

Where Have All the Mothers Gone? The Gendered Effect of Labour Migration and Transnationalism on the Institution of Parenthood in Ukraine¹

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Abstract

How do transnational families create strategies to reconcile work abroad and family life at home across borders? How is trans-border care-giving reconfigured within transnational family space? What are the gender effects of migrancy on the institution of parenthood? These are the questions examined in the current paper on the Ukrainian transnational family and parenthood, a still under-documented phenomenon in Ukrainian scholarship. The main argument of the paper is that changes in gender roles encouraged by migration primarily affect mothers, who assume the roles of bread-winners and providers. This expands their family obligations and perpetuates roles of “pseudo-moms” exposed to multiple exploitations, including exploitation by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), but does not entail their empowerment. At the same time, changes in the gender roles of fathers are only temporary, and do not entail tangible transformations in the institution of fatherhood in Ukraine. However, this experience may have an effect in the long-run, provided it attracts closer public attention and affects the awareness of the society about the role, status and responsibilities of men to their family and children.

Introduction

“No match found” was the result of my google Ukraine search for the entry “transnational family.” The same result emerged for “transnational parenthood/ motherhood/ fatherhood.” Online catalogues of central research libraries did not show any items either, evincing a lack of appreciation and absence of interest in this novel outcome of human mobility in the Ukrainian academic community.

It is argued that although the explosive character of institutional changes following the demise of state socialism entailed the destruction of all the principal social institutions in Ukraine, the family was the only one among them which did not undergo fundamental

transformations (Golovakha and Panina, 2006: 37). However, the Ukrainian family is changing. Some of these changes reflect European tendencies in attitudes toward kinship and relationships; others mirror global trends in the development of marriage and partnership. Thus, the concept of the head of the family is no longer the norm, and out-of wedlock cohabitation and single parents are no longer exceptional. The availability of contraceptives has enabled responsible family planning, while women's active entrance into the work-force resulted in older age of the first child-birth and fewer children in the family. Furthermore, new configurations of families have emerged during the years of economic reforms, such as the "transnational family," caused by the massive outflow of the population for earnings abroad as a result of "shock therapy." Ukrainian labour migration is a comprehensive process, affecting from 10% to 20% of the working age population. Together with family members, it encompasses over 1/3 of the Ukrainian total population (SIFY, 2004a). Indeed, considering the magnitude, this process invariably transforms the society and its principal social institutions, including family. In the Ukrainian school of family studies, however, no thought is given to changes in the institution of family caused by the increasing economic mobility of the population. The emergence of a transnational family model as a by-product of globalization, urbanization, economic restructuring, combined with improved transportation and information technologies has not been yet conceptualized and no attempts to reflect on the complexity of this phenomenon have been made. Even more than that, the most recent national accounts on the situation of Ukrainian families do not cast any light on this phenomenon (Libanova et al., 2009; UCSR, 2008; SIFY, 2005), whilst the latest available typologies of Ukrainian families (Kravchenko, 2006; SIFY, 2004b) do not mention transnational family and cross-border parenting as an emerging family pattern. Neither is there any entry on it in the online edition of the "Encyclopedia for Family and Youth" (2007). In essence, the scholarship on this issue is limited to occasional papers (Solari 2006; Castagnone et al, 2007; Yarova, 2007; Leifsen and Tymuszuk, 2008; Tolstokorova, 2009a; Dalgas, 2010). However, as these are mainly individual research projects performed outside Ukraine, they cannot afford either to cover a wide range of empirical material, or to offer a comprehensive conceptualization of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, transitional Ukraine, with its massive scale of migration flows accompanied by their *increasing feminization* (Tolstokorova, 2009b) is an excellent setting in which to study the vast changes in family life caused by growing international mobility.

Additionally, the fact that it is mainly Western scholars who study the non-Western side of the East-West migration circuits is potentially problematic. Although it may provide

impartiality and non-involvement, at the same time it entails methodological and cultural limitations. In particular, it may involve some ethical issues, given that in this case the relationship between an interviewer and an informant revolve around subtle hierarchical underpinnings, the former being *the other* for the latter and a representative of the *employer side*. This may result in attempts of responders to conceal some challenging aspects of migratory realities. Equally, some nuances of culturally ingrained meanings may wither or be misconceived due to differences in prevalent social norms and values in the researchers' and respondents' cultural traditions. For example, the concept of "relational closeness" and even the notion of "family" are sure to bear different cultural implications for "the exaggerated individualism" of westerners and "families and community orientated ethics" (Langguth, 2003: 33) of non-westerners.³ This is especially relevant for Ukrainians, who perceive family as "the material and spiritual foundation of the nations' existence, the guardian of the ethnic memory, mentality and identity" (Tolstokorova, 2007: 4). Therefore, there emerges a need to study the new phenomenon of Ukrainian transnational family and cross-border parenting with the consideration of an axiological⁴ dimension, in particular, with the accent on the specificities of the cultural identity, mentality, social modality and ethics of the Ukrainian familial and gender relations.

The research methodology for the project involved a complex approach, incorporating participant observation, in-depth interviews with experts in migration and gender/women's issues, gathering life-histories of circular migrants (10 women and 2 men), the use of sociological survey data and available statistics, as well as secondary sources on transnational migration, parenthood, gender and women's issues. Participant observation was possible due to my personal experience of extensive short- and long-term (up to one year) academic trips across Europe, which enabled the socialization with compatriots of diverse social backgrounds in a wide range of social settings. The informal mode of communication with the interviewees and absence of social distance in interpersonal interaction allowed for a deeper immersion into the migrants' milieu, facilitated a wider perception of their conditions, work, life styles and opportunities, and enabled a broader conceptualization of issues under study.

Semi-structured interviews with experts were conducted due to my participation in the project "Care-work and welfare internationalization: Transnational scenarios for the welfare of the future," together with researchers of Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), Rome, Italy.⁵ Though some of the interviews were conducted in English, more frequently I translated the interviews from Ukrainian or Russian into English for the Italian interviewers

and then transcribed. Life-history interviews with Ukrainian migrants were gathered in the course of an individual research project, “Gender implications of Ukrainian labour migration: costs and benefits for aging Europe” (2008), realized partly courtesy of the the National Scholarship Program of Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA). Most of the interviews were done during my visits to EU countries to participate in research seminars and conferences, which provided an opportunity to meet with compatriots working abroad. As the titles of both projects make clear, the study of transnational parenthood was not central to either of them. In the course of the fieldwork, however, this issue emerged as a by-product of discussions about gender, migration, family and welfare. Due to that, it became obvious that further research was required to document the clearly observable ongoing gender transformations in the institution of transnational parenthood as well as to illuminate parental experiences, concerns and constraints of both migrant women and their families left behind at home. It has to be done to facilitate policy-making and improve social harmony in the Ukrainian family for the well-being of all its members.

The *main goal* of this paper, therefore, is to explore the gendered effect of labour migration on Ukrainian transnational families as *imagined communities* (Vuorela, 2002), highlighting the actors’ point of view as “a unique, and often the only, way to access migrant experience, sensitivities and identities” (DeRoche, 1996, cited by Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004: 228). The paper focuses on gender implications of migration for motherhood and, more broadly, for the institution of transnational parenthood in Ukraine. Experts’ observations and migrants’ life-history interviews were used to document, with a gender-sensitive eye, the multiple relations established between the key actors involved in transnational parenting. The concept of *transnational motherhood* is understood here following Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997: 550) “not as physical circuits of migration but as the circuits of affection, caring and financial support that transcend national borders.” Both transnational motherhood and parenthood more generally, are regarded as phenomena “encouraged by the global network society” (Lutz, 2004: 54).

Drawing upon my interviews and observations, I argue that although migration might change gender roles, it primarily affects mothers, who assume the role of bread-winners and providers. This role, however, only increases their family obligations, but, as discussed below, does not necessarily entail women’s empowerment. Instead, it may lead to the perpetuation of their roles as *pseudo-moms*, who are exposed to multiple exploitations, but receive few dividends from their emotional and financial investments into children and family. The roles of *pseudo-moms* and *distant care-givers* are sustained through Information

and Communication Technologies (ICT), which allegedly enable *virtual intimacies* (Wilding, 2006) and *connected relationships* with families left behind, and therefore, serve as a compensatory strategy for adverse emotional effects of migrancy. My research showed, however, that ICT may also be used as a tool of enforced financial and emotional outsourcing of migrant mothers, draining not least their time, energy and earnings, but even affections. Meanwhile, changes in the gender roles of fathers that are prompted by their wives' migration are only temporary. As such, they do not entail the *modernisation of fatherhood* (LaRossa, 1997) by means of either a more *involved fatherhood* (Wall and Arnold, 2007) or *co-parenting* (Castelain-Meunier, 2005) after their migrant spouses come back home. Thus, the *culture of fatherhood* (La Rossa 1988) in Ukraine does not change noticeably due to migration. I argue, however, that though these transformations might indeed be temporary, they nonetheless may effect changes in the long-run, provided they are sufficiently conceptualized and used creatively for the benefit of both the family and society at large.

Transnationalism, Family and Parenting: *The Underbelly of Global Capitalism* (Bash et al., 1994)

Throughout the last decades new perspectives on the study of migration have developed in the social sciences. As observed by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), the linear, bipolar, and assimilationist models that were typical of well-established migration paradigms were taken over by a transnational perspective, emerging from post-colonial, post-modern inspired anthropology. It is argued that this new perspective focuses on the cross-border communities and networks and considers migration as a multidirectional process. According to Vertovec, this perspective “underscores numerous ways in which, and the reasons why, today’s linkages are different from, or more intense than, earlier forms,” including “the rapid development of travel and communication technologies” (Vertovec, 2001: 574). In line with this perspective, “mobility and insertion are viewed not as contradictory or exclusive, but as complementary” processes (Gherghel and Le Gall, 2005: 4). Migrants are seen not as uprooted, but as *transmigrants*, who “develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political – that span borders” (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992: ix). Thus, the transnational perspective enables a new approach to the study of individual migrants, their communities and families, although at the same time it admits that currently transnationalism *per se* is neither sufficiently understood, nor regulated at an institutional level (Piperno, 2007).

Analyses of the transnational family have been conducted within different theoretical frameworks. Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding (2007) outlined a model of transnational care-giving, focusing on the complexity of factors underpinning this process, including a capacity to provide transnational help, the cultural sense of obligation to care, and character of family commitment and kinship relationship. Gherghel and Le Gall (2005) offered to combine a transnational perspective with the life course approach, which enabled a comprehensive model of analyzing social and family behavior and generational change aimed at understanding the individual development, in regard to multiple temporalities: the social time, the historical time and the individual time. In the analysis of transnational parenting, Mummert (2005) underscored the importance of viewing individual and family decision-making processes within the framework of the global political economy. Changing labor market conditions, migratory policies, legislation regarding nationality and citizenship, border crossing controls, and other social, political and cultural trends, all shape how and why parents resort to leaving children behind or sending them back home. Sørnsen (2005) argues that a renewed focus on transnational family life occurred because of the increase in independent female migration. She offered three models of transnational family relationship: transnational motherhood, childhood and fatherhood. However, Sørnsen's argument bypassed an essential aspect of the transnational family arrangement, *grandparenting*, specifically *grandmothering*, outlined earlier by Plaza (2000). All of these studies admit that transnational, multi-local families are now increasingly common and therefore, transnational parenthood is a widespread phenomenon that requires closer attention. Many of them acknowledge that "migration engenders changes in a family" (Parreñas, 2005: 317) and research on the gender dimensions of transnational parenting is similarly important.

Gendered Effect of Transnationalism on Ukrainian Mothers and Motherhood

"First of all you are a mother:" children's well-being as a push factor and a migratory imperative

My research concurs with the opinion that Ukrainian migrants "see labour migration as one of few ways, if not the only one, to provide for immediate care of their children; i.e. care related to their survival and well-being, by providing for the child's basic needs (food, clothes, etc.)" (Leifsen, Tymchyk, 2008: 9). Therefore, it is primarily the role of a parent and specifically *motherhood*, that induces women to leave their homes to work abroad and causes them to confront multiple exigencies of migratory life, often illegal, to be able to provide for

their children. Mothers' responsibilities to their dependents serve as a push factor for foreign employment. At the same time, the obligations of motherhood perform the function of a *migratory imperative*, giving them reason for endurance and tolerance of *cultural risks* (Kindler, 2008) they might face in a foreign setting. For example, in her interview, Tamara⁶ (49, a live-in care worker in Italy), highlighted the emotional pain she endured as a result of the limitations her employer imposed on her dietary and personal habits. However, both Tamara and her family back home framed it as an unavoidable *emotional fee* to be paid for the financial benefits for her children she reaped:

When I complained of it to my Mom on the phone, she said: "I know, it's hard. But remember: first of all you are a mother. While you are there, your children here have food to eat and money to pay the University fees. So, clench your fists and tolerate it. Just for the sake of your kids" (Rome, 02.04.2009, originally in Ukrainian, translated by the author).

Hence, ironically, it is "in the child's best interests", that mothers make their heart-wrenching decision to travel far from their family (Mummert, 2005: 2) and to leave their children behind, sometimes alone and unattended, which is detrimental to their emotional security and social well-being. However, the remittances the mothers working abroad send home are not necessarily spent for the benefit of children, but instead, may be wasted on whims (Kyrchiv, 2004), if not vices. This is illuminated in the following interview by Yarova (2007: 5):

My husband and fourteen-year-old son did not suffer because I earned more money... You know ... money spoils people. They started to go to restaurants a lot, wasted money. After I came back, they passed back all my responsibilities to me, and were ready 'to sit on my head.'⁷ (Lena, married, fourteen-year-old son)

Furthermore, as evidenced by an expert interview with the head of the Department in the Affairs of Minors at the Lviv City Council (July 2, 2008, Lviv), the negative effect of remittances on migrants' children is that they may entice them into an unfavorable social milieu. Migrants' children represent a cohort of social risk and, therefore, a target of criminals' activities. They use these socially neglected children for a variety of dubious

purposes, like draining the remittances sent by migrant parents, involving the children in gambling, drugs, alcohol, pornography and child-trafficking, and using them as objects of sex tourism.

This opinion was confirmed by other experts:

Statistics show that most women who migrate are women of reproductive age. Most of them leave behind if not very small children, but at least teenage children, at the age when they most of all require their parents to be around. The children's letters of which I told you earlier confirm my opinion. You have to consider that those who agreed to participate in this contest⁸ were the brightest children. But they also describe the life of their contemporaries or coevals - what happens to them when they have money, but live without parents. It is drug-taking, alcoholism, all possible negative developments (Interview with the director of a think-tank on connections with the Ukrainian Diaspora, Lviv, 01.07.2008, originally in Ukrainian).

It was also noted that for children of migrants education becomes primarily a matter of high social prestige, rather than skills and knowledge acquisition and therefore, they often neglect studies at Universities, thus wasting European scholarships, received through remittances of their "paychecks moms" working abroad.

One girl told me: 'Oh, I study in a group where half of my group-mates have their moms in Italy, so they don't have to study because their moms send them money and they just pay for their credits.' So, it's a huge impact on children, especially teenagers. They have money that their moms send, they have easy money, they start gambling, or take alcohol and they don't need to study because they know: 'Mom will send me money, why should I go to school?' (Interview with experts of a women's NGO, Lviv, 02.07.2008, originally in English).

Hence, the sacrifices migrant mothers make for the sake of their children's well-being are not necessarily fruitful, and may have a reverse impact on children's worldview by fostering a consumerist attitude to life and to their migrant parents (Tolstokorova, 2009a). Furthermore, the hope that remittances invested in higher education of children will secure a

bright future for them may turn into an unrealized dream. Migration has a tendency to become hereditary, as evidenced by the experience of countries with a longer migration history. Thus, transnational motherhood beginning as early as the 1970s and 1980s among Dominican migrants, showcased a new generation of migrants raised by their grandparents who now repeat the pattern of entrusting their own offspring to the next generation of grandparents (Mummert, 2005:12).

Broken family bonds: parental cultural shock in migration and reverse cultural shock after the family reunification

The displacement of women due to migration is not only physical, but also social and cultural (Henderson, 2004; Skrbiš, 2008). As a result, they may experience a culture shock due to the exposure to a foreign culture and the necessity to adapt themselves to changes in lifestyle and norms as well as to their own new social status, which is most often related to “contradictory class mobility” (Parreñas, 2001: 180). Additionally, it is argued that “family dispersal” (LARG, 2005: 5) resulting from migration, may come at a high emotional cost (Levitt, 2001), because it “generates feelings of continuous instability” (LARG, 2005: 5), “abandonment, regret and loneliness” (Parreñas, 2002: 44) and entails emotional distancing, because generations operate in time pockets that are outside the real time of the outside world (Parreñas, 2008), which may exacerbate the cultural shock of migrancy.

My argument here is, however, that an essential element of the cultural adjustment migrant mothers face is what I would call a parental cultural shock. It is pinned on the changing attitude towards mothers on the part of their children, for whose benefit women sacrifice themselves. For instance, as was observed in reference to Mexican women working in the US (Mummert, 2005), biological mothers had to accept the fact that other kin could develop closer relationships to their children than they themselves could manage, despite frequent visits, telephone calls, letters, videos and other means of communication. In other cases children who have been cared for by alternative caregivers, or “other-mothers,” came to consider these women their real mothers or even forget who their biological mothers were (Schmalzbauer, 2004). Similar sentiments were expressed by Ukrainian migrant mothers in their interviews with Dalgas (2010). For younger children this situation is especially problematic because they do not understand the financial necessities that had driven their mothers away from them. Sometimes children reacted by not wanting to talk to their mothers

on the phone, while others simply seemed to slide away from their mothers and formed close relationships to other important adults.

This was the case in the family of my interviewee, Nadezhda (39, a former music teacher and a singer), who went to work first in Greece to earn money to pay for her son's University studies and then moved to Italy, where she was employed in elder care. In Ukraine, she had left her 10-year old daughter and a 17-year old son with her mother. The old woman could not survive her daughter's departure and passed away a month after Nadezhda had left. Her son moved to Kyiv where he lived with his uncle, Nadezhda's brother, and studied at the University. Unfortunately no one was left to care for her small daughter. Nadezhda had to ask her former school director, who was also her neighbor, to take care of the girl:

You don't know what it cost me. At the beginning I cried all through the night. Meanwhile, my daughter kept sending me such sad, touching letters! In one letter she wrote: 'Mommy, please come back! Please! Please! I need you and miss you very much and sob every day, but who cares? They step on my tears and walk over them.' She attached a page of her pencil drawings, covered in tear drops, with big black footprints over them across the page... [crying]. But what could I do? I could not come back without money, because I had to pay for my son's education and I had to earn something. How could I explain that to my little girl? She would not understand. She told me on the phone that I betrayed her and refused to talk to me when I called my ex-director to know how things were going on at home (Milan, 04.06.2007, originally in Russian, translated by the author).

As Nadezhda's story shows, this experience may be highly traumatic and stressful for transnational mothers. They believe they "have fallen short of their duties" (LARG, 2005: 8) and self-identify as "pseudo-moms" deserted by their own children, for whose benefit they risked foreign employment.

Additionally, I argue that women also have to confront a reverse culture shock after returning home, that may be just as damaging to their emotional well-being. Thus, the results of my field research were consistent with Yarova's empirical study, which showed that "after coming back from Italy, women sometimes experience difficulties with their children, including communication problems, misunderstanding and estrangement....Very often,

women become alienated from their families, because by leaving home, they are departing from traditionally constructed gender roles. Meanwhile, their transnational family may go through certain transformations during their absence..." which entails "challenges [to] the images of mothers and fathers" (Yarova, 2007: 3).

Furthermore, as was shown in my earlier papers (Tolstokorova, 2008; Tolstokorova, 2009b), Ukrainian experts reported a plethora of cases when upon returning home, women discovered not only that their marriages were ruined, but in effect, that they did not have families anymore, because during their long-term absence abroad, their husbands remarried and deprived them of their maternal rights. Therefore, such women lost their status both as wives and as mothers to their own children. This may also happen in mixed marriages after women return home, as showcased by the following story:

Some time ago a Ukrainian woman came back from Italy with a kid. She said that she had been married to an Italian guy and the kid was born in Italy, but then the family was broken and they agreed that the kid comes back with the mom. She said that it was a mutual agreement. So, the family was not there any more and she came back to Ukraine and she didn't hear from him [the ex-husband] for two years. But then she got papers from the Italian court, [writing] that he tried to deprive her of [her] maternal rights. She was shocked. She said that he didn't call, didn't give money and the kid got serious health problems and it was really shock for her, and she didn't get any papers that she was invited to the court . She has just got papers that she was deprived of [her] maternal rights and a two-years old baby [had to] be sent to Italy... He didn't see the baby for two years! It was a problem, but she resolved [it]. She said: I am OK. He can come here and see the baby. I don't mind [that] the child has a father and if the father wants to come – it's great! It's very good, but not this way: give me my baby back after two years of having nothing with him! (Interview with experts of a Women's NGO, Lviv, 02.07.2008, originally in English).

Migration thus may impose high emotional costs on women as wives and mothers. The transnational character of their family life may be deceptive, concealing a morbid reality, of which they are often unaware and continue to cherish relationships that may exist only in their imagination. As Leifsen and Tymczuk (2008: 2) argue, "relational closeness

tends to wither if care at a distance is not complemented with return visits” and “moments of physical co-presence” (Urry, 2003:156). Hence, although “motherhood is priceless” (Anderson, 2000: 22), the price of transnational motherhood, at least in the Ukrainian context, is the broken kinship bonds in transnational families. This is at odds with the definition of transnational family by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3) who describe it as the one whose members “live some or most of the time separated from each other but yet create a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood,’ even across national borders.” My research findings showed that transnationalism more often translates into defamilization (Lister, 1997) rather than into a specific transnational familyhood.

Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Migrant Mothering and Transnational Caring: Controversies of the “Compact Contact”

The scholarship on transnational parenthood has witnessed an increasing recognition of the importance of ICT as an essential element of transnational familial relations. This scholarship emphasizes technology’s positive role in maintaining connected relationships, and even virtual intimacies (Wilding, 2006) in transnational families, seen from this perspective as social constructions or imagined communities (Vuorela, 2002). It is argued that ICT and low prices “had spurred a burst of activity” in transnational families because “many have cell phones, phone cards, Internet access, Web-cams and carry out international conversations routinely” (LARG, 2005: 17). This enables family members “to be actively involved in everyday life there in fundamentally different ways than in the past” (Levitt 2001: 22). My argument, however, is that the role of ICT is not always so straightforward, insofar as the new and different ways of transnational communication within “new migratory spaces” (Morokvasic, 2006: 49) may have both favorable and adverse implications.

Favorable Effect: A Connected Relationship

Many papers underscore that migrancy induces women to build alternative constructions of motherhood when separated from their children, (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; LARG, 2005; Parreñas, 2005; Dalgas, 2010). This most often requires “to mesh caregiving and guidance with breadwinning” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997: 564). It is argued that the fact that migrant mothers are no longer physically present in their families does not entail the abandonment of their caregiving responsibilities, but rather their

rearrangement or even reinforcement by “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996, cited by Parreñas, 2005: 323). It may include management of the home from a distance by controlling the use of remittances, making telephone calls, maintaining e-mail communications, sending SMS and letters, and paying visits. These “time-space compressions” (Harvey 1989: 240) of transnational family space become possible through advanced technologies. They are indispensable in maintaining cross-border connections: geographic distance is perceived not as constraint to familial communication, but rather a determinant of its availability and intensity. This sentiment was echoed by one of my informants:

I bought my mobile as soon as I came here, so I call home very often. I learned how to use Internet as well, since we have free access to Internet here. Our employer often says: ‘Children are sacred’ and encourages us to maintain connections with our families. For that purpose he hooked our place to the Internet and provided us with e-mails, so all our girls have unlimited online connection and we write home whenever we might need it. (Interview with Anastasia, 38, working in the service business in Monaco. [More specific information on the character of her job was not provided to the interviewer “for confidentiality reasons”]. Nice, France, 08.12.2007, originally in Russian, translated by the author).

Hence, ICT as a new form of “compact contact” is instrumental in mitigating “the feelings of depression and hopelessness” (LARG, 2005: 19) of migrant mothers generated by the effects of “family dispersal” (LARG, 2005: 5) and allow to “vitally energize” the connected kin relationship across great geographical distances (Parreñas, 2005).

Dubious Effect: An Unreliable Connection

It is true that “modern communications systems do allow better oral communication” (Lutz, 2004: 54) to transnational families. However, it is highly doubtful that this kind of “acts of care from afar” (Parreñas, 2005: 323) may be seen as “compensatory strategies which limit the impact of care drain” (Piperno, 2007: 2) and that these “childrearing tasks [...] conducted over great geographical distances” (Lutz, 2004: 54) are highly efficient. Rather, I argue that while it is true that “at least there is an attempt to maintain contact with the children” (Lutz, 2004: 54) and other family members, this can hardly compensate for a

physical absence of a caregiver in case of a physically disabled, elderly, or sick person. Nor can technology guarantee efficient control, guidance, and timely advice to children, especially at a complicated age of puberty when children themselves may be unaware of the challenges they face or unwilling to admit them, showing to their mothers a “glossy picture” of their daily life. However, improved technology provides a convenient excuse for the compensatory effect of “care drain” (Hoshchild, 2000) and a prerequisite for “care gain” by care-recipient countries. This is why it is argued that “the sheer quantity of contact is not made up for by quality time” (LARG, 2005: 23), because “compensatory strategies adopted by transnational families often prove insufficient and an underlying care shortage persists” (Piperno, 2007: 2). Indeed, empirical studies have shown that physical absence and virtual communication actually erase emotional closeness even between the closest family members. It changes the nature of the relationship and entails estrangement together with a “lessening or ending of the mothers’ direct emotional connections” (LARG, 2005: 23) as evidenced by an interview with a Ukrainian woman conducted by Dalgas (2010: 3): “One woman told me, that after years living apart from her daughters, sometimes days could pass by, when she did not think of them.”

LARG (2005) reports that another reason for estrangement is the frequent breakdown of direct telephone contacts. In other words, although technological advancements surely benefit transnational families, they do not automatically guarantee a smooth flow of transnational communication (Parreñas, 2005). For example, children may be unable or unwilling to come to the phone, or relatives may insist on taking messages rather than letting mothers talk directly to their children (LARG, 2005). This was the case with the daughter of my informant, Nadezhda, cited above. This means that ICT are not always helpful and reliable, especially in emergency. Due to possible misconnections the required assistance, help or advice of far-away family members sometimes can not be provided when necessary.

Deleterious Effect: Enforced Outsourcing of Mothers

There is hardly any appreciation of the fact that the use of ICT, especially mobile phones, makes mothers almost always reachable, “always there” (Parreñas, 2005: 319) for both employers and families back home. It allows mothers to give an instant feedback on any problems their families might have. In doing so, mobile communication reconfigures the “power geometry” (Massey 1994) and renders women bereft of any personal space. As one interviewee explained, migrant mothers have the sense of “not belonging to themselves” and

of being exposed to manipulations by those whose calls they can hardly dare to neglect. Additionally, it creates the virtual spatiality that places migrant mothers “simultaneously here and there” (Parreñas, 2005: 319). This, in turn, increases the stress and emotional pressure on women, whose job of emotional labour is energy-consuming in itself. Thus, advanced technologies turn into a subtle tool of women’s exploitation by persons who matter to them.

Financially, international calls are also costly. Dalgas (2010) observed that the Ukrainian domestics she interviewed spent up to €100 per month for telephone communication with their family members. For live-in workers, this was quite a large proportion of their salary, which in 2006 was around €850. This is probably why none of my informants mentioned, for example, using Web-cams for interfamilial exchange. Very few of live-in domestics could afford using Internet. It may be attributed to the fact that “the compression of time and space in transnational communication is not a uniform condition, but a varied social process shaped by class and gender” (Parreñas, 2005: 318). Transnational communication requires access to capital and its frequency depends on the resources of individuals (Sassen 2000). As Mahler (2001: 610) notes, in this case, geographic location in essence translates into “social location:” technological advances are not accessible to everyone, which hinders the possibility of virtual caring experiences. This is especially true in regard to older women, both migrant and those left behind, who may be at pains using ICT. In a private conversation, a woman in her 60s told me that she had problems learning how to use her first mobile phone, and after numerous failed attempts to call her son, she was so angered and exhausted that she smashed her very expensive mobile phone against the wall. Equally, ICT may be a greater challenge for migrants’ families located in rural areas without the appropriate facilities and infrastructures (Parreñas, 2005: 318). ICT thus may serve a means of the enforced financial and emotional outsourcing of migrant mothers, draining their time, energy, earnings, and even affections.

Transnationalism, Gender and Fatherhood: *New Father’s* Share in Old Mother’s Care

Generally, discussions on issues of parenting have been focused on the role of mothers in childcare, whilst the fathers’ participation in parenting is most often ignored. This stems from a traditional gender ideology that presents mothers as the primary care-givers in the family, while assuming that fatherhood is the male’s additional role to that of a breadwinner. However, throughout the last decades, the *modernization* of the institution of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1997), and the emergence of the so-called *new fathers* (Coltrane, Allan,

1994) has caused the discourse on parenting to address both parents rather than mothers alone (Sunderland 2006). Wall and Arnold (2007: 509) point to a plethora of research, maintaining that the emergence of a cultural shift in expectations surrounding fathering has been most notable since the 1980s and was partly driven by movement of mothers into the labor force. In Ukraine, a renewed focus in the public discourse towards the issues of masculinity, paternity and responsible fathering was observable throughout 2000s, a trend that has only increased over the last two years (Tolstokorova, N.d.). Yet, my opinion is that the causality behind this process is of a different order than in post-industrial economies, insofar as the massive entrance of women into the labour force in Ukraine started in 1920s with the introduction of state socialism. At that time, however, it did not entail the new “culture of fatherhood”⁹ (LaRossa, 1988) that emerged half a century thereafter in Western societies, which gradually progressed through the stages of “paternal power” (*la puissance paternelle*), then “parental authority” (*l'autorité parentale*) and eventually arriving to “co-parenting” (*la co-parentalité*) (Castelain-Meunier, 2005).

I argue that one of the key triggers behind the recent interest in issues of fatherhood in Ukraine is the feminization of labour migration in the country (Tolstokorova, 2009b), or to be more exact, the increase of independent female migration. This issue is especially relevant in small towns and villages, where the high levels of poverty and unemployment have pushed women to search for income abroad. Statistics evidences that most of the females leaving for earnings abroad are family women with children. Thus, a 2003 sociological survey of Ukrainian migrants in Italy (Gorodetsky and Shegda, 2003, cited in Sapunko, 2006) showed that out of all the interviewees (of whom 91.1% were females and 8.9% - males), 64.4% were married at the time of the survey, 8.4% - not married, 16.4% - divorced, 10.7% - widowed. Furthermore, 90.1% of responders had children, of whom only 5.5% stayed with their parents in Italy. According to another source (Women's Perspectives, 2003, cited in Yarova, 2007: 3), 94% of the women interviewed had left their children at home in Ukraine. Most often, children stayed with their fathers, but in families headed by single mothers or in which both parents work abroad, 66% of children were left behind in the care of grandparents, whilst 33% stayed unattended. In this context, the issues of men left behind, and especially the responsibility of fathers for their children when mothers are working abroad, gain currency. From this, there emerges an imperative need to conceptualize these changes in gender arrangements in the family and society and to offer viable solutions for their regulation, especially in regard to the social roles of men and fathers in the family (Tolstokorova, N.d.).

My research shows that in Ukrainian “mother-away migrant families” (Parreñas, 2005: 318) the fathers left behind sometimes perform “reproductive work” efficiently and cope well with their new roles of caregivers and “househusbands” (Parreñas, 2005: 331). As one informant explained:

When I told to my husband that I wanted to leave to work abroad, he replied that he would not wait for me and would find another woman to live with. In effect, by that time our marriage was at dead end, but anyway, we still lived together as husband and wife. So, I had no choice but to agree to divorce, because my elder son was about to graduate from school and we needed money to pay for his university education. The problem was that, when industry and the army collapsed after the demise of the Union [USSR], in our small Crimean town there were no jobs left for men. Only some low-paid work for women in the service sector was still available. So, my husband lost his job and could find only part-time work in the informal sector. Since I worked in the service sector, I managed to keep my job, but my wage was ridiculously low. Anyway, our joint incomes were insufficient to maintain a family with two children. So, I decided I had to leave, because I knew that although my man was not the best possible husband, he was a good dad and my boys loved and obeyed him. Now, I see that although I am away from home, my boys are taken care of well, and all my guys get along with each other. Now that I have a short annual leave to go home, I am busy with present-hunting for my ex, to thank him for being a good father to our sons. (Interview with Anastasia, 38, working in the services business in Monaco [more specific information on the character of her job was not provided to the interviewer “for confidentiality reasons”], Nice, France, 08.12.2007, originally in Russian, translated by the author).

Anyway, the results of my fieldwork were consistent with the finding that “this change is just a temporary one, or at least in some cases they [men] wished this was so,” hoping that “after their wives come back they will again become the main breadwinners and their wives will stay at home and do the housework” (Yarova, 2007: 4). This was confirmed by expert interviews:

Interviewer. There's a question of debate in Italy: when a woman migrates, the man left behind, the husband, will do the domestic work and caring work, looking after kids. So if a woman goes away, if she is not divorced, and the man starts to do main things in the house, do you think it changes gender roles?

Expert. I think that in some cases it may be so, but I don't think it's typical. As a La Strada research shows, mostly children are left not in the care of fathers, but mainly in the care of grandmothers, aunts, older siblings. Then problems of men are mostly in drinking and idleness. (Interview with an expert in migration issues from a state research institute, Kyiv, June 24, 2008, originally in Russian)

My research confirmed that the reconstitution of gender role models in "mother-away migrant families" occurs mainly while women are absent from home. After the family is reunited, however, it is expected that the traditional gender contract would be reactivated. This interviewee echoes that expectation:

Expert: I have a brother who had been taking care of two teenage boys for two years while his wife was in Italy, and it was not a problem. It was OK.

Interviewer: And when she came back home, did anything change?

Expert: When she came back, it was the same as it had been before. You are back to Ukraine now! (Interview with a lawyer, an expert of a women's NGO, Lviv, 02.07.2008, originally in English)

Therefore, my conclusion is that the gendered effect of labour migration on the paternity status of Ukrainian men has only a short-term effect. It does not entail any tangible changes to the institution of fatherhood *per se*, given that men are ready to engage in "involved fathering" (Wall and Arnold, 2007) and assume traditional women's roles only conditionally and temporarily. Drawing on LaRossa's "culture versus conduct" paradigm of fatherhood (La Rossa, 1988), I argue that in Ukraine, though the "absent mother migration scenario" may entail temporary changes in the conduct of fathers, it does not affect the culture of fatherhood in society at large. Nevertheless, this experience may have effect in the long-run if these changes draw public attention and transform the awareness of the society about the role, status and responsibilities of men to their family and children. It is possible

that these changes may become “an important precursor to a more inclusive gender movement that will incorporate both women and men on egalitarian principles” (Tolstokorova, N.d.).

Indeed, the social constructions of fatherhood and motherhood are intimately intertwined (Mummert, 2005). The experience of transnational parenthood discussed above confirms my earlier finding that the optimism about the empowering effect of migration on women, allegedly enabling them “to move away from situations where they lived under traditional, patriarchal authority to situations where they are empowered to exercise greater authority over their own lives” (United Nations, 2004: iii) is not always pertinent. Although this optimistic assessment may be true for a few female migrants, more generally, the migration experience does not entail a more egalitarian gender order than currently exists in Ukrainian families. When they come back to Ukraine, women either have to return to the traditional gender contract they had had before migration, or their marriages dissolve because the women do not want to readjust to the traditional gender roles, while their husbands are not ready to agree to their new roles as bread-winners (Tolstokorova, 2008; Tolstokorova, 2009a). This opinion was expressed in expert interviews:

Expert 1: It is an extremely complicated issue [...]. In the village she [a woman] works hard, because you know the situation. And now she can leave abroad, where she sees quite a different attitude to herself. This is why she does not want to go back to the same situation at home. It is an empowering effect, you see. This is one of the reasons why families collapse. Because she does not want to go back to conditions where she was powerless [...]. Because after coming back home she will teach her child that it is possible to live by other standards. She will not want her daughter to be treated the same way as she herself had been treated by her husband. (Interview with the director of a think-tank on connections with the Ukrainian Diaspora, Lviv, 01.07.2008, originally in Ukrainian)

Expert 2: A women who works in rural areas in agriculture here, she works very hard, and she is not paid much. And of course, when the context changes, when she gets into other conditions of work, her attitudes change too, it changes her mentality, and when a woman gets back home she refuses to accept the same realities as she had had before, because her mentality changes

and her perceptions change. (Interview with an expert in migration issues from a state research institute, Kyiv, 24. 2008, originally in Russian)

In this situation, women face a dual loss. In the best-case scenario, they forfeit the possibility to benefit by social remittances earned due to migration, but preserve their marriage. Hence, they have to endure the forfeit of the individual human capital, but preserve the financial capital of the dual-earner family. In the worst-case scenario, they forfeit their marriage and therefore, access to resources available due to the husband's contribution into the family budget. In doing so, they are forced to confront the shrinking financial capital necessary for investments into children. Furthermore, they have to tolerate the decreasing social capital due to the lost status of a "family woman." Even more than that, they often have to cope with the feeling of parental guilt (Wall and Arnold, 2007) caused by stigmatization of mothers by their children, who consider them responsible for the dissolution of the family. In effect, women are forced into the circuit of "permanent transnational mothering:" to provide for the children as "solo mothers" (Hobson, 1994), they have to resort to re-emigration as a coping strategy and, therefore, re-separate from their children, returning to the roles of "pseudo-moms." Hence, women become trapped in a vicious circle that requires them to choose between a bad scenario and the worst one. Hence, my research goes in line with the finding that "crossing borders for work purpose can be empowering, open up opportunities for challenging the established gender norms, but it can also lead to new dependencies and reinforce existing gender boundaries and hierarchies" (Morokvasic, 2007: 69-70).

Summary and Conclusions

My analysis of the social dimension of Ukrainian economic mobility shows that transnational, multi-local families are now increasingly common, evincing the importance of issues of parenthood – both motherhood and fatherhood – in the exploration of migration processes. However, neither the transnational nor gendered perspectives have been applied in its study in Ukrainian scholarship. The situation of men and fathers left behind, their relationships with their children and migrant wives, and the impact of transnational care-giving on children as well on the institution of motherhood are still largely undocumented. Equally, little is known about the gendered implications of migration for the transnational

family space. Such observations point to the pertinence of the research on the Ukrainian family through a transnational and gendered lens, viewing it as a social process that involves not only the fluxes of labour force, but also human interaction by means of complex familial dynamics that explains the transmission of practices and norms related to caring, without excluding their transformation over time (Gherghel and Gall, 2005). Therefore, in my paper the analysis focused on the gender effect of migrancy on key family actors, both migrants and non-migrants, in the transnational perspective.

The Price of “Priceless Motherhood”: A Vignette of Women’s Burdens

I concur with LARG (2005: 30) in arguing that “transnationalism comes at a tremendous human cost for couples, extended families, mothers and children.” My opinion is that, for Ukrainian transnational mothers, as for others, too, transnational migration entails multiple exploitations and overexploitations. Thus, Mummert (2005) highlights hiring and labour force control practices that not only foster but actually impose the transnational motherhood circuit. For example, Wilson (2000) explains how attempts to enforce a re-separation of production and reproduction serve as a strategy for leaving the labor force “unencumbered” by family responsibilities and, therefore, available for overexploitation, while Barndt (2002) showcases how this recruitment strategy creates a docile, vulnerable, exploitable labor pool. Other studies have paid close attention to the exploitative nature of the division of labour in transnational families, where the duties of non-migrant women expand to include traditionally male responsibilities, such as farming. Yet these reconfigurations of labour are accompanied by the continued preservation of unequal gender divisions of labour in these families (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, 2000), thus increasing women’s double burden.

My research findings are consistent with these observations. As discussed above, for migrant mothers who often identify themselves as “pseudo-moms,” the *benefits of motherhood* may be only ephemeral, because they are based on mothers’ hope that their sacrifice will be beneficial for their children, a hope that might not necessarily come true. At the same time, the *costs of motherhood* are often too high, as they entail a “vignette of women’s burdens:” overexploitation, multiple penalties, financial and emotional outsourcing. Women are penalized for their long-term absence abroad by the forfeiture of spousal and maternal rights, and lost contact with children that results from their estrangement during the mother’s employment abroad. They undergo multidimensional exploitations: by employers,

using their cheap domestic labor; by families back home, living on their remittances; by national economies, benefiting by the foreign currency they bring (Seguino and Grown, 2006); by ICT businesses, making fortunes on transnational mothers' "virtual connected relationship;" by financial corporations, earning interests on women's cash transfers; by transportation industries and postal services, profiting from the circulation of goods, resources, gifts and other forms of intimate exchange across multi-focal migrant families networks; and by private educational systems, benefiting by university fees paid with mothers' earnings abroad. Furthermore, even social remittances, and more specifically, "gender equality remittances" that women acquire through the exposure to more egalitarian cultures of Western democracies, may contribute to overexploitation of women. As discussed above, they perpetuate a transnational motherhood circuit and reinforce the status of pseudo-moms. Moreover, in transnational families, "mothers inadvertently go against the reconstitution of gender initiated by the institutional rearrangement of the family in women's migration," because acts of nurturing "reinforce conventional gender norms" (Parreñas, 2005: 333). Therefore, transnationalism "has ironically become a mechanism for the retention of gender norms and a force that impedes the reconstitution of gender practices engendered by transnational mothering," leading to "no-win situation" (Parreñas, 2005: 333). In this context, the value of "gender equality remittances" for women's empowerment becomes dubious. Put another way, although gender roles in transnational families are, in essence, reconfigured, this change does not benefit women. As long as female migrants are forced to assume both the traditional male roles as providers and their traditional female roles as mothers, their responsibilities and workload only increase, and their double burden is exacerbated by distance. Hence, the cost of financial independence of post-Soviet Ukrainian women (which they in effect enjoyed already under state socialism), received due to migration, does not offset the cost of financial, managerial and emotional responsibilities for the well-being of their families. Mothers still have to perform these duties in complicated conditions of cross-border parenting in addition to their paid employment abroad. Hence, the institution of motherhood as a conventional social role of women turns into a tool of their exploitation, exacerbated by the "vignette of multiple burdens" they bear due to transnationalism.

"À la guerre come à la guerre"

The answer to the question in the title of this paper, "where have all the mothers gone?," which is a paraphrased quotation from a popular song, suggests that they have gone

to the war. In the context of this paper, it is a war against poverty and destruction, and for the dignity and fulfilling future for the children of migrant mothers. It is an invisible war, because the battlefield is deployed within the bleeding hearts of women whose children, husbands, and elderly parents stay home unattended, while their love is being invested on the frontline, away from their homeland. The mothers' only weapons in this war are the "labour of love" (Bock and Duden, 1977), caregiving at a distance, and virtual intimacies. However, it is questionable whether this weapon is powerful enough to enable the mothers' triumphant return to Ukraine after the *Blitzkrieg*, or if they will remain on the battlefield as casualties in this war. Therefore, the question of the title persists, but in a somewhat different mode: will mothers ever come back?

For this and other reasons, I find myopic the optimism of some experts who regard the stabilization of migration flows from Ukraine as a positive sign for the national economy, because, metaphorically speaking, for the wounded heart, the stabilization of bleeding does not entail pain relief, nor it is a sign of recovery. While bleeding, albeit slowly, the body still suffers the loss of energy, which is not only painful, but is detrimental for the patient's health. If not stopped, it might be fatal. The body can recover only if the bleeding stops and the wound heals. Similarly, Ukraine will recover when mothers and fathers come back home to their children and when transnational families reunite. In current conditions, however, this perspective seems unrealistic, because labour migration from Ukraine has been acquiring a pattern of permanent emigration, despite the migrants' willingness to go back home (Chaloff and Eisenbaum, 2008). Thus, Ukrainian parents working abroad are running the risk to remain in countries of work as "immigrants forever" (Oliveira, 2000) and never to rejoin their families. In this way they are enforced to confront the "warfare of immigration" (Lind, 2004) endlessly.

Notes

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² Dr. Alissa D. Tolstokorova received her PhD (Candidate of Sciences) for a dissertation in Gender Studies in 1991. She currently is an independent expert in gender issues. Dr. Tolstokorova previously held positions as Head of the Research Experts Group at the International School for Equal Opportunities; Director of the Centre for Research on Family and Gender at the State Institute for Family and Youth Development of the Ministry of Ukraine on Family, Youth and Sports; Associate Professor in the Department of Education Management, University of Economics and Law "KROK;" senior researcher at the Gender

Studies Centre at the State Institute for Family and Youth; and project coordinator in gender policy development in projects of the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research in Kyiv, among others.

³ This was evidenced by the in-depth interviewing held in Kyiv and Lviv, where all the Ukrainian experts insisted that migration has a destructive impact on family and kinship ties, while the Italian interviewers were reluctant to hear that and now and then started their interviews with phrases such as: “Oh, but don’t tell us that the family collapses and all this stuff...”

⁴ Axiology is a philosophical teaching about human values.

⁵ The experts interviewed covered a wide range of specialists, including top officials at the Italian embassy in Kiev; researchers at state research institutions and National Academy of Sciences; representatives of independent analytical think-tanks and research centres; policy-makers at Ministries, local administrations and state employment centres; representatives of international organizations, like IOM, Amnesty International etc.; NGOs activists working in the area of care services, social work, women’s issues and migration policy; journalists, etc.

⁶ The names of informants were changed to protect their anonymity.

⁷ “To sit on one’s head” means to parasitize, to use somebody in one’s own interests.

⁸ In reference to the contest of letters of migrants’ children, organised in 2008 (Open Ukraine, 2008).

⁹ LaRossa argued that, for example, in the US, fatherhood has undergone more changes in culture than in conduct.

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