

# MIGRATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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**Rezumat:** Legătura dintre migrație și relațiile intergeneraționale a constituit rareori un subiect de cercetare sociologică, fiind considerat de la sine mergător în toate procesele specifice migrației. De fapt, relațiile dintre generații sunt un subiect al sociologiei familiei, împreună cu câteva concepte clasice ca solidaritatea sau de la sine înțeles relațiile etice. În cazul migrației, considerăm că relațiile sociale sunt influențate de cadre și valori specifice și că cercetarea calitativă a acestor itemi poate fi folositoare în cadrul cercetărilor cantitative complexe. În acest articol am vrea să prezentăm unele considerații exploratoare despre influența migrației asupra relațiilor intergeneraționale.

**Cuvinte exploratorii:** relații intergeneraționale, migrație, sprijin, relații etice, legături familiale.

**Abstract:** The connection between migration and intergenerational relationships was rarely a subject of social research, because it was taken for granted in all the specific processes of migration. In fact, relationships between generations are a subject of sociology of the family, together with several classic concepts like solidarity or ethic relationships. In the case of migration, we consider that social relationships are influenced by specific frames and values and the qualitative research of these issues can be useful in complex quantitative research. In this article we want to present some exploratory considerations about the influence of migration on intergenerational relationships.

**Keywords:** intergenerational relationships, migration, support, ethic relationships, family bonds.

**Résumé:** La liaison entre migration et relations intergénérationnelles a rarement été un sujet de recherche sociologique, étant considérée comme allant de soi dans tous les processus liés à la migration. En fait, les relations entre les générations sont un sujet de la sociologie de la famille, à côté d'autres concepts classiques comme la solidarité ou les relations éthiques. Dans le cas de la migration, nous considérons que les relations sociales sont influencées par des cadres et des valeurs spécifiques et que la recherche

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qualitative de ces concepts peut être utile dans le cadre des recherches quantitatives plus complexes. Dans cet article, nous désirons présenter quelques remarques exploratrices sur l'influence de la migration sur les relations intergénérationnelles.

**Mots clés:** relations intergénérationnelles, migration, aide, relations éthiques, liaisons familiales.

## Introduction

Intergenerational relationships have changed over time. Nowadays the need for close intergenerational relationships in the same home is in rapid decrease (J. De Yong Gierveld, 1998). The ancient model of multiple families' cohabitating or extended families is abandoned in a modern or post modern society. Thus social relationships tend to be individualistic and solidarity – minimal. Another important factor is the economic dimension; in fact, a direct consequence of industrial development was the nuclearisation of the family with two important phenomena: isolation of the family from the kinship relationships and reduction of the familial group (Parsons, 1955). An important issue in studying intergenerational relationships is demographic evolution in migration context (Netedu, 2008). During a decline in fertility and a general process of ageing of the population, certain authors mention a verticalisation of the intergenerational family (Bengtson, Rosenthal, Burton, 1995). In other words a low level of entries (as births) and people who share an increasing period of time (due to the increase in life expectancy) are observed. In the recent past it was normal to have three or four generational levels that co-existed in the same time, but rarely in the same home. In this context, intergenerational relationships are very different due to social classes, mentalities, social capital etc. But whatever the growth of the family, the relationship between members have some important characteristics as seen in specific social research (Segalen, 2011): the parents-children relationships are more important than the relationships between brothers and sisters; out of the three generations the *middle women* are strongly responsible in care giving to the other two generations: the children and the elders; in households the mother-daughter relationships remains very important and the help of the mother is crucial in raising children or in domestic activities; a vast majority of grandparents take care of the grandchildren during holidays and a third of them babysit their grandchildren a couple of days a week; the elder have an important role in resolving family crises; the intensity of relationships increases as geographical distance decreases between families; intergenerational relationships are based on affectivity. Affectivity is very important if we agree upon the idea that family remains the only institution where people can establish survival strategies, and where at the same time the State has no responsibilities to guide or survey. (see Anghel, Horvath, 2009; 184)

### Migration, social worlds and conceptual schemes

The link between migration and social world at a conceptual level is an important key that we can apply for our study. We can cite this idea from D. Sandu (2010; 19):

“The migrants belonging to the same society/community and living in proximity of each other constitute *social worlds*, spaces of strong institutionalized life (formal or informal) in terms of modes of thinking and action. These spaces tend to have strong identity traits.”

In the center of this conception D. Sandu quotes the idea of *conditional matrix* (A. Strauss, 1993) understood as patterns of thought, evaluation or action and of social identity. In terms of A. Strauss the conditional matrix is a research tool which can be especially useful for studying complex social phenomena. In previous research, (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the conditional matrix is represented by “a set of circles, one inside each other”. For our exploratory study, we represent the inner circle from two perspectives: that of social representations (attitudes and values) and that of kinship (the strongest family bonds). The outer circles will contain those social representations and relationships more and more dissipated. The central circle represents the generic family and its specific values, and as we move outward, we reach the transnational family, at different stages, and in which human relationships are modified following circumstances (Cingolani, 2009; 185). In this context, we will observe migrants' interpersonal relationships varying according to the situation: presence or absence of children, intentions for permanent migration, intentions to invest in Romania etc.

In connection with the conditional matrix, we can define the concept of *social world of migrants*, which can be seen in the context of intergenerational relationships as holder of specific traits: migration can influence the relationships between blood relatives. In the *social world of migrants* we can identify specific forms of solidarity, forms of responsibility, forms of care giving and forms of mentality etc. *Specific differences in intergenerational relationships* can be identified for different forms of migrations: migration for work/for study, temporary migration/permanent migration, legal/illegal migration, internal/external migration, spontaneous migration/pre-arranged migration (for details see in Anghel, Horvath, 2009).

Another theoretical perspective is that of migration as a *total social fact* in terms of M. Mauss (see Mauss, 1997). In this case it is recommended to study this phenomenon from multiples perspectives: economic, cultural, religious etc.

### Previous research on migration

After 1990, migration in Romania has proven to be a very important phenomenon and its scientific research has developed. It is the merit of professor

D. Sandu who conducted numerous studies in this area (see Sandu, 2003, 2010) connecting different data sources (National Bank of Romania, INS<sup>3</sup>, national or international surveys coordinated by himself etc.) in order to explain such a complex phenomenon and to predict the volume of migratory feeds where there is, unfortunately, a lack of information. One can find information on intergenerational relationships in some studies, but it is only fragmentary. Here are some of these studies:

-*Community census of migration*, 2001, coordinated by D. Sandu (see Sandu, 2010; 80). It is noted that the departure of the migrant is initially based on social capital but after the arrival, it is the human capital which is more important. Part of the social capital (relational) is certainly intergenerational but it is extended to the entire social network of actors.

-*Temporarily living abroad*, 2006, coordinated by D. Sandu (see on site <http://www.soros.ro>). It is stated that the ways for finding a job were by way of kinship (for Spain), by way of friends and kinship (for Italy), by way of friends abroad (Turkey, Hungary) and by way of mediation firms (for Germany, Israel etc.). In some cases we can, of course, identify specific familial relationships. A very important observation is that along with the growth of the family, grows the number of family with migratory experience. In the final report, in a chapter called *Family relationships* (Toth, Toth, 2006) it is stipulated that a family with migration experience faces important issues:

- changes in familial roles.
- possible misunderstandings, confrontations, loss of affectivity or affective support; divorce.
- possible neglect of the children.
- in the families concerned, the gains in quality of life are considered more important than the costs generated by the separation after departure of family members abroad.

These conclusions were obtained using statistical techniques. Generally speaking the analysis referred to the familial couple, to the husband-wife relationships and occasionally to the children. The subject of intergenerational relationships is very seldom mentioned.

-*The effects of migration: the children left home alone*, 2006, Soros Foundation Romania. The representative sample included the school population from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade with one or two parents at work abroad. This report showed two categories of effects on the children:

- positive effects (superior standard of living, travels and holidays abroad)
- negative effects (damaged relationships with the parent at home, lack of help in school activities, depression, consumption of prohibited substances,

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<sup>3</sup> The National Institute for Statistics, Romania.

delinquency). Where intergenerational assistance is not available, it is the task of the school to help the children. Unfortunately, sometimes relationships with social workers or psychologists are difficult. For the children, the core value in life is family, even in the case of attachment centering on grandparents.

- *Analysis at the national level on the phenomenon "Children left at home" after departure of the parents to work abroad*, 2008, UNICEF and Alternative Sociale. In this research it is stated that usually the child stays at home in the extended family (with or without grandparents). Encounters between migrant parents and children are very rare (in average one meeting a year) and communications by phone average once a week. Communicating on Internet doesn't match the quality of direct communication. The authors observed that social assistance of these children poses many problems: from the legal aspects to the relationships between organizations involved in preventing certain risk situations.

### **Exploratory secondary research**

We made a secondary analysis using interviews made during practical research in our department (of sociology). Our aim was to identify other characteristics which describe intergenerational relationships – other than those already pointed out in previous analyses. From interviews made in Italy<sup>4</sup> in 2006-2009 and in 2010 we identified certain differences between categories: migrants living with their children abroad, migrants who left their children in Romania. After this stratifications we added two other categories: migrants for study and migrants who returned to Romania.

#### ***a. Migrants with children in the destination country***

With these emigrants we observed a strong focus on the family and children. Generally speaking we saw a relative *isolation* of these families, firstly within Romanian migrant communities and secondly from the intergenerational relationships with the friends and family who live in Romania. We cite a generic example:

M.A., 36 years old, lives in Turin with his wife and daughter. He works as a chef's helper. To M. A., the main reason for which he left Romania was, 'probably, the lack of money, then there are a lot of things I don't like in our country... I don't like the corruption, I don't like the bribing...' Also, his intentions were 'to offer as much as possible to the family, a future as good as can be offered'. The focus on his own family is obvious: 'when you arrive abroad, you don't have any more friends, no one helps, you now, on the contrary they're glad if

<sup>4</sup> Interviews realised by Daniela Feraru in Italy in 2006-2009 (15 interviews) and 2010 (30 interviews) and used in different papers (2006, 2011)

you're in trouble'. In his own family, his relationship to the child is a priority: 'if my child wants something, I offer him it because it's my child, I have to, and I'm morally obliged to offer him it'.

Relationships with the parents left in the country are visibly simplified: 'I help them the way I can, in a certain measure, but, I don't think it's so much... I offer them small presents at great intervals of time, I think it's normal, since they're parents'. Even so, M. A. thinks this is enough, as in Romania he could only help his parents with advice. As of the native country, 'nothing links you to it, other than family'. One of the interesting situations is that of older migrants whose children were already abroad prior to their own migration. In this case the relationships are ambiguous: from 'living together' to 'total separation'. An older woman, aged 62, went abroad to raise her grandchildren, and another, 58 years old, said that her children don't have big enough salaries to help her, so they live separately (and she sleeps outside).

The presence of young children with the migrants is very important for the decision to remain in the destination country. The fact of children having entered the educational system in the arrival countries is of equal importance. In these cases, relationships with the family and relatives in Romania became poor or inexistent. The need to invest in Romania decreases. In fact a lot of migrants emphasized that none of the earnings would be shared with relatives from Romania.

### ***b. Migrants with children in Romania***

This is the case of migrants that leave their children in Romania with or without their natural mother. The perception of the departure is different. 'There is no place like home, but what can we do, we have to sacrifice ourselves in order to achieve something' (said G.I., male, 34 years old, three children left at home). And many migrants thought the same. On the other hand, for other migrants it is impossible to have their children live with them: 'What would they do here? Starve to death?' (said T. V., female, 44 years old, two children left at home).

Unfortunately, there are many cases of children "abandoned" at home by the migrants. Many sociological studies worked on this subject (see Lupu, Stangaciu, 2009) but we would like to mention here some case studies of these children<sup>5</sup>. Some of these cases are impressive- when it comes to migration and intergenerational relationships. For example the case of F.C. (male, 17 years old) whose mother - aged 34, lived in Italy for seven years (never returning to Romania for the last 4 years), and whose father is a bodyguard. Together with his younger brother (16 years old), he lives with their maternal grandparents (56 years old and 58 years old) in their apartment. The maternal grandmother had been retired for

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<sup>5</sup> Case studies realised by G. Pascaru (2007).

five years because of illness, after having worked for 35 years; the grandfather was immobilized in bed, in convalescence after several surgeries and after a diagnosis with metastatic esophageal cancer. In this case the strong intergenerational relationship doesn't succeed in stopping the deviant behavior of the father (who was arrested) nor that of F.C. (entered in a probation system after he had abandoned school). Due to the mother leaving home, the father abandoned his children and their grandparents to go live with his mistress, this in very bad conditions (imminent evacuation from her apartment).

We can identify a destructuration of intergenerational relationships and migration is one of the many variables concerned. The migration rushed the destructuration of the familial relationships, but a pattern of this destructuration is difficult to generalize. In other cases intergenerational relationships were changed by the intrusion of other persons related by kinship: uncles and aunts. Unfortunately, in many cases like these, the intergenerational relationships are unclear and the reactions of children are rather those of avoidance. In many cases the children that are left with their grandparents develop severe educational problems and find difficulty in adapting to their old value system.

### *c. Migrants for study*

Analyzing the motivation to study abroad can be another important subject of social research. Here we resumed a study containing 15 interviews with Romanian students who study at Lille, France. These interviews were made by the authors, in the 2009-2010 academic years at the University of Lille 1. Almost all students said that the motivation to travel in France was the wish to do so since childhood. This desire was encouraged by enthusiastic French language teachers they had met in school. Sometimes, in their family, parents or grandparents gave special attention to learning French. In other cases a Masters student had been in France with her parents since the age of 8. Very interesting is the fact that the wish to study abroad came after a migrant experience of the parents and/or as a result of complicated intergenerational relationships. We observed that the desire to leave Romania in some cases is driven by a trend of migration of the family, not only in France but in other countries of Central and Western Europe. One parent is usually emigrated. For IC, 21, sophomore in sociology license, this is the case of the mother. She had left for Italy two years before, to work in services for the elderly, to provide a better future for her family (three children) who was facing financial difficulties. Another cause of the departure of her mother is represented by the problems between her and her husband. The two elder brothers of I. C. had found work and moved away from home, leaving her alone with her father. Thus, for IC the departure represents the output of an embarrassing family situation. The mother of O. C. , 24, a third year student of BA in Sociology and present in Lille for a year and a half, had also gone to Italy to work in the same sector of employment, in

order to support her three children, the parents having been separated for several years. The whole family had encouraged this student to study in France. The arrival of O. C. in this country is not only the result of family migration trends but also an attempt to provide for her, thus facilitating the task of her mother.

#### ***d. Migrants who came back to Romania***

The economical situation in some European countries makes the life of the immigrant difficult. In some cases the immigrants are the first proposed for dismissal. However, many former migrants come back to Romania. We read some interviews made by one of our graduates I. Pasăre (2011). He interviewed ten migrants who had come back from Italy, Greece, Turkey, Czech Rep. and Serbia. The great majority of the migrants had left Romania helped by friends, relatives, parents and the motivation was mainly of economic nature. Only two of the subjects surveyed had used work agencies to arrange the departure. All the migrants evoked discrimination at work due to poor social and cultural integration. The intergenerational relationships were present abroad mostly for men and not for women (in many cases the Romanian women stayed home with older people). Intergenerational relationships appear to be broken when one parent has migrated. Only one migrant declared that the relationships with parents did not suffer because of their parents living separately. When the wife and children lived in Romania it was very difficult for migrants to save money. The return in Romania had some typical explanations:

- economic strengths and the critical situation on the labor market;
- finding a job in Romania better paid than it would have been before departure (due to newly achieved experience in a foreign country);
- longing for home (not linked to strong intergenerational relationships);
- health problems;
- migrants' wish to put their children in Romanian schools.

Unfortunately all the surveyed migrants consider the actual situation transitory and the solution is to return abroad. Generally speaking the return in Romania is seen pragmatically in connection to the nuclear family but not in relation to intergenerational relationships within the extended family. Reintegration in Romania is difficult (most migrants see Romania in a negative manner). The return from abroad is not related to other kinship relationships (grandparents for example).

#### **Conclusions**

We intend to present some conclusions without the aim to generalize our results. This is a consequence of the fact that there is little research on

intergenerational relationships linked to migration, and also that this research represents a secondary analysis.

In accordance to the view of T. Parsons, we observe the tendency of nuclearisation of the family, directly influenced by the migration phenomenon and this process affects intergenerational relationships. We cannot conceive the weakening of these relationships in terms of distance alone, but also and necessarily in terms of migrants' interests or objectives. Intergenerational relationships tend to be strong in helping raise children, in presence of the intention to invest in Romania, or when the parents or the grandparents also go abroad. On the contrary, they tend to weaken when the migrant family lives abroad *with* the children (already entered in the local educational system), when resources are low and remittances are rare, and when there are no intentions to invest in Romania.

Beside the circle of the nuclear family, the emotional bonds to the relatives decrease (we have not met migrants who went back to Romania due to emotional bonds with kinship). Affectivity is replaced by an analysis in terms of cost and benefits (as an alternative for survival). In extreme cases, emotional support is suddenly interrupted (abandoned children or family) bringing radical changes to the structure of the family or of the extended family and even its dissolution.

A special case is the migration for studies. In this case, intergenerational relationships can determine the will to migrate, either in a positive way (the family supports the member wanting to study abroad) or in a negative way (the students use migration for studies as a way to escape difficult family situations).

The deconstruction of the intergenerational relationship can also be observed in the case of migrants who permanently returned in Romania. While their departure depends on these relationships, they restructure in time, and do not constitute the cause of the return (migrants don't think this return to be permanent). Generally speaking, in our opinion, the deconstruction of these relationships represents an extra cost of migration while other institutions cannot compensate for their weakening or absence. The reactivation of these social networks only by interest is a sign of weakening of the strong ties (see Granovetter, 1973). In this case, we can rethink the ethics of intergenerational relationships as a subject of social research at a national and European level. We didn't identify, among the migrants, the intention to support older generations as an *ethical preoccupation/obligation*. The remittances are addressed primarily to the nuclear family and the children, and even there emotional support can be severely weakened.

This phenomenon can be the subject of future research, due to the complexity of the social world of migrants, and it can be extended to greater samples in different countries.

### The authors' contribution

The contribution of the authors was as follows: A. Netedu is responsible for the documentation and secondary research; A. Chmilevshi is responsible for documentation and in depth analysis for study based migration.

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