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"ARE WE STILL A FAMILY?" THE PERSPECTIVE FROM ROMANIAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

Czy nadal jesteśmy rodziną? Perspektywa rumuńskich rodzin transnarodowych

Abstract: In 2015 the Romanian anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu wrote about the practice of migration in the case of the Romanian society, showing how it is ultimately deeply rooted, before 1989, in the communist period. Under the pressure of internal migration from villages to cities, the traditional Romanian family suffered a major structural transformation. According to the Romanian anthropologist, *the diffuse family–household*, as he calls it, seems to be "the grandmother" of the transnational family. The current practices of transnational families were formed based on these roots, of the "diffuse" family. Starting from the idea of Mihăilescu, the aim of this article[1] is to investigate the main (re)structures of the kinship practices in the Romanian society under the impact of external migration after 1989. One of the findings of the study shows that in the Romanian traditional society, preserving kinship cohesion meant a series of obligations and liabilities that were often transmitted from one generation to another without being questioned. They basically constituted and maintained the channel of communication between family members. The members of transnational families have absorbed these traditional structu-

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[1] The present article represents a developed version of the presentation held at the *V4Net - Visegrád Anthropologists' Network Conference - Social and Cultural Consequences of Voluntary and Forced Migration in Europe*, April 1-2, 2019, Poznan (Poland). Part of the material presented in this article was published in an early form in the study "Family cohesion. 'Diffuse family' practices and the transnational perspective", in *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 2017.

res, weaving over new formulas to adapt *family practices* (Morgan: 2011) to the specificity of transnational living, reformulating at the same time the traditional rules of kinship and adapting them to the new way of living. The study is based on materials derived from a qualitative research in five communities–three in Romania and two abroad.[2]

Key words: transnational families; kinship; family practices; Romanian society; "diffuse" family.

Streszczenie: W 2015 r. rumuński antropolog Vintilă Mihăilescu, pisząc o praktykach migracyjnych w społeczeństwie rumuńskim wskazywał, w jaki sposób były one zakorzenione w okresie komunizmu przed 1989 r. Pod presją migracji wewnętrznych z wiosek do miast tradycyjna rumuńska rodzina przeszła poważną transformację strukturalną. Według rumuńskiego antropologa rozproszona rodzina – domostwo, jak ją nazywa – wydaje się być „babcią" rodziny ponadnarodowej. Obecne praktyki rodzin ponadnarodowych powstały na fundamentach rodziny „rozproszonej". Wychodząc od idei Mihăilescu, celem tego artykułu jest zbadanie głównych zmian strukturalnych w praktykach pokrewieństwa w społeczeństwie rumuńskim pod wpływem migracji zewnętrznej po 1989 r. Przeprowadzone badania wskazują, że zachowanie spójności pokrewieństwa w tradycyjnym społeczeństwie rumuńskim oznaczało szereg obowiązków i zobowiązań, często przekazywanych z pokolenia na pokolenie bez ich kwestionowania. Ustanawiały one i utrzymywały kanały komunikacji między członkami rodziny. Członkowie rodzin transnarodowych przyswoili sobie te tradycyjne struktury, przeplatając je nowymi formułami w celu dostosowania praktyk rodzinnych (Morgan 2011) do specyfiki życia ponadnarodowego, przeformułowując jednocześnie tradycyjne zasady pokrewieństwa i dostosowując je do nowego sposobu życia. Prezentowane badania opierają się na materiałach pochodzących z badań jakościowych w pięciu społecznościach – trzech w Rumunii i dwóch za granicą.

Słowa kluczowe: rodziny transnarodowe; pokrewieństwo; praktyki rodzinne; społeczeństwo rumuńskie; rodzina rozproszona.

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[2] This article enhances the materials gathered in two research projects by teams of which the author was part: *Confronting difference through the practices of transnational families* (2015-2017) [http://transnationalfamilies.ro/] (as a postdoctoral researcher) and *Anonymous of Migration* (2019), research carried out under the aegis of the Museum of History and Art from Zalău, Romania (as a field researcher).

Introduction

One must bear in mind that transnational families are based on diverse constituents, a different status, and that they have been restructured depending on these particularities under the pressure of experienced migration. At the same time, we must not forget an equally important detail: although these transnational families do not currently belong to a particular territory (we can consider them as being *deterritorialized*[3]), most often, they have formed in a circumscribed cultural space, in our case, the Romanian one. This has impressed them with a particular essence and structure, and they do not start from scratch, as David H. J. Morgan remarks in connection with defining family practices (2011: 7):

> This is in part a recognition that individuals do not start from scratch as they are going about family living. They come into (through marriage or parenthood, say) *a set of practices that are already partially shaped by legal prescriptions, economic constraints and cultural definitions.* This is, in part, what is meant by structuration as a set of processes rather than fixed external structures.

Focusing on the case of his country, not further than the year 2015, Vintilă Mihăilescu, one of the renowned Romanian anthropologists, wrote in an article on the existing relation between family and migration: "Under the pressure of internal migration from villages to the city, the traditional family suffered a major structural transformation. (...) The Romanian society has started to install itself too in mobility, but still keeps the cult of the family." According to the Romanian anthropologist, *the diffuse family–household*, as he calls it, seems to be "the grandmother" of the transnational family. In this context, the author talks about the different logic of family compared to that of ancestry (about ancestry see 3), which constituted the foundation of Romanian society to a certain moment. He discusses about what could be called a "pragmatic" kindred where "it is not so much the relatives who help each other, but those who help each other become relatives." At that time, around the mid--80's, in the context of generalized penury, families have experienced a massive restructuring under the impact of migration from the village to the cities; the transnational family after 1989 was formed based on this

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[3] For the prime conceptualization of this term, see G. Deleuze & F. Guattari (2000) [1972].

"new family," along with the massive waves that have seen Romanians migrating towards the Occident.

Therefore, in the context of Romanian families already having a history "of breaking up," what took shape along with the massive migration of Romanians abroad has only meant an extension of the space in which families start to place and administer their ordinary existence. In this context, family practices that have kept family cohesion over the course of time have been restructured today, yet not reinvented.

Vintilă's theory is supported by statistics showing that, similarly to other Eastern European countries, as discussed by Violetta Parutis (2011) among others, Romanians maintained a particular behavioural pattern even after the fall of communism. Current surveys show that "family" comes first when Romanians are asked about their values. This is the same for Poland, with surveys from 2005 showing that family values ranked first in the people's preferences, as well as a markedly family-centred behaviour. To account for this, the restriction of freedom by the communist regimes and their attempts to take over control of people's private lives were invoked (Parutis 2011: 271). Moreover, a well-known fact is that during the communist regime, "family reunion" was the only official escape route to get beyond the borders of Romania, a motivation to which even the totalitarian regime seemed more permissive. The family, defined as the "cell of society," represented for this regime an additional lever activated in order to impose control over the population's private life. A number of measures–e.g. the prohibition of abortion by Decree no. 770 of 1966–regarding the sphere of private life modelled and maintained a certain, rather patriarchal, representation of the family among the population.[4] In addition, actual social realities were eliminated from everyday family representations: couples living outside marriage, married couples without children, mono-parental families resulted from divorce, etc. Actually, before 1989, family was defined in terms of *normal* (married couples, with as many children as possible) and *deviant/ inexistent/abnormal* (all other types of family, mono-parental families, families without children, etc.).[5]

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[4] For more details concerning these aspects cf. Gail Kligman (1998a), The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[5] The existence of such types of family was often discouraged by the socialist state before 1989 through different legislative measures. An example to that effect would be paying a surplus tax if one was 25 years old and not married yet etc.

In his 2011 volume, D. Morgan outlined the six fundamental characteristics of family practices.[6] According to the author (Morgan 2011: 10), all these characteristics overlap and structure family practices to form the essence of the concept of *family*. Concerning transnational family practices, what I consider to be of prime importance in their definition is what Morgan calls *a sense of fluidity* (Morgan 2011: 7). This characteristic of family practices is able to capture, most closely in my opinion, their perpetual re-structuration. *Fluidity* can also help one closely capture the "becoming" of the Romanian family in the context of migration.

Taking these points of reference, the study looks to first discuss the principle of reciprocity in the case of Romanian kinship, and then indicate how a particular family practice, the family visits, have been reformulated under the impact of migration to ensure its cohesion afterwards. In trying to answer the question of how perspectives on family have changed in the context of migration, the study tries to better define and analyse this particular family practice that keeps the cohesion of family in the case of Romanian migration. My attempt to detect the importance of this practice relies on an analysis of its evolution and actual situation, which makes it possible to reveal its past and present contribution in keeping the cohesion of transnational families.

Data, sites and methods

The research is based on the qualitative analysis of data obtained through interviews and participant observations with transnational family members and key people from five communities–three in Romania and two

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[6] In Morgan's perspective the six fundamental characteristics of family practices are: linking the perspectives of the observer and the actor (because in everyday life, people do not frequently talk about what family means, they simply live it and experience it); a sense of the active (that is, family members do not have only static roles, they are not only mothers, fathers, brothers, etc.–they are doing family); a sense of the everyday (including all those important actions in family life and those that people speak less of); a sense of the regular (the regularity with which a certain action takes place, whether it is daily, weekly, yearly, etc.); a sense of fluidity (the ways in which someone comes to be part of a family or excluded from it are quite flexible; at the same time, these practices that researchers define as being family practices, can just as easily be defined, for example, as being gender practices); and finally, the fact that there is a linking of history and biography (which could also be formulated as a link between private and public) (Morgan 2011: 5-8).

abroad. Our respondents were migrants, generally well-integrated in the receiving society and family members from Romania. The structure of the sample is the result of the method used to select our interviewees, i.e. the snowball method. The respondent sample thus turned out to be with ages between 28 and 70. In terms of education, it varies from high school studies to MA studies. Their answers reflect how views of *family practices* have changed and transformed.

The analysis of interviews was complemented by a review of the literature–Romanian ethnographic work and international literature in the field of kinship studies and the principle of reciprocity and then the transnational family studies focusing on the Romanian migration. One of the findings is that migration–in conjunction with status, values, and behaviours–has influenced, divided and transformed the way in which family practices are performed. At the same time, this change has also called forth a restructuring of the way in which families are defined and represented in current everyday practice.

The principle of reciprocity in the case of Romanian kinship

In the Romanian language, the term *bloodline* designates a family group that is connected both in consanguinity and in affinity (this kinship is realized especially by ritualistic means, through the institution of *năşie* [Romanian]/ritual sponsorship respectively) (Kligman 1998b: 30-33). Most often, in daily speech and practice, individuals use this term in order to identify who is part of the family. The term is even more valuable as belonging to a *neam*[7] [Romanian]/ bloodline or another (whether good or bad) and cannot be interrupted, not even by death. One belongs to a certain ancestry, both in the world of the living and in the world beyond, as G. Kligman remarked (1998b). It is worth mentioning that the term *bloodline*, by itself, has a value given by quotidian and canonical practice and not by its definition in the juridical sphere.

Belonging to a bloodline presumes associating the individual to a certain type of capital (especially in the rural areas), which can be a positive or a negative one. If we take in consideration the rural environment, on the other hand, what matters is the symbolic value that

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[7] Neam can refer to both one's family and a looser type of kin grouping that involves more than marriage or blood relations.

marriage has in a good bloodline, a value that extends onto the entire bloodline. According to this scheme, new kindred relations are bred between the two spouses, their descent families and godparents, relations that are most often labelled as a *conventional type of kinship* (Scurtu 1966: 239); instead, in the traditional society, kinship bred out of this type of relation was considered a *spiritual type of kinship* (Stahl 1936). This designation arises from the role godparents used to have in traditional societies in the lives of the wedded–to guide the young couple, to help it manage the eventual crises in adapting to a life in two, and to lead them on the path of righteousness and Christian belief. In fact, the institution of ritual sponsorship seems to have an old origin, contributing to the cohesion of the familial institution. Frequently, kinship by ritual sponsorship had a greater power than consanguinity (Hossu 2018a). This type of kinship had a conservative character, as the son (usually, but also the girl, as appropriate) had to take his/her father's place. Such situations bred new types of obligations and liabilities, all based on the principle of reciprocity–on the obligation *to give*, *to receive* and *to return the gift*, as Mauss noted in 1925, when theorizing *the principle of the gift*.

In the contemporary Romanian society, the most illustrative contexts where this principle is performed and reconfirmed are those occasioned by the organization of visits. These visits take place on different opportunities occasioned by the cycle of life's rituals (weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc.) and largely maintain the connection between the different members of the family. A series of today's practices among transnational families arise following the logic of such obligations, structured according to spiritual kinship and underlined by the principle of reciprocity.

In the following pages, this article will exemplify the restructuring of the Romanian family practices by presenting five cases that illustrate the particular situation of transnational families. Each case captures a particularity of how the family visits are being restructured under the impact of migration, but in the same time they contribute to the built up and maintenance of family cohesion. The last case I present will seek to mirror the special situation of organizing weddings in a village from the Satu Mare County–a locality largely composed of transnational families.

Case studies

Julianne[8]

Julianne is 28 years old and was born and raised in Romania, in a small provincial village. She attended the military high school in Sibiu, then the Military Academy in Bucharest, where she settled. Julianne has a twin sister to whom she is very close. In fact, they have bought their apartments in Bucharest next to one another so they could be closer to each other. She also has another sister–both sisters, their parents and her future husband live in Romania. She is not at her first migration experience, as she has previously went for one year in the Czech Republic. When I met her in Belgium, she had already left Romania for six months. For Julianne, this type of existence represents a challenge, but also an extremely calculated program. She wishes to settle in one place after her wedding in November of this year. She told us how organized her time and visits to Romania are. She claims that, ultimately, even if she were to live in Romania, she would still be away from a part of her family living in Transylvania (at a considerable distance away from Bucharest). Basically, communication (facilitated today by various means such as Skype, WhatsApp, Viber, etc.) is the key in maintaining family cohesion. But Julianne is also the one who talks during our interview about the importance that commonly shared experiences have regarding her couple life.

> They [her parents and sisters] came [to Belgium] and stood for one week, and now in the summer they'll come again. (...) I plan everything in detail, so that we can meet and find a way to see each other, and, likewise, they come to Bucharest when they know I'll be there too.

> Yes, throughout the week we keep in touch on Skype, of course, on WhatsApp, Viber, the social media that are available right now, although it's tiring and it exhausts you as well to know that you can only keep in touch on Skype with those dear to you. Sometimes it makes you want to turn it off and never open it! [she laughs] and it is more gripping, not in a dramatic sense, but affectively, because of the connection with your parents and your family, which is not in Bucharest and

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[8] The actual names of the informants are changed to ensure their anonymity.

you don't have the chance to see them so often. The distance between Bucharest and Transylvania...is a bit! [she laughs].[9]

I was just talking today with some of my colleagues, I was explaining to them that sometimes I have two lives: from Monday to Friday and from Friday to Sunday evening or Monday morning, because I change my environment completely, I change people, I change the life stories I share with different people and I also change my experiences, because the environments are so different! It is the setting you've left behind, with which you've been used for so long and the new setting, the one you've made for yourself. And that's why I wanted so much for him to come here, because I don't want to build myself a setting that's extra to the life we have there. Without realizing, you start to build, to bring closer around you people that only you know, you never come to know them as a couple.

Raul and Carla

Raul (34 years old) and Carla (32 years old) are the couple we've been closer to during our fieldwork in Belgium; in fact, they've also offered us lodging, giving us an opportunity to make participative observations. Raul moved to Belgium ten years ago. After a few years, his girlfriend at the time, currently his wife, Carla, followed him. They both work in the IT sector, which made it easier for them to find a job and adapt to the new country. They actually came to Belgium because of their outstanding skills, both of them working for an international company. Although they see very clearly the pros and cons of being a migrant, Raul and his wife plan to stay in Belgium. They make frequent trips to Romania–every two months–and this year they bought a flat in Braşov, the city they both left. During these trips, there is a program structured around the same variables: visits to the extended family, meeting their friends who remained at home, participating to weddings, baptisms or funerals. After 2014 when their girl was born, Raul and Carla changed the frequency of their returns back home, but they extended the period they spent in Romania. In fact,

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[9] Even though the distance between Bucharest and the hometown is about 350 km, as Romania is still deficient in terms of road infrastructure (without highways connecting all the major cities in the country), traveling would mean double the time it takes to get to Brussels by plane. So, even if they live in different countries, traveling is actually even easier than it would be on the Romanian territory - and in terms of costs, low-cost flights have acceptable prices.

their civil marriage, their wedding and the baptism of their daughter all took place in Romania and were planned long before. Their visits and meetings with their extended family and friends remain the subject of all their trips back home, but also of their trips back to Belgium. During these meetings and participations to events, they always exchange gifts and attentions–which go from simple books, clothes or perfumes, to comfiture, pickles, plum brandy and homemade bacon.

Meetings, visits:

> But we somehow make it to... that is, we keep in touch with them [people back home] by mail, by phone a bit more rarely, unfortunately, and every time we go to Romania we meet our closest friends. And they're ready, our friends... they're always glad to see us. [Carla]

> I keep thinking at this, that it's sometimes hard to deprive your grandparents of all these visits, which are ok, but are not enough. They clearly wish for more and I would go for this idea myself, because the job is very important, but at the same time so is our family basically... Our family is getting old too, so to say, and you need to take this aspect into consideration as well. [Raul]

> Carla: Yes, but at the same time, the trips when we make them are longer. Longer and maybe, overall, we spend just as many days in Romania as we used to do before.
> Q: But from Romania, how often do they come here?
> Carla: Ah, since our child arrived, much more often. Before they only came once, his family, and once my family, but after that... we've alternated a bit our families and I think every four or five months we have a visit from our parents. [Carla]

Mary

Mary, 56 years old, was born and raised in a small village from Suceava county. Mary has three daughters; all three of them have travelled abroad and settled there, and none of them plans to return home. Two of her daughters are in Europe (Italy and Germany) and one is in America. Although she talks about each of her three daughters every time and she is happy that they have successfully settled "among strangers," during our conversations she recurrently returns to saying they are far away. Mary

tried during our discussions to control her emotions but she barely succeeded. The life of her family is woven in-between the visits of her three daughters, although they seem to visit her less and less. The parents visiting the countries where their daughters have settled have instead replaced their visits. The life of the family is organised around these visits, long expected throughout the entire year.

> Now she [her older daughter] already came home twice, she made herself documents so she can come and leave whenever she pleases. And... it is hard for her to come and stay with us because they got used to another lifestyle and... I don't know, 'cause they all went to school and could find themselves work here too, but they already got used to another way of living. It is hard for them to return. So... I say "What will we do when we'll be old?" "Well, you can then come stay with us!" I tell them, how can I go and leave my home... "We'll buy one here for you as well, because we cannot come."

> We've been to Italy... in America we didn't go yet, we'll go next year. We've been to our little girl who used to work for the European Commission, we've been to Italy twice or three times to visit her... this spring we also travelled to Germany to see our girl who works there in Frankfurt. We've been there, we visited her, but still... we live yearning for our children because that's how it is, yet... they're ours, but they're not our property, so for some time they've been, as they say, each on their own.

> We see them, certainly, [on Skype] and we are pleased to know they're well and... yes. We got used to it now, because there have been so many years and we need to get used to it, but, as they say, with time passing by, we grow old and become more sensitive. When you are younger, you are not so sensitive...

Gabriel and Ana

Gabriel is 70 years old, Ana 67. They have three children together. They were born and lived their whole lives in a small locality in the Sălaj County, in N-W Romania, an area characterized by a low rate of development. This caused the migration from the area to start somewhere later than other counties, but at present, almost every house has one or more members that left abroad. Their case is even more special since all their three children

emigrated and only one returned to begin a small business in the automobile field. The two emigrated children, a male and a female, settled in America. Therefore, the visits take place after a well-established time schedule, and their duration is longer. This is not a problem because the parents are retired now, and health is still helping them. The departure of the children meant for them to get involved in series of unique experiences in their lives. The first visit to their two children in America was also the first trip by plane and the first trip outside the borders of Romania, a fact quite common in the case of the parents remaining in the country. Although in Romania there is much debate about the problem of the elderly left behind by the children left for work abroad, in their case, as well as for other such parents that I met during the research, demonstrates a different scenario than the negative one (e.g. abandonment): a revival of the elderly precisely on the basis of these experiences. Often, at the children's insistence as well as for the desire to see them more often and to spend time together, parents such as Gabriel and Ana (with a life largely lived under the communist regime that forbade them almost without exception any exit abroad) are more open to this kind of new experiences that otherwise might not have taken place in their lives. They spend most of the time they now have available in visiting their children. As traveling to America often takes place over a longer period of time, often, up to a year or two ago, Gabriel managed to find a job while staying with his children, not accepting the idea that he might be inactive. Living in the same house is often the case for transnational families, as underlined by Baldassar-Baldock-Wilding (2007: 167-168). This time spent together in the house of one of their children, one at a time, offers them a good opportunity to recover the time they have not seen each other. Furthermore, the fact that they live with their children gives them the feeling of closeness exactly as it used to be when the latter were youngsters and lived together with their parents. These out-of-country visits gave them the opportunity to develop their own opinions about how their children lead their lives, being able to see with their own eyes the complex contexts of their existences–the neighbours, the friends, the job etc.–as it was remarked also by Baldassar-Baldock-Wilding (2007: 149), "seeing is believing." At the same time, during these extended visits, Gabriel and his wife have the task of practicing with their grandchildren the Romanian language, a language that although in this case the grandchildren speak, it is still below the native level, as Gabriel also notes in one of our discussions. The visits thus become moments of daily experiences shared by the whole family.

When I was there, I used to take care of the kids, make food, clean. I also went when the eldest was small, and then when the little girl was born. I had to make sure the kids didn't hit each other, because the elder one didn't like the younger one, he was jealous. And I cooked everything I used to cook at home in Romania. My daughter used to say, mommy, I knew you were cooking pies (plăcinte) since I entered our street, there was no other place from where that smell could come. (Ana, Gabriel's wife)

When we are there or they are here, we are always together. Every time we are at their place, we make trips everywhere. We also went to New York. (Gabriel)

The girl still can speak (the niece), but Luca (the grandchild), our daughter's son, does not. We talk to them Romanian; they speak English to each other. But the nephew from our son, who left when he was five, knew how to speak Romanian. When he first came to visit the country, he could not speak Romanian anymore. Grandpa, asked me, how do you say "the window"? You say *fereastră*. (Gabriel)

Weddings

A small village in the Satu Mare county, which numbers a total of approximately 400 inhabitants, the majority of whom are over 60 years old, has a heated wedding tent for 1.000 people. The most obvious question would be: what for? Because every year, in the period between August 15 and September 15, this is where they make weddings each day of the week. Those who have travelled abroad to work return and organize these weddings in the only period they have free from work abroad and when weddings are permitted, that is, there is no fasting according to the Orthodox Christian calendar. Participation to the wedding of a family member constitutes for the Romanian society an obligation one is not allowed to miss. When participating to a wedding, a new obligation arises for the people whose wedding you attended: that they will be present at your wedding, or your children's and grandchildren's wedding. This obligation does not touch blood relations alone, but also congeniality relations, neighbours, school colleagues or friends. The obligation itself is "sealed" by the envelope with money (most often not a small amount) called *wedding gift*. Ultimately, what takes place at a local level, in certain communities, is a phenomenon of change in the marital behaviour, as weddings

are celebrated daily throughout the entire period between August 15 and September 15.[10] What happens around these weddings amidst Romanian communities is also a phenomenon of showing off the well-being and (most often financial) capital obtained from migration. Yet one of the primordial functions of these weddings has been and continues to be to preserve, affirm and reaffirm family and bloodline cohesion.

Final remarks

There are important moments in the life of a family that no migrant could ever imagine to miss. In the Romanian society, family visits have always been and continue to be eventful moments that hold the power to bring families together.

In the traditional society, preserving kinship cohesion meant a series of obligations and liabilities that were often transmitted from one generation to another without being questioned. They constituted and maintained the channel of communication between family members. The members of transnational families have absorbed these traditional structures, weaving over new formulas to adapt family practices to the specificity of transnational living. In this context, one of the practices that I considered one of the most important in maintaining this family cohesion was the periodical visit that the members of the transnational families make to each other. Visits in the traditional Romanian society were held mostly on religious holidays and on Sundays. The local researchers noted the special dynamics of this time/calendar in the traditional society: there was a daily, profane time, and a holy, sacred time (Eliade 1959; Şeuleanu 1995). This particular rhythm was imposed by a dynamic specific to the traditional societies facilitated at the same time by the presence of the majority of the family members in a circumscribed space (house, village, city), by a physical proximity and a circumscription in the same geographical area. The fact that today members of the same family live scattered in different countries has reset the calendar and the rhythm of the most important family practices, respectively the visits and the organization of the big events in the life cycle (weddings,

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[10] For more details on this phenomenon of change in the marital behavior in the case of Romanian migrants, and details on the wedding period taking place daily (in rural communities from Romania), see Anghel 2008.

baptisms). However, when we listen to the voices of our interviewees, we notice that this fact did not mean losing the value and the importance of these visits. On the contrary, most often they have increased in intensity, because these visits are moments that condense and try to recover all the time that those people spent separately, like already remarked by Baldassar-Baldock-Wilding 2007. Often this context causes a greater openness, closeness to the other.

Of course, we cannot ignore the emergence and global spread of new communication technologies in the daily lives of these families, which have facilitated the creation of new spaces for family practice. When a family cannot visit for different reasons (too high costs, too little spare time, etc.), the members who are in another country try to be present at least through the virtual environment. Many of our interviewees described how they spend their family holidays and meals broadcasting these moments live to each other: through the Internet new types of visits are now taking place, "virtual visits". These can replace the presence of a family member who is far from home at an important event of the family remaining in the country, contributing to maintain family cohesion during times of impossibility to travel (Hossu-Ducu 2017). Often the time spent in the same house when visiting each other, re-establishes a closeness that otherwise would not have happened between members of a family, and so it is a closeness created precisely by the context of migration. At the same time, young people from abroad can be the engine for different actions of parents or other extended family members, actions that would not have taken place in other contexts. One such example is the case of the Romanian ethnics from the Republic of Moldova, who, having children abroad, apply for the re-acquisition of Romanian citizenship precisely in order to benefit from greater mobility within Europe, a mobility that the citizenship of an E.U. state offers (Hossu 2018b).

Visits themselves become a practice that puts pressure on the members of transnational families, as it is often considered an obligation based on which certain relations are maintained (Baldassar-Baldock-Wilding 2007: 161-163). But this practice is not new for the family tableau. As I have mentioned, ritual visits are signalled by Romanian ethnologists, who considered them as underlining the maintenance of kinship cohesion. What happened in the context of migration were mainly a reformulation and a resettlement of these visits in the centre of family life, around them taking place much of the life of these transnational families.

More than ever in the history of Romanian society, the exchange of gifts that took place in ritualistic contexts–birth/baptism, wedding etc.–but not only, ensured family cohesion throughout time, in spite of the distance between its members.

Not lastly, migration has imposed a certain fluidity of family relations (Morgan 2011). These relations are preserved because of the connections between family members, connections which form through visits, communication and meetings. The members of a family and their roles, who is included or excluded from this circle, were formerly defined by unwritten law and genealogy. Today, the family member is the one who manages to stay in connection with those who remain in the country, and this connection is made in most cases through visits.

Herrera Lima observed (2001: 91) that transnational families are, symbolically, an agent by the instrumentality of which different conventions, practices and forms of consumption circulate and fuse. At the same time, it is by their instrumentality that cultures are created, recreated and transformed. The present study aimed to consolidate Lima's assertion. In the case of Romania, the practices of transnational families (re)outline the structure, dimensions and formula of the family institution through constant reformulation, ensuring family survival regardless of the context.

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