

THE NORMATIVITY OF MIGRATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL CARE IN THE POLISH-GERMAN TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE

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Migration and care are normative in terms of the social expectations, obligations and common-sense which they involve. Intergenerational care in Poland is recurrently characterized as being highly binding in terms of filial responsibilities in home-based care arrangements. The on-going high rates of emigration therefore ought to challenge intergenerational care arrangements. The majority of research proves, however, that migration does not dissolve migrants' care obligations toward their relatives in the emigration countries, but that they persist with some modifications and adaptations to its distant character. Previous studies therefore connect migrants', and to a lesser extent their relatives' in the emigration countries, care practices to the normativity of the distinct "care culture" in Poland. This article explores the idea that practices and obligations of intergenerational care are inherently tied to the social expectations and meanings attached to migration. Twenty interviews with Polish migrants in Germany and ten interviews with their relatives in Poland reveal how the binding character of familial care arrangements and high rates of emigration can co-occur in that transnational personal relations, between migrants and their non-migrant relatives, support the familial and home-based care arrangements by relational adaptations. The adaptations involve (self-)exclusions from (among others) mobility based on the intersection of previous migration experiences, the closeness of the family relationship as well as generation and gender, placing close, female and immobile family members (i.e. daughters) in a de-privileged position in transnational relations.

Keywords: Polish migration to Germany, intergenerational care, mobility capital, transnational families

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the European Union expanded towards the ‘East’, with 10 new countries becoming member states¹. Among those countries, Poland, due to its large population and high rates of emigration has significantly impacted the discourse on Europeanization, intra-European migration and the inequalities within the European Union in recent years. The reasons for why so many people emigrate from Poland are often found in its “migration culture”, making migration a ‘normal’ way of life organization with the normativity, social expectations and meanings associated with it. It is therefore conceived of as social processes which lead to the emergence and perpetuation of distinct migration patterns. In case of regions of Mexico with high out-migration, Kandel and Massey (2002) observe that for some people, in their example – young men, “migration becomes a rite of passage, and those who do not attempt it are seen as lazy, unenterprising, and undesirable as potential mates” (Kandel and Massey: 982). Migration therefore is not a mere movement through space, but it involves differences in life-chances, power and control over resources. The significance of spatial mobility as a resource and its interrelationship with social inequalities is aptly described in the term ‘mobility capital’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2001, Broderson 2014)². As all forms of capital, its value is not universal but depends on social processes of recognition, ascriptions and valorizations in specific contexts. Furthermore, it is unevenly distributed within social spaces. While legal restrictions and/or a lack of economic or social capital are discussed frequently as reasons for hindered mobility, mobility capital refers to people’s ability to move, as well as the social valorizations and ideologies of being mobile (Bonß and Kesselring 2001).

Among the many different realms where mobility capital is unevenly distributed, family life is an especially relevant one. This is because family life and migration shape each other in many ways. Families’ well-being may be a trigger for migration and maintaining a family life across borders an important way to orient oneself after migration (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Familial relationships are characterized by various obligations, expectations and commitments among which intergenerational care is considered to be the most

¹ Besides Poland, the new accession countries were Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia.

² I understand mobility as a broader term involving movement through geographical space (spatial mobility) as well as within stratification systems (social mobility). International migration is a sub-form of mobility through space because it involves crossing borders. International migration can involve social mobility in terms of upward or downward movement within stratification systems due to transferring from one society to another.

binding one. The high significance of care is emphasized by many scholars, who stress that care provided by families is “among the basic needs of a citizen” (Nussbaum 2002: 192) or even “one of the primary functions of societies” (Claassen 2012: 43). Although challenging, care obligations remain binding from a distance, in that they are being modified and adapt to the migration situation (Krzyżowski and Mucha 2013). As it is easier and more convenient nowadays to stay in touch across borders through forms of communication and travel, some forms of care can be provided at a distance, though predominantly in extraordinary situations such as child birth and surgeries (Baldassar and Merla 2014), while many daily care tasks require a local caregiver (Vullnetari and King 2008). Despite changes in gender and welfare regimes, in European societies care tasks are predominantly conducted by women (Bettio and Plantenga 2004). Poland is among the countries with comparatively high rates of familial and home-based care arrangements which is referred to as its distinct “care culture”³. Scholars observe that in Poland intergenerational care obligations still are highly normative denoting who cares for whom and being supported by social contexts such as labor markets and welfare regimes in which they are embedded (Krzyżowski 2011).

In the light of the 2004 accession of Poland to the EU, much research was conducted on the various facets of Polish migration to new destination countries, such as the UK and Ireland, but also Iceland and Norway. The studies focused on the dynamics and modifications of transnational migration, family life, social networks and social reproductive needs (Ryan et al. 2008, Lopez Rodriguez 2010, White 2011, Cieslik 2012, Krzyżowski and Mucha 2013). The analyses also concerned the gendered dimensions of transnational migration. Among the most prominent topics are mothers, who migrate without their children. Public debates refer to those children as “Euro-Orphans”, mainly because motherhood from a distance, even in cases where fathers or close family members take care of children, contradicts (Western) motherhood norms and was discussed as a negative side effect of European unification (for a critical overview, see Urbańska 2009).

Recent studies on Polish migration predominantly focus on newly arrived migrants who are often described as young and well-educated, which means that their migration is mainly considered as temporary and many of them do not (yet) have care obligations in Poland. Scholars yet note that many of the newly arrived migrants express that they would return to Poland in case their relatives

³ The term “care culture” refers to the ways in which persons and institutions are expected to provide care. In this respect a “care culture” is synonymous to a “care regime” (for a definition, see Lutz 2008).

would be in need of care, but also when they will have children themselves (Cieslik 2012). The fact that Polish migrants wish to raise their children in Poland is related to the differences many of them experience between Polish and “Western” caregiving. These differences are usually binary, in terms of collectivism and familiarity in Poland versus individualism and institutional care in western societies (Cieslik 2012, Krzyżowski and Mucha 2013). As many valorize familial care positively, some of them consider returning to Poland in case of childbirth or care for their elderly family members.

The values of care are not different between migrants from Poland in the new destination countries and in Germany, yet the Polish-German migration is to some extent different to the migration from Poland to the new destination countries because of its long-standing tradition, spatial proximity and often troubling collective history. This has led to a dense and well-developed social infrastructure as well as meanings attached to it. Moreover, for many migrants from Poland who nowadays live in Germany, their migration was meant to be permanent and influenced the migration decisions of their relatives and patterned relationships between migrants and their relatives in Poland. Care arrangements and migration decisions adapted to a situation in which some family members have migrated for good. These are not random, but process alongside the closeness of the family relationship as well as generational and gender differences. As migration is not only a mere movement through space, but is also associated with meaning, abilities and necessary experiences gathered through movement, these who are constructed as immobile and excluded from “mobility capital” face limitations in access to resources and in their life-organization. These constructions place daughters in a de-privileged position in transnational relations.

I will set my argument forth as follows. First, I will provide an overview of the research methods and methodology as well as a short overview of my data. Second, I will discuss what we know about Poles in Germany. Third, I will illustrate the meanings of migration in the Polish-German transnational social space given by respondents. Fourth, I will shed light on the division of care tasks within transnational families between migrants in Germany and their relatives in Poland – mainly in terms of care for elderly in Poland. By doing that I aim to contribute to the research on migration, transnationality and social inequalities by emphasizing that mobility is a relevant form of capital, which is unevenly accessible, and is often interrelated with care obligations.

STUDYING THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE WITH A MULTI-SITED RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is conceptualized as multi-sited (Amelina 2010). The main argument for multi-sited research is that the nation state can no longer be considered the natural unit of analysis. Therefore, research should address the multi-locality of attachments, social practices, and belonging. The ways data are collected shall be open to the spatial references respondents use. The overall question of the research project, that this article is part of, concerns the exchange and distribution of informal social protection across borders⁴. In pursuing this question, not only the instruments of data collection were designed in a way that it did not contain references to socio-spatial categories, such as Germany, Poland or another country, but also data were collected both in Germany and Poland.

The data in this article stem from 20 semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in 2012 in medium-sized German cities. There were also 10 semi-structured interviews in Poland, where interviewees in Germany provided contacts to their relatives. The sampling aimed at reaching a heterogeneous sample in terms of the time of migration, legal status, gender, class, and age. This followed theoretical sampling as well as snowball sampling with multiple entry points. The sample in Germany had an equal gender distribution with an age range from 22 to 67. Of these, eight respondents had Polish citizenship, eight had German/Polish dual citizenship, and four were naturalized German citizens. Eleven were married, four were single, three were divorced, and two were in an on-going relationship. Thirteen had at least one child, ten had a university degree, seven had completed vocational training, two were students at the time of the interview, and one had graduated from secondary school. Respondents with degrees had received them in both countries. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted in Polish and the other seven in German.

Ten interviews were conducted in Poland (three female friends, two mothers, two sisters, one female cousin, one daughter, and one uncle). This was influenced by matched sampling procedures (Mazzucato 2009), i.e. respondents were asked

⁴ The findings presented in this article stem from the author's involvement in the CRC 882 "From Heterogeneities to Inequalities", project C3 "Transnationality and the Unequal Distribution of Informal Social Protection", funded by the DFG (German Science Foundation). For more details on the research project, see Faist et al. (2015) and on data collection and analysis see Bargłowski et al. (2015b). This article was crafted during my stay at UC Berkeley and I am grateful to funding by the Bielefeld Graduate School of History and Sociology (BGHS). I want to express my gratitude to Łukasz Krzyżowski and Paulina Świątek-Młynarska, who were involved in data collection and analysis and, last but not least, to our respondents who shared their stories with us.

for contacts to their significant others. The interviews were semi-structured, aiming at a comprehension of the migration history and different forms of social protection, in the realms of care, financial support and exchange of information, locally and/or transnationally. The interviews were analyzed with social scientific hermeneutics, which mainly operates with sequence analysis in order to reconstruct meanings and processes of meaning-making (Amelina 2010).

POLISH MIGRANTS IN GERMANY

Transnational social spaces often connect countries which are characterized by multiple asymmetries, among which the most often discussed are socio-economic disparities. These asymmetries affect the human dynamics and social relationships of actors located within such transnational social spaces (Carling 2008). Poland and Germany are connected by a long migration history which started in the nineteenth century and was characterized by intense flows between the two countries. This has led to the development of a currently large and heterogeneous population in Germany. For most of their collective history both countries were characterized by disparities in socio-economic, political, and institutional conditions as well as moving frontiers and processes of expulsion and resettlement. An early account of the asymmetries between both countries was provided by Max Weber, who in the years between 1892 and 1905 visited Poland when he got involved with the “issue” of Polish agricultural workers in German territories. He describes Poland and its inhabitants (mainly Polish agricultural workers) as rural, less civilized, and backwards. Although this was a long time ago, these asymmetric perceptions appear to be deeply rooted in the transnational social space between Poland and Germany. When Poland was under socialist regime, one main encounter with the ‘West’ for most people was Western Germany, which represented freedom, economic security, and social stability. While many people migrated from Poland to Germany with various motives and in different legal circumstances, their expectations tended to be that their lives in Germany would be easier⁵. Therefore, the German-Polish space, like many others, is characterized by meanings and ascriptions attached to both countries.

⁵ Anna Amelina (2011) discusses a similar discourse in the Ukrainian-German transnational social space in her article: “An intersectional approach to the complexity of social support within German-Ukrainian transnational social space”, in: Chow E., Texler Segal M. and Tan L. (eds.), *Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities: Global, Transnational and Local Contexts, Advances in Gender Research*, special issue 15(2): 211–234.

After 2004, emigration from Poland experienced new dimensions and dynamics. In contrast to Germany, which has allowed for the free movement of workers in 2011 after a transition period of 7 years, the United Kingdom (UK) opened its labor market and allowed settlement directly after the new accession countries joined the EU. What followed was a large migration influx from Poland to UK and Ireland. Polish citizens had previously migrated to a low extent to these countries, but soon became one of the region's largest immigrant groups. It is hard to estimate how many Poles have emigrated until now, where they went and for how long. Some studies refer to an estimate of around 2 million Poles, who migrated or were mobile across borders during the period between May 2004 and December 2007 (Glorius et al. 2013: 9). Considering that the majority of Polish migrations headed to UK and Ireland, it is no wonder that studies investigating the impacts, reasons, and dynamics of their migration have become prevalent in recent years.

It is not only difficult to assess the extent of migration flows but also it is hard to predict future migration dynamics. One indication that Germany probably is again a favorite destination country for people from Poland is the 2009 "Social Diagnosis", which arrived at the result that Germany is back in the first position with 30.4% of potential emigrants who chose Germany as their preferable immigration country as opposed to 20.6% of potential migrants in case of the United Kingdom (Diagnoza Społeczna [Social Diagnosis] 2011).

Two characteristics are associated with Polish migrants in Germany. They are either considered as largely invisible because of their "silent" adaptation process or as "units of labor" (Kilkey et al. 2013). While the public debates in Germany are largely concerned with more "problematic" migration populations, such as migrants from Turkey or recently from Romania and Bulgaria, the main portion of scientific research addresses the economic activities of Poles in Germany⁶. Polish migrants have been conceived of as an "army of leprechauns" (*Heinzelmännchen*) (Wagner et al. 2013: 55), who come to do the "dirty" work, such as caring, cleaning, or constructing, and then leave (Lutz 2008). They also remain low-key due to their "unproblematic" processes of settlement (Schmidtke 2004, Boldt 2012). Although they form the second largest immigrant group after people of Turkish origin, the presence of Polish migration in the local landscapes in Germany contrasts starkly to the great amount of Polish shops and churches in new destination countries like the UK. Polish shops in Germany are less easy to spot when compared to the Turkish ones. The reasons for why immigration from Poland is

⁶ Research investigates the "demand side" of labor migration from Poland to Germany (Dietz and Kaczmarczyk 2006), their processes of circulation for work between countries (Morokvašić 2004), entrepreneurship (Miera 2008, Nowicka 2013), and migrant's economic networks (Elrick and Lewandowska 2008).

not so visible in Germany are manifold. Until the post-socialist transformation many people migrated as “ethnic Germans” and treated their migration rather as returning home, than immigration. Many others faced difficulties in emigrating and their emigration was experienced as an escape. For both, the “ethnic Germans” and those who managed “to escape” maintaining identification with Poland and remaining in Polish networks, if ever desirable, was challenged. Moreover, during the socialist times the issues were not only legal barriers to migration but also moral ones. Emigration contradicted the socialist propaganda of Poland as the “socialist paradise” (Garapich 2011) and especially during the 1980s people were encouraged to fight the socialist regime (Erdmans 1992).

While before the post-socialist transformation, the migration of Poles to Germany was rather meant to be permanent, because they were not “free to leave and come back” (Morokvašić 2004: 7), after the transformation, and due to spatial proximity, the Polish-German social space was characterized by frequent border crossings. People thus often led “bivalent” lives (Łukowski 2001) by working and living in different countries. After 2004, many circular migrants settled with their families in Germany. However, we do not yet know how permanent their settlement will be. Hence, the perspective on migration that frames commuting versus permanent residency as part of a dichotomous relationship is no longer appropriate. Many migration projects involve short-notice decisions about whether and where to migrate and how long to stay. Migration (within the European Union) is therefore best conceived of as an unstable processes of settlement (Amelina and Vasilache 2014) and associated with historically grown “migration cultures”.

THE MEANING OF MIGRATION IN THE POLISH-GERMAN SOCIAL SPACE

Being mobile, or the ability to be mobile, can be conceived of as a relevant form of capital, i.e. as “mobility capital” (Murphy-Lejeune 2001, Broderson 2014) and an allocation mechanism in the transnational stratification ladder. Zygmunt Baumann (1998) argues for the enhanced significance of mobility for contemporary life-chances as “local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation” (ibid.: 2–3). With those discourses, mobility has gained a symbolic meaning beyond the mere physical movement through space. The significance of mobility in contemporary societies to making a living, and the ideologies and social expectations attached to it liken mobility to other forms of capital, e.g. economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms (Bourdieu 1983). In this sense,

capital is inherently related to differences in life-chances. It can also be understood in the Weberian way as the opportunities of individuals and collectivities to access desirable resources and to improve their quality of life or satisfy their needs.

When Poland entered the European Union in 2004, new legal conditions allowed people from Poland to enter the labor markets in some European Union countries. The process of European unification was accompanied by “the official rhetoric, according to which EU-internal mobility contributes to a wealthier and more prosperous Europe” (Amelina and Vasilache 2014: 109). Obviously, not everyone welcomed free mobility from the new accession countries. Public debates addressed fears about burdens on national labor markets and social security systems. They revealed the inequalities within the unifying space of the EU and showed how nations are eager to protect their accumulated privileges. From a historical perspective, Poland experienced different emigration waves, which were partly carried out on a large scale. The scale, speed, and to some extent also the destinations of emigration after 2004 took on new characteristics (Burrell 2009). These migration dynamics are experienced by respondents in my sample frequently as an “emigration boom” in Poland after it entered the European Union. Migration as a possibility of life-making addressed not only the typical migrants, which were considered less educated and from the peripheral regions of Poland or those who for various reasons could not adapt to the post-socialist reality, but also people who did not think of migration before:

My husband received a job offer from the States, but it didn't work out, when the crisis in the States started. And then we thought, all Poles thought, I mean that a lot of our friends moved to England, Ireland, that was a boom, a social movement a lot of friends from my studies live in England, my sister lives in London (Andželika, aged 40, Germany).

We would migrate, if my husband and I would find an appropriate job according to our education. We don't want to migrate for pure financial reasons, but more to get to know another culture, living a bit abroad (Dorota, aged 30, Poland).

I was thinking about migration, and my sister (she means her cousin Andželika) tries to really persuade me. But honestly, I am a bit afraid and I like Poland, because they speak Polish here. (...) And I am afraid of being isolated from my family (Basia, aged 23, Poland).

These quotes exemplify the migration dynamics, which appeared after Poland entered the EU, but which have their roots in the long-standing tradition and high rates of emigration. In many regions of Poland, international migration

became a common social expectation for making a living. Informal networks, as in the case of Basia and her cousin, influence migration decisions and yield subsequent migration or non-migration. The negotiations about decisions to migrate between migrants and their immobile family members alludes to the significance of transnational networks in explaining migration patterns, indicating that migration is, to some extent, a self-reinforcing phenomenon (Faist 2000). Besides manifest persuasions within families, the high numbers of emigrants lead to many Poles having contacts to someone who went abroad. These contacts tell stories of success in Germany or “on the Islands” (Nowicka 2014: 176). The stories of success after migration and having a better life are another and more latent form of pressures towards migration. Migrants and non-migrants are engaged in social expectations and imaginations about what migration would mean to them, creating “imagined opportunity spaces” (Kindler 2009). The lifting of legal restrictions towards migration and settlement within the enlarged European Union do not only bring the freedom of mobility, but also affect the pressure put on potential migrants. This is also reflected in limitations of life plans for those who for various reasons cannot or do not want to migrate.

One trait of people located in transnational social spaces is their constant comparisons of emigration and immigration contexts, which leads to the development of a dual frame of reference. This dual frame of reference involves identifications, forms of socialization, and social norms present in different countries that migrants need to employ in order to make sense of potentially discrepant influences. Furthermore, this frame is related to how migrants perceive themselves compared to their relatives in Poland and others who have not migrated. Those perceptions are interrelated with two characteristics of the Polish-German social space. First, respondents refer to discrepancies between Poland and Germany in terms of modernity and differences in life-chances in both countries. Second, respondents consider themselves able to migrate and to improve their life-chances, while their relatives are often identified as “stuck”. One example for the asymmetric ascriptions between migrants and their immobile family members is Waldek. His wife died 10 years before the interview was conducted. The missing second income of his wife led Waldek to search for more income opportunities and he found a job in Germany as a construction worker. After his son reached adult age, he started commuting together with Waldek to work. Despite travelling to work in Germany, both return to Poland every couple of weeks. Waldek’s adult daughter still lives in Poland. Although Waldek clearly believes that she also should come to Germany, he doubts her ability to make the journey:

However, I would even persuade my daughter to come here [to Germany] too, and the house in Poland either renting or or or, no selling not, but renting or something like that. And I think that she would adapt quite easily here. But, she had never been across the border and she doesn't know how it is. I will try to find the right word...because I am lacking words for that...Everything is a bit stuck [zapyziate], because when a person travels around the world, has contact to people and if the persons like travelling and sightseeing then the person develops [rozwija się] and if a person only sits in one place, I don't say the person doesn't go on vacation or something alike, but I talk about the world, then they simply grow and [może nóż widelec] you can maybe change something. I think she could change something, but well I would have to persuade her. Well she is not completely happy, because of the work but there it is as it is, it is a kind of trapping [zasiedzenie]. Yes this is the right word (Waldek, aged 55, Germany).

Waldek's quote aptly illustrates the double and ambivalent role migration is often ascribed to. Captured in the term "mobility capital", mobility is tied to constructions of the ability to migrate as well as social valuations for mobility. In most of the respondents' narratives similar types of identifications are mirrored. This reflects the inner disposition and learning processes that engenders consecutive migrations. As a result, those who are "immobile" are often regarded not only as those who have not or not yet migrated, but also as those lacking the ability to be mobile. The figure of mobility in itself becomes tied to self-realization and pursuing individualized life-scripts. This is enhanced in a space marked by constructed differences in modernity (Schmidtke 2008).

International migration can be roughly divided into what Waldek describes as *traveling and sightseeing* as a tourist, and *really living there* as a migrant. This distinction between tourist and migrant are common figures of a globalized world. As William T. Cavanaugh (2008) writes: "If the migrant sees the bordered world from below, the tourist views it from above" (ibid.: 345). Yet, despite the distinction between different types of people moving through space, "the motives for both tourist and pilgrim may be seen in the transformation of the self (...)" (ibid.: 349). The dialectics of above and below in international migration are also aptly reflected in literature on "transnationalism from below and from above" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998).

Some respondents emphasize less the learning process or a transformation of the self, but rather the leaving and overcoming parochial settings. This becomes obvious in migrants who compare themselves with people of the same gender, age, and class. This is the case for Sabina, who migrated as a young child with her parents to Germany. She interprets her cousin's recent migration to UK:

She likes it very much. For me it was also interesting, that she now saw what I saw a long time ago: those different worlds. She told me that her mother told her: Well stay in Poland. Here everything is better and if we travel, then we go to another village to do vacation and such things. And my cousin said, that they don't see that there is another world beyond Poland and not only for working. Well that's typical village thinking, that you only see your own street, and think it's the best, and that there are no other possibilities (Sabina, aged 25, Germany).

International migration is evaluated as seeing *different worlds* and gains special pervasiveness against the backdrop of asymmetric evaluations of Poland and Germany. The asymmetries ascribed to Poland and Germany, as well as the meanings of mobility from Poland to Germany are related to the unequal participation in international migration. This in turn influences how care for the elderly is distributed in transnational families.

DIVISION OF ELDERLY CARE BETWEEN MIGRANTS IN GERMANY AND THEIR RELATIVES IN POLAND

Care can be divided into two fundamental aspects – practices of caring (taking care of) and orientations towards the well-being of others (caring about). Following Hooyman and Gonyea (1995), “[c]aring about involves affection and perhaps a sense of psychological responsibility, whereas caring for encompasses both the performance or supervision of concrete tasks and a sense of psychological responsibility. The fusion of caring about and caring for, between love and labor, often intensifies the stress experienced by family caregivers, particularly by women” (ibid.: 3–4). This distinction between care for and care about is useful here, because while taking care of requires some forms of physical co-presence, caring about can be typically done across greater distances. Studies frequently prove the high significance of intergenerational care in Poland, attesting it to a “home-based system of care” (Keryk 2010) and a high normativity attached to it (Krzyżowski 2010). Therefore, the main attitude mirrored in the narratives of Polish migrants in Germany is that the elderly in Poland should be cared for at home and by close family members. As care is considered to require spatial proximity, migrants in my sample do not usually perceive themselves as the main caregivers, nor are they expected to be such by their relatives in Poland. Therefore, care tasks are tacitly attributed to those family members who are considered to be “close” and “able”. This typically means women of a certain generation. Migrants’ tacit ascriptions of care tasks reveal a strong belief that the relatives nearby will meet their obligations:

I live in Germany, thus the probability I will go back to Poland and take care of my grandmother is very low...

I.: Who will take care of the grandmother?

The children that live nearby? Well, there are a lot... (Beata, aged 30, Germany).

I: Who would take care of your stepmother in Poland, if she needs help?

Tadek: I will not take care. (..)

I: Who else would take care?

Tadek: I think, her children.

I: Did you talk about that?

Tadek: No, I assume they would. Yet, they already do. When I am old, then I can imagine that my sisters would take care of me. They cannot refuse that (Tadek, aged 65, Germany).

These quotes exemplify the enduring persistence and strength of familial care obligations in Poland. None of the respondents mentioned retirement homes as a desirable form of elderly care, although some referred to their availability. The social norm of home-based care has a highly binding character according to the familial relationship, interpreted in terms of closeness, and gender. The distribution of care tasks proceeds in alignment with a ranking of family members and their obligations to care. The distribution mechanism of main care tasks is matrilineal, involving women of different generations. The closeness of the familial relationship refers mainly to adult children and their gender, meaning that the daughters are the first caregivers. The migration of daughters, therefore, becomes especially challenging in terms of elderly care. This can be illustrated in the experiences of daughters who are the only daughters close to their parents. One example is Aniela, whose only sibling, her sister, migrated from Poland to Germany ten years before the interview was conducted. Aniela currently lives close to her mother, who is retired but is not yet in need of care. Aniela anticipates that if she would migrate, her mother would not have another close family member, meaning the other daughter, nearby. Although migration is a possibility for her, she bars herself from leaving:

My boyfriend had a job offer in Munich, but then we got to know each other and he did not go. Well and we sit here... I do not even want to migrate because of my mother. I mean my mother would remain completely alone here. There is nothing more to say, it is clear that I will stay here and take care of her if she will not be able to take care of herself anymore. (...) No my sister will not

take care of my mother; I do not even take her into account, because she went away she cannot be expected to take care of it here (Aniela, aged 30, Poland).

In this example, the significance of the matrilineal character of care becomes obvious — both in terms of task distribution between women and in terms of task distribution according to generation. The highly binding character of home-based care is expressed here in Aniela's exclusion of migration as a means of life-making. We could expect that such a division of tasks produces conflicts, and certainly it often does. But the low degree of conflicts in terms of elderly care in my respondents' stories did strike me. How can we understand the unquestionable acceptance of care responsibilities as well as the high degree of coherence among family members from abroad? One answer can be found in the literature, which deals with transnational adult-children-parent care relations. They detect that in general care obligations remain binding across distance, yet some forms of care giving are modified while others remain largely unchanged. The study by Krzyżowski and Mucha (2013) indicates that the lack of physical and daily care is offset by financial transfers from abroad, but the gendered character of care provision from abroad remains prevalent, as those sending financial remittances are mostly women. In my sample financial remittances from Poland to Germany are fairly low and very few respondents report to be contributing financially to the livelihoods of their elderly family members. Those few who are engaged in providing financial means predominantly do not send or transfer money from Germany to Poland. Financial remittances from Germany to Poland, but also to other countries, are often measured to be neither frequent nor high (Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015). One reason for that might be that Poland and Germany are converging socio-economically. Another reason might be that one common way Polish migrants do transfer money to their relatives is actually within Poland – by endorsing the rent of their houses or flats to their relatives, which then is often not counted as remittances from abroad. The distinct housing market in Poland makes owning apartments and flats more common than renting (Stenning et al. 2010: 176). Consequently, many migrants, if they did not sell them, still own them. However, they still feel that major care obligations rest on the relatives nearby. This is expressed mainly in terms of filial obligations:

Sabina: Well we have a flat there, which we rent. The rent is transferred to a bank account and if anybody needs money, my aunt or the grandmother, well then it would be passed to them. It is a bank account for emergencies. If something happens, then we are safe, my parents, the grandmother or whatever...

I: Safe?

Sabina: Exactly! But my grandmother has seven other children, so when anything happens, then she can be located at theirs without any problems (Sabina, aged 23, Germany).

Even though migrants are usually not perceived as main caregivers, this does not mean that elderly people evaluate their relationships with their adult children abroad as being less intimate. In most cases, elderly people in Poland consider their adult children abroad as being very caring with regards to their daily lives and as very close to them. This is probably because their relationships are freed from daily struggles. In line with the expectations from their elderly, migrants rather display caring about, as in showing interest in the daily lives and displaying an orientation towards the well-being of their parents, which offsets the unavailable hands-on care:

Well the most important thing is that she [Marta; daughter in Germany] is interested in what I am doing. How I feel, what I do, where I have been, what I have been doing, how my day was, how my mother feels, just everything. She is very interested in that, it's not only that she calls and talks about her. I think this is the most important thing (Janina, aged 55, Poland).

The stories of my respondents indicate that the transformation of transnational care obligations is not only financial support versus hands-on care, but that the division of tasks proceeds alongside the two aspects of care, taking care of and caring about. Taking care of, as often permanent arrangements of assisting and supporting are mainly carried out proximally while caring about gains relevance from a distance. Caring about is not only feasible from a distance through the use of communication technologies, but by displaying emotional concern and interest in the lives of the others. It is enabled because transnational relationships are often relieved from daily conflicts.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to shed light on how transnational migration and intergenerational care obligations shape each other in the Polish-German transnational social space. The starting point for my analysis was the observation that the “care culture” and the “migration culture” in Poland are contradictory. The former involves a high normativity of elderly care as a familial and home-

based activity and therefore requiring spatial proximity. The latter made migration a viable way of life-making in many regions of Poland, and especially in those with a long tradition and high rates of emigration. Drawing from interviews with migrants and their relatives in Poland, I argued that these apparent contradictions can be explained by social processes of task division within families, which mainly grounds on relational adaptations, through which people orient their actions in relation to the actions of others. In this respect the main mechanism which supports the co-existence of high rates of mobility and the normativity of familial and home-based care are (self-) exclusions from mobility and therefore from a relevant resource.

The significance of migration as a resource has been described by the term of “mobility capital” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, Broderson 2014) and in other words by social theorists like Anthony Giddens or Zygmunt Baumann. From the perspective of mobility as capital, international migration cannot be conceived of as a mere physical movement across borders. Instead, it reveals the constructions of the ability to be mobile as well as its normativity. Akin to all other forms of capital, it is unevenly distributed within social spaces. One determining factor for access and control of mobility capital are family commitments. The highly binding character of familial and home-based elderly care excludes some people from international migration, mainly those who are addressed by social expectations to be the main caregiver. As literature frequently proves, care obligations do not affect all people to the same extent, but alongside opposite constructions of mobility and immobility, as well as matrilineal and filial care responsibilities. In that mobility is related to self-transformation and escapes from parochial environment, the often unquestioned allocation of care tasks to those nearby can be interpreted as not only being induced by their physical proximity, but also by their construction as self-evident caregivers. For those constructed as self-evident caregivers, this may mean restrictions in their life-organization, because as Weicht (2011) writes, “people who care face substantial ideological and material disadvantages which entail a possible vulnerability to exploitation and domination” (ibid.: 2). Social expectations to care exclude some people from international migration, which is one form of the “ideological and material disadvantage” people constructed as caregivers may face.

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