different spatial and cultural settings, belonging to different family generations in different temporal moments. For instance, more studies are needed on the perspective of elders (see already mentioned Baldassar et al., 2007), children (a theme taken up by Ackers and Stalford, 2004; Thorne et al., 2003; Parrenas, 2002) and men, the latter approached not only as a source of women's constraint. For instance Pribilski's (2004) work showed that through a more nuanced analysis of male migrants' transnational life "a more sophisticated picture of power" can be revealed. He indicated men's shifting self-images and attempts at redefining their conjugal and parental roles in the face of transnational separation. We should not preclude but carefully investigate the varying, historically and culturally situated role women and men may play in the formation of transnational spaces, including their input in the (re)making of particular family relations. The intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, class, legal status etc. is essential here.

Finally, a significant thread in studies addressing transnationalism and family is the symbolic reproduction of family patterns and identity. Foner (1997) argues that the (im)migrant family that faces new societal and cultural circumstances, materializes as a site of "a dynamic

interplay between structure, culture and agency,” where due to migration (and the conceivable engagement in cross-border practices) “creative culture-building” occurs. The external forces acting in the receiving society, in combination with the pre-migration cultural values and practices - still of considerable significance if transnational contact is maintained – shape new family patterns and contribute to cross-fertilization as various concepts and ideas travel both ways (ibid.). On the other hand, considering that kinship ties are essential to the creation of the self, and “who one is” depends largely on “where one comes from” (Carsten, 2004.pp.83-108), migrant subjectivity (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002.p.9) constitutes in turn one of the centre issues in the ongoing process of creation and enactment of transnational family. The relatives left behind are one of the crucial factors linking migrants to the culture and tradition of the sending society; an ‘ethnic’ belonging is mediated through family rituals, gatherings and family memories and they contribute to the definition of where ‘home’ is (although it can be in many places and perceived differently from the vantage point of different family members) (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004; Olwig, 2003; Gardner and Grillo, 2002, Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). This partially elucidates the motives behind the transnational maintenance of kinship ties for they help migrants to preserve a sense of continuity and coherence despite an apparent rupture. It also exemplifies the constrains of the political economy approach as economic and status-related factors only fragmentarily explain complex motivations and driving forces of the transnational family phenomena.

## **Chapter 2 Polish families, migration and historical changes: an outline**

The value of “the family” and close family ties are regarded as the traditional backbone of the Polish culture. It is a heritage from the national historical tradition and an influence of the Catholic Church. After 1945 an individualistic “laic family model” propagated by the communist ideology, rapid urbanization and modernization partially loosened the ties between the nuclear family and its families of procreation and contributed to higher divorce rates, but the malfunctions of the public sphere as well as the political and cultural power of the Catholic Church worked in favour of family consolidation. During the communist period the prime costs of reproduction lied in fact within the informal family networks. Such a reproductive strategy included close material and practical cooperation, the extension of family ties beyond the nuclear unit and a practice of nepotism, i.e. access to resources through family connections (Doniec, 2003.p.45; Giza-Poleszczuk,2002,pp.283-293). Intergenerational support was strengthened first and foremost. Adult children were oftentimes dependent on their parents in regard to housing, financial support, practical domestic help and childcare (in praxis the latter was help accrued to women, as they were the prime homemakers regardless of their formal employment). Parents were likewise dependent on their children in the later stages of life (for instance Tymowski, 1979). It was only the wide network of kin that allowed material survival.

At present Slany (2002.p.248), one of the leading family scholars in Poland, argues for the specificity of the contemporary (post-1989) Polish family. It is said to represent both the traditional and the modern, that is, Western trends. In its traditional dimension the family retains strong intergenerational solidarity, vivid emotional and economic ties with the family of origin, the domination of formalized marriages and growing but still relatively low divorce rates (in 2006 1,9 per 1000 population<sup>7</sup>). In the common opinion cohabitation is perceived not as an alterative but as a prelude to marriage; divorces and the single life are rather disapproved of. A Polish family is modern in terms of demography. This encompasses low fertility rates, late birth of the first child and prolonged cohabitation before marriage. There is also a predominance of affective family bonds over instrumental ones and more partnership in conjugal and parental relations (for instance Dyczewski, 2002; Zurek, 2001).

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<sup>7</sup>Central Statistical Office [GUS], 2007



Krzystoszek (1997) also points to similar cultural divergences. She suggests that the functioning of the contradictory communist and Catholic family ideologies in post-war Poland contributed to the emergence of ambiguous family norms and patterns of behaviour. They constitute a selective combination of elements from both. The awakening post-1989 Polish individualism is therefore “non-reflective, inconsistent and instrumental” (ibid., p.180).

The significance of kinship for mobility and subsequent transnational ties was indicated in the previous sections and the Polish case is no exception. Family resources and welfare are the reasons for Polish West-bound migration from the outset. They contributed to the fact that throughout the nearly 150 years of emigration history, Poland – a medium-sized country with a population of 38 million – managed to remain one of the major migrant-sending countries in Europe despite its partition and disappearance from the political map of Europe (in 1795—1918 Poland did not exist as a separate nation state), uprisings and fighting for independence, two World Wars and the Soviet domination. Mobility and family connections were always also distinctly transnational.

The existence of family-based migration networks was documented already by Thomas and Znaniecki in their classic work *Polish peasant in Europe and America* published in 1918-1920. It is not by accident that this work is today the most commonly referred one when the beginnings of transnational phenomena are discussed. A less-known study of what could now be perceived as a model study of transnational community lasting for more than a century was done by Kantor (1990). It investigated the transnational links between the Polish people of Zaborowo and Chicago. Both works focused on the period when the first mass migratory outflow from Poland (or, to be more exact, the terrains which belonged to Poland before 1795) took place and the emergence of the first transnational families with remittances and intimate correspondence between kin. In 1870—1914 four million people left the country heading mainly overseas: to the United States, Brazil and Canada. In the inter-war period (1918—1939) a subsequent two million people left Poland. The movement - usually of unskilled, male workers from rural areas – was induced by overpopulation and poverty and the chances for better living in the rapidly developing New World. Some of the migrants eventually returned and others managed to reunite with their families abroad. Many separated from their wives and children for long periods but there was also a number of unmarried migrants who were in a tight transnational contact with their birth families.

The Second World War, followed by the establishment of the communist regime in Poland (in 1952 the Polish People's Republic (PRL) was founded), ushered in a new era of Polish international migration history. Until its collapse in 1989 the socialist government pursued a repressive and isolationist policy aimed at an utter separation of the Polish nation from capitalist societies. The authorities gained an unlimited power in terms of deciding who was able to and was not to leave the country. Until 1988 the passport was a strictly foreign travel document granted for a single trip by the passport offices directly subordinate to the police (Okolski, 1998.p.10). Every passport application was approached individually and processed according to highly ambiguous regulations. The first two post-War decades of PRL were thus characterized by very low rates of international migration. The 1970s brought about a gradual liberalization of the migration policy. The old migration networks were reactivated and new ones gradually established. Yet, as the opening of the borders was still very partial, new emigration was largely illegal and thus not registered in official Polish statistics. The places of destination were almost exclusively capitalist countries: West Germany, Italy, Austria, Sweden, the U.S. and Canada. The Polish citizens were able to apply for asylum there. According to the official registrations in 1980—1989 250,000 people left Poland for permanent residence. Due to ideological reasons migration was silenced in academic studies and more realistic figures can be estimated only post-factum. Those indicate that in the 1980s approximately one million long-term and one million short-term migrants left the country. This made Poland the largest sending country in Europe at that time (Frejka, Okolski, Pyrozkhov and Sipaviciene, 1998.p.xx). This is called the “Polish exodus” by scholars.

The migrants who illegally overstayed abroad automatically obtained the status of a traitor of the Polish People's Republic. The exodus constituted a significant “brain drain”: 70 per cent of migrants in the 1980s were under 35 years of age; the majority had completed at least secondary education and 20 per cent held a university degree (Majewski, 2000.p.106). The more or less permanent outflow was mainly related to nuclear family groups, i.e. married couples with dependent children. The family members migrated together or in a chain. A number of presumably male (illegal) migrants was subsequently, sometimes after several years, followed by their spouses and offspring, this time leaving the country legally (Okolski, 1998.pp.18-19). Legal exit was also possible for those who married foreign citizens.

Before 1989 migration was prompted by a combination of economic and cultural factors. Communism had the least to offer to the young and educated. Most of them had virtually no

chance for personal and professional development. They felt tired with living in the PRL, disenchanted by the economic underdevelopment, constant shortages and poor quality of life. The Western world on the other hand was commonly perceived as the embodiment of “a paradise,” a guarantor of affluence and well-being.

The political breakthrough of 1989 and the introduction of the democratic system in Poland opened up the Polish national borders. However, this was also followed by increasingly restrictive immigration policies by Western governments towards Polish citizens as they lost the grounds for applying for refugee status. Poland faced rapid socio-economic transformation and a neoliberal ideology was inflicted upon the life-projects and survival strategies of individuals and families. This meant increased unemployment, economic deterioration, growing consumer expectations and material inequalities. In the global division of labour Poland became the supplier of workforce to the countries of the centre.

In the face of the new extraneous circumstances not as much the volume as the pattern of outflow underwent significant changes. The previously prevailing permanent or long-term over-seas migration was now substituted by temporary migration within Europe. It was commonly of the so called incomplete type (i.e. irregular, often for recurrent three-month periods) (Jazwinska and Okolski, 2001). In the place of destination work, accommodation and relevant information were largely obtained by relying on the social/migration capital which the kinship and the circle of friends possessed. In terms of the migrants' socio-demographic characteristics, a gradual equalisation of the sex ratio was accompanied by a prevalence of migrants from rural areas, educated lower than the migrants before and being under 45 years of age. The post-1989 movement also comprised of more permanent migration which, although still present, declined significantly (for instance Frejka et al., 1998; Jazwinska and Okolski, 2001). The diversification of mobility inevitably caused a diversification of the transnational family forms. Many family members were physically absent for short, recurrent periods of time. Increasing numbers of nuclear families were separated by the national borders. Abroad, the Poles usually performed low-paid, physical work in the service and agricultural sectors after 1989.

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 generated a new “exodus.” Other, previously less known destinations emerged: the UK and Ireland, Norway, Iceland and finally Finland. Until the end of 2006 nearly 2 million people altogether left Poland. As in the previous years Polish

migration has been mainly income-seeking. From the second half of the 1990s the migrants were also increasingly better educated surpassing non-mobile Poles (Fihel, Kaczmarczyk and Okolski, 2006). For now it is still difficult to state anything conclusive about the temporal character of the post-accession movement. However, some suggestions have already been made. In the UK the inflow chiefly concerned young (18—35 year-old) males, presumably temporary labour migrants (*ibid.*) not accompanied by their dependent family members. On the other hand a study conducted in London by Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara (2006) documented cases of post-accession (nuclear) family reunification, indicating a trend towards settlement. Among the Polish migrants in the UK capital also a considerable group (42 per cent) was categorized as “searchers”, young people who preferred to keep their options open and did not have definite plans of return (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich, 2006). The families across borders have continuously been mainly of the nuclear type. There has also been a significant rise of young, single migrants whose families of origin stayed in Poland.

The constitutive role of Polish kinship groups in the configuration and maintenance of mobility and cross-border spaces seems to be well documented in literature. Referring primarily to the extended family, Slany (2000.p.295) writes “through acts of help, maintenance of bonds and partial (emotional/material) dependence, against all external appearances, separated families create closely connected systems.” However, this view coincides significantly with the contrasting, nearly ubiquitous perception of migration as a factor largely disrupting family cohesion, leading in extreme cases to the utter dissolution of familial bonds (see for instance Okolski, 2005.p.24; Kuzma, 2005, 2001; Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2004.pp.44, 123; Romaniszyn, 2003; Korczynska, 2003; Solga, 2002; Lukowski, 2001; Kukolowicz, 1999; Latuch, 1996; Dyczewski, 1992.p.2; Okroy, 1989). The longer and more recurrent the migration, the more damaging is its effect for the family.<sup>8</sup>

The focal point of academic interest here is the “threatened” and emotionally fragile conjugal unit. The informal collapses of marriage, divorces and spouses’ promiscuity are by and large indicated – all phenomena accounted as dysfunctional and pathological which ultimately lead to the destabilization of not only particular families but also of the (Polish) social and national order (Zebrowski, 2001.p.24; Minkiewicz, 1994.pp.97,101). Terms such as “Brussels

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<sup>8</sup> The critical length of time of migration after which the nuclear family bonds start to deteriorate vary depending on the study. Balcerzak-Paradowska (1994) writes about three months, Dyonizak (1988) about one year and Gorz (1994) about three years of absence.

marriages” or “Vienna marriages” denote an emergence of a new form of matrimonial life. It involves the migrants’ cohabitation abroad but with simultaneous maintenance of the legitimate family in Poland whom the migrant continues to support financially (Romaniszyn, 2003; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2001). It reflects what in derogatory terms is described as a breakdown or at least a momentary suspension of moral norms regulating sexual and inter-marriage relations. These norms are traditionally underpinned by the Catholic ideology whose importance diminishes in the “demoralizing” context of emigration and the hedonistic, Western, essentially laic values (Koszalka, 2004; Okroy, 1989). For instance Reron writes:

“In the pluralistic society the field of formation of the moral consciousness is closed. It offers more feeling of freedom but it does not guarantee uniform cultural models. [...] The new social situations generate a sense of moral ambiguity. Therefore the separation of a married couple caused by labour migration is definitely unfavourable for the family.” (2005.pp.205-206)

The marriage crises are additionally augmented by the gossiping and hearsay channelled through the transnational networks which are an instance of an attempt to retain a certain degree of social control by the spatially extended community.

Concurrently with the above, in theoretical terms the family, although otherwise transnational and imaginatively united even if spatially separated, is interpreted as (at least temporarily) “incomplete” (see e.g. Kawula, 2006.p.101; Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2004.p.123; Bolesta, 2002; Kukulowicz, 2001; Danilewicz, 2001; Rauzinski, 2000; Auleytner and Błaszczyk, 1995; Minkiewicz, 1994.p.101; Kozdrowicz, 1989; Jarosz, 1987), “broken” and “disorganized” (Latuch, 1992, 1996.p.99). According to Latuch (1996) the migration of a sole family member is sufficient to lead to *the* (nuclear) family’s structural deformation, ill-performance of its functions, and the disruption of the proper life cycle development of the family. The disorganization thesis was applied to the analysis of Polish families in migration context already by Thomas and Znaniecki in the 1920s. Clearly it is still rendered as equally valid and unchangeable (Romaniszyn, 2003.pp.115-148; Slany and Malek, 2002.p.87). It drives not only the final results of many studies but also, sometimes very explicitly, their initial hypotheses. Korczynska’s study for instance starts with this idea: “Migration is linked with the disruption of the family bonds and a disturbance of the family’s socialization functions.” (2003.p.32). In a similar vein Stankowski argues: “The parents’ labour migration of has a negative influence on family cohesion and permanence.” (2006.p.246).

Arguably, the prevalence of this approach is a reflection of both the still fairly conventional theoretical conceptualization of the family and the traditional concern of the Polish Catholic Church and its academic institutions with matters of *the* family and migration. *The* family (a singular form is used predominantly) is thus more or less explicitly regarded as ideally formal, heterosexual and monogamous with a socially prescribed function and norms regulating the members' behaviour. It is also essentially co-habiting (see for instance Izdebska, 2006; Bolesta, 2002). Despite an increased recognition of other family forms this ideological model still remains the "basic" one (Slany, 2005.p.24) functioning as the norm and point of reference to which other family life forms are "alternatives." The very concept of an incomplete family, generally understood as a derivative, "structurally disturbed" (Danilewicz, 2001.p.71) and "incorrect" (Pawłowska, 2001.p.228) form of the nuclear, one-household family, is a palpable manifestation of this. The normative approach is particularly accentuated in the works of authors affiliated with the Catholic institutions who present a clearly theological perspective (see for instance, Reron, 2005, Jurczyk, 2005; Wojaczek, 2005; Koszalka, 2005, 2004; Bolesta, 2002; Okroy, 1989). International migration, especially of the kind separating the conjugal couple, is a threat here as is cohabitation, homosexual and one-parent families to the indivisible and sacred institution of marriage and the only "natural" family model and gendered division of the roles of father, mother and child. In other words migration disturbs the "natural" order of things within *the* family.

From the transnational perspective, the idea of disorganization obviously disregards a more nuanced and multidimensional view on family life. It obscures the processes of reorganization and restructuring of relationships and the negotiation of family borders. Significantly, numerous empirical studies indicated the Poles' desire and ability to maintain meaningful familial relationships despite physical separation.

Considering that affective dependence is an ideological fundamental of the contemporary nuclear family, the emotional costs of migration seem to be inevitable. Unsurprisingly migrants and non-migrants alike indicated a longing for loved ones as its main downside (Heffner and Solga, 1999; Giza, 1998.p.120). Nonetheless, many families, conjugal couples included, successfully endured the separation. The relevant instances can be found, among others, in the qualitative investigation of Romaniszyn (2003) and the phenomenon of "weekend marriages" she refers to, a study on labour migration from the Opole region by Heffner and Solga (1999.p.62), and, the biggest to date, the 1994—1999 study on Polish

international migration conducted by the Center for Migration Research in four regions of major outflow<sup>9</sup>. Drawing on her quantitative study in 1993 Balcerzak–Paradowska (1994.p.171) argued that usually a short period of separation and frequent contact helped to avoid the “negative changes” in family life. What is more, selected works reported instances of intensified familial bonds during migration, including an increased sense of loyalty and mutual responsibility (for instance Sakson, 2001), as well as the purifying effect on the marital relationship of short-term absences (Korczynska, 2003.p.159; Danilewicz, 2001.p.82).

Not to introduce a one-sided picture, there is also an increased interest in the transnational perspective on Polish migration even if the transnational issues that have to do with the family are looked into rather cursorily. Among the works documenting this subject worth mentioning are Morocvasic’s (2004) and Kuzma’s (2005, 2001) as well as the most recent projects in the UK: the one at University of Surrey on class and ethnicity among the Polish migrants in London (Eade et.al., 2007) and a second one that focuses on the changing migratory strategies of post-accession at Middlesex University (Ryan et al., 2006). Both showed that the transnational family linkages among the Polish migrants are strong and significant both as a source of cognitive and cultural orientation and material and non-material support. The valuable insight of these studies does not, however, involve a deeper look into the historical dynamics of transnational practices, including the period of communism important for Polish migration and identity. To paraphrase Foner (2005.p.3) such a comparative approach would allow us to see ”what is unique to a specific situation and what is more general to the Polish families’ transnational experience.” The substantial transnational analysis of earlier Polish migration, again to the UK, made by Burrell (2006), refers on the other hand only to post-war Polish refugees and deals with the issue of nationalism.

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<sup>9</sup> The study encompassed qualitative interviews and an ethno-survey. Among the interviewed migrants, 22 per cent did not notice any particular positive or negative changes in their family life after migration (Giza 1998: 121).

## **Chapter 3 Doing ethnography: the methodological framework**

### **Research problems**

The transnational family and its changing dynamics are the main focus of this research against the shortages of the current research detailed above. I explore the Poles' family life across borders in the context of the political regime shifts of the Polish nation–state after World War II. I am interested in the first generation of Polish migrants and their connections with immediate and distant relatives in Poland. The location of the study is also innovative: as there were some studies addressing the transnationalism of Poles in the UK and the U.S., this is the first study of its kind on Finland.

I carry out the investigation with regard to three historical periods, differentiated on the basis of the distinct migration policies adopted by the Polish and Western governments towards Polish citizens:

1945—1989 - the communist era in Poland. Unfavourable legal conditions for exits from the country.

1989—2004 – the period of major political, economic and social transformation in Poland, commenced with the introduction of democracy and the capitalist market in 1989. The opening of national borders.

1 May 2004 – to date - Poland's accession to the European Union.

I study the familial linkages of the people who came to Finland in a given period as well as ask how the national transformations influenced individual families across time. The transnationalism among the families studied is not presupposed but carefully investigated. Specifically, the following research problems/areas constitute the focal objective of this research:

- 1) The socio-cultural practices engaging kinfolks transnationally aimed at sustaining the feeling of familial unity despite separation. I look at the practices which are intimate and informal, but also at the ones that are more costly and involve the physical movement across borders.
- 2) The changing family relations in the new socio-cultural setting, discussed in terms of transnational care giving, i.e. mutual material, emotional and practical support enacted across borders within both the nuclear and extended family. I ask how this support has been negotiated at different stages of the transnational family's life cycle. How has it been connected with family ideologies and cultural family reproduction? What are the



Gender dynamics are considered throughout all the areas under investigation. Some detailed problems have developed throughout the course of the study. I started to pay more attention to the relations of support between adult migrants and their elderly parents. I noticed that these relations are central to their transnational family experience. In terms of transnational practices I set the question of communication and visits at the forefront. Again I followed the migrants' stories. Interlinked with the question of the means of staying in touch was the more distinct emergence of the subject of emotional support. Such constant movement between theory, research problems and empirical results is inherent to ethnographic research. The discoveries of the field are reflected in the sequence and the scope of the thesis' empirical chapters. They are constructed to follow the migrants' life experience.

### **The ethnography and the insider experience**

The inquiry was conducted by the means of ethnography, a qualitative method of gathering research data. It encompassed two key research techniques: participant observation and open-ended interviews. Its choice was determined by the research problems: I wanted to get to know the lived experience of migrants and the micro-workings of their families. A method more shallow or rigid would have obscured or probably misrepresented many vital questions. The flexibility of ethnography granted me the possibility of an on-going adjustment of the investigative tools, both, as I already mentioned of the research problems and of the particular techniques. Because the (geographical and cultural) terrain of the study is quite novel such adjustment was all the more needed.

Initially I assumed that the in-depth interviews would be a leading technique. But along with my growing access to the field, participant observation gained in importance. The interviews were open-ended and concentrated around the widely conceived problem areas: the history of immigration and settlement, family history and relationships, support and care and the perceptions of Finland and the Finnish society. For various migrants some matters were more important than others. I conducted three preliminary interviews whose material is also included in the thesis. A majority of the interviews took place at the migrants' homes, three took place in cafés. In the case of Polish conjugal families (i.e. in which both two partners originated from Poland) the interviews were conducted jointly. At the beginning I planned to conduct the interviews separately but I discovered that the presence of many voices adds up to

the material as well as gives me a possibility to observe the family interactions at hand. Mostly I also had the opportunity for more individual conversations. The migrants were scattered around Southern Finland and they lived in small rural towns and major Finnish cities.

Altogether I conducted interviews with nine Polish conjugal couples and fifteen individual migrants for the purpose of this thesis in 2006—2007. Among the latter, five (all men) came independently for contracted work, and the rest (one man and nine women) married a Finnish spouse. All interviews were conducted in Polish, recorded and transcribed verbatim. All the quotes in the thesis are my translations. The interviews lasted on average for 2.5—3 hours. I met with two couples twice for interviews. With many I also talked to or met with more than once but without the formalized recording. I complemented the narrative material with participant observation, informal conversations at the migrants' homes and during the various social gatherings of Polish migrants in public spaces (meetings after church, meetings of associations). I shared information about my personal life if asked and also on my own initiative. This often brought about new discussions and further insight. The meetings at homes usually included dinners, staying overnight several times, informal talks and other shared activities such as going to the sauna, watching TV and going for a walk.

The ways through which I found the informants actually gives a first insight into their everyday, transnational-ways-of-belonging experience. I met many old-time migrants in meetings after Polish Catholic masses which I started to attend regularly in two major cities. Others I found through the Internet, using the Polish messenger Gadu-Gadu, the messenger Skype and the websites of various Poland-related organizations in Finland. In several cases the contact was enabled by interpersonal networks. Interestingly, I gained access to a group of temporary labour migrants (I interviewed four migrants in this group more thoroughly) through the professional network of a daughter of one of the Polish female migrants. The latter I interviewed in the very beginning. Multiple recruiting means were necessitated by the scattered character of the Polish settlement. Computer-mediated technology also immensely facilitated the subsequent parts of the research. I was able to easily stay in touch with many through emails and messenger chats. In this way I was also able to organize the meetings. The significance of ICTs (Information and Computer Technologies) is clearer if you consider that some of the informants lived 200-300 kilometres away from my place of residence, and still I could talk to them on a daily basis. Furthermore, thanks to ICT, the sample I gathered is fairly

diverse including both men and women, residents of rural and urban areas, people of different ages, professions and times of arrival.

Finding and accessing the informants would have been more difficult if not for my position both as a “Native” (and a fellow migrant) and an “Ethnographer.” Weston calls him or her a virtual anthropologist, that is the one lacking the real Other with a blurred identity and unclear (or rather more unclear than in the case of non-native) subjective/objective stance (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997.p.33). My commonality with the migrants starts from my Polish nationality/ethnicity, knowledge of the Catholic rituals and my current place of residence in Finland. Many people referred to ethnic solidarity when they agreed to the interview: “we [Polish people abroad] have to help each other.” An important facilitator was also the fact of doing the research for the academia and giving voice to the Polish people in Finland. As a native my knowledge of Poland and the Polish culture was implicitly assumed. Arguably, as a consequence the migrants’ spontaneous narratives were greatly about their views of Finland and the Finnish society. They wanted to introduce me to Finland and they were able to allow themselves to make harsh remarks. For some it was very important that not only would they would remain, customarily for research, anonymous, but also that nobody else expect for me would listen to the recordings.

As many commonalities as there were between us, there were also numerous divergences. I am in the age group of the migrants’ children, rather than in the migrants’ age group. I was perceived as young, if not very young. For this reason, firstly, it was much easier for me to establish a friendly relationship with the most recent and thus younger migrants; secondly, I have little personal experience with the communist period. I know it from family history, the media and childhood memories, but my formative years were mostly in the totally different reality of capitalist Poland. Furthermore I am unmarried and without children and thus some migrants went to great lengths in explaining to me how it is to be a parent and on top being a parent in a foreign country. My sociocultural background is of intelligentsia, with a middle-class economic status. I have tertiary education which places me higher in the education hierarchy than some of the migrants. I could say that there were homes which were familiar to me. There were also homes which, at least initially, I found more alien in cultural and economic terms. All the above made my “nativeness” less salient. In terms of gender, unsurprisingly, I had easier access to women than men. With some of the female migrants I became very good friends.

It can be said that to some extent my ethnography was done in the geographical terrain I also inhabit. However, I have been living more permanently in Finland for only the last two years, I travel very often to Poland, and, importantly, my spatial position in the views of the migrants was rather ambiguous. One of the opening questions I always had to deal with (reluctantly) was about my future migration plans: do I want to stay, or do I want to return to Poland (I usually responded truthfully “I do not know”). Clearly my indefinite position demanded categorisation, a cognitive emplacement. It is one of the manifestations of how the hegemonic national categories still shape the thinking about migration, even if the migrants themselves live a very “indefinite” and transnational life.

### **Ethical dilemmas**

“The close and often lengthy association of anthropologists with the people among whom they carry out research entails personal and moral relationships, trust and reciprocity between the researcher and research participants; it also entails recognition of power differentials between them.” (Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth: Preamble).

All social research that involves studying the lives and cultures of people (and animals) entail dealing with ethical matters. They are present at all stages of the research, from the selection of the topic to the analysis and publication of the findings. Anthropologists are responsible to the research participants, scholarship and the scientific community. Accordingly I have been struggling with ethical dilemmas throughout the study. I was concerned to what extent the study allows and justifies the interference in sometimes very intimate problems, secrets and possible conflicts of the families. Writing the thesis I had to address such statements as “My mother-in-law had better not find out!” In the context of the relatively small Polish “community” in Finland this came to be particularly important and problematic. Above all I thus tried to ensure the migrants of utmost privacy and anonymity. Throughout the thesis all the people and places appear under pseudonyms and the individual stories are hopefully not easily recognizable for the real ones. The problem of anonymity was also one of the reasons why I did multi-sited ethnography and used many sources. I did not rely on the extensive snowball sampling which allowed for the diversification of the social circles from which I recruited the migrants.

Furthermore I did not want to break the principle of informed consent. Still I did not want the migrants to be pre-guided by the theme of the study. I wanted to see to what extent family and transnational relations are important. I was also aware that there was no point in a detailed

explanation of the theoretical depths of the study. I decided that it would be ethically safe to tell the migrants that the topic of my study are the Polish migrants in Finland and their linkages to Poland, with a particular focus on family relations. I explained the purpose of the study in detail only if specifically asked. One of the problems was also the language barrier (no English skills) which did not allow many people to personally read samples of my writing. In the end I believe I managed to successfully address at least the majority of the potential ethical transgressions.

## **Chapter 4 Polish–Finnish migration: characteristics of the field**

Finland is a particular case on the map of Polish west-bound international mobility. Mainly as the consequence of national political and economic circumstances and the specificity of the Finnish socio-cultural environment, the community (the term communities would perhaps be more suitable here given the heterogeneity of the group) of Polish migrants in Finland is still small, and only to a meager degree transnationally institutionalized. I would argue that the transnational social spaces linking Finland and Poland which encompass larger formations than families have just started to unfold, mainly in the post-accession period. For many decades Finland itself was a country of net migration loss. Compared to the 15 EU countries, it has the lowest immigration rates and the smallest population of foreign citizens. Although rapidly expanding, the immigrant population still accounts for only 2.2 per cent of the society (Saarto, 2006).

Polish mobility to Finland dates back to the end of the nineteenth century. From the beginning the mobility was linked to Poland's and Finland's location within the Russian sphere of influence. It included mainly traders and the Polish soldiers from the Russian part of partitioned Poland who were sent to Finland as a part of the Czarist army. In the Interwar period the Polish community in Finland amounted to 500 people. Eight months prior to Finland's independence, in April 1917, migrants established the first Polish association in Helsinki - according to its own sources most likely the oldest association of foreigners in Finland and one of the oldest in Europe. After World War II immigration started to increase only in the 1960s, amounting to 25—50 people annually. The inflow was almost exclusively for legal labour and family reasons (marriage with a Finnish citizen). A number of factors hindered more intensive Polish immigration.

Firstly, Finland, until the collapse of communism, was the only non-communist country which pursued a politics of neutrality and collaboration with the Soviet Union. For Poles this blocked the possibility of applying here for asylum and directed them towards the more favourable Western countries. Then again owing to the collaboration, going to Finland legally, for instance for student exchange, was easier than to the other countries outside the Soviet Block. For that reason several migrants in my study met their future spouses or established relevant social contacts while studying or doing an internship in Finland. On the other hand some Polish women met their Finnish spouses in Poland while the men were on a

business or a tourist trip. Secondly, for a long time Finland has been a closed and inhospitable country to immigration and until the 1990s it did not have any coherent immigration policy. Restrictions on foreigners' access to the labour market have been strict, no temporary labour migration schemes were developed, the traditionally strong trade unions opposed the liberalization of immigration and Finnish language skills have been a necessity. To date Finland has also had the smallest illegal labour market in the EU (Kuusisto, 2004). This made impossible the undocumented income-seeking migration (the most popular form of Polish international mobility after 1989), at least for such a scale as to the other 15-EU countries.

Given all of the above, exceptionally in the Polish migration context no large-scale chain migration to Finland took place. In 1990s the number of Polish long-term migrants amounted to 3,000 people. Migration, if not aimed at a reunification with a Finnish spouse, was commonly undertaken with the whole nuclear family. As a consequence the transnational relations were primarily within the extended family circle. Most of the migrants represented selected, sought for professions: musicians, doctors, engineers and technicians, architects and skilled workers (Later-Chodyłowa, 2004.p.28). In a response to the high demand for workers in the Finnish music sector during the 1970s and 1980s, musicians constitute to date a distinctive professional group of Poles in Finland. Additionally a number of migrants were always finding seasonal employment in the Finnish agricultural sector.

The unprecedented influx of Poles was generated only after Poland joined the European Union. It gave Polish companies and their employees free entrance to the Finnish market. Additionally in May 2006 Finland withdrew all legal restrictions regarding the mobility and employment of individual migrants. Estimates from December 2007 indicated that approximately 14,000 migrants have come to Finland since 2004. This included people currently working, their families and people who looked for work.<sup>10</sup> Most of the new migrants are temporary male contract/posted workers, i.e. people who work for Polish or other foreign subcontracting companies in Finland. They come for 3—6 months (the maximum period when the taxes can be paid by the posting company in the country of origin) or more. There are also researchers and young professionals working in the Finnish IT sector. Thus Polish immigration patterns in Finland have finally become analogous to those in the rest of the EU, and currently spouses and children stay behind more frequently. Yet contrary

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<sup>10</sup> The figure comes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland (2007).

to the main destination countries such as the UK and Ireland, influx to Finland does not constitute “brain drain.” Most of the post-accession migrants work in similar professions as in Poland (welders seem to be overrepresented) or they even advance in the hierarchy. The same is true for old-time migrants. Statistically (Heikkila, 2006) Poles, unlike many other groups coming from peripheral or semi-peripheral countries, have the same level of unemployment rate as the natives in Finland. In this respect they rather resemble the Western than the Eastern migrants. Their good performance on the labour market is reflected in their wage levels: the proportion of Poles who belong in the highest income level (200 000 FIM, i.e. 33 000 €) amounts to 14% and is almost the same as in Finland. Similarly to Finns the Poles also have a very high rate of employment in the public services sector (41%). Polish migrants are also very well educated: according to the official statistics from 2000 their tertiary education rate is almost at the same level compared to Finns.

Poles in Finland mainly live in the Helsinki area, others are scattered around the country, living in small towns and larger cities. According to Chodubski (1997) the Polish migrants in Finland managed to avoid the situation of “an ethnic ghetto.” Turku is now the location which documents the largest Polish inflow. Because Poles in Finland are an important part of the local Catholic communities, masses are held in Polish in all Catholic parishes usually once per month. They also constitute the informal Polish social and cultural centres. The majority of Catholic priests are Polish. Until October 2008 also the Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Finland was a Pole.

Inevitably Polish-Finnish transnationalism is composed of the most intimate cross-border linkages, enacted at the interpersonal level and within the informal social circles. I would suggest that it is also often “middling transnationalism” (Conradson and Latham, 2005.p.229), encompassing educated and socially accomplished migrants and their kin.

My studied sample reflected the above mentioned socio-demographic characteristics. Among the professions there were doctors, teachers, musicians, engineers, economists, academic researchers, managers and workers in the service sector. There was also a group of skilled labourers who arrived in Finland at the turn of 1989/1990. Except for one couple, all post-accession migrants worked in manual labour. Altogether there were four people with a PhD degree, ten people with tertiary education, twelve people with secondary education and seven people with vocational education. As I already pointed out, they lived in various locations



across Southern Finland, and originated from very different locations in Poland. However, the majority had a metropolitan, or at least an urban background – a fact which seems to reflect the general trend of Polish migration to Finland. The minimum documented length of stay in Finland was six months. The maximum stay was forty years. In three cases the Polish conjugal couples were separated across borders for various periods of time to be subsequently reunified in Finland. The transnational life and family relations of this group of people is the subject of the following chapters. I begin the investigation of their experience with the matter of everyday rituals in a virtual, technologically-mediated, space.

## **Chapter 5 Transnational communication: everyday rituals in a virtual space**

Adam came to Finland over two years ago. As a middle-rank technician he works for a Polish subcontractor in a Finnish company. He left two school-aged children in Poland who remain under the care of their mother and his former wife. The divorce occurred during his stay in Finland. The good relations he managed to maintain with his former wife were of significance for the further preservation of his bonds with the children. Now she is the prime intermediary of their transnational contact and, owing to the positive relations they have, an ally in fulfilling his paternal role from afar. “My children give me the reason to live” he says. The tight work schedule and limited financial resources allow him to visit Poland for a week once in every 3—4 months. Thus Adam primarily maintains through virtual contact the transnational “relationship of love and respect” with his children:

“We have agreed [with the ex-wife] that I will call them not chaotically, but on specific days: every Wednesday and Saturday. Since my ex-wife took up a job since our divorce and, furthermore, I should not call them too late, we have agreed I will call in the evening. So I call them at the agreed time, we talk and it’s great. .... In addition my mother takes them to her place every second weekend and then we can talk and see each other on the Internet as well. What do we talk about? The conversations with the children, if you want to call them frequently, become after a while quite schematic: what did you do, what did you eat, where did you go. And in the case of my children even their going out is limited [because of health problems]. So their life is actually fairly schematic. Thus I learnt not to ask them any longer about what is going on. I rather ask them about the specifics: about their health, how is school etc.”

As the above vignette shows, in the situation of cross-border separation, if migrants want to enact their family membership and preserve the quality of the relations from before migration, they have to find new forms of staying connected. New practices have to be employed through which the absence of face-to-face contact – conventionally the pre-requisite for commonality and welfare in the family – is addressed and positively resolved. For even those upper and middle-class families that are usually more mobile still meet relatively infrequently no matter where the meetings take place in Finland or Poland. Regardless of the kin’s socio-economic situatedness the visits always entail at least a minimum of prior planning and organization and are, the development of transportation notwithstanding, costly and time-consuming. In this context it is transnational communication, the verbal or written exchange of information across borders that acquires heightened importance and meaning and becomes the central everyday practice standing for the members’ embodied interaction. It usually precedes and allows initiating all other forms of staying connected: the flow of commodities and remittances, visits and the imagining of presence. Usually it is enacted regularly and has

its own, more or less explicitly agreed schema. As such it arises to the form of family ritual: a symbolic communication “that owing to the satisfaction that family members experience through its repetition, is acted out in a systemic fashion over time.” (Wolin and Bennet, 1984.p.401). Turner (1977) reads rituals as a key to understanding the society’s social organization. Rituals, in his account a part of the religious system, reaffirm the structural order and social hierarchies. They serve the ordering of the social world and emotional expression of anger, hate, grief and affection. He ascribes the central role to rites of passage, i.e. the rituals of transition, and the liminality they entail. Liminality is a “moment in and out of time,” when the ritual subject, individual or corporative, is in a state of limbo, detached from the past and the future, escaping any structural classifications. In many rites the ritual subject has to yield himself/herself to the authority of the community – the repository of norms, beliefs, sentiments and value systems. “Its representatives in the specific rites [...] represent the generic authority of tradition.” (ibid..p.103). Turner writes about the rites of life-crisis (birth, puberty, marriage, death) and calendric rites (linked to the annual production cycle).

The necessity of studying rituals in the transnational family context was first and foremost pointed out by Gardner and Grillo in their editorial to the *Global Networks* (2002) on rituals and transnational households. Out of the five articles there, only Al-Ali’s (2002) dealt with other rituals than the life-crises. Undoubtedly, the more high-scale and deliberate ritual forms bear a great significance for the (transnational) family life and identification. However, here I would like to underscore the not lesser importance of intimate and informal ritualized activities, the patterned family interactions. The least pre-arranged but the most commonly enacted, they are one of the primary tangible tools in the creation of a sense of belonging and identity, in conveying the symbolic meaning of family roles, rules and attachments (Segrin, 2004.p.51). As such emerge the recurring cross-border communication: the exchange of phone calls, letters, e-mails and post-cards in a transnational family. Through ritualized communication family solidarity and emotional welfare can be (re)produced, power exercised and negotiated and the most intimate affiliations strengthened or downplayed. It helps to transform the “ambiguous”<sup>11</sup> presence of the transnational family presence into a presence which is more unequivocal and definite. It allows to have a clear cognitive comprehension of

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<sup>11</sup> Paraphrasing, I draw here on the term of “ambiguous loss” by which Bell (2003) refers to the cognitive state experienced by families with missing family members.

the family situation and thus to act accordingly. In other words it allows migrants and those left behind to enact the family-related aspect of their identity.

I see the concept of ritual as a theoretical tool useful on the one hand in underscoring the particular role of ostensibly plain telephone conversations or text messaging in a situation when you just cannot simply “hang up the phone and instantaneously go and see for yourself how everything looks like,” and, on the other, the particular regularity and thus anticipative character of the, necessarily virtual, transnational contact. Communicative rituals introduce a degree of stability into the seemingly ‘shaky’ and fragile environment of a separated family and compensate for the uncertainty created by physical absence (although they never fully substitute the presence itself).

At the same time the regularity and patterned enactment of these informal rituals do not mean that they are invariable. Quite contrary, compared with other ritualized forms they are the most flexible and prone to change in response to given situational and temporal circumstances (Wolin and Bennett, 1984). Their transformation suggests the family’s ability to adapt to a constantly fluid social, political and technological environment as well as to its own inner dynamics.

The communicative processes underpinning the cross-border family making have drawn increasing attention in transnational studies in recent years (Baldassar et al., 2007; Wilding, 2006; Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Vargas, 2006; Horst, 2006; Haiming, 2005; Vertovec, 2004, 2003; Pribilisky, 2004; Tamagno, 2002; Mahler, 2001). The enactments of ties through new as well as old communication means were dealt with: letters, postcards, mobile and landline phones, faxes and the internet. They all seemed to substantiate the general thesis that technological affordances, the advantages and deficiencies related to the distinctive, material properties of any technology, do affect the character of communication (Hutchby, 2001). In other words the various technologies delimit the possibilities they offer for interaction. Inevitably this, along with the ever decreasing cost of communication, influence the ritualized practices the family members enact transnationally. It is in this context that the idea of the “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1989) as standing at the forefront of the proliferation of small cross-border societal forms like families should be read.

It is hard to deny today the truthfulness of Cairncross's (1997.p.1) hypothesis that "it will be no more expensive to telephone someone on the other side of the world than to talk to someone in the house across the street", when it will be having those living afar actually as if "across the street." At present this is an actual reality. Still, we have to remember that every technological tool is ideologically biased. Its benefits and deficits are not equally distributed. It demands specific infrastructure and economic resources and favours a particular set of skills, abilities or senses over others (Postman, 1993). As a consequence many geographically and socially disadvantaged actors are denied access to the newest technological developments. Some transnational families are still built upon scarce communicative resources and struggle for even the faintest moments of cross-border intimacy. Such inequality of access to communication contributes to the unequal power relations between those who left and those who stayed behind (Mahler, 2001). All this should be borne in mind when communication in a transnational context is analyzed. We should not get carried away by the celebratory voices of distance annihilation. It is therefore my aim not to take the communication for granted, but to carefully investigate what the communication practices, their agents, and the historical and socio-economic contingencies were. The last section gives insight into the abusive employment of technological devices.

### **Verbal vs. epistolary practices**

In the history of transnational families the emergence and wide spread of telephones takes an unprecedented role. Unprecedented not as much in the sense of contributing to a family's feeling of unity and togetherness, since this can be preserved even through very meagre contact, but the possibility of achieving what Hutchby (2001) called "the intimacy at a distance." Telephone was the first communication tool that allowed a transnational family to speak intimately "in the manner reserved for the personal co-presence, conversationally, in a way that preserves all the personality, recognisability and inflection of the ordinary voice," across vast spatial distances. It afforded a sense of co-presence without actual presence (ibid..p.85). Unsurprisingly, verbal communication via telephone whether landline or wireless was thus for migrants and their kin in Poland the most appreciated form of contact until the introduction of the Internet enabling also visual interaction. The Internet is a means of staying together transnationally which seems to be the fastest, the easiest and the most adequate for communication and pursuing of family-type relations from afar. It is set against and wins over the only alternative that existed for years: correspondence by letter:

Jolanta (in Finland since 1989): "I have never written any letters [to my family]. I always found it insufficient. Letters are something you can write to your friends, once, twice per year. But to keep in touch with a family, to be up-to-date, to know what is going on there, I always used a telephone. We have been in a constant contact."

Teresa (in Finland since 1984): "We used to write a lot of letters with my mother. I was writing even twice a month. I sent postcards. I called less because there were no such possibilities. A couple of years ago we stopped writing. My mother does not feel like it anymore. Also her health does not allow her to. Now because of her bad condition I call her every day."

Wiktor (in Finland since 1990): "For communication purposes the telephone is much easier [than letters] [...]. Less energy, less time-consuming. [...] My mother is ill now. She would not manage to write a letter. And for me calling her is just about picking up the headphone, pushing one button and getting connected."

The great advantage of telephone is its physical effortlessness. Similarly to Wiktor and Teresa, most migrants stress that the phone-call is the only option of staying in touch with their elderly, often disabled or physically weak parents. Letter writing demands certain endurance, a particular set of aptitudes, and health, which decreases rapidly with age. In comparison to the telephone, it is a physically strenuous and exhausting practice. What seems to be its most inadequate characteristic for family needs is its inherent asynchrony: in a letter exchange "time and space are important." Spatial distance is usually the reason for the exchange of letters, and there is a time lag between the practice of writing and reading. "Two worlds are invoked. The here and now of the writer and the here and now of the reader." (Barton and Hall, 2001.p.6). In contrast space and time are compressed in telephone conversations. The caller and the called inhabit a single, "synchronized" world which is produced instantaneously in collaboration on an ongoing basis. Simultaneity enables spontaneously developing interaction, a dynamic dialogue which in turn gives rise to new themes and problems which would possibly be left out if dealt with in writing. "A letter never conveys everything" as one of the migrants told me.

In accordance with the above some migrants simply do not see themselves in the role of letter writers. They find it difficult to convert their life experiences into the literary form and produce a narrative without the cooperation of the recipient. Here education plays its role as the less schooled are less inclined to write (which by no means signifies that the higher educated were unequivocally enthusiastic letter producers: they wrote because of the situational constraints rather than preference). For instance both Wieslaw and Henryk have the most basic, primary education:

Wieslaw (in Finland since 1989): "I do not like to write letters. Because you start to write something and after a while you do not know what to write anymore. And it is pointless to send a short letter. The letter should be long. [...] Whereas on the phone it is different:

somebody asks me about something, I ask about something, and the subject pops up by itself. So the telephone contact is much better.”

Henryk (in Finland since 1979): “Nobody [from the family] has ever written letters to me and I have never written to them and I will not ever. I am just not a letter-type of guy. I do not even send postcards for Christmas. I have always been calling everywhere. “

The time span necessary for letter production is also their downside. Most of the studied migrants, both male and female, are very active on the labour market. There were actually only a few who did not have regular full-time employment. Some blue-collar migrants have actually worked around the clock for the last fifteen-twenty years, holding a job in at least two places. Many professions additionally demand work in shifts. “We got lazy” remarks Wiktor. Letter writing would thus inevitably be the mode of contact chosen in the last instance.

### **Struggles to keep-in-touch: uncertainties of the communist period and beyond**

The above brief account of the preferred means of communication – means that favour certain forms of according rituals over others – are important in that they help to understand the importance of historical shifts (and continuities) in the communication rituals as well as the changing power relations and hierarchies of dependency in which these rituals have been embedded. Indisputably the majority of Polish migrants, literate, educated, staying in Finland legally, often advancing in the occupational hierarchy, have for years looked at the transnational processes from a privileged geographical and social location. This would also include the practices of communication within the family. Most importantly, migrants were (and still sometimes are) the ones who usually enjoyed either the advantage of initiating the call or the call’s sponsorship. In both cases they ultimately had a financially-based power of choice whether the verbal interaction with kin in Poland would or would not take place. Historically the widest gap in this respect characterized the communist period when the infrastructure was poor and very expensive. Therefore the family members left behind were almost unequivocally the recipients of verbal communication or else the calls were collect calls. Written correspondence was practically the only tangible tool which gave the former more agency in the active pursuance of family ties. Bogdan, recalling his relations with his mother who in the 1970s was already a retired academic, explicitly acknowledges: “The correspondence was her initiative. She was the one who started to write. She sent me letters even twice a month. I was always writing her back. Otherwise I would have never done it.” Here the mother, despite occupying the materially inferior position, managed to establish an enduring two-directional interaction. She drew upon the compelling – if not the only one

available to her – resource: the culturally inscribed sense of the care giving duty of an adult child towards an elderly parent.

Then again the workings of the communist system disadvantaged both the parties involved to a great extent. The infrastructural shortages, including the undeveloped telecommunication system and censorship, limited any family contact, regardless of the side of the political border where one resided. Transnational communication was hence reduced to usually rare, even if regular, and expensive phone-calls and an exchange of slowly-flowing correspondence. It was limited to the affectively closest family circle: spouses (in the rare instances when the nuclear unit was separated), children, parents and, in further order, siblings, favourite cousins and the dearest friends. Irena, whose husband Andrzej worked in Finland in the 1980s as a researcher while she stayed with children in Poland, reminisces this period as nearly deprived of any information exchange. To stay in touch she worked out a mundane monthly or else bimonthly ritual only sometimes successfully finalized in necessarily very short telephone conversations. Unavoidably the children were left out from the communication practice:

“Of course there was letter correspondence but obviously there was censorship and letters went a month, it is said that Poznan [a major Polish urban center] was the only city where 100 per cent of the correspondence was checked, they were opening and checking, so what now, only the telephone was left, but as there was no telephone, I was using [the help of] neighbour friends who were living in the next entrance, and I was ordering a phone-call. I was ordering, coming back [home], putting kids to bed, going to them and waiting for hours so as to talk this couple of minutes. And not always – sometimes there was no connection at all.”

Likewise many other families had to rely on the intermediacy of third persons in Poland to communicate with their loved ones. Assistance was usually sought for in the well developed neighbourly networks during Communism. As it appears from the narratives, there was always some befriended person living in the vicinity that enjoyed the privilege of having a landline telephone and thus held the influential role of “a gatekeeper” (Hutchby, 2001.p.104). In comparison, telephone at home was ubiquitous in Finland. This allowed the convenience of speaking intimately and privately. Dorota, who joined her Finnish husband in Finland at the onset of the 1980s, owned a telephone from the very beginning. As she says, she comes from a very affectionate and tightly-knit family. After migration “I wanted to be with them even more. Particularly during the first 5—6 years I missed them very, very much.” Dorota’s way of dealing with the acute yearning was to maintain regular and, if possible, frequent and lengthy communication on the phone. Above all she longed for talking to her mother: “I was



everything to her.” Unfortunately this was also the period when contacts were the least possible:

“Then [in the 1990s] the contacts were still rather rare. There were no computers, no internet, calls were expensive. At the beginning my parents did not have a telephone. The telephone was very, very pricey. Not everybody could afford having one. At our street [in Poland] there were only two or three people who had a telephone at home. Some teachers, generally people who were better off. So I waited for a very, very long time before they would install one. And then I could call freely because earlier I had been calling to the neighbour. She had a telephone. When I got through I was asking her to ask my mother or father to come. But then all this took so much time. The contact was difficult. So I could not wait till they would install [the telephone]. And then finally I could call them with ease.”

At that time calls back were also made from workplaces, telephone booths or calls were ordered at the post-office. Unsurprisingly call-ordering like the calls ordered from Poland were not always successful. Long hours of “sitting and waiting” on the post-office bench could pass before the clerk would inform that the connection “could not be made.” During the Martial Law (December 1981—July 1983) when, after the initial shut down the telephone communication in Poland was finally restored, international conversations were interrupted by an occasional voice reminding the callers that what they said was under the constant surveillance of the communist authorities. “The controlled call’ became one of the ever-mocked symbols of the Polish People’s Republic and its relations with the outside world. “It was just like in the Polish comedies” Henryk recalls talking with his parents.<sup>12</sup> “It was extremely frustrating. But what could I do.” As the above shows, verbal communication demanded specific and sometimes prolonged arrangements. What several decades later became a highly private and intimate family practice enacted in the seclusion of one’s own household, was during communism a ritual bearing strong marks of formalization and, particularly during the Martial Law, as much as anything a public matter. Scheduling, ordering and waiting for the connection, and the involvement of third parties was often inherent to the process.

The lack of intimacy was pertinent also to personal correspondence which was subjected to the random control of communist censorship officially until 1986. Left with no other choice, many families, like Bogdan and his mother, nonetheless engaged in a ritual letter and postcard writing. Jan, who wrote to his parents regularly, responded, when I asked him about the potential surveillance:

“So what! They [the censors] would read at best that I went with my pals for a beer. I wrote about what was going on here [in Finland], about everyday life, our foreign travels, where we went for holidays. I did not write about the [politically compromising stuff].”

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<sup>12</sup> *The controlled call* (1991) is a title of the cult Polish comedy of Bareja, which ridiculed the regime.

The correspondence circulated both ways. “Letters flew back and forth incessantly. Slower but flew. Everybody wrote [...]” If the whole nuclear family left to Finland, the writing process was shared: each member wrote to a particular set of kin. The letters, except for the exchange of everyday information, also enclosed pictures, children’s drawings, newspaper clippings, food recipes. Until the onset of the 1990s they were the main carriers of transnational ideas and artifacts, conveyed the realities of the migrants’ lives in Finland, cultural particularities and the multiple trials that the newcomers were confronted with. They were *the* source of knowledge about the political affairs in Poland and supplemented “what had not been said on the phone.” Given the political constraints on mobility and first-hand information about countries beyond the communist block (although it should be emphasized that many of the studied families had international contacts even in the 1970s – a fact indicative, on the one hand, of the fairly elitist character of the in-flow, and, on the other, of the genuine rates of mobility during Communism), especially at first migration stimulated interest in the family’s suddenly expanded cultural habitats. Finland, particularly, was a destination highly unknown and untypical. If the family members had some image of the United States or Germany, Finland was still a cognitive “blank spot:”

Janina (in Finland since 1985): “Who heard about Finland among our kith and kin? Nobody. In our home city some Finnish recipes started to circulate through me, something about this country. It was exotic. Exotic that was little heard of. So our coming here had a lot of this kind of interesting aspects.”

Yet the aforementioned characteristics of the letter, entailing a time gap between the writer and the reader, additionally enhanced by the poor postal services in Poland, delayed news reception. Communication was often filled with frustration, anxiety and prolonged episodes of disturbing silences when the state of family affairs “here” and “there” remained unknown. To fully understand the weight of such a situation, one has to realize that without a more or less full comprehension of the family’s actual state and configuration, the “proper” enactment of one’s family roles and obligations is impeded. Without “knowing”, the family identity as a community of support and an individual coherent sense of self are undermined. This is the reason why the need to “know” was so often stressed by the migrants. The period of Martial Law in Poland was recalled as exceptionally distressful in this regard. The disruption of contact was the more nerve-wracking in that it was abrupt and completely unexpected: some migrants had just returned with complete ease from Poland and others were about to go there. Suddenly they as well as their kin who stayed behind were left without any information about each others’ lives. That the introduction of the Martial Law came as a shock can be

substantiated even solely by the self-initiated and detailed narratives regarding the circumstance in which the news was received:

Piotr, a researcher (in Finland since 1976): “I was lucky. I would almost have been caught up in the middle of it [the Martial Law]: just one week before its introduction I came back from visiting my parents in Poland. I had already been here [in Finland], conducting some research on the vessel. I was almost done with the work when on Sunday evening my Finnish colleague came to me and said: ‘Listen, you know I have bad news for you. There is a Martial Law in Poland.’”

Katarzyna, Piotr’s wife: “Oh shoot!”

Piotr: “So it was something totally horrible. All telecommunication was down, I could not get through [to contact my family], letters did not circulate. It was a really, really horrifying period.”

Henryk, a musician (in Finland since 1979): “In 1981 the police stopped me in Vaasa and took my passport. Because my contract with an agency was about to expire<sup>13</sup> I was forced by law to go back to Poland for half a year. So I went to Helsinki [where the ferry to Poland was departing from] with all the instruments and stuff. While waiting for the departure, I found out that one of my Polish friends was playing in a local hotel so I called him. He invited me to the party. He said: ‘Listen stay for the party, you can go with the next ferry.’ So I stayed. The next day, it was December 13<sup>th</sup>, Finns woke me up. They told me ‘There is a war in Poland!’ Of course at this point my journey was over. ... The very next day I went to the police. I said that Poland is in a state of war, that the police took my passport and they wanted to send me there by force, to put me on the ferry against my will. And that no way am I coming back. So the chief of police said: ‘no, that can’t be, man, you cannot go there, I will fix it.’ And he turned on the Finnish TV news. And they were on and on broadcasting exactly the same scene: a black and white shot of the army with tanks on the streets of Gdansk, with a commentary that it was a dire situation there. ... Here nobody said that it was the Martial Law. No. They said it was a war. Only later the TV clarified, and Finns translated it to me, that it was not a war but a Martial Law. So the policeman made some calls, and later I got the passport and all the necessary permissions. .... For about a year I could not get in touch with my family [in Poland]. I did not know what was going on there, whether everything was all right. So finally the stress got to me. At some point from all this, my nerves, I got face paralysis. .... My face was like cut in half. One eye constantly open, the tongue in half. When I was eating I always had two tastes. I recovered only after half a year. The doctors told me that it was a very, very rare condition.”

Also some other migrants (like many Poles in general) who came to Finland years later spontaneously reported what they had been doing on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1981 – back then still living in Poland. This is indicative of to what extent the lives of migrants are shaped by and transnationally connected to the lives and events in Poland. Even despite migration and distance, at critical historical points the life stories of those who left and those who stayed behind have many converging points. Here the commonality was marked by anxiety and distress stemming from the deprivation of contact. Particularly Henryk’s story shows that the state of uncertainty can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Undeniably it was also a part of the everyday life of the loved ones staying in Poland. As Henryk emphasizes it was of

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<sup>13</sup> Henryk, like many other musicians at the time, came to Finland through the state agency for Polish musicians PAGART. The agency was one of the few options for musicians to go to work abroad legally. Yet the passports granted to them belonged to the agency thanks to the contract. After the contract was fulfilled they were obliged to return the passports back to the agency in Poland.

great importance for his family, parents and siblings, to finally get to know about his well-being. Afraid of paying a personal visit to Poland, he passed on the news through a Polish friend who had only Finnish citizenship and thus did not dread travelling back:

“My friend was going to Poland. He wanted to visit his mother. She is from Lublin [a Polish city]. So my father and brother travelled three hours to meet him there. He gave them the letter from me, told them about my life here, that I found work and so on. So they were finally relieved to get to know that I was all right, everything was going well and there were no problems.”

The changes in the opportunities for transnational communication came gradually. The collapse of communism impelled infrastructural development. New technological innovations started to enter global markets, including Poland. Competition induced a steady decrease in the costs of international phone-calls. Still, among the studied migrants verbal communication was a ritual linked more to family celebrations and traditions than everyday family activities until the mid-1990s, reserved for special events such birthdays, name days, religious holidays and emergency situations. Communication was also kept relatively brief and mostly one-directional. Only the wealthiest family members in Poland (or such relatives that were West-bound migrants themselves) could afford more frequent phone calls to Finland. Irena, who has already been mentioned and who finally joined her husband in Finland at the start of the 1990s, even if emphasizing that there was no comparison with the communist period, still recalls the first years of their settlement as a state of practical “cut-off” from family affairs in Poland: “when calling, we were aware that the conversation had to be kept short: five to ten minutes. So it was literally a fast track: all the best, how are things, how are the kids, how is the weather. And that was it.” The costs of telecommunication services were particularly budget-draining for the migrants who, as Irena and Andrzej, came right after the collapse of communism and who still had low financial resources during their initial settlement years. The migrants maintained more regular and frequent verbal interaction, from once a month to as often as several times a week, with those with whom they felt a particular emotional need and responsibility to stay in touch:<sup>14</sup>

Alina and Krzysztof (in Finland since 1990): “We called Krzysztof’s parents [...]. I called my nanny and my uncle’s former wife [...]. I always called around noon [...]. Then of course we called less often because it was costly and we were in the ‘start-up phase’, but always once, twice per month we had contact.”

Helena and Leszek (in Finland since 1990): “We had a regular telephone booth. It does not exist anymore. We were going to the nearby shop and buying the telephone card. The credits were running out almost immediately: the phone-calls were expensive and one card lasted for

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<sup>14</sup> This stands in contrast to the findings of Wilding (2006) on the multinational sample of immigrants to Australia. Until the mid-1990s letters in general were preferred here more as a means cheaper and more convenient to communicate than telephones. As one of the female newcomers said, the expense of phone-calls was hard to justify in the starting-up phase.

maybe 15 to 20 minutes. But once a week we always called. [...] We called home, to our parents. And we wrote a lot of letters, but mainly to siblings. “

When verbal communication was particularly sought for and at the same time not supplemented by any other form of communication, the financial costs were dramatically increasing. Karol, who has worked in Finland since 1989 and only recently reunited with his wife, called to her every single day from the onset of their separation. As a result he spent half of his Finnish salary on “getting by” and “half on the telephones.” At the end of the month “there was no money left.” This was possible importantly because as his prolonged stay in Finland, initially intended as temporary and economy-based, in the end ceased to be primarily determined by financial gain. Karol was caught in what could be called the vicious circle of migration; he remained in Finland in order not to lose his pension entitlements. Therefore the moneys he earned were devoted first of all to the communicative maintenance of their transnational marriage and only secondly for remittances. The expensive daily ritual of phone-calls also helped to counter the “unbearable loneliness” he had experienced:

“It was impossible to come home from work and not to call, it was just impossible. I do not know where it was coming from. But it was just impossible to do otherwise.... I do not drink. But even if one had a shot or two, it was worse. Then you wanted to call even more.”

A high financial input was considered a must also in response to changing family dynamics. The deterioration of one’s parents’ health brought about changes in the ritualized practices, including an increased temporal intensity of phone-calls and an adjustment of household budget expenses.

Finally, discussion of the economic burdens and transnational communication cannot omit the question of gender. Studies indicate that access to communication is uneven and determined by the power hierarchies within the household. By controlling financial resources some husbands limit their wives’ possibility of keeping in touch (Baldassar et al., 2007). In my study this was not the case with Polish married couples residing in Finland whose budget-related decisions tended to be based on the principle of partnership, even if the wife was unemployed for long periods and the husband was the exclusive breadwinner. However, in some Polish-Finnish marriages, where always initially the Polish wives did not have their own economic resources, the question of transnational communication but also of the financial support of the wives’ relatives in Poland was at least subjected to the consent of the Finnish husband. Nonetheless, interestingly, the approval of the latter was not always considered by the women. For instance Dorota reports: “I called of course. I did not care whether my husband would have had something against it or not. At the end of the month he was annoyed

with the telephone bill. But I ignored it and did my thing.“ This strongly indicates the need and importance of communication rituals, of family intimacy across borders against all odds.

### **Communication rituals in the era of new information and communication technologies (ICTs)**

I met with Henryk, now in his fifties, for an interview in 2007. We met in the local church but we arranged the where and when of our meeting via the mobile phone and internet messenger. When we entered his apartment, the very first thing Henryk tended to do was to turn on two devices: the TV with the Polish 24-hour news channel (the decoder was registered to his cousin in Poland) and a computer standing right in front of us on the small table. He instantaneously logged on to Skype. The setting of our talk was in this respect strikingly similar to all the others I have visited and studied. During the interview, while he was telling me about his communication and health struggles in the 1980s, his mobile phone went on. It was an alarm reminding him about his niece’s birthday, who, along with the rest of his extended family, still resided in Poland. “I have all the essential information on my mobile. Otherwise I would not remember anything.” And he added: “You see this is how it works now. I should call her in the evening with greetings.” The phone-call that he would make later that day would not be from the ordinary landline phone (as he no longer had one) or a mobile. He now calls to Poland almost for free through the Internet. Special family occasions, such as birthdays, make up for only a small fraction of his transnational contact. As his closest family lives under one roof it happens that several times per week he calls and talks to anybody who is available at the moment. The extremely cheap phone-calls from the Internet also allow him to chat extensively with his elderly mother on a weekly basis. As she does not use the Internet, she receives his call via a standard landline connection – a practice common among other migrants and their elderly parents. The technological shift came in a good time: several years ago his father passed away and his mother now needs somebody to talk to. Therefore Henryk calls her every Sunday afternoon when he knows she is already at home after completing her usual domestic duties. Then they “sit and talk, sometimes for an hour, sometimes for two.” She tells him “what has happened during the week, all the things, all the up-to-date information.” And he listens.

Needless to say, Henryk’s and many others’ transnational family life became intensive as never before along with the wide spread in the last decade of the new means of

communication and the interrelated decrease in phone bills. Families with the readiness incorporated changes into their ritualized activities. The conversations that used to be expensive and brief turned into a lengthy and even daily endeavor. Mobile telephony and the Internet became so ordinary for the migrants that their very existence “goes without saying.” Letters, pre-paid telephone cards (which Vertovec in 2004 called the “social glue” of small scale cross-border formations), life without not only mobiles but also landline telephones seems to be a part of a long-forgotten era, even if in fact it is a very recent reality. Dominika and Przemek, the newcomers, recall that when their computer – the central means of social contact with kith and kin in Poland - broke down “we were like sick, sick. Without the Internet it’s like without a hand!”

A ubiquitous bewilderment with the new technologies is unsurprising. They allow for an instantaneity of communication and an exchange of up to date knowledge about each other’s lives. The communication can be both verbal and visual. Thanks to web-cameras family members have the opportunity to enrich their transnational conversations with the “use of gesture, gaze and overall bodily compartment” (Hutchby, 2001.p.125). The interaction is almost as if embodied. As Irena says “seeing the face of the loved one finally gives you a sense of being close.” The change in the perception of the contact is visible if only on the level of language: verbs which were traditionally reserved for face-to-face encounters are used to describe the transnational communication. Instead of the weekly dinner rituals families can now actually ‘meet’ in the transnational space for equally lengthy gatherings. For instance Helena “meets” her sister online every Sunday. They “sit together,” see each other and chat. Leszek, Helena’s husband, laughs that in three hours they usually manage to “do the rounds” of the affairs of every single person in the family, “because there is the possibility.” Another Polish couple, Zofia and Wiktor, “drink” and “eat” via the Internet with their siblings in Poland at Christmas time.

Significantly, what can now be exchanged is not only vital information. The function of communication goes beyond “controlling the situation” of family affairs. There is time for everyday stuff, jokes, gossip, even playing games. The ritual aimed at the maintenance of family ties acquires features of social entertainment. The families’ vibrant social life is no longer limited to contact with family members who are physically close:

Zofia and Wiktor: “When you talk on the phone the topics repeat themselves sometimes. Computers took it even further. As a matter of fact when you talk for an hour or more, in the end there is nothing to talk about. Only if somebody likes to talk just for the sake of talking.

Usually the conversation starts to be totally relaxed. You start to tell jokes and the like, very trivial things.”

Jagoda (in Finland since 2005): ”My nephew bugs me constantly. ‘I am bored. Auntie please play with me.’ So I played with him yesterday on the Internet. To some extent I brought him up. He looks up to me, my brother’s son, a very intelligent boy.”

As a consequence migrants say that at present they “do not miss on anything.” The state of being “cut-off” which dominated the previous decades is substituted by the impression of “being in Poland, at the same place.”

The communication shift also means the possibility of employing multiple technologies to stay in touch equally intensively with a wide range of family members. Verbal and visual contact can be maintained with parents, siblings, cousins, nephews, nieces, the closest and more distant friends. In general the migrants reserve different modes and times of communication for different family members, depending upon such factors as the recipient’s infrastructural access, capability and individual preference. For instance, Jagoda, who has an extensive family circle in Poland, calls her disabled father on a landline phone every second day and is in a constant contact with her sisters and brothers via an Internet messenger,<sup>15</sup> while she corresponds only by e-mails with her mother-in-law.

As in the past, there are thus now communicative rituals aimed at nourishing particular relationships which have their clearly defined recipients and, if synchronous, fixed times of enactment. They are established in accordance with the everyday schedule of all the parties involved. For working migrants, weekends are the most common for transnational talks. However, an Internet messenger also offers the possibility for interaction which is spontaneous, non-scheduled and carried out with multiple persons simultaneously. The commencement of contact is based on noticing who is on the messenger at the moment. Although the conversation is initiated without a previous agreement, it is initiated with an awareness of the recipient being at least potentially accessible for the interaction. For Jolanta, who comes from a family of nine, this signifies having an instant and direct contact with all her siblings:

“Now everybody has a computer so we can talk through Gadu-Gadu. And it often happens that there are several persons online and send messages, and I have to send each and every one of them a response that I am talking with somebody else at the moment because they see me online and think I am available. So the Internet makes our life easier to the extent that now we are up-to-date with all the family affairs. We connect everyday.”

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<sup>15</sup> Polish migrants use two communicators: the Polish messenger Gadu-Gadu and Skype.



Irena: "Now I call to my mother every week. [...] To my mother-in-law approximately every second week [via Skype]. And sometimes I will just call whoever is there [online]. This is how it works."

The sense of constant connectivity is enhanced by the mobile phone. It is a technology that allows the family members to connect anytime anywhere, that is, of course, if the appropriate infrastructure is available. Considering the high costs of international mobile calls, its verbal function is used primarily in emergency situations. It entails discussion of the most urgent family problems which can now be resolved transnationally and are reached for usually in such instances when no other communication media is accessible. A mobile phone plays an important role particularly in the connectivity of the temporary labour migrants, who in comparison to the permanent ones have limited access to landline phones and the Internet. For their families in Poland a mobile is usually the only means through which they can initiate an immediate conversation and, if needed, look for the migrant's support and participation in family decision making. The predominant use of this technology comes in the form of text messaging. The SMS appears here in two distinctive roles. First of all it can be read as a mobile-specific, ritualized "way of maintaining ongoing background awareness of others, and of keeping multiple channels of communication open" (Ito and Okabe, 2006.p.264). According to Ito and Okabe, in contrast to telephone calls which demand undivided and focused attention SMSes are "predicated on the sense of ambient accessibility, a shared virtual space." They "do not require a deliberate opening of a channel of communication but are based on the expectation that someone is in earshot." (ibid.). In this sense they serve to reassure intimate and affectionate relationships, convey emotional presence and confirm a sense of togetherness regardless of distance on an ongoing base. Transnational family members achieve this through the exchange of messages which talk about their everyday doings as well as convey expressions of care and support:

Anna, the interviewer: "So you [and your wife] are still together?"

Tomek, a contract worker: "Well yes, at least until yesterday. Because yesterday I still got the sms [*Laugh*] [...]. They wrote they love, they miss, they wait."

For the migrant labour workers the significance of messages goes beyond the "lightweight awareness of connection with others" (ibid.). They are about keeping the "sanity" and giving meaning and sense to their tribulations and loneliness. They are the main, even if feeble, source of everyday emotional comfort and, similarly to letters, read recurrently. Through a SMS the migrants' matrimonial relationships are built everyday anew. In-between there is uncertainty. As in Tomek's accounts, the only tangible proof of the bond with his wife was from "yesterday."

The text messages also serve practical functions. The predominant one is the micro-coordination of interaction. SMSes are here the means of securing that the actual communication ritual takes place. Through a mobile telephone transnational family members, similarly to the local ones, adjust their itineraries, manage daily schedules and agree on meetings (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol and Qiu, 2007.pp.89-90). The only difference is that instead of taking place in a defined geographical place, such family meetings take place in a virtual transnational reality. Their possible delays and interruptions are also SMS-coordinated.

Text messages also provide a greater flexibility and spontaneity of interaction whether of casual or urgent character. It is common to send a SMS not only to exchange essential information but also to organize a low-cost conversation through the landline telephone or the Internet to discuss the matter in length. Oftentimes the principle is “first we send a message, then we talk.”

### **Communication through the new ICTs: the determinants of access**

Since generally migrants were until recently the ones who spent significant resources and effort on staying connected, from their viewpoint the most striking consequence of technological development is the increase in *their* possibility for tangible participation in family life. The question remains as to what extent this has actually given the communicative power to those who have stayed behind. Does the diversification and decrease in costs of contact combined with the overall economic advancement of the Polish society entail a democratization of family communication rituals? Does it afford their two-directionality and equal opportunities for all the parties involved to pursue the ties? The above sections already provided some hints on the matter.

The rapidly increasing mobile penetration indicates that families spanning Poland and Finland inhabit a space which is connected most intensively by mobile telephony. According to Puro (2002.p.28) “every child in Finland learns that there is one name, Nokia, that is somehow very special in Finnish life. It is something monumental and important and affects everyone’s life in Finland.” At the beginning of 2007 there were 107 mobile phone subscriptions per a population of 100 in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2007). In 2006 only seven per cent of Finnish households did not have a mobile phone – the very top rank in the EU (Special Eurobarometer, 2006). In the third quarter of 2007 also Poland exceeded 100 per cent of mobile subscribers, with the mobile penetration level reaching 105,1 per a population of 100.

This means the further prevalence of the mobile over landline telephone, and a decrease in the number of Polish households without the former. In 2006 they amounted to 25,9 per cent. Mobile phones are also increasingly accessible to the lower social strata (Central Statistical Office of Poland, 2007c). Providing its ubiquity and technological affordances, the mobile phone therefore becomes the most common tool eradicating the transnational communicative imbalance. As already mentioned, mainly through text messages, it allows not only the migrants themselves but also the family members in Poland to initiate contacts, enact their family membership, provide care and affection, actively deal with distance-generated uncertainty and to express expectations of support from the migrants. A message from a relative in Poland also seems to be sufficient to prompt the migrant's instant phone-call response. This indicates that family members recognize who has the appropriate material resources and thus the obligation to make the financially more demanding communicative effort. The incident below accurately epitomizes the state of two-directional perpetual connection initiated by the SMS. Here it allowed Zofia's sister in Poland to enact affective care and sisterly solidarity and, for them both, to achieve an emotional comfort:

Zofia: "It happened when we were on a trip to Sweden. We were sitting on a bus to Uppsala, waiting for the departure. Suddenly I got a message from my sister saying: 'Zofia I am asking how are things because I got to know' - she even did not write from whom - 'that you are terminally ill.' So I got really scared. 'Terminally' - it is such a 'terminal' word. I called her from the mobile right away. I asked 'What are you writing about, where did you come up with such ideas?' And she said that our cousin approached her on the street that day and asked what was happening with Zofia in Finland, because the rumour had it that she was mortally sick. And my sister thought 'God forbid, mortally sick!' So I am reassuring her that, no, no, I am not sick, everything is all right. We are in Sweden now, on a bus. So she says 'Thank God, what a relief. Because I could not sleep! I had to get to know right away [if it is true].'"

The only group which seems to be excluded from this text-message practice are the migrants' elderly kin. Although there are increasing numbers of subscribers to mobile phones in Poland among older people, with the percentage of its users amounting to 20,7 for the age cohort 65-74, and some parents of adult migrants indeed have a mobile, they rarely if ever use its text function. Being usually low on financial resources, the elders are therefore excluded from one of the cheapest options to connect.

Apart from the mobile phone, another technological tool which potentially grants greater equality in the information exchange is the Internet. Combined with text messaging it undermines the privilege of migrants as the people who decide whether to initiate a phone-call and who bears its economic responsibility. Yet, Internet penetration rates in Poland, although gradually increasing, are still lower than in Finland and in general lag behind the rates of mobile telephony. Looking at the most recent figures, the difference between the countries is

significant: in Finland, in spring 2007, 79 per cent of 15—74 year-olds used the Internet, and as much as 75 per cent were active (at least once per week) users (Statistics Finland 2007); in Poland, on the other hand, in 2007 only 39 per cent of 16-74-year-olds were active users, with 52 per cent of the 16-74-year-old population having used the Internet at least once in their lifetime (Central Statistical Office, 2007a). Accordingly, whereas the majority of the migrants studied were active Internet users, only some of their non-mobile kin were. The relatively high financial input is one of the important but not exclusive factors which inhibit Internet availability. Again a new set of skills and relevant health capabilities are needed. These two factors excluded a considerable share of the migrants' relatives from the group of active, or else autonomous, Internet users. Overall in Poland as much as 97 per cent of the population above 60 years of age and nearly 90 per cent of the households with the lowest incomes do not use the Internet (in comparison, the use of Internet is at 68 per cent in households with the highest incomes) (Central Statistical Office, 2007c). Additionally 85 per cent of 15-74-year-olds do not know how to make a call from the Internet (ibid.). In consequence many kin depend on the assistance of others to use the Internet or to gain access to it. The recurrent story is of a parent who once in a while goes to the migrant's sibling specifically to have a visual and virtual meeting with their adult children in Finland. The parents' loss of physical abilities is however enough to eliminate this practice. All things considered they are unchangingly dependent on the migrants to call. They are usually the ones who wait and the migrants are still the ones who have the privilege, by the means of verbal contact, to act habitually upon their transnational relationship:

Anna: "Hasn't your mother wished you would call more?"

Felicja: Maybe. But I would assume it is because of the age. The other day when I called she exclaimed: Oh, you have not called me for such a long time! And long was for instance two weeks ago [...]. But one might say that people just are like this when they grow older, maybe some general moments of bitterness."

It is partially for the awareness of the parents' financial constraints and their waiting for the possibility to talk that the ritual of phone-call is established. The call in reversed direction (from Poland to Finland) is usually reserved for emergency situations.

In the end, uneven access is one of the main reasons why new forms of communication did not utterly supersede the old ones (see also Baldassar et al., 2007). A limited use of technological innovations does not mean an inability to tangibly pursue family ties. The ritual of letter writing is still practiced. This includes its short form, the postcard (Barton and Hall 2000.p.2). Postcards, particularly for migrants, are usually "a must" when it comes to special

family occasions such as birthdays, name days and holidays. They are exchanged with the kin who do not have the Internet (otherwise the greetings were sent via e-mail), and often complement a phone-call. They serve the general purpose of acknowledging family membership and the importance of particular relations. Letter correspondence on the other hand has become a less common ritual. For couples skilled in new technologies letters seem to acquire a special meaning. It is a tool reserved to express love and affection. When Karol's and Barbara's marriage was on the verge of a breakdown, apart from the extensive phone-calls, Karol wrote to his wife in length. "I had never thought he could write such letters," Barbara says. Others initiate more systematic correspondence as they do not adapt new technologies but still have the writing capacity and the desire to actively draw on the family connections. The letters allow the non-migrants to look for transnational support and assistance which most likely would not have been granted otherwise:

Karol: "My mother's sister, she is 87, has been writing to me for several years now. And we [Karol and his wife] constantly send her money because she writes openly: send me some money. So we have been sending her one time for medicines, other times for something else. And she continuously writes to me and begs me to take her home when I return to Poland. She says she wants to die where my mother has died, that is in our hometown."

First Karol himself, then his wife had always been writing back to the aunt. In general, the history of reappearance, whether of letter or calls, provides the people back in Poland with certain assurance that the family bond is sound and the contact will continue. The fragility of such tacit agreement and thus of their position comes to light when the ritual is interrupted, even if only temporarily, by the better located migrants. As was noted at the beginning, Karol's aunt, Felicja's mother and many others still have limited means to exercise their transnational relationship:

Karol: "When we were recently on holidays abroad she [the aunt] wrote us a letter [to Finland] and nobody responded of course, because we were not there. So now she complains that we have probably abandoned her, that we have forgotten about her, that she is old and nobody wants her. But that is not true. [...] one has to go on holidays once in a while, doesn't one?"

### **Control and struggle in the "safe haven" of rituals**

Notwithstanding the asymmetrical access, in the transnational setting the everyday communication rituals are a powerful tool for dealing with solitude and longing, of ensuring the family well-being. Yet only ideally are those rituals what Wolin and Bennett (1984.p.419) referred to as a "safe haven" for the family members. For, by enabling a "smooth continuity of family roles" (ibid.), the rituals in question also help to reify the unequal power relations of abuse, control and conflict. Nowadays more than ever these can thrive in a transnational space. Technological developments bring about what was hardly possible among the families

separated during the previous waves: personal contact and surveillance across borders on a daily basis. Here I would like to point to other “burdens” than the ones the most discussed i.e. the ones underpinned by economic hierarchies (see for instance Horst, 2006; Pribilsky, 2004; Mahler, 2001). The Polish-Finnish case, which entails that the transnational family relations often are of relative material independence, sets at the forefront other forms of dependence, power struggle and conflict. They are not only economically, but also emotionally and affectively based.

Practically from the beginning of Patrycja’s and Robert’s marriage, that is over ten years now, Robert spent a part of each year in manual labour abroad. He worked for various periods of time in various countries, in the last years recurrently in Finland. Patrycja took care of their three children. He was the family’s exclusive breadwinner. His jealousy and control of her whereabouts, of her detailed spending and of her social conduct permeated all their marriage. During his stay abroad he attempted to maintain similar dominance. They contacted every single day. They talked on the Internet during his break at work: meetings were scheduled for the exact hour and additionally they had a constant contact via text messages. As a consequence her life in Poland was to a great extent determined by his Finnish schedule and its requirements. She was expected to appear online every time it was agreed upon and to respond to every message he sent starting from the very morning.

Since the introduction of mobile telephony and the Internet, Patrycja’s and Robert’s interaction pattern is not so uncommon among transnational couples (see also Horst, 2006). It is enabled by the very nature of technological innovations, which, ironically, rather strengthen than dramatically change the existing family relations (Castells et al., 2007.p.87). Domination and control which were earlier exerted by the vigilant social network at home can now be enacted personally despite the embodied absence. It is particularly the mobile phone that does allow for spatially extended surveillance. As Ito and Okabe (2006.p.265) argue, its introduction has created “new disciplines and power geometries.” There is now a tacit obligation to have a turned-on mobile wherever you go, and to make yourself always available to the family, friends and lovers. As a consequence, even in the case of the seemingly undemanding text messaging, the social expectation emerged of a quick and similar response (ibid.). The scheduling of frequent conversation on the Internet additionally allows enforcing the kin’s immobility. In the studied (multi)nuclear families, those who attempted surveillance were always those who had left: the male labour migrants. They were

the families' main economic resource and their remittances allowed for a financially smooth life in Poland. Thus at least in these terms their privileged location and power was indisputable, even if some wives had at their disposal also their own meager income in Poland.

However, the ritual of communication, by the very fact of its repetition and anticipative character, is also a potent field for manipulation and hierarchical struggle. In social life there is always space for resistance. Family roles are never written in stone, and the material power is not the only one that counts. The affective attachment and emotional dependence can also be influential (see Dallos and Dallos, 1997). The female spouses I talked to emerge with a range of subversive practices challenging the husbands' attempts to dominate and control. This happened especially through a conscious manipulation of the regular interaction pattern. Ironically, the benefits of the latest technologies which gave the migrants a means of control, also gave their non-migrant wives a possibility to resist. Barbara's and Karol's case serves as an example of the phenomenon.

As previously mentioned, during the seventeen years of their separation, Karol called his wife as often as a couple of times a day. She had a landline telephone and additionally Karol bought her a mobile – one of the very first models that appeared in Finland. The key topics of their telephone conversations were not remittances as is often reported by other transnational studies. Instead they talked about “What she was doing, where she was and when she would get back home.” Karol trusted his wife with the expenses, but not with her private conduct. He acted according to his rule “Without jealousy there would be no marriage.” The constant phone-calls and inquires annoyed Barbara:

“I was losing my nerves. Because how long can one talk constantly about the same? One is so overworked, underslept, with millions of problems, overwhelmed. And additionally one has to listen to some unjustified and senseless complaints from afar. “

As a consequence she was breaking the social rule of their telephone ritual: when Karol called she was deliberately failing to pick up the phone or, in extreme situations, she was just turning it off (with the mobile she could screen the calling number). The periods of silence lasted up to several days. They were an emotional torment for Karol. “When she turned off the phone it was the worst for me. My imagination started to run wild.”

Similar anxiety is a part of the transnational experience of other migrant workers. Messages not responded and unanswered phone calls bring about a state of uncertainty: distrust and suspicion of the spouses' imagined promiscuity. There is an expectation of explanation and an expression of regret for validating the tacit rules in the quote below. As the non-reciprocity of communication accumulated it sometimes took time to resume the ritual:

Igor, a temporary labour migrant: "I sent the SMS [to my wife]. I waited: first message, second message, third message – no response. Only after two days did I get an answer. She started to write back, vaguely, I felt she was angry, I just did not know why. [...] So this time I became offended and waited for her response, to explain to me what was going on. In the end the situation somehow resolved itself. She apologized and told me: 'I am sorry, everything is ok'."

Another migrant half-jokingly pointed out that his wife still maintained contact and sent him affectionate messages only because he "was still profitable for the family." A sense of affective dependence underpinning the ritual of communication is implicit here. In the end also Patrycja attempted to resist her husband's surveillance. At some point she turned their everyday SMS-ritual into a mockery. Responding to her husband's demand of sending him messages right after she wakes up Patrycja commenced reporting her most basic and mundane morning activities.

As the above shows, the everyday rituals in the era of constant connectivity bestow those who left with the possibility of pursuing a kind of overbearing relationship which, from their perspective, would make up for their physical absence and on-site management. By the same token it also allows the non-migrants to keep a grip on or else create new forms of detrimental ties with the kin living abroad. This is particularly problematic if the migrants move to escape from negative relationships. For instance, Dominika always had rather unpleasant relations with her mother-in-law. Her husband, on the other hand, was always very close with his mother. Things have changed little after they arrived in Finland. Although the mother - an active user of technological innovations - is not with them physically, through daily Internet and mobile communication her presence is almost tangibly discernible. When Przemek speaks to her on the Internet her voice via the loudspeakers permeates the domestic space: "So many thousands of kilometers and she still harasses me. When she says something about me, I am bouncing with anger. I am walking nervously around the apartment."

It is not only the fact that technology allows non-migrants constant contact. I would suggest it is also that in the contemporary transnational context not staying frequently in touch can no longer be justified by "a legitimate excuse" of being afar. Before, scarce transnational



communication was expected and understandable. Once in a while “it was just positive that one would call” as Irena said. However, there is the implicit expectation that the pattern of interaction would be adjusted to the means available. For Dominika it means hearing her mother-in-law more often than her own mother who was the only one in the family who did not have the Internet.

In this chapter I indicated that in a transnational family the majority of interactions takes place in disembodied form. “To know” tends to be one of the crucial functions of transnational communication rituals. ”Living all the time in uncertainty of what is going on there - I think I would not stand that. I would have to know... I would desperately look for some way to have contact with my family. A man cannot live by bread and water alone.” – Zofia’s words reflect a common stance. Contact on the Internet and on the phone serves these ends well. But it is the visits to Poland (as well as to Finland) which could be regarded as the ritual highlight of transnational life. I will turn now to their specific role in kinship bonding.

## **Chapter 6 The ritual of visits**

At first it could be assumed that today the possibility of continuous verbal and visual communication would decrease the importance of visits. At earlier times visits afforded the most intensive, instantaneous and comprehensive exchange of information and care. Vibrant family life can now be played out in a virtual space. Long periods of partition do not preclude active and up-to-date involvement in the loved ones' affairs. Still the high value of embodied contact has remained unchanged. Visits are the things most awaited, planned and talked about. Not only the recent but also the old-time migrants, along with discovering the Internet and the mobile, enthusiastically explore the latest transportation possibilities. Despite the change in the historical and technological context, visits continue to be the most appreciated tool of building family transnationally. The telephone and video-mediated interaction give only the impression of being close. Visits thus serve as the prime gauge by which the Polish migrants evaluate the advantageousness of their transnational position.

The visits' key features, the frequency, time-span, geographical direction, goal and who travels, varies depending on a given family, its internal dynamics and the material, occupational and historical location. The visits to different extents inscribed in the family's socio-cultural fabric. On average visits are a ritual enacted by kin once or twice per year. Mostly it involves travels to Poland or/and to Finland during summer and holiday seasons. In five cases, though, it was even a bimonthly (and sometimes monthly) endeavor. Every meeting and virtual contact I had with the migrants was always in-between the acts of transnational mobility: some of them had just come back from Poland, others were about to go there, somebody just visited from Poland or a visit was expected. The rhythm of my study was tuned to this transnational life. The interviews were scheduled several weeks in advance. In this chapter I would like to address two key issues: the transnational practices preceding and directly related to the very movement and the historically situated character and functions of visits. I will refer to visits of return (on the same theme see also Baldassar et al., 2007, pp.137-171; Duval, 2004; Salih, 2003, pp.52-83; Baldassar, 2001) as well as to the no less important reunions in Finland.

### **Planning, waiting and imagining the visits**

Visits could be regarded as straightforward acts of embodied mobility and personal meetings. Here, however, I would like to refer to their other, equally important dimension: the formal

practices and work of imagination which precede the travel. It is impossible to write about the visits without noticing that it is a ritual particularly extended in time, even if the reunions themselves are short and infrequent. Apart from the situations, unexpected and unforeseen, the visits are usually imagined, anticipated and acted upon months before their actual enactment. These practices constitute a significant part of the transnational get-together in the making, practices which additionally connect the family members across borders.

Because visits demand out-of-ordinary temporal and money input, a specific organizational arrangement is required. Formally they start with the act of planning: scheduling work, taking days off, agreeing about it with the other family members. It is followed by reserving the tickets, notifying the rest of kith and kin and purchasing the gifts. These practical preparations add up to the tangibility of transnational family life. For instance, when I met Jagoda in October, she already showed me the toys for the nieces and nephews which she would take to Poland for Christmas. For months she had been asking her siblings about the most desired gifts. Alina and Krzysztof have been meeting with their friends for a dinner in a Polish restaurant once per year for the last fifteen years. They made it a ritualized part of their visits to Poland. Days before leaving from Finland they would book the table by phone. Of course the relatives in Poland also plan and discuss their summer visits to Finland a lot in advance. The specific schedules of both parties are adjusted:

Zofia: "Three years ago my sister was here [in Finland] with all her family. They had a wonderful time. This year they were very eager to visit us again. Everything was very much planned. But unexpectedly my sister got a job. And her leave of absence collided with her husband's. They could not reschedule so they did not come. We sat all our vacations at home because we had thought that they would visit. We did not plan anything else."

Later on Zofia and Wiktor told me about their already agreed trip to Poland. They would take it in four months:

"We will fly on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December. Just the two of us. We want to stay over for New Year's Eve. We were supposed to go much earlier but it was impossible to get out of work. It is understandable that one is limited by the days off. Besides it would be improper to abuse the politeness of the supervisors. So we have already planned that we would go after Christmas. Only my boss still does not know about it." [Laugh]

Because visits involve the physical crossing of national borders they are strictly bounded by geopolitical configurations, specifically the system of migration regulations between the countries. During communism the bureaucratic tribulations particularly prolonged the ritual. The characteristics of the system and its politics of exit here entail a shift of focus from the migrants themselves to those who stayed behind. They were the ones who stood in the queues, dealt with the bureaucrats, filled in numerous forms and in general waited for the

formal permission to meet their loved ones abroad. If looked from a traditional migration perspective, an account of these mundane activities, pursued with an essentially transnational orientation in mind, could be easily obscured.

For Irena the annual summer travel with children to see her husband in Finland started already in the winter season. It involved several stages. Since a passport was only a one-time document issued for a specific trip, she had to go through exactly the same procedure each and every year. And every year “it was equally difficult.” The procedure lacked clear regulation and unless one had appropriate social connections, the outcome was always unsure. All the drudgery could be in vain:

“The waiting itself lasted three months. And always there was this uncertainty: you will get it [the passport] or you will not. Because my husband was in Finland as a University delegate, first I had to go to the University’s Department of Foreign Affairs to get an official letter. The letter would state that my husband stays in Finland from this date to this date, he does this and that and the department gives consent for me visiting him together with children during the holidays. I also had to get the documents from the primary school and from my work. All this procedure usually took two months or so. Then, with all the documents ready, I had to go to the police and submit an application for the passport. This was taking another one month. And only after that, finally, could I go to Warsaw to the Finnish embassy to apply for a visa. This of course prolonged the procedure for another month. So it was an amazing amount of bureaucracy, indeed a funny one. In the end one somehow managed to get it done, but how much of nerves it cost, it is even hard to describe.”

Irena was always granted a passport. But there were others whose applications were rejected several times. The meetings were worth the effort. Inevitably every step of the unwelcome paperwork and long hours spent in a queue were accompanied by imagining the visit yet to come. “We lived and breathed the perspective of vacations that we would be [together]” says Irena. It is also through this prism that the burden of the formalities should be read. Additionally, Polish people were well trained in the humility of queuing. Fixing the passport and visa might have been frustrating, but so were many other activities of social life.

The collapse of the communist system enabled the family members in Poland to obtain passports without any legal obstacles. The year 2004 brought about a further loosening of regulations within the European Union. Crossing recently the border, Helena’s father could not believe he only needed a regular identity document to visit his daughter in Finland. The actual meetings are nonetheless still relatively scarce. The practice of “mindwork” has not disappeared from the transnational repertoire, even if the formalities which would enhance them have practically disappeared. Waiting has remained one of the key terms used to describe the family life. The visits are continuously a matter of thought and virtual discussion.

One of the most explicit customs in this respect is the counting-down ritual. Igor, a temporary labour migrant, left his wife and 8-year-old daughter Karina in Poland. He was always a central figure in Karina's life. When Igor went to Finland, she started to mark in the calendar days left to his recurring arrivals.

Igor: "My daughter got cross with me recently. Because I had earlier told her I would come at the beginning of January. And I came somewhere in the middle of the month. And she was marking the days and complaining to me on the phone: 'When will you come?! When will you come?!'. My wife explained to me that according to her counting I should already have been there [in Poland]. And I flew in a little bit later."

Other migrant workers told me that this practice is also a "normal thing" for them. The bulk of their time, during leisure and at work, they spend envisioning what they would do after coming back from Finland and how they would use the money earned. In fact, the everyday life of male migrants whose families all stayed in Poland, whether migrants from the recent or much earlier periods, could be characterized as mentally disconnected from the Finnish "here" and "now." Their minds have been set on a place which they unequivocally called "home." Their orientation towards the future has been more visible when crucial holiday breaks have been approaching. In case of Igor his forthcoming visit (and a break from work) to Poland was planned to last to up to six months:

Igor: "Two months ago I missed my wife terribly. But now, when I know that at least for the time being, after three weeks I am done with the work here, I do not miss her so much. Now I know that I will be at home soon, everything is planned. We are going for a two-week vacation in the mountains. Of course I know plans may change, but everything is fixed to the extent that I know at least April will be great... So now I feel as if I was at home already. Almost. My wife is also more at ease now; we look at the whole situation differently... For this half a year I do not intend to take up any job whatsoever. My brother-in-law called me, already prompting me to come back because he needs help at work. But I told him: no way... I can party with him but I am not going to work. Well maybe if I get really bored I will, for one month."

Andrzej, a researcher (in Finland in the 1980s): "I remember that all my activity here was reduced to sitting at the university from dawn till dusk. I was leaving to work early in the morning and coming back in the evening to a dark and empty dormitory. I was a science enthusiast. But after a while my mood started to decline, a slight depression struck. From some point there was only the waiting for Christmas, the anticipation of coming back home."

The above shows that waiting can be a central transnational practice and this is regardless of the time spent on communication and being together virtually. It has the power of uniting and enhancing family belonging. In the extreme cases studied waiting seems to hijack all other social activities. This happens when the given relationship emotionally preceded all others, when those away were perceived as the most important, if not exclusive, sources of affective support. Perhaps not accidentally the relevant instances in my study regard only the non-migrant elderly kin, people stricken with illness:

Jagoda: "For our [Jagoda's and her daughter's] first visit to Poland we had to wait for five months. And it turned out that my dad was in hospital then. He was waiting for us so much,

counted the days for our arrival that he just did not stand it; physically and mentally he did not endure the waiting. Eventually he ended up in hospital for a very long time. So our welcome was sad. But afterwards he got better: my daughter has just healed him. He fell in love with her. When you are happy you recover faster.”

Karol: “We sent my aunt our photos. She writes that she had put them behind the glass of the old sideboard. And that she looks at us, praying when we would take her. And waits, and waits.”

Hanna: “My mom is in a very serious condition now. She undergoes physical rehabilitation in the rest home.... I just cannot not go [to Poland] to visit her. She expects that we will come; she lives from one of our visits to the other. So how am I supposed to not go?”

The ritualized pattern of meetings often underpins the anticipation. The migrants themselves, and the children, spouses and parents left behind “get used” to being together for specific times such as holidays and summer vacations, annually or even monthly. Therefore there is “nervousness and apathy,” even “shock” when the visit cannot take place. It becomes, as one female migrant put it, “a habitual desire that did not come true.”

Because of the power lying in repetition, fairly parallel to the communication ritual, an interruption of the pre-agreed regularity of visits can also be used to affect the family relations more deliberately. Most importantly in times of matrimonial crisis or major family celebrations the “expected” meetings are sometimes intertwined with “unexpected” ones. Surprise return visits are intended as the most valuable gift, a way to emphasize the significance of the given relationship, to express love and care and to strengthen the family bonds. Always welcomed with a great positive “unbelief,” they are remembered, cherished and talked about. Because they do not involve any customary mutual pre-arrangements, they seem to be paid as if casually, as if made in a local not transnational context. Therefore the key symbolic force of surprise visits can be found in their fervent refutation of distance. On the other hand though, within marriage the surprise visit can be also read as a means of control.

### **“The quest for a Golden fleece”**

A quick look at the map of Europe may give the impression that Finland and Poland are located in a geographical proximity, divided only by the Baltic Sea. Yet for years Finland has turned out to be a place relatively distant from Poland for both the migrants themselves and their families left behind. One of the migrant’s kin, after paying a visit, called it ironically “Finland, that is the end of the world.” Arguably the country’s imagined remoteness was a consequence of its geopolitical position vis-à-vis Poland, including the insignificance of the

Polish-Finnish migration stream. The cheapest options of travel, by ferry (eventually cancelled in 1994) or by car through the Soviet Union (later on the former Soviet Republics) or Sweden were time-consuming, tiring and even dangerous. Until recently there were also very few air connections between the countries. Going to Finland was “a huge expedition.” In the 1980s it took Irena and her children three days to reach her husband in Finland. First with loads of luggage – as they usually stayed in Finland for three months - they traveled for seven hours by train to the harbour city from which the ferry to Finland used to depart. There they stayed at Irena’s aunt’s for the night. The ferry departed the following morning. After two nights at sea (with a stopover in Sweden) they finally arrived in Finland. When summer was over they took the same route back to Poland. Plane travel was beyond the family’s financial reach. The trip was paid for by Irena’s husband. Because of the favourable if irrational currency converter<sup>16</sup> the ticket price constituted only a small fraction of his still relatively meager researcher salary in Finland. For Irena it equaled one year of her Polish earnings as a part-time teacher: “some absolutely amazing amount of money.” This was a reflection of the more general condition of mobility at the time. If the people in Finland could not afford or were not willing to provide the visit’s sponsorship, and furthermore acknowledge it in a formal invitation (stating that they were ready to financially provide for the relatives during their stay), coming to Finland was near impossible for those with an average salary in Poland. “Even the idea was unthinkable that one can just simply go to visit somebody here” recalls one of the old-time migrants. On the other hand, even until the end of the 1990s, the general high costs of visits combined with not always the best material situation of some migrants in Finland (even if good in comparison to their Polish counterparts) also made the travels back to Poland difficult. On top the migrants did not always welcome them with great emotional willingness. During the end of the 1970s and 1990s Poland was generally perceived as a “dark,” even “nightmarish” place. But the need to see the family was often stronger. People went to great lengths to facilitate the process. They explored new routes and developed new practices. Every journey enriched their transnational “know-how” of how to reach Poland faster, more comfortable and cheaper. Their transnational habitus thus involved not only knowledge of the “here” and “there” but also the ever improving skill of how to enable the transition between two places, how to physically move in a transnational space. As Zofia and Wiktor say, their past return visits, just like the ones made by Irena to Finland, were as if “the

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<sup>16</sup> There was no fixed, official exchange currency rate. The main unofficial gauge was the price of vodka. Furthermore the buying and selling of dollars was possible only on the black market. In a formal and legal way dollars could be given only from a bank to a specific person, in a specific amount, if going abroad, for a specific trip (Dziegiel, 1998).

quest for a Golden fleece.” The couple always went by car but despite this relatively meager means of transportation, travel was always money-consuming and highly stressful. It started with the bumpy road through the visa-requiring Soviet Union, later on the post-Soviet states. “It was scary even to stop” Karol recalls. Until around 1996 he always wore a vest with many pockets for the travel. In each pocket he had a wad of dollars. Each wad was for the guards at the subsequent borders, who wished to extort a bribe. “It was enough that they had spotted the Finnish plates.” Others tried the available international trains and buses; or chose longer, nearly three-day passages via Sweden. These trials always generated multiple anecdotes, produced new traditions and as such entered the annals of the transnational family history. They became a constitutive part of a new family identity rooted in mobility.

The anecdotes told post-factum were often a mixture of exhilarating and extremely discouraging experiences. The journey was particularly daunting for those who like Zofia and Wiktor originated from the South of the country:

Wiktor: “It was very tedious and wearisome: not the stay itself but the travel. Two days on the road one way. It is an enormous stress to go through Poland by car. It is so stressful that when one finally arrives, dead-beat, and thinks that soon one has to go through exactly the same once again, all the spirit is gone.”

Zofia: “Sometimes I lost my nerves and cried.”

Wiktor: “And I was cursing. It was just impossible otherwise.”

Clearly even with the substantial economic differences between the countries, residence in the West (in this case Finland) did not automatically grant easy access to mobility. Especially in the initial process of settlement migrants had to face the dilemma of either having an investment in the process of economic adaptation or visits to Poland. In many cases the need to go prevailed, in others the focus was placed on the Finnish “here.” Some migrants did not travel to Poland for up to several years. For instance Irena, after the final reunification with her husband in Finland, decided to put her heart into building their new house instead of visits. “We were low on budget. But if one wants, one will do everything to go. I just did not have such a strong internal pressure: ‘I have to go.’” In this situation migrants rather preferred to invite their kin to Finland for various periods of time (up to half a year and longer). Even if they sponsored the travel, they avoided the additional expenses inevitable while being in Poland: the tacit obligation of buying gifts, leisure consumption and sometimes a wish for conspicuous material display. In an equally satisfactory manner these visits allowed for the positive resolution of the need for embodied family interaction, and, interestingly, also contributed to the migrants’ rooting in Finland. This happened when the visitors participated



in house reconstructions or helping in caring responsibilities thus enabling the migrants to pursue their professional careers. It is one among many exemplifications that transnational and integration processes not only do not exclude but may even reinforce each other.

In terms of visits “things started to change” after 1989 and even more after the 2004 EU enlargement. Poland-to-Finland migration intensified; the countries became closer politically, economically, and by association, geographically. New flight connections emerged, the ticket prices decreased tremendously<sup>17</sup>, the construction of the highway “Via Baltica” was launched. The troublesome border guards between the former Soviet Republics lost their function. Migrants eagerly started to engage in transnational mobility. After the aforementioned long break, Irena went to Poland in the last two years already three times. “I just spotted a cheap flight and decided to go.” Zofia and Wiktor plan to fly to Poland for Christmas – it will be their first return trip by plane, and the first Christmas away from Finland since they moved. They adamantly said that finally they will not have to miss out on most of the family occasions. Some migrants appear in Poland even up to six times per year. The post-accession transnational elite, like Jadwiga and her husband, a manager in a multinational company, have frequent travels back home granted in their contracts. When I talked to Igor, a labour migrant, he was about to get a promotion. A small one, but considering the low ticket prices, sufficient to afford very frequent return visits. He optimistically speculated:

“With my wife we have somehow managed to survive the period of long separation. Now it will be much better. We will see each other more often and then everything will be okay; we will stand the separation with ease. Without problems I will be able to spend 600 zł [approximately 150 euro] once a month for a ticket. And the distance is not so big. Three hours and I am at home [a city in central Poland]. Generally everything starts to work out [for me] now.”

Igor therefore imagined a near-to-ideal transnational arrangement. This concurs with the idea that it is not the very family separation but how it is worked out that (in the migrants’ subjective perspective) is detrimental. The above also points to an important process of democratization of the migrants’ access to mobility (as being a transnational migrant not necessarily means that one does not stay put, even for prolonged periods of time).

When it comes to those left behind, they also slowly become a part of what can be called a borderless sense of the world (even if only apparently). As a consequence of the overall

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<sup>17</sup> Even in January 2004 the only direct connection with Finland was from Warsaw, two-three times per day. The price of a return ticket started from 400 euros. In the second half of 2007 during the summer season there were direct flights also from Gdansk and Krakow, several times per day. The return ticket could now be obtained even for as little as forty euros.

material advancement of the Polish society, the enormous economic gap which previously divided the countries, and thus the family members, gradually disappears. Although obviously there are still relatives who are economically disadvantaged, or whose situation has even deteriorated, it is no longer “unthinkable” to come to Finland on one’s own expense. The wealthier kith and kin are able to “drop by” in Finland almost as if casually. Travel abroad is imaginable and relatively accessible. To quote Hanna and Tadeusz, one of the more mobile couples, whose “doors to the house in Finland are always open”:

“Times have changed .... Now people are coming [to visit us] by their own cars. For the Pole now to spend 40 zloty in Poland is exactly the same as to spend ten euro in Finland. Which is like nothing. And you have to buy the gas somewhere, and everywhere it costs the same.”

Although the above quote arguably refers to the Polish middle and upper class rather than the society in general, the change in opportunities of movement is discernible. Even more distant relatives pay their first visit to Finland. The less well-off manage to come without help from their wealthier migrant relatives.

Poland’s shift to a capitalist economy is also significant in other ways. Compared to Poland Finland used to be “colourful” and affluent in consumer goods, but now the hierarchy has somewhat reversed. Migrants are positively astonished with the rapid development of the Polish economy, with the range of consumption choice and growth of infrastructure. Because they visited the country more or less regularly, they could witness the process of change first hand. Mirka who left from Poland in the second half of the 1960s remarks:

“Communism was a terrible period and I even did not feel like going to Poland. But I was going. Even during the Martial Law I went to Poland. Only after 1989 life in Poland has changed. Since then travels were and are really pleasurable. I go with eagerness.”

### **Visits: “a toil” of family building**

Di Leonardo (1987) indicates that doing kinship, the creation and preservation of family relationships is labour. It demands time, skills and effort. In the transnational context visits, particularly those of return, are a practice where this aspect of family life is explicitly visible. Because close family ties are usually the main and most enduring force driving the migrants to Poland, the activities focused on nurturing them take a central place during the visits. More specifically, depending upon the aim, the visits can roughly be divided into three overlapping categories: general socializing and leisure; caregiving and celebrations. In Poland they are often intertwined with arranging the practical matters: visits to the doctor, hairdresser, shopping, tending to the administrative stuff, even obtaining a driving license. Also the partially tourist character of many return visits can be regarded as a part of kin work: travels

around Poland frequently take place in the company of non-migrant kin; if relatives live scattered around the country, visiting them becomes an opportunity for sightseeing. All in all it is primarily the interactions with the close ones, in the familiar places in Poland which allows migrants a positive “recharging of the batteries.” It is a labour, but in their subjective perspective, a gratifying one. As Wiktor puts it: “You know already before the visit how it will end up: you will be tired, worn-out. But then, after a while, you miss it, you want to go again. If only seeing your parents in a good health gives you a boost to live.” Such visits’ affirmative power is sufficient for several months or as much as several years.

The migrants go to Poland even if declaring that they habitually spend there anything but the “real” vacations: there is always little time for peaceful unwinding, little “time for oneself.” A stay in Poland is usually a “marathon,” tiring, physically exhausting. “We fly like a meteorite” Alina and Krzysztof report with amusement: “We go out in the morning, come back late in the evening.” Especially migrants who have an extensive tight-knit family, even more, if the family resides in different parts of Poland, the visits take the shape of hectic, planned to the last minute, “work” schedule of constant mobility:

Irena: “If you are not there physically it is great to visit. A couple of hours and you are back there again. You have plenty of family and friends and everybody wants to meet you and you want to meet everybody .... So [the last time] I achieved something amazing, impossible. Overall, for 12 days of stay in Poland I paid twenty visits to the kith and kin in my hometown, plus I have spent nearly 2 days in a train traveling hence and forth 600 km to visit my mother for 3 days. So on average I had three meetings per day. I even visited my friend for breakfast, because it was the only available time he had.”

Jolanta: “Every second holiday we tried to go somewhere else than to Poland. To catch some rays, to see something else, just to do something more than in Poland. Because in Poland it is only family, it is sitting at the table and eating, it is going from one relative to another, a bit here a bit there. But it is not a rest.”

Helena and Leszek:” The worst is [*laugh*] that when we come we are non-stop getting invitations from somebody, constantly we have to go somewhere, we are constantly on the move. We have a big family. All the siblings would like us to sleep at their place at least one night. One night at that one’s, the second at another’s, and in the end we are practically never at home. It is a marathon. In any case we try to visit at least the closest ones because otherwise they would get totally offended. They all live nearby and obviously they know for sure that we came. And we would like to have a bit of peace, spend some time by the lake, make a small trip to the seaside, anything. Of course, since we are on vacation, it is our break from work. And here unfortunately we have to constantly go and see somebody [*laugh*].“

The above social intensity is a consequence of what the migrants’ sense as an “obligation to meet.” Satisfying this obligation is one of the conditions allowing the preservation of positive family ties in a transnational context and averting estrangement and exclusion. It suggests the great weight family members invariably ascribe to embodied contact and its importance in

defining the boundaries and unity of a family. One strategy implemented to limit the meetings without running the risk of “offending” kin and of deterioration of ties is to notify only a select group of people about one’s arrival in Poland: spouses and children, parents, favourite siblings and cousins and best friends regarded as family. Here affection rather than sole genealogy decides with whom to primarily meet, ergo with whom the closest ties are maintained and how the immediate family circle is defined. Yet even then migrants have a difficulty in striking a balance between the different relationships. “We would like to be for everybody but it is just impossible” Zofia and Wiktor noticed. Parents are usually the ones who feel the most disadvantaged and neglected during the visits. They wish that their adult children were with them “constantly.” However this desire is fulfilled only when the migrants come for the sole purpose of care giving. Otherwise they regard such demands as “understandable” but easy to ignore. “We have to forgive them; after all, all parents are possessive” Wiktor concluded.

In one exceptional case of Ludwika, a female migrant from the end of the 1970s, a distant relationship with her parents and sister is the reason why when she goes to Poland, she meets mainly not with the family but with her two best friends who also revisit her regularly in Finland. She knows that in Poland she has “her place” nowhere else but at their homes: “In Poland I visit those who are close to my heart and with whom I am bonded the most. And with my parents it was only coldness, coldness, coldness.” When the loved ones pass away, the visits continue, although in a changed form. Visiting the cemetery becomes a part of the migrants’ everyday schedule while in Poland. They tend the graves, light candles and keep vigil:

Mirka: “Staying in Poland is all about visits. Firstly, there is the obligatory visit to my parents at the cemetery. My sisters go every week on Saturday. They bring fresh flowers. And it is also the first thing I do upon arrival. I throw away the luggage and run to the florists. I buy flowers and dash to the cemetery. Mikko [Mirka’s Finnish husband] always goes with me. And only afterwards are there meetings and meetings. But first of all there is always the visit to the cemetery.”

The ritual points to the memory of, and the respect for the departed. It brings comfort and a spiritual continuance of the relationship, a historical and cultural rootedness in the family. Importantly thus the death of the people left behind does not put a stop to the tangibility of the migrants’ transnational practices. It is not solely limited to the memory, symbolic attachment and transnational identification, but brings about an actual, active transnational involvement. The ritual of visiting the graves goes on for years after migration and, as some migrants declared, it stands behind their unequivocal orientation towards a permanent return. Yet not

everybody pursues this practice. The rule of affection tends to work also after the kin passes away. As Ludwika admitted, she had never visited her parents' graves: "Since there was no closeness during life, there is no reason there should be after death."

The labour of doing kinship through return visits is not only about time invested in particular relationships. I already indicated that in the face of the intensity of social interactions, visits may be also mentally and emotionally strenuous. This was characteristic of especially the past periods when technological underdevelopment affected the migrants' experience of family meetings. At this point we can see that transnational communication and the practices of visits are mutually interconnected. Several decades ago limitations on the disembodied contact created a sense of a definite absence from Poland and from participation in family affairs. Even in the first half of the 1990s "in order to know what was going on in Poland you had to be there." Surely, the slow exchange of basic information did not reflect the vibrancy of the family's social life back "home." It took place without the migrants' direct involvement. Return visits meant that suddenly they had to absorb everything accumulated during their absence: knowledge about the relatives' lives, gossip, multiple accounts of family conflicts and problems and disagreement. Zofia and Wiktor recall: "in these two or three years of break in our visits everything piled up there. And when we came we were given all that as if in one pill." In this sense the ties had to be "refreshed" with every single visit and up-to-date knowledge exchanged before a more everyday being-together could commence. Only then could the "relationships move forward." "It was draining us out" Zofia and Wiktor concluded. What the frequent transnational communication introduced was a continuity of interaction. As the migrants today can easily participate in the family affairs from afar in-between visits, they can even be the distant mediators of various family conflicts and the embodied meetings and the relationships themselves are a continuation of what takes place in the virtual space. Because of spending hours on phone meetings, the fact that Katarzyna, a female migrant from 1989, and her mother "do not fervently have to start exchanging information right away" always comes as a "surprise" to Katarzyna's husband: "A surprise because he thinks we will be talking on and on, and she already knows everything." Piotr is an old-timer who arrived in Finland at the end of the 1970s. Perhaps because he remembers the communication difficulties of the past decades and the total absence of contact during the Martial Law, his reaction is not different. In addition, although he calls his mother even several times per day they rather talk about her health than exchange more intimate information.

The changes in the possibilities for communication have reduced the emotional charge of family meetings and the weariness coming from the information overload. But even currently, against the frequent social limitations of the migrants' life in Finland, the number of interactions they have upon the visits may still at times be (positively) overwhelming. In particular the everyday interpersonal contacts of migrants living in the rural areas of Finland hardly exceed the workplace and the immediate family circle. Even after two decades of staying in Finland some migrants' core social networks invariably concentrate on Poland. Return visits thus mean a sudden change of the peaceful Finnish status quo, "a reanimation" from a state of social dormancy. Leszek says that every time after returning from Poland he has difficulties in readjusting himself to the reality of his "Finnish" life: "For two weeks or even more I actually cannot collect myself." "It is true, one cannot find a place for oneself" acknowledges his wife Helena. "After we cross the border everybody is mentally crestfallen and the children cry."

As I already pointed out, the visits are usually paid interchangeably. Kin come to Finland and not the other way round because of time and money considerations, political circumstances, celebrations, the stage of the family life-cycle and finally because the non-migrants have wanted to see for themselves the new life environment of their loved ones. Going to Finland means going abroad, to a foreign country: it is an attraction and a possibility to spend vacation in an interesting place. What I want to draw attention to is the striking difference between these visits as opposed to the return ones. Intensity, haste and weariness seem to be replaced by "peacefulness," "serenity" and "relaxation." During the summer, when the most visits are paid, Finland emerges in the eyes of the visiting kin as if a postmodern paradise, "a fairytale." They spend time fishing, picking berries, going to the sauna and travelling around the country. The migrants often rent a summer cottage by the lake for the occasion. The visitors get acquainted with the migrants' social environment, with Finns and Poles alike. They develop new enduring interpersonal connections which sometimes start to thrive independently, without the migrants' involvement. Through this they contribute to the additional enhancement of the transnational social spaces.

Importantly, such visits give the opportunity to focus on the nourishment of the particular family relationships without "a sense of guilt" of neglecting the other family ties which often accompanies the return visits. Therefore the migrants most frequently invite the people with whom they most wish to maintain and preserve the bonds: parents, siblings (and their children

and spouses) and the closest friends. Parents who have retired come for longer periods. They stay from one to even six months. This provides both parties with extensive time for simple “being together” which is usually impossible during the comparatively shorter stays in Poland.

### **Visits and the recreation of ties**

The visits inevitably lead to the selective maintenance of transnational family ties. Contacts not regarded as essential are consciously neglected and set aside for an indefinite period. This is in accordance with the idea of the fluidity of the family unit, with the fluctuation of its borders depending upon given circumstances. As there is the possibility of truncating the ties, there is also the possibility of their reactivation. Again, the return visits become a major tool serving this purpose. Reconnection with the wider family circle is most typically not achieved through everyday interaction, to which I have largely referred in the previous sections, but through more high-profile and festive celebration rituals. Many studies suggest it is the meaningful and powerful transnational practice which allows for the acknowledgment of the solidarity of the kinship group and a (re)drawing of the borders, of a reaffirmation of its role as a meaningful space of identification and belonging for both those who left and those who stayed behind (Sutton, 2004; Olwig, 2002; Salih, 2002).

The migrants most commonly participate in the festivities as guests. They travel to Poland for weddings, funerals, anniversaries, First Communions and baptisms. More rarely are they the ones who organize certain religious and secular events for the family in Poland. Those migrants who have a strong Catholic background place great importance on their children’s First Communion in the presence of the family exceeding the most immediate circle which is impossible in Finland even if they had married into Finnish families. It is a reflection of a more general phenomenon, namely that the family branch in Poland usually seems to be more extensive and vibrant than the one in Finland. Therefore the celebration is held in the migrants’ hometowns where, after the ceremony in the family’s local church, numerous kith and kin gather for festivities in the restaurants. For instance, for the purpose of hosting the wider Polish family circle and reactivating the neglected ties, Zofia and Wiktor decided to organize a two-day wedding reception for their daughter Kasia who married a Finn in Poland. It was intended as a “vast family reunion” and a gift for Kasia who spent all her summers in Poland and was bonded with the family. They decided to have the expense despite the fact

that the church wedding itself and the first reception had already been held in Finland. Even their elderly parents were surprised, but also appreciated the gesture:

“Our family in Poland meets frequently at different celebrations like baptisms, weddings and the like. And not always can we come and participate. That is why now there was the occasion for us to invite everybody. For instance when we were coming to Poland we were usually visiting most of the cousins, but not all of them. Some of the cousins’ children we saw for the first time ever. Or we have seen them only once, a long time ago. And now they are already grown-ups. So it was a surprise for us. Cousins, of course, it is not the closest family but it is a family which had lived nearby, with whom you had sometimes been brought up. So it was great to see them again, to meet in the wider family circle. “

Significantly, the celebration was a unique occasion to get acquainted with the “Polish” side of the family with the newly gained “Finnish” one. I would emphasize that such intersections allow for the actual and not only imagined merging of the various social networks and therefore contribute to the further blurring of the never-fixed cultural and ethnic family boundaries. The multiple cultural and geographical orientations of the transnational family space become (re)produced and strengthened and break away from the idea of essentialized, ethnically “Polish” transnational spaces.

In the transnational context scholars also note the organization of family reunions which are exclusively aimed at the reconnection and recreation of ties, at the establishment of new ones and at acknowledging the family as a distinct site of belonging and a common reference point (for instance Sutton, 2004). Because the families in my study have many other large events serving a similar purpose and because their migration history is still relatively short, the reunions here are arguably less widespread. Nevertheless I also found traces of this phenomenon. It was a cousin reunion recently organized and attended by Teresa, a female migrant from the 1990s whom I already mentioned.

Ultimately, such gatherings are a powerful and successful means of reunification. Their consequences are regarded by the participants as meaningful and enduring. To quote Wiktor: “the wedding reception has fulfilled its role. We have refreshed the ties. And more: we have refreshed our memories, our past.” The reunions point to the continuous appeal the widely extended family still holds for the migrants. There is an ideological value ascribed to the family that reaches beyond the nuclear unit. Against the Finnish cultural context of, subjectively perceived, social distances and small sociability such reunions and extended family connections seem to have an additional meaning for the migrants: they are a signifier of “Polishness.”



The aim of this and the previous chapters was to give meaning, structure, and patterns to two of the main tools through which the Polish kin have been building their families transnationally. I indicated their historical and social situatedness, transformations through time, but also the significant continuities linked to the ideals and actual relations of the particular families. The chapter that follows is intended to complement this picture. Keeping the communication and visits in the background, I will now focus more specifically on the family relationships themselves. I will address them through the investigation of different kinds of mutual support (also defined as care) exchanged within a family. Here the family emerges as a transnational source of material and non-material reassurance, support in everyday matters and an ultimate “safety net”, and eventually as a place of intergenerational care.

## **Chapter 7 The transnational family as a network of assistance and trust**

When migrants talk about their family relationships they commonly define them according to the “closeness-distance” continuum which relates to the affective bond linking their family members. It is a function of mutual support, care and intimacy which usually but not essentially materializes in the frequency of contact. I heard “We do not have to call to know that we think of each other.” According to Edwards and Strathern (2002.p.160), closeness implicates the values of loyalty and love, “the ability to confide in, depend upon, and trust,” and is a culturally constructed measure of happiness in a Euro-American family (di Leonardo, 1987). Clearly, it is an ideal family image also held by the Polish migrants. What they acknowledge, however, is that what families ‘should’ be like is far from what families often are actually like. There is a consensus that “the Polish families are and were different.” And as there is “love in diaspora” (Chamberlain, 2006), there is of course denial of support, conflict, indifference, abuse and estrangement too. In other words there are different degrees of distance: across borders and across time. The contradicting relationships are often internal to the family, exist simultaneously, intersect and challenge each other.

When asked why they help and support their kin, why they continue to care after leaving Poland, the migrants were often surprised. The answer seemed to them so obvious and straightforward. After all I as a Polish person, a fellow from the same ethnic group, should be acquainted with the importance of family in the Polish culture. “You ask like a Finn” they said or “and you would not care?,” “why do you contact your family?” References were eventually made to a combination of love and duty, morals and affection. There was a general feeling that certain social norms exist, pertinent not only to the Polish culture, which ascribe certain responsibilities and obligations to family relationships. However, it was also evident that these are never absolute and unconditional, but rather negotiable and changeable. “The ability to confide in, depend upon, and trust” (Edwards and Strathern, 2002.p.160), as well as the sort of dependence and trust expected and provided is determined by numerous circumstances internal and external to the family. This includes the biographical trajectories of the family and its individual members, the “accumulated commitments” which Finch (1989) and Finch and Mason (1993) mention.

Already prior to migration adult migrants have time to build up a certain set of family obligations and commitments. In Poland they receive and give support (housing, childcare, money, work) and develop ties of intimacy and trust. Upon coming to Finland they are often already married and have school-age children. They are graduates with professional careers that have started already in Poland. Migration by no means ceases the process of developing the commitments and the various forms of material and emotional dependency. Mutual caring and support continues despite distance, unavoidably making the subsequent legitimate withdrawal increasingly difficult. In the eyes of the studied families migration itself is clearly not an acceptable excuse to abandon family ties. Those who left and those who stayed behind emphasize this equally. Migrants and non-migrants are expected to continue to care. What is justifiable, though, is a transformation in the form of care. Transnational separation impedes certain caring practices but enhances the possibility of others. For the transnational nuclear families the above is clearly even more understandable. Here migration itself is a form of care: a family strategy of economic advancement.

### **Moral economy and transnationalism**

#### **“It was easy to make presents back then”**

Jan’s wife, Basia, went into labour several days before 13<sup>th</sup> December 1981. They were still in Poland. The situation in the hospital was “absolutely hopeless.” He was called by his wife to come to rescue and bring their own cotton wool and a razor blade. She managed to smuggle him through the back kitchen of the hospital. In the end the razor turned out to be too blunt. “I always remember the moments where I failed” says Jan with laughter. “It was total lunacy.” After years he can afford to laugh.<sup>18</sup> They returned home on 12<sup>th</sup> December. The very next morning a friend came over. “How can you still be sleeping!?! Don’t you know there is a war [the Martial Law] in Poland!?” They did not believe it. Jan recalls that the Martial Law was a lot about the psychological threat. Tanks cruised round the city and the military government imposed a curfew. “There was nothing but vinegar in the shops. It disappeared at some point anyway. Why it was the vinegar and not for instance a solvent, I have no idea. It was good we had our own apartment, at least we were not homeless.” They were also privileged otherwise. Two years earlier Jan came back from Finland where he did his Ph.D. degree. His mother held an esteemed professional position and thanks to her informal channels Jan was granted a

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<sup>18</sup> Significantly, one of the well-known works describing Eastern Europe during communism is entitled *How we survived communism and even laughed* (Drakulic, 1993).

multiple-border-crossing passport. “We were a spoiled family” Jan laughingly acknowledges. Jan’s post-graduate ceremony was held in Finland shortly after Basia’s labour. Jan contacted his Finnish friends. They prepared for him the most basic sanitary commodities. Upon his return flight from Finland he carried three two kilogram-packages of washing powder in hand luggage and an additional ten kilograms of washing powder and a stock of diapers in checked-in luggage. In 1982 in the face of the prolonged crisis Jan and Basia decided to move temporarily to Finland. Jan again drew upon his family connections to get the permissions to leave. After their arrival in Finland their extended family, although educated and with prestigious professions, started to be the recipient of basic commodities from Finland. In economic terms the occupational location made a difference, but not a substantial one. Prior to the migration Jan himself was in the academia and Basia was a doctor. But as he cited the popular communist saying: “The authorities pretended to pay us and we pretended to work.”

I would say that Jan’s and Basia’s transnational practices emerge as typical for their times. They reflect a general story of the families who, with one foot in the West and the other in Poland, gained a considerable tool to fight the “pre-programmed poverty” of the communist system (Dziegiel, 1998). They are symptomatic of what anthropologists call the moral economy of the family: “the substantiate relationships of exchange that are governed primarily by morality or by ethics governing a particular vision of the good life” (Ong, 2006.p.199). From the moral economy perspective all the economic activities, including earning, sharing and consumption within the family, are underpinned by the moral inclinations and norms of loyalty and solidarity between kin (Sayer, 2004).

The economic aspect of transnational family life is the most visible when extreme material differences between the countries of destination and origin come into play. In these cases the family relations tend to be seen first off through the lens of moralized economic configurations. And in the Polish case the differences have never been as striking as during the Cold War when Finland was unambiguously perceived as a part of the West in terms of prosperity, access to commodities and freedom of choice. For those migrants (and their Polish kin) who previously never travelled abroad, the initial reaction upon coming was one of shock. Finland amounted to the iconic American land: in a popular Polish representation the epitomizing of capitalist success. According to Roos and Sicinski, authors of a comparative Poland-Finland study conducted in 1979-1980, Poland of the 1980s was “a country in a permanent (or a series of recurrent) crisis, both externally and internally,” and Finland: “a

country which after a period of instability and crises has reached in the past 20 years a level of prosperity, stability and consensus unheard of in its history.” (1987.p.6) And further: “In Poland life is a constant struggle for ‘normalcy’, which is never completely attained. In Finland it is exactly the other way round. In the typical case, a ‘normal’ life is a rule and it needs a lot of personal courage not to live in a ‘normal’, orderly manner.” (ibid..p.7). For those left behind the most desperate moment came during the crisis of the late 1970s and the 1980s. In 1979—1982 the state-governed economy of Poland collapsed. The salaries and income, commodity consumption, investments and imports from the West dwindled dramatically (Simatupang, 1993.p.4). Rationing coupons (sugar, meat, chocolate, petrol, cigarettes, alcohol, and clothes to name the main ones) were introduced for which there was insufficient coverage in products anyway. Long queues, waiting lists and fights for the meagre supply of everything became a part of the day-by-day existence. The most distinctive recollection that Natalia, a daughter of an old-time female migrant, has from a family visit to Poland in the 1980s is of a vast group of people standing in front of a shop. She inquired her mother about the reason for the gathering. “It turned out they all waited for toilet paper. It had just been delivered to the shop.” Along with the empty shelves it is probably one of the most common, and, resonating with Natalia’s feeling, the most peculiar images recalled from the period (see also Burrell, 2003).<sup>19</sup> The authorities made failed attempts to revive the country from the recession. The state of acute deprivation continued until the total collapse of the system in 1989.

Just like in Jan’s case, the crisis set into motion a machinery of intensified family help from Finland. Considering the nature of the economic problems the help mostly came in the shape of commodities. Jan returned with a stock of diapers and washing powder. Migrants also sent parcels with clothes, toothpaste, soap, coffee, sweets and even flour. A part of the contents was often stolen along the way. Money was primarily sent to parents within the extended family. Throughout the period kin were also invited to Finland as a form of support. Here they could “wait out” the dire economic situation and catch their breath in conditions of “normalcy.” Through such visits the migrants were able to get glimpses of the communist hardships also in Finland. The first relevant account comes from Henryk. After numerous rejected applications Henryk’s parents finally got a passport and a permission to visit their son in Finland in 1984. It was five years since their last meeting and Henryk recalls the moment

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<sup>19</sup> Paper - ‘a politically sensitive product’ - like all other goods was centrally allotted and almost constantly scarce (Dziegiel, 1998.pp.46-48)

of their disembarkation from the ferry as a shock. “It was heavy winter. They came out in shabby shoes and clothing. Complete despair. Horror . . . . Luckily back then I lived nearby the harbour. I went to the shop immediately and bought the most basic stuff.” Notwithstanding Henryk’s father’s high position in a construction cooperative, the hard times did not spare the family. Another story comes from Laura, who migrated to Finland in 1974:

“I left during the Gierek era<sup>20</sup>. The Polish economy was on the rise. The shops were full. That is, of course, if you had planned to buy something specific you could not get it anyway, you had to get something else, but the shops were full. Surely the clothes in the shops were substandard, but we were buying the good-quality ones from the sailors [Laura lived by the seaside]. I remember I even had lovely red boots. Thus I had not suffered poverty. The empty shelves with vinegar were not something I have experienced. But my mother did [...]. She was visiting me every year for two-three months. I remember when she, my dad and my niece came around in 1981. My mom was finally relieved: there were no problems with provision, no queues. What you planned to buy from the shop you could just go and buy. Naturally she was always returning to Poland fully stocked.”

Teresa’s parents did similar restocking in Finland. Teresa migrated ten years later than Laura. Her family was always tight-knit and supportive. In Poland the everyday provisioning, including the endless waiting in queues, was done by her retired and unmarried aunt. She was the only person with enough time on her hands in the family. Teresa emphasizes that kinship closeness was a necessity during Communism. After coming to Finland she herself hosted her parents every year for three months which was the maximum visa-free period. During their stay Teresa’s informal networks activated. A collection of clothes was organized by word of mouth. The process went smoothly and even more so because the Finnish media were constantly broadcasting the alarming news of the Polish situation:

“Friends were giving their used clothes. Somebody was working in the clothing company and gave the remainders from the production. Somebody else was doing some promotional folders for Nokia and could donate what was left from the storehouse. So we were also getting new stuff, not only second hand.”

Children’s clothes were particularly sought after. At home Teresa was doing a selection. The best ones were taken by Teresa’s parents to Poland. “They were loaded like a pack of mules.” Later on the clothes were distributed throughout the family, mainly among kin with young children. Probably the most grand case of such transnational assistance, although more indirect, was reported by Alina. When she lived with her parents in Finland during the 1970s her aunt and uncle came to visit. Because Alina’s father worked at the Polish diplomatic mission he had access to free transportation by truck. So they purchased a black leather couch, a signifier of great luxury at the time, and transported it from Finland. After thirty years the

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Gierek was the chief of the leading Communist party in 1970-1980. The first half of his term was marked by relative economic affluence based on increased investments, consumption and indebtedness to the West. The social atmosphere was optimistic. From 1976 onwards the economy started to decline as did the social moods (Simatupang, 1993.pp.168-180; Swain, 1993.pp.166-168).

couch still stands in her aunt's Polish apartment. It evokes the already by-gone transnational distinction achieved thanks to family ties.

When migrants paid personal visits to Poland their cars were also "filled up to the roof." "It was easy to make presents back then" I was told. One of the common nation-wide representations from the period was reported to me by the male migrants from nuclear families. It was of a father returning home with bags full of exotic fruits, sweets and Lego building blocks. Adam, the already introduced temporary migrant and a father of two, was himself a child twenty years ago whose father worked temporarily abroad, in the Middle East. Adam remembers well the excitement and curiosity with which he awaited his father's return. He looked for chocolate and oranges in his suitcase. The possession of goods symbolizing Western affluence granted the migrant father (and husband) with the power of respect and authority unattainable in later years. He was welcomed with enthusiasm. Due to the aforementioned favourable currency converter the remittances enabled the nuclear, and by affiliation the extended family, a significant improvement of living conditions (see also Lukowski, 2001; Cieslinska, 1994).

It could be suggested that the economic hardships that the relatives were experiencing in Poland increased the migrants' sense of familial loyalty and responsibility. However, I would see it as a continuation of the strategy of reproduction which already developed pre-migration. In communist Poland the migrants' private and professional lives had been heavily embedded in the kinship webs of support. The migrants became an additional, only this time transnational, branch of the family's strategic cooperation abroad. This happened even if migration had not been intended as such. By the same token they remained a part of the communist reality (as the Finnish one became inscribed in the lives of those who stayed).

### **A decline of the myth**

The emergence of the capitalist market in Poland brought to halt the commodified form of remittances. At present nobody sends either packages or brings goods to Poland to the extent that could be perceived as considerable economic support. The remittances of money remained significant primarily for multinuclear households and in situations of emergency. Gifts are still brought although they have lost their "indispensable" and luxurious aspect. Adam's children of course wait for his arrival and the presents he brings just as Adam waited for his father two decades ago. But he decided it was pointless to bring anything except for souvenirs from Finland. "Let's be honest. Everything is exactly the same here and there now,

the same product, the same shop. Only here it is four times more expensive.” So like most migrants he buys the major gifts in Poland or through Polish internet web-sites. What is brought from Finland is supposed to be uniquely Finnish.

The decline of the material distinction and glamour surrounding West-bound migration seems to be irreversible. The Polish commodity market quickly exceeded the Finnish one. “Finns do not even know what it means to have a wide range of choice in the shop.” Now migrants are the ones who return from Poland fully stocked. They bring the same kind of goods they used to remit: clothes, shoes, cosmetics, alcohol and food of any kind. They take advantage of both the diversity of goods and the so far lower prices. Some sojourns are purposefully made by car. Non-migrant kin have also become senders of goods from Poland. Since there are no Polish shops in Finland, the migrants rely on family networks to obtain Polish delicacies: mayonnaise, spices and sweets. Those left behind are not only no longer in a situation where they need immediate help. An emphasis on conspicuous consumption in Poland generates conditions in which they enjoy at times higher material standards of living than the migrants in Finland: bigger houses, better cars and better equipment. Asked about the differences in his family, Andrzej told me about the telephone conversations he recently had with his brother-in-law. He was inquiring what kind of a plasma TV set he should purchase in Andrzej’s opinion. Andrzej smiled at the question. They are financially well-off with Irena but they still have the old model TV. In a similar manner Alina and Krzysztof, who in Finland belong to the upper-middle class, reproachfully commented on their cousin’s house: “We have never imagined that so much money can be sunk into one single apartment.”

To understand the economic relations of the transnational family of those migrants who, like the couples above, came at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (ten cases in my study), it is not enough to just say that the collapse of the communist regime induced material advancement in Poland. The true irony is that coming from the malfunctioning communist system, those migrants came straight into another immense economic crisis: Finland’s “worst slump since the 1930” (Jakobson, 1998.p.106). At the onset of the 1990s Finland experienced a double blow: a demise of the trade with the Soviet Union and the recession in Finland’s Western export markets. The GDP dropped 15 per cent and unemployment reached 20 per cent (ibid.). The situation had consequences for the newcomers. They had to manage without any contingency resources and initially without the Finnish language. The crisis particularly affected the migrants who did not have a pre-arranged job in Finland and those were



exclusively women, all coming under the reunification scheme (as the wives of Poles or Finns). They entered the Finnish labour market permanently only after several years. Or else, like in the case of Irena, they had solely short-term contracts. “And this would have topped off our financial situation” she remarks.

The story of Hanna, an engineer, and Tadeusz, a musician, is perhaps the most indicative. In Poland they were rather prosperous: they owned a relatively well-equipped house and a car. They migrated in 1988 with two children and wanted “to become wealthier.” Tadeusz got a contract in a local school. At that moment they did not actually think about permanent settlement. They took unpaid leave of absence from their regular jobs in Poland and kept the house. It turned out that Tadeusz’s contract was insufficient in Finland. Hanna tried to find a job to compensate but was refused a work permit. On top they crashed the old car in which they came and had to take a loan to buy another.

“As a consequence we got so poor that there was no way we could return to Poland. We would have got into the debt up to hilt. [...] Later on the transformation of 1989 came and we lost our regular jobs in Poland. An economic free-for-all started. And there was nothing to come back to anymore.”

Hanna finally got employment in a factory but then the crisis in Finland hit. She was quickly made redundant. Tadeusz’s salary dropped three times. “Now we got into complete misery. There was no work. No work at all. So we got stuck.” Fifteen years later they finally reached the living standard they had before migration. “Except that in Poland we did not have debts, and here we do not own anything. Everything is a debt.”

From this viewpoint the economic advancement of migrants and their kiths and kin in Poland can be read as more or less parallel. The latter also started to accumulate the bulk of their wealth only after the introduction of capitalism in Poland in 1989. Among the migrants’ kin there are currently well-paid professionals, private entrepreneurs and employees of foreign corporations – people who seized the opportunity that the transition offered. Now they constitute the rising middle class of the Polish society. All migrants seem to agree in Alina’s words that “the fortune favours the brave” and this is regardless of geographical location. Nowadays some of those in Poland have enough resources to constitute a potential source of economic support even for migrants. There are instances starting from pricy gifts like portable computers to co-financing foreign studies and money loans. Hanna and Tadeusz, coming from a relatively homogenous social environment in Poland, are now as they say “paupers” in comparison to the kith and kin who did not move. When they finally decided to buy a house

in Finland, it was Tadeusz's cousin to whom they turned to for a loan. Also other instances suggest that the people in Poland have finally gained a material tool in the negotiation and struggle over respect and authority which could actually count transnationally.

On the downside, the capitalist breakthrough also introduced previously unheard socio-economic disparities in the Polish society. The affluence came accompanied by vast unemployment (at moments reaching 20 per cent; at the end of 2007 at the level of 11.4 per cent, Central Statistical Office, 2008), impoverishment and lack of social security. After 1989 the groups that ran the highest risk of poverty included families with many children and one-parent families, disability pensioners, the unemployed, the inhabitants of rural areas, people with low education and physical workers (Central Statistical Office, 2007a, 2007b). In view of this, the life-worlds of, for instance the recent labour migrants' families in Poland, are hardly congruent with those of Alina's and Krzysztof's kith and kin. Here the spouses and children left behind are the prime recipients of a regular traditional flow of remittances. Adam, akin to other temporary migrants, takes advantage of the transnational division of labour by working in Finland and consuming in Poland. Prior to migration he lived with his wife and two children in a small rented apartment. He was the only breadwinner and the children's health problems consumed a substantial part of the budget. His salary was enough for nothing beyond a "survival." Migration was supposed to solve many of the families' problems, including buying their own apartment. Economic advancement exceeding the "getting-by" level is typical motivation for also other contractors and their spouses left in Poland (none of the migrants prior to migration was unemployed). The aim is to meet the modern standard of affluence and to thrive socially. And, for the skilled labour workers, it has never been easier to achieve this through migration as after 2004. To quote Tomek "it is enough to open a newspaper and the doors of the world stand wide open." The existence of the transnational household is nowadays also facilitated in economic terms. The legality of migration is also an important factor here. The remittances can simply be wired through the official banking channels. Workers posted by Polish companies receive money directly to their Polish accounts. In general the migrants say that the spouses in Poland have easy access to their accounts. "These are no longer the times when you had to bring the money in your pocket."

Yet, despite the significant changes, the traditional Finland-to-Poland direction of material support is also present among the permanent migrants and also within the larger family circle.

Money is being sent to parents, less often to siblings and their nuclear families. Here however the support is much more intermittent. From the migrants' stories it is clear that the extended Polish family as much in the transnational as in the local context (on the latter see for instance Potoczna, 2004; Dyczewski, 2002) nowadays serves more as an economic "safety net" than a source of regular provisioning. Thus direct monetary support appears justifiable transnationally at some more costly stages of life or in response to emergencies: illness, problems with covering the basic consumption needs (food, coal for heating) and aspirations for education (studies). When the problem subsides, so does the financial endowment.

Significantly there are no signs of financial exploitation of the kin abroad, observed so commonly in other studies (in the Polish migration context for instance in Znaniecka-Lopata, 1976.p.105). Straightforward asking for money seems to be uncommon (it appeared most prominently in Karol's aunt's case). And this is even if the non-migrating relatives are at times in financial trouble, jobless and have low pensions. Apparently the status of the West-bound migrant is not in itself a legitimate reason to presuppose his/her role as the family's "natural" financial benefactor. Only in a conjugal family is this situation taken for granted. Because the family members left behind were not interviewed this explanation can be given here more or less tentatively.

Firstly, the migrants state that they have always been very explicit about their material situation in Finland which, as I already indicated, has not necessarily been even relatively outstanding. Nobody has a good reason to pretend to have more than they have in reality (as is the case for temporary migrants coming from disadvantaged rural communities, see among others Jazwinska and Okolski, 2001). The kin paying visits to Finland have the additional occasion of seeing for themselves the migrants' actual living conditions. I was also told that Finland's image in Poland was hardly that of "America," even during Communism. Because it was a popular Polish migration destination it has also been rather absent from the public discourse (contrary to the traditionally conspicuous presence of the U.S., Germany, or more recently the UK, Ireland or Norway). There is no established representation of Finland as an economic "El Dorado," although it is definitely considered a Western country. In the end it is safe to assume (and this is in line with the migrants' statements) that the non-migrants less commonly associate their kin's life in Finland in terms of luxury as they could in the case of other destinations. This is not to say that there are no hints of jealousy on the part of those who stayed. Even then, however, they do not translate into financial demands. Secondly, I

would read the limited open financial demands as a function of a Polish family's post-1989 half-way status between collectivity and individualization, tradition and modernity. This idea is more relevant here considering that most of the studied families originate from urban areas where the process of family modernization is noted to be the strongest (see for instance Doniec, 2001). The kin in Poland are granted financial support often without their explicit asking for it. However, they talk to migrants about the problems they are experiencing. I would suggest that there is an implicit (and not necessarily conscious) expectation that if the migrants are aware of the problem (and if the relationship is close there is an assumption they should be actively interested) they should react accordingly. Therefore providing money as if voluntarily, in a response to a particular need or in the form of a Christmas gift, allows the giver and receiver to strike a balance between dependence and independence, individualization and family cooperation. After Finch (1989), and Finch and Mason (1993), it can be argued that the implicit expectation is based on normative guidelines. They roughly suggest, with regard to which family member, in what kind of situation and how much money it is acceptable to look for and provide. Also, although many migrants are not actively turned to for monetary assistance, they believe they would be if their loved ones would experience some serious difficulties. Furthermore it appears that the monetary support is less expected between siblings than between parents and their adult children. Similarly a local study of Zurek's (2005.pp.86-88) indicates that single Polish adults looking for support would firstly turn towards their parents. Brothers and sisters would be second. This would suggest a more general application of Zofia's remark. She says that her sister in Poland, although for some time unemployed, would rather look for help from their retired mother than from Zofia herself. Even if Zofia's mother has a small pension and lives in the Polish countryside, this still seems to be the more "natural" arrangement.

### **Non-monetary forms of material support**

All of the above may also give a hint of an explanation of the ongoing importance of non-monetary, and thus more indirect, forms of material help. This includes the hosting of family members in Finland and assistance in looking for work. I would also suggest that these are the practices allowing migrants to help kin materially but without incurring financial costs, which are perceived as too excessive. Migrants emphasize that even if they do not provide regular or substantial monetary support they always sponsor their relatives' stay in Finland (food, accommodation, trips within Finland), give small presents upon leaving and also pay for the journey (although recently more rarely). Implicitly it is a gift of free and attractive holidays.

Furthermore I also noted reliance on the family networks in search for work which was widely discussed in literature. Not even in one case, however, did it contribute to chain migration. It always had a more or less temporary character, such as seasonal labour, non-seasonal physical work and babysitting. The migrants stress that it is the character of the Finnish labour market that makes finding a more permanent employment for the relatives near impossible. Then again, giving that many of the migrants' younger kin joined (or intend to join) the post-accession wave to the UK or Ireland, it can be safely assumed that Finland, even despite established family contacts, would be a place of destination considered in the last instance. At the same time the very practice of looking for jobs, regardless of its success, is a type of material assistance which can be provided by migrants with comparatively small effort and financial input. Therefore I argue that it may be provided for distant, even unknown relatives. In their case monetary help, at least in the Polish family context, would be regarded as rather illegitimate to ask for (even if potentially it could be granted). An illustration of this may be the two instances below: Already after 1989 Jan got a letter from his previously unheard of female relative. She was unemployed and asked for help in finding a job. Willingly, but in vain, Jan activated his social networks in Finland. Ironically he also looked among his transnational circles in Poland. He was still very well connected. Unfortunately he failed there as well. Afterwards the contact with the relative returned to a state of dormancy. She did not contact him and neither did he try to contact her. Ludwika's case was slightly different. As mentioned before, her closest family relations were marked by indifference. Meager bonds linked Ludwika to her sister. Nonetheless Ludwika has been recurrently asked by her sister to find her seasonal employment in Finland. Ludwika always managed to arrange for her to work on a farm in a nearby village. During her stays they scarcely met. These were the sister's only visits to Finland.

Finally it should be mentioned that among the studied families money seems to be one of the main generators of conflict. According to the migrants, money is not a taboo in the Polish culture, at least not to the extent it is in the Finnish culture. The migrants themselves also frequently talk about the moral economy. The material family relationships appear to be a delicate subject matter, an explosive topic. The borderline between exploitation and insufficient support, independence and over-dependency is fragile and easy to cross, particularly in a cultural context which still ascribes a lot of weight to close, supportive and harmonious family relationships on the one hand and to individual autonomy on the other. It can be argued that in the cases mentioned above both parties of the transnational families

more or less consciously understood and pursued the tacitly acceptable manner of reaching for material help. The following cases reported by Dorota, a migrant from the 1980s and Patrycja, who came after 2004, exemplify the contrary. They both emerged as exceptional in the sense that they manifested a migrant's open denouncement of the materially underpinned imbalance of the family relationship.

Dorota, now in her fifties, comes from a relatively well-off family. They were always tight. The only "source of friction" that has always appeared in the otherwise harmonic relations was Dorota's younger sister, Janka: "she was always the one who was the most miserable, always calling for help from everybody, always demanding assistance." Janka got married and stayed at home looking after three children. The first significant form of help that Dorota provided her with (apart from the packages sent to Poland) was to arrange a job for her husband in Finland. It was a job in a small repair shop owned by Dorota's Finnish husband. Janka's husband worked there for a year. Although he was asked to stay longer he did not want to do it without his family. But "Janka said she would never move to Finland. Never." So he came back. After several years he passed away. Janka was left alone with the children. She was always in financial trouble. But also Dorota's situation in Finland was difficult. Since settlement, she was unemployed for over a decade while her Finnish husband's income was hardly sufficient. In the end "there was no money to provide for the family in Poland." But Janka was recurrently visiting Dorota in Finland with her family. Every time "they never had to pay for anything. I was providing them with everything." Upon leaving Dorota was always giving Janka some small monetary gifts: around 100 euro. "So she could buy something for herself, some shoes or a dress." "She was not interested in second-hand clothes. She always wanted new stuff," said Dorota bitterly. Recently Janka became unemployed and expressed a strong desire to come to work in Finland. Dorota arranged a physical job for her for a year. Because Janka did not speak any foreign languages, Dorota had to initially assist her in the work-tasks. She also provided her with full accommodation at her place:

"She did not have to worry about anything. I fixed everything for her. Everything was ready, given on a plate. She did not have to pay for the apartment, for sleeping, even for the food. And she did not come for holidays but she came to work. And she was earning her own money. In this way I wanted to help her."

After three months Janka decided she wanted to come back. "She missed her family and Poland." Dorota was, at the very least, discontented "because if somebody arranges everything, puts a lot of effort into it, and the other person promises that it would be for longer, then no matter how one would miss home, one should grit one's teeth and give one's

best. Totally. It is just not right to do something like this.” And she continues: “But apparently Janka has now thought it over. Probably she finally realized she was very well off here. And I see it troubles her a little now. And I think she would like to come again.” Dorota, regardless of disapproving of “neediness” and unreliability, is once again ready to help her sister.

Patrycja came to Finland over a year ago. She was the only child raised by a single mother. Her mother worked physically and always had problems with making the ends meet. Economic problems aside, Patrycja’s mother “was not worth her salt.” She was uncaring, her “maternal” warmth insufficient. She was not quite like a “real” mother should be. Even during her younger years Patrycja could not really count on her mother. It was rather the other way round. Patrycja got married fairly quickly and moved out. They rarely met with her mother. But regardless of the past disagreements, whenever her mother had a material problem she was always “running back” to her daughter for help. “She is the exact embodiment of the victim type” Patrycja sums up.

“She was always saying she was so poor, so miserable, so unfortunate. ‘I do not have money, I do not have a place to live and so on and so forth.’ And everybody had to help her.... Throughout these years I taught her that if she had no place to go to, nobody else to count on, there was always me. And she knew I would always help her. Now I regret this.”

Patrycja claims that her coming to Finland changed the situation. “Now when I am here, she has to manage by herself. And this is how it should be.” Nonetheless the utter cut-off does not seem to be the complete truth. Right after Patrycja moved to Finland, her mother moved into her Polish apartment. This, similarly to all the other instances of support, is looked upon with discontent by Patrycja’s husband, Robert. “Give someone an inch and they will take a mile .... She has never supported us” he ardently emphasizes. The ongoing provisioning seems to him the more excessive considering that his mother-in-law worked and should therefore try to sustain herself.

What is additionally interesting in the above story is that the couple primarily stresses the economic aspect of the relationships. At the same time though they give a hint that Patrycja’s mother is not all that “unsupportive,” especially when it comes to childcare. Patrycja even ventures saying: “My mother is a great grandmother. Even though she was not worth her salt as a mother, now as a grandmother she is. She fulfills the role of a grandmother one hundred per cent. And you have to give her credit for that.” This statement may be read as Patrycja’s attempt to at least partially rehabilitate her mother. However, it would not stand in contradiction with the assumption that there is a subjectively perceived inequality between the

different forms of support, linked to particular relationships. For Patrycja her mother's "good" practical deeds as a grandmother do not erase her "underperformance" as a mother, materially and affectively. All things considered Patrycja's words about the cessation of further calls for material assistance may be highly premature. Dorota's case only confirms that that kind of a relationship may continue across borders for decades, appearing intermittently according to the emerging needs.

Against the transition and the collapse of the family as an "instrumental strategic unit" the notion of the family as the outmost fundamental of *the* Polish societal order still holds strong. The norm of familial solidarity along with the ideals of "a good" family, "a good mother" etc., are pervasive. In praxis this stimulates the process of developing responsibilities for particular family members. It also helps to keep it going across borders and against the lack of reciprocity. This applies as much to the economic as well as to the emotional aspects of family life.

### **Emotional work in a transnational setting**

The remittances constitute a tangible and objective enactment of the family's sense of solidarity across borders. They are relatively easy to measure and quantify. However, in the migrants' subjective perception it has been first and foremost the emotional harmony and affective care that has made up for the picture of "an ideal family." Without these, regardless of the satisfying material and practical support, a family is regarded as largely deficient. In the contemporary Euro-American (including Polish) culture "love" and intimacy are the culturally constructed, ideological prerequisites of family happiness. Affective care: "a provisioning of emotional security through the expression of concern and feelings of warmth and affection" also constitutes one of the central transnational family activities (Parrenas, 2001,p.131; see also Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Chamberlain, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 2003; Aranda, 2003,). In the studied case where regular family remittances especially since 1989 are fairly marginal, emotional care emerges as the leading transnational practice.

Hochschild (1979) indicates that the production of family affection is far from a spontaneous biologically-driven act. Emotions are "work." Working on and the management of emotions; evocation, molding and suppression of emotional feeling; stimulation of particular feeling in oneself and in those whom we care for follow the sociocultural rules of family life and is an indispensable part of kinwork (DeVault, 1999). The theme of family love and affection



recently gained the interest of transnational studies. Yet, we still know little about the emotional family labour done across borders, its mechanisms, functions, patterns and the possible divergences from the local family context. “Love” may have an intangible and subjective character, but it is also a powerful emotional tool having tangible consequences (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993). It is experienced as “real” and as such it underpins the family’s transnational life: cooperation, support, but also its inequalities and hierarchies.

As I will show, migrants and those left behind provide each other with mutual comfort and support, share joys and anxieties, but also intentionally modify and silence out what could upset the assurance of emotional care. Affective work is thus done with attention paid to the specificity of the transnational context. Spatial distance, cultural differences and the peculiarities of some experiences are taken into consideration by the family members. From the migrants’ perspective they are also intertwined with questions of adaptation and building new intimate networks in Finland. For the migrants the role of the transnational ties spans from the affectively central, through to complementary and to as much as the enhancement of a positive integration experience.

### **The networks of emotional support in the context of the adaptation processes**

Migration is usually portrayed as an act accompanied by strong emotions. Concurrently with the above they are always produced within the framework of a given family and national ideologies. It entails a physical separation from the familiar socio-cultural environment and the wider networks of affective support and an encounter with a new culture, language and new challenges. Solitude, longing, a sense of “displacement,” in other words the “emotional costs”, are pointed as the common markers of migration. They emerge particularly in the initial phase of settlement.<sup>21</sup> Studies indicate that as an alternative source of support and emotional care the transnational linkages smoothen the processes of adaptation and ensure emotional continuity against the spatial rupture (see for instance Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Aranda, 2003). Needless to say the migrants’ experiences are diverse and cross-cut by the triad of class, gender and race. Affective deprivation is not inevitable and the relevant importance of transnational support varies greatly.

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<sup>21</sup> Danuta Mostwin, a Polish scholar quoted in the very beginning of this text, writes: “the solitude of the emigrant is his/her characteristic feature, practically unavoidable. With this we have to come to terms. Even those informants who state that they ‘have never experienced solitude’, after several years of emigration will start to experience such solitude.” (1991.p.104)

Undeniably the studied Polish migrants, “white” and staying in Finland legally, enter the Finnish social structures on a relatively privileged basis. Due to joint arrival or the reunification mode of migration most of them are embedded in the caring networks within their nuclear families from the very beginning. Migration with or to join family, perceived usually as more stress-free, combined with the Finnish working culture not only constitutes the most immediate affective buffer but also creates an opportunity to increase the emotional investment in the parental and conjugal relationships. At least in this sense migration actually improves the circumstances for affective care for many migrants. Asked about the initial impression after moving Hanna recalls:

“Phenomenal. It was like jumping off the express train, which on top lost its brakes. Because this is how we both worked. We came and suddenly it turned out that on Friday you can just go out from work and until Monday you may not exist. Nobody will call. Nobody will be interested.”

In Poland, regardless of the political system, migrants often worked long hours and held several jobs. During the communism the principle: “we pretended to work, they pretended to pay us” generated the conditions in which, as Andrzej says, “you were earning one official salary plus two or three additional ones, and altogether it was manageable.” Nowadays on the other hand it is the capitalist system that demands harsh competitiveness. Hence to date a shift from the Polish to the Finnish workplace contexts usually means a sudden deceleration<sup>22</sup>.

Wiktor says:

“In Poland the work was on the account of family life. Here everything functioned completely different. I was coming back from work and I could spend the whole afternoon with the family. Children finally had a chance to see me. And this was already a bonus.”

For instance the story of Marzena’s migration, described below, which was stimulated in fact by events related to the chain of emotional care emerging transnationally while she still lived in Poland, is an actual reverse of the predominant trend. Here it meant the filling out of an emotional void and the need for care and intimacy which was missing in Poland. What should be emphasized though is that it was not migration of escapism or a quest for liberation from burdensome family ties.

Until coming to Finland Marzena was a single mother. Apart from certain material input the father of her child did not participate in the upbringing process. In 1992 she met Jukka, a Finn who temporarily worked in Poland. The acquaintance unfolded slowly. “We did not hurry.

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<sup>22</sup> Here I mainly but not only mean the permanent migrants. Contract workers, if they have the possibility (or else are pressured by the employee), aim at fast maximalisation of income through the maximalisation of working time.

We were checking each other out carefully and with reservation.” Marzena’s father fell seriously ill after half a year. Jukka drove Marzena around the hospitals where her father was laying, assisted constantly and brought comfort and compassion. All her family was “astonished” with his attitude.

“Jukka left in May. My father died in August. Cancer. He suffered very much. He was only seventy [...]. I thought I would not survive that. My father... I was everything to him. He never called me anything else than ‘my golden birdie, my sunshine. Never by my name.’”

His death also crushed Marzena’s mother. She was “in a desperate condition.” Left by herself on the farm, she tried to shift all responsibilities on Marzena. Again Jukka emerged as a powerful, now transnational, source of support.

“Whenever I felt really bad, so bad, I called him. He is the type of man who will tell you ‘do not worry, everything will be all right’. And for me it was as if the sun came out again. And then I thought what it is with him that is enough that he would tell me a couple of words and I feel such a relief. I feel like working again, I got my powers back. So I knew that if there would be an ‘us’ it would be for better or worse.”

Soon Marzena came to visit Jukka in Finland. Alone and in mourning, her mother agreed to stay with Marzena’s son. “She helped me immensely. Such grandmothers come along very rarely.”

“The very moment I entered the ferry I melted into tears. I felt such a bliss .... I drew energy from Jukka, from the lakes, from the weather. I saw Finland in the most astonishing moment for the first time. It was May. I was standing on the balcony and literally, right in front of my eyes, the leaves were blooming. Within a week everything turned green. It was beautiful.”

After a month Marzena returned to Poland. She visited Finland again for nearly three months in October. Once again she asked her mother to take care of her son. Soon Marzena and Jukka got married and had a child. The family settled in Finland. Because in the first years Marzena was busy with studying the language and setting up a small business, Marzena’s mother circulated hence and forth between Finland and Poland to take care of her grandchildren. Eventually Jukka and Marzena asked her if she would like to live with them permanently and she agreed.

The story points to the emotional security and affection coming from the nuclear connections which allowed Marzena to enthusiastically embrace her new surroundings, assuring a smooth and positive transition. However, the very emergence of these connections was interrelated with affective intergenerational care. From the beginning it had a transnational context. What is noteworthy is that the “ethnic” heterogeneity of the marriage did not at any rate impede the provisioning of comfort and affection. Rather it contributed to its emergence.

The presence of conjugal linkages is important but at the end of the day they are usually insufficient. Thus new settlement acquires positive affective connotations also through the wider community structures. In my study, against the often initially poor command of the Finnish language, such a function was mainly (but not always) performed by a community of fellow compatriots. They emerge as complementary to the conjugal and transnational linkages, enhancing the affirmative experience of migration and the home-like sense of belonging. Fortunate enough, some migrants have befriended Polish networks already upon arrival. For Irena and Andrzej it was half a decade of life across borders and Irena's frequent visits to Finland that had given them the opportunity to create new intimate social connections. Before migration, their family circle in Poland was more about intermittent social gatherings than everyday sources of support (quite untypical for the period). The couple's resettlement in 1990 was thus rather a tightening than a disruption of the care giving social connections:

“We got to know Finland. We were not like ‘the parachutists’ who land in one day. You might say that earlier there were summer visits [of Irena and the children] and this was a continuation. We had a good social environment here. We were not strangers. And people of course mean contacts, help and various advices.”

The emotional benefits coming from immediate immersion in the local immigrant community emerged particularly strongly in the case of Helena and Leszek: a couple who, contrary to Irena and Andrzej, was closely embedded in multiple family networks in Poland, and for whom the separation could be potentially more painful.

The couple arrived with their baby son to a rural Finnish town in 1990. Even though Helena found herself unemployed for the first time in her occupational and Leszek's salary was hardly sufficient, their first migration experiences were enthusiastic. They were “spell-bound” with Finland - a perception that deteriorated rapidly during the years.

“At the beginning we lived in a small neighborhood. There were only Polish families. We all came here for the work invitation from the local Finnish company. And we were all getting along. The atmosphere was great, really great, because everybody was starting from scratch. People had practically nothing [of their own]. Lock, stock and barrel were left behind in Poland. The company provided us with the accommodation. We did not have anything beyond what they gave us. So we all had more or less the same things: similar apartments, similar furniture and similar income. But poor as we were, it was great socially. People were very friendly, we shared everything. We were meeting for coffee, spending weekends together.... We were doing a common pickling of cabbage, baking of bread, seasoning. The things we used to do in Poland. At the beginning the wives did not work so they were all taking care of the homes.”

The first years in Finland, marked by a strong community solidarity and mutual support, were visibly recalled by the couple with great warmth and nostalgia. This is not to say that the

affective ties across the borders did not have their emotionally positive input. Quite the contrary, it can be assumed that owing to their continuance through phone-calls and letters such image could be preserved. Moreover several years later they allowed the couple to endure a moment of community disruption and local social exclusion.

The above instance sheds light on the positive experience of resettlement which might have or might not have declined with time. In some cases, though, the initial sense of isolation and loneliness emerges as particularly overwhelming with the source of support almost exclusively located in Poland. Here the gendered nature of the phenomena emerges (see also Viruell-Fuentes, 2006). The studied male migrants had from the outset the opportunity for social interaction within the employment structures. This not only allowed them to make their first social connections but also occupied their time and gave an environment to master language skills. I noted the opposite in the case of the female migrants.

Prior to migration all but four women worked full-time and some had very promising careers ahead, high skills and at least secondary education. Everyone was in her twenties-early thirties and led a vivid social life. The migration created a sudden social and professional void. It was “a blow” to be unemployed (“And I thought I am very well educated, smart, articulate and speak foreign languages”) with an excessive amount of free time, topped by the few immediate networks providing care, comfort and entertainment. The spare moments were bringing back thoughts and images of people and places in Poland, exacerbating the sense of loneliness and emotional decline. For the Polish women who married a Finn, access to their husbands’ wider family and friendship networks was actually of little affective benefit. Even if the Polish spouse was positively accepted the lack of Finnish language skills was a serious obstacle.

Ludwika: “When I came [to Finland] I felt very lonely. Lonely and sad. At the beginning it is always a huge language barrier. You cannot communicate with anybody normally, with anybody except for your own people [Polish fellow migrants]...I longed for Poland, my vivid, hectic life there, people whom I could talk to, the environment in which I could wind down. None of that was here.”

Marta: “I had great difficulties with acclimatization. I was and still am very conservative. When I came here I had the ‘no, no, no’ attitude. Jari [Marta’s Finnish husband] arranged everything for us [Marta and her children], everything was ready and waiting for us: I knew where the Catholic Church was, where the children would go to school and who our doctor was. Also Jari’s sister took care of us. Jari tried to do his best so as I would not feel lonely, so as I would not have time to think. But I could not come to terms with many things. For instance being unemployed was very painful. In Poland I always worked. And here suddenly I was out of a job. Also family relationships, the way of bringing up children, is very different than in Poland ... I cried everyday. Of course not in front of the children. I waited for their bed

time, usually around eight in the evening. I was putting them to bed and going out for a walk. It was already dark. Then I could cry freely. Nobody would see me. I know that this must have been heartbreaking also for Jari. He must have thought he failed to fulfill his declarations. But he understood me. [...] Actually I do not even know how it had happened that I finally decided to come to Finland [*laugh*]. I do not know, because I am really not the kind of a person who likes change. I had never thought I could move out from Poland.”

It could be assumed that the affective circumstances of the women migrating with a Polish spouse would be fairly more favourable. However, the isolation was reported also here. And as I was able to investigate the stories of past adaptations only through oral accounts, I became more directly involved in their process of integration in the case of the post-accession migrants. After initiating the contact I discovered that for Jagoda and Dominika, both home-makers who migrated in the past two years, it is me in Finland who constitutes their main source of intimate interaction outside the nuclear family. Even only this fact points greatly to the degree of their social seclusion:

Jagoda: “I always laugh that the house which we have in Poland is just an extra [thing] which holds us there. In fact I long for people. I miss my family and friends. After all, one has to interact with others, otherwise it is a nightmare. So here it is really tough. There is nobody else to talk to, to go for a walk with. In this I can count only on myself and my baby daughter. Bartek [Jagoda’s husband] sometimes goes with us but he does not like to walk [...] .people here seem so cold, closed.”

Dominika: “At some point I had an awful depression. I felt like in a prison. Only children, nowhere to go to, nobody to talk to. Awful.”

The emotional deficit was answered by the women primarily in two ways: through the maintenance of intensive transnational contact as well as making oneself busy with everyday tasks. Except for Jagoda, whose migration was linked to her spouse’s work contract and was intended as strictly temporary, the women tried to optimize the available local and transnational resources to speed up the process of integration. The goal was to enter the informal and formal structures of the Finnish society with as much of affective security as possible. Against the social seclusion the latter lied unavoidably in the well-rooted relationships with the loved ones in Poland. Phone-calls, letters, and personal visits were the transnational tools to ensure oneself with emotional well-being. “I felt awfully lonely. But I always had close telephone contact with [kin in] Poland. I called; my first, second, third sisters called, there was always something going on.” For Dominika and Jagoda who came already in the Internet era, the “Finnish here” constituted a mere physical framework for their existence in a virtual space until their husbands came home from work. In its extreme form Jagoda did not go out from home at all for three months after her arrival as she was in the last stages of pregnancy. She kept the Internet messengers and the mobile phone turned on even during mundane household tasks. The kith and kin in Poland were constantly within reach of

communication. This kind of continued access to transnational emotional resources emerged as central and essential. However, as I noted previously, the awareness of distance inscribed in the above technologies impeded the total eradication of seclusion. Although they actually talked with those in Poland every day, it was the sense of embodied interaction that they sought for. For another migrant, Marta, the communication emerged as of no support at all: “I did not call often. I was just unable to talk. And this was a problem. I was not able to talk on the phone. Because when I talked I only cried.”

The everyday communication confinement to Finland was characteristic of the women who came before the technological explosion or else did not use the Internet. Inevitably the actual possibility to counter their emotional tribulations through transnational talk was limited. Here the intentional organization of time, including study of the Finnish language came to the forefront. With the absence of a local social circle the activities were designed to bring comfort without the necessity of wider interactions.<sup>23</sup> Until recently, the limited opportunities of learning at public courses underpinned the sometimes frantic engagement in mastering the language skills at home. The study was twenty-four-seven, in-between the household chores and sleep. When Laura’s baby daughter was waking her up at night, she rocked the baby in the trolley, while repeating the material from the notebook lying open on the table:

“I studied with bravado. I was sitting over the notebooks and learning. I was learning by myself because there were no courses available. I was doing exercises by myself and I was checking them by myself. Later on my husband found some classes at the company so I did a two year-course in one year.”

The idea was to learn Finnish but it was also an occupation that countered the transnational wandering of the mind towards Poland. Marta recalls:

“I put a lot of effort into my Finnish language. But I did it also so as not to go crazy. When the children were leaving to school I was taking out the cloth, the vacuum cleaner and I was cleaning frantically. And I was studying Finnish. I started the Finnish course right away. Normally the lessons were once per week, but I was voracious so I took twice per week. There were Finnish labels all over the house. I had Finnish around the clock. You go to sleep, Finnish, you wake up, Finnish. You want to devour as much as possible. For three months I had a terrible headache. But I also remember my house has never been so clean as then.”

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<sup>23</sup> It is a strategy of adaptation necessarily different from the one of community building employed for instance by the temporary labour female migrants to the US (Pessar, 1999.pp.64-65). Obviously the studied women also actively looked for social networks. They developed them, however, only in the later stages, gradually networking with more Polish people and befriending Finns. The stories told by women, stressing individual rather than collective-based attempts at adaptation (at least when it comes to their contacts within Finland) should furthermore be looked as the culturally underpinned, more or less intentional self-representations. They reflect the cultural values held by them in high regard: of female independence, self-reliance, professional success. In the end all these women accomplished a great deal, climbing the occupational and social hierarchy.

Also Barbara pursued a strategy of purposeful organization of time as she eventually rejoined her husband Karol in Finland upon retirement. After two years of intensive language study she started to engage in multiple sports activities: cross-country skinning, biking and swimming – things she actually did not do in Poland. In her late fifties she learnt to rollerblade. With Karol they recently installed a computer with Internet access. The everyday talks with her brother, daughter, granddaughter, mother and friends combined with her newly discovered pastimes made her being in Finland finally “bearable.”

Regardless of the above, during the initial phase of migration the most effective means enhancing emotional welfare and by the same token preventing a sense of displacement was embodied personal contact. Return visits were made soon after migration, or if that was impossible, kith and kin were invited to Finland. Some women, married to a Finn, still regarded Poland as their only true “home” physically and affectively months after migration. A recurring motif was of “packing the suitcases.” At the beginning, whenever disagreement between the spouses (from Polish or mixed marriages) occurred, whenever the downbeat feelings became overwhelming, women for a moment thought of the networks left behind as a refuge and acted upon it, packing the luggage. In a less tangible manner the same kind of affective hovering between “here” and “there” was manifested in the imaging of a return, of spontaneous escape: “sometimes I just thought about taking the car and going back, even for a short time.” Poland emerges as a relieving alternative, and even if the thought was not pursued, it was an emotional safety net. The imagining itself brought comfort, provided a reassurance that if the affective slide would continue there would always be the possibility of going back. This was also constantly reaffirmed by the women’s parents. They always emphasized that if anything happens they can always return “home.” In this regard perhaps the most salient is Marta’s story:

“I visited Poland very briefly. I thought that my head would explode. I thought that I would not stand it any longer. So I went there by myself already after 4 months, in April. Then we went there with children for the summer holidays. Jari had to work and stayed in Finland. And this was a terrible thing: I thought I would not come back [to Finland]. When I visited Poland in the springtime, I was by myself, it was short, one week or so, and I was returning to Finland to my kids. And this was normal. Everything was all right. But when I returned to Poland with my children during the summer, I went to my former employer and I asked for reemployment. I inquired whether my children would be accepted back to school. I still had my old apartment. My parents did not intervene. They knew it was my decision to make. Jari lost a fortune on the telephones. And I said I was not coming back. I postponed the return ticket [to Finland] once and I tried to do it a second time. Jari said that if I would stay, he would come and bring me from Poland himself. Eventually I came back. I knew I had to adjust.”



Marta's instance also indicates another important theme: for the majority of women rooting, that is acquiring an affective security in Finland, was tightly linked to the life and location of their children. For the women whose children were born post-migration, giving birth marked their gradual sense of emplacement in Finland. It was the naturalization of belonging and growing responsibilities which bounded them more to the new community. For others like Marta it was the children's successful adaptation. Gradually the longing became less acute, the emotional needs, even if through children, more fully satisfied. Yet the transnational personal linkages were always there to lean upon during hardships. Also thanks to the constant maintenance of contact with Poland, in case of divorce, the partner's death or other upheavals, the possibility of return continues to be an affective back-up. A statement such as Teresa's "If anything I can always go back" entails the idea that the networks in Finland can be lost, but the transnational ones close to never.

### **Transnational emotional work: talking and imagining**

Practically no family story I heard emerged without ideological "love" or emotional affection being mentioned: its presence or absence, loving "too little" or "too much." There is love for those who live and for those who have passed away, with actual and symbolic transnationalism brought about accordingly. The labour of love is primarily done through disembodied talk, but also through money, gifts, and thoughts and, of course, personal contact. And even if all but the latter are culturally constructed as somewhat defective and incomplete, transnational family members more or less explicitly acknowledge not only their value but also the potential power of making the relationships more affectively rewarding. For instance flowers received unexpectedly from afar may say more about the affection than everyday face-to-face contact. "My brother was so tremendously happy" recalls Marzena "when I sent him a beautiful bouquet for his fiftieth birthday via an Internet florist. I was not able to come personally. He said 'as long as I have lived I have never got anything near to that. When I stood on the doorstep I felt as if you were here'." It is no accident that some migrants claim that their family relationships gained in quality since separation. If the emotional nurturance stemming from particular relationship is to be preserved, it demands particular attention, sometimes more emotional input than in the local context. Most of the transnational family members, now that they finally have the technological opportunity, spend hours talking and listening to each other, something which they had not always done, or would have been doing while living in Poland. Simple calling every week "just to catch up" entails interest, care and affection. As in the case of Mirka, her relationship with her sisters is

better than the latter have with each other although they reside in the same city. Mirka talks to them more intimately and more often despite, or rather because, of the distance and knows more about them than the two know about each other. Virtual conversations with the loved ones appear as a significant act of nurturance, it is a time used to enhance the quality of the relationships.

Dominika: “All in all I now have much better contact with my mom than I had in Poland, maybe because I have started to appreciate our relationship more. In Poland we did not see each other often. I never had the urge to go to visit her deliberately. Never. Just when I happened to be in the neighborhood, and I felt like visiting her, wanted something or the like, I dropped by. And it was once per two, once per three months. We had our ups and downs. And now I just know that I cannot see her, that I have no other possibility to contact her other than the phone. And maybe that is the reason why I miss her more.”

Family members living nearby may postpone talk and intimate being together; the family seems to be more taken-for-granted. If contact is often, for instance under the same roof, the amount of contact, the meetings in passing are not so often equated with their quality – distinct and rarely interchangeable concepts. Still such contact is idealized, by the Polish media, the Catholic Church and even by the Academia. Migrants and their loved ones have to create the meaningful, “loving” relationships against these ideas.

The context of multinuclear households shows well how deeply this ideal is internalized by the migrants and at the same time how it contradicts with life in practice. When I met some of the (male) temporary workers, all married and with children in Poland, they asked me: “This way of life is a disease. Maybe you know how one could recover?” According to folk assumption they built love “abnormally” (to use the migrants’ term): through ritualized communication, dreams and thoughts. Already mentioned when the ritual of visits was discussed, imagining of the loved ones should be read as a significant self-nurturing (but also a self-penalizing) practice that provides a sense of belonging in a physically alien environment. Every evening before falling asleep, Adam thinks of his small boys. What they do, how they feel. It is a part of (re)confirming that his “life has meaning,” or more specifically, that his stay in Finland has a purpose. When the transnational conjugal relationship is marked by distrust, “too much free time” (and ironically this may be found in some Finnish workplaces in abundance) might mean “mindwork” that is tormenting.

Tomek: There is a problem: too much free time, and nothing to do with it. And this makes you just sit and wonder. One has to come up with any activities at all just not to think. And there is not much stuff you can do around here. *[laughs]* You can go to the shop, play some pool, go to check the Internet *[accessible to 140 people]*, and I do not know what else. Constantly the same people, the same faces. Not enough books in the library. Anyway there is definitely too much free time. Too much free time at work and during leisure *[laughs]*.

However, the difficult moments might have increased the appreciation of the emotional safety stemming from particular relationships.

A transnational family network of affective support stretches from the imagined everyday reassurance of being cared for to the more specific exchange of advice, guidance, expressions of sympathy, understanding and concern. For some migrants these networks are the most significant source of emotional care. As the most sound, intimate and appreciated networks, they are the first ones sought for. Confidence in particular relationships comes from the shared history, the endurance against time and separation. Significantly they survive the break-up of many interpersonal ties established in Finland which are undermined by social divisions, conflicts and, ironically, internal and return migration. After twenty years of social upheavals, estranged from both the Polish and Finnish networks in Finland, Helena is not alone in her statement as she says: “At least there [in Poland] I have somebody who will always support me, people who I can count on. Here [except for my husband] I have nobody to go and talk to, pour my heart out to.” This points to the actual strength of the transnational ties or to the relative insignificance of national borders and distance.

Discussion of family emotional work is hardly possible without touching upon the issue of gender. The assurance of the family members’ emotional satisfaction is commonly emphasized as a women’s area (Wharton-Erickson, 1995; Duncombe-Marsden, 1993; Cancian, 1987). In my study at least from the men’s perspective they are themselves almost equal providers of emotional support: they also call, listen, write letters and visit. They are the intimate confidants of male and female family members. Of course, lack of the relevant account from both transnational parties necessitates taking all these declarations cautiously. The study of Ostroruch and Chmura-Rutkowska (2007.pp.187-215, 265-276) suggests that men in Poland have problems with providing emotional family support, including support provided for spouses and parents. To a lesser extent this regards men with university education. Similarly, according to Mikolajczyk-Lerman (2006.pp.65-70), Polish wives feel significantly less satisfied with their partners’ emotional support than vice versa. To some extent emotional unfulfilment is also expressed by husbands. What is noteworthy though is that encompassing only four transnational conjugal couples, all with a migrating husband, as limited as my investigation is, it largely confirms the above. In all but three cases at least at times there seemed to be two marriages: “his” and “hers.” Her emotional needs were unmet transnationally even if the couple talked for hours every single day. On a more positive note

Barbara stressed that Karol, when pressured by the matrimonial crisis, managed to express love and care she had waited for. Irena and Andrzej were the only ones whose marriage did not go through any serious emotional upheavals during the separation, even despite almost a complete lack of communication. However, the situation seems to look quite different among long-term migrants and their relations with their families of origin. Again only in the case of Andrzej and Irena, this time already after the reunification, she is more active than he in the emotion work performed transnationally. She makes the regular phone-calls, and generally it is her “task” to “listen to” and express affective care. Andrzej does it more occasionally, whenever the need occurs or whenever he “feels like it.” As the couple indicated, one of the reasons for such a division of labour is Irena’s unemployment and thus she has more free time. Furthermore in the case of one migrant family his relationship with the extended family is emotionally much more intimate than hers.

More saliently the gendered character of emotional work appears in the practice of open search for emotional support. Although migrants construct it as a more general cultural difference relevant for the whole Polish society, in my study it is more pertinent to women. It is the female migrants who look openly for emotional support and look for it among the other women in the family.

During one of the Polish community meetings I heard from an elderly woman “Unlike the Finns, we, Polish people, have to blurt things out. That is why we meet here.” This opinion is endlessly reproduced endlessly. “Blurting out helps us, prevents stresses and mental illnesses” says Dorota. The Finnish culture, if anything different from the Polish one, appears as such in the cultural patterns of affective expression and social contact. According to Tadeusz “the inherent feature of Finnishness is silence.”<sup>24</sup> “Polishness” is about, in the Finnish view, an excessive and bad-mannered verbalization (it is “nolo” – embarrassing). After years of stay in Finland some Polish migrants admit that to some degree they have adapted to the more silent pattern of sociability. For instance at the beginning of their marriage Marta’s Finnish husband called her “a radio”: she talked constantly, she wanted to know everything. With years she has become more composed, at least in the everyday interactions in Finland. Nevertheless “talking things out” is the most common form of emotional support that the (always female) migrants and their non-migrant counterparts seek for in the transnational family networks. In

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<sup>24</sup> On “reticence” as a culturally constructed ethnic indicator of Finnishness, see Taramaa, 2007.

this they rely on the most trustworthy sisters, mothers, aunts, the “fictive” kin. The subject of talks spans from everyday matters to emotional emergencies: the heartaches of sudden sicknesses, the deaths of family members and friends, general family tribulations, but also everyday worries, for instance children’s foreign travels, their education problems and upcoming exams. During our first meeting, Mirka was preoccupied with the situation of her adult niece’s husband: he was about to go to work in Germany and had paid a high fee to a middle-man. Mirka worried that this might be a scam (she watched the Polish TV every day and the news were filled with affairs of this sort). She decided she would call her niece the same day to ask how things were and by the way again express her concerns. Migrants call just to ease their sudden longing, since even after years of living in Finland while “doing something totally unrelated, out of the blue the thought overwhelms you how great it could be to be now with everybody in Poland.” Marzena has with her best friend, as-if a family member, at least once a week on the phone “a nightly psychological life-fixing.” Women’s accounts suggest that the (transnational) talk about trivialities is for their emotional well-being as important as talk about matters of apparently greater concern. If men appear as the emotional confidants (of their wives, elderly parents), they appear mainly in the role of listeners “as it normally goes when you talk with women,” to quote Tomek. In this context the technological development is of additional significance. The emotional well-being is easier to ascertain if the means of communication allow for longer discussions not constrained by money considerations. It is also one of the reasons for the definite preference of the phone over any non-verbal form of communication:

Alina: “I have to let out what is heavy on my soul. I talk to my husband, but afterwards I always have to call to Poland and talk the problem through one more time. I just have to. And because the phone calls are nowadays so cheap I can talk with more ease. We always called but now of course we call much more.”

Support through talk flows in both directions. It would not be an understatement to say that there are problems which engross all the family regardless of the borders. At some moments everybody’s lives are preoccupied with the same, common matter. As conflicting and disagreeing as the matter might even be, it still brings the transnational kin closer together. Owing to the distance, it happens that amidst the family conflict the migrants are looked upon as the tacit via-phone arbiters or intermediaries. Apparently being afar provides them with a degree of objectivity and emotional neutrality. They are the ones who can afford to look at the family disputes with interest and attention, but at the same time with a legitimate, limited engagement. However, the role of an arbiter is shunned away from. The migrants try to limit their participation to listening to the different sides (usually of siblings, brothers and sisters-

in-law, siblings and parents) and avoid making allies. “There are always two different versions. We assume that the truth lies in-between” says Helena and Leszek. “You can never guarantee who is ultimately right. And we do not want to go to Poland afterwards just to find ourselves between the two parties. They should fix those things between themselves, locally.” Leszek continues: “I can smooth certain things, give some advice, but I do not want to take sides.” Similarly the migrants have sometimes been the only confidants of some family affairs.

Transnational emotional talk of course has gone far and beyond dealing with family predicaments. Celebration and the possibility of sharing personal joys is also a part of the emotional family labour. Perhaps the most obvious exemplification would be child birth. “I am a father” was the email message that Jadwiga’s husband sent to all kith and kin in Poland. A picture of their newborn baby daughter was attached to the message. The same flows in the reverse direction when the migrants follow the growing up of their new born kin with amusement. There is also a sense of pride and accomplishment: material, social, educational, a confirmation that the migrants seek among those who knew them prior to migration and thus who can most accurately evaluate their success.

I already pointed to the culturally divergent patterns of verbalized expression recorded by the migrants. However, they are not the sole dimension of the different models of social contact in Finland which enhances the value of transnational affective support. According to the migrants, there is sometimes a hard-to-bridge “cultural gulf”: of feeling, thinking and understanding between the Poles and the Finns. I recorded relatively tame expressions stressing the different histories and different experiences, “functioning on a different wavelength,” as well as harsher statements, like the following:

Alina: “There is a complete lack of empathy. Finns are cold, deprived of feelings. They do not understand your situation. And if the other person does not understand you, then any communication is fairly impossible....It is not only that they are deprived of feelings towards us [migrants]. I think that they are even worse towards each other.”

As one of the cases in point, Alina indicates her experiences with the Finnish health services. Several years ago she had very serious and intimate health problems. It was a tremendously painful period for her (and for her husband). The already harmful experience was in no way addressed but even exacerbated by her Finnish doctor:

“I wanted to find out why; what had happened. And I got nothing. He told me barely two words and the visit was over. I encountered a wall. No emotional expression, no attempt to understand the pain of the patient. He should say something, he said nothing.”

The same month Alina's mother-in-law came to Finland. "She wanted to console me."

All this by no means signifies that the Polish migrants do not have any close Finnish friends. Quite the contrary, there are statements acknowledging that if you manage to really befriend a Finn, it would be one of the most reliable social relationships you may ever have – you can open in front of them "(almost) as much as" in front of the Poles. Many migrants actually have at least one close Finnish friend. There is also an emphasis on the necessity to overcome the stereotypes and understand "the Finns" on their own basis: "you have to know what to talk about and with whom." Unsurprisingly then the generalized statements on the Finnish social culture contradicted with individual experience. They are important, however, as arguably they allow the migrants to symbolically disturb the same "ethnic" hierarchy that impeded their genuine access to the Finnish social networks.

**"We thought they would care more": failed expectations and "inappropriate feelings"**

After Hochschild (1984, pp.56-75) I would say that the transnational emotion work which by producing the "proper" feelings brought the migrants (and drawing on their accounts presumably also the kin in Poland) emotionally satisfying family relationships was analyzed in the previous sections. Yet this is only one side of the picture. First of all, if separation may create conditions in which the care resting on the family ties, now deterritorialized, becomes more valued, the higher then the sense of disenchantment when the care is not provided, i.e. in situations when "an inappropriate feeling" (ibid.) – inappropriate for a given situation, for a given relationship - permeates the transnational interaction. "Migration is a test for the [conjugal] relationship" I heard from Tomek, a temporary labour migrant. It is a fairly popular assumption. I would suggest that migration if anything is a test of the conceptions family members have about their relationships. We know that for instance men tend to have misguided assumptions of the emotional quality of their marriage. Unsurprisingly then a break-up of the ties may come as a blow.

Migrants, as well as their non-migrating kin expect that the emotional support will continue across borders. Migrants, who at least at the beginning often experience social isolation, may have even higher expectations. A look at the emotional history of a relationship, a process of the building of its intimate support, sheds light on the possible underpinnings of the expectations that do not materialize. To exemplify I will refer to Dominika's story.

Dominika, as I already mentioned, is a recent migrant. She came to Finland with her husband and two children. Soon after migration her small baby daughter was about to undergo a series

of serious medical treatments in a Finnish hospital. It was a tremendous emotional upheaval for Dominika. Apart from her husband she had no other source of intimate support in Finland. But even more painfully she was failed, as she thought, by her close and trustworthy family networks in Poland:

“Maybe we imagined too much. That they would miss us, that they would care... But everybody ignored us. I think that at least my mother or Przemek’s mother should be interested. If I were them after every doctor’s appointment [of Dominika’s daughter] I would keep calling and asking how it had gone. Personally I would do it. But they did not. Not my mom, neither Przemek’s mom did do it. They forgot.”

Przemek tried to legitimize their, or rather his own mother’s, lack of concern: “They did not ignore us. It is just that everybody had their own problems.” Dominika on the other hand clearly assumed that the emotion work was the responsibility of her female kin, particularly of mothers. For Dominika, who is a daughter but also the one who does the primary emotional care in the family, their behaviour is unacceptable. However, if one is to consider their family history, Dominika’s expectations were hardly possible to fulfill. Earlier she claimed that her mother had always failed her. The same went for her mother-in-law. It seemed that both family relationships were a history of emotional misdoings, even if along the way the mother-in-law provided significant economic support.

To continue with the negative side of emotional care giving, there is also the kind of support which not so much as fails, but its ill-meant (or at least perceived as such) character continues after migration. Again it is related to the maternal role in its “unsuccessful” and “inappropriate” performance, lacking love and affectionate warmth which mothers are culturally bound to have:

Jadwiga: “I think that my mom has bestowed with love only her one, first child. She did not have space for the rest ... She has never appreciated me, she has always been telling me I am and I would be nobody... Now I try to boost my self-esteem a little. I have my husband and my baby daughter. I am reading a book about toxic parents. Just to understand all this. My mom is from a normal home. She used to be normal, she was totally different, only later on she became so bitter. I do not know what has happened.[...] She has no interest in me.”

Anna: “But earlier you said she is interested?”

Jadwiga: “But you know it is not that kind of an interest as if she would like to help. She just does everything to prove to you that you are worse, that everything that you do is wrong. If I have a problem and want to ask her something, for her it is just a satisfaction that I am stupid and I do not know something.”

Anna: “So maybe it is good you are here, you will get some break from each other?”

Jadwiga: “Well, yeah. But the thing about toxic parents is that they attract their children. And children try to do everything to get their love.”

The above once more indicates how problematic it is sometimes to challenge the negative family ties, here for the sake of parental “love” and the affective safety it is to ensure. The provision of support, although usually perceived as a positive transnational practice, may as



well rebound, and create emotionally upsetting, “toxic” to use Jadwiga’s (inherently Western) term, networks of intimate relations.

### **Self-reliance and the intentionality of emotional work**

Regardless of the interest and care expressed by kin, the fact is that the power of transnational support in addressing the kin’s mutual emotional tribulations is actually limited. Hochschild (1983.p.68 ) writes: “the deeper the bond, the more emotion work, and the more unconscious we are of it.” It can be argued that the transnational setting partially uncovers to the family its intentionality. The parties here and there recognize that the distance and different cultural contexts preclude complete emotional disclosure.

Firstly the transnational family members get to know about some upsetting family events post-factum, or sometimes never. Leaving other parties under-informed, at least until the issue is resolved, is an attempt at their emotional protection. Being afar, whether in Poland or in Finland, “they cannot help anyway,” while information would just cause unnecessary distress. In addition there seems to be awareness that distance affects perception. The lack of embodied contact enhances the play of the imagination, and therefore some problems may be distorted, blown out of proportion:

Tomek: “Life happens there in its own right, one is not there physically, does not feel it. If there are things which are not necessarily so serious, you exaggerated them because you do not see them, it is not so tangible to you. This brings discomfort, uneasiness; you have to work and be vigilant but your head is preoccupied with what is going on at home. So it collides, it definitely collides.”

Thus silenced out are those problems which are perceived as minor or possible to resolve independently: practical and health difficulties, inner family conflicts and psychological stresses. Some problems are discussed with some siblings but not others and parents are “spared” upsetting news and vice versa. For instance, Helena’s parents told the couple about her mother’s broken leg after the problem had been taken care of but confided in them and looked for advice regarding the disagreements they have with their other adult children.

Also not everybody is willing to “pour their heart out” excessively. Some refer to the idea of self-reliance and dislike “burdening” others with one’s own problems, as “everybody has enough problems of their own,” especially in contemporary Poland.

Leszek: “I always try to be independent. Nobody can ever say that I owe them something. Everything I have I owe only to myself. [...] Of course if I would ask somebody personally I am sure they would help me. For instance I have a very good contact with my brothers-in-law.

It is just that I do not like to share my worries with others, ask for help. I prefer to deal with things on my own. I would only ask if I really did not have other choice.”

This stood in contrast to the previously discussed cultural need for talking things through among the Poles, but there are also indications that such restraint is again highly selective.

Conscious control of the information flow, although a part of the emotional work of caring, is perceived with ambiguous feelings by the migrants. On one hand it allows enjoying only the positive aspects of the family relationships and spares the tensions and conflicts that are nearly inevitable in the local setting. It facilitates dealing with the separation. On the other, however, not knowing impedes the fulfillment of family obligations, including the ability to care. In the end the migrants prefer to be fully informed about matters which in their view could affect their role in a given family relationship.

In a fairly different mode, the deliberate emotional work relates to situations in Finland which the migrants assume are not fully comprehensible to the kin in Poland. Firstly there is the idea of the general emotional specificity of “being a migrant” and “living in exile.” Here an understanding of the particularity of certain migration experiences, such as discrimination, appears to be the prerequisite for the possibility of providing genuine support. Secondly, there are problems considered as alien to the Polish culture. For instance, according to some migrants, it is futile to talk about the financial hardships they experience in Finland which are also one of the prime problems most of them have to deal with. From the perspective of the kin in Poland the solution for lack of money would simply be to borrow money from the extended Finnish family or relying on any other intimate social networks. Apparently this is not a viable answer in Finland. Before the introduction of the capitalist market economy also the idea of a bank loan and the necessity of its subsequent repayment was only vaguely familiar to the people living in a centrally planned economy.

Considering all of the above, the most desirable source of help would be a befriended, trustworthy person residing in Finland, with a shared history, familiar with the Finnish context but also with the experience of being a foreigner. The limitedness of such intimate networks, in some cases a severe one, puts emotional pressure on the conjugal unit the migrants are a part of. It becomes the heightened place of affective care, the most reliable circle of trust. It also increases the sense of belonging to the nuclear family. Zofia and Wiktor say about their marriage:

“We try to reduce the resistance. When two horses pull the carriage they will always help each other because unfortunately we can only count on ourselves. Who will help us in times of trouble? Nobody. We are here alone.”

For the migrant women adult children also often constitute important confidants. Yet everybody recognizes that there are moments in which the nuclear unit is emotionally insufficient, when the wider social contacts not only in their virtual, transnational form, but also in the embodied, local one would constitute a complementary social buffer, available on the spot and with a common understanding of the situation (see also Gardner, 2002.p.118).

Helena: “I know that my husband has his own problems, something troubles him, why should I additionally burden him with my own problems. The same goes for our children. And one is sometimes left completely alone, can rely only on oneself, on one’s own strengths. And that’s the truth. There is nowhere to go to, no friend to pour your heart out to, to wind down, detach from all that. “

Interestingly, the lack of the latter does not necessarily make the migration experience a negative one, particularly if there is an opportunity for very frequent return sojourns. Migrants also “get accustomed” to the increased social self-sufficiency and develop an “emotional armour” (to use one of the migrant’s terms) against the hardships.

## **Chapter 8 Transnational chains of care and the (re)construction of 'Polishness'**

When I entered the room of Jolanta's seven-year old daughter, Kasia, my eye was caught by one of the photos standing on the shelf. It seemed a very emotional, almost a tormenting picture. The photo portrayed Kasia and her frail eighty-year-old grandmother. They both cried and hugged each other. At the background there was an old Polish house, the place in which Jolanta spent her childhood and her children have spent all summer vacations. It was an annual scene of goodbye, "always a moment of despair."

Kasia, Jolanta and her mother represent three generations of transnational actors, linked through the family provisioning of emotional, practical and material care. Although Jolanta's mother has never visited Finland, she actively participated in the upbringing of Jolanta's two children who have already been born in Finland. When Jolanta's mother's health deteriorated Jolanta started to spend more time caring for her mother.

Throughout the family life course a chain of diverse forms of assistance and help flows across borders, encompassing the different family generations. The most distinctive is the support provided at two family life stages: childrearing and care for the frail, elderly parents. This includes the practical, material and emotional provisioning whose extent and type are individually negotiated.

The norm of mutual intergenerational obligation and responsibilities is, according to Potoczna, "deep rooted" in Polish family life (2004,p.249). In the transnational space the importance of such assistance acquires a new dimension, accounting for the multicultural habitat of the family. The symbolic and actual transnationalism, transnationalism as a "way of being" and a "way of belonging" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) mutually complement and reinforce one another. Firstly, through the care giving interactions the family members in Poland constitute powerful nodes linking the migrants' children to the Polish heritage and the heritage of the particular family: language, traditions, national and family history and predominantly the Catholic religion. Secondly, in a more straightforward manner, the patterns of upbringing and care for frail parents can be regarded as a means of distinction from the "Finnish" mainstream and an indicator of counter-assimilationist tendencies. In the face of scarce co-ethnic community the domestic sphere is the one the migrants perceive as the space

of the most uninhibited cultural creation. I was often told about the “little Poland” and ways of life and bringing up children not according to the “Finnish” norms but norms “of one’s own.” Jolanta for instance remarks:

“There is a lot of things [in Finland] which I do not like, but well ... we unfortunately live here. The Finnish saying goes that you have to follow the norms of the country you live in. I am introducing in my home what I have learnt in Poland as much as possible. But unfortunately when it comes to the surrounding environment I have to adjust to it, not the other way round.”

Interestingly, at a first glance a different stance, but in the end pointing to the same aspects of transnational freedom within the domestic space was manifested by Andrzej:

“In the powerful, dominant cultures, like in Germany, if you want to succeed you have to assimilate totally, you have to go native. The pressure of the native model is so strong that migrants, at least if they want their children to manage somehow, decide to cut them off [from the culture of origin], to make them native. And hence you can meet people [Andrzej and Irena know them also personally] who left Poland and forgot their own language. In Finland though there is no real pressure to assimilate. It is a consequence of the fact that it is a small country, people are introverted. The Finns’ lives go around in their own orbit and people do not trouble anyone. For instance it is really hard to find a Pole who would speak poor Polish here. People mainly retain their culture of origin, that is, they do not absorb the native one. They just exist somewhere on the margin, or manage through work. But what they do in their free time, nobody cares.”

Obviously the pre-migration patterns are not transplanted but interact with the existing structures in the transnational context. The dynamic interplay of “culture, structure and agency” (Foner 1997) leads to the retaining of some elements and to the modification of others. At the same time, though, the migrants are forced to conceptualize their “Polishness” in the face of the rapid changes in Poland. The constant transnational linkages through people and the Polish media (the ubiquitous TV and the Internet) afford them with up-to-date knowledge of the scale of transformations. In the case of the migrants from the communist era, the Poland they left behind and the Poland with which they are in contact at present are two tremendously different social worlds. The Polish post-1989 society is seen by the migrants as a society of dog-eat-dog competition, “in a rush”, where people have gradually less time for close social interaction and family life. I was provided with examples from their immediate environment of the growing commodification and individualization of ties; a turning away from the rigid Catholic norms including increased divorce rates, cohabitation and single parenthood. These are recognized as processes of a steady blurring of the cultural, Finnish-Polish boundaries: “When I now go back to Poland I imagine that some things should be as they were when I left. Unfortunately they are not,” Marta reported sorrowfully. The transformations are perceived particularly negatively by devoted Catholic migrants.

The idea of certain “habits of the heart”, to be passed on as a version of the Polish culture, was additionally made problematic by the migrants’ fairly diverse views on Finnish family life. My presumption of more uniform representations was not confirmed. Referring to scientific sources (academic lectures, books and papers) and their personal experiences, the migrants, although not always explicit, indicated the heterogeneity of the intergenerational family relations in Finland: cases pointing to close support are intertwined with sharply opposite ones. What is recognized, though, is that there are certain “models” or “standards” which allow for the kind of family practices which in the Polish normative context would be much harder to accept.

Espiritu (2003, pp.158-160) reminds us that a marginal ethnic position is a powerful tool through which migrants may assert their moral superiority over the “host” society. Indeed, along with the acknowledgement of diversity and fluidity, some migrants construct certain aspects of the Polish family (and more widely the social and national) as more advantageous. As in many other migrant groups, the advantageous distinctions are ascribed to the issues under discussion in this chapter: close intergenerational relations throughout the life course, an enduring family support and the interrelated idea of the home as an intimate and family-centered “refuge.” The historical position of both countries (Poland with a nobility heritage and Finland with a peasant one) and class differences are also played out. The more educated migrants emphasize the atmosphere of cultural ‘refinement’ and erudition, a sense of cosmopolitanism in which their children are brought up and which the ordinary Finnish children lack. The transnational nature of the family, the personal and symbolic connections spanning multiple nation states, is the means of cultural elevation. At the same time this strategy also seems to involve a not all-embracing but a critical gaze at the Polish family culture. For the migrants, occupying the liminal position here means discerning as much about the society of destination as the one they came from. Viewing cultures from multiple perspectives, recognized as beneficial in the rapidly transnationalizing world, is also to be passed on to the next generation. The close contacts with the extended family in Poland and the inclusion of the oldest generation in the process of upbringing serve these ends.

### **Childcare support**

Mirka: “I did not have any help in mothering. Only when my youngest son was born did my mother come to Finland for four months. But otherwise I had no help. My Finnish mother-in-law is a ‘great opera diva’, she was just coming for a coffee, but she never even went out with the children for a walk. Here [in Finland] the mother-in-law does not help [in childcare] even if

she is young and at her best. Here there is no such custom as in Poland that the mother-in-law, mother, grandmother or aunt would help. No, there is none. Here you have to hire strangers to baby-sit.”

Jolanta: “My mother-in-law was ill. She was on the disability pension for over twenty years. And she always thought she was sick enough so as not to help me. She has never helped me. I always had a grudge [about that] against her. I had a tremendous grudge because there were situations when it was really hard for me, in a foreign country with a small child that was very difficult. Karolina [Jolanta’s first daughter] was exceptionally difficult to raise. She was so difficult that after two years I decided I did not want to have more children. It was harder because I was in an alien environment, and there was nobody I could give the child to even for an hour, to go somewhere, do something else, just to relax. I was with her non-stop, twenty four hours a day. And I remember her screaming day and night. And I remember my first visit to Poland. Karolina was around eight-nine months old. I remember the moment when we arrived. At my parent’s place there was a cradle and all other stuff for the baby, everything was prepared. And my mom told me: listen, today you will have a peaceful evening and sleep, and I am taking Karolina with me. Otherwise it was a horror, a nightmare [...]. With Kasia, my second baby, it was easier to the extent that I just arranged it for myself differently. When Kasia was about to be born my niece from Poland came here. And she was with me for nine months. Practically she has brought her up. I was just the mother who cooked and prepared stuff. I slept in the morning while she was taking her for a walk. She was a very energetic girl.”

The female migrants coming to Finland, noteworthy always residing within nuclear family structures, all faced a similar predicament: the absence of locally available, practical help in childrearing. Even if they stayed at home during the maternity period, the lack of extended networks they could rely on was sometimes the cause of immense distress. The above cited accounts of Mirka and Jolanta, migrants married to Finns, are special in the sense that they construct the intergenerational care shortage as much in terms of the transnational separation as a cultural difference. Even a short visit to Poland brought the women a confirmation of the positive qualities stemming from close, unsurprisingly uniformly female, intimate family support. They were read as a customary part of the Polish family culture. Their unattainability in the Finnish family circle enhanced the cultural assumptions. Other migrants from mixed marriages report that their Finnish in-laws were involved in the upbringing process. However, the care has never emerged without the complementary role of the practical and emotional support provided transnationally. The same is reported by migrants from Polish marriages.

To begin with, during the lengthy visits in Finland, primarily grandparents but also the other family members (who were female except in one case) spent the bulk of their time providing on-hand childcare. They took on the domestic responsibilities while their migrating kin worked, went on holidays or enjoyed their free time. It gave them the opportunity to establish an enduring bond with the “second generation” and created an atmosphere of “Polishness” in the household. Grandparents, frequently devout Catholics, also exercised their religious influence starting from encouraging or else pressuring on the ceremony of baptism and First

Communion and, at later stages, expressing their dissatisfaction with the grandchildren's predominantly informal family relations: cohabitation and unwed parenthood. These were, although with time, understood and accepted by the Catholic migrant parents themselves. Paradoxically the grandparents were in a position from which not only did they have difficulty in coming to terms with their grandchildren's "Finnish" family habits, but also due to the radical and rapid historical shift they were little in touch with similar changes in Poland. On this basis, for instance, Marta denounced her mother's criticism: "She does not know what is going on in Poland, the more she should not judge what is going on in Finland."

Indeed individualism is the value which gets to be appreciated in the childrearing process and which is more associated with the Finnish than the Polish culture (at least in the culture experienced by the migrants in childhood). It is seen as a tolerance of the child's free development, unconstrained choices and independence, yet balanced with enduring family support, very close ties (for instance everyday lengthy contact with the already married adult daughter or son) and some degree of control (for instance controlling the hours of going out in the evenings, teaching good manners). A ready acceptance of such transnational habitus is particularly understandable if read through the prism of the Polish elites' (the intelligentsia's) Western aspirations already during Communism. Throughout the period they looked at the West as a representation of "high culture and progress." Ideologically the West was Poland's "true place" on the map of Europe, taken away by the externally imposed "backward and oppressive" communist regime (Mach, 2007.p.69).

An important, culturally-based argument for the transnational childrearing arrangement is also the one related to the idea of the superiority of kin care over the formal one. "The lack of the grandma institution is a great problem when you live abroad" Jan noticed. His mother-in-law and elderly aunt came to Finland for a while when his children were small, but they needed full-time care. In the initial years of economic adaptation both parents were pressured to be very active professionally to make the ends meet. The elderly aunt was to stay, but she felt very nervous and uncertain abroad. Because Jan and Basia thought it important to have a 'co-ethnic' caregiver, they made attempts to bring over family-recommended Polish baby-sitters. They often turned out to be a disappointment. Another good case in point Marzena who has already been mentioned.



Marzena's mother's caring role emerged as vital when Marzena's second child was born. Janek had poor health and demanded increased attention. Marzena's mother, already a widow but still living in Poland, spent over two years moving between Finland and Poland and relieving Marzena from her twenty-four-hour responsibilities. Marzena's mother-in-law was also of help but to a far lesser extent. In the meantime Marzena was able to study Finnish and attend professional courses. After several years she managed to start her own business. Finally Marzena and Jari, her Finnish husband, decided to ask Marzena's mother to move in. She agreed and after struggles with the Finnish immigration office Marzena's mother was granted a residence permit and migrated to Finland permanently. The application procedure alone reflected a care-value difference and stressed the role of childrearing as a process of multi-cultural reproduction. Marzena and Jari motivated the application with the need of a caregiver for their small child. The application was rejected several times. The Ministry indicated they did not see it as justifiable since they could get help from the Finnish social services or other relevant institutions. Jari wrote back that they were "not poor enough to go to the social services, nor rich enough to pay for a private nanny. They had, however, "a grandma [*babcia*] who was a fit carer with Polish language and a Polish background and able to give her grandchildren everything they needed and introduce them and the home to the Polish culture." Nowadays Marzena's mother says about Janek, now seven: "I came here after him, who else. He is mine, I practically brought him up." I was able to witness first hand one of the effects of this transnational cultural family strategy. Upon his grandmother's request (NB she herself was born in where nowadays is Ukraine) Janek started to recite in flawless Polish a nationalist poem for children. The poem starts with the words: "Who are you? I am a Pole [...] And what do you believe in? I believe in Poland [...]. Do you love it? I love it sincerely."

In line with the gender division of kin labour and cultural reproduction, studies indicate that in mixed marriages where the male spouse is Polish the children are more uniformly influenced by the mother's "host" culture (Jaroszewska 2003: 164, Gruszynski 1989; Chodubski 1998: pp.23). Therefore the migrant's mother's influence may be assumed to be of particular significance in this type of conjugal configurations. Here the interactions between the wife and the mother-in-law also mean the encountering of two cultures and two family models of upbringing. And although the limitations of the material do not allow for any wider arguments, some putative remarks can be made. All Polish migrant women notice the differences in upbringing patterns. The Finnish ones, apart from such practices as feeding the baby, seem to be more liberal and permissive, even by contemporary Polish standards. Also

whereas the Finnish mothers-in-law are portrayed if not indifferent, definitely non-intrusive, the Polish mothers at least openly express their critical opinions (for instance regarding the feeding). The above, coupled with the communication barrier, can create certain tensions when a Finnish daughter-in-law is involved. This was the case of Piotr. His mother spent three months each year in Finland caring for his little daughter. The lengthy stays bothered his Finnish wife. Piotr nonetheless advocated his mother's presence. He wanted his daughter to have more contact with the Polish culture (Piotr had practically no Polish contacts in Finland) and to prevent his mother from a sense of loss of the grand-parenting ties. As Piotr suggested this could have been one of the reasons of his marriage's deteriorating bonds which ended in divorce.

During the maternity period, kin provide on-hand assistance in childrearing predominantly in Finland. The support is also virtual. On the phone women ask for guidance and share the maternal experience with the other female family members. Again, however, this kind of care can be excessively intrusive as it bridges a spatial distance which is sometimes actually desired. Jadwiga, already married for two years, wished additionally to affirm her independence through childrearing. However, her mother, who ventures unsolicited advice on the phone, violates this need constantly. The transnational border just enhances the disagreements:

“She has far too much to say. She intrudes into my and Alcia's [Jadwiga's baby daughter] lives. For instance she instructs me on how I should feed her. I say that I am feeding Alcia with this and she says no, give her the other thing. She says 'surely there is no baby-food in Finland'. And I tell her that here they have the same stuff as in Poland; that they also have children here and these children also have to eat something. I tell her: 'Mother, do not be so backward!'”

As significant as the phone contacts and visits to Finland are, the most effective means of shaping the intergenerational bond and by the same token the children's transnational sense of belonging are visits to Poland. The power of the return visits in forging the second-generation experience is noted in numerous studies (for instance Zontini, 2007; Smith, 2005; Levitt and Waters, 2002). In my study it appears as travel to the “roots” in multiple senses: in building attachments to particular geographical places, the construction of a second “homeland” and a national identity (“learning to love Poland”), the tracing of genealogical connections and their conflation with Polishness. Bringing children along or encouraging them to spend periods of time in Poland is furthermore an answer to grandparental needs. In this form it is as much a practice of childrearing as caring for non-migrant parents. Children habitually spend summer

vacations in Poland, live at the grandparents' place and learn the family's and Polish national history. The interactions taking place exclusively in a Polish environment are far more demanding and emotionally powerful than those happening in Finland. They allow the children to forge affirmative and affectionate memories about their grandparents which endure after their death and thereby prolong the symbolic transnational connections. Unsurprisingly, the first association is gendered and linked to Polish food – a quotidian but potent emotional source of positive affiliation and an expression of love. Through cooking favourite delicacies such as pierogi and spinach soup, often “ordered” by the children before arrival, the grandmothers become the embodiment of the warmth of the “Polish” home. Against the frequent absence of the parents during such visits, contact with the grandparents also necessitates communication exclusively in Polish.

In Polonia studies language is usually perceived as a major determinant of cultural identification, an index of ‘ethnicity’ (see for instance Smolicz, 2003; Jaroszewska, 2002, pp.162-165; Grabowska, 1998). Chodubski argues (1998, p.15) that “language is a central key, which reveals [Polonia’s] regional origins, social background, education. It is an archive of culture, a tool and transmitter of values, as well as the repository of the information about the values.” Also the studied migrants give precedence to language as a marker of “Polishness” and a “Polish” kind of upbringing. It emerges as an indispensable tool providing access to the cultural and family “roots.” Parents often refer to their children’s fluency in Polish to compliment the latter’s strong linkages to Poland (and indirectly their own national and ethnic loyalty and personal investment). Habitually, they set their own against the linguistically less skilled children of other migrants or even kin children in Poland. The family staying behind is here both a reason and a means of linguistic development. “I cannot imagine that my children could not communicate with my parents or siblings” says Helena.<sup>25</sup>

Vacations in Poland held an instrumental value. The multiple cultural affiliations, used to elevate the migrants and their children’s socio-cultural standing in Finland as I already mentioned, acquire a superior stance also in the context of the growing transnational interconnectedness of the (post)modern world and capitalist competitiveness. The deliberately

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding the young generation of transnational kin, I came across an indication of the English language emerging as a new lingua franca.

induced multilingualism, accompanied by the independence and strong family support, places the migrants' children at the front of the race at the global labour market.

### **Negotiating care for frail parents**

The parent-child relationship is situated among the central family affiliations in the Polish culture. Linked through the genealogical bonds in its "appropriate" enactment it is enduring and deeply affectionate. In a contemporary Polish urban family, the parental roles give precedence over the conjugal ones (Zurek, 2001.p.60). This lasts throughout the child's life course, including the period of adulthood. In the previous section I discussed the help parents provided for their adult children in the upbringing of the third generation. Here I would like to focus on child-to-parent assistance, specifically on the "working-out" of the moral obligation and emotional need to care for frail parents.

That the distance and life across borders do not preclude filial caring has been indicated in numerous studies, above all in the collaborative research by Baldassar et al. (2007). Indications of transnational care for elderly parents in the Polish migration context can be found for instance in the works of Sprangler (2004), Korczynska (2003) and Ryan et al. (2006). Unsurprisingly a concern and responsibility for the gradually weakening and ageing parents was commonly expressed and acted upon also among the studied migrants. They are those who, if the whole nuclear unit resides in Finland, constitute the focal point of transnational family endeavors, the ones who "evoke the most affection." A conceptualization of the motives of care giving is built upon the cultural patterns of intergenerational reciprocity, the filial roles and their normative and emotional scripts as well as the changing circumstances of the Polish economy. "Because they are our parents," "Because I love them," "I feel responsible," "I felt I had to," "My obligation as a child" were phrases habitually used. Some religious migrants bring up the Catholic rules. They refer to the fifth commandment ("We are from this 'sect' that believes in the 'honour thy father and thy mother.' And it is some absolute, supreme moral obligation"); an idea of respect for the parents regardless of the circumstances ("even if he/she lost his/her mind there are values which should be cherished.") Clearly, in practice the above is negotiated and interpreted in the given interfamilial and external context.

The negative affective history of a given relationship was the reason for the withdrawal from care for the parents in two cases. The absence of love, regarded as a crucial part of the

parental role, here seemed to be a legitimate excuse to forsake the normative filial roles. Usually, however, the weakening health and death of one of the parents/in-laws was one of the key transition moments inducing concern and stimulating long-term intensified care. Migrants started to be aware that their parents need, and expect, help. How the parents' future will unfold thus partly depends on the migrants themselves. The care is negotiated (explicitly and implicitly) with the other potential caregivers and the parents. Negotiation is here a suitable term as it entails dynamics, a process, and an ongoing (re)definition of the family situation. The parents' word was important in accepting or else refuting the arrangement. It should not be forgotten that in this way they were also significant agents shaping their individual biographies at the end of life. The children respected the parents' wishes at the same time though as they expected that the parents should understand the precariousness of their own position. The help in dealing with the difficulties of old age was negotiated to reach the transnational optimum. It was an attempt at a "zero-sum game" in which the care would not be a "sacrifice" of any of the family members involved, that is it would not entail what within the given context the family members could regard as an illegitimate and excessive demand. Gender is of relative insignificance in shaping the process. The male and female migrants, sons and daughters, are usually both engaged in filial care: emotional, material and practical.

Inevitably how adult children care for their parents is historically contingent. In the studied case the improvement of the welfare system in Poland and the cultural changes were the source of major changes. However, what remained unchanged was a preference for personal, family assistance in the old age, both by the parents and the migrants themselves. This corresponded with the overall trends in Poland (over 80 per cent of indications in the CBOS study in 2000).

Family-based provisioning for frail parents was an inevitable feature of the communist system. The social welfare system was underdeveloped and institutionalized forms of care (paid help, old people's homes) almost non-existent. The existing forms of help were stigmatized and, like any other state services, of very poor quality. In 1975 the income of one fourth to one third of the retirees in Poland was beyond the social minimum or on its borderline (Tymowski, 1979.pp.58-59). The norm was "the older the person, the worse his living standard and the greater the need for help from his family" (ibid..p.59). The support was then fairly undisputable and the cultural models (re)assuring it more unequivocal.

The most problematic thing from afar is provisioning practical help: shopping, the preparation of food and taking care of administrative and health issues. Practical help plays an indispensable role in overcoming the physical burdens of ageing. The studied migrants' situation in this period was facilitated by the still relatively young age of their parents. At least one of the parents, more often the mother than the father, was usually fit enough to provide the hands-on assistance. Otherwise an intensive personal involvement by the other family members was necessary. That the siblings resided in the vicinity or under the same roof smoothed the situation. For instance Mirka's father passed away soon after she came to Finland (in 1968). Her mother fell chronically ill. "She had shingles, diabetes and the coronary heart disease. Somebody had to care for her twenty-four-seven." Mirka agreed with her oldest sisters that the latter would resign from formal work and take over the caring responsibilities full time. Mirka was obliged to pay her "as if" a normal salary.

The post-1989 infrastructural changes increased the availability of formalized assistance in caring. Although the strategy of deliberate resignation from paid work disappeared, one sibling's permanent or temporary living with an ailing parent is still not uncommon. If there is no need for full-time assistance the non-live-in caregivers are at times hired to complement the family work. They come for several hours daily, while siblings in Poland (and in Finland) can continue their professional careers and take care of their nuclear families. Otherwise the siblings are the main source of support. In two instances of everyday help also "fictive" kin were involved.

The immediate carers function as the "steady links" between migrants, parents and the "external world." Only such ongoing and unincidental assistance can ensure the migrants with the "mental comfort" that the parents' will under any circumstances, including the sudden deterioration of health, not be left unattended:

Marta: "My parents are already in the pension age. Ageing means health and organizational problems. Slowly we become frail and we do not manage as well as we did before. Fortunately my sisters live nearby. They provide support for my parents, they are on their every call. "

Helena: "I have two sisters and two brothers. They are with our parents in a constant telephone contact. There is constantly somebody visiting them, checking how things are. We can say we have a mental comfort that they are not alone. That if something happens, there is always somebody close by who will help them.

Leszek: Yes, the bottom line is that they will get help."

In fact only Hanna's mother was at the time of the interview living in a nursing home. She had gone there after a stroke and her stay was planned to be temporary, for the time of her

rehabilitation. The home was chosen because of its “European standards.” Hanna stressed that such a solution has been possible only recently. During the communist era “everything was poor and substandard.” Hanna decided on the form of care together with her brother, a long-distance truck driver. Although he lived in the same town as the mother, he was constantly en route. While their mother stayed in a nursing home, they sustained her vacant apartment financially: “My mother could not imagine she would not have her old place to come back to.”

Significantly, despite the physical absence from the parents’ everyday life, none of the migrants has ever been denounced by their siblings that their caring involvement has been insufficient or the arrangement unjust. Firstly, the migrants are ubiquitously given, what Baldock (2000) called, a “license to leave.” The search for economic betterment in the West, regardless of the period, is understandable in the immediate family. The communist shortages and post-communist insecurity in common knowledge provides enough reasons for migration. This is especially so if other kin has migration experience as well. Migration under the family reunification scheme appears even more acceptable. Indisputably also a role is played by the fact that international mobility is a recognized part of the Polish national biography, and the West has always been in some ways a better place to live. Furthermore the migrants seem to be quite proficient in striking a balance of support, at least when it comes to their relationships with siblings. Sometimes the fact that the people in Poland are the prime caregivers is the outcome of the parents’ more intensive involvement in their lives than the lives of the migrants. The migrants also have at their disposal a powerful financial tool to achieve the balance in care. To come back to Mirka’s case, I asked her whether her sister did not mind Mirka’s limited hands-on participation. She replied “No, not at all. I helped her financially and she was content. I paid her more than she would earn monthly doing a regular job.” Mirka also sent remittances and after her mother passed away she felt obliged to forsake the inheritance: “I resigned from my share of the money. I said: ‘This is for the gravestone,’ and the rest I leave for you. We had a small detached house with a garden. I helped to renovate it. They sold it later on and I took nothing. Nothing.”

The improvement of the social welfare system in democratic Poland enhanced the financial situation of pensioners. In fact, according to the national statistics, they nowadays belong to a social group that is among the least struck by poverty (Central Statistical Office, 2007a). Nonetheless, in the face of the relatively small pensions, the limited possibilities of getting

additional income and the precarious health situation it is a group which still runs the risk of harsh economic degradation (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2004.pp.69-71). Hence the migrants provide material support usually in crisis situations. Money is given firstly for medicines, surgeries, hands-on care, bribes for the doctors and, secondly, for basic consumption needs and home reconstructions:

Marta:” As long as my sisters live nearby, surely they watch over our parents and help them. And I, to say bluntly, I fix it by financial means. “

Karol: “I gave my father money for coal and the like. Occasionally. Until recently dollars were the main exchange currency, so he was getting one hundred dollars or so. But then he was giving the money to the doctor. Like an old man he thought if he would line the doctor’s pockets, the doctor would heal him. But what could I say? He tried to help himself in his own way.”

Dorota: “I also helped. If only at the hospital one had to pay for the care, for the nurses. Because without ‘greasing’ there is no good care in a [Polish] hospital. To get some medicine, to have the nurse deliver better care - you have to pay for everything.”

Although the migrants’ financial role is significant, they are not the only financial providers. If the siblings can afford it, they are expected to share the expenses as well. Who pays for what and when depends upon the economic status, not the spatial location. To fully appreciate this form of transnational support we should consider that, according to the national statistics, the majority of Polish elders are the providers rather than the recipients of material help. The adult children, reciprocating to their parents mainly through practical means, often leave their financial needs unsatisfied (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2004.pp.70-71; Public Opinion Research Center, 2000). We can assume that the migrants complement in this way the otherwise deficient local strategies of care.

Forsaking the inheritance, as Mirka did, is yet another financial means. In two cases, however, the migrants decided to retain their part. This brought about a conflict among the siblings. For Leszek the struggle over his mother’s apartment, which she left him as the sole heir, ended up in the utter break-up of the family ties. Leszek was always the mother’s “favourite” and prior to migration he invested the most time and effort to helping both his parents. After Leszek left to Finland his brothers took over the practical caring responsibilities for four years. Conceivably this and the couple’s migration status contributed to the feeling of injustice. However, Leszek insisted that he “would never give up the apartment.” They see it with his wife as their physical anchor in Poland and their place of residence in the future. Perhaps this was also one of the reasons, or rather hopes, that stood behind the mother’s decision on the heritage which generated conflict.



The migrants also attempt to meet the requirements of embodied assistance. Altogether the migrants spend at least one month a year by “being” with their frail parents in Poland or in Finland. They provide hands-on care and perform the emotional work through shared activities. For instance when Hanna’s mother was still fit, they spent part of the time together in Poland, and other times in Finland because of Hanna’s professional obligations. Every summer now for the last couple of years they have been going to a health resort together for two weeks: a way of bonding and helping the mother’s recovery. Hanna, seeing her mother up to five times per year, emphasized her own active embodied participation in care giving: “We are more often in Poland at my mother’s, visiting more often than adult children living in northern Poland whose parents live in the South [of the country]. No problem.”

In the technologically shrinking world a part of the practical care can be done from a distance. This includes dealing with administrative issues and monitoring the quality of formal care by talking with the caregivers, the parents themselves and the rest of the kin. For instance when Teresa’s mother found it necessary to relocate to a different dwelling, Teresa first struggled with the building owner and then managed to help her mother through letters and phone calls to find a new apartment; Hanna exchanged e-mails with the nursing home management.

When it comes to the hardships of care giving for ill parents, the migrants also constitute a source of emotional support for the siblings. The latter can always call to the migrants to talk through the problems as they emerge, knowing that they would be listened to. Also “who else would be better to talk about it if not the brother or sister?” Culturally, the parents are their common concern.

All things considered, looking at the siblings (or even co-residing spouses) who stayed behind, their contribution should not be overestimated. The majority of the frail parents benefit from locally residing children in terms of everyday matters. But the children residing in Finland are no less important listeners and providers of solace. The often highlighted practical care may be performed with limited attention paid to emotional provisioning. I would like to stress once again, that the ensuring of affective comfort is work. It demands effort and focus whereas those who are involved also have their own fast-paced professional lives and nuclear families to tend to. I would suggest that the migrants’ transnational position, the separation and the interrelated sense of guilt on the one hand, and the limited social networks on the other, make them particularly attentive to their parents’ emotional needs,

including an awareness of their sense of loneliness or at least emotional unfulfillment. On top of this, the family biographies set them sometimes in the center of the parents' affection. Also, because an element of understatement and imaginative speculation is inherent to the disembodied contact, when you "cannot just hang up and run to see for yourself how everything seems," the migrants experience a state of apprehension about their parents more intensely than if they would live spatially close. When the parents fall ill and require daily assistance what for the latter is "an everyday thing" amounts to the extraordinary for the migrants. The parents and their potentially unaddressed problems become most important. This is reflected in telephone conversations and during personal visits. The relevant instances can be found in the following quotes:

Henryk: "Everybody is busy with their own lives. My brother works his fingers to the bone, his daughter works, his son-in-law works all the time as well. So nobody there has even time to sit and talk to her [Henryk's mother]. And I call her very often. I call her through Skype, we sit and talk, sometimes for an hour, sometimes for two. She tells me about everything that is going on, all the current stuff."

Jagoda: "I call home every second day because I am very worried about my dad. Something can happen with him any moment. He once already went through clinical death. And recently he also went through a stroke and had some serious surgery: a cleaning of the aortas. So since then I am very scared for him.... I am the only one who would listen to him, I would help him, I would talk to him. Everybody else gave up, they say: 'Let it go. I do not even want to hear about it.' And I try to help him because I know he needs support. My mother is always tired, she is like 'I am not going to listen to you anymore, you old men, stop it!.' So when I am coming, he always talks to me. He is so tiresome. An ill man can only talk about his illness so you have to arm yourself with patience, honestly. [...]. Always when I call he makes me feel so guilty. He says: I do not have anybody to talk to. If you were here it would be totally different. I have already forgotten how to speak. [...]. He talks to my sisters and generally they do not have bad contact but I think that he favours me the most. He misses me and my daughter. Maybe it is also because he misses me so much, because I am so far – I am not sure. But you know I was already taking care of him before. He was not ashamed of me. For instance there were moments when he was mentally collapsing. He thought that everybody wanted to kill him. So I was closing myself with him in a room. I did not let anybody in. Only then would he eat - he would let only me to feed him. I gave him food, I shaved him, he held my hand."

Marzena: "When my father died my mom became so lonely. Loneliness, loneliness. [...] And she came to us [to Finland]. Dearest heart. She was always like this. Today it is uncommon. And mom has gotten used to us. [...] She came once, for three months. Everything was great, she had strength, she was going out, for walks and downtown. And immediately she felt better. Just like me, when I came here for the first time. There was this sense of such warmth, such togetherness. After three months she left. She circulated for two years. Again and again to Warsaw [to the airport]. It was my friend who usually drove her - my mom was not very close with my brother or sister. They left home very quickly, right away started their own families. [When I went to Finland] they were coming to visit [our mom] every two weeks, dropped by for a short time. And that was it. Everybody was busy with their work. She was closest with me. And finally we asked her whether she would like to live with us in Finland. And she responded 'Why not. Can I?'. And I said: 'Yes, why not.'"

Migrants who are the only children, or whose siblings reside also abroad experience the emotional downsides of separation particularly heavily. Similarly, in one case although siblings resided locally, a serious family conflict made the migrant daughter the only source

of family support her elderly mother remained with. In these family configurations the filial support demands an increased material, practical and affective investment, for instance very frequent visits and monitoring of parents well being through phone calls up to several times per day.

### **“You never know when it can happen:” ensuring “good dying” across borders**

The deteriorating condition of the parents brings about an increasing awareness that the caring for their well-being is at the same time assistance in one of the key family transitions: from life to death. It is a stage when the idea of death, whether its timing is predictable or uncertain, permeates the migrant’s life. Anticipation of death structures the intangible and actual transnational practices. The aim is to ensure the parents’ “good dying” – a process which commences with the general awareness of reaching the end of life - finalized in “good death” (Sandman, 2004), and thereby to complete in a culturally proper way the embodied pathway of the filial/paternal relationship. To quote Hanna “I know that my mother is old and scared and needs help. And my moral obligation is not to leave her. In my view, my moral obligation, an obligation of a child towards an old parent, is to guide her to the other side.” It can be argued that how this transition is enacted affects the general nature of the relationship and its imaginative (re)construction by the children in the future.

A recent national survey indicates that the Polish people favour spending the last years of their lives at home, in the familiar environment (Public Opinion Research Center, 2000). One’s home is also the preferred place to die (Public Opinion Research Center, 2007). Although in line with the model of intimacy at a distance, only one fifth wish to live with the younger generations at old age, the physical presence of the loved ones is implicitly written in the ideal. Also the ritual of the funeral, which is a part of the “good death,” culturally demands the attendance of the closest ones, the children in particular. Absence at these crucial stages makes the closure particularly difficult. Needless to say, to bestow the parents with the way of dying they wish for, the migrants have to overcome the spatial separation and once again evaluate the “Polish” care giving model.

Piotr: “When my mother recently broke her hand I faced a situation when I had to think everything through and to start to act upon it. For many years I have been scared of this moment to come.” Piotr’s mother was over eighty. For years of living alone it was the first time she lost her self-sufficiency. Piotr was then in Finland. Fortunately his cousin lived

nearby and took the mother to the hospital. Piotr knew she would not have liked to move with him to Finland, even temporarily. At that age she was reluctant to move anywhere.

Piotr decided to weigh other options:

“I had a contact in a nursing home for elderly people run by nuns. I went there and found out it was a center of good standard: clean, neat, elegant, everything looked well. So I thought if my mother would not have liked to come with me [to Finland], maybe she could stay there until full recovery. But when I only mentioned it, she reacted so badly that I instantly regretted it. She is scared. Old people’s home is [from her viewpoint] something horrible. In the end it took me a long time to persuade her to come to Finland with me. She is not aware that she would not have managed by herself. She still thinks she is young and fit.[...] But she came and she felt well. But after a while she wanted to go back very much.”

When we talked Piotr was faced with an emotionally unsettling and uncertain future. However, he was though determined “not to force” his mother into anything, “neither to any care center, even the best one,” nor to move to Finland. “After all I cannot tie her here. Because she has to spend her last years as she wants to.”

In the end only Marzena managed to bring her mother permanently to Finland. Otherwise the parents’ desire, like Piotr’s mother’s, is for the children to eventually move to Poland. Even if they have once given the migrants a “license to leave,” granting them a license to stay when the parents are approaching the end of life is more problematic (regardless if other children were accessible locally). A silent negotiation takes place. The parents are expected to understand the difficulty of the children’s position and the fact that there are limits to filial “sacrifice.” A nuclear family to care and work for in Finland is the rational argument which parents appear to understand although not always to come to terms with emotionally. Even Piotr’s mother, adamant about his return, idealistically proposed to her son “You could live in Poland, work in Finland and commute every day by plane.” With all the infeasibility of the idea, this indicates that she was aware of (and in a sense respected) his rootedness in Finland. In this regard an interesting play of understatements took place between Karol and his father. Karol migrated to Finland to a great extent because of his father’s encouragement. “Everybody goes abroad, you are a skilled worker, why do you still sit here?” he told Karol two decades ago. “So he built me up so much [that I left]. But this was a mistake. This was a mistake.” Karol had never told his father about his post-migration reflections. “I had never told him that I regretted that he directed me in this way, that I regret everything. I did not want to upset him.” His father, on the other hand, was telling him on the phone how hard it was for him to live alone without any help. But he did not tell Karol to return even once. “Stay there. Your life is better there. Do not come back. And I always thought to myself: ‘better? Maybe - but not in Finland’.”

Children also respect the rooting of their parents in Poland. Thus the impossibility of bringing them to Finland as much as many children would like to – a means of alleviating the sense of guilt and spending more precious time together – has significantly little to do with migration legislation and a great deal to do with the cultural pattern of dying. The parents belong to the generation who through living its life in the communist era was always relatively immobile. With age the sense of emplacement increased. Furthermore, the Finnish language and limited social networks in Finland work as an obstacle.

Unsurprisingly a desire for the residential proximity with the children at the end of life is also guided (or even more so) by a mutual desire to make the most out of the time that is left. “Why has fate thrown me abroad, I could be closer, I could be with them more often, I could see them more often” is a reflection which has come over Dorota recurrently since her parents passed away. Similarly, the uncertainty when the moment of death would come (“It can happen anytime”) makes the migrants pay out of the ordinary return visits with a special focus on their potentially final character.

The dilemmas of transnational care at the end of life are furthermore a function of the stigma surrounding the old people’s homes in Poland. Their image as the “waiting room for death,” to quote the words of one of the migrants, is a historical and cultural construction. It comes from their already mentioned desperate situation during the communist era and it continues to be a symbolic representation of the refutation of family responsibilities and the interrelated, frightening idea of a lonely death. Even if the contemporary high standard of the old people’s homes undermines their association with poverty, the cultural beliefs are much harder to break away with. To what extent it is still a taboo is well indicated in the way the migrants talk about it. The very consideration of this option necessitates its implicit defense, a stress on the material advantages and standards. Interestingly, formal live-in care is in the studied cases actually not even considered.<sup>26</sup> The old parents’ distrust towards having a stranger around also makes temporary help problematic.

Importantly, in a most explicit way the above is perceived as a marker of the Polish-Finnish difference in family culture. As Andrzej remarks, what the Poles would consider a standard, the Finns would consider as something “beyond comprehension.” The perception of old

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<sup>26</sup> According to the statistics live-in care is also practically not considered in the society at large (CBOS 2000).

people's homes and more generally institutionalized care as rooted in the Finnish (or the Western more widely) model is related as much to the migrants' experience as to the Finnish self-representations. For instance when the migrants attend a Finnish language course, old people's homes are one of the institutions which they visit as a part of getting acquainted with the workings of the Finnish society. The visits are also made on other occasions. The negative impressions reassure them of the benefits of family-based care they are familiar with in Poland:

Irena: "Some of the classes took place in the old people's home - nicely looking, good standard. There were always people sitting in the corridor, disheartened, apathetic, empty eyes, with no enthusiasm or purpose. It all made a very depressing impression. When we were coming we always tried to be polite and cheerful: hello, how are you, etc. The other day my friend started to talk to one old lady. I did not follow the whole conversation, but in the end the lady looked at us with great sadness and said: 'I would never be here if it wasn't for that I have had to.' So it means that there is nobody to take care of her. This was the most emotionally disturbing moment for me."

Yet in difficult to resolve transnational situations the seemingly positive aspects of the Polish way of care are at times brought to question. "The Polish and Finnish models are completely different and I actually do not know which one is better" remarks Piotr. Andrzej goes as far as saying:

"[In Finland] people do not burden themselves too much [with caring for dependent parents]. The matter is resolved in a way that nobody will be overloaded. When one cannot manage by oneself one goes to the old people's home and that's it. [...] I think it is a natural, normal solution. The only problem is that it is very budget draining, it costs money, public and private money, and thus it is hardly possible in Poland."

His wife however does not share the opinion and, in general, reading the state of chronically ill parents in terms of burden is rare. Also the view of the most preferable model of care is arguably dependent on the current situation and may change substantially in response to the way one's parents have died.

I would argue that the very moment of the parents' death is one of the border moments when the contours of the cultural ideology and capacity of the transnational space to enable the (re)creation of the desired family relations are revealed. Similarly, the appropriate completion of the filial relationship is an ultimate testimony of its nature. Positive stories when the transnational situation does not hinder the active ensuring of good death contribute to the general affirmation of the migration experience. These were the stories which defy distance and national borders, and allow for unrepentant grief. For instance, although from afar and despite other relatives being present locally, Alina and her husband managed to arrange for her admission in the hospital when Alina's mother suddenly collapsed. Her mother's state was

critical to the extent that nobody wanted to accept her. Alina and Krzysztof activated their social networks in Poland through the phone. Later on Alina flew to Poland and the very same day her mother passed away. The funeral was organized right afterwards.

On an opposite note, the migrants' stories uncover that no chance of saying goodbye, the parents' "undignified" lonely death and a failure to attend the funeral account for enduring remorse. At this point the distance and division by borders emerge as a vast spatial gulf. The transnational circumstances are more or less explicitly blamed although they should be read as the stage for the happenings rather than their direct generator. There are two recurring themes. First, saliently capturing the state of the spatial and symbolic in-betweens is missing the last moments of the parent's life and the funeral because of their passing soon after the migrants have returned to Finland. Second, regarding two cases, it is of parents who after collapsing at their homes are found too late to recover. Although talking about the loved ones' death is not easy for any migrant, the latter accounts I found particularly filled with a sense of guilt, sorrow, but also of embarrassment and shame (we can assume that me being Polish contributed to this tone). Again one of these stories is of Karol and his father:

"My father was a widower. He did not want to re-marry although he had many chances. But he did not want [another woman], he did not want till the end. And he died miserably, at home, on the floor. Damn. Because there was nobody. Neighbours found him [after some time] and let the family know. My brother came, I flew in also. For actually he did not pass away immediately. He was taken to the hospital where he regained consciousness. But after three days he lost it again. When I was leaving he was unconscious. I had to return [to Finland] because I only had few days off. Two weeks later he passed away. I even did not go to the funeral. I was here alone, the funeral was there: one did not know anything, who, how, what [was going on.] ... At some point my brother told me: 'I will never, ever forgive you did not come. How could you?' And I was unable to come. I was just unable. It was right before May, 1, and he died April, 30. And in Finland it was already a holiday, we had days off, all the shops were closed. There was no possibility to buy neither a plane ticket nor a green card [for the car]. If I would have had a green card back then I would have gone by car. So I was trapped. And this is precisely 'the charm' of [being] abroad. When you are there, you are there. And this way a fat lot of good it is."

Interestingly, little has changed despite the technological progress and the opening up of the borders. Although now notification of death is given instantaneously (for those who did not have a telephone, or the telephone connection was hard to make, the notice was earlier given in a telegram), there is the Internet and the travel options are much more diverse the migrants still sometimes miss the last memorial service: because of material reasons and work schedule. A kind of cultural "redemption" is possible, however. In the case below, it is through post-death rituals.

Henryk's dad waited for Henryk's habitual summer visit to Poland. He was very ill and wanted to meet his son. As Henryk reflected, his father knew it would be the last and only possible time to meet with his son so he held on. Henryk came as usual. Throughout his visit his father was getting weaker. When Henryk was finally leaving to Finland his father was in a hospital. "Of course I said goodbye to him, kissed him at the forehead and said 'bye dad'." The next morning Henryk flew to Finland. The moment he landed he got a text message that his father had just passed away. "So I am there, at the airport. And now I have to find a way to get back immediately [to Poland]." But in such short notice Henryk could not find an affordable ticket. He called home and his mother told him: "Do not come. We will manage. The most important thing is you were with him until the last moments. He just passed away when you left." "So in this respect I was all right" Henryk said. He felt uneasy about not attending the funeral though. But soon "the strangest thing happened." Before passing away his father had imagined a gravestone he would like to have. At the time nobody had enough resources to buy it. Henryk was unemployed. Unexpectedly while being in Poland he was sent some money he was suppose to receive later on "It must have been God's hand" he said "The sum [I got] exactly equaled the price of the gravestone. Nothing more, nothing less." My interview with Henryk was held several years after it had happened. He proudly showed me a picture of himself standing by his father's grave at the cemetery. The grave had the black marble gravestone that his father had wished for.

From the above accounts it is visible that there are certain family obligations and norms which are difficult to resolve positively in a transnational space. However, even in the most apparently normatively unambiguous situations the culture offers a space for negotiation. In this lies the potency of the affirmative experience of the transnational circumstances

## **Chapter 9 Towards a conclusion**

Throughout the thesis I have attempted to show the persistence with which people at different historical and family moments strive to stay in touch, actively search for and find new ways of being together, renegotiate the rules and modes of family building and balance between the different forms of support and care that it is possible to enact at a given moment. The transnational context brings to the fore the family's creativity and flexibility. Because of the limited time the kin have for face-to-face interactions, we can see more clearly the constant



processes and principles guiding the inclusion and exclusion of family members, defining who is close and who is more distant, who is worth seeing now, and who can be met later on.

In the studied families the decisive principle seems to be an affective one. Emotional work, the production and sustenance of “love”, hence takes an important place among the transnational practices. It is a crucial element of the conjugal relations, the transnational care giving for the elderly parents and the interactions between siblings. Emotionally unsatisfying, “improper” relationship history may legitimately excuse the migrants (and non-migrants) from family provisioning. The many parallels in this regard with the Polish families residing locally additionally confirm that the transnational families should be read not as an abnormality guided by a different set of rules, but as another, increasingly ubiquitous, family form.

A family is always an interesting societal space to study. In the Polish culture it is visibly embedded in high normative expectations and strong emotions. Contradictory feelings pervade family life at all stages. Accordingly, a focus on the transnational family is not only a focus placed on a fundamental transnational formation, but also allows seeing more acutely the positive and negative aspects of staying connected. Among other things, the study shows that technological developments, often welcomed with celebratory voices, work both ways. Thanks to it families can communicate faster, smoother, easier, at all times and everywhere. Unexpected, as-if casual visits can be paid. The constant interaction provides family members with the benefit of knowledge about each other’s lives and thus enables the provision of help whenever it is needed. At the same time, though, technology brings about an excessive continuation of the unwanted, sometimes abusive relationships, the possibility of surveillance and control. Furthermore, against the common argument that technological advancement (in communication and transportation) is a major contributor to the emergence and maintenance of transnational families, the question emerges does it also entail a better enactment of family roles and responsibilities? Does it lead to a qualitative enhancement of family relationships across distance? My study indicates that this is not necessarily so. It is a perspective of families that lived in different historical contexts of separation that points to the strength and, if desired, the unchangeable quality of family ties. The thesis that it is easier nowadays to meet family obligations and responsibilities would only be justified if it is presumed that they are fixed and predetermined. The concept of negotiating commitments (Finch, 1989) becomes helpful here. It lets us see the situational flexibility of the “proper” enactment of family roles.

The communication and visits should be read in their own historical context. The given temporal moment, entailing a particular state of technological development, provides a “legitimization” of the frequency of various forms of contact. Also the changing technological conditions affect the process of negotiating the roles and obligations within a transnational family.

Somewhat interrelated to the above is the question of the relevance of the thesis put forward in quantitative studies (mentioned in the theoretical chapter) that the phenomenon of transnationalism is pertinent to minority. It is claimed that transnationalism unjustifiably became a key-word which opened all empirical doors. Within a decade it started to appear everywhere, creating a misrepresented picture of reality. There is thus a call for a stricter conceptualization of the phenomenon.

As the truth may be that transnationalism in its narrow sense is not present always and everywhere, transnationalism defined beyond the static and formalized activities is common. There is no reason to narrow people’s lived experience. And this happens when we advocate exclusive categorization. The commonality of transnational practices only points to the fact of how blinded the scholars were by the idea of methodological nationalism; the look from only one nation state. I would argue that Polish migration was transnational from the very beginning. The work of Thomas and Znaniecki, ubiquitously indicated as pioneer in tracing the transnational phenomenon, was after all addressing Polish mobility. Subsequently American scholars tended to forget about that kind of transnational connections of Polish migrants, shifting the focus to other migrant groups. Notwithstanding, the Poles’ transnational linkages have remained strong. Also the transnational engagements of the migrants I studied were well visible regardless of the period. They have been mostly regular and habitual. The prevailing majority has been tangibly pursuing different transnational practices, ranging from intimate emotional support and works of imagination, to economic and political activism. These practices have often been normal, habitual, and even mundane, to the extent that to a degree they had skipped the migrants’ everyday reflection. They might have even imagined themselves as shifting decisively towards rooting in Finland, becoming more aware of the intensity of the connections only after our talk. For instance, one couple since recently travels to Poland as often as once per month: because of care giving responsibilities, education, and work. They are in touch with Poland by phone up to twice per day. Their kin more than frequently visit Finland. Additionally he is the co-founder of a political organization lobbying

for the entrance of Poland in the European Union. And only after the interview did they come, with a sense of surprise and amusement, to the self-reflection: “if you really think about that, we have really a lot of contacts with Poland!” Surely such explicit realization would have been much more ubiquitous among the migrants, if the popular (Polish but not only) media would not have represented migration as a one-way street; a clear-cut mobility from one country to another. For me it is clear that if the migrants (and the people they have “left” behind) despite their everyday practices still not so rarely read their lives through the hegemonic representations of identity and belonging, and still deeply believe in the boundedness of the nation states, even if unbounding them everyday, it is too early to abandon the concept of transnationalism. Even if the national borders cease to matter formally and the nation states become transnationalised, their cognitive representations are still very firmly geographically bounded, at least in the minds of the people I studied. A trip to Rovaniemi and a trip to Warsaw may be exactly the same in terms of distance and, nowadays, in terms of legal demands but, if only symbolically; they are two totally different journeys.

This thesis also confirms other empirical findings, most importantly that it is the family ties which are at the most fundamental and everyday stage of the migrants’ transnational connection. They push the migrants to call and travel to Poland, to bring up their children in a transnational atmosphere: to teach them Polish, nourish traditions, send or bring them along to Poland for summer vacations. In this manner the migrants contribute to the prolonging and enhancing of the transnational social spaces more generally. For we can talk about their enduring character only when the subsequent generation will be in the process more firmly involved. The vanishing of practically all the important family connections, noted in two cases, decreases the actual transnational involvement.

This is not to say that the symbolic attachment to places, longing and nostalgia are not powerful. Their strength, however, lies in the potentiality, the opportunities they offer for action rather than in the actual, present engagement. They provide with a sense of belonging to a transnational space, and consequently, make the transnational connections always an alternative tangible resource. For instance, I came across migrants who in the face of work-related problems in Finland shifted their professional orientation towards Poland, instances of taking up studies there because of the wider educational market – this even several decades after migration. They emerged as an alternative and were possible only because of symbolic

linkages. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) called this a way of being in and a way of belonging to the transnational social field. They may, but do not have to, go hand in hand.

The desire to be with the family unsurprisingly surpasses other reasons for connections to Poland. The migrants came to Finland from multiple geographical places. There is one Polish region which starts to dominate in terms of origin, that is Eastern Pomerania, but there is no single place of outflow even there. Therefore the more institutionalized type of transnational activity, which in the transnational literature is usually community-based, has no scope for development. However, the formalization of the transnational social spaces takes place through intermediary actors: recruiting agencies, Polish companies operating in the Finnish market and vice versa and individual businesses. These are the fields of activity in which the Polish migrants are sometimes actively engaged in. They serve as mediators, translators and experts.

The above, more intimate pattern of transnationalism is in general less typical for transnational studies. But this thesis is essentially about a group of people who are still rather absent from the empirical transnational accounts. They come and stay in Finland legally, they are “white,” in many instances relatively well-off and come from urban areas. Their story is a story of gradual advancement, often of a migration success. Declassification and the double status it generates – lower in the country of destination, higher in the country of origin – is relatively rare. At least outwardly they adapt easily. As such they posit few problems for the country of destination. It seems that also the children of migrants experience mostly positive integration (at least in institutionalized terms). As a consequence, the observed transnationalism has rarely been an act of resistance. More often than not, it is complementary to the integration. Still, it should be recognized that their transnationalism often has vital cultural and social functions. I indicated that it is above all about the links to people: family and best friends often considered the family. Close social networks provide with a sense of affective belonging, give ontological safety and ensure support and care. And for many migrants these kinds of most fundamental ties are still in Poland. In Finland they might have spouses and children, some close friends, but in Poland they have the family of origin with whom they have the longest and the most trustworthy relationship, the intimate friends with whom they are on the same “wavelength.”

The multiple-home experience at the time of the study does not apply to the temporary migrants who intend to stay in Finland only for a short time. Their return to Poland is always a return to a place where their home and all family are. But my study documents (and other studies confirm that as well) that it is possible to live for years, even decades, in a state of constant transnational mobility, and at some point finally reunify in Finland. We know that migration is always an open-ended project, and what trajectory it will take is hardly predictable. I would argue that because of inhabiting a common transnational space the same regards the family members left behind. They stay put, one might say, only for the time being. If the family relations are positive, the transnational connections are an additional alternative, a safety net also for them. Also their (im)mobile biography is thus prone to taking an unexpected course. One case worth mentioning is of Dominik, a post-accession permanent migrant. When we met four months ago, he still had one brother in Poland who had a stable job there and was about to get married. The brother had little education, no language skills and no previous migration experience. He seemed firmly rooted in Poland and there was no idea of bringing him on to Finland. At the moment of our meeting Dominik and his brother were in a state of deep conflict. The brother had very seriously failed Dominik's trust. Several days ago, however, during our brief meeting I discovered that his brother was already in Finland. Apparently, he had suddenly lost his job, and Dominik had quickly fixed him with a new one in the Finnish company he works for. He found him accommodation, and was about to pay for the plane ticket of the brother's fiancé so that she could also join him in Finland. The wedding remained scheduled for the summer, but the couple would now live in Finland. Because I came to know about this already after I had finalized the key part of my fieldwork, I realized with particular intensity to what extent it is important to observe the dynamics of transnational spaces. Of course the ideal would be to conduct a longitudinal analysis. Only such an analysis would allow for the accurate account of (family) transnationalism at different stages of its development. Still I hope that my focus on the various periods and stages of migration at least partially addresses this shortcoming.

The sudden turn in Dominik's family transnational situation also compels to reflect upon another issue, namely that if one studies the family relationships, the moment at which the interview or meeting is held is crucial. Particularly when we deal with transnational circumstances, in which as I indicated certain conflicts may be harder to resolve, even a conversation on the phone held the day before affects the optic with which the interviewee sees his current family relationships. This also influences the borders of the intimate transnational circle one claims to have.

Finally, the historical periodization applied in this thesis allowed, firstly, to avoid the mishaps of many studies which talk about contemporary transnational migration in the vague terms of now and then (where then is at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Secondly, it revealed the shifts of transnational practices grounded in the changing geopolitical circumstances. Transnationalism is a process that undermines the nation state containers. But simultaneously it brings attention to what it denies: nation states still matter and exercise their ongoing influence. What happened in Poland in 1989 was a silent revolution that shook the grounds of individual and collective lives. That kind of rapid and enduring nation-wide transformation happens very rarely. Therefore Poland is said to be an excellent laboratory of studying social change, in particular the family-related one. It is thus also a good starting point of studying the transformations of transnational family processes. My results indicate that the changes were well noticed by the migrants and in many (but not all) aspects welcomed with enthusiasm. They affected the modes and directions of the provisioned transnational support, speeded up the technological development, transformed the images of Poland and Finland, leading in some terms to a significant reversal of the previous trends. Since 1989 there is a gradual evening out of the unequal economic power relations between the kin here and there. The capitalist transformation of the country gave some kin in Poland a material position equal to the migrants not only in relative but also in absolute terms. The economic shortages during the communist era induced an intensive flow of commodities and monetary help from Finland to Poland. After 1989 the migrants started to restock in Poland. Poland is now “colourful,” Finland relatively “grey.” The economic help is still present but it is less substantial and more intermittent. The transnational family becomes predominantly an affective imagined community, to a far lesser extent a strategic unit of economic survival.

The transnational paradigm attempts to go away from the nationalist approach in both theoretical and methodological terms. One of the limits of this study is that the fieldwork is exclusively concentrated on the migrants. The study would undeniably benefit if it investigated the perspectives of the family members who stayed behind. Their stance is presented in this thesis only through the voices of the migrants themselves. Needless to say they are filtered by the migrants’ personal experiences and the ideas they have about their relatives in Poland. I attempted to look more two-sidedly during the interviews and participant observation, but of course it was always bounded by the Finnish side of the border, from which many things may look different, perhaps more optimistic.

If investigating a family (and not only the particular family positions or “roles”) it is always of significance to look at its members across the different generations. The study of transnational family actors with multiple spatial positions should thus be in future complemented by a study of the migrants’ parents and children. The question of endurance of the transnational connections particularly prompts an investigation of the children’s experience. They are now becoming the subject of scholars’ increased attention. We know that transnationalism is not uncommon among the “first generation” migrants. But it is in their descendents’ biographies that lays the answer to (and a test of) the actual power of transnational connections.

Finally, I would like to address the question of methodological validity and the possible extrapolation of the results. The critiques of the transnational paradigm pointed out that it was exclusively developed on case studies. Family life, however, is a subject so sensitive and intimate, and family relations so often embedded in contradictory feelings, that another method would have obscured more issues than it would have revealed. To induce some of the potentially extrapolating features of the presented cases, I juxtaposed them with nation-wide research from Poland and with other relevant empirical investigations. The sample, although small, was diversified, represented various forms of mobility, location in Finland, socio-economic background and family configurations. I also conducted many more informal discussions with the Polish migrants during various gatherings. Therefore I would suggest that the results of this thesis give some hints which can be applied to the larger population of Polish migrants in Finland. There are also parallels with the studies on Polish transnationalism conducted elsewhere. Given that it is the first such substantial and detailed study of transnational families from a Polish perspective in general, my material can serve as a rich preliminary ground for further investigations.

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