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Special Issue: Transnational Family Research – Methodological Challenges

Guest editor's note*

During the last decade, research in the field of transnational families has intensified, and therewith the methodological approach to this subject has become more complex and diverse in capturing the various aspects of the thematic. In this issue, we have tried to gather researcher experiences in what concerns the methodological challenges they confronted while researching within the field of transnational families. On the one hand, we wanted to grasp new trends in the field, on the other, to make this special issue become a source of inspiration for scholars who wish to project new research designs for the field. We have sought the papers to reflect the challenges posed by new approaches that leave classical methods behind, such as: the use of online applications (Skype, Facebook etc.); visual media like photography and video; couple interviews; group interviews; multiple interviews within the same family; unusual locations for data collection and participative observation etc. Additionally, we were very interested in papers that reflect the difficulties researchers meet in their work and the ways they solve them: from identifying participants and obtaining their agreement to participate, to data analysis and interpretation.

In this special issue, we have managed to gather 10 articles that correspond to the above terms. Thus, readers of this issue will find approaches to the methodology of couple interviews (Bezzini, Żadkowska, Ducu). We have articles that contain reflections and challenges in the research of sensitive issues: trafficking (Hilário Pascoal) or gender inaqualities (Caro et al.). A great result of the issue is the fact that a considerable number of the articles tackles the use of new technologies in qualitative research: photography (Ilea), film (Carrillo Espinosa and Hossu), online research (Kovács, Ducu, Aştilean).

Viorela Ducu

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On Interviewing Partners in Mixed Couples Together: Performance, Meta-Communication and Positionality

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Abstract. This paper is based on a qualitative study about the processes of boundary-making among Albanian-Italian and Albanian-Romanian couples in Italy. In particular, it focuses on the methodological challenges arisen during my fieldwork of interviewing mixed couples. Although joint couple interviews have rarely been considered as a technique per se, the paper shows how they actually represent something more than an interview format in between individual interviews and focus groups, precisely by virtue of the relationship between the two interviewees. In fact, joint couple interviews are characterised by three main dimensions: perfomance, meta-communication and positionality – which add essential meanings to the narratives themselves. Firstly, joint couple interviews provide observational data through the couples' interactions; secondly, they constitute an opportunity to display the couple/family history to a multiple audience (the researcher, the partner, the 'witness'); thirdly, they need to be carefully considered at the intersection between participants' and researcher's positionalities.

Keywords: joint couple interview, migration studies, mixed couples, qualitative methods, research encounters

1. Introduction

This methodological paper is based on a qualitative study about the processes of boundary-making among Albanian-Italian and Albanian-Romanian couples in Italy. The three groups taken into consideration (Albanians, Italians and Romanians) are not only the national majority and the two largest immigrant minorities in Italy, but also three groups quite similar although related to each other through subsequent phenomena of othering via stigmatization (King & Mai 2009; Mai 2010).

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The originality of this research consists in looking at the integration process as an interactive one, which involves majority and minorities in the reconstruction of a shared social space. From this starting point, this research focuses on the integration sphere of intermarriage (Heckmann 2006), which, thanks to the 'total social fact' character of marriage (Lévi-Strauss 1950), makes it possible to link the personal and the societal, moving the research in the direction of the social change that mixed couples and families indicate.

During my fieldwork, carried out between February and August 2016, I personally interviewed 96 individuals belonging to 61 Albanian-Italian/Romanian couples, of whom 48 were Albanian-Italian and 13 Albanian-Romanian couples. In 35 couples I interviewed both partners and, in the other 26 couples, only one of them. The couples were married or cohabiting and, to a lesser extent, engaged or separated. Roughly the half of them had children. They lived in Tuscany, in the cities and provinces of Florence, Prato, Pistoia, Pisa and Arezzo and were between 25 and 45 years of age. The couples were mostly constituted by an Albanian partner who arrived in Italy in his/her adolescence for a multiplicity of reasons (study, work, family reunification, asylum, healthcare assistance), either as a primary or a secondary migrant. From there I moved into two directions: towards an Italian and a Romanian partner alike. In terms of education and occupation, the sample is diverse within and across the three groups. Participants are equally divided between those with secondary and and those with tertiary-level education – actually ranging from primary school to PhD level – as well as between those with lower and higher income jobs – e.g. accountants, baristas, bloggers, cleaners, cooks, couriers, cultural mediators, dentists, engineers, firefighters, gardeners, journalists, hairdressers, lawyers, lorry-drivers, masons, musicians, policemen, shop-assistants, waiters, wedding-planners, etc. I contacted participants through the snowball method, wedding banns online and Facebook. I used three main data collection methods: interviews, photo-elicitation and participant observation. This paper focuses on my interviews and specifically on the added value of joint couple interviews in intermarriage research – a topic neglected in the methodological literature – by analyzing the characteristics of performance, meta-communication and position.

2. Joint couple interview

Interviewing does not only consist of asking questions and the selection of the interview technique thus depends on the type of information desired. In-depth interviewing is the most interactive technique, while questionnaires require the lowest level of interaction between researcher and participant. In-depth

interviews allow the researcher to gather rich data about participants' experiences and enable the latter to describe and interpret their own lives in their own words (Sánchez-Ayala 2012). Moreover, interviews can be distinguished on the basis of the structure – in this respect, interviews can be defined as 'structured', 'semi structured' or 'unstructured', if they follow a predetermined plan, only establish directions within the conversation, arise from the research encounter itself – as well as on the basis of the questions – in this respect, interview questions can be defined as open-ended or closed-ended, if they make it possible to collect stories or identify patterns. In addition to this, a further distinction is that interviews can be either individual or collective (e.g. joint couple interviews or focus groups). In the case of collective interviews, not only meanings but also interactions can be captured. Another specific trait of collective interviews is the inter subjective dynamics of storytelling, made up of multiple consonant and/or dissonant voices.

With reference to this research, a key issue concerned whether couples should have been interviewed together or individually. As Bjørnholt and Farstad (2012) suggest, a combination of both individual and joint couple interviews would ideally constitute the best option, even though in most cases it does not seem to be feasible. As an alternative to this combination, the authors enumerate the advantages of joint couple interviews which are practical, ethical and methodological. Yet, joint couple interviewing has rarely been taken into consideration as a technique in itself: Kvale and Brinkman (2009), for instance, speak about individual interviews and focus groups only. However, it is not just the size of the group which distinguishes focus groups from joint couple interviews – since focus groups are supposed to include between 5 and 10 participants – but it is also the fact that focus groups mostly put together people who do not know each other, which makes the difference. From a practical perspective, joint couple interviews are often the only way to achieve a more balanced gender ratio within the sample – mainly for interviewing male partners in marriage and family research (cf. Edwards et al. 2010). Moreover, Luke and Luke (1998) showed how, by making participants choose between being interviewed together or individually, almost everybody went for the joint couple interview. In addition to this, their study also gives a brief insight into the supposed 'absence' of the partner in individual interviews taking place within the same research encounters, by giving the example of a husband supervising in the background the interview of his wife through occasional comments. From an ethical perspective, Bjørnholt and Farstad (2012) claim that joint couple interviews would facilitate the management of confidential data, since what may be revealed to the researcher alone may not

be revealed in the presence of others, including the partner. This means that, in a case of putting into practice the time-consuming combination of two individual and joint couple interview in sequence, the researcher would then need to carefully manage the data in order not to mediate between participants' 'secrets' and this could add a further level of stress to the interview. In addition to this, even though the data are anonymised, participants could be still identified by close members of their social networks – partners in primis – and even cause an unintended negative impact on the partnership itself. On the other hand, joint couple interviews could also give the researcher access to details that could not be gathered in individual interviews through the 'cueing phenomenon', by which participants basically help each other to divulge information. From a methodological perspective, the authors finally argue that individual interviews seem to assume the authenticity of autonomous selves, thus they could somehow be thought of as in opposition to the constructivist paradigm which instead considers knowledge as co-constructed and identities in relation to alterities. Another advantage of joint couple interviews is then represented by the fact that the couple dynamics in the context and situation of the interview itself would add richness to the data, being an opportunity for observation as well as for developing common reflections and arguments.

Nonetheless, the advantages of joint couple interviews have been mainly explored with reference to endogamic couples, as a way to delve into gender and class issues. Studies on exogamous couples, thus referring to a broad understanding of the category of ethnicity, are often based on individual interviews mainly because of the phenomena of stigmatisation which may affect partners' ascriptive groups. It is consequently excluded that the social stigma could be effectively discussed within a joint couple interview. Referring to my research, although at the beginning I also tried the theoretically ideal sequence of individual and joint couple interviews, this immediately showed its practical limitations. The physical separation, which was possible only in home-based interviews, was completely artificial and rather akin to a counselling encounter[1]. Furthermore, the likelihood that partners alone would have explicitly revealed things that they would not have revealed in the presence of the other was actually low, as explicitly shown in the quotation below – and also confirmed by pilot-interviews I conducted this way:

[1] It is not a coincidence that the format of two individual interviews and one joint couple interview has been mostly utilised by family therapists (e.g. Killian 2001).

Rachele: And what did your parents say?
Massimiliano: Nothing special…
Dorina: 'Oh my God, she is Albanian!' [she laughs]
Massimiliano: No, no, they didn't say anything about that.
Dorina: 'Choose wife and cattle from your hometown?'[2] *[she laughs]*
Rachele: Do you remember anything, any episode…?
Massimiliano: No, no, anyway…
Dorina: I can go away, maybe he'll tell you something…
Massimiliano: No, no.
Rachele: No…
(Dorina & Massimiliano[3]*: Albanian woman and Italian man, cohabiting)*

3. Performance

The previous example also introduces the performative dimension of the joint couple interview, allowing us to analyze this technique through a drama type approach. In fact, couples could be seen as if they were acting like a team, managing together the overall impression and also taking on the individual roles which are socially required. Referring to first encounters, Goffman (1959) noticed how the wife would demonstrate a more respectful subordination to the will of the husband than when she is alone with him or with old friends, so that he could assume the dominant role and the impression of conjugal unit which is expected by the audience could be sustained. Joint couple interviews could be seen as a special form of these first encounters, in which the couple performance could be disrupted any time due to the inappropriate conduct of either of the partners. Therefore, each teammate has to rely on the conduct of the other and the necessity for cohesion in front of an audience would also make it possible to overcome inner divisions. It follows that, in a joint couple interview, the definition of the situation projected by each partner would be commonly sustained by the intimate cooperation of the other partner – which may not lead to a double-line narrative but to the preeminence of one line, as revealed in another quotation from the same interview:

[2] Literal translation of the Italian proverb: 'Moglie e buoi dei paesi tuoi'. This proverb worked as a refrain throughout the fieldwork.

[3] Participants' names have been changed in order to protect their anonymity as well as the confidentiality of the data. However, I tried to maintain the sense of the original name – e.g. international, Albanian/Italian/Romanian, religious, etc. also given the importance of names and naming among mixed couples (Edwards & Caballero 2008).

Rachele: What about you, referring to this discourse of being an Albanian-Italian couple, instead of Albanian-Albanian, Italian-Italian, let's say, what do you think is more, less, different, similar?
Massimiliano: She thinks the same as me, I guess…
Dorina: Yes, yes, yes, yes.
Massimiliano: …she also noted this superficiality…
Dorina: Yes, I agree.
(Dorina & Massimiliano: Albanian woman and Italian man, cohabiting)

Yet discontinuities and breakages occur, more or less implicitly. In order to avoid collusions, the use of irony could contrast the direction of the performance or partners could even postpone public declarations until the couple's decision has been made. But they could also disclose 'secrets' to the researcher, not necessarily because he/she is seen as a confidant. By acquiring what Goffman (1959) called 'destructive information', I occasionally found myself at a crossroads between either playing a 'discrepant role' or discrediting the definition of the situation and possibly the relation between the participants. I chose the first option, even though this meant cooperating with one of the partners, at the expense of the other, in order to save the performance. I chose to do so when I realised that what I might have initially interpreted as a wrong assumption, could actually have been made intentionally. In this way, I found out that citizenship acquisition and transnational mobility were not simply the realm of bureaucracy, but rather territories of contention embedded in power relations within the couple. Moreover, crises in terms of dramaturgical loyalty within a team could open the way to potential re-alignments – with the audience, for example – or simply show emotional dissociations, awaiting for external mediation and/or team defensive practices. In the former quotation, Bekim and Alina recall their main controversy, linked with her lack of supervision over a young single female cousin of Bekim's hosted at their place. While Bekim asks my opinion, pushing for a re-alignment on the basis of Albanian-Italian cultural proximity, Alina had instead referred to our shared category of education in order to justify her position. Although I ignored the question twice, the third time I felt I had to answer. Yet, I did not intend to take sides. Therefore, I gave him a general and rather unsatisfying answer and then, having taken the floor, I changed topic. In the latter quotation, instead, Federica (Italian, practising Catholic from a practising Catholic family) plays along with the jokes of Dritan (Albanian, non-practising Muslim from a practising Muslim family) until the conversation shifts from a blurry boundary (language) to a bright boundary (religion), where

irony is no longer welcome and the collusion finally occurs, quickly turning into a postponement:

> *Bekim: …an open-minded person, Italian, like you, how would feel? […] Among us this thing…I don't know in Italy, among you…what you think about it, as an Italian, but among us, in Albania, it's serious, I can't understand how they could…[…] but for you as well, here in Italy, as far as I know, it's not such a small thing…*
> *Rachele: Yes, indeed, but it also depends on people, on what part of Italy, it depends on many things…another thing…that one was your first time in Albania, right, other times in Albania? How often do you go now, together with the kid?*

(Bekim & Alina: Albanian man and Romanian woman, married, one child)

> *Rachele: I don't know if you have ever thought about it, anyway, what about children, would you be interested in both languages, in teaching both Albanian and Italian, or…*
> *Federica: Both, it's normal.*
> *Dritan: Both would be better…*
> *Rachele: Ok.*
> *Dritan: Albanian first, because it's more difficult [she laughs], Italian is here… [everybody laughs]*
> *Rachele: And in that case what about religion?*
> *Dritan: Religion? Muslim! [he laughs]*
> *Federica: No. We don't know. We'll see. [she is getting upset]*

(Dritan & Federica: Albanian man and Italian woman, cohabiting)

4. Meta-communication

In addition to the performative dimension, we could also approach joint couple interviews in terms of meta-communication. By meta-communication I mean a secondary layer of communication, which is both verbal and non-verbal and which could be considered as a constitutive dimension of intimacy (Perlmutter & Hatfield 1980). For this reason, on the one hand, I have also indicated non-verbal elements in the transcription (glimpses, laughs, sighs, silences, etc.); on the other hand, through the quotations below, I will show the multiple functions of joint couple interviews, referring to simultaneous layers of verbal communication which are addressed to a plural audience (the researcher, the partner, the 'witness') and which fulfill different tasks. In fact,

besides being a technique to elicit information, joint couple interviews turned into an opportunity for partners to speak about specific topics for the first time, inquiring about the state of their relationship and its future, or even making some remarks:

> *Rachele: Another thing about the future, children…*
> *Valbona: Hopefully…*
> *Rachele: What about religion in this case?*
> *Valbona: I've actually thought about it, but I haven't told him yet…*
> *Federico: I'd like the baptism…[she sighs]*
> *Valbona: I see…he hasn't told it to me before, now I know. I've thought about it, to tell the truth, but…*
> *Federico: …but if it doesn't happen, it's not such a big deal, eh! [he laughs]*
> *Valbona: I don't know…*
> *Federico: But it's something that…I don't know…*
> *Valbona: Because I would like…I don't know if for a child also the hoxha[4] could come and give (a blessing), because also the hoxha should come and give (a blessing), like the priest…*
> *Federico: I don't know if both are possible…*
> *Valbona: I don't think so…*

(Valbona & Federico: Albanian woman and Italian man, cohabiting)

> *Rachele: Are you planning to meet his family, not yet, or…*
> *Klejdi: We don't know…*
> *Aurora: Thank God you've asked this!*
> *Rachele: Wrong question…[everybody laughs]*
> *Klejdi: No, it's not a wrong question…my parents are people who've lived their life in a certain way…an Albanian way…*

(Klejdi & Aurora: Albanian man and Italian woman, engaged)

> *Rachele: Do you cook Albanian food?*
> *Giacomo: I wish! [everybody laughs]*
> *Rachele: Do you ever eat Albanian here?*
> *Gerta: Unfortunately it happens very rarely, I admit, I don't have too much time, and I feel it requires more time […]*
> *Giacomo: Yes, sometimes she makes…would you like to know what dishes she makes?*
> *Rachele: Yes, sure…*

[4] Hoxhë or imam is the Sunni Muslim spiritual guide.

Giacomo: Sometimes she's made byrek[5]*…I'd love to eat it more often… [looking at her]…I take this opportunity…I love it…[everybody laughs]*

(Gerta & Giacomo: Albanian woman and Italian man, married one child)

Meta-communication was specially important when children were witnessing it, as it would turn the interview encounter into a parenting practice and means for the inter-generational transmission of values. Moreover, children were not only observing the scene, but they would also occasionally participate in the construction of the story – as here the 7-year-old child of Chiara supporting her viewpoint:

Chiara: Besides, I go to the bar for a coffee, so…
Rachele: Ah, ok…
Chiara: 'She goes to the bar!' 'By herself!' 'To have a coffee' 'Shameless, reckless!'
Chiara's son: Yes, my old granny, that one over there, in Albania, she can't even go to the bar!
Rachele: But were you told this to your face or behind your back?
Chiara: They tried to tell it to me as well, but as I don't accommodate to them, as I do whatever I want…no, at the beginning they tried, they tried a lot: 'Why…why don't you have it at home…' 'No' 'But…' 'No'. In fact, they gave up. My parents-in-law…no, they didn't…at the beginning my mother-in-law, then she gave up, my father-in-law instead: 'No, go, go, go, go!'

Rachele: She also…

Chiara: Sometimes she tried: 'But…take it (at home)…' 'Where are you going? By yourself…' 'Where do you think I'm going?! I'm in the middle of nowhere, there's nothing around here, where do you think I'm going?!'
Chiara's son: You're not going to war, are you?!
Chiara: While his brothers still try: 'Tell her to stay at home' 'Who?! Me?!'

(Chiara: Italian woman cohabiting with an Albanian man, one child)

5. Positionality

This interactive character of joint couple interviews, up to now referred to as performance and meta-communication, has further implications in terms of positionality. The term 'positionality' first of all indicates the location of the researcher in the social structure and the acknowledgement that this location affects the way in which the world is understood and the research project carried out. The relationship between the researcher and the field and thus the

[5] Byrek is an Albanian dish of Ottoman origin consisting in a baked filled pastry.

way in which the researcher both interprets and is interpreted within the field is inevitably influenced by the multiple social memberships of researcher and participants. Enguix (2014) argues that the researcher continuously negotiates his/her own position in the field within and between social relationships with participants. On the basis of his/her attributes (age, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) the researcher is identified as an individual just like all individuals belonging to a specific group. Through this typification, participants construct their own expectations of the researcher and behave in consequence. The researcher therefore needs to take into consideration his/her own attributes within the presentation of the self in the field, remembering that identificational categories are more or less 'fluid' and that sharing an attribute with participants does not automatically mean insiderness. In the same vein, not sharing an attribute with participants does not automatically mean outsiderness. In/outsiderness therefore need to be conceived as oscillatory movements rather than as the outcome of essentialised identificational categories – which would inevitably lead to the paradox of autoreferentiality.

A starting point for understanding in/outsiderness in migration research corresponds to the identification of the researcher as a part either of the national majority or of an immigrant minority – in fact, since not everybody migrates, whoever does migrate could rightly be considered a minority (Sánchez-Ayala 2012). However, while co-ethnicity may reduce participants' suspicion of the researcher and also provide him/her with a cultural and linguistic baggage, this does not necessarily mean familiarity. In fact, the interaction between researcher and participants, before, during, and after the interview, is actually shaped by the interplay between multiple categories: intermittent moments of co-ethnicity would thus alternate with gender solidarity, urban/rural oppositions, and perhaps kindness towards a third-level student (Moroşanu 2015). On the other hand, the category of migration in itself may produce commonalities beyond co-ethnicity in research encounters (Ryan 2015). In addition to this, Wimmer (2004) asserted the importance of moving beyond an ethnic lens in migration research and rethinking in/outsiderness through further ascribed and acquired categories such as class, generation, and individuals – in my fieldwork, I started from the category of 'generation'. In fact, although the sample attained was more heterogeneous than initially planned – this for comparative reasons, because of the snowball technique, and also due to a possible age gap between the partners[6] – the core sample was composed of an Albanian 'in-between generation' come to Italy in their adolescence, either unaccompanied or

[6] Although the majority of couples interviewed were equal in age.

together with their family, thus consciously in between two languages, cultures, and places – as participants also noted. My intention was to reach an extended sample of those who had been my classmates, flatmates, and friends and thence move in two directions, towards Italian and Romanian partners alike.

Issues of in/outsiderness in my fieldwork were further complicated by the fact that I was interviewing mixed couples. Therefore, while I could have been, for instance, 'female' like or unlike my interviewee, in a one-to-one relationship, I was at the same time like and unlike my interviewees in a one-to-two relationship. My 'association with' 'affiliation for' 'alienation from' (Marcus 1995) was more contingent and fluid in joint couple interviews, and thus required continuous monitoring. I tried to balance proximity and distance with each of the partners in order not to 'overlap' with any of them and yet not be perceived as a complete outsider. Clearly this was not always possible. Nationality was not enough, when all the other identificational categories would put me far away from a participant, turning perhaps into a North/South divide (versus emigration/internal migration as a commonality within the Albanian-Italian couple). Similarly, gender was not the most salient trait, when a common experience ended up reinforcing the national divide instead. Going around with a backpack, paper and pen put me in the position of the student, which was seen with kindness among older partipants and with empathy among the younger ones. Tertiary education was also the main identificational category among several couples, who would see me as their peer. In the case of an educational gap between the two partners, tertiary education would instead put me on the side of the educated partner, most often the woman. In this case, however, evergreen gender hierarchies implied downplaying such commonalities and listening to the Italian male partner's opinion about women and education with complicit silence, for instance. Handling joint couple interviews has been complex, not only because of the effort of maintaining the role of mediator between the two partners, but also in the struggle to control the impressions between the poles of participation and observation. This included learning by mistakes, when to laugh and with whom, managing bewilderment, holding back smiles and tears. In an individual interview, for example, listening to a female participant who was visibly moved, I put my hand on her shoulder, to show my sympathy. But I refrained from any physical contact and opted instead for changing topic, when something similar occurred during a joint couple interview, as I felt my reaction would have further embarrassed the woman's husband. Another element which contributed to creating familiarity with participants was the fact that I am from the area where I conducted the fieldwork.

This provided me with background information on places of origin and settlement, meant that I was familiar with landmarks pinpointing the narratives, and was also able to make strategic use of language codes so as to be further identified as an insider. Moreover, even though I do not master either Albanian or Romanian, my basic knowledge allowed me 'to pass the test' when some participants asked me for a translation, or to show that I was not unaware of narrative coordinates. All interviews were conducted in Italian – the common language among Albanian-Italian/Romanian couples. In addition to this, because of the several years spent in Italy, the young age at migration, and even because of a phenomenon of 'anticipatory acculturation' – among Albanians (King & Mai 2009) – interviewees often defined themselves as 'bilingual'.

In particular, joint couple interviews revealed the existence of a hierarchy of in/outsiderness, which can be strategically employed by both researchers and participants. To give an example, I showed my interest in Albania depending on the interest shown by the Italian partner in Albanian-Italian couple interviews, in order to avoid indirect comparisons with the Italian participant and gain the trust of the Albanian one – being sometimes turned into an 'honorary insider'. However, while I could engage in conversations about Elbasan, Gorani[7], and Turkish coffee alike, I could not 'follow the people' along the metaphoric multi-sitedness of their narratives (Marcus 1995) all those times I was unexpectedly asked if I remembered that well in Krujë (where she used to get water as a child) or that neighbourhood in Shkodër (where his in-laws still live). The following two quotations present a strategic usage of insiderness through its emphasisation and de-emphasisation:

> *Chiara: My best friend […] was volunteering with a NGO […] a bit in Albania, a bit in Kosovo, so, every year I would go and visit her, once he also came over…*
> *Arjan: You've also been on a course, in Kosovo…*
> *Chiara: Yes, indeed, I've also attended a language course…*
> *Rachele: Me too!*
> *Chiara: Oh my God! […] Who was your teacher?!*

(Arjan & Chiara: Albanian man and Italian woman, cohabiting, two children)

> *Klejdi: [looking at her] I think you tried llokum…*
> *Aurora: What's that?*
> *Klejdi: It's a kind of jelly, like a jelly with…nuts, for example, inside…*
> *Aurora: Yes…*

[7] Gorani are a Muslim Slavophone ethnic minority between Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia.

Klejdi: I think I made you try llokum…
Aurora: Yes…
Klejdi: [looking at me] So, she also tried llokum. You know it…
Rachele: Yes, indeed…
Klejdi: You…you know…[looking at her, pointing me]…she knows more about Albania than…
Rachele: No, no! [everybody laughs]
(Klejdi & Aurora: Albanian man and Italian woman, engaged)

As mentioned above, also outsiderness can be strategically employed. First, shared outsiderness could create commonality, as shown in the former quotation in which Giacomo – born and raised in Florence, although originally from Northern Italy – alternates a feeling of belonging to Florence (earlier defined as 'his own city') with a declaration of 'non-Florentinity', which moves the two interviewees as well as the interviewer temporarily closer one to another. The latter quotation instead shows how simulating outsiderness as a lack of expertise (Ryan 2015) may be a way to elicit richer data – here about the wedding of Xhuljana's sister in Albania, which also introduces the existence of an 'anthropological gaze' within the sphere of intermarriage:

Giacomo: When somebody tells you that the Florentine is hospitable, don't believe it.
Rachele: No…
Gerta: You don't believe it! [she laughs]
Rachele: No way…
Giacomo: The Florentine is mocking, makes fun of the tourist, doesn't consider him a resource, considers him a nuisance instead, the same with foreigners, is a bit racist, the Florentine is racist with the Tuscan…
Gerta: A bit close-minded…
Giacomo: Very close-minded!
Gerta: In fact, over these years I wasn't able to make friends with Florentines, I mean, it's incredible, I simply couldn't! [everybody laughs]
(Gerta & Giacomo: Albanian woman and Italian man, married, one child)

Matteo: If you don't know it, I can explain to you how Albanian weddings are…
Xhuljana: You really want to know…
Rachele: Tell me, tell me…[he laughs]
Xhuljana: Come on, tell her, you're an expert now!

(Xhuljana & Matteo: Albanian woman and Italian man, cohabiting)

6. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the technique of joint couple interviews in intermarriage research, reflecting on examples drawn from my fieldwork among Albanian-Italian and Albanian-Romanian couples in Italy. It has shown how this technique not only corresponds to an alternative format to individual interviews but, precisely by virtue of the relationship between the interviewees, it could give added value to the narrative itself. The paper has thus discussed the three main characteristics of joint couple interviews (performance, meta-communication and position). First, joint couple interviews are particularly suitable for analysis through a drama type approach characterized by team-work, loyalty, destructive information, discrepant roles, irony, postponements, re-alignments and collusion. Second, joint couple interviews are ways not only in which data are elicited within the frame of a research project, but also in which meanings are transmitted within participants' partnering/parenting practices – therefore, they fulfill a double function. Third, joint couple interviews offer the chance to reflect on self/other identification categories, through a 'three-player game' in which similarities and differences are defined in relation to a third pole – the researcher, walking a fine line between proximity and distance from each participant.

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The Virgin of "EL CISNE" and the Ecuadorian Families Resident in Madrid

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Abstract: This article reflects on the relationship between religion and the bonds between transnational families. The case I document is the cult of the Virgin of "El Cisne" also known by her worshipers as *La Churona*, whose origin comes from a province in the South of Ecuador and who now is also worshiped in Madrid, Spain. The main objective is to examine the role of the figure of the Virgin from a familiar and subjective stand. It is of interest on a meso-level to look at the transnational families like a key component in the transmission and the sustain of religious practices and on a micro-level by focusing on the subjectivity, specially on female immigrants centered on the link between the Virgin and the exercise of transnational maternity.

Keywords: religion, transnational families, the Virgin of "El Cisne", ethnographic film

1. Virgin of "El Cisne", transnational families and long distance care taking

In the practice of the devotion towards the Virgin of "El Cisne" by immigrants in Spain, in addition to the strictly religious implications, another realm is present as well: the transnational family. Although its role is generally not visible, the participation of the transnational family is expressed in two levels. The first one is established in the religious links that the members of these families generate or limit.

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The second level, a more subjective one, is defined by the central importance that the figure of the Virgin has as the universal caretaker of the families, mainly of the sons and daughters who have stayed in their country of origin or who reside in a third country.

Migration questions one of the strongest ideas associated to the concept of family: the co-residence and the physical closeness to achieve the material and effective reproduction of its members. Guilt, worry and anguish are common feelings among the immigrants in this new situation and they require a deliberate work on kinship to keep the family bonds through time and space. One of the ways to mitigate this anguish is to have an image of the Virgin, a reference of the care to which loved ones will be entrusted. Sons and daughters who stay in their country of origin "give themselves" to the Virgin before traveling, and once migrants reach their destiny they place the pictures of loved ones next to the Virgin to keep them present in all petitions, thanksgiving and prayers, enforcing kinship in a subjective level.

The transnational families belong to a broader subject matter that has been brought up by the feminist economy related to *care* as the base of life sustainability and understood in a multidimensional manner, that is, in a material and affective-relational aspect (Pérez Orozco 2006). In transnational families, the organization of care and its multidimensional and gendered situation will obtain special characteristics deepened by the separation.

Studies about transnational families have evidenced that migration does not only depend on a production scope but also on a reproduction one and have exposed the different members that participate on migration processes, even those who do not travel, like the sons and daughters that stay in the place of origin, the new caretakers who are in charge of the children and other family members that somehow are part of the migratory project. In addition, they have shown a complex point of view of power relationships that exist in families and the different positions that their members own inside the domestic unit according to gender and age.

The seminal text about trans-nationalism *Nations Unbound* indicates that the transnational family and the people considered relatives constitute the origin of the other types of transnational social relationships (Basch et al. 1994: 238). In the religious matter transnational families are also a fundamental part of the "transnational religious sphere" (Levitt 1998) in which its members here and there participated in this exchange circuit. Relatives are the first people which whom the testimony of religious celebrations is shared within the country of origin as well as in the destination one while the non-immigrant relatives act as a prolongation of the immigrant to fulfill the

promises and assignments related to devotion. Investigators like Baldassar and Merla (2014) propose the idea of the "care circuit" to refer to the activities that flow reciprocally, though asymmetrically, between the home of origin and the different arrival contexts where immigrants can be found. In this series of obligations and love, different expressions of devotion to the Virgin of "El Cisne" are also present. Members of Ecuadorian families channel the flow of beliefs and practices that allow immigrants to create this transnational religious field in an intimate and social level. Support on a religious level constitutes a specific type of care that strengthens the kinship relationships among the members of transnational families and implies an emotional and subjective level that intertwines with more concrete issues and practices.

2. The Virgin and transnational maternity

The increase of female migration and their insertion in socially invaluable jobs like domestic service and different forms of care taking inscribe inside the logic of a globalized economy and it is how, in many cases, the female leadership in transnational families is explained. Frequently, migration is an economic strategy in homes where women are committed to assume the subsistence of their husbands, children and other relatives who stay in the country of origin (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Anthias and Lazaridis 2012). International migration of Ecuadorian women could be understood within these global parameters in addition to specific causes related to the weakness of the Ecuadorian state to take responsibility of the processes of social reproduction of its population where immigrants, specially women, are the ones who have to be responsible for the functions that the State does not assume (Herrera 2005 2013).

The migration of Ecuadorian women to Spain has been characterized by its location in the domestic work niche as well as the different definitions of care taking. In the first stages of migration, the majority of women became internal maids (Actis 2005; Herrera 2013), which enabled a particular dynamic for the religious practices we analyze here. First, the lack of leisure and socialization opportunities and fundamentally, the emotional support of maids and internal caretakers favored for them to find in church a place to socialize with other women from Ecuador and Latin America and to channel the relationships between them towards the practice of the Catholic faith. Furthermore, their condition of internal workers where the private/public spheres are superimposed and confused and where women interact on the edge where they neither belong or not belong to their employers' families generated, in some cases, an exchange of religious experiences with their

employers or with the people under their care. This is how we find examples of Spaniards or Italians who have traveled to the "El Cisne" Sanctuary in Loja, Ecuador after years of living with Ecuadorian maids and listening to narrations about *La Churona* or nannies who have transmitted their religious believes to boys and girls under their care.

In general, beyond the work modality, Ecuadorian female immigrants who left their families in their country of origin where forced to find different strategies to keep and strengthen their contact with their loved ones and several times, religion prevailed within these strategies.

Several studies on transnational maternity (Alicea 1997; Hochschild 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 2003; Salazar Parreñas 2001, 2005; Erel 2002; Solé and Parella 2004; Dreby 2006; Gamburd 2008; Herrera and Carrillo 2009; Herrera 2013) evidence that migration entails the painful paradox that mothers and fathers have to get away from their children in order to take care of them. In this sense, the Virgin of "El Cisne" plays a fundamental role to calm the anxiety of mothers as well as fathers, but in a larger instance for mothers because they carry the heaviest weight of the care taking job after the separation. Virgin Mary, being a universal mother, also takes care of the sons and daughters in the original society (or in a third country) and creates an additional bond between immigrants and the people under their care.

3. Ethnographic audiovisual

One of the biggest changes that ethnographic film has gone through since its origins has been the shift of its center of interest which no longer looks at a far away and exotic place, instead it looks within (De Brigard 1975). A consequence of this shift are the documentaries about subjects like migration among which we find "La Churona" which is a result of a long process of ethnographic investigation and registers Ecuadorian migration in the 1990s.

This documentary's idea and script started generating around 2005 and had the intention to analyze immigrants in Spain focusing on the transnational connection with their families and original places and in which the point of view on them would not be centered on the dichotomy of the excluded victims vs. successful subjects, a concept well questioned by Herrera (2007). One of the main intentions was to record migration in Spain from *situated knowledge* of someone who migrated and not from the point of view of the receiving country. My formation as an anthropologist and filmmaker made it possible to have a particular approach in the production of the documentary by not having to go into the conflict that Asch (1988) narrates where an anthropologist and a photographer collaborate and one does not comprehend

the complexity and priorities of the work of the other, or they get into a dispute about the relevance conferred to the anthropological investigation versus the narrative capacity of image and sound. In anthropology, image has been understood as an investigation technique and as an object of study (Ardévol 2006). In this sense, the diverse films done about Ecuadorian migration in Spain, which corollary is the documentary "La Churona", are defined and understood as an investigation technique.

Ethnographic films as methodology emphasize on the anthropological reflection of the filmed sociology-cultural aspects and that they are emphasized in all the phases of investigation like registration, analysis and interpretation of the data as well as the presentation of results and the construction of social participation and cultural discourses. The audiovisual data has more value and importance for Anthropology in the sense of having the filmed information as well as how and through which criteria the objectives were selected (Asch 1988; Rollwagen 1995).

In the ethnography carried out about the devotion to the Virgin of "El Cisne", the investigation for the script, shooting and editing had as conceptual framework the transnational perspective on migration, but importance was also given to the dramatic structure of the story. The shooting itself was part of the process that, more than worrying about "how to capture reality better" focused more on "how reality could be examined while it is being captured?" (Rollwagen 1995: 330).

This audiovisual piece wanted to film trans nationalism and express with images and sounds the idea of the "transnational field". Several authors have insisted on the need of the production of multi-located ethnography to be able to apprehend transnational practices adequately (Marcus 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Gupta and Ferguson 2008). Therefore, it suggests, for example, to focus on the intersection of the networks taking under consideration those who migrated as well as those who stayed; and through observation and interviews, document how people maintain connection and interact in spite of time and distance (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

"La Churona" wants to express this point of view through interviews to migrants and non-migrants, but mainly through sequences that allow perception and "seeing" the existence of the bonds between families and communities. To achieve this, the objective was to film scenes where the presence-absence of immigrants was evident within the context of Ecuador; under this same perspective, the way in which the country, the family and the community are present while the place filmed is Spain, so both contexts were connected in a fluid manner.

The shooting of the documentary implied a multi-local ethnography by "following empirically the common thread" of a cultural process (Marcus, 2001: 112), common thread that in this case was not a subject but the image of the Virgin of "El Cisne". The shooting started in Spain, and after the insistence of worshipers who asserted that in order to understand the devotion I had to go to the Sanctuary, it continued in El Cisne and once there, it went to all the places visited by the Virgin along her pilgrimage.

In Loja we could appreciate that the presence of migration was constant: in immigrants going back for vacations and participating in the pilgrimage as an act of gratitude towards the Virgin. Also in the family members who were left without a loved one who traveled and who also walked towards the Sanctuary to ask the Virgin for them; in courier agencies where every kind of religious souvenir of *La Churona* was sent to immigrants in the United States, Spain or Italy and in the thanksgiving plaques placed on the walls of the Sanctuary.

Back in Spain, there was a special attention on registering elements that show the bond between immigrants and their land of origin as well as some ritual practices celebrating the Virgin of "El Cisne" in Madrid. Among them were the recreation of Ecuador in a micro space-time festivity or the many photographs that assistants took in the processions to send them and corroborate their assistance to their families of origin. Nevertheless, the story of the youngster and his siblings, who will travel to meet with their migrant mother is the one that makes the bond more visible, not only between the places but also between the families; it connects a macro matter like the migration process with a micro matter that shows the conflicts and separation between fathers, mothers, children and grandmothers.

The documentary film "La Churona" belongs to the tendency developed by Jean Rouch or Jorge Prelorán where field work is aimed since the beginning to the production of the documentary and the use of the camera does not depend on the anthropological investigation, instead, the anthropological knowledge is based on the understanding of the social reality that the ethnologist-filmmaker plans to represent and where it is important that the film is interesting and accessible to a broad and a specialized audience (Ardévol and Pérez Tolón 1995; Prelorán 1995; Rouch 1995).

The use of film as a methodological option will depend on the objectives of the investigation and what it wants to show, so one has to ask oneself constantly what type of data is necessary and what is the best way to get it (Asch, 1988). In this sense, the visual technology was chosen because of its suitability to investigate a subject of religious expression like the devotion to

the Virgin of "El Cisne" since this technique has demonstrated great effectiveness to capture "the drama of the ritual" because it transmits the effect that cannot be expressed through writing (Georgakas et al, interviewing Rouch 2005: 93). The distinctive feature of film to capture simultaneously corporal expressions (gestures, posture, sounds), materials (instruments, surroundings) and rituals (De France 1991) allows an approach to diverse elements that are put into play in devotion and especially in the main characters' emotions.

In addition, one of the most important consequences of the introduction of a film or video camera in investigation methods is the "deferred observation" since this technique allows repetition, acceleration, slow motion and freezing of images and sounds (De France 1991). Thanks to the capacity of film, after viewing the final product or even the discarded scenes and takes, it enriches the first observation that was made during the moment of shooting.

Also, the process of filming has allowed questioning towards two main points: the subjectivity in the processes of knowledge, and the representation and participation of the investigated persons.

a) Subjectivity in the processes of knowledge

Along history, ethnographic film has given more importance to filming as an integral part of the investigation process and the relationship with the people being filmed has been reconsidered like an opportunity for theoretical reflections instead of a problem. Subjectivity is no longer eliminating the fieldwork but instead it has been incorporated in ethnographic films and in similar forms in feminist ethnography or native ethnography, where, more than hiding, what is important is to evidence the anthropologist's positioning. This reflection is of great importance for the investigation in migratory subjects because, when thinking on the relationship between the anthropologist and immigrants and analyzing the interaction with the camera, some points of inflection and worry by the filmed subjects can be determined that may have been unperceived if the camera was not included. Like Henley (2001) analyzes, several behaviors that are produced by the interaction of the investigator when he/she decides what to film and what not, will have at the end an analytical value.

b) Representation and participation

While the previous point addressed subjectivity, the key point in the present one is the subject of power. The election of an audiovisual ethnography like

methodology implies the continuous questioning of the representation subjects, in other words, the relationship between who produces the images, who is represented and who is watching. Like Sontag remembers in his analysis of photography (2005, 2010), while facing representation, it is fundamental to analyze at how the relationship of power and interrogation has been established and if the portrayed subjects have had some opinion or voice about the way they are represented, who will be the author of that image and in which context will these images be presented.

The use of audiovisual ethnography attracts attention in migratory studies about ways of representation to which immigrants and their families are held to and it invites us to ask ourselves how they are being represented and which is the canon of hegemonic image that takes privilege from the academic point of view.

4. Final remarks

The data collected along all these years in this multi-located audiovisual ethnography shows that the practice of a common religion is one of the mechanisms that immigrants use to establish connections with their family members dispersed in several latitudes. These mechanisms imply different negotiations and relationships between relatives. The testimonies and images towards the devotion for the Virgin of "El Cisne" show that inside this circuit, love and solidarity flow as well as the control and the compromise for the renovation of kinship.

Another fundamental conclusion is that *religious care* constitutes a specific kind of care in a transnational level; one that implies an emotional and a subjective aspect that intertwine in more concrete and practical matters. In an intimate level, it expresses itself through prayer and individual religious manifestations framed in a spiritual sphere. Furthermore, it is channeled through transnational communication, where the religious reason enables the contact and encounter with family members. Lastly, it is shown through transnational religious work (sending money and religious imagery, organizing events, emotional care) where relatives are part of the circle that makes it possible to fulfill certain rituals and promises made by immigrants.

Regarding the use of the audiovisual medium for investigation, it is important to mention that this tool allowed capturing fundamental issues for immigrants and their transnational families that may have been overlooked without a camera on site, like the importance of time passing reflected on the physical changes of the family members who stayed in the original country or who live in another country; the selective formation of bonds with relatives;

the presence/absence of loved ones in intimate spaces and also in social spaces. In the same way, the possibility of film to be close to subjectivity made it possible for certain matters to flourish more clearly; like the perception of discrimination and race rejection from immigrants in their arrival societies; the feeling of illegality; the complex range of relationships established between immigrants and locals; the immigrants' desire of visibility or the opposite, the desire of anonymity evidenced by the precaution that the shooting process generates. This is due, to a large extent, to the complex series of images that people have in front of them, in front of acquaintances and strangers, where there are certain issues that one can and wants to show the others to ratify the constructed idea about oneself and at the same time being careful not to provide with material that contradicts oneself.

An additional advantage of the audiovisual support over a written text was evidenced after the exhibition of the documentary; it has the virtue to be able to reach a broader and heterogeneous audience, and the possibility to cross the academic frontiers more easily. At the same time, it allows people to look at themselves and see familiar spaces (for example the airports, the sanctuary, the road of the procession) giving a greater sense to what their collaboration and participation meant in the process of investigation.

To conclude, beyond this specific experience, visual ethnography about migration are an opportunity to make several theoretical reflections, since, through "differed observation", they allow to establish comparative studies, either about the same group of immigrants in a determined scenery with a diachronic perspective; about a specific group of immigrants established in diverse contexts; about immigrants of diverse origins who share the same context of arrival; or also about a specific subject matter like religious devotion or transnational families experienced by different immigrant groups in different arrival scenery.

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Methodological Challenges of Traditional and Virtual Anthropological Fieldwork in Migrant Integration Research: the Case of Chinese-Hungarian Interethnic Partner Relationships

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Abstract: The paper is based on a piece of anthropological research on Chinese-Hungarian mixed partner relationships. This qualitative research on the intimate relations between members of a highly transnational migrant population and members of local Hungarian society posed a number of methodological challenges. A substantial segment of the data was collected through ethnographic fieldwork where the otherwise non existent ethnographic field (i.e. no community formed by mixed couples; the lack of a geographical or an online locality) was defined by the initially formulated research questions. Fieldwork was complemented by the collection of diverse data from computer mediated communication carried out by members of Chinese-Hungarian couples and their family members, however, combining information available in online space with data gathered through face-to-face interaction has proved to be problematic.

Keywords: migration, Chinese-Hungarian intermarriage, research methodology, fieldwork in fragmented field, computer mediated qualitative data

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1. Introduction

This paper is based on a piece of anthropological research on Chinese-Hungarian mixed partner relationships.[3] Focusing on the role of the different social and cultural backgrounds in the lives of couples, the research project addressed a series of questions concerning mixed partner relationships as a global migration related social phenomenon, as an aspect of first generation Chinese migrants' presence in Hungary, and also as a channel of Chinese migrants' integration.[4] This experience based paper reflects on everyday challenges and practical matters that emerged during anthropological fieldwork.

There are different ways the normative concept of integration is treated in social sciences discussing migration related phenomena. It often refers to the structural integration of migrants through the labour market, citizenship, participation in the education system, language acquisition, intermarriage, to mention some examples. In the following discussion integration is thought of and interpreted as a series of events that happen through personal interaction in intimate relations. More specifically, it refers to personal interactions as narrated by Chinese and Hungarian individuals. Although I had equal interest in the everyday practices of the lives of mixed couples, I gained systematic access mostly to what they said about their shared lives and not what they actually did. This paper is concerned with the methodological challenges of research on the specific reality of Chinese-Hungarian interethnic partnerships from a Hungarian point of view.

It is unknown exactly how many Hungarians are married to or cohabit with Hungarians and even less how many Chinese and Hungarian persons date each other. There is no relevant statistical information available on Chinese-Hungarian marriages or cohabitations. Data on the marriages between Chinese and Hungarian citizens are not gathered by a central office; these figures are recorded separately in district registry books. Based on informal communication with registrars of Budapest districts number 6, 7 and 10 there were about one or two such marriages per year in the period between 2009 and 2013, including inconveniently also marriages between Chinese citizens and ethnic Chinese migrants turned Hungarian citizens. Several relationships encountered during fieldwork were not registered marriages, whereas the majority of those who formalised their relationship got married outside

[3] The work on mixed couples formed part of a thematically wider research project on the intimate relations between Chinese migrants and Hungarians. Besides mixed partner relations, childcare arrangements between Chinese families and Hungarian carers were concentrated on.

[4] Some results were already published. See Kovács (2015, 2016).

Hungary, in China or in a third country. Official marriage records may also include Chinese-Hungarian sham marriages which, interesting a phenomenon as they may be, were not included in this project.[5] What fieldwork data showed was that the earliest Chinese-Hungarian relationships could be dated back to the early 1990s, so, with a single exception, not even the longest-lived relationships could have lasted for more than two and a half decades.

Although initially I wanted to interview married couples and their families, later dating, cohabiting, divorced and separated persons were also approached, since their experiences contributed largely to the understanding of the everyday dynamics of interethnic partner relationships. This widening of the original focus is reflected in the interchangeable use of the terms marriage and partner relationship throughout the text.

2. Highlights of the Chinese migrant context in Hungary

Although Hungary cannot be considered a typical immigration country, it has been affected by several waves of inward migration for the last three decades. Most migrants were ethnic Hungarians arriving from neighbouring countries, but the largest visible group was that of the Chinese migrants exceeding forty thousand by the mid-1990s. Challenging a task as it was, they were targeted by several research projects, and demographic, social, economic, educational, gender and identity aspects of Chinese migrants' presence in Hungary were already studied (Nyíri 2006, 2010a, 2010b; Várhalmi 2009; Beck 2015; Kovács 2015, 2016; Kovács & Melegh 2010; Szabó 2009; Feischmidt & Nyíri 2006). Chinese migrants arrived in massive numbers from the early 1990s, and by the mid-2010s their number fell to fifteen thousand.[6] During this period their principle business model has changed from shoes and clothes retail to local and regional wholesale of a wider range of Chinese products, several Chinese businesses growing large and becoming very successful economically along the way. As their demographic characteristics, as potential actors of the Hungarian marriage market of the 1990s are concerned, there were almost as many women as men among them mostly in their twenties and thirties, some arriving alone; a relatively high proportion with some form of tertiary education. Literature hinted at the lack of the norm of endogamy among Chinese migrants in Hungary (Nyíri 2010b:153)

[5] I did not meet members of Chinese-Hungarian sham marriages, that is, marriages of convenience entered into solely for the benefits of married status. Throughout the fieldwork, several Chinese as well as Hungarian persons commented on their existence. See also the section on culturally embedded concepts.

[6] Based on informed estimates of representatives of the Chinese community in Hungary.

The group of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Hungary have operated their businesses on a transnational basis, and lead a transnational way of life with persons and resources in constant flow between Hungary and China, and sometimes also other locations in the European region or the Americas. The way Chinese migrants and migrant entrepreneurs and Chinese businesses operate in Hungary was most recently discussed by Várhalmi (2009, 2013).

Many first-generation Chinese migrants were disinclined to take out energy from their businesses to invest in learning Hungarian leaving the task of translation for the family business to the school age second generation. They established a way of life and arranged their businesses in a way that learning the local language was not essential for them. Signals from local society may have contributed to this. Studies have indicated that Hungarians manifested negative attitudes towards Chinese migrants (Örkény & Székelyi 2010; Szilassy 2006).

My fieldwork has supported this with many personal ethnographic details, with events ranging from discrimination at kindergarten and school, or in sports associations, through verbal offence and verbal aggression to occasional physical insult. Verbal attacks in public spaces were often reported to have targeted mixed marriage children and youth, or Hungarian women accompanying Chinese-looking children or Chinese men. A Hungarian father related the episode of travelling with his four-year-old Chinese-Hungarian son using the public transport in Budapest. Trying to work their way off the packed tram at the rush hour he stepped down first reaching out a hand to help his son get off. It was in this moment when a young man waiting to get on the tram yelled at the boy in a hoarse voice 'Hurry up your ass, yellow motherfucker!', leaving the Hungarian father dumb and helpless. Most such Hungarian offenders in my field experience were reported to have been teenage boys or young men.

Several mixed marriage parents commented on similar experiences of their children and some of them chose the Chinese-Hungarian bilingual school as an escape route from negative experiences and isolation at school. Lacking space to go into details of relevant ethnographic experience about this here, let me also note that there are a set of cultural spaces in Budapest such as Chinese tea houses, traditional Chinese sports associations, Mandarin and calligraphy courses, centres for traditional Chinese medicine, top quality Chinese restaurants where interactions between Chinese migrants and a select group of Hungarians are defined by the appreciation of and an exotic longing for the rich Chinese cultural traditions these institutions represent.

3. Research questions, research aims

As it was mentioned above the majority of Chinese migrants who arrived in the 1990s became transnational economy based entrepreneurs. They are called 'typical migrants' throughout the text. The plan of the research was originally driven by the assumption (Nyíri 2006: 44) that few interethnic partner relationships were formed by 'typical Chinese migrants', and Hungarians, compared to the relative size of this migrant population. One of the research questions was what could explain the supposedly low incidence.

It was another research aim to study and understand the everyday reality of living in a Chinese-Hungarian mixed partner relationship in Hungary and to reveal how the cultural differences between partners' socialization contributed to the inner dynamics of these bonds. Are Chinese-Hungarian partner relationships more or less likely to be persistent in time than similar bonds between Hungarians? Are these bonds more or less likely to be satisfactory for the individuals who constitute them than ethnically homogamous relationships?

Are there cultural factors that have a substantial influence on the stability of Chinese-Hungarian mixed partnerships? Does stability in this respect have a culturally conditioned gender component to it? In what way do members of couples perceive and reflect on the fact that their partner's emotions and their forms of expression are culturally conditioned?

Another aim of this research was to find out whether these bonds shared certain features allowing for categorisation and a Chinese-Hungarian relationship typology. Transnationalism, a fundamental aspect of the lives of Chinese entrepreneurs based in Hungary was an important focus of research. Do all members of Chinese-Hungarian mixed couples and families become transnational the same way as their Chinese member is likely to live a transnational way of life? Are transnational practices in these families' lives connected to business models and economic success? How are transnational practices related to individual and family language strategies? What are the consequences of the individual and family language strategies in the couple's or family's life? What was the connection between language strategies and family members' transnationalism? Can childcare and education strategies and solutions be seen as fundamentally related to and part of Chinese migrants' transnationalism? How are problems related to transnationalism negotiated in a mixed marriage or family? Some results of the research were published (Kovács 2015, 2016) and I would like to emphasize that important results lie in ethnographic details. Space is limited here; nevertheless, some general findings are referred to briefly in a simplified way. In spite of their great individual

differences, the sample of forty couples outlined two characteristically different types of relationships. The first type is referred to as 'student love' relationships, and it is characterized, most of all by closeness in educational status. The 'student love' sub-group of very highly qualified couples with a high value on the international labour market seemed even more successful relationships. The second type is the relationship of the 'typical Chinese migrant' with a larger social and often educational distance between its members. Relationships in the former group tend to be more successful and persistent in time, whereas the latter are considerably less persistent. Chinese-Hungarian relationships studied in this research were more persistent in time if the Chinese partner was female. Research confirmed literature stating that in spite of changing Chinese family relations, Chinese family culture is very characteristic and relatively persistent (Efron Pimentel 2000). Hungarian partners' fluency in Chinese and their understanding of, putting it in an oversimplified term, Chinese ways improved prospects of a mutually satisfactory relationship. 'Typical migrant' men's spouses or children contacted during research showed no, or only a very low degree of transnationalism.

I would also like to note that a Chinese and a Hungarian interlocutor of the highly qualified and internationally mobile sub-group of 'student love' relationships pointed out that marriage and family related norms and social practices were changing rapidly in China and the observations made in Hungary would not necessarily hold in all segments of Chinese society.

4. Methodological challenges

The anthropological approach to the intimate relations between members of a highly transnational migrant population and members of local Hungarian society raised several methodological problems. Some of them were variants of classical problems anthropologists encounter during fieldwork intertwined with others that, compared to previous research experience with geographically concentrated or community based anthropological fieldwork, required special methodological attention. Bearing in mind this research framework, in the next part of the paper the following points are going to be addressed: 1) the topic specific definition of the ethnographic field and fieldwork; 2) the use of written and visual sources from the digital world; 3) the epistemological value of long term fieldwork as a research method; 4) ways of handling the lack of information; 5) strategies to use and interpret narratives of third parties; 6) ways of handling culturally conditioned strategies of communication, especially that of intimacy; 7) ways of handling socioculturally embedded concepts; 8) considerations about masking interlocutors' identities; 9) personal

position of the researcher as a factor conditioning the type of information accessed; and 10) the public afterlife of the ethnography. Wherever possible, the problems are going to be presented with examples from the field.

I. The ethnographic field of Chinese Hungarian mixed partner relationships

Data was collected through ethnographic fieldwork including interviews. At first it was not quite clear for me where my ethnographic field lied so I searched for it everywhere, including within my personal network and that of friends. What the ethnographic field is, where it lies, and its borderlines were initially unclear since mixed couples formed no communities or institutions and they could not be tied to one particular geographical locality or localities. I was inspired by George E. Marcus's handling of this problematic letting the object of study describe its field (Marcus 1995). Nevertheless, the field had to be constructed and reconstructed in an effortful way several times. The concept of multi-sited ethnography seemed appealing at first, however, during the course of fieldwork I eventually preferred to describe it as fragmented (see Nagy 2015: 46). The research-specific rules of what fell within or outside the scope of the ethnographic field had to be modified from time to time as new bits and pieces of information opened new paths to trace.

Looking back at the fieldwork process and tracking down its subsequent phases, the first set of field experiences were collected through intensive Chinese language courses taken at one of the two main authentic Budapest language academies specialized in Mandarin Chinese, and later through individual classes taken from a Hungarian teacher of Chinese, throughout a period of altogether three years. My Hungarian Chinese professor had several years of experience living and studying in Beijing and besides cultural and historical issues of China he was also knowledgeable about representatives of different aspects of Chinese culture in Hungary, such as Chinese martial arts associations, Chinese medical experts, and official representatives of the PRC in Hungary. While he was familiar with and an enthusiast of China's cultural, economic and scientific achievements, he also seemed highly critical of some of their 'purely business oriented' representatives in Hungary, Chinese and Hungarian alike. His confronting attitude has made him an isolated figure in a cultural field that one might label as a 'Chinese-Hungarian cultural encounter zone in Budapest'. With years of experience as a foreign student at Chinese universities he gave me insights into the beginnings and workings of one type of Chinese-Hungarian partner relationships that later was labelled as 'student love'. The distance he kept from

the actors of this encounter zone also kept him outside the dense network of trust and possible reciprocal favours – to be explained further. It was only much later that I realized how important it was to (in one way or another, temporarily) be included in such a network, existent mostly between Chinese migrants but also some Hungarian individuals, to obtain information for the research I wanted to carry out. Determined to study Chinese-Hungarian mixed marriages but having no contact with any of them I asked relatives, friends, colleagues, and neighbours for help. It came unexpectedly from a member of my family with a double career in business and academia.

He connected me with a second-generation Chinese man, a former student in his late twenties, referred to here as Young Yu. Young Yu was a close friend of one of my relatives business partners since their shared time at university, now associate in a well-known and leading financial firm. They encouraged me to connect Young Yu who had given his consent. We arranged a date where Young Yu appeared accompanied by his father, wealthy and educated Mr. Yu, owner of a very successful transnational family enterprise. As a matter of fact Young Yu came along as his father's translator since Mr. Yu spoke no Hungarian. We met in a café in a shopping mall close to the Chinese commercial district. Mr. Yu arrived prepared with a list of mixed marriages he and his wife knew of. All his statements were supported by newspaper cuts from local Chinese papers. He went through the case one by one and shared some details with me. He gave me the impression that he did not want to say more than what was included in the papers he brought me, giving at last his general statement: there were few Chinese-Hungarian marriages, and usually they did not work out well. We talked for two hours with the assistance of Young Yu who did not seem involved in our conversation and kept to translating his father's sentences attentively. After our meeting, the father and son proposed to show me the location of their business and offered me a ride there and back to the shopping centre. I travelled in Young Yu's fabulous car and Mr. Yu took his own to show me their extensive property in the 10th district of Budapest. They seemed proud to let me know that over two thirds of the land and buildings I was seeing was purchased by Chinese entrepreneurs including their family headed by Mr. Yu. After a short walk among the shops and warehouses Young Yu drove me back to the shopping centre.

Their helpfulness was in sharp contrast with subsequent experiences of rejection by potential interlocutors during fieldwork. Trying to make sense of why Mr. Yu and his son helped me drew the attention to a fundamental component of my fieldwork. Through the bond between the two trusted, respectful and successful mutual acquaintances I temporarily became part of a

network of trust, respect and potential favours while the Yu family did not have to give away sensitive personal information. There was only a light violation of the norm of keeping important information from third parties on his part: the information he gave was available publicly and he only provided me with some extra clues.

The lack of this relatedness through trust or possible favours, or a sudden change of the researcher's indirect position within the network could impede access to information that seemed to be within arm's reach. A Hungarian friend's teenage son was dating the daughter of a successful Chinese businessman married to a Hungarian woman. The mixed family lived in an elegant villa on the Buda side and was reported to have achieved very good economic standing through the father's transnational trading activities. I was eager to meet this couple since they seemed to represent the rare group of functioning marriages between a 'typical migrant' man and a Hungarian woman, with children and decades of shared experience. I talked to the wife on the phone to arrange a date for the interview she had consented to. The week before the date set I called her to specify location and she told me that she could not do the interview after all. It was a couple of days later I learned that my friend's son broke up with her daughter, an incident that removed me from a trusted circle of possible favours. In summary, interviews were only made possible through some form participation in networks of friendship or business with a hope of gaining some kind of symbolic return on possible interlocutors' part. A Chinese person's reasons to cooperate in the research cannot be interpreted without references to degrees of integration in social networks.

And finally, I would make a remark about my personal perception of the repeated fieldwork experience of how Chinese migrants handled time. Whenever I had the opportunity to call a Chinese person about an interview I was either turned down immediately, or if not, I heard that person consider time options to meet, often making an excuse for not being able to meet that very same day and offering the day after instead. It seemed that something that had to be done, had to be done as soon as possible, giving a hint on how a Chinese business person can quickly and successfully adapt to a changing economic environment. The same attitude was reflected in remarks on Chinese entrepreneurs' ability to adapt quickly to changes in the economic environment (Várhalmi 2009).

II. Digital sources from the online world

The online world as an object or location of ethnographic fieldwork was systematically introduced into social sciences by Christine Hine's Virtual Ethnography (2000) connecting computer mediated communication (see Hine 2000) with the possibility of doing ethnography research in and of the internet.

The question of what fell within my ethnographic field became more intense once I entered virtual space and searched for computer mediated communication carried out by or available about members of Chinese-Hungarian couples and their family members. The wide variety of online sources included visual information such as publicly accessible video recordings, photos, personal avatars as self-representations on community media sites; personal profiles and networks on community media sites; online documents such as entries in the online business register that were informative of whether, for example, Hungarian spouses are at least formally included in their Chinese partners' businesses as local associates or not; online chat streams on mixed coupledom; Hungarian and Chinese newspaper articles on mixed couples' and their children's public activities.

Members of mixed couples are located at the intersection of two online worlds where the lack familiarity with the written language of one another kept up a boundary for many of them, both Chinese and Hungarian.

Some couples I succeeded in interviewing, others I did not. Even if ethical considerations as to how these sources can legitimately be included in research were set aside for a while, the qualitative richness raised dilemmas. I often lacked the possibility to trace further these pieces of information and provide them with as much context as it could be expected in traditional fieldwork based research.

The story of an interlocutor's relatives, a couple with a teenage daughter who never married but cohabited on and off for a few years before they separated definitively may offer an example. Theirs was a relationship of the most problematic type encountered, that of a 'typical Chinese migrant' man with no tertiary education arriving in the 1990s from a rural area of China who built up a prosperous transnational enterprise from scratch with his siblings. It became quite clear that my interlocutor was in no position to provide me with access to them. She commented that ever since the separation the Chinese father (and his Chinese kin resident in Hungary) kept very occasional contact with the young girl who felt abandoned and very different in a Hungarian small-town context and who was desperate to have her Chinese father's attention. Being familiar with the girl's name and town of residence I

made a Google search and found her unprotected profile on a teenage community site. Her avatar was an East-Asian female manga character, a sad and solitary young woman set in a hostile urban environment. Intimately revealing as this may be about a Chinese-Hungarian mixed marriage child's personal identity I was confined to these pieces of information and could go no further.

At one point during fieldwork it was not clear at all how the visually presented and subtle information in a one hour long amateur video indexed and openly available online and recorded at a public event involving a Chinese man and his mixed marriage family is going to be made useful for research purposes. The recording showed all family members at a vernissage in an art gallery where they moved around demonstrating gestures and body language that suggested separation between the spouses. It also showed the presence of the Chinese man's new Chinese partner, and presented father and children keeping a physical distance at all times without interchanging words. This family had been in the focus of my attention for a long time with no possibility to make an interview before I found this recording. Fortunately, later on the Hungarian wife agreed to a conversation and told me the story of her marriage; she put the images I saw into words providing a context to them.

Likewise, two brief accounts in the Hungarian electronic edition of a local Chinese online newspaper told the stories of two failed marriages between Chinese women and Hungarian men from a Chinese point of view. Fragmentary, short of ethnographic detail, and unclear about the women's motifs of entering in the relationship, the two paragraphs presented the sad fate of these bonds between Chinese wives and their Hungarian husbands as inevitable.

A chat stream associated with the online edition of a Hungarian women's magazine on the topic of mixed marriage provided scattered and anonymous information, nevertheless, the comments on and experiences of Chinese-Hungarian dating relationships emphasized certain themes, such as the verbal aggression against Hungarian women dating Chinese men; and also showed cases of passionate defence of Chinese migrants supported by their work ethic.

Internet searches for the computer mediated communication of members of Chinese and Hungarian couples brought many results which, at the same time, showed a relatively low level of participation of these first-generation Chinese persons on Hungarian community media sites. No systematic study within this research project focused on this, but they seemed to be absent from Hungarian social media sites, such as Facebook. There could

be many reasons for this, among them the fact that Facebook cannot be used in China where other Chinese sites such as WeChat or Weibo are popular; and also, that using these sites requires English or Hungarian language proficiency. Bearing in mind the often mutually limited language capacities of persons involved in these relationships I would like to draw attention to the two the partners' parallel online universes separated by languages.

III. Long term anthropological fieldwork – was it worth the effort?

Long term fieldwork has been considered an indispensable anthropological research method defining the discipline ever since Malinowksi's pioneering venture (Malinowski 1922) in the Trobriand Islands nearly a hundred years ago. Anthropological reflections and theorizing about various aspects of fieldwork, it's epistemological value, the anthropologist's role in the ethnography produced and her position in the studied community have been topics at the fore of the discipline for many decades now. There have been several crucial attempts to re-conceptualise anthropological fieldwork shifting its focus from simple to complex societies and from foreign worlds to that of the anthropologist's own, including more recently the practice and notion of fieldwork conducted in the world of the internet. A summary published in Hungarian by Károly Zsolt Nagy (Nagy 2015) outlines this process.

As a sociocultural anthropologist working in an interdisciplinary academic environment surrounded by social science scholars with a different and perhaps more economical vision of the time and other resources spent on data collection, I felt the need to scrutinize the epistemological worth of the extra efforts invested in fieldwork towards the understanding of the workings of the intimate relationships between Chinese migrants and their Hungarian partners.[7] This question may as well be rephrased to ask what results other methodologies, such as a survey type of research on Chinese-Hungarian interethnic partner relationships would yield.

A phenomenon of similar magnitude would most likely not invite quantitative methodology. More importantly, the people involved in these relationships, particularly from the Chinese side, were often reluctant to contribute, and especially so without a close friend's recommendation, making other potential research methodologies unviable.

Trying to assess a migration related phenomenon surrounded by predominantly negative preconceptions in Hungary may easily lead to the formulation and use of labels that Elizabeth Durham (2016) refers to as

[7] Time after time anthropologist may also experience that editorial suggestions make them painfully remove ethnographic details from journal articles to meet size requirements.

culturalisms or cultural keys, that is, simplified and potentially under informed explanations of socioculturally conditioned practices and norms. Using the example of authorities' inability to efficiently communicate medical information on the Ebola fever to locals Durham contrasts culturalisms and cultural keys to substantiated anthropological knowledge, concluding that everything is more complicated and complex than it seems (Durham 2016). Interlocutors' multiple voices during fieldwork helped build up a multidimensional reality of at least some Chinese Hungarian mixed couple relationships where partners' decisions, conflicts, actions, intentions were discussed in relation to their sociocultural backgrounds and life experiences.

As indicated in the section on the ethnographic field, fieldwork started a long time before the research project outlined in this paper took its final shape, with intensive language courses and later individual classes, and a systematic attempt to attend public social events where Chinese and Hungarian people met outside the world of commerce where. This was an exciting and research-wise inspiring yet time and money consuming process I nevertheless considered indispensable. It gave an overview of where one may find couples and what are the ways to approach them that definitely did not work; and it produced clues to knowledgeable individuals as potential cultural consultants.

There are some methodological advantages of extended fieldwork that stand against its high costs and lengthy process. Even if the ethnographic field is fragmented fieldwork made it possible to meet some interlocutors more than once. It allowed for the patience to wait until some encounters could happen. Importantly, in a few cases it opened up the possibility to follow subsequent stages of the relationships adding a dynamic component to the analysis. It created opportunities to fill in information gaps making phone calls or via e-mail, or the incorporation of previously unplanned sources of information, or discovery of some of the mistakes committed previously. Also, a continuous personal involvement in the data collection process offered some degree of visibility for interlocutors.

The ethnographic fieldwork towards the world of Chinese Hungarian mixed couples had its limitations. This was caused primarily by the fragmented quality of the field leading to fresh start situations during fieldwork way too often. Separated or divorced couples and subsequently fragmented families further aggravated this. Chinese partners' transnational mobility and periodical absence from Hungary also complicated the fieldwork process.

IV. Missing information

As it was suggested in the introduction, there are several conditions that challenge research on migrant groups in Hungary. The Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (ICCR) in Budapest organised a series of seminars on the methodological challenges of migration research in Hungary and published its results in an edited volume (Kováts &Várhalmi 2014). The introduction enlists five conditions/circumstances that challenge migration research in particular: 1) the low number of migrants with no segregation or migrant neighbourhoods; 2) the lack of relevant statistical information available about migrants; 3) the risks concerning the validity of empirical sampling; 4) the difficulties arising from culturally different norms of interpersonal interactions; and 5) the lack of trust related to the social distance between migrant groups and majority society (Kováts & Várhalmi 2014: 9-10). One of the central problems addressed was the methodological treatment of data gaps and missing responses in survey types of enquiries.

Anthropological fieldwork extended in time helped overcome some of these difficulties to a certain extent. With time, several people involved in mixed partner relationships living in different neighbourhoods were identified, contacted, and interviewed. Having an idea of their existence, attempts could be made to find additional information about them in different forms of computer mediated communication. Conducting anthropological fieldwork, the problem of the validity of sampling was reflected on in the ethnography. Nevertheless, several obstacles stood in the way of giving balanced pictures of the individual cases. According to the original aim, both persons involved in a relationship should have been interviewed but it was generally only one of them willing to share experiences. Partners interviewed together talked more tactfully in each other's presence than individual interviewees and thus proved to be generally less informative. On the other hand, partners who were interviewed separately tended to give richer accounts than the ones interviewed as a couple.

Gender sensitive social science literature on relationships has suggested that there exist two, often very different or contradictory personal versions of the same relationship (see for example Efron Pimentel 2000: 35). In more than half of the interviewed cases it was either his or her version that the interpretation was based on and the story remained one-sided, tempting speculation. The conversations with two Hungarian women both in their thirties and involved with Chinese men in their early fifties raised the question in what way and to what extent their relationship narratives would correspond to that of their Chinese partners.

One of the women, let's call her Kati, a highly qualified professional with experience in China and very advanced Chinese language skills, was romantically involved and had a child with a married politician of the PRC who was reported to be about to divorce his wife whom he had married obeying his parents' command. Their child was about two at the time of the interview and lived with Kati who expressed an explicit intention to find a job and realize her and her partner's shared dream of uniting their family in China. Conceived during one of his father's international trips, the child had met his father on one occasion in a third country during his dad's official visit there. Kati and her child communicated online with the Chinese father in prearranged time periods on a regular basis, but it was their explicit intention not to be online permanently. A recent communication with Kati two and a half years after the first interview revealed that she and her child were still living on their own in the Hungarian capital where she was working full time. When asked to give a second interview about how their relationship and family life developed ever since, Kati responded that she would prefer not to talk about these things, noted that their plans and mutual affection for one another did not change but both her and her partner's situations are delicate and require discretion.

The other Hungarian woman, Piri, a secretary with no tertiary education or Chinese language skills met her 'typical Chinese businessman' fifteen years her senior at an online Hungarian dating site eight years prior to our conversation. They had corresponded for a year before their first date and their subsequent encounters developed into a romantic affair slowly. Although she expressed hopes in this respect, the two of them had never moved in together nor did her Chinese boyfriend ever express his intention to do so, but she thought that she just had to be patient and it would happen. He always met her on his own and she said to have met none of his Chinese friends or relatives living in Hungary. On our first encounter during fieldwork interlocutors were encouraged to tell about themselves only as much as they felt comfortable with. This was the case in which an interviewee made most use of this instruction commenting time after time that her boyfriend probably wouldn't like her going into further details about his name, business, hobby, family status, and Chinese relatives living in Hungary, basic things she seemed to have been familiar with but what he may have considered qualified information. In both cases Chinese, male partners' narratives and viewpoints would have been crucial to the understanding of the definition and inner dynamics of these relationships. Although it was extended in time, fieldwork opened no doors for me to be able to listen to the men's versions of these

relationships directly. Some possible reasons for this are going to be discussed further on.

V. Information from third parties

Personal friends and acquaintances who had known Chinese-Hungarian couples made an important contribution to the fieldwork process. They provided the first clues about the existence of some of these bonds. In a few cases narratives of couples' intimate friends became central sources, especially where no interview was possible. The group of potential interviewees least likely to share experiences with me and least accessible during fieldwork were Chinese men.

A Google search on mixed marriage had helped identify a couple, Petra and Ping, living in Budapest and married with children for nearly two decades. Computer mediated communication including their relationship story, family photos, business websites, and chat room comments suggested that not only did they work together but they also shared political opinions, leisure time activities, and religious faith. They, however, preferred not to be interviewed. It was thanks to a male friend's accidental encounter with Ping, the Chinese businessman, on a long hiking experience in the countryside, and his sharing it with me that gave insights of an otherwise inaccessible viewpoint during this research, that of a Budapest-based Chinese businessman living with and caring for his mixed marriage family. The two men, both in their late forties, walked together for several hours talking over sports, business and family. Discussing issues related with fatherhood Ping expressed his regrets of having not forced his children to learn Chinese when they were young. Referring to his teenage kids his said "he committed a mistake; that it went wrong, and it was all too late to change."

In a few cases third persons' knowledge of couples outlined a reality quite different from that expressed in interlocutors' narratives. In their interpretation of a few cases Chinese men's Hungarian girlfriends or cohabiting partners appeared as persons "blind to see their real position in the relationship," implying that they may not have been included in their Chinese partners long term plans, or that the men may have had a wife and family back in China.

VI. Deciphering culturally conditioned norms and strategies of communication

The acquisition and skills of the languages used by the studied group, in this case Chinese and Hungarian, are considered a prerequisite of anthropological

fieldwork. Mandarin studies were referred to in the section on fieldwork, however, it must be noted that I did not reach the necessary fluency in Chinese to obtain the type of qualitative information this research required. It raised the question whether or not the lack of ability to communicate fluently in half of the potential interlocutors' mother tongue was a major obstacle. My fieldwork was framed by the Hungarian language (Borsfay 2014: 80). Although it probably played a part in the difficulties of reaching potential Chinese interviewees, their major cause was to be found in other factors related to norms of communication conditioned by sociocultural and, to a lesser extent, possibly by gender factors.

The original research design of the complete project on Chinese-Hungarian intimate relations (including also the relations between Chinese families and Hungarian child carers) counted on the paid collaboration of an ethnic co-worker, a well-connected cultural consultant from the local Chinese community. Having searched for months, a second-generation Chinese university graduate, raised in Budapest and fluent in both languages, seemed interested, comprehensive of and willing to get involved in the research project. But she became paralysed when it came to actually contacting her local Chinese acquaintances or her parents for an interview or even for an informal conversation on intimate relations; so, in the end our cooperation could not work out. Alternately, a similar attempt was made with a Hungarian intermediary with connections in the Budapest Chinese community. After a series of failed efforts, he withdrew from the project. At this stage in fieldwork it seemed that, seen from the Chinese side, the whole idea of the research topic was transgressing implicit norms of communication. Later on, these experiences connected with the ethnic stereotypes of communication that a Hungarian and two Chinese female interlocutors referred to independently during our conversations. They shared the view that "the Chinese would never talk about the things most important to them. They would keep those thoughts only to themselves." There is no space here to discuss in the detail the implications of this statement for the study of intimacy, nevertheless it helped me understand and handle the challenge of rejections.

This notion also helped process the research experiences when two Chinese interlocutors denied or kept basic relationship information to themselves, presenting thus a modified version of their relationship stories. I'll present the case of an elderly Chinese lady whom I refer to as Madame Wu. She and her husband had met and married in China in the cold war era and decided to move to Hungary. After a series of communications, phone calls and e-mails we finally arranged an interview date with Madame Wu who had

lost her Hungarian husband years before. A fluent speaker of Hungarian, she recalled vividly her first encounter and happy married life with her Hungarian husband and his parents, declaring it her life project to arrange and publish her late husband's academic legacy, presenting an overall picture of a long, happy, affectionate and successful marriage with shared interests and two children. Talking to a Hungarian friend about how fieldwork was advancing it was by accident that I learned that Madame Wu had divorced her Hungarian husband years before his death, an event that finally occurred in an old people's home. During the interview, I did not specifically ask if they had a divorce, since no hints were given that it could have been the case. Madame Wu did not see it necessary to provide me with this detail.

The relationship accounts manifest in the interviews showed very different degrees of articulation of and personal reflection on the specific issues influencing the everyday reality of mixed bonds (and families), ranging from simple, ethno-centric comments to highly elaborate and complex interpretations, primarily depending on partners' ethnic belonging and level of education. Fieldwork and the interview process indicated that the Chinese migrants present in Hungary were less willing to talk about their relationships than their Hungarian partners, and even when they decided to contribute they shared less about their emotions and everyday personal interactions within the relationship in the interviews. The likelihood that a person involved in a Chinese Hungarian relationship was accessible for this research seemed to have been influenced by a number of conditions such as gender, ethnicity, level of education, and economic success. In general, Hungarians were more likely to talk to me than Chinese, and women more likely than men; a Hungarian woman much more likely than a Chinese man; Chinese persons with a higher degree of education more likely than the ones without; economically very successful Chinese business persons less likely than Chinese employees or freelancers.

VII. Culturally embedded concepts

The problematic of culturally embedded concepts in quantitative as well as qualitative migration research was addressed by Borsfay et. al. (2014) referring to the context of Hungary. Discussing the languages and specific terms used in questionnaires of migration research they drew the attention to the significance of the different cultural frameworks of interpretation of notions such as 'rootlessness', 'home','foreign country', or 'income'. These terms invited very different associations from their ethnically mixed group of migrant interviewees. During the research on Chinese Hungarian mixed

couples the socio-culturally conditioned circles of associations of two central concepts, "marriage" and "family" marked a key dividing line in mixed couples' lives.

At the beginning of field research in 2013 I had a lengthy conversation with Dr. Li, an elderly Chinese man living in Hungary, recommended to me as a well-integrated member of the Chinese community. Dr. Li was considered an intermediary between Chinese migrants and Hungarian locals by my first Chinese contact in the field, Mr. Yu. Dr. Li dedicated his entire professional life to learning and teaching Hungarian as a foreign language and became university professor of Hungarian at a prestigious university in China. He had spent several long periods in Hungary before finally getting settled in Budapest. I hoped that he would know mixed couples and help me contact them. He talked in Hungarian enthusiastically and I did my best to tell him that I intended to realize and anthropological study to understand the role cultural heritages played in the lives of Chinese-Hungarian mixed marriages. He seemed to follow what I said, he told me that once he had a failed relationship with a Hungarian woman, and that he couldn't help me by providing contacts because he did not have any. I was on my way home from the interview when he telephoned and told that there he was with his wife sitting next to him and that he thought that they could actually help me. He gave personal data of his wife's nephews, two Chinese men in their thirties who had arrived in Hungary a couple of months before. He named the prestigious Chinese restaurants where they worked as cooks, told me how much they earned per month and added that they were about the get a rise. They would be interested in marrying Hungarian women of their own age or maybe a little older but definitely not divorcees. I told him again that my interest in mixed marriages is not setting them up but studying the ones that already existed. I found this episode informative on how, in spite of communicating fairly fluently in the same language, the cultural embeddedness of certain concepts, such as 'marriage' and 'an anthropological study on mixed marriage' in a Chinese-Hungarian context may invite different culturally conditioned associations and drive a conversation onto separate tracks.

Another example highlights the culturally conditioned definition of 'family' of a typical Chinese businessman as perceived by Susan, his Hungarian wife in her mid-fifties, mother of his five children. Susan's husband's ideas of 'family' and 'family duties' determined basic structural aspects of their family life. Their case is analysed in more detail elsewhere (Kovács 2016), but in summary, Susan's definition of 'family' referred to her husband and their five children, while her husband's definition of family referred primarily to his

parents, siblings, and more distant blood relatives, and his Hungarian wife and children came second leading to never ending and unresolvable conflicts in their lives, and finally to the separation of the couple.

VIII. Masking identities

Although it was possible to divide into different relationship categories, Chinese Hungarian mixed partner relationships do not involve a numerous population. Qualitative information, relationship histories, and life narratives could easily reveal individuals' identities. When asked to contribute to this research interlocutors were promised anonymity. Writing up research results started with hiding their real identities and replacing their names with pseudonyms. Episodes of their lives were used separately, without one making references to the others. There still remained some particularly revealing personal features (e.g. number children; gender of children; location of residence; profession; specification of business; etc.) that had to be hidden or altered decided on an individual basis after careful measuring. When details were changed in order to mask interlocutors' personal identities it was intended to be done in a way that the new sociocultural pattern associated with a person appearing in the final results would not be substantially different from the original. However, combining information available in online space with data gathered through face-to-face interaction signalled the limits of masking people's identities and raised dilemmas of whether or not and to what extent to use sources gathered through the internet.

IX. Personal position

Notions such as marriage, family, childcare, or a 'good childhood' are heavily loaded with norms and values directly connected to one's own sociocultural background including the anthropologist; yet they tend to be implicitly thought of as universally human. An academically inspired interest in everyday human interpersonal interaction of a Hungarian female anthropologist combined with her personal ideas have inevitably influenced the formulation of (some of) the research questions. The question of how, let's say, a Chinese male researcher would go about the study of the same phenomenon kept intriguing me all through the fieldwork. (I think of this possibility as a methodological must for similar future research projects.)

The culturally conditioned norms and communication strategies mentioned previously combined with my gender, age, Hungarian ethnic background and language skills eased my way to women, especially Hungarian women, and limited especially my access to Chinese men's ideas about their

relationships. This personal position seemed to have influenced the situations and the overall atmosphere of my encounters with (potential) interlocutors and also the quantity as well as the qualitative depths of the information in interviews. Conducting fieldwork in a fragmented field on numerous locations can also be accounted for the distance that remained between the anthropologist and the field in the majority of the situations. Fieldwork data and literature (Borsfay et.al. 2014) suggest that the presentation of a socially acceptable image of oneself including one's social relations is object of personal efforts in the Chinese context. In a way, the research fell victim to the social imperative of either hiding personal information or drawing a socioculturally conditioned ideal picture of ones' family relations, just as we saw it in the case of Madame Wu. Doing research in a fragmented field also decreased the anthropologist's visibility for the people she studied; however, interchanging e-mail messages and sending interview texts for revision helped balancing this.

X. The 'public afterlife of ethnography' and the consequences of research

This reference to Didier Fassin's term (2015) in the subtitle draws attention to the increasing need of and expectation from anthropologists to face and handle the social and political consequences of their research and its results, especially the ones that affect the people they study. How will an ethnography change the lives of the anthropologist' interlocutors? With respect to the present study this question arises more powerfully in a time when social and political tensions related to migrants and international migration dominate politics as well as public discourse all over the world.

When presenting results, the minimal personal principle was trying not to do any potential harm or risk to the people who contributed. As long as the products of research, conference presentations, papers, articles, book chapters stay within the restricted and isolated field of academia, chances of public repercussion of results and potential negative consequences (for researcher and interlocutors alike) are indeed low. Thinking of building blocks of a more positive vision of how the research on mixed couples may enhance interlocutors' lives, three potential themes are specified. Reading more than the abstract of an ethnographic article may contribute to a more profound understanding of migration related phenomena by breaking up ethnic stereotypes of migrants into ethnographic details that provide context and reveal motives of behaviour. Second, some of the interview situations, especially the ones that narrated failed marriages, seemed to have contributed

to the interlocutor's process of elaboration of these life experiences. Their articulation and the interpretation of conflicting experiences contributed to their empowerment. Finally, research results, and especially the typical culturally conditioned causes of conflict could be used in marriage counselling and translated into useful pieces of advice; they could be turned into a bi-lingual Guide to Chinese-Hungarian Interethnic Partner Relationships, for actual and potential members of such bonds.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to reflect on the process of the construction of the ethnographic field as defined by its object of study, Chinese Hungarian mixed partner relationships. The research was driven by the assumption that first generation Chinese entrepreneurs and Hungarians only rarely engaged in a romantic relationship. I had to face several methodological challenges during the interpretive anthropological attempt to understand the everyday reality and the sociocultural factors influencing the dynamics of intimate bonds between Chinese and Hungarian persons. The anthropological fieldwork presented here meant to answer two sets of research questions; one set targeted partner relationships, while the other focused on the relations between Chinese families and their Hungarian child carers. The particular methodological problems related to the latter were not included in this work.

Some methodological difficulties were typical of extensive and extended anthropological fieldwork, such as handling information coming from third parties and socioculturally conditioned strategies of communication, working with culturally embedded concepts, or assuming the consequences of the researcher's personal position in the field. The problem of masking interlocutors' identities takes us to that group of methodological challenges that was conditioned by computer mediated communication and audio-visual sources from the world of the internet. The borders of my ethnographic field were outlined step by step following the research topic, the specific research questions, and experiences gained through fieldwork. During the research on Chines Hungarian marriages almost all methodological problems had to be faced that were discussed in a volume on migrant research methodology in Hungary (Kováts & Várhalmi 2014), the most important of them being missing information. Let me close this with Durham's ideas on the epistemological complexity of what she considers 'good anthropology'. She argues that 'good anthropology' also implies the 'ability to be comfortable with partial conclusions' and 'epistemological uncertainty' (Durham 2016: 7).

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Kaufmann's Comprehensive Interview Applied in a Longitudinal Study of Migrant Couples: Notes from the Field

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Abstract: The longitudinal study of Par Migration Project (Socio-cultural and Psychological Predictors of Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality – Cross-Cultural Comparison of Polish and Norwegian Families) is the task of sociological work package. The study is designed using feminist approach that let Respondents speak for themselves. According to it on one hand men and women involved in the study have total anonymity and right to leave the study in any moment they wish, on the other hand all Respondents may become involved in the project more and more each year of participation if they will. In presented paper I share the process of recruitment procedure, correspondence challenges and creation of interviews calendar. Such a complex and comprehensive study makes the researchers be sure to obtain as an accurate image of everyday-life practices and challenges Respondents deal with, as it is possible. In the article I present the dilemmas and issues concerning the role of the researcher. The final section is focused on interviewees and communication with research team, as well as on the description of the interview setting. In the end it let me conclude with the evaluation of joint interview (interview with couple).

Keywords: longitudinal study, sociology of couple, qualitative methods.

1. Introduction

The article is devoted to communication, ethical and empathy challenges in longitudinal research on couples. Methodological considerations draw on Jean Claude Kaufmann's method known as the *understanding interview*, whose description in the first part of the article is followed by a discussion of the research process. The main technique on which I am going to focus is the dyadic (joint) in-depth interview supported by participant observation and visualisation of research space.

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Introducing the methods of working with couples, I will refer to the PAR Migration Navigator project (Socio-cultural and Psychological Predictors of Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality: Cross-Cultural Comparison of Polish and Norwegian Families), which aimed to explore work-life balance and gender equality issues by investigating what happens when people migrate from less egalitarian (Polish) to more egalitarian (Norwegian) culture and what facilitates and hinders the shift towards work-life balance and gender equality (Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004). The main goal of the Work Package 1 of the project (Qualitative Sociological Study and Workshop Method Implementation) was to discover the patterns of balancing work and life, both among individuals and couples. The study focused on the analysis and comparison of interaction between partners in order to determine how gender equality is realised within couples in both Polish and Norwegian households, with special emphasis on the work-life balance strategies adopted by couples. With a view to achieving this objective, the project relied on the use of longitudinal and exploratory methods.

The second part of the article is devoted to observations concerning the role of the researcher. The final section is focused on interviewees and communication with them, as well as on the description of the interview setting.

2. Jean-Claude Kaufmann's "understanding interview"

The "understanding interview" is both the main method and technique of Kaufmann's approach, one in which the mode of constructing the object is reversed: the author argues that research must first focus on the field and only subsequently develop a theoretical model. In this way, the definition of most impersonal survey techniques used in interviews is fundamentally changed (Kaufmann 2010: 34). The adjective "understanding" reflects giving voice back to the individual, as a researcher is not supposed to explain, but to understand. Declaring interest and empathy is quite enough to find out what the individual has to say (Kaufmann 2010: 37). The understanding approach is regarded here in a way similar to Max Weber's perspective (1921/1968), in which human beings as subjects of actions are active creators of the social rather than mere bearers of structures. They have an internal knowledge that can be accessed via their value system by means of what Kaufmann refers to as "intropathy", an insight into oneself achieved during the conversation with a researcher. Next, the knowledge is analysed by a researcher (Kaufmann 2010: 38).

The understanding interview has an ambition to suggest the closest possible links between field studies and generating particular theories

(Kaufmann 2010: 39). The field is supposed to induce hypotheses based on observation, which is where the reversal of the classic model of research can be seen clearly: the mode is reversed (research starts from the field, and theoretical work gains momentum later). However, those two phases are not separated (Kaufmann 2010: 41). Here, Kaufmann refers to grounded theory principles and repeats (after Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin) that discovery and proof go hand in hand[1]. However, Kaufmann's method differs from Strauss's, which postulates that the initial stage should involve immersion in facts. According to Kaufmann, this creates a hazard of "drowning", especially for beginner researchers: while the abundance of facts is certainly fascinating, controlling it might be quite a challenge. Consequently, the author's advice is to have an idea which will serve as guidance and prevent the researcher from getting lost in the understanding interview. One can even begin his/her research with an initial hypothesis, an auxiliary question, and only then determine the object and the field (Kaufmann 2010: 54–55). In the case of our study, the idea was to observe practices related to household and parental duties in Poland and in Norway on a similar sample of Polish families (with and without migration experience).

3. Dyadic understanding interview

One of the methods selected for the purposes of the study was the joint interview, which is qualitatively different from the individual one. Although a joint interview can be conducted with different kinds of dyads, it is usually used to study marriages or couples. According to Hilary Arksey (1996), the advantages of this method include an opportunity to obtain more understandable data, a confrontation of opinions on the same matter, and hearing the voice of those who usually remain silent. Moreover, a joint interview seems more just, as it gives equal chances to both respondents (Arksey 1996), unlike individual interviews with only one member of a couple talking about the other, who has no opportunity to react or defend him/herself. Importantly, in the case of joint interviews it is easier to build a relation based on trust (Gudkowa 2012: 124). Using this method, one can reveal various aspects of the couple's knowledge (each partner talks about the same thing in a different way) and help fill the gaps in the memory of one of the partners (Arksey 1996 after Seymour, Dix, Eardley 1995). On the other

[1] *Grounded theory strategy* requires compliance with the designated code of conduct and demands no preliminary assumptions. Research consists of three kinds of activities that are frequently intertwined: gathering data, coding and identification of an idea or concept, and generating theories (Hensel & Glinka 2012: 92). Generating theories involves creating hypotheses and their further integration in order to create a theory (Hensel & Glinka 2012: 105).

hand, joint interviews carry the risk of domination of one of the respondents and can provoke turmoil and discord between the participants (Arksey 1996). The interview situation can evoke some tensions in a couple because of topics that are new, controversial, suppressed or uncomfortable for one or both partners. Some researchers mention that women tend to retreat (they talk much more in individual interviews). On the other hand, it is suggested that men are bossier, they interrupt and talk on behalf of both partners (Arksey 1996 after Jordan et al. 1992; Shakespeare 1993). Observation and analysis of domination patterns in an interview situation may provide an important source of information about relations within a couple. According to Jan Pahl (1989), joint interview enables an insight into interaction and power relations in a couple thanks to the possibility of observing non-verbal communication.

Arksey notes that joint interview is criticised on the grounds of credibility: couples tend to paint themselves in bright colours, construct a better picture, produce data that are more convergent, and can "use" interview situation to legitimise or justify their actions or to normalise the situation in their relationship (Arksey 1996). An interview with a couple is risky both when one persuades each partner to participate, and in the course of the survey, when one needs to "keep" both partners in the research process (Pahl 1989). It is easier to recruit one person than two; it is also easier to maintain contact during an individual interview. In addition, Jan Pahl observes that men take part in joint interviews less willingly than women. There are several orders applied to conduct join interviews: mixed with individual interviews (joint first, individual second), mixed with individual interviews (individual first, joint second), separated by themes and/or years of study (Ruiner 2010, Żadkowska et al. 2016).

Using the joint interview method, one must take into consideration both its advantages and disadvantages. Graham Allan (1980: 205) mentions the necessity of taking up interviews with couples in order to be able to obtain results that would never come up in individual interviews. According to the author, the interaction within the couple in the course of interview may lead, first of all, to better coverage of the topic. Secondly, the fact that it can be observed directly is a substantial characteristic of the research.

The interpretation of events "in the couple's eyes" can only be reached by means of joint interview, because this is when rationalisation takes place. A couple "survives" when interpretations concerning its development and events correspond. If they do not – for one person it is "on time", whilst for the other it is "too late" – the couple enters a crisis phase and has to forge a reinterpretation of the event in order to overcome the crisis (Ruiner 2010: 10).

A couple avoids the crisis when interpretations of events relating to the development of the relationship are shared. It is crucial for a researcher to witness this kind of moments. This is why, according to Ruiner, what needs to be examined is not only objective events and milestones, but also the lack of events and the way a couple copes with it. Surveying both partners by means of qualitative joint interview is necessary in order to understand the development of intimate relationship and the way it is constructed and negotiated (Ruiner 2010: 10).

4. Methodology of the PAR migration study

The study was carried out in two countries – Norway (Rogaland region) and Poland (Pomerania region), the former considered more egalitarian and gender-equality oriented than the latter. The total of 305 longitudinal in-depth interviews, both joint (129) and individual (176), were conducted (and transcribed) between 2014 and 2016 among seven groups of participants:

- Polish migrants in Norway
- Norwegians in Norway
- mixed couples in Norway
- Poles in Poland who did not have the experience of migrating to egalitarian culture
- Poles in Poland who lived in Norway and returned to Poland
- mixed couples in Poland
- LAT (living apart together) relationships

Comparison between these groups made it possible to follow the dynamics and processes underlying the development of more egalitarian attitudes, both on individual and family level, among groups who entered more egalitarian culture than their culture of origin. We analysed how the experience of immigration to more egalitarian society changed the traditional division of household chores among Polish couples:

(1) what makes women ready to overcome their traditional roles,

(2) what makes men ready to overcome the socially respected role of "breadwinner".

The study was focused on the factors which had an impact on the stability of these changes when the couples returned to their former, less egalitarian society.

5. The structure of targeted group

The choice was made to recruit people who, due to their demographic characteristics, are more inclined to the idea of partnership. According to CBOS research (Szczepańska 2006), this means double-career couples with higher educational background, aged 30–35 and living in large cities. The couples were approached in such a way as to maintain a balance between three different categories based on the number of children they have (no children, one child, two children). Declared double employment (double-career family) was also an important factor despite the possibility that a woman might take maternity or parental leave during the research, or would have the so-called "transitional" break from work.

Kaufmann believes that the ideal solution is to balance the sample selection criteria in a way resembling a representative sample (Kaufmann 2010: 64). According to the author, the very establishment of the sample is a technical element, much less important than in qualitative research. However, it is essential to avoid imbalance between certain categories or overlooking some of them (Kaufmann 2010: 65). In the case of our purposive sample, only the number of children was balanced out, while other criteria mirrored particular socio-demographic traits which were assumed to be the required condition and thus offered greater chances to recognise a partnership model in a relationship, whether applied consciously or not. As in Kaufmann's case, our sample was selected rather than constructed, because understanding interview is more about the proper choice of informants than building a sample (Kaufmann 2010: 66).

We successfully recruited over 40 couples for qualitative sociological survey in the PAR project; 41 couples took part in the entire project. The structure of the sample indicates that we reached the planned recruitment goals.

The majority of participants (75%) had higher educational background; 17% were high school graduates, while only 8% of them had finished their education at post-secondary or vocational level. 27 pairs of those who participated in the study were in informal relationships and 15 of them were married; the average age of the respondents was 31.8 (data valid for all participants who began the project in 2014). The two most numerous age groups ranged between 21–31 and 32–42 years old; only nine respondents were above those ranges. As the project lasted three years, the participants became three years older by the end of it, when they were interviewed in the last round. The time of their relationship did not exceed two years only in the case of seven pairs; five couples had been together for 19 years or even longer

(maximum 25 years); thirteen couples – between 2.5 and 5.5 years; twelve – between 6 and 10 years; eight couples had been in the relationship for less than 16 years.

In the recruitment process, we also tried to target respondents in different phases of couples' life course as distinguished in the model proposed by Felix Bühlmann (2010):

(a) a couple before the birth of the first child, i.e. the couple do not plan a child for two more years,
(b) a couple planning to have a child, i.e. one in which at least one member plans to have a child in three years' time (including pregnant couples),
(c) a couple with a baby under two years,
(d) a couple with the first child aged between two and five,
(e) a couple with a child/children aged over five years.

The above list fits well into other typologies of family life (Szlendak 2010; Żadkowska 2016) emphasising the moment of birth and the period of bringing up the first child, which are very important considering an increasing number of household and parental duties in a couple's life and the necessity to constantly renegotiate their division.

The study reflects on couples' passing through subsequent phases and reports the influence of some events, such as moving in together or having the first or the second child, on the development of the relationships.

In order to have access to information about more than one stage of the couples' life course, consecutive interview scenarios assumed longitudinal contact with interviewees. We met them for three years (between 2014 and 2016), around January and February each year. We expected major changes in their lives, concerning enlarging the family, formal status of the relationship, change of employment or residence (including the country). We asked the respondents about each change and noted down their answers, thus creating their profiles necessary for the analysis of the changes along the life course of the couple.

6. Participant observation

Apart from the understanding interview, another simultaneously applied method was participant observation. According to Kaufmann, a researcher has to be convinced that he/she is in a position of a privileged observer, as he/she is directly involved in the social construction of reality made in contact with the person who speaks in his/her presence. Informants are also engaged in this. They have to be ready to speak, show more and in a more clear way, than usually (Kaufmann 2010: 92). According to Morris Schwartz and Charlotte

Schwartz, participant observation is a research process and presence in a research field has its strictly scientific goals. Thanks to direct and close relations with the subjects, the research team participates in their ordinary life, which provides study material for the researcher (Schwartz & Schwartz 1955: 344, after Konecki & Chomczyński 2012: 198). Each time an interview was conducted, an observation note/interview card was made.

Contact with the couples and scheduling appointments was usually made by communicating with one of its members. They arranged the meetings, sometimes the dates were changed, and in this way everything often took place in contact with one person only, in most cases a woman. This is why it was extremely important to ensure comfort and trust towards the person who knew the researchers less. Typically for joint interviews, there was an initial strong feeling of the lack of trust in researchers, connected with a greater uncertainty of the situation. To make it more comfortable, joint interviews were usually conducted by two people of different genders. This made it possible to maintain gender proportions, which was especially important considering difficult issues of gender differences and male-female relations raised in the interviews. Apart from such a selection of researchers, what also enabled winning trust was a proper opening of the conversation or contributing something by the researcher.

Kaufmann mentions the necessity to disturb hierarchy without, however, blurring the roles of the parties, which means that the researcher still asks questions and sets the rules, and the respondents give answers (Kaufmann 2010: 72–74). First of all, one has to get closer to the couple's style of conversation. Our research immediately confirmed that each couple had more or less well-established communicative style of their own: some were more talkative, others – quite tight-lipped; some had to snipe at each other and stick the knife in on every occasion, others were unbelievably agreeable and asked each other to confirm their opinions or stories. The role of a researcher is to read the pattern and adopt the style that is as similar to the one presented by the subjects as possible, in other words, to mimic their communication pattern, which requires high acting skills. Giving the voice back to the subjects is ideal as it evokes the feeling of playing the main role in the conversation.

In this way, informants become convinced that they are a source of valuable knowledge and that they are really subjects rather than objects of research (cf. Wyka 1993).[2]

[2] For stylistic reasons, in this article I use the terms "informant", "subject" and "respondent" interchangeably; however, in principle I opt for subjective treatment of respondents-informants.

As the interview continues, the informants are increasingly more convinced about the importance of their role and understand that if they dive deeper into themselves and therefore present their knowledge in a more profound way, they thereby strengthen their power in the interaction (Kaufmann 2010: 74).

Everything was much easier in the next rounds of the study. Contact with the subjects was an important issue between the meetings (about twelve-month lapse): they were informed about the progress of the project and we exchanged letters concerning remuneration for their participation; they also kept us posted about changes of their names and addresses; one of the couples asked us to take "patronage" over their wedding in Poland. It needs to be observed that familiarity in relations with the interviewees increased their trust and made the couples declare their willingness to talk on such intimate topics as childbirth (the second round), finance (the third round) or sexuality (the third round).

The presence of children was an important "element" of interviews for a number of reasons. As Kusenbach describes destructions that can appear in sit-downs interviews, making the respondents do act more naturally (Kusenbach 2003), children can be one of them. Firstly, some older children wanted to talk about household duties, including their own, and comment on their parents' role. They sometimes noticed that their part was overlooked, which upset them or made them laugh. Small children, on the other hand, had a considerable impact on the comfort of conversation (and listening to the interviews, as confirmed in notes made by researchers). When they cried, the parents often felt obliged to silence them, which would not have been the case if the researchers had not been present. A crying baby makes the conversation difficult and the interlocutors tend to lose the topic. This also makes transcription and listening more problematic. Dealing with an unexpected difficult situation makes an interesting moment in participant observation. One of the researchers often stated that she had felt obliged to take care of the children. Such situations were a factor which disturbed the set hierarchy of the meetings and often modified integration between the subjects and researchers.

The person hindering the interview was a two-year-old son, Mikołaj. One does not expect a two-year-old to sit still and be quiet. During culminating activities one of the researchers took care of him, and the other proceeded with the interview. Such a situation only took place twice, then the child was calmer and took care of himself. (interview card: 1_DDI_PL_PL_2015)[3]

[3]After each interview, the researchers compiled an interview card (see the appendix) to note their observations and make participant observation' notes.

> "*Planning children is one of the crucial topics raised in a joint interview. Sometimes this provides a couple with an opportunity to discuss their plans: they can return to this taboo theme and break the silence or share the news. Each round of our study concluded with a question about plans for the future. Since it was very often understood in terms of planning children, we heard such comments as: "The truth is the biological clock is ticking somewhere there and one should finally think about it somehow; but on the other hand, one has become lazy and life also sets quite difficult tasks. And we talked about this citizenship thing – Norwegian citizenship and Polish citizenship of the baby. We haven't decided because it might be in a year or two, but it's funny… I mean, if the baby is born in Norway…" (6_DDI_PL_NO_2015); "There is this plan to have a child; we'll see how it works out"* (17_DDI_PL_PL_2015).

After a year, the two quoted couples (nos. 6 and 17) were parents.

7. The role of the researchers' gender

Empathy is a key feature of the researcher in the understanding interview. Kaufmann-type researcher has to show modesty and tact about, and a kind interest in, even the most irrelevant or strange opinions, as well as straightforward sympathy towards the informant. In the case of an interview with a couple, it is important to express the same degree of kindness towards both participants and not to take sides, which is why it is significant to take care about a balanced gender representation: a woman and man as researchers and a woman and man as subjects. An awareness of the gender factor is crucial: the researcher in an interview is also a man or a woman, often associated by respondents with stereotypical roles and characteristics. The researcher is supposed to enter the world of his subjects – both the shared, marital one, and their separate individual worlds – with kindness. He/she is also supposed to understand each individual's "intellectual structures" (Kaufmann 2010: 79).

Kaufmann's next requirement may be the hardest to implement: "To achieve the emotional and conceptual affinity with the interlocutor, the researcher must completely forget about his/her own opinions and mental categories. He/she is supposed to think about only one thing: there is a world to discover, full of hidden treasures" (Kaufmann 2010: 79). The first difficulty concerned holding back unwanted reactions to gender stereotypes, sometimes echoed by some respondents. We believe it is best to try neither to confirm nor deny them. The researcher can inquire whether it is really how the respondents see the issue and ask for examples. The second difficulty is about not getting

deeper into some additional roles played by researchers (more on this below). Interviews have to be conducted with empathy and respect, as well as with a strong hunger for knowledge. Following Kaufmann's further instructions, one has to make an effort to engage in conversation (Kaufmann 2010: 80). In order to stimulate interaction, the researcher has to be firmly present, to stay him/herself a bit, to preserve his/her everyday habits, feelings, language habits and ways of expressing emotions. The way the researcher speaks provides respondents with valid benchmarks. The researcher should smile, even laugh, pay compliments, display opinions shortly, clarify some aspects of the hypothesis (very frequently asked questions: What the heck is this research about? What do others say?). And then, if the "depth" of the interview was satisfactory, one can comment, for example on disagreement regarding gender stereotypes.

Empathy goes hand in hand with sympathy, so the researcher above all has to be kind, positive, open to everything her/his interlocutor says. However, once this basic pattern of behaviour settles in, it becomes possible and interesting to spotlight some points of disagreement. This enables the researcher to be more honest and often invigorates the discussion. (Kaufmann 2010: 81–82)

During the conversation, the researcher should be a friend, someone one can confide in. The deepest confessions require a guarantee of anonymity similar to the doctor–patient privilege (Kaufmann 2010: 82). In the case of an interview with a couple, there is of course another level of trust concerning what is suddenly said between the partners. They also have to trust each other that if they open up and engage in the interview, they will do it together. The researcher has to be even more alert than in the case of individual interviews. She/he has to interfere if only one person opens up; she/he has to prevent retribution for an intimate confession or a statement that has not been heard by the other informant before. It is unacceptable to remain indifferent to such comments as "You're breaking my heart". Although, a researcher is not a family therapist, he/she is responsible for causing the situation and cannot leave the informants alone.

Researchers also play other roles which are very often activated during interviews, e.g. the role of a parent or a spouse. Giving something back by a researcher played a significant role in the interviews, e.g. stories about the project, interesting (and anonymous) examples, the ways others cope – or not – with particular problems, etc. On the other hand, a researcher cannot give advice or enter the level restricted to friend-like relations. We made a considerable effort to show a great diversity and arbitrariness prevailing in such

areas as the division of household duties. A survey is a difficult situation, a kind of confrontation with "one's own reflection in a mirror of interview". Most couples defended, often unanimously, their image by making such excuses as *it's not totally normal here* and *it looks more normal in other families for sure*. They also asked for confirmation whether their arrangements were acceptable, e.g.: *it's ok, isn't it?*, or for an explanation: *what can this disagreement indicate?*

One also has to be aware of tampering with the world view, especially in the case of such a research topic. According to the theory of individual agency, new ideas emerging in mind can trigger resistance against, and weariness with, a role suddenly classified as traditional and outdated. Consequently, the interviews could contribute to the emergence of negative capital in female respondents:[4] they might start to think critically about the model of relationship they followed and regard it as inconsistent with abilities discussed during the interview. This is why we touched this matter with great care and used – more or less consciously – the technique of compliments and humour (Kaufmann 2010: 84). If it seemed that both partners, or at least one of them (usually the woman), dreamed about a better and fairer division of chores, we thought together what already indicated such a division, and at this point we praised her, him or both of them.

The respondents behaved in an easy-going and natural way, they did not seem to be embarrassed even for a moment. Quite on the contrary, they were very open and they often laughed. Interaction between them was very natural. They maintained eye contact between each other and the researchers. They were both equally involved in the discussion, sometimes starting to talk simultaneously, which called for a slight intervention by moderators. While talking about domestic chores, the male subject clearly felt that he did not engage enough in family life: he turned more and more gloomy and depressed with every question from that section. The researchers felt the weight of this quite long-lasting moment. It was hard for them to bring the informant out of his thoughts spiralling towards guilt and great discomfort. However, in the next section the he recovered his sunny mood and eagerly joined the discussion. (interview card: 18_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

As the sphere of domestic duties is not a particularly intimate topic *per se*, informants are eager to talk about it. It is a good subject for the first meeting with couples. It is always easy to find something funny here; you can also give an example from your own life as an ice breaker. One can give an example of his/her own husband, who is unable to find anything in his own

[4] Negative capital – attitude to domestic duties which becomes an unwanted, wearisome and burdensome activity when the idea of (gender) equality appears (Kaufmann 1995: 157–160).

house, a son who refused to wash the dishes, or a wife who avoids fuelling the car. It is important to give real examples. The fact that a researcher does not quite cope with the implementation of the partnership model is very interesting for respondents and makes them more involved in further confessions.

Research done by our team is also consistent with a canon of treating experience as a cognitive tool (Wyka 1993: 5). Here, Anna Wyka's advice is to combine participant observation and open interview (understanding interview may be classified as such a combination). In our case, participant observation was conducted during the interviews, which is why it was very important for us to hold them at the subjects' homes so that we could take part in their family life "as it happened". Wyka, like Kaufmann, thinks that research situations are, most of all, situations of sharing knowledge and social competences. In the study, the researcher ceases to be a neutral observer and loses her/his advantage of being "higher" than the subjects. He/she "adapts to study the development of the situation and changes him/herself as a result" in a flexible way. He/she becomes an active witness and participant of social activities. In line with Wyka's suggestions, we tried to act openly and communicate our intentions as clearly as possible in order to morally legitimise the intervention in the subjects' life (Wyka 1993: 26).

Analysing conversation dynamics, it can be assumed that the subjects agreed on most issues. However, evident differences appeared with regard to money management. Their priorities occurred to be a controversial issue – the need to travel (the woman) versus the need to make improvements to, and redecorate, the house, and a dream of buying a Porsche (the man). The subjects were not embarrassed by the researchers' presence; they argued on the issue, but their argument was a humorous one; the respondents respected each other; the researchers did not feel that this behaviour was caused by their presence. (interview card: 11_DDI_PL_PL_2015).

Among the tools used in the process, Wyka (1993) mentions sociological imagination, sensitivity and intellectual competence, which is in line with the principles of feminist and Kaufmann's methodology.[5] As in Kaufmann's approach, the task of a researcher is to get to know social reality

[5] Feminist methodology postulates using structured and more interactive interviews instead of quantitative analysis. It prefers the way of sociological writing which gives the subjects the opportunity to speak about themselves. Kaufmann himself talks about informants rather than respondents or subjects. Theoretically, female sociologists, psychologists or pedagogues can display greater tolerance towards ambiguity and multitude of truths and tend to focus more on everyday women's life rather than use abstract notions with no contact with experience (Marshall 2006: 192).

from the point of view of the subjects creating this reality (Wyka 1993: 34). To sum up, according to Anna Wyka, studying social reality through shared experience is based on the assumption of the subjectivity of researchers and subjects, direct experience of reality, and stresses the "community" of the world of the exploring and the explored subject. None of these assumptions is omitted by Kaufmann, nor is any of them dissonant with his approach.

8. The role of communication: domination and togetherness in private space

Researchers applying this approach gain easy access to "what is happening between the subjects" for further data analysis. Thanks to the joint interview situation, the way the couple sits in relation to the researchers (indicated in the drawings of the study field) and the way they express themselves say much about the dynamics of the relationship. Different elements of non-verbal communication (e.g. partners going through their interview sitting together on the couch, holding hands or holding each other while telling their story) confirm the issues under discussion and the authenticity of memories. Although some interviews were joint rather than individual, the subjects were able to take care of the comfort of expression of the other respondent if there was a need to do this:

Because the female respondent has a child from her former relationship, the section concerning childbirth referred only to her, which made the male respondent grow silent. He tactfully went out of the room taking the dishes with him. (interview card: 6_DDI_PL_NO_2015)

Speaking together, taking turns, complementing each other, using the word "together" confirmed the community of actions and consent to the current state of affairs. Doing things "together" enabled us to qualify such couples as ones "sharing duties".

> *I cook, I go shopping, but if there's more to buy I need transport because I don't drive a car. So, for sure we drive to buy things together if there's more to be bought. When Friday comes, Tomek cleans everything, I mean, he does the laundry for example, I do the cleaning, dusting and so on; Tomek, so to say, he does what's lower, I do everything that's higher up, so, no doubt, we share, and Tomek does a lot, yeah.* (20_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

The researchers' comments in transcription notes (interview cards) provide an opportunity to make use of additional observations concerning the atmosphere of the meeting and offer an attempted analysis of the relationship. What is interesting is that each year these descriptions might be different.

Sometimes it is a woman who dominates, sometimes – a man; sometimes a woman participates more in the interview, sometimes – a man. The differences can be observed not only in relation to the couples, but also to the year of the interview, which probably indicates the context of the couples' reality in a given moment.

The situation was different than the other year, when a certain distrust could be felt at the beginning of the interview. The female subject prepared a lot of food and drinks for the researchers. She was more active during the whole interview; she also spoke on behalf of her husband. The moderators tried to activate the male subject a number of times, however (as the year before), he seemed to be a taciturn (a matter of personality and temperament) and precise person – he either provided sober answers without detailed descriptions, or agreed with his wife's opinion. Unlike his wife, he did not digress from the subject of the conversation; the female subject digressed eagerly, describing in detail events which were very loosely connected to the questions asked by the moderators. She also initiated eye contact more willingly; however, this does not mean that the male subject avoided it – it was probably the result of his lesser engagement in the discussion. The atmosphere of the interview was favourable and the interlocutors often smiled. (23_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

Subjects stand in various relations towards each other and the interview dynamics proves this. Sometimes it is the man who dominates, as can be seen in the following examples:

Domination of the male participant was visible from the very beginning: he answered on behalf of his wife, corrected her statements, made cutting remarks, e.g. "you can have a chit-chat now". The female respondent seemed to be used to such treatment, she did not pay attention to her husband's provocations, and they did not develop into a full-scale conflict. The researchers found his behaviour more surprising. The male subject seemed to be an eloquent, intelligent and sophisticated person – he had a vast knowledge in many areas, sometimes he digressed. He talked quickly, resolutely and confidently. The female subject also made frequent digressions, describing a few versions of her usual day, providing details and nuances of each activity, which visibly annoyed the male, who said: "it will take a while" at the beginning of his wife's statement and left for the kitchen to bring some refreshments for the researchers. The female subject's divagation often triggered reactions in the male, who urged her to stay with the topic. The male subject dominated most of the interview; the moderators often had to activate his spouse; however, her

statements were often interrupted by her husband's interjections and remarks. (Interview card: 5_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

During this interview, the male participant was more active and laid-back. He was more sure of his opinions, he expressed them in an open, confident way. One could even have the feeling there was a moment when he poked at the female participant and provoked her to say something (domestic chores and the issue of cleaning). She was calm, but strangely distanced in comparison to the previous year. There were some topics or questions which might seem sensitive for the participants. There were some words, not even sentences, which could cause embarrassment and affect their openness, e.g. the question about a shared bank account – the male subject stated firmly but clearly his opinion on the advantages of having two separate accounts. He explained that if they got divorced, it would not be problem to divide money and property. (interview card: 20_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

Sometimes it is the woman who dominates: She dominated the interview. She was usually the first to answer the questions. Her answers were rich, effortless, clear and straightforward. The male subject was sort of absent. His answers were short and quick. He seldom digressed. The researchers were disappointed with his attitude (the year before the dynamics of his statements was quite different – he was open, joyful, even excited). This year, taking part in an interview seemed to be beyond him. It even happened that a question had to be repeated (because he thought it was not directed to him). (interview card: 19_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

And sometimes the issue of domination is hidden from researchers:
The subjects expressed the same opinions in the case of most of the topics; there was only one topic on which they differed: shopping. However, they did not let themselves argue in the presence of the researchers. (interview card: 2_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

Researchers' reports indicate their positive impression created by a good interview atmosphere and genuine involvement of the couples. On the other hand, discomfort of one of the respondents and the feelings of shame or embarrassment about memories or the partner's behaviour interrupt the rhythm of interview and affect the level of involvement in answering the questions. Sometimes one of the subjects must deal with the role of the person responsible for the effect of the interview, which makes him/her the key interlocutor, a kind of an ambassador.

During the interview, the male subject seized the initiative in answering the questions. He also talked about childbirth in an equally active and enthusiastic way. Time and again, the researchers tried to activate the female

subject, but the male immediately took control of the conversation. It was clear that he was in his element in this role. The researchers had the impression that it surprised even the female subject; it was not necessarily about the very activity itself but the statements on some experiences or opinions. Then the subject abandoned the topics and the main issues, digressing every now and then. It is worth mentioning that he did this with a peculiar charm and lots of humour. However, his digressions were so frequent and elaborated that the researchers had to intervene a number of times. The subjects were very open. They concealed no details concerning the issues under discussion. Their eye contact was natural; the female subject often looked at her husband while talking. The atmosphere during the whole interview was nice and friendly, as was saying goodbye. (interview card: 22_DDI_PL_PL_2015)

9. Conclusion

Joint interviews are a considerable challenge among qualitative methods. The article made an attempt to indicate their advantages and disadvantages, as well as to observe a high degree of their complexity. Our experience demonstrates that:

(1) joint interviews go very well when understanding interview principles are applied;

(2) thanks to this mode of conversation, we can see a couple as something more than two individuals observed in individual interviews;

(3) joint interviews provide an opportunity to catch the dynamics of the relationship, and a longitudinal version of such research can give us even a greater insight into processes going on in a couple which reflect broader social changes (migration, family planning or women's emancipation);

(4) in the eyes and the stories of partners – when they talk to each other, sometimes ignoring researchers – one can clearly see groups they relate themselves to (aspire or dissociate themselves from), their plans for the future and risks of crisis situations; individual interviews will never give us such an insight.

We have also found out that joint interviews can be a nice and developing experience for couples. They often admitted that they had not talked with each other like that for a long time or they had never done this before. Thanks to one of such meetings which proved important for the couple, we were able to secure their cooperation agreement for the entire project. Finally, most subjects enquired whether we would ever come back.

There is one more issue which must also be mentioned while discussing the use of joint interviews in the study of families and couples. Our

experience indicates that "happy", satisfied couples accept this kind of commitment and want to share their story with others. On the one hand, this provides comfortable working conditions – we are not able to significantly interfere with their relationship, and if they decided to take part in the survey, they are apparently not in a crisis phase. However, it should also be noted that couples will avoid difficult or crisis situations and the partners will not answer some questions. This is why it is worth complementing such research with other techniques, such as individual interviews or diaries.

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"Minding the Gap" in the Research on Human Trafficking for Sexual Purposes

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Abstract. Since the signature of the United Nations Trafficking Protocol in December 2000 that human trafficking has been labeled as a transnational, complex criminal phenomenon. However, despite the implementation of international soft law instruments to tackle the phenomenon, human trafficking is constantly evolving by the frequent changes of strategies, routes, types of exploitation and methodologies applied by the criminal networks. This flexibility of the phenomenon does not only difficult the implementation of effective tackling measures, but it also demonstrates to be an obstacle to produce accurate information on the subject (Cusick et al. 2009). Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the implementation of qualitative research on human trafficking for sexual purposes by 1) the identification of the obstacles on the research; 2) the application of an ethical conduct during the research; 3) the problematic of the participative observation method on the sexual exploitation.

Keywords: sexual exploitation; qualitative research; participant observation; ethical issues; human trafficking

1. Introduction

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes has proven to be methodologically challenging due to the criminal nature of the phenomenon (Brunovskis & Tyldum 2004; Zimmermann & Watts 2004). However, the adversity on the academic research on human trafficking for sexual exploitation has not only been verified due to the complex features of the phenomenon, but also due to the moralistic perspectives and lack of delimitation of its own definition.

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According to Siegel (2015) some researchers choose their data in order to support their ideological position, especially in sexual exploitation, by ignoring information that opposes to their moralistic preconceptions. For instance, this issue has been debated from one side by the feminist anti-sex work lobby, which affirms that prostitution is a violation of women's dignity (Barry 1995; Hughes 2002) and pro sex work feminist scholars that uphold for the rights of sex workers (Kempadoo 1998; Doezema 2005; Augustin 2007). This misconception of the trafficking's definition and lack of common understanding of human trafficking for sexual purposes has brought into the academic literature on the subject, researches with an undefined focus group, which includes not only human trafficking victims for sexual exploitation, but also sex workers. Furthermore, the intentional gap on the definition of sexual exploitation during the *Travaux Preparatoires* has permitted to each Member State to adequate the Trafficking Protocol according to their National Legislation on sexual work (Gallagher 2010). The implementation of this social research was taken in Italy, in which voluntary prostitution is not considered a crime, but is not either considered to be illegal, putting prostitution into a gray zone in legal terms. However, pimping and sexual exploitation in Italy as well as prostitution of minors are considered to be a crime. Therefore, the intention of this article is not focused on the theories debating the sex work, yet, on the research procedures on human trafficking victims for sexual exploitation and the necessity of an homogeneous applied definition of trafficked victim[1].

2. Qualitative research and the lack of access to the focus groups

Quantitative research on human trafficking tends to be noteworthy uncommon (Gozdziak & Bump 2008), due to the lack of access of data as well as the fluidity of numbers, being merely based in estimations. Furthermore, quantitative research on human trafficking normally tends to be carried by transnational institutions or governments through monitoring systems on identified victims by monitoring the type of exploitation, gender, age, nationality, etc… On the other hand, qualitative research has the ability to deep the subject of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Therefore, in order to acquire

[1] Trafficking definition according to the Art 3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol: "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".

data in qualitative research, investigators tend to access to specific researching methodology such as interviews, group discussion, observations and narratives (Snape & Spencer 2003). However, research on human trafficking is known to lack from direct sources, since researchers tend to be confronted with the lack of access to the target group (Berman 2003). Furthermore, researchers tend to have access to the victim after the exploitation period, since accessing to the victims is clearly unsafe (Brunovskis & Tyldum 2004; Zimmermann & Watts 2004). However, protected victims tend to provide sided information, since the women that provide information are the ones who have been already identified as human trafficking victims by the law enforcement agents and are normally aware about their exploitation.

The access to the victims is normally through mediators such as organizations working during the protection phase of the victims. Despite the facilitation on secondary sources, victims can produce "first-hand information", especially on the victim's vulnerabilities during the recruitment and the conditions during the exploitation period (Laczko 2005). However, identified victims are in a vulnerable situation, especially traumatized after their exploitation experience (Zimmerman et al. 2006), falling often into deeply silence as a survival strategy (Brennan 2005). Furthermore, victims after the exploitation period are often confused or traumatized, embarrassed or afraid of menaces from the traffickers to them or to their families (Jordan 2002). Interviewing victims after their exploitation period can expose more the victims, as well as their families and friends to their exploiters or criminal networks. Furthermore, victims can also be considered unreliable sources, since they might be traumatized and attached to the traffickers. During the investigation, victims were also generally verified to lack from core information on the criminal networks or to still be emotionally attached to their trafficker (OIM 2014).

Due to the often impossibility of accessing human trafficking victims, especially regarding protection measures by belonging to a vulnerable group, many researchers apply the combination of purposive sampling and snowballing in order to recruit participants to their research. According to Maxwell (1997) purposive sampling is a type of sampling in which 'particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices'. Snowballing, instead, comes normally to complete the use of purposive sampling, since it is easier that people who work on the related subject indicate other potential participants that fit in the research (Singleton & Straits 2005).

During my research, I have applied purposive sampling with local stakeholders that work against human trafficking passing from the third sector as NGOs and institutions to law enforcement agents. The variety of participants working in different fronts can provide different perspectives on the subject from the criminal to sanitary, social aspect during and after the exploitation period. Furthermore, these participants tend to regard the phenomenon from different perspectives that provides a multifaceted aspect of the phenomenon. I have also applied semi structured interviews, since interviews are a good methodology due to its openness (Sarantakos 2005). Furthermore, semi structured interviews facilitate a better interaction between the researcher and the participant and the opportunity to deepen important aspects of the research as well as the participants' experiences (Gorman & Clayton 2005). It is also important to use semi structured interviews to collect data, experiences and the participant's experience on the phenomenon (Arthur & Nazroo 2003).

Despite speaking directly with secondary sources by the application of purposive sampling, where stakeholders working with human trafficking victims are valuable source on the subject, we are still researching a very sensitive subject and data that secondary sources sometimes can be reluctant to provide. Furthermore, also secondary sources are also not able to provide detailed information as human trafficking victims are, especially regarding to the exploitation period. Despite the evident partial acknowledge of information of secondary sources, it is much easier to obtain consent from participants that work with human trafficking victims rather than the victims themselves. Furthermore, explaining the study to the victims can demonstrate to be challenging, especially regarding to the involved risks or explain that the participant will not be publicly exposed (Kelly & Coy 2016)

3. Ethics and research on human trafficking for sexual purposes

Preparing the process of empirical research on social sciences has been accompanied with the delicacy of ethical issues (Siegel & Roos 2016), being strongly affected with ethical protocols (Haggerty 2004). New methods have also been applied in the field of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, yet the extension of this methodology has not avoided the concern with ethical issues (Brunovskis & Surtees 2010). For instance, critics have been made regarding the payment of women to participate in research (Coy 2006). Furthermore, ethical conduct becomes a bigger preoccupation, when it is related to human trafficking for sexual purposes, when victims are seen as vulnerable and participative research is regarded as unethical (Siegeland Roos 2016). The complexity of researching such sensitive subject becomes difficult

to balance between the well being of the victims and the political agenda to focus attention on this subject (Eastonand & Mathews 2016). Safety, not only regarding to the victims, but also to the researcher, should be also included on ethical frameworks, especially while studying criminal phenomenon (Melrose 2002). Therefore, according to Kelly and Coy (2016) ethical issues should be included in safety protocols where supervisors or colleagues should be informed about the researcher location and study. In 2008 the UN Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) has launched a guide on ethics on research on human trafficking where it recommends the researchers to do "no harm" to the victims. The recommendation is based not only on the safety issues, but also regarding to their emotional and psychological well being, which passes also by avoiding invasive questions (Zimmerman & Watts 2004) that can result in the so-called secondary victimization.

Another major issue on social research is the guaranteeing of anonymity and confidentiality, especially when regarding to criminal research. In fact, many researchers in some countries may be obliged by law to provide information related to criminal activities (Siegel & Roos 2016). For instance, many potential victims can be linked to illegal activities, such having an illegal status on the territory or selling sexual services where prostitution is not allowed (Kelly & Coy 2016). However, despite the access of researchers, law enforcement tends to have more substantial information on the traffickers and exploiters rather than the researchers. Therefore, the information acquired by the researchers normally is not considered important to law enforcement agents (Iniciardi et all 1993). Despite the unnecessary information disclosure by researchers, it is well known that in order to tackle human trafficking, stakeholders need to apply the rule of the four Ps (Prevention, Protection, prosecution, Partnership). Therefore, more anti trafficking networks have been established against human trafficking in Europe, which also includes the partnership between the third sector and law enforcement agents. In the city, I am developing my research, recently a mixed anti-trafficking network has been established, by a previous informal contact that organizations working on human trafficking had already with authorities.

In order to research on human trafficking for sexual purposes, the methodologies as well as the research design have to be implemented according to the access that researchers have in the field. Therefore, according to Kelly & Coy (2016) before the first stage of research, investigators should "research the local context, consult stakeholders on potential risks for the researcher and participants, and how the presence of a researcher might affect relationships, including those of NGOs with partners and the communities

they work in". This analysis will help the researcher to understand the access and conditions of the participants in order to implement an adequate methodology.

Ethical issues regarding the research on human trafficking should be regarded in every step of the research, not only while the researcher is dealing with the participants, but also during the data treatment. For instance, in social research informed consent is required, not only in order to inform the participant on the use of the stories, but also to protect the researcher in case the research can potentially harm the participant. However, written informed consent tends to be very difficult to achieve, especially with participants involved in sex industry (Wildt 2016). Therefore, according to Wildt (2006) and also from my experience, the explanation on the participation of a research project can be performed verbally.

Lastly, for the researcher, studying extreme violence situations and abuse of human rights, as human trafficking can be psychologically and emotional challenging. Not only due to the direct encounter with the victims, but also due to the emotional work that the researcher has to do while in front of the victims. This emotional gate-keeping can lead researchers into search emotional comfort on their social network, by feeling the need to retell the victims' stories and difficulty in separating their self from their research (Melrose 2002).

4. Participative observation method

Participant methodology has demonstrated to have both advantages and disadvantages for the researcher (Siegel 2004), especially regarding to ethical and safety issues. Furthermore, in outdoor sex work it has been demonstrated to be provisional to arrange the possibility of participating research (Coy 2006), unless the researcher has the possibility to establish a long-term relationship. This method requires chronological availability and patience, as well as a well-designed strategy that not always target its aims. The application of participative observation method can be emotionally and psychologically challenging. However, this method provides a deeper knowledge into the women's lives that researchers cannot access through reading stories (Coy 2006). Furthermore, researchers can sharp their knowledge focusing on the interested subject or create a context that permits to explore the subject of interest.

For a research on motherhood during and after sexual exploitation, the author has applied the participative observation method. The target group, which is composed by Romanian women engaged on the outdoor sex industry

has been accompanied for two years, once a week, in which the author is part of the street unit. The group provides hot and cold beverages and some food, as well as the accompaniment by a cultural mediator to a doctor aware about the girls' situation. The introduction on the volunteer group was made without any difficulty, since the previous volunteers have already engaged in a trustful relationship with the girls. In fact, trust is one of the key factors for accessing real basis information (Kelly 2005; Siegel 2016), since the girls often are not interested in telling the truth.

As mentioned before, one of the first dangers in researching on the sex industry is to mistaken human trafficking victims and sex workers. In fact, despite the experience on the sector and recognition of the indicators of the researcher it was not easy to confirm the potential victims, especially because many girls did not feel that they were victims (e.g. Siegel & Bovenkerk 2000; Siegeland Yesilgöz 2003; Siegel 2005; Janssen 2007; Brunovskis & Surtees 2008). Furthermore, since many of them are victims through the *loverboy* method, in which the exploiters are their boyfriends, they perceive their violence as "domestic violence". Therefore, the first encounters were mainly to identify the potential human trafficking victims and the sex workers by the application of some questions. In this case, despite that the majority of the girls are located in the same place and they also know each other, since they share the same nationality, three different categories were identified, separated in three different groups.

First of all, a particular group was immediately identified as potential victims of trafficking, due to their clothes, since that in low temperatures they were still wearing shorts or panties. We also noticed that the women from this group had to work for longer hours than the others. However, contradictions were encountered, for instance, the same girl who has declared that she had to stay working longer than the others on one day, on the next week explain to us that she was having a headache and that she was planning to go home earlier. These contradictions confused the street unit volunteers in doing a proper evaluation of the situation of exploitation. However, the exploitation of this girl was later confirmed by one police operation, where she was identified to be abused by her boyfriend, one of the exploiters of the network. At this time, it was obvious during the research period that it was extremely challenging to possibly identify victims of trafficking, since the victims themselves did not see themselves as victims. Furthermore, while involved in the *loverboy* method, the victims cannot perceive most of the abuse and in case they do perceive the abuse, they tend to diminish its importance, therefore they will also not mention it to the volunteers or to law enforcement agents.

A second group was identified to be potential victims of trafficking, after some encounters. The evaluation was not based on their clothes, but rather on their presence on the street while in adverse climatic situations, such as rain. Furthermore, during the encounters, I posed questions to understand the girls' knowledge about the city or monuments, which they have replied negatively. The girls also demonstrated to lack from social life, especially during the summer, by never going to the beach. Another important indicator to understand the level of exploitation of the girls was the time that they were not going back to Romania. For instance, some girls, even with children in the origin country have claimed with some sadness to be away from home for two years. The demonstration of submission to an exploiter is also identifiable due to the difference of behavior in presence of the controller, where normally the girls tend to demonstrate to be more nervous and less willingly to talk.

Developing a participative observation method in the sex industry, where potential human trafficking victims can be involved, requires a caring minute strategy, not only regarding to the dangers involving the potential victims, but the researcher itself. In fact, it is not difficult that in the trafficked group, one of the girls is the controller, therefore, any conversation or question has to be connected normally with their daily basis. When I entered into the volunteer group, one of the first things that the other volunteers have mentioned was the presence of potential controllers. These controllers often are the inter-mediators between the exploiters and the victims and, profiting from their experience on the sex industry they present to be a model to the new girls (Lo Iacono 2014). Their role tend to be connected in controlling the number of clients that the women have per night, their behavior and also they normally alarm the exploiters in case of any problem with clients or the presence of police. Furthermore, the girls do not see them as controllers, but as friends that also do outdoor sex work. This perception was easily understood, when during a police operation one of the controllers was arrested and the girls have manifested their sadness in confront of her arrest. Furthermore, the girls also demonstrated to be highly opposed to her arrest, since she was considered "to be one of them".

When I started to do research within the street unit, the establishment relationship with the girls was easy, since the street unit was operating from two years. Furthermore, being a religious group, the girls on the first year though that I was also connected to a religious congregation. The girls that I have accompanied through these two years have been mainly the same, yet many have gone to other places and then came back. For instance, one girl has promised us to leave the sex industry and come back to Romania, yet after one

year she has returned and explained that actually she was in London in indoor prostitution. In fact, despite that the girls tend to maintain their place, it is interesting that when they go home or decide that for a period they will go abroad, they are immediately substituted for new girls. This happens especially during the summer, when the girls go home for a month. When new girls come, normally they are introduced by the controllers to the street unit volunteers. However, when the street unit encounters new girls, who do not belong to a group, it has been demonstrated that the contact is very difficult to be established, since the girls tend to mistrust any new people that they encounter. Furthermore, the new girls tend to do not understand and speak Italian, unless they have lived in other Italian cities for a while. With the aim to better understand the girls while they spoke among themselves I have also started to learn Romanian, yet I am still not able to keep up with their mother tongue spoken Romanian.

The access directly to the research subject provides not only information on the women's lives, but also their on their daily basis and social networks. This information is often mentioned by the participants themselves and it normally regards to their families and their lives back in the origin countries also through the technology as Facebook and smartphones. Most of the times, the conversation starts with only "how are you" and then the women start talking and guide the conversation (Brennan 2005; Zimmerman & Watts 2004). In addition, through the participant observation method, the researcher is able to understand the relation of the participant and his/her family. This provides not only information of the family's acknowledgment of the involvement of the participant on sexual work, but also information on the participants' children. Furthermore, information is also provided on their relation with the clients or with "friends" that wait all night for give a lift home. However, despite that the women speak often about their families and social contacts, the women tend to disclose small information regarding to their boyfriends or love attachments in the destination country. This lack of information on their love can be normally related with the involvement of the boyfriends in illegal activities, as well as their own exploitation.

A last ethical issue is regarded to the encountered of extreme exploitative situations, where there is clearly the presence of abuse. According to Tyldum (2010) women that are identified as human trafficked victims and left in their exploitative situation by the researcher lose their hope in being rescued. This attitude also shows an unethical behavior from the researcher, yet in some situations of human trafficking even though victims are identified it is very difficult to separate from their exploiters, since they are their boyfriends.

During my experience in the street unit, no physical sign of abuse was encountered. Since their exploiters are their boyfriends, as previously mentioned the women don't talk about their love relationships, especially the abuse they suffer, despite that in the same police operation abuse and violence was reported. Therefore, with the aim to empower the women from their exploitative relationships, the volunteers group has stated to include the issue of love relationships and gender equality with the women, in order to understand their perception on the subject. However, it is interesting that the perception of men and relationships is not only connected with an exploitative situation. In fact, the third group identified by the researcher, which is considered to be sex workers, without the presence of an exploiter or pimp, has demonstrated to have similar perspective on man and relationships. For instance, the woman has the leading role on taking care of the family as well as domestic tasks and man has the right to claim them. This vision on the gender identity is shared as by trafficked victims as well as sex workers, yet on trafficked victims their exploitative situation might be enhanced by violent family background that normalizes abusive relationships.

5. Conclusion

Research on human trafficking sexual purposes has demonstrated to be considerably changeling not only regarding to the lack of access of direct sources, but also regarding to the involvement of the so considered vulnerable groups. Therefore, research on human trafficking for sexual purposes requires a strategy plan, not only to identify local stakeholders working on the subject, but also to understand the best way to access the target group. The research plan should include the participation of different secondary sources, by identifying third sector and law enforcement that are normally identified through purposive sampling and complemented by snowballing.

The application of participative methods on social research has emerged a long debate on the ethical issues applied on the research, especially when focusing on vulnerable groups such as human trafficking victims. For instance, Siegel (2016) who is known for the implementation of participative methodology in sex work and human trafficking suggests the application of three rules such as: keeping distance from the respondents; clearly explain your limits as a researcher; and never spread gossip that can harm. These rules are definitely a key guide on the research on human trafficking for sexual exploitation, yet they put an interrogation regarding to the confrontation of the research and a potential human trafficking victim and denouncing an exploitative situation. On the other side, as mentioned by (Iniciardi et all 1993)

the researcher's information may not be relevant to law enforcement, yet this ethical situation has been seen to be overcome when researchers are also within anti-trafficking networks (Wildt 2016).

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Exploring Migration Experiences and Gender Dynamics through Biographical Interviews

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Abstract. This paper explores the challenges and advantages in conducting biographical research based on life narratives of 140 Albanian migrants in three host societies, Greece, Switzerland and Germany. This methodological paper is written in the context of the research project investigating the experience of industrial citizenship (IC) of labour migrants coming from the Western Balkans (WB) to the European Union (EU). We reinforce our biographical accounts with semi-structured interviews, visual methods, participant observations, field notes and expert interviews which will provide context to the biographical interview texts. This paper shed light into challenges emerging in the framework of ethnography research field work, addressing the ethnographic issue trust building, hierarchic position, gender, ethical dilemmas, resistance and technical issues as well. Moreover we discuss how self-reflexivity take place during the field work and challenges the professional and personal identity of researchers.

Keywords: biographies, self-reflexivity, insider-outsider, migration trajectories, migrants, gender dynamics, positionality, ethical dilemmas, field sites, emotional catharsis

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1. Introduction

In depth, qualitative methods are preferred when researchers are interested in receiving detailed accounts of the experiences of a particular target group and/or phenomenon from the micro perspective. This article explores some of the advantages and challenges of the biographical approach and methods employed to conduct the field work of the research project "Industrial Citizenship and Migration from Western Balkans: Case studies from Albania and Kosovo migration towards Greece, Germany and Switzerland" (ICM project), a project aiming to explore the labor market integration and of migrants in the host countries[1].

The biographical approach is particularly suited for transnational migration research, offering a way of empirically capturing and reconstructing the diverse, complex, and transforming character of the migration experience. It also helps to contextualize migrants' experiences by encouraging them to reflect on their past and current education, employment, working relations, migrant identity, gender dynamics, household and migration paths, as well as on their future plans regarding these domains.

In this paper, we discuss the methodological choices we made to approach this study. It considers the position and importance of qualitative methodology by focusing on the biographical approach and follow up data collection. Moreover, the paper provides an overview of the stages of the fieldwork, the development of contacts in the field and the different methods applied. It then proceeds with the approach to analysis, a descriptive background account of the research site and follow up with some reflections on the fieldwork.

2. The advantages of the ethnographic and biographical approach

In order to contextualize migration paths and gender dynamics in the household and host society and explore how these dynamics change over time and space, it is necessary to understand the whole migration history both of individuals and linked families. The biographical approach aids in reconstructing in time the migration history and the gendered experiences of migrants. Moreover, the follow up interviews we are able to trace changes and experiences as they have happened since the previous round of data collection.

[1] Regional Research Promotion Program funded project "Industrial Citizenship and Migration from the Western Balkans: Migration from Albania and Kosovo towards Greece, Germany and Switzerland" PI Dr. Erka Caro.

We will gain an understanding of the social, economic and cultural integration on both ends of the migration experience, and its relationship to experienced practices of inequalities.

This approach suggests that the meaning of migration, trajectories and the identity of migrants are established over the life course (Halfacree & Boyle 1993). It implies the collection and analysis of detailed narratives of life histories of the population under study, usually by in-depth and repeated interviews (Miller & Brewer 2003). It links personal perceptions to societal attitudes that govern public and political treatment of migrants offering new insights that cannot be discernible quantitatively or by analysing a single social domain (Findlay & Li 1997). The focus on biographies of migrants and linkages to broader social and policy discourses unfolds migration as a dynamic process and migrants as heterogeneous and active agents, socially embedded, who influence and are influenced by the structures, in which they are located.

The biographical approach enables the researcher to reconstruct experiences and reflections over experiences (Kõu & Bailey 2014) and it allows participants to relate their experience and reflections to broader social structures through analyses of sense making and coping with structural barriers, making visible links between micro and macro structures (Chamberlayne et al. 2002). As such, the biographical approach facilitates the understanding of the socio-economic impact on both ends of the mobility experience: For instance, integration process is likely to accompany increased ability to navigate the labour market of the destination country, and may also imply a different profile in terms of accessing social systems of destinations (bringing along family e.g. may mean accessing child benefits or educational services) (Danaj & Caro 2017). This approach sees migration as a process defined by life course and promises to bring finely grained insights into the changing nature and meaning of mobility over the life course.

Moreover, the biographical interview is particularly suited to migration research as it offers a way of empirically capturing and reconstructing the transformational character of the migration experience (Apitzsch & Siouti 2007). Following migrants in time and in space offers a unique way to investigate how processes, outcomes and performances of mobility unfold over life courses (Mulder 2007). Moreover, it enables one to track changes in the individual's migrant status, and to embed the individual within the policy discourse (Ho 2011), which is important in explaining the implications of the institutional setting.

3. The challenges of the biographical approach

Biographical interviews are lengthy and demanding, i.e. based on previous experience they can last up to five hours. It might be difficult to attract participants and ensure good quality of the interview. Asking people to speak about their life stories is a far from easy task. Issues like trust, comfort, perceived expectations of the researcher, reputation and personality might affect the quality of the interview and the account, especially when research covers sensitive topics such as irregular migration, informal employment, and the legalization of stay in the host country. The positioning of the researcher, their gender, nationality and language of communication also seem to have an impact on the accessibility and the narratives of the migrants.

It is difficult to convince you potential respondent to agree to a time consuming and in-depth interview. In this situation, the role of the community intermediary (gate keeper) is very important. Another challenge might be to properly describing the interview. The researcher needs to inform the interviewee about the objectives of the study and how data will be used without guiding them too much on the content of their narrative. The biographic interview is composed of open questions and as such is difficult to keep the participants on track and without deviance. The researcher needs to politely interrupt when they digress and direct them towards the needed information without forcing and/or leading the respondent and the narrative, a balance that is very difficult to find and keep.

The place where the interview takes place might be very challenging and it can turn a potentially good interview into a nightmare. The respondents while narrating their life story need comfort and a sense of safety and easiness.

4. The biographical interview

Biographic-narrative interviews (Wengraf 2001) were conducted using biographical-oriented interview method, following Adam Mrozowicki's (2011) three-phase interview structure. The first phase of the biographic interview consists of one question only, namely, a 'single question aimed at inducing a narrative' (Kou & Bailey 2014). This first phase gives the participant an opportunity to tell his or her life story from scratch, thereby assigning value to the experiences and events he or she considers important enough to relate (Wengraf 2001). Participants were asked to tell their life story from the period when they still lived in Albania until the present. In the second phase of the interview, the necessary details of the narrated biography were specified by the principal interviewer in order to engage with the participant but also to probe for new information. In the final phase, any relevant topics not covered in the

life story were brought up by the interviewer in an effort to obtain a full picture of the life story of the participant. The final stage included also some theory based questions. The idea for life-story interviews is to give as much as possible room for the informant to tell the most important events related to his/her life. To ask informant to tell her/his story we tried to let them "position themselves as central actors in their mobility" (Passerini et al. 2007: 6). The participants were asked to reflect on their past and current education, employment, working relations, migrant identity, household and migration paths, as well as on their future plans regarding these domains. After responding to questions about life events and domains, participants were probed for the role of various structural factors, such as social networks, immigration policies and labour market opportunities, in shaping their migration path.

The ethnographic interviews took place either in coffee bars and respondent's houses or reception. The participants were recruited using the snowball method and through personal contacts and social networks of the interviewer. This ethnographic work includes participant in-depth tape-recorded ethnographic interviews, field notes observation, personal journal, lasting between one to three hours each.

5. The biographic data and analyses

Our dataset is composed by 140 biographies with Albanian migrants working and living in Greece, Germany and Switzerland and 52 expert interviews. The expert interviews include trade unionists, policy makers, and employers and will provide insights into the labour market context where migrant workers operate. The primary dataset includes both original and follow up interview collected during the 2.5 years of the project. The follow ups have been conducted with a smaller number of participants chosen out of the original sample. Through the follow up interview we can trace the changes as they have happened since the first round of data collection. The rich biographical interviews include interviews with a wide range of migrant groups such as low and highly skilled, guest workers and post-conflict refugees, transnational and return migrants and expert interviews in Kosovo and Germany.

The starting points for the recruitment of participants were several personal contacts, followed by the use of the snowball sampling technique through different points of entry. In all countries, the fieldwork sites included major pivot areas such as Tirana, Athens, Berlin and Zurich. Duration of the interviews varied from 50 minutes to five hours. We conducted the interviews using, Albanian language. The participants were sought among Albanian

migrant working in the three destination countries aged 18 to 65 who has been living in Greece, Germany and Switzerland temporary or permanently.

Photo 1. During field work interviews with migrants in Greece

The interviews were transcribed preserving the original language, further the transcriptions were analysed using the qualitative data software MAXQDA. The first cycle of coding involved identifying both inductive and deductive codes. In the second cycle, the codes were grouped together in code families. A thick description was made based on the code families and their relationships, which resulted in the identification of three overarching themes of the migration process outlined in the finding section. For this, we sought to contextualize narratives about economic decision making, particularly as it relates to finding employment, managing relationships with employers, and ensuring the economic security of the family unit. Other themes inductively connected to these, such as family relationships and economic crisis were also explored.

I. Lesson learned and reflections

Doing ethnographic interviews with migrants has been professionally and personally a challenging and rewarding experience. As in any study involving fieldwork, sampling depends upon the willingness of the respondents to be interviewed and their availability. A number of problems and limitations were encountered in the fieldwork. First of all due to the sensitivity of the topics and a number of ethical issues we needed to consider, issues such as illegality, informal employment, domestic violence, psychological abuse, divorce,

separation emerged through the spontaneous life narration of our participants. Important were also issues of positionality and (power) hierarchy between the participants and the researcher and trust building. For instance, the presence of family members might alter the narrative of the participant while the nationality and language skills of the researcher turned out to be important elements which insecure higher quality of the interview, community networks and gate keepers are a necessity in this type of study. Moreover, positioning yourself (the researcher) as the participants equal (meaning sharing the migration experience and/or being female) facilitates access and builds trust. Further, issues such as objectivity and analytic distance are quite difficult to remain intact, while the above issues are brought in the interview process.

Hence, we rely on the idea of auto-ethnography and self-reflexivity (Spry 2001) to shed some lights on the experiences and reflections as researchers and how previous attitudes, mentalities and experiences were constantly changed and shaped through conscious and unconscious learning process in the field work research. The quality of the interview and the account is influenced by trust, comfort, perceived expectations of the researcher, the importance of reputation for the interviewee, and their personality, positionality of the researcher etc.

II. Let the migrant tell the story

It is important for the researcher to step back and let the migrant tell his/her story. It happen often that migrants takes time while trying to remember some details of their life story based on what they are talking about or amount of time passed by.

My first interview was with Ela[2], a 21 years old girl, who had temporary returned to Albanian from Greece to pursue her studies. While, she was talking about her experience as a migrant in Greece I found myself keeping record about details such as years and other life facts which at some degree changed slightly from the beginning toward the end of the story. However, I felt that interrupting the interview and approaching her directly with questions and correcting her narrative and especially reflections to review what she previously said might have changed her story telling narrative and at some degree did confuse her and probably she felt as she was taking an exam. During the ethnographic interviews the researcher should not push respondents to reflect on their thinking process, kind of introspection. Other senior researchers who were present at the interview told me that "it is more important to pay attention to the person and her emotions, rather than correcting the facts and

[2] All the names of the participants used here are fictional.

numbers". I learned that, it is not the duty of the researcher to do the police investigator and have a confrontational approach at the first phase of the interview, but let the migrant narrate their story as they want and in the way, they prefer, and later on after the interviewee is done with his story, try to at least narrow it to cover parts which might be interest for the analysis. This is a very important skill I learned by doing. (Field diary, Tirana May, 2015)

III. Discharging theorization and stereotypes

When conducting biographical interviews, it is important go to the field without pre-constructed theories and conceptual models. This type of research should be inductive and grounded in the field and observations.

For instance, while talking about how the Greek crises affected Albanian families, a migrant man replied to my comment on men being the breadwinners of the family that "it doesn't make sense to talk about men breadwinner in 2015". This statement made me reflect on my stereotypes and theories on traditional gender roles expectations and position of women in Albanian society. As an activist of gender equality, I was happy to hear that Albanian women in Greece are ate some extend contributing equally to their family incomes and at some degree waged employment outside the family entails a bargaining of empowerment in decision making within the household, hence challenging traditional gender roles expectations. I realized that it is important for the researcher to empty somehow his/her pre-existing mentalities and knowledge and be attentive to the unique cases of respondents and talk with their language. (Field Note, November, 2015)

IV. Researcher positionality

The positionality of the researcher affects the outcome (accessibility and the narratives of the migrants) of the interview based on their gender, age, nationality and language of communication. During the field work the dilemma of inside/outsider (Nowicka & Ryan 2005) was present in all the fieldwork stages Even though, we (researcher and participant) speak the same language and share the same culture, which might be necessary in building trust for the interview, still, unequal relationship, build on concept of "us here and "you there" can be problematic in creating a mutually equal relationship. Sometimes such differentiation seem to be reinforced by the fact that despite being born in the same homeland, we live into two separate worlds reinforced by "we here and you there" boundaries.

Sometimes higher education and professional attainment might serve as a real barrier for the interviewer to build an equal relation of trust and

confidence with the interviewee. The hierarchic position is a two-way process felt not only from the respondent, who might be in an inferior educational position, but it can be felt from the researcher him/herself, conducting interviews with respondent who has a different gender and has a higher decision-making working position.

The interview with Avni (57) was one of the most difficult interviews I have conducted during the field work. Throughout the interview I felt an outsider and I was put constantly at a lower position. He worked in academia in higher position, which probably did serve as a boundary line to reinforce the outside/insider relations or powerful/powerless gendered binary borders. The interview was conducted at his workplace and he was resistant to all my questions (Field Note, December, 2015)

V. Confronted by the respondents

It was one of the most interesting interviews I had considering the quality of the interview, diversity of her work positions and relationships with employees and supervisor Lela was quite talkative, energetic and very open throughout the interview. The interview took place at the reception hall of the hotel. I felt that her story was quite rich and the way Lela. explained her situation or the situation of her family was amazing. At one moment, I was so amazed about all what she said and I was just following her and having constant eye contact, forgetting for few moments to take notes and suddenly she interrupts the interview saying to me: "Ok, than I now understand as my story might not mean nothing about your analysis as you are not taking notes". I was stunned as I did not expect that, considering how much attention I was paying to every world she was telling. Though the whole interview was taped reordered, this was no enough as a justification. I felt I need to explain to her the methodology of the study, the transcribing and coding system and to justify myself that every word that she said matters from my analysis and that was for real one of the richest interviews we have conducted in terms of thematic issues we were looking for and analyzing as well. The next few days of my staying in Munich, she phoned me again, saying that she arranged another interview for me but now at her apartment with her daughter in law. She picked me up with her car at the hotel I was staying. The whole way up to her apartment she was very enthusiastic to show me were her family works, were she lives, which are her neighbors and places when they go out for leisure time, where they drink beer and coffee, where they used to stay and rest when they first came in Germany. She was very friendly and happy to show about her daily life in Munich.

VI. Resistance and the rest of the story after switching the voice recorder

There have been numerous instances when the respondents were resistant to detail their life stories. Of course, it is challenging to ask and have people speak about their life stories in enough details to be informative. Based on our experiences there are respondents who tell their life story in less than five minutes and in short and general sentences while there are others that talks for hours and you need to politely interrupt when they deviate. There are many factors which influence these approaches; some of them are the personality of the respondent, sensitivity of the topic, emotional memories, trust, comfort at the moment of the interview, the presence of the voice recorder etc.

When I first met Dhimiter (44) he wanted the interview to be held at his workplace because first of all, he wanted to show me where he worked and secondly to show how well he was integrated in the Greek labor market. The company he was working for was a big one, with dynamic architectural styles inside halls, numerous sculptures, lights and it took around 15 minutes' walk to go to the bar nearby his offices. I found him very reserved and it was difficult grasp his narrative and perception while discussing his migration experience. It was one moment when I asked him if he felt more Albanian or Greek and what was his feeling when he visited Albania. He answered that he had to think before so that his response would be the "right" one. Even though I explained at the beginning that there is no right or wrong answers and that we want his opinion independent of our project aim, he stressed again that he didn't want to boldly express his opinion and complain about his country. His story was influenced "conditioned" by the presence of the voice recorder. After I switched off the voice recorder he started talking about issues he did not mention with the recorder on. We have been talking for more than 30 minutes while the voice recorder was off certainly he was more relaxed (Field Notes, November, 2015)

VII. When others interfere and you get the gendered approach

The majority of interviews were conducted individually with few exceptions when partners or other family members would interfere in the narrative of the main respondent. This situation might be challenging for the researcher and might affect the narrative of the respondents but at the same time could uncover interesting gender dynamics and power relations in the household which would not have been possible without such interference.

The interview with Tila (she) and Aldi (he) was one of the most interesting interviews in terms of resistance and richness of data. We were

talking about the effect of Greek Crises on gender division of labor and family economy among Albanian migrants in Greece and Tila (36) said "*This situation [laid off men] has a positive influence for our family. In the beginning I had to hire a babysitter for the children but now he is taking/holding the role of the babysitter and taking care of the kids*" Aldi (40) interferes: "*No I am not playing the role of the wife I am just doing the parent".*

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to explore the methodological choices, implications and ethical dilemmas of doing ethnographic research with migrant population in three host societies. By drawing on the field work with 140 migrant narratives in three host countries and the collection of detailed observations and interviews we pinpoint the implications and challenges we as researchers face dealing with rich, and holistic insights into migrants' views and experiences (Scott et al. 2008) in the field work.

We noticed that the positioning of the researcher affects the outcome (accessibility and the narratives of the migrants) of the interview based on their gender, age, nationality, education, professional experience, language of communication. Doing ethnographic interviews with migrants it is at the same time rewarding and challenging for researcher and raises a number of ethical issues to be considered. The interview might be a sensitive and emotional process because of the nature of the topic and the issues being discussed such as illegality, document falsification, informal employment, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, divorce, separation etc. Based on our experience organizing a biographic interview is time consuming and difficult to arrange. Respondents take time to trust the researcher and decide to have the interview; they are inclined to say no, especially after they know that it will last for couple of hours. However, after they have agreed to the interview and the first difficult moments has passed by, they (the migrants) oftentimes flow in their narrative and at the end of the interview express their gratitude for the provided opportunity to talk about their life and express their emotions without being interrupted. As such the biographic approach is particularly suited for exploring, capturing and reconstructing the diverse, complex, and transforming character of the migration experience.

The interviewing process does not affect only the respondent but also the researcher. Through the life stories narrated by the respondents we as researchers have understood better not only their personal and family stories but the migration history of a whole nation as being interpreted by the migrants themselves. Moreover, listening to their stories, difficult trajectories to

migration and integration the researcher become more aware of the nature of the migration process and give voice to the main actor of this process, the migrant.

At the same time the migrants feel sometimes the interview as a place of catharsis for their inner emotional conflicts and they reveal about their personal dilemmas, and quite confidential personal information. Things such as objectivity and analytic distance are quite difficult to remain intact, while the above issues are brought in the interview process. Hence, we rely on the idea of auto-ethnography and self-reflexive (Nowicka & Louise 2015; Spry 2001) to shed some lights on researcher's inner experience reflections, personal attitudes and views that affect first the way they approach the respondents and secondly, the way how researcher thinks about his personal and professional issues after ethnographic research experience.

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Online/Offline Couple Interviews in the Study of Transnational Families

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Abstract: This essay-type article aims to highlight some novel aspects we have confronted while using the named interview type as a data collection tool. Thus, in this paper we present, on the one hand, the sensitive elements in employing this type of interview: the argument for introducing these in experimental design; recruitment of participants and data protection; types of data obtained. On the other hand, we have signalled two exceptional aspects within couple interviews: the role of one of the partners as interviewer and the unveiling of family secrets through couple interviews. Through this article, we wish to draw the attention of researchers on this type of data collection as a useful tool in the study of families in general and of transnational families in particular.

Keywords: couple, joint, interview, data collection, online, offline, video, practices, families, transnational

This essay-type article is based on the research unfolded within the project *Confronting Difference through the Practices of Transnational Families* during the 2015-2017 time period, that aims at identifying the various hypostases of families with migrant members. During this research, we have employed couple interviews - online (through Skype and Facebook) and offline (live, on several research fieldworks in the country and abroad). The paper is structured into two parts.

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In the first, we shall address the delicate issues of using these types of interviews as data collection tools, such as: motivating their use; recruitment of participants; data protection; and types of data collected through these techniques. In the second part, we shall present two less customary aspects for researchers used with individual interviews: taking on the role of interviewer by one of the partners from the couple, and unveiling family secrets through these situations where both partners are interviewed. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the promotion of this qualitative data collection type that we find highly useful in the study of families in general and of transnational families in particular.

1. *Sensitive elements in employing couple interviews*

An argument for using couple interviews

Using couple interviews as data collection methods in this project has been proposed after we have unfolded simultaneous with both partners from couples in a previous research[1] (Ducu 2016). We have observed that the data collected from both partners develops the same topic to a large degree, and that for similar questions, the answers took on identical phenomena from different angles. Moreover, we sensed that in certain situations new information appears in the discourse of the other partner, not because the first would have wanted to cover them in silence, but because she found them to be irrelevant. Analysing the results of these interviews from the perspective of the life of couples as a set of daily practices (Morgan 2011 a, b), capturing both partners' perspectives allowed us to grasp aspects that would have remained unraveled through interviewing a single partner. In order to grasp as diverse aspects as possible from the life of transnational families that we have chosen to theorize from the perspective of family practices, we have proposed to employ couple interviews as a data collection method in this experimental design. These have been collected in parallel with individual interviews. Since we have also unfolded a virtual fieldwork within the project, in order to contribute to the development of data collection methods with the help of the Internet (Hine 2004), online couple interviews have also been taken. Through this involvement of both partners we wished to overcome the stereotype that women are rather in the position of talking about family life, and to draw men into this research as well (Hertz 1995).

[1]A research focusing on the topic of ethnically mixed couples from Transylvania - fieldwork carried out in 2013 -2014.

Recruitment of participants and the dilemma of confidentiality

It wasn't as difficult to convince couples to partake in this research as other researchers emphasized (Mellor, Slaymaker & Cleland 2013), perhaps due to the nature of the research topic - describing family life - as well. We were given the agreement very easily to take couple interviews regardless of the gender of the partner we first contacted. The only gender difference we have sensed was that men were more open to offline video interviews (all online interviews were video recorded) than women, the latter needing a reassurance that they are good-looking enough for the public (we asked for permission for fragments of interviews to be presented at conferences or to be broadcast in other contexts with a public character).

Couple interviews are very little employed in family research in general (Bjornholt and Farstad, 2014), and in transnational family research in particular, being more often used in studies concerning health. The most sensitive point of couple interviews is considered to be the lack of confidentiality - the other partner being co-present (Norlyk, Haahr and Elisabeth Hall 2016). Of course that the one-on-one relationship between the subject and the researcher may have that character of confidence, of catharsis, an equivalent of the client - psychologist relationship, but I think that this intimate relationship appears rather in the representation of researchers, they being preoccupied with ensuring confidentiality, building a relationship of trust, of high attention to interaction in order to ensure a climate that is favourable for discussion.

But in the moment of research, even if quantitative, we should distance ourselves as researchers from the wish to learn the *truth*, to search like detectives for answers hidden in the direct or indirect declarations (in non-verbal language or observation through participation) of subjects. I consider that when participants to the research give their agreement for their opinions to be noted in a questionnaire, or even audio/video recorded, they will share their experience as openly as possible. I don't believe that an anonymous and self-administered questionnaire would bring more sincerity.

Perhaps sometimes, to some degree, offering material compensation (e.g. money) for the data could lead to its distortion, not because the participant wants to mislead the researcher, but because she would very much like to *help*, and thinks that one answer or another should be more useful for the researcher, especially since the answer is purchased. I am using the term *help* since I have simply come across it countless times during fieldwork. Participants were offering me an interview to help, and were happy that they could help simply by answering to a few questions, or sometimes amazed that

simply sharing their life experiences, something they even took pleasure in, was helpful to me.

2. The type of data obtained through online interviews

One story or two? - Offline interviews

One of the fundamental questions of researchers using joined (two-respondent) interviews is what type of data they obtain (Polak and Green 2015): an enhanced version of the facts, or two versions of the same phenomenon. In the case of couple interviews, the question becomes even more sensitive. In agreement with other researchers (Taylor & de Vocht 2011), we consider that couple interviews do not grasp a story from two perspectives, but rather two couple stories that intertwine and complement each other. Of course, just as in the case of individual interviews, we have differences between narrators, some tell more, taking control somehow over the interview, whereas others respond less, but sometimes more relevantly than the former. We haven't analysed the interview protocols from the point of view of the volume of information delivered by one partner or another, just as we haven't comparatively analysed the volume of information offered by individual participants, but we were aware that we could not talk of equity at least in what concerns the quantity of information per partner. Still, we encountered situations when the partners, just as in their life as a couple, gave the word to each other and complemented each other, hence the story of each could be heard, and through their interaction, they transmitted a more complex image of an event towards the interviewer.

In the following, we shall present a selection from the interview that Gabi and Edin offered us as an illustration of the way they first met. We would like to underline that the first part is the one told by Gabi in Romanian, since we told her to speak any language she liked, Romanian or English, then she suggests Edin to speak English, then they both speak English during the rest of the interview, even though they speak Flemish to each other in their daily life. This choice of Gabi to speak herself English came as a natural reaction to join Edin in the discussion, in order for them not to be unequal partners. We have also came across this choice, but this time from the beginning of the interview, when the foreign partner didn't speak Romanian, the discussion to be had in English, especially in face-to-face interviews and when the foreign partner was a woman. If the foreign partner spoke Romanian, then the interview would run in Romanian. Coming back to the story of the way Gabi and Edin had met, reading the fragments that follow, we can see how the film of the first encounter is created: the two observe each other for a year without

talking, while commuting by train between their residence and working towns. Eventually Edin addresses her. It is the moment of knowledge. In that moment of the meeting, the interview changes from a simple recall to an act of emotional remembrance. Through the way the discussion unfolds, we observe his wish in the present that he had surprised Gabi, and her confirmation that it was indeed a surprise shows us how important and emotional their relationship still is for them. Of course that the story would be full of emotion if Gabi or Edin narrated it alone, but we would not have learned that both partners are still as moved when remembering their first meeting. In the narrative of each, although the partners tell the same moment in their common life, the reader can easily identify two stories: the one of the woman who already chose her man, who makes conscious decisions to create the opportunity to meet with him, but who doesn't make the final step herself, and the one of the man, who falls in love with the woman he meets daily *by chance* and who is a little afraid of what she could say, since he took the liberty to *follow her*, but now that he knows that this wasn't actually pure chance, asks himself, whether his decision to address her was a surprise for her, or she was expecting it eventually.

> *Gabi: We met at the train station. I first saw Edin at the trains station, in Bruxelles, I was coming from work. He was also coming from work and I noticed him at the station and he remained there, like that, in my heart a little bit! [laughs] And I searched for him. After that, I searched for him for about six months, I looked for him at the station. I stayed longer at work so that I get there at the same time I had seen him, on the platform, at the station. I never met him again. About six months later I was at the station here, in Leuven, and I saw him in the morning on the platform. I recognized him immediately, of course, and I think he also recognized me, but this is for him to say. And from that moment we both started taking the same train every morning, for about a year, and we never talked. We were virtually going to work together (…). Meanwhile, he studied me: he heard my voice, listening what I spoke with my girlfriend, I think he was just studying me. And then I let him tell how we came to talk, to meet [translated from Romanian to this point]. In English, then.*
>
> *Edin: Yes, in English. I've noticed that Gabi`s girlfriend, who she was travelling with every morning to work, she was leaving the train one station earlier and that Gabi , from that point, every day had the habit of looking for the daily newspaper in the train. So, at a certain point, one day her girlfriend left the train and I was seeing that she was starting to look for the newspaper and as soon she started looking for the newspaper, I had one and I gave her the*

newspaper. She was surprised because not only was I giving the newspaper, but I was also telling by my … by doing this movement I was telling that the next message, that I have noticed that every day when your girlfriend leaves the train you are looking for the daily free newspaper. So somebody is watching you! [laughter] I hope it was a surprise.

Gabi: It was a surprise indeed!

Edin: And at that point she said: `Oh, my god! This guy has probably watching me for ages!` (…) and from there we started to talk to each other when leaving the train, because meanwhile we arrived at the destination. (…) We talked, I said who I was and she said who she was. And that was the start: taking the train together. (…)

Gabi: He came to me saying: `Can I come over?` and I said: `Come and stay forever!` [laughter] (couple interview, video, Belgium)

The features of online interviews

We haven't noticed qualitative differences in the level of information provided by offline versus online couple interviews. Of course there are many differences between the two types of data recording - with advantages and disadvantages - such as: the lack of participatory observation in the case of online interviews as against offline ones, or the fact that people are willing to talk more, in terms of time in the case of online interviews as compared to face-to-face ones, hence online couple interviews (as well as individual ones) lasted longer on the average than offline ones. I would explain this phenomenon through the fact that both parties are in a safe environment and do not feel that they are bothering the other. I have conducted all online interviews from home. Moreover, these online interviews are minutely scheduled (one must also consider the time zone difference between the interviewer and the interviewees). And yes, we also faced the phenomenon of rescheduling, but we couldn't say that in the case of online interviews we faced absenteeism (Deakin & Wakefield 2014). We could best compare online interviews as a level of response and rescheduling to those unfolded in the fieldwork in my home town. Unlike fieldwork outside of town, the one in Cluj the discussions were more often rescheduled, from both sides, sine in a way we were all more available and had this alternative. We notice the same phenomenon in the case of online interviews, since virtual meetings are hypothetically always possible. Still, once people found the appropriate time for discussion, these were more relaxed and longer, since there was no pressure from the roles of host or guest. One aspect I observed in the case of online

couple interviews and one I wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't had comparative interviews (offline couple interviews) was the fact that the Romanian partners from the couple (whether women or men) preferred to speak Romanian, even if their partner was not fluent in Romanian and was speaking English, all becoming bilingual interviews, a phenomenon that contrasted face-to-face interviews - where both partners spoke the same English most of the time, or Romanian if the partner was fluent in it. I would put this phenomenon on account of the physical distance to the interlocutor. When the interviewer is beside yourself, you feel that you may use a foreign language (in the case of Romanian partners in the couples who chose to speak English during offline interviews) with the interviewer, since you can fulfil your role as host in other ways too, such as by offering a tea or a coffee at a restaurant - as it did happen. In te case of online interviews, the decision to speak Romanian was probably due to the need to show the Romanian partner's availability. In all cases, the contacts with the online interviewed couples happened through the Romanian partner, although the interviews themselves were funnily carried out mostly through the (Skype or Facebook) IDs of the foreign partner. I take this to be a way for the foreign partner to confirm her welcoming the interviewer in her world. We would establish the agreement of principle, online or by phone with the Romanian partner - on the topic of the research, the date of the virtual meeting and the way of communication (Skype or Facebook video chat).

Then I would receive an invitation of online association on the discussion platform from the foreign partner. I haven't realized this phenomenon until the present analysis, but now I consider that this practice was a way the foreign partner wished to create closeness with the researcher, given that the Romanian partner already had previous contact with her. We emphasize that although at the beginning of the research we proposed to carry out the interviews through Skype (Janghorban et al. 2014), at the suggestion of respondents we started using Facebook video chat calls with great success. In our experience, this is easier for many participants, since they are already using these calls to connect with their transnational family, and would have needed to install Skype additionally in order to be able to use it.

Just as in offline couple interviews, we notice that in online couple interviews we receive different answers to the same question, ones that could at first sight be perceived as stories of different couples. To the question what language they spoke, Garry and Elena seem to give different answers, although they both are saying the same thing, but each to the point they consider relevant. Garry tells how their relationship began: he was planning that when he retires (being an employee of the London police and retiring relatively

early), he would move to Romania, and posted an advert telling that he was looking for Romanian language tutors. Elena's sister was working in London and answered the advert. Since Garry, who is half Italian, was fluent in Italian, Elena's sister recommended Garry to speak to Elena, in Italy at the time, by phone in order to practice his Romanian. Garry did not advance very much in Romanian by this strategy, since they spoke Italian only, but instead fell in love and found himself a wife. Then we asked if the couple uses Italian in their communication within the couple. From Garry's answer we could interpret that in fact they speak English now, but Elena nuances this, saying that it's rather a mix of Italian, Romanian and English, while she makes efforts to perfect her English, and he intensifies his involvement in learning Romanian, Italian providing a safe common ground when they get stuck.

> *G. In the beginning, yes. (We speak Italian) Now I speak more English with Elena., for Elena to learn her English. (...) I am a beginner in Romanian.*
>
> *E. We have made in the house… we have like... a mixed language. Sometimes we speak two words in Italian, two words in English, two in Romanian, many people say „Yo, how complicated!", often he speaks Romanian to me, I answer in Italian, I try to tell him in English, and I might forget the word... (...) the Italian language – between us it works as a buffer and doesn't have anything to do with the two of us. He is English, I am a Romanian, we offline in Romania and we speak Italian, so we thought that slowly, slowly we should dismiss it completely (in Romanian)...*

(Elena and Garry, Romania, Timişoara, Facebook chat video / online interview)

3. Novelties encountered in couple interviews

The role of the partner as interviewer

One of the challenges the use of joined interviews raises that David L. Morgan and his colleagues (2013) signalled is the form in which the interview unfolds, the order of the questions, the way the researcher and the participants relate to each other. As in the case of individual interviews, the way couple interviews unfold is highly diverse, varying from couple to couple. For example, in the case of individual interviews, we have encountered diverse situations along this research: from short, questionnaire-style answers - as in the case of a homeless elderly person who left his children in the state's care, but they still kept contact with him from abroad when they grew up and helped him as much as they

could, who was very happy and embarrassed at the same time by my presence in his hut - to interviews that alternated with my questioning by the participant, to situations where participants told their story almost by themselves. One interview situation was exceptional in this sense, in a Brussels restaurant where the respondent hardly learned the topic of the interviews (in her case I was interested by the story of bi-national couples, since she was married to a German citizen), and began telling her story by herself, documenting it by Facebook pictures, highlighting aspects I wouldn't have selected but were very relevant; I almost had no reason to ask any further questions, having all the relevant topics of the issue covered, even surpassing the area I had aimed at: a natural born storyteller. Similarly, in the case of couple interviews, their unfolding varied from the type of interview where we formulate questions and the partners answer in order, and mostly the same order they answered in regarding the first question (first her and then him or the other way around), since this is the way they outlined as the norm; to a situation where him or her - we haven't discovered significant gender differences, in contrast with other researchers (Seale et al. 2008) - almost dominated the discussion; or to moments when the researcher remained, as a simple moderator, somewhere in the background (Taylor & de Vocht 2011) while the partners took over the role of interviewer. The interesting fact is that this interviewing behaviour on the subjects' side wasn't happening for the sake of the official interview situation, but because the interviewing partners wanted to hear ampler answers to the questions they hadn't yet posed. A good illustration of this was the intervention Gabi made to Edin's interview when he was asked whether he had had contact with Romania before he met Gabi. She learned who the first Romanian whom Edin met was, what other cultural references linked to Romania Edin had had before meeting her, and even led the discussion to the conclusion - somewhat disappointing to her - that Edin's encounter with Gabi's Romanianness was not very abrupt. Of course that we haven't necessarily learned more from this intervention of Gabi, full of curiosity, and from Edin's answers than we would have if we had an individual interview with him, but it was important for Gabi to learn these things. Often times the couple interviews we have conducted, online or offline, went into this direction, through conversation and/or the mutual questioning of partners.

> *E.: No, she wasn't the first Romanian person that I knew. The first Romanian person that I knew in my life... his name was Cornel Barbu, was a tennis player, a very impressive tennis player and in the tennis club we had a couple of other Romanian tennis players (…)*
>
> *G.: You played together?*

E: Yes. (…) It's true that, for instance, you have Romanian tennis players like Ilie Năstase and Ion Țiriac. You have famous gymnastics and also Romania is one of the most ancient nobility of Europe, which is also a positive point. In Belgium we have had also other information about Romania, about life there, we know, for instance, that you don't want to be an orphan in Romania, we understand that, we know that. (…) You have some famous linguists in Romania that I came across a little bit during my studies. I read a Romanian novel before I knew Gabi.

G: Eliade?

E: No, that came later, but I have read the novel of Gheorghiu, which is called ` "The 25th Hour". It's about religion. And, of course, I knew George Zamfir before, but you know, you have some aspects of Romania like I would have from other countries probably. Yeah.

G: So I was not something very, very, very new, exceptional.

E: No. No. I am also very aware that is also a Romanic language Romania. A Latin language. I didn't know that it was so far in Europe, geographically.
(Gabi and Edin, Belgium,Video interview)

Unveiling secrets through couple interviews

A quite interesting situation that appears in couple interviews is the surfacing of secrets that the partners have kept under silence, for various reasons, then from mere routine. The framework created by the interview sometimes touches upon forgotten or veiled issues, and then the old story surfaces within the discourse. The partner, present at the discussion, herself learns, together with the interviewer, family secrets that provide her with a new image of her own family. One of these situations happened within a couple interview in the Republic of Moldova a team member conducted. The central topic of the interviews carried out in the Republic of Moldova was the transnational relationship of those at home with their migrant children in Romania. Rada, a mother with a migrant daughter in Romania, tries to delimit her quite diverse family origins at the beginning of the discussion, a diversity rather typical for Moldovan families. Since she was thinking somehow that her daughter chose Romania over Russia, she considers it very important to mention her family's Romanian origins, and tells about her natural grandfather, the natural father of her father, who was a Romanian policeman landed in the Republic of Moldova when her town was under Romanian rule. Since Romanians were long considered invaders and enemies, the relationship of the Moldovan woman

with the Romanian man was seen as treason, and the young woman with a child from this relationship (the father of the narrator) was at the point of being lynched by the Soviets for this love story. Saved by the villagers, the young mother was quickly married to a communist who recognized the child as his own, in order t erase her shame and provide them protection. For the safety of the family this relationship with the Romanian man was then kept secret and remained under silence. Now the mother thinks that her daughter chose Romania out of a call of blood, as her father inherited his natural father's musical talent, as it were. In the family, not even her husband, her daughter's father knew the secret. Now, when history has turned and a relation with Romania is not seen as shameful anymore, on the contrary, many Moldovans see Romania as a Western target country one could migrate to for a social-economical upgrade, it seemed natural to Rada to unveil her Romanian roots to some Romanian researchers. The interviews often lead the participants to remember forgotten aspects of their lives or to answer to questions they would never have asked and thus rethink their own lives. Through the fact that her partner, Eugen, also took part in this discussion, he became a witness of events from Rada's family history, ones that concern him directly since they reveal of his daughter's ancestors. Maybe if Rada touched upon the issue in an individual interview, Eugen would not have learned of the Romanian origins of her wife. Maybe if Rada didn't consider it relevant until now to tell him, it might have stayed that way further on. But from an individual interview with Rada, the team would assuredly never have learned that the *secret* was kept even towards Rada's present day family. This information sheds new light on how perplexing the decision of youth to migrate to Romania must be for these families, many of whom becoming Romanian citizens, when their dreams were directed towards Russia, and in their childhood being of Romanian ancestry had been such a shame that it was swept under silence to the degree of not even telling one's own husband.

> *Rada: well, we are both born here; we used to live on different streets, nearby. We knew each other since we were small, even if we are at a distance of seven years. If… I don't know… I'm from a family of… the parent, my mother is from a seed of… Ukrainians and my father, of a Romanian and my grandmother, my grandmother Moldovan, with… was… she let herself into love with a Romanian gendarme [laughs]. Let me tell you a family secret! With a Romanian gendarme and in `35 my father came along and my grandmother didn't much want to tell, since it was very… In `40 the Soviets came and it was very strict and she had great troubles… My dad was five and the Soviets wanted to shoot her, I mean she had links with a… and they*

dragged her to the edge of the village and wanted to shoot her. They took her out at night, in a night shirt, and… but they were… she was eighteen my grandmother and she was going from house to house and was making food. She was a very good cook! And… the neighbours, the village came out with axes, with pitchforks, with… and the Soviets were afraid, from a scandal that is. It was not wanted, since then they had were already unwelcome and they left my grandmother alone, and to save my grandmother, to smooth out the whole situation, they married her to a communist here. With a communist with a pedigree, and they changed her family in no time and she came with my father and was married with… father, hence, was lived, raised, lived with a stepfather, but a very good father! Granddad was very kind, like a real granddad! I mean I asked grandmother once and she told me that my granddad was called Toader and he was a very rich gendarme, but that he proposed to her to leave then, in `40, but that she didn't want to. And that is about the story. Grandmother didn't want to tell anymore, since she was afraid. We were raised like that, and granddad was a ranger, he was a very well respected man. He was a communist. And this thing was hidden, it wasn't known anymore. And my father was and I think he also [inherited] something from his father, from my real granddad… since my father could play the accordion, he was a very creative man! And he wrote poems… he had… he was… mhm… he was a very… I miss him very much! [sighs] And he wrote music, he wrote verse… something like that. And I think that maybe this time too, this big girl… 'cause when I said that she was going to leave… I wanted in a way… I was raised among Russians and I thought that she would leave to Moscow to study. That's how I wanted it, and she told me: "Mother, I cannot live with your dreams!" Because I thought that Russia is a very big country and there are very big opportunities there! And perhaps… I don't know? Maybe the call of blood called her and she wanted Romania so much! And she said that she… I thought that I'll die on the spot, but she went away. She studied in Romania and never came back!

Interviewer: When did this happen? Beginning in high school?

Rada: She left during high school. Father should say something too...

Eugen: What should I say? You are right, in that you have told quite a big secret...(...)...

Rada: We are going to tell from now on! We tell, since time has passed....

(Rada and Eugen, the Republic of Moldova, video interview**)**

4. Concluding remark

Although very seldom used in family research, couple interviews prove to be a good source of diversification of experimental designs, since they offer reserchers new perpectives on the phenomena unaccessible through individual interviews, even simultaneous ones. This short essay, while trying to relfect upon the author's experiences in implementing a design that includes couple interviews, besides the sensitive questions researchers ask themselves when using this type of data collection - Why would I use this tool? How should I recruit the participants? How confidential are the data? What kind of data do I obtain? - aims at revealing novel aspects that surface through couple interviews as well, such as the takeover of the interviewer's role by one of the participants, or the unveiling of family secrets formerly unknown for the other partner. We hope for this article to join the ones that, through insights to a subjective research experience, provoke other researchers to take into account couple interviews in the design of their future research.

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The New Aspects of the Research Field

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Abstract: This paper discusses the new approach one can have during fieldwork and how the social media changed the way we view the interactions a researcher has with the people he interviews. From the contacts on Facebook to the online interview (somewhat new for migration research in Eastern Europe), it is easier than ever to contact the people you wish to have in your study and at a same time the question of the validity of the study deepens as we, as researchers, emerge into the social media and behind the screen more and more.

Keywords: social media, Facebook, Skype, online research, interviews, methodology, field research

We ca say that the role that social media plays in our lives is more and more obvious. In this context it's not only the way people relate to one another that has changed but also the way the researchers interact with the people interviewed or with their colleagues.

It is only natural that in the era of a migration that fluctuates and in the context of the globalization that we would discuss about a new method through which the people can communicate on a daily basis, and this new modality of speaking is on-line. All of these platforms as well as others that I have not mentioned give the possibility to be at all time in contact with the family and the friends that remained home. The internet connexion and a smatphone are the only two requirements for a communication with another person in any corner of the world, all of these at the user's fingertips.

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This technological revolution meant a new step forward for the migrants in the direction of maintaining a healty friendsship and family relationship, maintaining all of these relationship in a somwhat normal parameter (Nedelcu 2012).

In the specialty literature the subject of the new means of communication of the migrants is little explored, furthermore the context in which we wish to discuss a methodological application of the virtual relatity (Noy 2008) is even less accessed in the academic world. Even if the speciality literature is constantly trying to develop new means of research it does not mean we cannot discuss a trend observed nowadays in the case of researchers: to develop their networks through the social media. In order to exemplify this method we can underline the classic example of the researcher who used the snowball effect method to get to different subjects (criminals in this particular case), and because this researcher did not have acces to these subjects and his only alternative was to discuss to them through the access granted through other people he realized he needed to rely on others to complete his work, thus resulting in a new methodology discovered – the snowball effect.

I believe that in the case of the application called Facebook which is a social media platform we can discuss about the same typology when is comes to the methodology – it's like the snowball effect, especially when we are looking for certain subjects to help us. This is because of the message that will get through our friends (which in return will be able to distribute the message) and which in the end it will arrive to the person we want our message to arrive to. In other words the method used in the real world can easily be applied to the virtual world having the same effect, and sometimes it can produce better results.

The idea that Beneito-Montagut (2011) had launched is developed, the main idea of the virthual ethnography, the main issue here being the realization of an entire fieldwork through the means of online applications, such as Facebook or Skype. This fieldwork consists in doing all of the documentation for the migrantion through on-line means, and to create a new type of methodology which is based on internet access and the idea that any necessary information (especially when we are speaking about the fieldwork that has a main theme the migration) is only a few clicks away.

There are also researchers that consider that this new type of research cannot be valid because in the social media each one of us is creating their own identity thus there cannot exits transparency (Maranto & Barton 2010). If each one of us can be exactly who we want in the virtual world then how are we, as researchers able to find the thruth about the subject that interests us, and how would the interview develop? Furthermore, which is the line that is drawn between the researcher and the interviewee in the online environment? We can

state that people create easily the day to day mask they wear in the virtual world, and of course, behind a montor it's even easier to hide and/or deny our identity, but in the end the people who are willing to simulate a certain character will do it both in the on-line environment as well as in front of you, so the argument of the unsincerity cannot hold a big relevance. Also, a lot of time scientists conduct these interviews to people in their homes, and therefore invading their private space and intimacy, so this imaginary line that is drawn between the people that make the object of the research and the people conducting this research does not exist in the majority of the cases. Sometimes even this situation created through the on-line interview could be the key that opens the interviewee through communication, with the person being interviewed not feeling as exposed as in real life.

The ethics of using this methodological dimension comes into the discussion in many anthropological circles. More precisely, how can we develop this fieldwork style, to gather the necessary data if we do not get out of the internet bubble and all of the interviews are done through the social media (Zimmer 2010)? Thing get even more complicated as the participative observation dimension is compeltely lacking as a methodology, and this is actually a very useful methodology when gathering data. In an ideal research there is a combination of the two methodologies, which means that there is not only a gathering of information and realizing the field work on-line but we would also have the traditional research in which the researcher would go in the off-line world and speak to the people face to face. Another aspect that can help getting out of the internet bubble and not use it exclusively is if the interviewees are known before hand, if they are fiends, relatives or if we simply know them before conducting the research, if we have previously interacted in the past or if we met them outside of the virtual world.

Why is this aspect of such a great importance? By doing this type of observation when we go into a community of which we are not so familiar with their customs and therefore we can make our own image of them, in addition to what they tell us in the interview. We can create this complete image of them, more of an overall sight if we interacted with them in real life, if we were able to see their conduct outside on the on-line environment and not only the image they show on Facebook (which is higly constructed), and only then we can have an overview of the person which is necessary for a complete analysis of the data that we got on the field.

"Qualitative research must not bring with fixed epistemolofical implications. The researchers must decide which science they want to gather on the social world and in which way, but the epistemological assumptions, values and

methods can be inextricabily intrinsecs. This is applied in the case of research on the Internet, where they daily realities of the people are spatian and temporal (…) Internet, despite of an absence of a face to face inteaction, creates an envionment for the purposes of the research and offers considerable opportunities to study the world further from the point of view of individuals and of groups"(James & Busher 2009: 9).

This lack of face to face interaction is no longer a problem of the 21st century, this issue was eliminated through Skype, for example, the program that allows you to communicate in real time and interact with the help of the web camera, the microphone and the access to the internet. Thus, eliminating the doubt the researchers previously had towards who is answering their questions, who is the person behind the interview (and here we need to mention the pre Skype era or another program of this type in which they used other forms of on-line interactions – such as chat rooms or email.) These types of perivous on-line interactions in the virtual world caused a stir in the academic world as you could never know if the data you were collecting was indeed received from the people you were expecting (if you were speaking people you have not met in real life). The doubts had vanished with the appearance of Skype and applications as Skype, but there were still some other problems that remained, more precisely ethical ones, for example how personal or impersonal does the answer develop itself or how impersonal the interaction becomes in the virtual world. Again, we need to mention that there is not an obligatory impersonal interaction in the moment that the researcher and the person that is taking part in the study have the opportunity to see each other on the internet with the help of a video camera. In this sens we can argue that in the period in which the discussion is being done, which can take up to several hours, there is a bond going on, just as in the case of a face to face interaction.

There are also the benefits of re-interviewing someone with the help of the internet, and the social media platforms, whenever the researcher would want it. If before you had to redo a whole fieldwork because of some interviews you might have missed (and this meant a loss of resources, a loss of time and funds), nowadays it's sufficient to re-schedule an interview on line and in function of the time the interviewee has, and this can happen no matter of the distance, we can redp those interviews.

As a romanian researcher the participative observation was double- once as a romanian citizen, studying the society at a micro level, as well as a migrant outside of the country inc ommunities such as France and Belgium. In this way I could discover different patterns and characteristics of the habits of romanian

migrants while experimenting the participative observation even before starting the research project.

In order to better explain the phenomenon that has been created and the easy way in which these days we can do a research field, much simpler and much easier band faster than before the development of these means of communication, I will concretely exemplify with the fieldwork I have previously done in Great Britain, London, in april 2016. The fieldwork had as a main theme the study of the differences in the romanian migrant transnational families. In this case I have used Facebook (Baker 2013) to post a picture from London so that out of the 800 friends and aquantances (Allison 2012) which I previously had in my list would get the message of mine and my research team's location. Even in the first hour of posting the picture I received approximately five messages, of five different people which I met on different occasions and in different backgrounds. All these people lives in London or around it and all of them were curios of the reason why we came to England. By exaplaining them the reaserch topic and the situation I did was not only met with great kindness in which they were agreeing to be interviewed (every one of them was a romanian migrant, some of them with families there some without, all migrants that have been working in London for many years) but also material help (offering a place to stay or if wanted to go out to dinner). Not only that I got the interviews (because of the large number of people that accepted to do the interview and the relatively short period of time we had to cut some of them off) but we also got several reccomandations from their part of other romanian migrants that could be interviewd and answer our questions (Orchard et al. 2014). It is important to underline that these people, some of them, were people who I did not have friendship relationships with, but they were more in the area of some passive accuantainces, and these people had no problem in offering new contacts or a more practical help.

Thus, we managed through the snowball effect method to obtain more interviews than if we would have gained by not using the on-line environment. Furthermore the people's backgrounds was more diverse in which the charachteristics of the migrants is concerned –different jobs, different social status.

This new type of disseminating the information works because it is related to everything that is connected to everything that appeared after 2010 regarding the providing service area, and that is the rapidity in which a service offeres is developed or not. It is only natural that in this context, the way in which the migrants communicate with their loved ones back at home should also be a fast adn very fast one (Kien 2009). The new media used is much superior to the telephone (even though the migrants continue to alternate between the classic way

of communication which is the phone, and the new media like Facebook or WhatsApp), by using Skype (a program which is working through an internet connection and through wich the users can see each other through the web cam, can speak in real tipe through the microphone incorporated in the device and can even do conferences in which they can incluse more people in the discussion) people get the chance to see each other, to interact therefore the sensation of closeness is easily spread, this sensation is most probably interrupted when they communicate via telephone. The migrants have the possibility to send pictures of things at any time during the day, photographing any tiny detail on their smartphone therefore inviting their loved ones to take part in their privte daily lives.

When we discuss about the qualitative type research, more precisely the interview, we must mention that this has changet its interface lately. Out of reasons that are direclty linked to distance, the one between the interviewee and the researcher, today it is possible that they interact through a new communication platform such as Skype, which allows also the entire recording of the interview, and that also breaks down some barriers creating a safe space for the interviewee. The person is underthe impression that he is communicationg with a relative or with a friend (because of the dissemination environment of the information which is utilized a priori with the family) and the interview will not incorporate that specific awkwardness, but more like a friendly type approach. In this case the people accept much easier to be recorde, not only the audio but also their image, people have a native opening towards technology and using it and the researcher can have an easy acces to some people who live in different corners of the world without a problem.

During this research there were interviews that were recorded with people from Canada, United States or England (these are just to name a few locations) with the help of the internet connexion and Skype. These interviews could have had a very low procentage of happening because of the lack of proximity and funds to trave if they would not have been done through internet. Time was also shortened thoruhg the quick connection with the interviewee and time is also a resource which is of great importance when developing a subject in the field. This program is also valuable from the recording point of view, which means that through the telephone for example (if we are taking the latest form of communication before the apparition of internet accesibl to everyone) there wasn't really a possibility to accurately record the interview, either it was difficult and the quality of the sound made it hard to translate in a precise way. Through Skype and with the help of a complementary program the recording is saved directly on the computer of the researcher and the recording can be listened to

and viewed whenever it is necessary in order to make an accurate transcription of it.

The opening towards this type of interview is much bigger as the people give their time to the researcher without having the inconveniency to let that researcher fizically into their house to do this interview, and they do not have to go somewhere to meet the researcher. We can speak here about the double win from both ends- the researcher and the person being interviewd. This especially because of the habit of the people of surfing the internet all day nowadays but also the easy way in which they communicate using these means, thus we cannot speak about an emotional distance or a boundry that is between the researcher and the interviewee, but we can se it more in the light of a friendly rrelationship that is devloped in a normal environment and mostly natural for the romanian migrant, an environment in which the majority of his interactions take part.

Conclusion

In the internet era and the constant connection which we have between us, through which we communicate with our loved ones, we can say that from the sociological.anthropological point of view we need to allign ourselfves methodologically to the new type of interaction (Scolari 2009). Even if we can combine the clasic interview with Skype or do an interiwe fieldwork exclusively online with the help of the internet, finding some key community interviewees through Facebook and communication wth those through this type of platform can become a valid method. This methodology (Blaikie 2000) doesn't need to be treated as something exterior to the research but more like a tool through which we can advance and through which we can advance our research methods.

Because of the large number of the romanian migrants which contantly travel and not only between Romania and other country, but some og them also develop migratory processes through countries such as Spain (where they used to live) and England (Robila 2010), in function of the financial opportunities but also in function of members of the extended family that live in certain areas, their ways of communicating among each other is changing, and they are using more and more the mobile internet. In the sense where the majority of the communication between these migrants and their family had developed in the online environment it is only normal that there is the idea of the methodology and research „on the internet" (Piacenti, Rivas, Garrett 2014).

The technology has the role of helping us in our daily lives, and it was only a matter of time until this technology will be introduced in the research. These days the fieldwork and the interviews does not mean a high necessity of vast funds for travel, and it doesn't mean time lost in the means of transportation

(plane, train, car) and it does not have to mean extended resources both financial and human. The most important factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the time which is one of the most precious resources. When the researcher doesn't have that waste of time with the travelling to other cities or countries, he can focus on other aspects of the research and can develop the research in a shorther time and more efficiently from the point of view of the resources involved.

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Video Research in the Study of Transnational Families

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Abstract: This paper exhibits and puts to questions the main challenges involved in the research methodology on the subject of transnational families. The data analyzed are the result of the first fieldwork campaign undertaken as part of a bigger research project on the topic of transnational families. The first part of the fieldwork was done in several villages from the rural area of Suceava and Bistrița Năsăud, counties characterized by a larger than usual migration rate. The main objective of the research consists in analyzing the strategies through which the transnational families manage their specific way of life. In this context, the project implementation team has assumed the role of developing an innovative methodology in this domain, that will combine qualitative field research methods with visual recording methods and documents (photo and video). This methodology will be represented through *composite video*.

Keywords: innovative methodology, transnational families, migration, video, composite video

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Although an area that we can say it is still at an early perpetual stage in Romania, visual studies get materialized in institutions in two important university centres: Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca. In both cases there are master programs having as topics the documentary film and the society.[1]

The visual studies field seem to have been lost in the debate *To whom it belongs in fact?* The example of the two programs of study is representative for the stated dilemma. Assuming that no matter which side of the barricade we may be, we would lose a perspective and valuable tools in the approach of a research project, the project team assumed the existence of a *liminal* situation[2].

The central objective of the research project entitled *Confronting the difference through the practices of transnational families'* rests in the analysis of strategies through which transnational families manage their lifestyles specificities. Given this objective, the team members have sought to identify both everyday practices regarding the functioning of transnational families and the specific situations in their lives (eg, developing new patterns of behaviour with regard to marriage (Anghel: 2008: 9-10), increasing the number of mixed couples, having children with dual citizenship, the phenomenon of "display" of families (Ducu: 2013: 42-45 etc.). The concept of *difference* (the difference of lifestyle, the different image that this type of family has in the middle of the original community, "at home", and in the host-country) is seen as central in the analysis of this type of family.

In this context, the project implementation team has undertaken the development of innovative methodologies in the field, combining qualitative field research methods with visual methods of recording and documentation (photo and video). An important component of this methodology is precisely that of creating a bridge between visual anthropology, documentary film and qualitative research in the context of this research project. As we have mentioned, although in Romania there is some interest in the documentary film, we believe that, unfortunately, very few people in the industry understand that a good documentarian is a good anthropologist and that the documentary needs anthropologists, and anthropologists need film people when they want to produce a video / documentary product.

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[1] MA in visual studies and society, SNSPA, Bucharest and an MA in Documentary Film, Faculty of Theatre and Film, UBB, Cluj-Napoca, (MA in English Documentary Filmmaking).

[2] The choice of this term is not accidental and is based on the connection with the concept of *liminality* (see V. Turner 1967, Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage. In V. Turner, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 93-111, Cornell University Press). The authors adhere to *liminality* by virtue of a connection between this concept of "tradition" in the social sciences and the actual state of transnational families - always caught between two places: that of origin, "home", and the host country.

We note that the situation looks quite different in the West. Academics debated the appropriateness and relevance of research visual methods in social sciences starting from Margaret Mead (Mead: 1975: 3-10) and until these days by means of the studies of Marcus Banks, Jay Ruby, Claudia Mitchell and others. Going through the works of these authors, in fact relevant to the history of visual studies, we stopped however on an article that we consider of great importance for arguing the option in relation to our methodological tools. It belongs to Claudia Mitchell and represents the foundation for choosing this type of methodology in our research project (Mitchell 2011:159-176). Throughout the book (Mitchell 2011) the author revealed the importance that visual methods can have in the qualitative anthropological research, both as ways of investigation, of information, as well as modes of representation. The chapter mentioned (Mitchell 2011: 159-176) additionally provides us a key for the dilemma of being located in one field or another, developing the concept of *composite video*.

"A composite video: a video research, a research instrument, a communication instrument is more than just a video (or images recorded in a video). This is a stand alone production, with a beginning, a middle and an end. It includes a narrative, (told through a voice of a narrator or through title slides, subtitles or other text), fragments of visual data, (photographs, participatory videos, drawings) contextualized with data such as frames recorded during the research and often using musical background in certain parts. What is important lays in making a product that allows different strata of field research convolute as a composite." (Mitchell 2011: 161)

The fluidity of relationships and of the intimate space of the family is no longer a novelty in contemporary Romanian society. The migration process has only served to accelerate and emphasize this transformation of the concept of "family" in research literature. In the past 10 years family has evolved from the classic conceptualization of everyday practice (same surname, same address in the identity card, sharing the same physical space), acquiring new dimensions.

In search of the best possible methodology to capture this flow of transformation, the project team chose to investigate this process through innovative tools that allow the reconsideration of the link between anthropological research and photo-video. At this moment of research, the composite video seems to give us the most valid blend between the qualitative-anthropological research and the photo-video one. The added value of this tool lies in its double meaning, both for researchers as well as for those involved, both groups being able to use this material as a communication tool.

Also, it may serve in the process through which the field data archive is recovered even after the moment when the research was completed. The composite video provides a continuous flow of information that is created because of an open field for interpretation (Mitchell 2011: 162). As the author metaphorically says, "the composite [v]ideo contributes in some way to the *afterlife* of the research projects." (Mitchell 2011: 162)

Thus, our choice regarding research methodology was born from the wish that the object achieved by the team through this project should also reach the general public, and in this regard we believe that the visual material is the best choice. At the same time, we wanted our creation to go back in one form or another to the people, our subjects. In a certain sense, we intended through this methodology to reveal the many facets of transnational family ethnography. We consider relevant in this respect the idea that David MacDougall stated in 1978 (MacDougall 1978: 422), according to which the meaning of the ethnographic film appears in the triangle formed by the film subject, its director / creator and the audience. The statement can be certainly applied to photo-video products achieved in the context of quality-anthropological research.

Through this option for this methodology, we wanted to achieve the personification of our subjects. In other words, we wanted to portray those who agreed to share their life stories. We could say that this was the big challenge. Anthropological research practice involves ensuring anonymity. What we have proposed by using a methodology which involves the photo-video component opposes this practice. You cannot both portray someone, and also ensure the anonymity of that person. These first challenges followed the one in the field, all these opening a Pandora's Box from which new situations arise one by one. In what follows we will review the main challenges that the team encountered during the first field trip. All these are situations experienced, we believe, by all researchers who have used during a field research this type of data recording.

A first type of challenges consists of the technical problems. Thus, as researchers, we cannot fail to notice that the camcorder, camera, equipment generally made the access to the community harder for us. People are less willing to talk to you, or if they are, they are often more reserved. In addition, all the necessary equipment can cause technical problems: there are cases where, because of the heat / cold, you have a hard time in properly using the equipment; sometimes something would not work at all or would not work properly; most often it happens that the intensity of light is not the one we wanted - often looking for the best natural light, we find that in winter we are

unable shoot after 5 o'clock; and in terms of sound recording, we "fought" with the desire to use a microphone attached to the camera (which would raise considerably the quality of sound), but we gave it up because it would have created a discomfort to the interviewee, thus opting to use the microphone integrated in the camera and the separate recorder for the audio recording of the interview. All these are technical details which often affect image quality and thus the quality of the final product.

Somehow, all these limitations imposed by the technique on a particular field make us talk about the second great challenge, the one represented by aesthetics. We can say that the option to follow the rules of composition of a frame when we make an interview or when we shoot the images adjacent to the interview is not the most inspiring thing when we shoot in this type of research.

Working with people and having to rely on their goodwill in much of the work we do on the field, to build frameworks that take the aesthetic side into account beyond the content appeared to us often as secondary. We do not work with actors, but with people - and people can have certain preferences regarding the way in which they want to appear before / to be represented by means of a camera. Most often, the setting where we shoot is a given one, in different homes or spaces more or less suitable for such activities.

In the second year of the project, to all these challenges it was added a problem that we had not had it in mind when the project was conceived. This was materialized in terms of the quality of the filmed material during field research. Most times, when we were watching the video recorded during the field, we realized that this represented a doubling of the audio portion and could not support an individual montage longer than a few minutes. Obviously, this detail was not new for us - we were aware that we would reach this point and that it would have to consider making a plan to eliminate this limitation. In this context, the project team chose the last field to be designed around the idea of recording a material whose destination is (was) solely for the final assembly. Thus, in carrying out this last field, team members have worked as a film crew during the production of a documentary - certain characters were chosen to be videotaped, there were some shots in a certain part of the day and in a particular context, thought a thread linking these interviews. This decision came as an extension of the idea that a video interview / visual material would most often rely on a wide range of other parameters than an interview / audio material did. Unlike audio interview, where the character details as charisma, the recording, sound quality, etc. are almost insignificant, in the case of visual material they do qualitative difference between the successful

and the unsuccessful montages. In addition, the processing of audio interview, the researcher has a handy set of tools (theoretical contextualization, bibliographic references and notes, content analysis etc.) which does not hold when performing a video. Basically, achieving a coordinated assembly works on some coordinates that are based on another language: not every story lends itself to be told in a visual language. With this decision we assumed to use footage recorded earlier in video composite solely, which to be concentrated on a theme or a particular character.

Finally, though not least, a major challenge is the one represented by the montage of the product that we will create – which are the images that we will use, what are the questions and answers that remain and to what extent the anthropologist who runs the discussion will be present in the shooting? In general, people do not feel the need for the anthropologist to be present in such a video product. This entails a number of technical details and decisions, including changing the interview technique. For example, if generally the anthropologist encourages the interviewee by resuming the phrases which he/she utters when filming, we learn to communicate more often by mimicry. Otherwise, the post-production part will consume a lot of time and resources. And in such a project we do not have any of these components excessively. Talking specifically about a case, that of a lady who had two daughters living abroad, we realized that there is one more human dimension which we had not thought about before going in the field: what if one of the interviewees begins to cry, what do we do? Do we stop the camera? Do we continue to shoot? What do we cut when we make the montage and how much do we leave from the footage in our final product? Thus, we wonder, even in this early stage of research, what will we do when we make the final montage? How long will we leave the story to be told and to what extent will we tell this story? Eventually, the realization of such a type of product that falls somewhere on the border between research and film, is a challenge, and if we believe we do not direct when we make a documentary film / video, we're sadly mistaken. Quoting a famous professor in visual anthropology, Michael York, *all documentarians direct, but only some of them admit doing this and some others do not*. Where we will place ourselves in relation to this assertion remains an open question.

To give time to the subject and the characters you are approaching in your documentary is an essential feature which reflects the quality of the final product. However, through its essence the documentary can constitute a qualitative type of research. The documentary is often seen as an adjacent part of the anthropological research or like a sub-field of cinematography. Because of this, most of the time, for a documentary that is produced in Romania we

can feel the lack of the necessary time to construct the research and contour the subject, as well as finding the best options for representation in the post production part. Starting from a theoretical foundation that emphasizes the relevance of the use of photo-video tools in qualitative-anthropological research projects, we argued in the first part of the article the choice of the composite video as the basis of our research methodology. In the second part of the text we inventoried the main challenges we faced during the implementation of the first field trip of the project, inevitably at this early stage of research. In conclusion, our perspective reveals the importance of a complementary, interdisciplinary view in anthropological research.

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Environmental Portraits as Means for Depicting Transnational Families

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Abstract: By examining interviews with photojournalists, research in visual anthropology and observations made during field study, it become clearer and clearer the need to identify a new method to convey the information regarding the difficulties transnational families deal with in everyday life.
This paper makes a case for the usage of environmental portraits as a means of study for the relationships between family members in transnational families, but also as a new method to disseminate the research results regarding transnational families from Romania. Environmental portraits are generally used by photojournalists to display their subjects in their natural environment and, in doing this, to give more information about their personality or about the issues they are dealing with. The method employs a new type of presenting the results to a wider public, in which environmental portraits are coupled with relevant quotes form interviews.

Keywords: visual methods, photography, photojournalism, environmental portraits, transnational families.

1. Introduction

Given my background as a photojournalist, I was in front of a dilemma when invited to participate in a sociological study on the subject of transnational families. How to use my skills in a meaningful way? Would they be of great help or would they be an impediment?

Photojournalism is defined as journalism in which written copy is subordinate to pictorial, and it usually involve photographic presentation of news stories or in which a great number of image presentation is employed. (Editors 1972)

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The core values of photojournalism involve: truth and accuracy in presenting the story, fairness and impartiality no matter the personal standpoints or objectives, independence in practicing the job, humanity in depicting stories – even the more challenging and sensitive ones. (Editors 1972) There are different types of approaches in photojournalism, and generally developed towards the following directions: (1) Feature photojournalism - where activities are the main interests (exhibitions, movies, business, technology, etc.); (2) Sports photojournalism – as the name says, it involves sports (games, players, events etc.) and (3) Environmental portraits – where the essence is the subject placed in his/her natural setting. (Kobre 2008)

On the other hand, methods in sociology are quite different, and visual methods were for many years developed toward two directions: visual records produced by the researcher and visual documents produced by those under study. Their main concerns were about issues of documentations (Edwards 1992; Scherer 1990) and issues of representations (Fyfe & Law 1988). However, in recent years the dichotomy between the observed and the observer has begun to disappear and another kind of representation has emerged: the collaborative representation (Banks 1995). This approach involves a direct collaboration with subjects in the production of visual and text information.

In the context of migration, the study of transnational families offers opportunities to experiment with photography and visual research methods. Even though social researchers encounter images constantly, either as part of their everyday life or as part of the lives of those they work with, it seems that many times they don't find the way to incorporate images into their professional practice (Zeitlyn 2015).

Considering all arguments above, we propose a new method that allowed our research team to combine some of the core values of photojournalism (truth and accuracy, fairness and impartiality, independence, humanity) alongside with methods of research from visual anthropology – like collaborative representation in which the researcher produces visual representation by collaborating with the social actor (Banks 1995).

The first field work done in several villages from the rural area of Suceava and Bistrița Năsăud turned out to be the best opportunity to test the assumption that environmental portraits are a method to obtain visual data but also to give a visual representation to the subjects of the research. The result is a photo album that exemplify the usage of environmental portraits as part of disseminating the results of the larger study, combining two experiences, the one of the photojournalist and the one of the researcher.

2. Background

The use of photography as a method in social research has been addressed by numerous scholars (Becker 1974; Caldarola 1985). But, using social research requires a theory of how those pictures get used by both picture makers and viewers. Before using photography as data or as data generators, we need to stress out the theoretical foundation for using photography in qualitative research.

For many years, photographers were thought to reproduce the reality of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report. So, the photograph become just a receiver from which viewers withdraw meaning. This approach fails to take into consideration the process of constructing photographic meaning. Taking photos is a dynamic interaction between the photographer, the subject, and the image. And the meaning is actively constructed, not passively received (Schwartz 1989). Barthes (1964) depicts photographs as "poly-semis" because of their capability to generate multiple meanings in the viewing process. The description Byers offers is quite similar: "the photograph is not a "message" in the usual sense. It is, instead the raw material for an infinite number of messages which each viewer can construct for himself. Edward T. Hall has suggested that the photograph conveys little information but, instead, triggers meaning that is already in the viewer (1966 : 31)."

What that implies? The fact that treating photographs as objective evidence ignores the process of both image making and interpretation. For the social research to benefit, the use of photography as research method must be grounded in the interactive context in which photographs acquire meaning (Schwartz 1989). Having that context in mind, we can ground our theory in the photography as social transaction.

When it comes to use photography in dealing with social issues like immigration, most of the well-established photographers use documentary photography and/or photo stories. Compared to photojournalism, documentary photography offers a lot more space for visual interpretation of the subject. In the case of most photo stories, the photographer spends a lot of time with the subject, in order to better understand and portray the issue documented.

The 2006 fall issue of *Nieman Reports,* entitled *Global Migration and Immigration: Stories and Images About the Journey* represents a good starting point for analysis of the way photojournalists use their tools to document migration. This collection of stories and images takes us from "what is going on in Europe today", to "the new attitude toward migrant workers in the Chinese

news media" and back again to "the troubled lives of immigrant youths who turn to gang membership in the United States, then are deported and bring gang affiliations and activities to Central America." (Ludtke 2006).

In these long-term documentary projects, we come across the images of well-established photographers and documentarians such as Sebastiao Salgado, Lester Sloan, Donna DeCesare, Don Bartletti or Pat Shannahan and we get a much deeper sense of understanding on what immigration is all about. "People have always migrated, but something different is happening now. For me, this worldwide population upheaval represents a change of historic significance. We are undergoing a revolution in the way we live, produce, communicate and travel. Most of the world's inhabitants are now urban. We have become one world: In distant corners of the globe, people are being displaced for essentially the same reasons. In Latin America, Africa and Asia, rural poverty has prompted hundreds of millions of peasants to abandon the countryside. And they crowd into gargantuan, barely inhabitable cities that also have much in common. Entire populations have moved for political reasons as well. Millions have fled Communist regimes. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe then freed many more to seek out new lives. Now, with the imposition of a new world political order, ethnic and religious conflicts are spawning armies of refugees and displaced persons." (Salgado 2006)

3. Methodology

Why the need for a new approach? Photography can place additional time demands on the research process in multiple ways. Time to take photos. Time to research. Time to establish a connection with the subject.

First, the researcher has to take into consideration the time needed to obtain access and permission to photograph the subjects in their natural environment. Second, but even more important, the time to build a kind of connection with the subject, needed to obtain meaningful information. In our experience, there were several times when people who accepted to do a recorded audio interview, did not accept to be photographed. Third, there is the actual time spent photographing the subjects. And fourth, the time spent editing archiving or analyzing the resulting images.

Usually, a documentary photographer or a photojournalist does a thorough research of an issue and tends to spend a long time photographing, in order to cover as many angles as possible. A field research interview is the exact opposite, living the photographer involved in a research project with a limited amount time and only a few choices of portraying a certain subject.

In order to avoid the time constrain of long period documentary photography, we looked at the possibility of doing environmental portraits to gather visual data. Environmental portraits blend posed subjects with their environment to symbolize jobs, capture personalities, and ultimately communicate something about them to readers (Douglas 1997). This method is a good opportunity for photographers to create portraits that show both the subjects and their surroundings, using the setting to symbolize an aspect of the subject's life or personality, or simply to lend atmosphere or graphic interest to the composition. When the subject is unfamiliar, the environmental portrait offers an engaging, challenging way to tell a person's story in a single frame. "While some photographers prefer the controlled environment of a studio, others like the opportunity to document someone in their surroundings. To shoot a successful environmental portrait, photographers need to be skilled at lighting, composition and problem solving. They also need an understanding of their subject and a way to communicate their insights to the viewer". (Hughes 2012).

4. Consideration on the field research

The field research[1] conducted by a research team in three Romanian communes (Prundul Bârgăului, Dorna Arini, Jidoştiţa) three towns/cities (Cluj Napoca, Turda, Drobeta Turnu Severin) in the past year offered the opportunity use environmental portraits as means to gather visual data and to give an image to the subjects of the research. To process of photographing posed a couple of problems that need to be solved. In the photojournalism tradition, it's a must to have the name of the person you photograph while in sociology research the custom is to ensure privacy, by using pseudonyms. People were asked for names and if photography and/or video is allowed. There were situation in which a person who allowed a video or audio interview, did not allow to be photographed and the other way around. In this situations, the visual data was not collected, only an interview was conducted. Some of the photographs were taken during the interviews while other were candid situations that happened either at the beginning or at the end of the interviews. More than 25 persons were photographed, either in their home, familiar environments or at the location of the interviews. In some cases, details were photographed to underline key aspects of the discourse of the interviewee.

[1] The field research is part of the project *Confronting difference through the practices of transnational families*, http://transnationalfamilies.ro/.

Other issues were of technical nature. Some of the people interviewed were available only late in the afternoon which affected the amount of light available on certain locations. Dark interiors, rooms with only one window or poor illumination did not offer the best conditions to take photos. Because the documenting process also implied recording video, more batteries and memory cards were needed, along tripods and sound equipment. These had to be carried and set up at each interview. Several times, the set-up of the equipment triggered changes in the behavior of the interviewee and in one case a direct refusal of photographing certain areas of the room.

The resulting images were gathered and selected based on both the quality of the image, technical and aesthetic, and the information gathered during the interviews. The presentation of the photographs took the form of a small photo album, the groundwork for a future photographic exhibit. The amount of post processing was minimal, in order to preserve the visual information as accurate as possible.

In 1990, as The Associated Press made its transition to digital processing of its images, Vincent Alabiso, Etecutive Photo Editor, released its unequivocal internal policy regarding photo manipulation. "As imaging technology becomes more sophisticated, more accessible and more seductive, basic journalistic tenets remain the standard. Simply put: pictures, like words, must always tell the truth." (Alabiso 1998)

The context is the one that provides meaning to images. If photographers do not provide an explicit context, the viewer may or may not construct one using his own resources (Dancu 2009). Most photographs need words to help them work their magic, like star performers need a stage. Photo captions do that work by providing a framework for images so that audiences will respond to them in the way intended by the photographer.

Taking the time to properly identify your photo and video images is an absolute must. This is true whether you're submitting photos as part of a pitch to traditional media, embedding a video within a blog post, attaching a profile picture for a company bio or uploading photos to a photo-sharing site like Flickr. (Junker 2012).

In order to present the result of the research in a different way, the focus of the words displayed next to the photographs is intentionally set on quotes. Their purpose is to reveal key issues and results of the scientific research in a more mundane manner.

Transnational communication not only provides information exchange between "the ones who leave" from the family and those who "are left here". It is a way of life, a practice that makes the two parties merge, each living

permanently something from the reality of the other. […] the family members in the country, sometimes the elderly, invest in this communication: they buy tablets, pay their own internet subscription, they pay subscriptions to physical or mobile networks that give them a chance to communicate with the departed in a very much cheaper manner than if the others would call. This happens because mobile operators in Romania have adapted quickly to the demand and made special offers for the communication with overseas. (Viorela Telegdi-Csetri 2015)

As an example, the quote from the interview with Mihai V. "*Yeah, it is not easy to see them every 6 months, but we use the opportunities to communicate with these ... tiny, how can I call it, mobile phones. At first when they appeared they were like stones! My girls have bought a phone and when I took one myself ... they said it's for girls so that I would give them mine. I had international minutes on the landline subscription",* coupled with a detail image of the phone he was holding convey in a graphic and easily understandable manner the research results quoted above.

Foto 1.

Migration does not just take a meber of a family to another country, leaving the others at home: more likely, migration is an experience of the whole family, when the family is functional – those that stay are cognitive and emotional as departed. (Viorela Telegdi-Csetri 2015)

> "*He was married, he left to work abroad, in the meantime ... his wife left him ... divorce and tribulations and hardships. And he struggled so much because the girl remained with her mother after divorce and fought and helped her return to him when she was 10 and gave her to us. He still cares for her, of course, it's just ... She's in high school now, in 10th grade, she's good, obedient ... she is comforting us a little bit.*" said Elisabeta B. from Dorna Arini.

Even if the niece was not there for the interview, her presence can be observed through the multitude of framed pictures of her in the background. In the case of this elderly couple, the interview revolved around the life of their son and the way he managed to get their niece back after a failed marriage. The quote and the photo selected are intended to give a voice to their story, both textual and visually and to exemplify the idea that migration is an experience of the whole family.

Foto 2.

Further methodology research is needed to validate if this way of using quotes and environmental portraits ads a layer of understanding to the researched topic. Pictures are not just forms and shapes; they show things and people. How much we care about those things and people affects the power of the image over us (Goldberg1991).

We looked at how photographers can tell a person's story in a single frame with use environmental portraits and agreed that the interpretation of the massage coded into images rests upon the shoulders of the viewer. The photographer assumes a degree of subjectivity by framing a certain subject instead of another or by simply selecting certain part of a scene in his photograph. The process of selecting one single frame out of a series is also subjective by nature. In the case of the old couple taking care of their niece a total of more than 50 frames were shot during the interview but at the end only one was selected to be coupled with a quote. This was done having in mind the actual quote but also aesthetic values of the image their gestures and details in the background. The result combines visual information with textual information in a product that brings better understanding of the subject.

This process was recreated for each image used in the photo album. Out of the whole take, about 50 images per interview, a smaller number of images was selected, about 10, based on aesthetics and content. The end photograph was selected by

As photographers and researchers, we can use a method that combines this type of portrait with relevant quotes from interviews to give a visual representation to the subjects of the research and to ease the understanding of the issues and challenges faced by transnational families.

5. Conclusions

My background as a photojournalist helped me a lot in dealing with the challenges of working in a team conducting a sociological study on the subject of transnational families. Some of the issues encountered during the field research were pretty similar with the ones I faced as a professional: difficult conditions to photograph, subjects sometimes reluctant to the camera or time constrains. My experience helped me overcome these issues in creating and collecting the visual content for the research. Heaving a highly visual team member offers the possibility of generating an extra layer of information. The way the visual information is used and disseminated represented a challenge.

The resulting photo album represents the way in which the two approaches were combined. The research offered insights on transnational families, insights that were summarized by the quotes of the subjects and paired with

the selected environmental portraits. This way, the resulting product is easily readable by the public and also concentrates on the most important facts concerning transnational families.

The usage of environmental portraits as a means of study for the relationships between family members in transnational families, but also as a new method to disseminate the research results regarding transnational families when coupled with quotes from field research proved to be the right approach. This project aimed to find a new multidisciplinary method to convey the information regarding the difficulties transnational families deal with in everyday life.

In Romania, the usage of visual research methods in teams that bring together professionals with different backgrounds are still at the beginning. Further research could prove if this approach is accurate both for the study of transnational families or sociology studies in general.

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BOOK REVIEW

Viorela Ducu and Aron Telegdi-Csetri (Eds). (2016). *Managing Difference in Eastern-European Transnational Families.* Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford: Peter Lang: , 190 p. ISBN 978-3-631-70236-9 (print), DOI 10.3726/978-3-631-70237-6.

The volume "Managing *Difference* in Eastern-European Transnational Families", edited by Viorela Ducu and Aron Telegdi-Csetri addresses important questions of family transformations in Eastern Europe in an age of intensified transnational migration over the last thirty years. It covers three main thematic fields: the role of gender in transnational families' arrangements, transnational and bi-national couples, and the effects migration has on children. The editors argue that a focus on Eastern Europe as a frontier zone provides a lens to study difference in the 'persistently shifting domains of power and empowerment, domination and subversion by choice, hegemonic discourses and displays of social existence, legal-political frameworks and practices of living and coping' (p.13) The chapters cover a wide geographic area including both EU and non-EU countries from Eastern Europe, drawing empirical material from the Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Albania Hungary, and Serbia. This provides a chance to emphasize the unevenness of the Eastern European space and the emerging and transforming internal frontiers expressed in varying policies, that inform different degrees of rights and entitlements, and ultimately shape a variety of practices. Centring the analysis on the question of the transnational family, the editors and the authors in this volume, seek to shift the analytical focus from a top-down approach and look for various modes of practicing and performing family relations. The insistence on analysing the processes of 'doing families' and 'displaying families' in a transnational context provides a fresh and informative perspective in the field of migration studies focusing on Eastern Europe.

The chapters in the first section cover the questions of transnational fatherhood (Tolstokorova), the role of familial ties for coercion in cases of labour and sexual exploitation of Romanian migrants (Hilario Pascoal and Schwartz), the concept of emancipation among Romanian migrant women (Astilean), and motherhood-work conflicts for Albanian workers in Greece (Xhaho, Caro).

The second part analyses the effects of transnationalization of the family through the lens of couples: bi-national couples and their children (Ducu and Hossu), challenges for Chinese-Hungarian marital unions (Kovac), and the issue of egalitarianism and gender equality among Polish migrant couples (Zadkowska, Szlendak).The third part focuses on the problems faced by children left behind from the perspective of the already grown-up children of migrant parents from the Romanian country side (Rentea and Rotarescu), and on the human rights aspect of transnational adoption (Perovic).

The main contribution of the volume is the rich empirical material on issues that have been little researched in the context of Eastern Europe. The diverse topics covered by the studies allow the reader to gain a wide understanding of the pressing problems and challenges that migrants and their families are facing in the context of intensive intra-European labour migration. A few of the papers are worth a special notice for raising particularly salient question. The contribution by Pascoal and Schwartz describes in excruciating empirical details the role of emotional family ties for the coercion of Romanian women in Italy into both working under unfair labour conditions and into sexual exploitation. It provides an excellent presentation of the complex structure of dependencies that span across generations and across space, showing vulnerability as a relational quality that expands beyond the economic disadvantage. The main contribution of the paper is in the emphasis on the importance of shifting beyond a perspective on the individual and reformulating the unit of analysis (and indeed intervention) at the level of family and kin relations, but also community power structures and dependencies.

Another important point taken by some of the papers, is taking seriously the role of the fathers and husbands in discussions of migration effects on parenthood and family making (Tolstokorova, Zadkovska and Slendak, Xhaho and Caro). Analysing the emotional trials and the practical challenges that migrant men are facing both as fathers and as husbands is a fresh breath in a literature dominated by discussions of transnational motherhood.

The chapters analysing family arrangements of bi-national couples make two important points. The definition of family relations is culturally and socially constructed, but it is also negotiable and flexible. Different ideas of the hierarchy of kin relations in regard to solidarity and obligations between generations, spouses, and blood relatives make Chinese-Hungarian unions face serious challenges (Kovac). On the other hand, bi-national couples residing in third countries and speaking a 'neutral language' and adopting 'neutral

strategies' for raising their children represent a newly emerging trend in which ideas of family belonging and cultural inheritance are negotiated and remade (Ducu and Hossu).

Finally, a focus on the grown-up children who were left behind by their migrant parents (Rentea and Rotarescu) allows for a longitudinal analysis of some of the effects of family separation, and the conflicts arising between emotional and everyday care and economic support. Particularly interesting is the point on how these affect the future plans of the grown-up children and shape their aspirations, but also the sense of obligation towards their parents and towards themselves.

However, the main lens that the editors employ in their introduction – the question of doing and performing a family, is also the one that is most difficult to address with the approach that most of the papers adopt. While the empirical material of many of the papers provides a basis for expanding the notion of family and for looking into changing patterns of relations, and of new emerging dependencies and solidarities, analytically all papers employ a rigid and narrow definition of family as a two-generational nuclear family of parents and children. Relatedness and kinship are complex constructions that have been widely addressed in the anthropological literature.

Engaging with these analytical concepts and borrowing from scholarly fields beyond migration literature might have provided a sounder analytical foundation and allowed for a more flexible conceptualization of how relations are being made and sustained. Another point that is generally missing from the analysis proper is the wider socio-economic contextualization and a discussion of the underlying structural inequalities that shape particular social actors' trajectories and experiences. Perhaps with the exception of Pascoal and Schwartz' contribution which implicitly demonstrates the power relations in which the low-skilled and economically disadvantaged migrants are entangled, the rest of the papers somewhat surprisingly skip altogether such discussions. Finally, a more rigorous contextualization both in terms of geographical comparisons and a temporal perspective, could have made the arguments of some of the papers sharper. Male labour migration is not a new phenomenon, both as internal labour migration and as international labour migration within the Soviet bloc. Children being taken care of by their grandparents in the countryside while working class parents are working in the urban industry has been a prevalent strategy during socialism.

Transnational migration does indeed bring a new shade into these questions, but family doing from a distance, or cross-cultural families (e.g. interethnic and inter-cultural marriages within the same state) have long history

in the region, but also globally. I this sense, a historical and comparative perspective would have allowed to better tease out the peculiarity and novelty of the analysed practices, or indeed to better understand the deploying of similar practices in a new context. That said, the volume is an original and valuable contribution in the field of migration studies and transnational families' analysis which provides an enjoyable and informative read.

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The *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* is published twice yearly by the Centre for Population Studies. The journal is included in the EBSCO, ProQuest and C.E.E.O.L databases.

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