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Between absence and presence: transnational care practices among male migrant care-givers in Italy.



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1. Introduction

Life is hard, I miss my family but I'm doing it for them, to provide a good education for my children and buy a big house. I talk to them a lot, I feel close to them...despite everything.

Theodor, 35 years old, left the Philippines in 2008 and migrated to Italy in order to seek financial prosperity and improve his family's standards of living. His wife and two children remained in the Philippines where he returns once per year. Because of his inability to spend time in person with his family, he attempts to maintain close ties through virtual contact. He is currently working in Milan as a live-in domestic worker.

While the phenomenon of female care workers has received much attention from scholars in the last decade focusing on women's role of transnational mothers, men's identity has been often underexposed. Men have been analyzed mainly as left behind fathers or as economic providers, and their caregiving practices have been largely unexplored. On the contrary, male migrant care-giver workers constitute a relevant angle from which to analyze the gendered and racialized division of labor, as well as the social constructions of masculinity in contemporary societies. I chose to concentrate on the gender perspective to analyze how male domestic workers' sense of masculinity is challenged, as they are performing activities which are usually taken up by women within the family, and constructed as "naturally" feminine (Scrinzi 2010).

In this master thesis I investigate the experiences of migrant men who work as care-givers in Milan, Italy. Although domestic work in Italy is mainly a female field, in the last decade the number of males performing such profession increased. The absence of more "traditional" job opportunities have pushed migrant men towards typically female jobs that resulted in a masculinization of care. Furthermore, domestic work represents the most accessible channel for many workers to legally enter Italy or to regularize their position (Scrinzi 2010). I find relevant to investigate whether migration destabilizes conventional notions of gender, as the threat to the migrants' sense of masculinity is linked not only to downgrading social mobility but also to their employment in feminized jobs (Gallo 2006; Keeler 2008).

In spite of the multitude of studies conducted on men's migration, discussions of transnational fathering remain absent in the literature on migration and their gendered lives have been largely excluded (Willis and Yeoh 2000). Traditionally, mothering is mostly associated with the care of

children, while fathering with securing economic resources for the family and the role of fathers lies in their economic success as migrant workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 2000). Certainly, the access to greater income due to migration enables migrant care-giver workers to better fulfill the traditional responsibility of male breadwinning. However, my interest focuses on how transnational fathers negotiate and manage the absence of a shared physical space with their children and their effort of being present despite the little opportunity to interact directly with them.

Care giver workers constitute an interesting object of analysis due to their condition of being simultaneously paid care providers employed by Italian middle class families, and distant fathers, providing care to their kin back home. Such dualism shows the complexity of the concept of care which derives from the assumption that humans have roles, obligations, and senses of attachment to others in order to fulfill their needs. The exchange of care also involves questions of conflicts, inadequate resources and disputes on how to achieve it (Tronto 2001).

The meanings of care and the ways it can be displayed are multiple; care includes a different range of activities directed at the self, significant others and distant others. In proximate families, the exchange of care is constituted by ritualized practices of everyday life such as face to face conversations, bodily contact, shared meals and daily interactions among family members characterized by physical co-presence (Falicov 2007). Proximity is believed to be essential for the maintenance of emotional ties and leads to the assumption that distance and absence automatically prevent the exchange of caregiving. However, as shown by migrant care-giver workers, caregiving does not include only 'hands on' but imply a wide variety of care exchanges; from emotional support of 'caring about' that can take place through virtual communication and co-presence to care in the form of hired labour (Fischer and Tronto 1990).

Though migration potentially brings great economic gain and positive change for their families back home, problems also exist. Due to increased immigration restrictions in many destination countries, many workers have to leave their families in the country of origin and current policies that intend to restrict illegal immigration have had the consequence of separating families even more, by impeding reunification (Williams and Gavanas 2008). Migrants' attempts to visit their kin are limited by states' regulations and employers' restrictions on the amount of time they can spend with their families, leading to prolonged periods of separation. Paradoxically, therefore, the

achievement of family financial security goes hand in hand with an increase in their emotional insecurity (Parreñas 2001).

The formation of transnational families is inevitably linked to the existence of inequalities on the global scale. The income inequalities between the North and the South of the world have generated a global hierarchy in which at the top are situated those families with the human, economic, and social capital to live and work where they choose, while, at the bottom, there are families who must leave their home countries and reorganize their labor to secure survival and to attain a better future. In such effort to realize family security, men and an increasing number of women come to be on the move uprooting themselves geographically, culturally, and economically (Schmalzbauer 2010).

Understanding how family relationships move beyond national borders and redefine themselves in transnational space is a fundamental task for those involved in researching transnational living. The question of how transnational families manage kin relations over long distances, and whether they are able to do so over time, has become more relevant as global migration increased. Being apart certainly makes caring intimacy difficult and deeply changes how care is displayed. Although, despite being geographically far, people still need and want to care for each other (Baldassar 2007).

The purpose of this research is to examine how transnational families create proximity and closure in a transnational space. What makes transnational families a relevant object of research is the fact that they are characterized simultaneously by closeness and distance; geographical separation and emotional proximity. In transnational families, the geographical distance between members does not automatically leads to the weakening of family relations, and proximity or distance is neither directly correlated with how family members feel to one another, nor with how far relatives provide support or care for each other (Mason 1999).

More specifically, I analyze how fatherhood is negotiated in transnational families, claiming that geographical distance does not preclude the subjective maintenance of close family relations in terms of emotions and trust (Zontini 2007). I am concerned with establishing how men maintain their roles of father and spouse from distance, re-establishing family identity. I conceptualized transnational families as processes in which everyday practices of caregiving, emotional work and intimacy are central. Practices of transnationalism oriented towards families are deeply personal, and therefore subject to gendered values and their constant negotiation and re-negotiation

(Baldassar and Merla 2013). In my research, locating transnational fatherhood requires an 'exploration of quotidian micro-practices and experiences of daily life that ultimately constitute meaningful situations in which migrants confront their identities as husbands and fathers' (Gutmann 1997: 385).

Grappling with these themes of family, care, migration, fatherhood and masculinity I elaborated the following research question:

How do migrant fathers within care work in Italy construct and maintain family ties over space and time? How do they negotiate their masculinity when performing domestic work?

To elucidate the first part of the research question I conceptualize care not as a simple one-way process but as a multidirectional and complex flow of support that moves within the dispersed family members (Baldassar and Merla 2013). I examine migrants' practices of transnational communication: a flow of information, goods, money and emotions across borders used by migrants to maintain familiarity and display care between distant family members. Intense family involvements are conducted at long distance, and these involvements differ considerably from connections in families who live their lives *in situ* (Falicov 2005). Compared with years past, technological advances allow these men relatively inexpensive opportunities to keep in touch with family members through phone calls, Skype conversations and e-mails which keep up their emotional ties (Parreñas 2005).

The second part of the research question examines migrant men's experience as care-giver workers, showing how men who enter female occupations face a range of challenges in their sense of masculinity. Through the narratives of migrant domestic workers I explore the concept of masculinity, emphasizing how this is not static and innate, but rather situational, even when it is constructed transnationally. Analyzing the practices of men care-givers, I question the belief that nurturant and care-giving behaviors are simply not manly.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review of the main bodies of literature and scholars that has been used to construct my research. In Chapter 3 I explain my methodological choices and the ethical considerations taken into account. In Chapter 4 I present the theoretical framework used to analyze my empirical data. Chapter 5 is an introduction to my analysis, which gives an overview of the

phenomenon of migrant care-giver workers in the Italian context, elaborating also on the State's legislation. The majority of the analysis is contained in Chapter 6 and 7: the first part examines migrants' caring practices and emotional labour focusing on how the new media facilitates the creation of a 'virtual intimacy' and on the exchange of economic and emotional remittances. The second part of the analysis concentrates on men's negotiation of their masculinity when entering a job that is considered typically feminine. My interviews with migrant care-giver workers are interweaved into the discussions of these themes along with relevant theoretical approaches. In Chapter 8 I present my conclusive remarks.

2. Literature review

Within the last decade, a rich literature (Parreñas 2005; Baldassar 2007; Zontini 2004) focused on the daily practices of transnational families. Much of the secondary literature of this research can be divided into either theories on transnational families, global care chain or fatherhood and masculinity. The latter is a rather new perspective within the literature on transnational families and global care chain. Studies on global care chain and transnational families have been two important bodies of research to acknowledge the social reproductive aspects of migrants' lives. They contributed in different ways to challenge the economic paradigm of migration, highlighting that migration can be motivated by care responsibilities and it is essentially a family strategy (Kilkey 2013).

2.1 The Global Care Chain

To explore the Global Care Chain concept I primarily used literature of Hochschild (2000), Yeates (2004), Isaksen (2008) and Lutz (2012), whose researches dominate the literature on female migrant domestic labour in a south to north flow.

The Global Care Chain concept has been first developed by Hochschild in 2000 and refers to a 'series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring' (Hochschild 2000: 131). It describes a situation in which migrants leave their home countries and families to take care of children and elderly people elsewhere, creating a caring vacuum in their countries of origin. According to Hochschild, such chain has produced a new 'ecology of care' in which one kind of care is dependent on another in a series of international interconnections. Care labour is therefore taken from the global south and moved to the global north, resulting in an 'emotional surplus' in 'developed countries'. By moving emotional care

labour from those in poorer countries to those in richer ones, the global chains of care reinforce those global inequalities (Hochschild 2000). Following Hochschild, Widding Isaksen et al. (2008) argue that a care gain in the receiving country implies a 'care drain' in the sending country, a concept which complements the more studied phenomenon of 'brain drain'.

While this concept represents a major innovation in the analysis of the relation between globalization, care and migration, I take distance from Hochschild's view of migrant care-giver workers as passive victims of globalization. A most relevant approach instead is the one proposed by scholars such as Lutz (2008) and Evergeti and Ryan (2011) that conceptualize migrants as agents of change. They assert that migrant workers are not driven by circumstances but choose to be domestic workers as a strategic and functional decision in their migration project.

In this thesis, migrants are agents of change, willing to travel and take risks to connect the sending and the receiving countries and establish a new global migration space. Like many other migrants, domestic servants have to repress the anticipation of dangers and problems in favour of the expected positive results, trusting their own problem-solving capacities. In particular, Lutz (2008) approaches the migrant worker as a resourceful and independent agent who takes a conscientious choice of empowerment. In her view, when considering transnational dependency and global care chain it is important to take into account both opportunities and constraints that affect care givers and receivers as well as the dynamic and changing position of different players in the chain.

In her review of Hochschild's global care concept, Yeates (2004) contends that its present application to migrant domestic care workers must be broadened in order for its potential to be fully realized. According to Yeates, migrant mothers working as domestic workers in contemporary household do not represent all migrant care workers settings. Therefore, the Global Care Chain concept should not be restricted to them but should capture the diversity of care workers and care contexts, taking into account different family statuses and skill levels and over various historical periods.

Yeates emphasizes that care chains are structured by factors that cannot be entirely understood within an economic framework, however broad. Underscoring the importance of linguistic, religious, cultural and familial factors in the choice of destination, Yeates points out how migration decisions are often made on non-economic bases. Yeates, furthermore, indicates the need to

integrate family status of migrant care workers as a variable into global care chain analysis. The care of relatives, both in the immediate and wider family network, deserves greater attention in the global chains of care as it implies the possibility that family members move to care for other members, on a transnational basis. I emphasize how the care obligations of migrant care workers towards different kin members are met and changed by the migration process.

Finally, the way Hochschild conceptualizes the concept of care is very one dimensional and fails to seize the complex network of interaction that supports and maintains family ties, and the changing nature of caring responsibilities. Yeates, on the contrary, adopts a multiple perspective and underlines the existence of different types of care. In my decision to introduce the state regulation in my research, with its possibilities and limitations, I was inspired by Yeates' analysis of both state and non-state entities in care chains, pointing the role of labour strategies and immigration laws, recruitment agencies, religious institutions, ethnic networks and households in shaping migration patterns and experiences.

2.2 Transnational migration: family and care circulation

The recent wave of studies (Baldassar and Merla 2013, Tronto 2001, Parreñas 2008 et al.) on transnational family migration has increasingly focused on the realm of intimate relationships at a distance, as these relationships potentially persist between members of the same household physically divided by migration.

In the study of transnationalism, key authors are Levitt and Schiller (2004) who propose a social field approach to the study of migration which is crucial to contextualize my research. Levitt and Schiller rethink the boundaries of social life, claiming that the incorporation of individuals into nation-states and the maintenance of transnational connections are not two contradictory social processes. As a consequence, living lives that incorporate daily activities, routines, and institutions located both within national boundaries and transnationally, is a possibility that needs to be theorized and explored.

In my attempt to define transnational families, I was particularly inspired by Bryceson and Vuorela (2008). Their conceptualization of transnational families emphasizes the fluid and changing nature of family arrangements and encapsulates the reality of people whose lives are shaped by movement, separation and reunion. Transnationalism forces us to reconsider the definition of households and

families based on the idea of co-residency and physical unity and to take into account the possibility of familial ties regardless of spatial separation.

In my research, circulating care involves those duties related with looking after the young, the sick and the elderly, as well as those everyday tasks that maintain family ties overtime such as virtual communication and remittances. To investigate caregiving and kin-keeping within transnational families, I relayed on Baldassar and Merla *Transnational Families, Migration, and Care Work* (2013) which presents the concept of family care as circulation, a broad conceptualization of care located in kinship and moral economies of care.

According to Baldassar and Merla, a flow of care, even though uneven and unharmonious, circulates among family members over time and space, subject to constant change and negotiation among them. Transnational caregiving binds family members together in a network of reciprocity and obligations, love and trust, tensions and relations of unequal power (Baldassar and Merla, 2013). Even though the maintenance of family solidarity in transnational setting is undoubtedly a difficult process, the purpose of adopting a care circulation perspective is to show that migrants and their relatives are both receivers and providers of care (Ryan 2007). The care circulation framework highlights the fact that the modalities of care are multidirectional and can take place simultaneously within family network. Baldassar and Merla theorize family care as reciprocal and asymmetrical. Reciprocal as family care is an exchange, which circulates back and forth between those who migrate and family members back home. Asymmetrical because such circulation of care is an uneven exchange and the return of care is not immediate and equivalent but there is an expectation and obligation that care will be returned to them (Baldassar and Merla 2013).

A preponderance of academic work on transnational families focuses on migrant women taking the role of breadwinners and their experiences as mothers *in absentia*. Zontini (2004) has been a relevant author to explore care work and the feminization of migration. Her case studies on immigrant women in Spain and Italy, shows the key role that women play in the maintenance of their families geographically dispersed and their contribution to the interlocking spheres of productive work, kin work and caring work. A relevant contribution to the literature comes from Lutz, who suggests how domestic labour has triggered the feminization of migration, offering women power on a global market. Other case studies dealing with immigration in the Southern European context all mention the stretching of immigrant women's responsibilities brought about

by transnationalism. Alicea (1997) and Di Leonardo (1984, 1992) show the crucial importance of women's kin and care work for sustaining their transnational families. Feminist researchers have long drawn attention to women's non-market activities and defined them as labour.

Research has neglected the participation of men in reproductive work which includes both caring for family members and keeping alive kin relationships and the mutual obligations that they imply. Men involve themselves in the raising of offspring via financial support, visits, gifts and phone calls (Dreby 2010, Parreñas 2008, Pribilsky 2004) but the caregiving practices of fathers in chains of care remain largely unexplored. As Mazzucato and Schans (2011: 707) state: 'to get a complete picture of transnational family life it is important to add fathers to the picture, not just on the sideline but as main actors', understanding how family relationship move beyond national borders and redefine themselves in the transnational space. This study aims at bridging this gap in the literature by delving into migrant men's caring practices towards their distant families.

2.3 Masculinity and transnational fatherhood

A third body of literature focuses on masculinity, gender and fatherhood. Recent academic work (Pribilsky 2004, Dreby 2006, Schmalzbauer, 2004) has started to pay attention to transnational parenting, looking at the implications that transnationalism has on those which have to leave apart. In particular, American scholars such as Hondagneu-Sotelo, Avila (1997) and Parreñas (2001) explore the experiences of transnational mothers that is to say, those mothers who, due to their work commitments in immigration countries, have to leave their children behind to be cared for by relatives in their countries of origin. While a rich body of literature exists on transnational mothering, comparatively little is known about the fathering experiences of migrant men. An explanation for this omission is the fact that the absence of fathers for breadwinning purposes represents a norm, more than an exception, as historically it has been men who migrate and leave their families behind (Parreñas 2008).

In the study of transnational fathering, Parreñas (2005, 2008) claims that the performance of fathering in transnational families does not question but maintains gender conventions. Migration reaffirms the traditional division of labour of male as the breadwinner and female as the housewife, enabling men to fulfill their traditional responsibility of economic provider of the family. According to her study of Filipino male migrant workers, men's primary role is to provide material support and project authority from afar, at the expense of emotional attachment. A similar approach is adopted

by Donaldson (1993) who asserts that fathers do not have the capacity or the need to care for children. While the relationship between female parents and young children is seen as crucial, nurturing and care-giving behavior is simply not masculine. Most men have an idea of fatherhood which involves impartial discipline and emotional distance, traits associated with the idea of hegemonic masculinity, a concept adopted by Connell and now omnipresent in masculinity studies literature.

Even though Parreñas illuminates the connections between migration, fatherhood and conventional masculinity, I distance from her approach as, according to what emerges from my interviews, migration plays a role in the changing of men's gender and understanding of masculinity. Instead, I choose to follow Montes (2013), Pribilsky (2004) and McKay (2010) who argue that migration destabilizes conventional notions of gender. According to McKay, Parreñas represents an interpretation of Filipino masculinity and migrant male gender performances which is too narrow, particularly because the study does not explicitly take into account the perspective of male migrants themselves. Pribilsky, who explored transnational fatherhood among undocumented Ecuadorian male migrants living in the United States, gives an insight on the ways in which migrant men organize their transnational livelihoods according to their role as fathers. He noticed that during migration, men acquire certain nurturing behavior distant from hegemonic masculinity. This reminds of Kimmel (1987), who challenges the concept of hegemonic masculinity, invoking a framing that draws attention to the diversity within masculinities and the idea of multiple masculinities.

Another perspective, in which I analyze masculinity in my research, is in association with men's work as care-givers. An analysis of the positions of men within the international division of social reproductive labor has been missing from the literature. Authors such as Kilkey (2010), Sarti (2010), and Scrinzi (2010) broaden the concept of global care chains by focusing on male domestic workers. They explore the connections between international migration and the gendering of occupations, with regards to the construction and management of masculinity in domestic service. They argue that the threat to the migrants' sense of masculinity is linked not only to downgrading social mobility but also to their employment in feminized jobs (Gallo 2006; Keeler 2008).

My research seeks to contribute to the task of addressing the omission of academic research on men experiences as transnational father and as care-giver workers. In doing so, I argue that it is

important to examine how men are implicated in stereotypically female tasks of social reproduction, such as care and cleaning. I destabilize the perspective care-femininity, analyzing simultaneously the role of men as fathers and men as care workers. I do not focus specifically on how migrant men interact in the work place but I center my analysis on the narratives of how they perceive themselves as men and how they construct their masculinity. Referring mainly to the Italian context, I focus on migrant men as workers in the international domestic economy, adopting the broader conceptualization of domestic labor.

3. Methodology

This chapter offers an insight of my methodological approach, incorporating the reasoning for the research perspective, applied method as well as the relevance and limitations of this study. The aim of this section is to clarify the choices made during the research process and understand why and how I came to the conclusions of the research question.

3.1 Epistemological considerations

Social constructivism is the theory of science embedding the research project. It helps understanding the subjective meaning of caring practices among migrant men as well as the negotiation of meanings of fatherhood and masculinity. Masculinity, which is a dominant issue in this thesis, is viewed as a social construction constantly reaffirmed and revised through social actions and interactions. When knowledge is socially constructed it is not static but can change over time. Furthermore knowledge is socially and culturally dependent. This also implies that several truths and realities can exist parallel. A word or a statement can create several meanings and one meaning is not necessarily more right than the other (Vanwynsberghe and Khan 2007). On these grounds it can be argued that the results and conclusions of this research project are dependent on the cultural and historical context in which they are founded. Therefore, my research should not be considered as representative of the men domestic workers in general, but rather a product of a very small portion of the reality, in the specific context of Milan, in a specific time.

3.2 Narratives and migrants

I find the qualitative method the most appropriate way of both collecting and analysing my data as my aim is to investigate the construction of transnational family ties in a transnational space. In qualitative research, 'the investigator is concerned with how the social world is perceived by the participants with a focus on the context' (Bryman 2004: 280). The output of a qualitative research is

the answer to a “how” or “why” question by producing detailed descriptions and providing deep understandings of the perspectives of the population acting in a social setting, that in turn, is possible due to the explanation of meanings, processes and context (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

This qualitative research aims at answering the question: *How do migrant fathers within care work, in Italy, construct and maintain family ties over space and time? How do they negotiate their masculinity when performing domestic work?*

I chose to collect narratives through semi-structured interviews as I consider this a relevant method apt to catch such a complex reality. Similarly, in the analysis, I chose to leave much space to my informants' narratives and to let their interpretations of the world and emotions be shown directly through their words. For the above mentioned reasons, I did not consider a quantitative method as the right approach for dealing with such complex and subjective perception of the reality.

This research is based on a qualitative data collection performed during January and February 2014 in Milan, Italy. Semi structured interviews were conducted with seven male migrants who work as care-givers as well as cleaners for private employers, middle class Italian families. Among my informants, six have regular work contracts and held a residence permit, while one is an undocumented migrant and not regularly employed. The informants' age varies between 29 and 55 years old. Most of the interviewees were middle class students or professionals in their home country and speak fluently two or three languages. Rather than interviewing people who share a common ethnic background, as it is often the case in qualitative research related to migration, the subject of my research is people of different nationalities. The informants come from Ecuador, El Salvador, Eritrea, Philippines, Romania and Sri Lanka which are some of the most representative nationalities among domestic workers in the province of Milan. The reason behind this choice is to focus my research on their experiences as transnational fathers within professional care workers. Even though my informants come from different countries of origin, they are united by their social condition of being part of a transnational family and being working and living in Milan within the domestic sector. I aim at exploring whether their common situation of being far from their families and being domestic workers makes it possible to identify similarities in their feelings and caring practices.

3.3 Narrative method

In qualitative research, the data collection is conducted through an inquiry in the real world, that is flexible and sensible towards the studied social context (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). My collection of primary data takes the form of semi-structured individual interviews, carried out among seven male care workers in Milan, Italy. Semi-structure interviews consist of several key questions that helped me defining the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewees to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail. My interview framework has been adjusted in response to what I saw as significant replies of my interviewees. The flexibility of this approach allowed me to discover information which is important to my interviewees that I have not thought of as pertinent before. I allowed people to express their emotions freely and emphasize what they find noteworthy about their life story, while directing the conversation towards their caring practices as transnational parents. The following is the basic framework used to guide each interview:

Introductory questions

These first questions I posed have been used as ice-breaker. They are mainly fact-finding questions regarding the informants' name, age, country of origin and a description of their own family.

- What is your name?
- Where do you come from?
- How old are you?
- Could you describe your family?
- When did you arrive in Italy?

Transnational life

I followed with a series of questions about my informants' transnational life. I firstly investigated the reasoning and modality of their migration process and continued with questions regarding their caring practices toward distant family members.

Migration

The purpose of those questions is to investigate the reasons that pushed my informants to migrate and why they chose Italy as the country of destination. Moreover, I aim at understanding the role of the family in the decision making, whether the familial environment was supportive, hostile or if they felt a social pressure towards migration.

- Which are the reasons why you decided to migrate?
- Why did you choose to come to Italy?
- How did you manage as soon as you arrived in Italy?
- How was the decision to migrate taken and how was the reaction of your family members?
- How long are you planning to stay?

Communication practices

This set of questions regards my informants' communication habits and how these changed over time. I insisted on the type of media they use, the frequency of their contacts and the content of their virtual communication.

- How often are you in contact with your family members?
- Which means of communication do you use?
- Did your way of being in contact change over time?
- What do you think is important to share with your family when you talk?
- Are you honest to them when talking about your state of mind and your problems?

Sending of remittances

Investigating about remittances, I first asked the frequency and amount of money my interviewees are able to send back home and who is responsible for deciding how the money are going to be spent. However, my main concern was to understand the personal meaning of remittances according to my informants.

- Do you send money back home?
- Are you satisfied on the amount of money you are sending home?
- Do you feel a pressure from your family regarding the amount of money you send to them?
- How are the money you send used for?
- Who is responsible for how the money are spent?
- What does it mean for you to send money home?

Feelings, emotions and fatherhood

Asking about emotions and feelings has been one of the most critical part of the interview and many of my interviewees were very reserved in dealing with such sensitive questions. The aim of my

questions was to explore if and how distance has been changing their feelings when thinking about their families and whether it changed their ability and way to express them. These questions focus as well on my informants' conception of fatherhood and, in particular, on their role as distant fathers. I tried to understand what it means for them to be a good father and I investigated which is the reality of their caring practices toward their children, concerning both practical matters and educational values they want to transmit to their children.

- How is it to be distant from your family?
- How distance makes things different?
- Which are your feelings when thinking about your family?
- Is the relationship with your wife different? In which way?
- Do you think about making your family come here?
- How do you live your fatherhood from a distance?
- How do you think your wife experienced being a single parent?
- What does it mean for you being a good father?
- What is important for you to transmit to your children?

Professional life and masculinity

The last part of my interview guide deals with the informants' work life. First I asked about their main duties and tasks, to approach subsequently a more personal level in which I inquired their feelings when performing domestic work, in particular with respect to their masculinity.

- What does your job consist of?
- What are your main tasks?
- Have you ever done this job in your home country?
- What is the hardest thing in your job?
- How do you feel in doing your job?
- Do you consider domestic work a female job?

The interviews have been conducted both in Italian and in English, according to the informants' familiarity with the language. All of the informants felt comfortable expressing themselves in one of the two languages though none spoke them as mother tongue. Some of the interviews were

recorded, others were noted down depending upon the context, particularly the sound quality available. When I asked for permission to record, all the interviewees agreed.

The interviews took place both in public and private spaces: a language school, a restaurant, a car, a bench and private houses. A relevant disadvantage has been the fact that few interviews occurred in the interviewees' work place. In such cases, the informants understandably did not feel comfortable answering question regarding their job and their feelings towards it. Their concern was that their employers might have heard something unpleasant towards them, undermining their professionalism.

In general, the participants reacted to my questions in a positive way. They all seemed interested in the research topic and few of them congratulate with me for 'speaking about migrants feelings, something that people never talk about...' and 'showing a personal side of migrants by talking about family'. A drawback has been the impossibility, mainly due to lack of time, to meet with my informants on a regular basis, building a relationship with them. As a result, it was sometimes difficult for some of them to share their feelings. A subject which seemed to be particularly taboo was the relationship between husband and wife, especially with regard to the faithfulness of their partners. For this reason, although it was of great interest to me, this topic has been just marginally raised.

3.4 Recruiting informants

I came into contact with the informants in a variety of ways. First, I contacted a local parish where volunteer teachers teach Italian language to foreigners. The choice of that specific parish was twofold: first, because a friend of mine is a volunteer teacher there and this would have made it easier for me to be introduced; second because the parish is situated in a wealthy neighborhood of Milan, where I assumed families could afford to hire maids and domestic workers. The interviews took place in two sessions. The first time I visited the parish I just explained to the potential interviewees about my project and during my second visit I conducted the actual interviews. While the class was taking place, the informants, one by one, came to talk to me in an adjacent room. The language school was perceived by my informants as a safe and friendly environment in which they could talk freely, without fearing gossip or judgments, and this sure represented an advantage in the conduct of my research. There, however, I had a great deal of trouble coming into contacts with male informants since most of the students in the school were women. Another aspect to take into consideration is that the interviewees who attend Italian classes arrived quite recently in the country.

A second strategy to enter in contact with my informants was through their employers. I therefore contacted old people living in Qt8, a residential area of Milan where I have been living for 22 years. I knocked on their doors, introducing myself and my research project and through them I was introduced to my informants. Even though I have not been living there for the last 3 years, I still have a good network of acquaintances and I knew of some people who employed domestic helpers.

When approaching potential informants I explained that I am a student undertaking a research about the consequences of migration on the family unit and would appreciate hearing their perspectives and experiences. The fact that some of the interviews took place in the neighborhood where I used to live has both positive and negative consequences. Some of the employer I contacted used to know me since I was a child; therefore I was introduced to my informants as a trustworthy person.

A clear drawback has been the risk that the informants might not have felt comfortable in expressing themselves because of possible rumors and gossiping in the neighborhood. When I asked about the relationship between them and their employers, many refused to answer or answered very shortly by saying 'it is fine'. The strategy I adopted was to always introduce myself as a student of a Danish University, living in Copenhagen in order to locate myself more as an outsider, separated from the social happenings and in more equal position with them. Though none of my informants requested to do so, I have changed their real names with fictitious ones to protect their privacy.

3.5 Researcher positioning and anonymity

It is a fundamental task, when doing research, to take into account the researcher's role and influences on the outcome of the study; recognizing the impossibility of remaining unaware with regards to your own subjectivity and personality. Already when formulating my research question and making hypothesis, I am being subjective, as I have an idea of what I am looking for and shape things accordingly. Inevitably, I was an active participant in the interviews by virtue of my presence and request to share a part of themselves with me.

I contend that my subjectivity and personal history, by affecting my research and gender relations have played an important role in shaping the interview process and influenced the sorts of data obtained. Being a white, Italian woman allows for certain insights and might have changed the informants way of expressing their personal history and emotions. Another aspect to take into

account is that my role as researcher inevitably creates a relationship which is inherently hierarchical. Although nothing can be done to change it, it is useful to reflect about it.

As sustained by Mik-Meyer and Jävinen (2005: 13), meaning is produced within the social setting, in this case an interview setting. Whatever phenomenon, it does not stand by itself and does not have a built-in essence but is an unstable unit and a product of its context. This means that my pre-understanding of men care-givers in Milan will inevitably affect the results of the thesis at hand. I started this research with the preconceived idea that migrant care-giver workers in Milan have not chosen their profession and do not enjoy it. Furthermore, I had the prejudicial belief that they have difficult lives and suffer from being far from their families. Duly noted, I tried to every extent possible to set aside my own opinion and compensate for them during the course of the research, for instance by asking very general questions in order to let my interviewees guiding the conversation. However, as argued above, this is only manageable and even relevant to a certain extent in an interactionist and qualitative perspective.

3.6 Presentation of the informants

The following are brief biographies of the men I spoke to, in chronological order from the first extended interview I conducted with each. I highlight their family situation in the country of origin and the current working condition in Italy.

Theodor

Theodor, 35 years old, comes from the Philippines. He holds a degree in civil engineering. He arrived in Milan in 2008 to work as a live-in domestic worker. He is regularly employed at an Italian family where he takes care of cleaning, cooking, gardening and baby sitting. Back home he has two children, thirteen and sixteen years old, and his wife. He usually visits them once a year for one month.

Kamil

Kamil, from Sri Lanka, is 30 years old. In his home country he was a student of agronomy. He got married in Sri Lanka and soon after he migrated to provide a better future for his family. He arrived in Milano in 2012. He is mainly cleaning houses, ironing and doing other small occasional cleaning jobs but he doesn't work full time. He has a one year old son. Because Kamil does not have a residence permit, he has not been able to return to Sri Lanka yet.

Neel

Neel, 44 years old, also comes from Sri Lanka. He has been working for two years in Kuwait where he was a servant at the house of the Italian ambassador. Through him, he migrated to Italy in 1992. Neel and Kamil come from the same village and they have been knowing each other since they are children. Neel helped Kamil to come to Milan. After working in the kitchen of a restaurant and in a clothing factory, Neel became a domestic worker. In Sri Lanka he left his wife and three daughters: thirteen, twelve and eight years old. His dream is to open a small bar or restaurant in Sri Lanka.

Carlos

Carlos, 33 years old, left El Salvador in 2010. He is regularly employed as a live-in care worker. His main duty is to take care of an old person who is sick and not self-sufficient anymore. He has two children of nine and twelve years and a wife who remained in El Salvador. Depending on the money he is able to save, he visits his family once a year or once every two years.

Jose'

Jose', 29 years old, has left Ecuador less than a year ago. He has a three years old child who is living with his mother since Jose's wife died. In Milan, he works full time as a care giver but he lives in his own apartment together with two friends.

Andrei

Andrei is a 47 years old man who comes from a rural part of Romania. His 30 years old daughter, who was living in Spain, has been arrested for drug related crimes and condemned to 6 years of prison. Her 2 children were given into custody to Andrei and his wife. Not able to provide for them with his salary in Romania, Andrei had to migrate to Italy in 2008. After working as a construction worker for a while, because of general economic crises he lost his job and found a job as a domestic worker through the local parish.

Ghebru

Ghebru from Eritrea arrived in Italy in 1990 and before he has lived in Saudi Arabia for ten years. He has four grown up children, two females and two males, who were born in Sudan. He reunified with his wife in Italy but soon after they divorced. In Italy he worked for many years as a janitor but recently he became a domestic worker, because the pay was better.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I present the main theoretical concepts of my thesis. I firstly give an overview of theories of transnationalism, essential to contextualize the phenomenon of transnational families. I then introduce the concept of care, which constitutes the backbone of my research. Caring practices assume a crucial relevance for transnational families, as their very existence is based on family ties being kept alive and maintained across time and space. I present caring practices as a type of emotional labour, as I believe emotion is an intrinsic factor of the transnational experience. I conclude with theories of masculinity, a notion that influences both the private and professional life of my informants.

4.1 A transnational approach to the concept of family

In the conceptualization suggested by Basch, transnationalism represents ‘a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries’ (Schiller et al. 1995).

A relevant approach to transnationality is offered by Levitt and Schiller who explain how the lives of an increasing number of people can no longer be understood by looking exclusively within the boundaries of national states. They suggest the need for a reformulation of the concept of society, since migrants are often embedded in multi-sited transnational social fields which embrace those who move, as well as those who stay behind (Levitt 2006). Terms such as transnational social fields or transnationalism usually refer to ‘sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from low to highly institutionalized forms: transnational social spaces are combinations of ties, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that reach across the borders of multiple states’ (Faist 2000: 189).

In opposition to the nation-state container view of society, a transnational social field approach is more appropriate to understand the experience of living simultaneously within and beyond the boundaries of a nation-state. Such approach does not undermine the importance of nation-states but acknowledges that social life is not confined by nation-state boundaries (Levitt 2006). Based on Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1995), Khagram and Levitt define social field as ‘a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed’ (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 31). Such concept is necessary to conceptualize the pattern of social relations linking those who migrate and those who

stay behind; since individuals who do not move maintain social relations across borders through various forms of communication (Khagram and Levitt 2008). Communication technologies become essential in this process.

By saying that transnational social fields transcend the boundaries of nation-states, individuals within these fields respond not only to more than one state simultaneously, but also to a multiple of social institutions and sets of laws (Levitt 2004). As argued by Sørensen (2007), state regulations of inclusion and exclusion, in both host and sending societies, affect the everyday lives of those involved in the micro-dynamics of transnational family formation. Transnational family life, therefore, should be seen as affected by complex and interconnected social, political and economic processes.

In light of what has been said so far, basic assumptions about social institutions, such as the family, need to be revisited. The transnational approach calls for a better understanding of transnational ties as reciprocal, mutual relationships and reveals how family ties are worked and reworked over time and space (Boccagni 2011). In the analysis of transnational caring practices, it is essential to adopt a theoretical position that considers family as a flexible social practice, based on negotiation and ongoing processes (Pruss 1996). Therefore family is understood as a fluid, long distance unit whose members negotiate relationships and caring responsibilities across borders (Evergeti and Ryan, 2011). Such notion challenges the idea of family as a static bounded residential unit by acknowledging that, despite being separated geographically, family members maintain social, cultural, reproductive and economic links across borders (Zontini 2007).

Migrants' interpersonal relationships are analyzed here at the micro level of the transnational paradigm, which applies to migrants' kin left behind. Micro factors focus on the cultural expectations and social roles of kin relations which are often scattered by distance and absence. The enormous geographic distances that separate some migrants and their kin do not, for the majority, diminish the concern they have for each other manifested through continuous practices of transnational caring (Baldassar 2007). Therefore, transnational migration does not necessarily lead to family disruption and the end of caring practices. Rather than being in decline, as some social capital theorists seem to suggest, transnational families can result in new familial arrangements and continue to perform emotional and practical tasks for each other (Zontini 2007). In their article 'Transnational families: memories and narratives', Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004) show how

transnational families remain ‘family’ despite time and distance apart through the construction of ‘coherent narratives of self and kin’, drawing on memory to create the family’s ‘interior life’ (Yeoh, 2005).

4.2 Towards a definition of transnational families

Any definition of transnational families must be aware of the differences that exist between various migrant groups as well as of social, cultural and economic differences within every group. There is no such thing as the transnational family, understood as a uniform family form defined by constant characteristics. They are as diverse as geographically proximate families with a variety of socio-economical, educational, cultural, ethnic and religious background. At the same time, however, new transnational families are formed across lines of national origin, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality (Sørensen 2007).

Over the past decade, the phenomenon of transnational families has caught the attention of migration scholars (Baldassar et al. 2007; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004; Parreñas 2005; Dreby 2010; Raghuram 2012). Acknowledging that transnational families constitute an evasive phenomenon (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), the interest of academics concentrates on how ‘the realm of the family continues to retain its significance in the face of distance, dispersal and translocality even as the desire to go on being a family under such conditions is occasionally ruptured and continually reworked’ (Yeoh et al. 2005: 308). According to Herrera Lima (2001: 89), ‘the forces that hold transnational families together may be stronger than the legal and physical obstacles that separate individual family members. Instead of living life in two separate worlds, transnational migrants’ experiences form a fluid continuum’. Dispersed family members are brought together in one social space by emotional and financial ties (Sørensen 2007).

Along these lines, much of the literature on transnational families explores the process through which family ties are constantly established, maintained and re-configured; and how family members negotiate relationships and caring responsibilities across borders (Sun 2013). A widely accepted definition on transnational families is the one elaborated by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3) according to which: ‘Transnational families live most of the time separated from each other but hold together to create a feeling of collective welfare and unity even across national borders’. According to Boyd, ‘transnational families represent a social group geographically dispersed, they

create kinship networks which exist across space and are the conduits for information and assistance which in turn influence migration decision' (Boyd 1989: 643).

One of the fundamental ways in which families create intimate emotional ties is through everyday practices that, through repetition, become ritualized (Falicov 2005). This is part of an effort, both conscious and unconscious, made by family members, to make their family a social unit of emotional interdependence and affection. Transnational families are missing this everyday physical interaction with each other's and have to intentionally construct the notion of family both emotionally and economically, rather than taking it for granted (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). To understand transnational families though, it is important to understand how relationships are developed and maintained across time and space. Frequent interactions between emigrants and their families at home, can result in a spontaneous circulation of remittances, cross-border communication and transnational caregiving practices that may persist for a long time, regardless of the physical distance (Mason, 2004). I conceptualize family, households and home as processes in which everyday practices of care giving, emotional work and intimacy are central.

4.3 The concept of care

The term care reflects a wide range of meanings and expectations. As an indefinable mixture of physical and emotional work, care extends throughout the spheres of affection and profession (Williams, 2009). It is therefore impossible to make care fit into a single category – along conventional divides such as professional-informal, production-reproduction, public-private, commercial-altruistic (Boccagni 2014).

Caring, as an interpersonal need, commitment and day-to-day social practice, concern a large number of people on a global scale; inside and, more often, outside the labour market. Care-giving is an activity that embraces both instrumental tasks and affective relations and exceeds the dichotomy public-private. In fact, care-givers are expected to provide love as well as labour, shifting back and forth between the domestic domain and in the public arena (Abel and Nelson 1990).

An interesting aspect of care is that its manifestation is considered closely related to physical proximity. Physical co-presence, in the form of daily face to face conversations, bodily contact, shared dinners, is considered essential for the maintenance of emotional commons (Baldassar and

Merla 2013). Such ideal of proximity, leads to the assumption that distance and absence automatically prohibit the exchange of care-giving. This could be identified as one of the main reasons why transnational families tend to be stigmatized as somehow broken or at risk (Baldassar and Merla 2013). On the contrary, 'an enormous amount of care-work is required to maintain family relations across space and to manage the social and emotional costs associated with family separation' (Bernhard et al. 2009: 5). While certain care exchanges require to be physically co-present, others, such as emotional support, can be effectively exchanged across distance, through virtual communication and co-presence (Fisher and Tronto 1990). Indeed, none of these forms of support are mutually exclusive and all of them are characterised by different degrees and forms of communication and interaction (Baldassar 2008).

Baldassar and Merla theorize the exchange of care in transnational families as a circulation, as care flows among family members over time and space. Such flux of care is subject to constant negotiation over time and it is characterized by reciprocity and asymmetry. This means that these exchanges are neither immediate nor equivalent but characterized by the expectation and obligation that care will be returned to them. This care circulation framework conceptualizes migrants as both the providers and the receivers of care and elucidates the importance of theorizing mobility and absence as common features of family life, in which absence refers to physical absence because there are ways to create a sense of co-presence despite distance. The lens of circulation captures all the care activities, practical, emotional and symbolic, which requires a broad definition of family and caregiving.

I believe that care circulation provides a productive lens with which to examine transnational family practices. Even though the maintenance of family solidarity in transnational setting is undoubtedly a difficult process, as it commonly is in proximate families, the purpose of adopting a care circulation perspective is to show that migrants and their relatives are both receivers and providers of care (Ryan 2007). Indeed diasporic care is increasingly a feature of migration, as people move to different countries and leave behind family members to be cared for at a distance, the framework of circulation is better able to highlight the fact that the mobility of care is multidirectional, and can take place simultaneously (Wilding 2006).

4.4 Emotional labour and caring practices

Even though it is often underestimated and unacknowledged, providing kin with moral and emotional support requires time, intention, and skills. It is a way of maintaining a reliable relationship and it is an investment in future obligations, in the security of knowing that you can call on help if you need it and be certain to receive it (di Leonardo 1987).

Alicea, who researched upon Puerto Rican transnational families residing in the United States, draws attention to the crucial role of the caring work carried out by migrant workers. By 'kin work' she means: 'The conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the decisions to neglect or intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities' (Alicea 1997: 610).

Kin work, therefore, can be considered a type of emotional labour, mainly conducted through the effort of "staying in touch", the fruits of which include the maintenance a "sense of family" across distance' (di Leonardo 1987: 443). Building a life between two or more countries, means introducing strangeness in a family and fighting the consequences of this strangeness finding ways to re-creating familiarity (Banfi and Boccagni 2004).

As stated before, many studies on transnational families indicate that migrants do not cease communicating with their friends and family in their countries of origin but instead maintain their ties and relationships (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Schmalzbauer 2004; Smith 2006). Although migrants' family members may not feel 'left behind' by their relatives abroad, the rupture of migrant families represents a great source of stress that affects the daily lives of both migrants and their family members. Also those who remain in the home countries and do not directly experience migration may go through stress and depression due to familial separation (Silver 2011). One of the causes of stress could be due to the changes in familial roles, as explained later on.

The act of migrating involves sentiments: fear, love, nostalgia, pain, and isolation are evoked throughout the processes of departure, settlement, and return (Castellanos 2007). Skrbish in his article 'Transnational Families: Theorising Migration, Emotions and Belonging' underlines the central relevance of emotions in studying transnational families. 'Emotions should not simply be seen as a convenient and occasional resource called upon to explain certain peculiarities of

transnational family life but they need to be seen as constitutive parts of the transnational family experience itself” (Skrbiš 2008: 263). This is because individuals and families are inevitably linked by emotional ties and furthermore, because emotion is an intrinsic factor of the migration experience itself. The feeling of missing beloved people and places appears to be an integral feature of the kin-work and emotional labour needed to maintain transnational relationships (Baldassar 2008).

What we defined before as transnational caring practices is called by Skrbiš (2008: 237) *emotional labour*, a concept first introduced by Hochschild in the *Managed Heart* of 1983. According to Skrbiš emotional labour is ‘routinised performances of emotional work and emotional displays...where “emotional gift exchanges” are conducted’. This involves communication through phone calls, texting and emails but has also an important economic dimension that extends beyond the act of sending remittances home. The concept of *emotional labour* is an extremely relevant tool to analyze my informants' narratives and their fathering role from distance. Baldassar introduces the concept of ‘mobility of care’ which means that the commitments of migrants negotiated with their families back home, develop through time and cultural expectations about caring obligations within family. The particular practices of transnational care-giving are influenced by a sense of moral obligation to provide care, a culturally constructed notion of sense of duty, social roles and responsibilities (Baldassar 2007).

From what has been said so far, we can remark that the emotional investment of migrants, their activity of transnational longing and the imagining of transnational family, serve to maintain transnational relationships over time. These emotions have a social outcome through the need for co-presence, they are located not only in the person, but in the social situation and interaction which they help to construct (Schieffelin in Baldassar 2008). They are socially located and have a social aim. The emotion of longing for provides the motivation for the communication and kin-work needed to produce a bridge of co-presence between transnational kin (Baldassar 2008).

4.4.1 A ‘virtual presence’

Communication is essential for reproducing the social field which connects family members and enables them to provide and receive support (Wilding 2006). Given the temporal and spatial distances that separate transnational family members, the most common contact between them is the

so called ‘virtual co-presence’, which is constructed through various communication technologies and acts as a surrogate for physical proximity, touch and contact (Baldassar 2008).

New media involve deep changes in immigrants’ lives, shaping transnational family communications despite geographical and time barriers. Information and Communication Technologies increase the modality and frequency of migrants’ contact with their family members and allow them to be involved in everyday life and day-to-day decisions in a completely different way than in the past’ (Levitt 2001). Doubtless, the contact between migrants and their loved ones became more frequent and the sense of connection to everyday lives at a distance increased (Wilding 2006). This is due to the fact that, in the last decade, ICTs became more and more accessible to most labour migrants, facilitating the possibilities of maintaining social ties across national borders (Bacigalupe 2011). The regularity, modality and frequency of cross borders contacts are largely determined by people’s access to appropriate technologies. Some aspects of access are dependent on state provision of infrastructures and services, but others depend on people’s skill and knowledge to utilize these technologies (Baldassar 2008).

There are many cases of migrants staying in daily contact with family and friends back home through email, instant messaging, telephone and text messaging. Vertovec (2004) notes that cheap long-distance telephone calls are one of the major types of ‘social glue’ binding transnational migrants to their families and friends. Because it is a visual and real time medium, teleconferencing has the potential to amplify emotional connections and adds another significant layer of connectivity for relatives living across distances (Panagakos 2006).

The introduction of ICTs does create more opportunities for keeping in touch with kin, although, this regular communication can sometimes make stronger the sense of distance, in the sense that frequent communication allows an intimate connection that clashes with the inability to have any physical contact (Wilding 2006). The investment in expensive but more interactive ICT can prevent transnational migrants to be able to pay a journey back home, but also gives migrants without ‘papers’ the opportunity to engage in a meaningful form of return without jeopardizing their presence in the country of migration (Panagakos 2006). The time and financial commitment involved in the virtual co-presence is an important consideration that influences not only the individual involved in transnational caregiving but their local family as well. “Staying in touch” with family overseas requires time and money and, when there are scarce resources, this means less

time and money for local needs; having other household members willing to support transnational care is therefore a significant variable (Baldassar 2008).

Falicov explores how immigrant families use ICTs as a way of overcoming geographical distance and national boundaries, strengthening their connection, identity, and survival. ICTs have increasingly changed families' identities, transforming transnational families into "virtual families". Virtual communication can help create the sense that loved ones are present, despite geographic distances (Baciagalupe 2011). Wilding, however, disagrees with the statement that ICTs transformed extended family network into a 'virtual family'. Wilding argues that there is no new or radical separation between virtual and real life, and certainly no virtual family has come to replace the family that is situated in geographic space. Although virtual communications provide a useful addition to family practices, they do not displace them. ICTs do not create virtual families where none existed before. Indeed, the ICTs are used primarily to enable and supplement the continuation of existing family practices. Furthermore, the introduction of ICTs does not completely eliminate the effects of distance (Wilding 2006).

In Licoppe's review of the literature on communication technologies and social bonds, he argues that communication technologies, instead of being used to compensate for the absence of the loved ones, are used to provide a continuous flow of interactions in which 'the boundaries between absence and presence eventually get blurred.' (Licoppe 2004: 135). Virtual forms of co-presence are today most commonly constructed through the sense of hearing; verbal exchanges on the telephone or Skype are considered the favorite of men as they are seen as more real and direct, useful to solve problems 'face to face' (Vasquez Del Aguila 2014).

Having a 'virtual home' for migrants scattered around the world help migrants to cope with nostalgia and the feeling of loss of displacement. Technology provides the resources to communicate and exchange what Vasquez Del Aguila calls 'emotional remittances', the sharing of everyday lives, achievements, sadness and isolation. It is the circulation of emotions and feelings that strengthen the bond between family members (Vasquez Del Aguila 2014).

The 'keeping in touch' is very much linked with the moral commitment of migrants towards their families. Baldassar introduces the concept of 'mobility of care' which means that the commitment about caring obligations within family, that has been negotiated back home, develops through time

and cultural expectations. In Finch and Mason's terms, transnational communication using ICTs does not bring just positive effects. Communication generates new expectations of communication and support and increases the level of obligation felt by migrants to give emotional and financial support (Wilding 2006).

4.4.2 The social aspect of remittances

Remittances usually refer to the money and resources that migrants send to their country of origin. Remittances, however, are analyzed here as a constitutive aspect of the relationships between migrants and their family members, rather than in terms of their impact on the society of origin (Muller 2008).

Understanding migrant remittance practices has become an important area of study for migration scholars. By focusing on economic transfers, these studies observe migrants' non-monetary contributions in the maintenance of migrant communities (Castellanos 2007). Remittances are, according to Castañeda, an indicator of the strength and extent of the social relations between migrants and their families. As stated before, migrants leave their family behind geographically but not emotionally, and most of them keep their moral commitments towards their family expressed through caring practices (Castañeda 2011). Therefore remittances, as a financial household strategy, have implications that expand further the economic domain and affect social roles and emotional processes (Sørensen 2007). Remittances are a mean to express care for the recipients and to reinforce previous social ties and responsibilities, which maintain trust networks and emotional bonds across distances (Tilly 2007). Money has to be seen as a medium of relationships and care, in other words as a 'product of love' (Castañeda 2011).

Remittances are part of a broader framework of persisting communication between members of the transnational family (Singh et al. 2010). For migrants, to remit is to be a good family member and it is seen as their main responsibility. Although this is not without problems, as Fisher and Tronto (1990: 56) write: 'even at its best... conflict will always be part of caring'. Tensions arise within migrant families when there is a perception of an imbalance of communication, caring and money in the transnational family and migrants could be labeled as "bad" parents or ungrateful children for not remitting. Since a moral distinction is made between those who remit and those who do not, when the economic situation does not allow them to do so, many migrants may prefer to completely cut communication and ties with their families rather than return home empty handed.

To remit means to stay attached to family and community; in this way migrants can expect loyalty and continued membership in their families and communities of origin. A good provider is expected to leave, which is indicative of the enormous social pressure exercised on individuals. Not migrating is seen as a parental failure to provide economically for one's children (Castañeda 2011).

4.5 Theory of masculinity and fatherhood

In recent years, the question of masculinity in transnational communities has attracted attention among international migration scholars (Hoang and Yeoh 2011; Pribilsky 2012; Smith 2006). However, the emotions manifested by migrant men, in particular with respect to their fatherhood, have been scarcely documented.

When reflecting about masculinity, West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender" is a core principle in my analysis. Their approach challenges the conceptualization of gender as a 'natural' property of individuals and conceives it as an ongoing situated process. They introduce the concept of gender not as something we are born with or something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman 1987). They transformed an ascribed status which is taken to be one's 'essential nature' into an achieved status. Thus, masculinity is a 'doing' rather than a 'being' and 'a mean of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society' (West and Zimmerman 1977: 126). As defined by Kimmel: 'masculinity is a constantly changing collection of norms and meanings embedded in gender relations between men and women and among men' (Kimmel 2005). One of the characteristics of masculinity, as argued by Kimmel, is its changing nature. As everything that is socially constructed, it is not static or unalterable but rather dynamic and relational and it varies across time and cultures (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Masculinity is composed of 'many masculinities' which struggle for power and dominance in inter and intra gender relations (Vasquez Del Aguila 2014).

Although different masculinities can coexist within the same group, the literature describes there is an intense pressure on men to fit in the stereotype of hegemonic masculinity and to adopt the normative version of masculinity prescribed in a particular group (Adams and Savran 2002). Hegemonic masculinity is an ideal representation of being a man around which men constitute their gender identity. It is a culturally idealized form, both personal and collective, which gives the common sense about breadwinning and manhood (Vasquez Del Aguila 2014). Men construct their

gender identity through repeated performances, tests and rites of passage, and through the demonstration of male achievements, such as the ability to provide resources for the family (Guttmann 1997). Men's breadwinning and economic support of children is a demonstration of their masculinity but also the most unifying element in fathers' lives. So the role as the primary provider of financial resources for their families is one of the main aspects of the hegemonic masculine model (Marsiglio et al. 2005: 102).

Gender has the function to regulate what set of emotions is entitled to what gender and which emotions can be shown to whom and in what contexts. Emotions such as anger, pride, and independence are characterized as masculine and supported and encouraged among men (Fernandez et al. 2000). Men have traditionally internalized rigid emotional expressions and have been conditioned not to show certain feelings. This socially conditioned relation toward emotions is, according to Montes, one of the most widespread characteristics that define what it means to be a man across cultures and, thus, how masculinity is achieved (Montes 2013).

To discuss the condition of transnational migrant fathers, it is useful to look at the intersections of gender and emotions and to understand whether migration changes or maintains traditional gender roles. An interesting approach to the issue is presented by Parreñas who argues that migration enables men to fulfill the traditional responsibility of breadwinning, reaffirming the traditional division of labour of male as the breadwinner and female as the housewife. According to Parreñas' view, in the families of migrant men, transnational fathers tend to perform an emphasized version of conventional fathering; through the display of authority and imposition of discipline on children, physically distant fathers can project the role of a disciplining 'father figure'. By maintaining the traditional masculine notions of fathering, transnational fathers preserve gender conventions but also maintain their identity as 'fathers', which is threatened by their distance from the family and challenged by the inclusion of actions that are seen as maternal, such as communication (Parreñas 2008). Although I agree with Parreñas in her argument that transnational fathers accomplish their role of breadwinners through migration, I argue that migrants' role as fathers goes much further, as migration changes 'traditional' roles.

I follow Montes' theory that migration becomes an opportunity for transnational fathers to reflect on their emotions towards their family members and, as result of those, contradict some of the negative traits associated with a hegemonic masculinity, such as being unemotional, non-nurturing,

aggressive, and dispassionate (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Likewise, Pribilsky argues that migration creates the opportunity to get in touch with deeper emotions that would be neglected under normal circumstances because of the social association with feminine identities. 'Distance made some hearts grow fonder' as Pribilsky (2012: 330) puts it. Separation leads migrant men to embrace less rigid masculine models that might allow them to adjust to their new emotional circumstances. As migrant mothers, migrant men suffer the emotional cost of separation but their coping mechanisms differ from them because of their rigid and inhibited emotional expressiveness (Montes 2013).

According to Marsiglio et al. (2005) men often define fathering very much in terms of marriage and sharing the same home with their children and their children's mother. When they migrate, migrant men lose the shared living space with their children and their wives, and such loss can be expected to provoke substantial changes in men's sense of power and authority. For Pribilsky, migration overturns the social structure of the family, altering 'traditional' roles and the division of labour both in migrants themselves and in the family members in the home country. Male migrants now in charge of their own domestic lives come to assume many traditionally female roles, while women are more involved in decision-making and adopt tasks once carried out by their husbands. Migration involves a gender transition in housework (Sørensen 2007), transnational fathers, whenever home, tend to do more housework and develop a new awareness of the gendered nature of work, perhaps because their masculinity is left intact by their financial contributions to the family.

Once more, I emphasize the malleability of gender as a social construction that shifts according to the emotional needs of individuals in the family and cannot be understood as natural and unchanging. I analyze men's migration as a gendered experience and I am interested in the complexity of the relationship inside transnational families, how men position themselves in the family focusing on care.

4.6 Men in non-traditional occupations

As mentioned above, masculinity is located within a system of social relations. For this reason it is possible to argue that occupation is an important field in which masculinity is maintained and challenged (Lupton 2000). As Carrigan et al. (1985) argue, the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity supports the social definition that there are 'men's work' and 'women's work'. Activities such as teaching, mothering and nursing are constructed as feminine because they require

characteristics such as being emotional and caring. On the contrary, men's occupations revolve around qualities such as strength and rationality.

Masculine identities, like other identities, need to be constantly reconstructed and negotiated and this becomes even more relevant in environments where masculine identities are challenged (Lupton 2000). Such view is confirmed by Williams (1989) according to whom, the reason why a small percentage of men perform domestic work should not be ascribed to gender discrimination, but rather to its association with femininity. Masculinities can, therefore, be challenged when men enter occupations that are traditionally populated by women. I believe that, in the context of care giving, it is interesting to investigate how male domestic workers experience working in a sector which is extremely gender segregated. Understanding the different meanings that men attach to gender, can help explain the existence of occupations that falls outside of the normal gender patterns.

Men are generally concerned with establishing and defending their gender identity and many achieved masculinity taking distance from whatever is associated with femininity. They have historically used the occupational realm to secure economic advantages but also to affirm their essential difference from women (Williams 1989). Male domestic workers, for instance, may feel downgraded to an inferior social role because of the lower status of women's job. As it has been said, the workplace is an arena for exercising and regenerating masculinity, so those men who cross over into nontraditional occupations might fear that working in a female field would limit their ability to use their work identity to confirm their masculinity. Migrant domestic workers find themselves in a critical position: by asserting a traditional masculinity, their competence and suitability to work as care-givers would be called into question, yet by adopting a more feminine approach they would suffer a challenge to their sexuality and masculinity (Lupton 2000).

As Sarti and Scrinzi (2010) notice in their studies on migrant care-giver workers, in order to protect their sense of masculinity from criticism or shame, many male domestic workers develop different techniques to re-establish their masculinity in the work sphere. Similar patterns result from my empirical material, which will be presented during my analysis.

5. The phenomenon of domestic labour in Italy

In this chapter I present the phenomenon of domestic labour in Italy, with the aim of contextualizing my informants' narratives that I will present in the following chapters. My informants are all employed by Italian families as domestic or care-giver workers and some of them live in the same house of their employers. In southern European countries, such as Spain or Italy, the presence of a care-giver in the house is considered a more desirable and cheaper solution than admitting elderly or non-self-sufficient persons in care facilities. Migrant care-givers became therefore an essential part of the Italian welfare system which is based on a family model of care. This section outlines the State legislation in terms of regularization of domestic labour, working arrangements and ethnic composition of care-giver workers in Italy, which are useful elements to understand the context my case study is centered on.

5.1 Defining caregiving and domestic labour

I found particularly interesting, for the purposes of my thesis, the view of Kofman and Raghuram who broadly define care as 'the work of looking after the physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more people...[embracing] a range of human experiences and relationships of obligation, trust, loyalty and commitment concerned with the well-being of others' (Kofman and Raghuram 2009: 3).

I attempt to contextualize this definition to the life experiences of the migrant care workers I had met. My interviewees negotiate between their professional role as paid care-givers, employed by Italian families, and their position as informal care providers for their loved ones in the home country. The distinction between the two roles, and the meanings attached to each of them, are far from clear. On one side, while doing care work in Italy, migrant men discovered an unexpected emotional involvement in the practice of paid care. On the other side, their actions aiming at improving the livelihood of their significant others back home, and at building 'long distance intimacy' with them are much more than a private exchange of care resources (Parreñas 2005). A professional dimension is fundamental to the prospering of their transnational relationships, which has necessarily to be mediated by the money sent home.

In this thesis I use alternatively the terms 'domestic worker' and 'care-giver worker' and a clarification of them is needed. The International Labour Organization uses a definition of domestic work which includes housekeepers, child-care workers, home-based personal care workers,

domestic helpers and cleaners. Domestic workers are involved in a wide spectrum of activities such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, elderly, disabled or even domestic animals (ILO 2012). The tasks may not be closely defined and may vary widely over time and according to geographical and cultural context.

The term ‘care-giver worker’ refers to a person who supports elderly or people with physical or mental disabilities in their own homes, with everyday tasks such as cleaning, shopping, getting dressed and cooking (Drentea 2007). Care workers can be professionals, as in the case of nurses, as well as non-professionals, such as *au-pairs*. Mainly when the work takes place within the household, the activities of domestic and care workers might overlap. In a familial context, migrant workers are often treated by their employers as ‘members of the family’ which makes the boundary between work and privacy very blurred. For live-in workers, in particular, there might be no limit in the range of tasks they are entitled to perform. Theodor, for instance has a contract as domestic worker but among his assignments, he is expected to babysit the children of his employers.

Thus, although we do have a distinction between domestic work and care-giving work, the border between the categories is fluid. Domestic work is a broader term which focuses on housework such as cleaning and cooking and does not necessarily include the presence of a non-self-sufficient person. Despite that I argue that domestic work also contains elements of care-giving. Preparing meals or cleaning the house of an old person, for instance, can be seen as a form of caring. Moreover, they both might involve a component of emotional support, which may include listening, counseling, and companionship. Therefore, in this context, I use the two terms as synonyms.

In relation to the definition of domestic and care work, I present hereafter a table that gives an overview of the ethnic and gender composition of domestic and care-giver workers in the city of Milan, where I based my data collection. The table refers to the applications for the regularization of labour migrants in 2002 by gender, average age, type of contract signed and nationality.¹

1 The data presented in the table has been retrieved from Bernasconi (2004)

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Master Thesis

<i>M</i>		<i>F</i>		<i>M</i>		<i>F</i>	
<i>Domestic work</i>				<i>Care-giver work</i>			
Philippine	31,9	Ecuador	31,7	Ecuador	32,1	Ecuador	33,6
Peru	31,2	Philippine	32,1	Peru	32,3	Ukraine	42,3
Sri Lanka	30,7	Peru	31,5	Philippine	32,7	Peru	32,8
Ecuador	31,3	Ukraine	37,5	Sri Lanka	31,1	Romania	33,3
Romania	26,9	Romania	28,6	Ukraine	35,3	Moldavia	40,9
China	30,5	Moldavia	35,1	Romania	27,5	Philippine	32,8
Morocco	26,7	China	32,0	Morocco	26,1	Poland	43,3
Senegal	31,6	Albania	30,1	Albania	24,0	El Salvador	30,5
Ukraine	32,3	El Salvador	26,8	China	31,8	Albania	32,0
Brazil	31,6	Brazil	31,5	Moldavia	33,4	Bolivia	35,2
<i>Average 29,4</i>		<i>Average 30,3</i>		<i>Average 31,3</i>		<i>Average 35,7</i>	

When examining migrant workers' countries of origin, the data are strongly polarized if we consider that more than 75 per cent of the total number of migrants involved in domestic work belongs to only six citizenships: Ecuador, Peru, Philippines, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Romania (Bernasconi 2004). Three main migration chains towards Italy can be identified, which I followed in the choice of my informants: from Eastern Europe, East Asia and Latin America. Such chains have ostensibly different aims. Easter European workers (Ukrainian, Moldovan, Polish and Russian) appear as target-earners, which mean that in a short-medium period of time they seek to maximize their economic gain to return to their countries of origin and reunify with their families (Bernasconi 2004). On the contrary, South American and East Asian migrants have a long term plan, also due to a greater flow of male migrants and with the advantage of being supported by a greater network already established in the area (Bernasconi 2004).

Examining the gender composition of migrant labour in the domestic sector, it is noticeable that in Milan, as in the rest of the country, a massive employment of migrant women in domestic labour is occurring. We are therefore witnessing a process of 'feminization of migration'. Around 80 per cent of employed migrant women in Milan work in the domestic sector, making domestic labour a typical feminine job (Bernasconi 2004). Notwithstanding that, the phenomenon of migrant men employed in the domestic and care sector is increasing. In recent years, the presence of migrant men has been shifting around ten/eleven percent (Sarti 2004).

The reason behind such phenomenon is linked to the very limited possibilities of legal immigration in the country, which makes domestic service a privileged channel for migrants' regularization. Especially after the economic crisis started in 2008, the country does not have many possibilities to offer in traditional sectors and foreign men weakness on the job market may have pushed them to accept typical feminine jobs. Indeed, Italian men do not seem interested in performing domestic work, fact that could be explained with their reluctance to renounce the privileges of the traditional gender division of labour (Sarti 2004).

5.2 A family-based model of care

The phenomenon of transnational migration in care and domestic work is becoming more and more significant in many European countries. First of all, the decreasing in birth rates and the increasing of life expectancy in Europe resulted in a progressive ageing of the population, drastically increasing the demand for elderly care. Socio-economic factors, as well, need to be taken into account; a greater number of European women are employed outside the house and people's mobility increased in order to grab job opportunities. Finally, the welfare State has mostly neglected the need for elderly assistance (Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck 2012). As a result, the burden of elderly care can no longer be handled by the family on its own and families rely on the help of migrant workers.

Italy represents a rather relevant region in which to explore the emergence of transnational families. Contrary to what happens in North-Western European countries, where current immigration is mainly the result of family reunion (Zontini 2010), in Southern Europe it is possible to observe a continuous flow of both male and female workers. The presence of large groups of men and women migrating alone to work and improve their families condition is a key factor in the development of transnational families. This labour force is required to meet the growing demand of the Italian middle classes for home-based care workers (Zontini 2010). In Italy, indeed, it is the family that is primarily responsible for providing welfare for financially or physically dependent family members (Saraceno 1998). The lack of a strong welfare system and of significant public alternatives turns domestic labour into a private issue to which individual solutions must be sought.

Over the last decades, care has in general moved outside of the realm of affective relationships based in traditional kinship relations and shifted into other forms of provision often through the state. This process of de-familiarization of care means that care has become financially and

temporally valued in the market. In other words, the time of a care worker is valued and the labor of care is timed. In Italy the provision of care remains characterized by a ‘certain familialism’, which means that the organization of welfare relies on the family as the main source of care provision (Lyon 2006).

In such context, migrant labor allows the maintenance and the continuity of family care. The often continuous presence of the live-in care workers and non-specification of tasks shares the characteristics of informal care. At the same time, while some of the actual labor of care has been displaced from wives and daughters, they nevertheless remain significantly responsible for the management of the care contract or relationship. In other words, migrant labor in Italy fills a supply gap at a low cost and also sustains an ideal (Lyon 2006).

Such family-based model of care is even encouraged by the state and by public policies. The Italian government, in fact, supports informal care performed by undocumented migrant workers by means of cash payments: ‘attendance allowance’ (*indennità di accompagnamento*) and ‘care allowance’ (*assegno di cura*). These two measures are quite different: the ‘attendance allowance’ is a flat-rate cash transfer granted to all citizens who are certified as totally disabled on the basis of a medical assessment, which should in principle follow the same criteria across the country. The ‘care allowance’, where it exists, is provided by local welfare departments on the basis of a means test and highly selective criteria, which are strongly heterogeneous across municipalities (Naldini 2006). The introduction of cash-for-care benefits, in a country with a scarcity of social services may be read as a confirmation of the private nature of caregiving, while shifting part of its costs on to the collectivity (Naldini 2008).

The policy of cash payments led to a change in the phenomenon of domestic labour in Italy. The introduction of cash-for-care benefits made care work considerably more affordable for a broader range of the population. If higher-class Italian families have long used paid care within the home for the elderly, as well as for domestic work more generally, Italian middle class families can now employ a domestic worker.

The Italian familialistic care regime supported by generous and uncontrolled cash benefits induced therefore the emergence of a ‘migrant in the family’ model of care (Bettio et al. 2006: 272) in which the state is barely involved in the provision or financing of social care (Van Hooren 2012).

5.3 State legislation and the regularization of domestic workers

Labour migration into Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon as the migration flow only started in the 1980s (Calavita 2004: 345). The state lacked any specific legislation in the domestic sector until 1986, when the first norms to regulate labour migration had been promulgated. Such norms established that migrant workers were employable in the domestic sector. However this could happen only in the absence of Italian workers eligible for the same job. Moreover, foreign domestic workers could only have a full-time contract; and when expired, they were obliged to return to their country of origin and were not allowed to return to Italy for a period of three years. As a matter of fact, the Italian government adopted at first a protectionist approach, with the attempt of limiting the arrival of foreign labour and underling its temporary nature (Colombo 2003).

If on one hand, the Italian State put strict limitation to the presence of labour migrants, on the other hand, there was an increasing belief that foreign care work was a crucial resource for the Italian welfare regime. While in 1990 the so called ‘Martelli Law’² put rules and constraints on the arrival of labour migrants, one year later, in 1991, the Ministry of Labour allowed specifically the entrance of live-in domestic workers from non-European countries, on condition that they did not change job or employer for two years. Domestic workers, therefore, appear to be a privileged category within migrant workers. The fact that care work represented the easiest, and sometimes the only way to be legally employed, led many migrants towards this profession.

The current legal framework that regulates the immigration flow in Italy is the so called Bossi-Fini law³ of 2002, which includes specific rules concerning the regularization of migrant care workers. The law establishes annual quotas reserved to domestic and care workers and defines the general conditions for the employment of foreign workers. For instance, the employer has to submit a self-certification of his occupational status and of his salary as a proof that he can afford to legally hire a domestic worker and pay the contributions.

2

The Martelli Law takes its name from Claudio Martelli, who covered the position of Attorney General at that time.

3

The law is named after the first signatories Gianfranco Fini and Umberto Bossi, who at the time covered, respectively, the positions of Vice President of the Council of Ministers and Minister for Institutional Reforms.

Such policies were enacted as a reaction to the large number of irregular care assistants who were already in existence. It has been estimated that, in 2003, 77 per cent of all workers were unregistered (Caritas 2003). With the aim of decreasing the number of irregularly employed workers, the Italian government carried out cyclic practice of regularizations which enabled many irregular migrant workers to start working regularly as private care assistants. The Italian government, in fact, has never developed a coherent action in relation to migrant care workers and the institutionalization of migrant labor has been the result of occasional regularizations instead of state targeted policies (Van Hooren 2008).

Two main regularizations had been carried out so far, in 2009 and in 2012, as a consequence of the increasing inflows of migrant domestic workers in the 2000s⁴. Such regularizations consisted of amnesties for those who occupied care and domestic workers without a regular contract. The employers could avoid the severe sanctions imposed by the ‘Bossi-Fini law’ by declaring to the authorities that they have been employing a care worker and by paying a contribution of 500 euros per worker. The employer would then request a residence permit on behalf of the migrant worker. The procedures of regularization were entirely centered on the employer, with no active role of the migrant worker, who was not authorized to participate in any of the stages of the procedure (Amnesty International 2012). This makes domestic workers highly dependent on the benevolence of their employers. Since regularizing an illegal employee cost to the families between 30 and 40 per cent more, many did not agree or could not afford passing from an irregular to a regular contract (Pasquinelli and Rusmini 2010). Large numbers of domestic workers are therefore employed informally and cannot be granted a residence permit, becoming an easy target for exploitation and lacking basic working rights. Having a status shapes to a great extent the life of my informants, not simply regarding their working situation but also in the maintenance of family ties. Holding a residence permit allows migrant care-giver to visit their families in their country of origin as well as to apply for family reunification.

Thus, these amnesties have benefited a very large number of immigrants working in the underground economy and, simultaneously, have created expectations which have acted as a strong pull factor fueling new migration flows in the medium run (Venturini 2003: 303).

4

The total number of foreign nationals regularly employed by families as care assistants increased from about 5000 in the 1970s to 464,033 in 2007 (Van Hooren, 2010).

5.4 The role of the Church as recruiting agency

Not by coincidence, the migration flows toward Italy have originated mainly from Catholic countries. Religious institutes play an important role for migrant care workers in Italy, functioning as mediation between the new comers and the Italian society. In fact, it is through a parish that I came in contact with a few of my informants who were attending there Italian language classes.

First of all, Catholic parishes cover a social function facilitating the meeting between compatriots and helping newcomers in finding an accommodation. They function as places of socialization and dissemination of information needed by migrants for their integration. But mostly they work as informal recruitment agencies of migrant care workers in Italy.

Andrei, one of my informants, was employed thanks to the priest of the church he attends, who took the role of mediator between him and the family. In fact, priests and nuns use their network to match families and migrant workers but they also provide migrants with assistance on administrative issues related to work permits and housing (Sarti 2010). Palidda (2008) points out that, when it comes to regularization, Italian institutions have recently tend to rely on parishes, favoring migration from Catholic countries and so discouraging migration through other networks. As claimed by Sarti, migrants are clearly aware of the importance of the Church as "facilitator agency" in their relations with the welcoming society, therefore relations with the parishes are generally carefully treated.

The charitable work carried out by volunteers in Italian parishes is highly ambivalent and the relationship with migrants is somehow specious and opportunistic. On the one hand, local religious institutions represent a valuable resource, but on the other hand they are perceived as a place through which local people can exercise a form of hidden control over domestic workers. Parishes tend to intervene in private aspects of the migrants' lives, for example social and religious activities, and the support of migrant domestic workers is mixed with the expectation that they become involved in social and religious activities (Bettio 2006). Therefore, if initially it was Italian priests to represent the referent point key, today we are seeing a greater reliance on fellow priests, with a lesser attendance at local parishes, mostly characterized, to migrant's eyes, by forms of opportunism. On the other hand it is possible to assume also that the Church tends to have represented an indirect inhibitory element of any process of integration with the local reality, as

certainly not interested in getting this community of faithful Catholics exposed to the secularizing trends that pervade the Italian society. So, if ecclesiastical institutions have favored the inclusion in the labor market, they have also worked to preserve the Catholic identity (Cominelli 2002).

To sum up, migrant labour within the domestic domain has become fundamental for many Italian families and for the Italian welfare system. Although it is still a female-dominated job, men caregivers are starting to take their space within such field. This is due to the absence of more traditional occupations and to the fact that domestic work is considered a privileged channel to obtain a resident permit. However, a vast part of domestic workers in Italy are not regularly employed. Such condition impacts not only their living and working conditions in Italy, but also their capacity to provide care for their families in the sending societies. Kamil, one of my informants, is an undocumented migrant worker who does not hold a residence permit, therefore he is unable to travel to his home country and visit his family. If he leaves Italy, he would not be able to return. Due to such constraints, transnational caring practices become even more relevant and are often enhanced, as they represent the only way in which migrant workers can overcome the distance and ‘be there’ for their families.

6. Family life and transnational care practices

This chapter examines the viewpoints and life experiences of migrant fathers, tracing on my informants’ personal accounts and my own interpretations. Through the lens of physical absence and emotional proximity, I dissect migrant men’s feelings, caring practices, channels of communication and involvement in the daily lives of their distant families in order to understand how transnational bonds are maintain within distant families.

6.1 The family influence on migration

In this first part of my analysis I discuss my informants’ reasoning for migrating. It is primarily family relations, as well as friendship networks, that represent a motivation for migration and mobility and often comprise the infrastructures of transnational social fields (Levitt and Schiller 2004).

Theodor, 35 years old, left the Philippines in 2008 to work as domestic worker in Italy. The reason why he decided to move to Italy is that his sister, Adele, had migrated to Milan few years before. Adele assumed the role of ‘auspice’ assisting her brother in the adjustment process of settling in a

new country which involves bureaucratic matters, such as arranging transportation, finding housing and jobs, as well as emotional help and support in a moment of cultural seclusion and material hardship.

Theodor: I came to Italy because of my sister. She arrived before, in 2004, she married an Italian, she settled here and then she helped me coming as well. She found me an accommodation and a job. The first day I arrived in Milan, I already had a job. She was working at a family, cleaning etc...and she found another Italian family who was looking for someone. It was easy. But it's not just that...you know...I felt safer and less lonely because I knew already someone in Milan.

Serena: How did you decide to migrate?

Theodor: It was what I had to do...To provide a better future for my family...At first my wife was not happy...it's not good to be left alone but then she understood I was doing it for her. This made it easier for me to go. Also my children were happy when I told them I was leaving. They told me: 'go daddy so then you will buy us a big house'.

In his narrative, Theodor explains that the motivations behind his migration are mainly economic and can be traced in his will to improve his family's living conditions in the Philippines. Theodor explains that migrating was 'what he had to do' to reach his aim of giving a better future to his children. This gives us an indication of Theodor's sense of responsibility towards his family but, simultaneously, reveals the amount of expectations that his family has towards him. Theodor is the 'man of the family' and covers the role of breadwinner. Migration allows him to fulfill his duties as economic provider; on the contrary, not migrating could be seen by the community as a parental failure. Theodor's migration is an example of 'gendered migration' as it allows him to maintain his role of father and husband *in absentia*.

The help received by Theodor from his sister during the process of migration to Italy, is an example of mutual aid exchanged between new comers and old migrants and reveals how transnational families are embedded in a transnational social field, a system of communication, social assistance, money, advice and emotional support that connects Italy and the Philippines.

Adele is a relevant figure in order to examine the development of transnational families. Despite she left the Philippines, she still maintains a high level of contact with her homeland and she is the node through which information and resources flow. The fact that she is incorporated in the receiving

society, does not contradict with the maintenance of transnational connections and the persisting of a sense of family. The relationship between Theodor and his sister demonstrates that the boundaries of social fields are not fixed and exemplifies the concept of family as a fluid, long distance unit whose members negotiate relationships and caring responsibilities across borders.

Initially Mayumi, Theodor's wife, did not agree on his decision to migrate; she was afraid of the amount of new responsibilities and challenges she would have to face as a consequence of her husbands' physical absence. After a while, however, she understood that it represented a sacrifice for the sake of the whole family and she accepted it. Claiming that his wife's support made migration an easier step for him to take, Theodor suggests that migration is essentially a family strategy instead of an individual choice. The reaction of Mayumi has an impact on Theodor's emotional state as it will affect the relationship they are going to establish from far.

In fact, as Baldassar suggests (2008), those individuals whose migrations are supported by their families and communities will have fewer difficulties to manage transnational family relationships than those individuals whose migration meets with disapproval. A similar conclusion emerges from my material. Ghebru, another of my informants, has never been supported by his family, in particular his wife, in his decision to migrate. As a consequence, their distant communications are mostly characterized by a sense of mistrust and exasperation and Ghebru has to live with the pressure to return home exercised by his family.

6.2 Expressing feelings of longing

During my interviews, I came across several examples of men expressing their concerns and emotions about being separated from their families. Almost without exception, the informants were moved when discussing their transnational relationships. The emotions involved into the migration process - fear, anxiety, nostalgia, love, and sacrifice – demonstrate the complexity of the decision to migrate, which is not only based on a rational cost-benefit analysis but takes into consideration family relations and emotional bonds with other family members (Montes, 2013). One of the key emotions that informants expressed during interviews was a sense of missing, in particular for their spouse and children, and a sense of frustration for not “being there” as it emerges from the narratives below.

Life is hard, it's hard to know that you left your children so far from you. You always worry for them. You miss your family but, at the same time, you know you are doing it for them (Carlos, El Salvador)

It is very difficult to be far from my family; it is the first time so it is difficult to adjust. It is a matter of sacrifices and then there will be the fruits of that (Theodor, Philippines).

Some good things, some bad things...I have earned money but I have not seen my children while they were growing...so it is most what I have lost than what I have gained (Ghebru, Eritrea).

The testimonies of Theodor, Carlos and Ghebru show the profound sacrifice and the emotional costs of migration and reflect the situation that millions of mothers and fathers face as they become transnational parents. Reflecting on what it means to be apart, they expressed what scholars refer to as metacognition, that is, 'to think about their thoughts and give direction to their thoughts and ideas' (Schrader McMillan and Paul 2011: 369).

While for transnational mothers to express feeling of longing for their children left behind is considered somehow 'natural', according to the standards of hegemonic masculinity migrant fathers are not expected to show their emotions. However, as my informants' narratives show, the physical distance that separates these migrant fathers from their families, gives them the opportunity to get in touch with their feelings and to reflect about their thoughts, in a way that they did not experience before migration. This becomes evident from Kamil's words:

At home I would not have said things like I miss you but now it's different. I am here and she (his wife) is there...Last time I have seen my family was one year ago, my son is one year old, if I see him once per year, is he ever even going to remember me? (Kamil, Sri Lanka).

Kamil worries about his inability to build a father and son relationship with his child due to the physical distance. He seems particularly upset of having the chance of seeing his son only once per year and potentially of not being able to follow him while he grows up. In fact, he also expresses his concern of being perceived by those left behind simply as money provider and turn into a nominal father. This reveals how Kamil refuses to narrow his father role to simply material provision, but on the contrary he seeks multiple ways to emotionally connect with his wife and child.

By reflecting upon his feelings and openly expressing his emotions, Kamil positions himself outside the culturally expected masculine identity, according to which men should be unemotional and inexpressive, and he embraces less rigid masculine models that might allow him to adjust to his new emotional circumstances. Such ability of stepping outside the hegemonic masculinity model has been defined by Barker (2005) as ‘resistance’. Kamil’s narrative uncovers how migration becomes a factor of change within the construction of masculinities. The situation of physical separation leads many of my informants to reflect upon their feeling as a result of being separated from their families. Migration therefore, might create the opportunity to get in touch with deeper emotions that would be normally neglected by men because of the social association with feminine identities. Thus, migration generates processes that make migrant father and husband meditate on their roles and feelings and start assuming behaviors and mindset that were not contemplated in their family life before migration.

In the account below, Andrei expresses a dilemma which arises from his way of doing masculinity and fatherhood from far.

Serena: What do you talk about on the phone?

Andrei: I generally ask about school, how the children do at school and about their health...That’s what we speak of.

Serena: Do they also ask about how you feel here?

Andrei: Yeah, they ask me how I’m doing. I always tell them that I’m working, I’m fine, I never say if I’m angry or sad... I do not want my wife to worry about me...

Serena: And is it really like that?

Andrei: On the economic side I am satisfied but which kind of family is that? From 40 to 50, the best part of a man’s life and I am here...my wife, she still cries on the phone...we live in the countryside, we have some land and animals, there is a lot of work to do and when she can't do it herself she has to ask someone else, a neighbor...this makes me sad...

The complexity of being a distant father and husband becomes evident when talking to Andrei. His account shows two interesting aspects. On one hand, Andrei is proud of the material accomplishments he achieved due to migration, and being the economic provider enhances his masculinity. On the other hand though, he recognizes the emotional cost of his choice and he

manifests to me a feeling of guilt for not 'being there'. Furthermore, Andrei feels defeated when his wife has to ask other men to help her with heavy works. In this situation, his masculinity is undermined as he is unable to meet the obligations of a good husband and head of the house.

A second aspect of his narrative reflects the practice, diffused among distant family members, of omitting what might give loved ones worries or anxiety. This is also observed by Baldock (2003: 53) in her study on Dutch migrants residing in Australia. Migrant parents would hide from their families that they were homesick, physically ill or depressed. I argue that such effort to protect transnational kin from upsetting news is a way of protect the delicate emotional balances that characterize distant communications.

To conclude, in this chapter I tried to demonstrate the emotional cost of transnational migration for men, a reality which is poorly acknowledged and scarcely documented within migration studies. I found out that my interviewees are especially worried for not being totally part of the life of their family, not being able of being there to solve the problems of elderly parents, for comforting their spouses and for seeing their children growing up. Many of them feel guilty for being fathers, husbands and sons at distance. Moreover, despite their troubles they try not to show their family their sense of loss and inadequacy. Finally, the lens they use to analyze and manage their roles within the family changes as well.

6.3 Doing kin work and care practices in transnational space

In this section of my analysis, I explore the practices of distant care performed by my interviewees towards their families back home. Despite the limitations, all of the transnational fathers I spoke to made attempts to retain strong ties with their children left behind: by sending remittances, presents, by communicating at a distance, and visiting them back home. This aims at challenging the idea that distance leads to the destruction of family ties, exploring how migrant men are trying to recreate familiarity in a transnational space.

Every two months I sent my children pens, bags, everything they need in school...I was responsible for everything. I was not far, just far from the face but not from the heart. My wife was cooking and washing clothes and that's it. Even the clothes, I bought them. I changed with them, I was not far. The most important thing is my children's education. I discovered that my children were studying

the Koran and I said: My children are Christians and they won't become Muslim. So I decided to hire a teacher to teach them English. I saved my children (Ghebru, Eritrea).

Ghebru has been living and working in Italy for nearly twenty-five years and has spent most of them far from his wife and four children, now adults, who lived in Sudan. The geographical distance that separated Ghebru from his children, however, had not diminished his concern for them and their future which is manifested through continuous practices of transnational caring. Care is manifested through material provision but also on Ghebru's influence on their education.

In the narrative above, Ghebru proudly claims that he was majorly responsible for his children well-being and education. Through the economic provision of school items and clothes from Italy, he performed his role as father from a distance. Determined in his will of giving his children a Christian upbringing, Ghebru took his children out of school and hired a private teacher to teach them English at home, after he discovered that in the public school they attended in Sudan, his children were studying the Koran.

Even though he used to see his family once per year, Ghebru was present in his children's upbringing, taking fundamental decisions for their lives. Being physically far though, did not prevent him from being emotionally close to his children, suggesting how fatherhood consists of much more than physical presence. The two separate worlds Ghebru and his family lived in are brought together in one social space by emotional and financial ties, experiencing a fluid continuum. In a transnational context, fatherhood still means 'being there' even though not physically, and this is possible through the conveyance and exchange of care. The frequency and modality of care practices is the result of negotiated commitments that develop from family histories and personal relationships within families (Finch and Mason, 1993).

In Ghebru's family personal kin are kept alive and even considered unchanged by him thanks to his commitment towards the provision of economic and emotional support that overcome distance. This is even more evident as it seems that Ghebru considers himself the main provider of care to his children both in financial and emotional terms, by arguing that his wife's role as a parent was only to cook and wash their clothes.

The relationship with my kids is okay, they are studying and that's good but they don't listen to their mother, this is a problem. Through Skype I talk to them, I ask what the problem is. I always talk to them to make them understand our situation. I always tell them that they have to listen to their mother, that if their mum says they can't go out then they shouldn't do it. Before it was me who said these things but now it is different (Neel, Sri Lanka).

Neel has two teenage daughters who are living in Sri Lanka with his wife, Mathy. In this quote, Neel expresses his concern for their behavior towards their mother during his prolonged absence. When in Sri Lanka, the division of labour in Neel's family was quite conventional and he was the main responsible for his children's discipline. Migration, however, has overturned the social structure of Neel's family and changed its gender roles. The fact that Neel is far from home means that Mathy is involved in decision-making regarding every aspect of family life, decisions that Neel would have done otherwise. From Neel's experience it appears that migration transforms gendered interactions for both men and women that are usually taken for granted.

Transnational families negotiate new arrangements on a daily basis as they attempt to reshape their existence in order to maintain a transnational livelihood (Pribilsky 2004). The dynamics arising with migration, made Mathy becoming more responsible for the household and the education of the children than the scenario that would have taken place if Neel was still living with them in Sri Lanka. However, apparently, their daughters assume behaviors that highlight their reluctance in adjusting to this change and have difficulties in recognizing their mother as the new decision-maker in the family. Paradoxically, even though the mother is the new decision-maker, by telling the children that they should listen to their mother, it is clear that Neel still has a position in the final decision-making. In other words, he still has the authority and the power of disciplining his children.

From Neel's narrative another relevant aspect of his role as a distant father emerges. Although he seems to have conventional view of fatherhood, Neel does not simply accept an emotionally detached role from his kids; instead he tries quite hard to understand their problems and to make them understand the delicate situation they are living. Neel often talks to his children and he is willing to listen to them, assuming a father role that goes beyond the maintenance of the discipline. He expresses care in showing an interest in his children education and behavior and in their

relationship towards their mother. Doing so, Neel breaks the gender role stereotypes and expands his duties beyond the role of economic provider, as can be seen in the majority of my interviewees.

It's almost like I am there, when there are problems my wife sends me a text and I call them. I am still the one taking all the decisions, with my wife. Also when there are problems at school, I am the one calling the school...I feel 100% the father, not like my father...he never cared about us (Theodor, Philippines).

Theodor's narrative reminds us of the fact that not every parent has the privilege of being close to his children. However, it also shows that distant fathers do not necessarily abandon their children and that being a transnational father does not mean neglecting the responsibilities as a parent. Theodor is a 'physically absent' but 'emotionally present' father, who expresses care by taking responsibilities over his children and answering their need of care. As a transnational father, Theodor experienced the loss of primary shared living space with children and consequently, his care as a father cannot be displayed by simply 'being there'. Theodor compares himself to his own father who, even though was physically present, did not take an active part in the everyday life of his children. Theodor, paradoxically, feels more present in his children's life more than his father was, by living in the same house. Through Skype, he is able to give practical support as well moral help to the family.

6.3.1 Communication practices and 'virtual presence'

Due to the distance that separates transnational family members, virtual communication is essential to keep families ties alive. To communicate and to facilitate their transnational exchanges of care, migrants mostly rely on new technologies such as phone, e-mail, SMS texts and Skype (Bacigalupe 2011). As it appears from my informants' narratives, the proliferation of new communication technologies has radically transformed interpersonal communication. The objective of this section of my analysis is to investigate how men's way of doing transnational fatherhood changed due to the introduction of new communication technologies.

When I asked about his communication habits with his distant family, Theodor immediately showed me his mobile phone and told me how fundamental it is to keep contact with his family in the Philippines.

Theodor: For us Filipinos the phone is very important. With the first money I earned here I bought my family a mobile phone, cause until that point they didn't have one. I do everything with my phone, I wish them goodnight, I comfort my wife, I check on my parents' health...

Serena: What do you talk about on the phone?

Theodor: Everything! Our daily life, the kids, my work, the money...in a way it's like I'm there but it's not all good...Sometimes I don't feel like talking but I have to... my wife is always afraid that I am going to forget her, that I find another wife in Italy. I have many friends who did that but I could never do it... I am responsible for them.

The main interaction between Theodor and his family left behind is carried out through phone conversations. Money spending, disciplining children, emotional support, and job issues are all discussed between them over the phone. For transnational fathers like Theodor, ICTs become the only means through which they can keep being informed about their children's activities and at the same time achieve that proximity they used to have, despite distance.

When physically present, Theodor could display care through his body: raising the tone of his voice, showing physical affection and playing are those every day activities that keep intimacy and familiarity between kin. Because of the distance, all these simple acts of showing care are unrealizable. It is through the phone that Theodor virtually performs care and accomplishes his duties as a father. He reproduces every day rituals, such as wishing the children goodnight, which are the base of family relations. During their phone conversations, Theodor as well receives care and moral support. Emotions and feelings circulate among them and strengthen the bond between family members living in transnational space. Theodor and his family exchange what Vasquez Del Aguila (2014) defines as 'emotional remittances', the sharing of everyday lives, problems and achievements. From his narrative we can argue that new communication technologies fill a relational, emotional, and social void for families who live in a transnational space.

A second aspect that emerges from Theodor's narrative is the sense of moral obligation connected to care-giving practices. The 'keeping in touch' is very much linked to the moral commitment of migrants towards their families. At times, Theodor would rather not to speak with his family but morally he feels obliged to do so, as his wife feels insecure and fear to be abandoned. This reminds of Baldassar's (2007: 280) concept of 'mobility of care'. The commitment about caring obligations between him and his family has been arranged back home, and continues to be negotiated through

time. Thus, Theodor perceives the need of complying with the commitment of being loyal to his family and especially to his wife that he initiated when he was living in the Philippines.

Theodor, as many of my informants, kept repeating the concept of sacrifice and loyalty towards their families. They seemed very concerned of giving an image of themselves as moral fathers and husbands. In my view, such behavior is linked to the fact that, there is another aspect of their life in Italy they were less eager to show. My informants are exposed to different temptations and a great amount of freedom, far from their families and communities. However, the sense of responsibility towards his family prevailed, Theodor confessed me that in Italy he has been with other women and he had a extramarital relation.

For Theodor, the availability of ICTs means that whether he chooses not to communicate with some family members, he would be likely identified as a ‘bad father’ or a ‘bad husband’ and since he has no external excuse as to the choice that he made, he is considered personally responsible for that decision. “New” technologies therefore have generated new expectations of support by Theodor’s family back home and increase the level of obligation felt by him to give emotional support. On the one hand, Theodor embraces the new means of communication that overcome the effects of distance, on the other hand, he might perceive as negative the ways in which new ICTs reduced their capacity to sustain a sense of distance (Wilding, 2006). This creates a sort of paradox in which Theodor seeks to overcome the sense of distance from his family and, at the same time he would like somehow to maintain such distance that protects him from the responsibilities and the overwhelming pressure that comes from his kin in the Philippines.

Now (that we talk on Skype) it is like we are close. We speak every morning and every evening, always...always. Before Skype I could spend 100 euros per day to talk to them. Instead of eating I charged the phone and talk to the children and after I felt like my stomach is full. I manage so that we eat at the same time, even if I am not hungry. (Neel, Sri Lanka).

Neel enthusiastically describes the improvements that technology brought to his life and to the relationship with his family. Through a metaphor, he explains how whenever he talks to his children, he feels like his stomach is full. In other words, being in contact and ‘being there’ for his family is like nourishment for him. The economic aspect plays a crucial role, now he can afford to be in contact with his family every day while before he had to live a cheap life to be able to talk. In

particular, Neel has his meals in front of the computer at the time when his family is eating in Sri Lanka. Neel is using Skype to create a form of 'virtual connectedness' that might substitute for physical co-presence (Licoppe 2004). Looking at each other through the screen, Neel and his family recreate those everyday shared activities, such as enjoying a meal, which constitute the base for family life. Before the introduction of Skype, Neel missed the immediate feeling of co-presence and simultaneity that sight allows.

I like video-calls so I can actually see my children's faces, I can be sure that they are doing well and I have more a feeling of being together. But sometimes I would rather write an email, when I am sad or angry for example. But then they take a long time to reply and I get nervous. I feel I don't find a way to get close to them because they shield themselves from me (Josè, Ecuador).

Josè likes to Skype with his children, as it adds to the communication the visual aspect which is a powerful tool in shaping their distant relationship. For Josè, listening to the voice of his children remains essential as a mean of assessing their feelings and creates a sense of proximity. In fact, through video calls he can see them and feel confident that they are well, healthy and happy.

Video calls make the boundaries between absence and presence blurred and make Josè simultaneously not completely present and not completely absent. However, there are occasions when he would prefer not to use it, as when he is sad or upset and doesn't want his children to sense that he might be having problems. On those occasions he feels email gives him more security and control over the communication. Simultaneously, sometimes his children seem they want to hide something from him, delaying their answers to their father's emails and Josè gets the feeling they are shielding themselves from him. While communicating at a distance, Josè may realize that he is no longer able to exert the same level of control on his children.

Once again, it seems difficult to replace physical co-presence and even frequent communication by phone reveals its limitations. Although video-calls may create a feeling of 'being together', as Josè says, it is hard to cope with the constant delay of co-presence.

I always spoke with them by phone but I cannot say at that point we cared about love, we wanted to solve that problem...that we were far from each other; we wanted to get closer to each other...actually I am not even sure that it improved the relationship with my children...as time

passes, it gets harder to make them talk, to find something to say, and so I keep on asking them what about this or that (Ghebru, Eritrea).

Ghebru, to a certain extent, stands out from the rest of my informants. Even though he kept regular contact with his wife and children, his energies were all towards the effort of reunifying and put an end to their physical separation. Ghebru complains about the superficiality and repetitiveness that affected the phone conversations in the long run. The aspect of timing it is very important in order to fully understand transnational family practices, and it is necessary to take their duration and frequency into consideration. While my other informants praised the importance of technology in the improvement of their relation with distant kin, Ghebru put them in a secondary position and prioritize physical reunion.

Although virtual communications provide a useful addition to caring practices, they do not displace them and Ghebru is very much aware of the great distance that separates him from his family. Thinking that the arrival of cheap and varied media would resolve the negative issues of separation is far too simplistic. On one side, new media create more opportunities for keeping in touch and for creating a stronger sense of proximity, but still the introduction of ICTs does not completely eliminate the effects of distance (Wilding 2006). Ghebru has even doubts whether new media has made the relationship with his family any better. While it is undeniable that the contact between Ghebru and his family became more frequent and the sense of connection to everyday lives at a distance was enhanced thanks to the new media, this regular communication served to intensify rather than diminish the sense of distance. This represents a paradox, as in Ghebru's case regular communication creates a stronger sense of distance and consequently a sense of frustration for not being able to have physically together.

As I pointed out, the new media are now an integral part to the enactment of transnational relationships although, relying only on transnational communication inevitably leaves space for conflicting feelings.

6.3.2 Sending remittances

In this section of my analysis I explore remittances as a mean to express care and as a tool used by migrant men for doing fatherhood and assert their masculinity. Remittances are indeed one of the

ways in which migrants continue to keep connection with their transnational family as expressed by Carlos:

I send money to my family every month, to my wife and children...I have never missed a single month 'cause they count on that. I also sometime send money to my parents and siblings but only if there is a special occasion, or an emergency. Sometimes I send presents to my children...toys especially...I hope they don't forget me! (Carlos, El Salvador).

Carlos' remittances represent a main source of income for his wife and children, which makes it for him an essential and inescapable duty towards his family. This narrative shows us that, despite distance, Carlos carries on his shoulders the responsibility of the family's well-being which makes him still the head of the family. Once more, this is an example of how masculinity is reinforced through the role of the breadwinner. He demonstrates the fact that physically absent fathers maintain commitment and sense of responsibility and that distance does not necessarily lead to the destruction of the family and the cease of caring.

On top of that, from Carlos' narrative, it is possible to notice that remittances have multiple meanings and they are 'a terrain for ambivalence' (Boccagni 2013: 233). Thanks to the remittances sent by Carlos, his family has more economic possibilities and a better standard of living. However, their importance goes far beyond the ability to purchase goods in the countries of origin. The money Carlos sends home is expected to signify much more than a means for family social reproduction. In fact, his remittances are filled with affective and moral expectations, related to their instrumental value but also to their performative function. Carlos uses remittances as a tool for sustaining emotional connections between him and his distant kin, in particular his children. Sending remittances home does not only mean the simple action of sending money to his family, but it also impacts social roles and emotional processes. We can see the same patterns in the research conducted by McKay (2010) on male seafarers in the Philippines.

At the moment of the interview Carlos had not seen his children for one year. The act of sending gifts can be seen as an act of 'remembering' (Lamvik 2010), Carlos undertakes such action not only to provide a material good and make his children happy, but also to keep alive in his family his own memory. Therefore, although it does not necessarily happen in a tangible way, sending remittances is a mean to narrow the gap between him and his children, creating a transnational family. The toys

that Carlos buys for his children may be seen as a physical reminder of him. Due to the prolonged separation, this is one of the best ways for Carlos to show care and affection to his family and to stay attached to them.

Carlos' remittances seem to convey several messages simultaneously: that in Italy he is working hard, that he is loyally complying with his commitments, that he is creating better life conditions for those left behind and finally that he still covers the role of head of the main as the main economic provider.

I send money monthly. This is a sacrifice I am doing for my family. I think about them more than I think about myself, I am not having a great life here, sometimes I drink beer with my friends otherwise it would be too sad but I am not here to enjoy myself, I am here to work. I send 600 euros per month to Sri Lanka and they always say it is too little...With the money I am building a big house at home...one day we will all live there (Neel, Sri Lanka).

True to his intention of coming to Milan to help his family, Neel sends almost all that he earns back to them in Sri Lanka. He insisted on telling me that he does not spend his salary at the casino but instead he sends money home or he puts credit on his phone to be able to call his family. Saying so, Neel underlying his effort to be a virtuous husband and father who has the well-being of the family as his primary goal. Neel expresses his intention of being a good father, which often goes hand in hand with being a good remitter. Simultaneously, Neel illustrates another aspect of migrant men's life. Despite my interviewees underline the sacrificing aspect of their transnational life, a different dimension also exists. Neel enjoys a certain degree of freedom far from his family's obligations. Neel has a group of other Sri Lankan men and during their spare time, they enjoy alcohol free from the moral judgment of their wives or their community. Thus, their experiences as distant husbands and fathers are never black and white but are characterized by many contradictions.

Apart from covering basic expenses such as rent, food and school fees, Neel wants to invest in a new house, where he is dreaming to live happily with the entire family. This family home functions as a physical reminder of the sacrifices he has made and it is a symbol of what he was able to achieve because of migration. As Lamvik (2002: 197) puts it, 'to be away is to link them to their families'. All the material items that Neel's family is able to achieve thanks to the remittances, are a constant reminder of his absence and suggest how striking and influential such absence is because

of the important effect it has on the family. Paradoxically, 'his absence makes him present'. Through the investments and expenditures on gifts, phone calls, housing, education, distant fathers achieve a sort of 'conspicuous absence' (McKay, 2010) and, viewed through such lens, Neel actions can be seen as a way to remain connected to his family, despite distance.

Remittances may represent a sort of compensatory acts after months or even years of absence from home. They might also function as an instrument for Neel, a remedy to consolidate or even expand his position in the family web or in the social landscape. They work as a vehicle that strengthens the invisible bonds among Neel and his family members. The money Neel sends contains as well a message to himself, a physical proof of his own renouncement and of his hard work (McKay, 2010). Remittances, therefore, have a double meaning. They are directed outward, as they are linked to social relationships and networking but they are also an inward process because Neel will also be reminded of his own efforts and his own position as the economic provider of the family.

I don't know how they use the money at home, I can't know...my wife takes all the decisions...A friend of mine sent 25.000 euros of savings to Sri Lanka to buy a piece of land and his sister spent them all...what was he supposed to do? Kill her? He stopped talking to her...I hope this is not going to happen to me (smiling)...

Neel continues his narrative telling me about an incident that happened to a friend of his, who was also working in Italy and sending remittances home. Neel seemed confident about the fact that his wife is spending the money wisely. However, he admits, he has no control over it. This shows how transnational migration involves an distinctive amount of mutual trust, placing valued accomplishments at risk to others' misbehavior.

Before migration Neel, as the head of the money, used to have the last word with respect to disposition of family property but this changed completely and his wife is now the major responsible of the distribution of family finances. Migration overturned the social structure of Neel's family and brought changes in gender roles also for his wife who remained the home country. Because they are based on trust between family members, remittances work as a major conjunction in transnational families. By regularly remitting funds to his family members, Neel clearly shows his responsibility of providing for primary and extended kin. This is an example of mutual assistance which transnational families rely upon. Neel illustrates the persisting value of

mutual cooperation in his maintenance of a transnational family, which is a sentiment of collectivism and mutual obligation among kin (Parreñas 2008).

When I decided to come to Italy, my plan was to stay 2 or 3 years and then go back but now it's already six years! I realized that I needed to stay until I saved up enough money to make my family live a good life in Romania... It's a sacrifice I have to do for a bit longer, if I go back before it is the right time then I need to come back here a second time and I absolutely don't want it to happen...(Andrei, Romania)

Despite Andrei's first intention, he has been living in Italy for nearly six years. This shows how, although the separation from loved ones is often constructed as a short-term, this is not necessarily how it proves to be. The financial dependence of Andrei's family on his salary makes it impossible for him to return home and puts him into a 'liminal position' (Lutz 2008: 110). This means that on one side, the fact that he is distant from his family makes him unwilling to make any definite plans in Italy, on the other side, he is unable to return home until he feels he saved enough money to be able to give his family a good life, whatever that might mean in practice.

In Andrei's account, the notion of migration as 'sacrifice for the family' has to be understood mainly as separation. Leaving his family behind is understood in terms of self-sacrifice and responsibility towards the family and as a unique opportunity to provide the children with better future life chances. Paradoxically, Andrei is willing to live a professional life away from his family, with the aim of improving the well-being of the family. In other words, Andrei's actions are not dominated by the immediate challenge of 'making the ends meet' but by long term goals such as ensuring a better education to his grandchildren. The state of being a transnational father seems to be perceived by Andrei as a transitional condition, a step that needs to be taken before returning to the normal relationships of co-presence. Transnational family life, in other words, stands as a condition that one is forced to go through, despite the sufferings it often provokes. It is a marker of migrants' commitment, flexibility and spirit of adaptation, but surely not, in Andrei's perceptions, a desirable condition, nor a goal in itself (Boccagni 2012).

7. Negotiating masculinity

In this second part of my analysis I explore migrant men's professional experience as care-giver workers, focusing on how the migration process changes migrants' gender perspective. Indeed,

migration does not imply only a physical displacement of the body but concerns a greater aspect of migrants' identity which affects their social class, profession and status (Sarti 2010). Migration often signifies a change of the individuals' social status in the receiving society when compared with the one in the home country; as migrant care-givers perform a job which is socially less recognized but economically more profitable (Sarti 2010). This section focuses on the feelings migrant men undergo when entering a feminized and low skilled job and how they negotiate their masculinity perceived as under threat.

7.1 Managing downward class mobility

Many of my informants, who are currently working as care-givers, have been university students or middle-class professionals in their home countries. They are so generally well educated and do not necessarily belong to a lower social class than their employers. A main reason for such apparent contradiction can be identified in the remarkable cost of migration; which is probably out of reach for a greater part of the population in the workers' sending societies. This reflects the motives of domestic workers' migration which is usually not to guarantee the survival of the family members in the country of origin, but to improve its economic condition and status.

Josè was living in Quito, Ecuador capital city, studying engineering at university and working part-time as a Spanish/English translator. He liked his job but the pay was poor and became insufficient when Josè came to be a father. After moving to Italy, Josè experienced a consistent gain in income but, as far as his occupational status is concerned, he faced significant downward mobility. Therefore, while on one hand his wage has increased, on the other his current occupation represents a less prestigious and lower skilled job compared to the one back home. Some of my informants were aware, before arriving to Italy, of the job they were going to perform and accepted their professional lot. Others, once relocated to Italy, expected to find more prestigious jobs and deeply felt the downward class mobility as in the case of Josè:

Back home I had a maid and here I am the maid, it's quite hard to accept. Of course I was hoping to find a better job because I have a degree in Ecuador but it seems that it is not recognized here. I was not prepared...the idea I had of Italy back home was work, money and opportunities but the reality is different...also I don't know anyone so it's more difficult to find a job 'cause nobody wants to hire a stranger and a foreigner...When I feel down I think about home, about my son and I get

the strength to do it, to carry on! In the end I have to be grateful I found this job, at least they pay me well (Josè, Ecuador)

Josè imagined Italy as a land of wealth and opportunities, however, such golden picture clashed with the reality he faced once he arrived to Milan. As an engineer, he expected to find a highly regarded and well paid job but, after a while, he was forced to accept a job as care-giver of an old woman. Migration resulted in a remarkable overturning of Josè's social status; from a situation in which he could afford hiring a domestic worker, in Italy Josè is being employed as one. This, to a great extent, undermines his pride, self-esteem and masculinity. In Jose's case, the feelings of embarrassment and discomfort are located internally in his own sense of self-worth, as he does not fully respect himself in this work. This is especially linked to the fact that the position of domestic worker in his house was taken up by a woman, which makes it for Josè a further reason of shame.

Furthermore, as a new comer, he is deprived of the social network he used to have in Ecuador and in Italy he perceives himself as simply 'a stranger and a foreigner'. However, such backdrop motivates Josè to maintain tight bonds with his relatives in the homeland. Every time he feels lonely or depressed, Josè thinks about his loved ones. Thinking about his son and sustaining transnational family ties give Josè the emotional fortitude to cope with the experience of downward class mobility as well as the process of adaptation to a new reality that had been made necessary by migration.

Josè acknowledges that the job he found does not reflect his initial expectations in terms of role and responsibility; however it does satisfy his economic purpose when migrating to Italy. In this sense, through his care-giver role, he is able to send to his Ecuadorian family considerable remittances, even if he admits not to be fully personally accomplished and satisfied. His economic motivation, the outcome of his job in terms of remittances and the thought of his family are all elements that help Josè in managing the stress potentially emerging when he has to accept a job for which he perceives to be over qualified.

7.2 Regaining masculinity in a women's field

The main reason why, for many of my informants, the impact of domestic service has been painful is because they perceive it as a female job. From the narratives of the migrant men I interviewed, I identified five coping strategies elaborated in order to cope with this subversion of gender roles. Migrant men use such strategies to reassert their masculinity they perceive under threat and to distinguish themselves from women in the way they perform care work. In the developing of the coping strategies I have been inspired by the research on migrant male domestic workers in Italy and France conducted by Scrinzi (2010).

7.2.1 Hiding the truth

Andrei, a man who spent his entire life in his village in Romania and migrated to Italy at the age of fifty to repair his daughter's mistake told me his position on this issue.

Serena: What made you come to Italy three years ago?

Andrei: Well, it's a very delicate story...One of my two daughters, she is living in Spain...She fell in love with a guy...a bad person...I don't know, she started dealing drug...she got caught and she is in prison now...she has two children and now they are under our responsibility (Andrei and his wife)...You know how expensive it is to raise kids? So here I am...At first I looked for a job in the construction sector but with the crisis many companies are in a bad situation and I was not finding any permanent jobs, just casual labour that didn't allow me any fix income so I looked for a job in the houses...

Serena: What did you tell your family about the job you have here?

Andrei: Only my sister, my wife and my close relatives know what kind of work I do here...I haven't told anybody else that here I do the washing... They think I work in a factory...the truth is that I'm ashamed...

Serena: What are you ashamed of?

Andrei: It's a very low job, it doesn't feel good...it's more a female thing to take care of old people...you know...I have always being working in construction...and the woman I work for tells me what to do, how to do, she gives me orders...I feel very embarrassed...

At a mature stage in his life, Andrei unexpectedly found himself in the situation of taking care of his two grandchildren six and eight years old, after their mother went to jail. The responsibility of the children's well-being lies heavy on his shoulders and his salary as construction worker in Romania became inadequate to support the enlarged family. Failing in finding a permanent job in the

construction sector, Andrei had to consider domestic work, a profession that was completely unknown to him.

To talk about his job makes Andrei feel very uncomfortable because, in his eyes, it implies feeling downgraded to an inferior social role. For the first time in his life, he finds himself cleaning, washing, ironing and caring for old people. He accomplishes duties that, within his family, are usually taken up by women and constructed as “naturally” feminine. In order to understand his feelings of embarrassment and shame, Andrei’s view on gender roles needs to be examined. Following the idea of hegemonic masculinity, Andrei believes that women have the main responsibilities for the housework and that reproductive tasks are not appropriated for a man. This leads him to experience caregiving work in a more dramatic way than men who have more egalitarian views about men and women’s roles.

Moving between places can be a source of status and power especially in the eyes of the families back home (Scrinzi 2010). Nevertheless, Andrei does not seem to feel to have gained in terms of power and status; on the contrary, he perceives his role as a man is being undermined by carrying out a woman’s work. Andrei seems especially concerned of his reputation whether people would find out about his job in Italy. His feeling of shame is mainly located externally, to how he could be perceived by friends and acquaintances, in particular other men. ‘They would probably think I’m gay or something’ he told me. Admitting to be a domestic worker makes him feel so frustrated and humiliated that he decides to hide the truth regarding his working situation to everybody but the closest family members. Andrei fears that entering a woman’s job such as domestic service may in a way feminize him and put his masculinity at risk. Moreover, another element that Andrei perceives as threatening his identity as a man is the fact that his employer is a woman. This fact turns upside down again Andrei’s traditional view of a gender order where men are more powerful than women. Andrei told me that once per week he meets with some friends to play football and after the match they enjoy a couple of beers together. For Andrei this signifies more than a way of spending his spare time. Such typically ‘manly activities’ allow him to have some time in which he stops being a domestic worker and he returns to be a man. Indeed this reflects how Andrei is looking for other ways to regain his masculinity, outside the professional sphere.

7.2.2 Underlining the differences with the home country

In my country, for example, housework is a job for the wife and the work outside is for the husband...At home, I was taking care of certain things and my wife of others...I wouldn't have done this job at home but here in Italy it is different because everybody works, wife and husband work, it's all different. So, as I am here, I have to do as it is here...even if at first, I didn't understand...but when I will go back, things are going to be as always (Carlos, El Salvador).

Carlos claims that, in lack of alternatives, he accepted to do in Italy a job he would never have done in his own country, where men do not work inside the house. However, migration made him experience an overturn of what he perceives as the “normal” gender division of labor. He claims that normally in his homeland the wife works at home and the husband outside, whereas in Italy both work outside, which makes it necessary for both men and women to do domestic jobs. Carlos' strategy consists of emphasizing the differences between El Salvador and Italy. Since he is now in Italy, he has to behave as it is appropriate in the new social context. His way of coping with the shame is asserting that his “real” identity is to be found at home while the one in Italy is fictitious and adopted to cope with the circumstances.

However, Carlos claims that when he returns to El Salvador the normal gender roles in the family will be re-established. Such strategy is used by Carlos to distance himself from his new way of ‘doing manhood’ and to re-appropriate his hegemonic masculine identity. Nevertheless, the alteration of ‘traditional’ gender roles caused by migration does not involve only Carlos but also his wife in the home country, who is taking more responsibilities and enjoys a greater amount of freedom and control over her life. As a consequence of such changes in the gender division of labour, I believe that both partners develop a new awareness which will persist even when Carlos has returned home. This new way of performing gender, both for him and his wife, will influence the new family arrangements once in the home country. This shows the complexity of the relationship inside transnational families and the construction of fluid and changing gender identities.

7.2.3 Focusing on economic gains

When I asked Neel how he feels about working in houses, Neel told me that it is a weird and unpleasant experience and it is hard for him to get used to it because it goes against his culture:

In Sri Lanka a man does not work in the house, because the woman does everything in the house. It is the woman's duty while the man is responsible for the economic part. I could never accept to do this in Sri Lanka but here it is different. At the beginning I felt very humiliated in doing this job because I perceived domestic service as a work for females; I felt that I was at a low level. But this kind of job allows me to get a lot of money that I can use to help my family back home...I have already been repairing my house thanks to the money I earned here, my children will go to college and I will buy a land in Sri Lanka! Maybe I can even open my own activity back home... (Neel, Sri Lanka)

Neel does not consider domestic service a normal job for a man. He said that in Sri Lanka men are not at all involved in domestic service, which is only performed by women. He reveals that, in his opinion, male domestic workers are not 'real men' and supports a traditional, hegemonic idea of masculinity. Saying so about domestic workers, Neel undermines his own masculinity. Neel feels that working in a feminized sector may challenge his masculinity: he is accustomed to associating his gender identity with a set of behaviors and attitudes that he considers normal, not to say natural, for men; yet in the migratory context, he experiences a subversion of this normality, finds himself associated with something that they consider feminine, and fears being downgraded to an inferior, feminized masculinity (Sarti, 2010).

The strategy used by Neel to regain his masculinity is to emphasize his roles as the breadwinner of the family. He underlines with enthusiasm the material achievements he managed to accomplish through his earnings: giving education to the children and repairing his house in Sri Lanka. He also focuses on what he will be able to realize in the future; in particular, Neel has the dream of opening his own family business in Sri Lanka. Hence, remittances can be used by migrant men as a strategy to regain a mature and full masculinity, even when they are physically absent from their families.

Neel accepts doing a socially disqualified and stigmatized job mostly because in Italy wages are so much higher than in his home country. In the quote above he remarks that domestic work allows him to earn a lot of money. His words, however, are followed by '*that I can use to help my family*'. In other words, the value of his salary is always linked to the family organization; the meaning of money lies in to what degree it may contribute to the well-being of the family. In other words, the income represents a major contribution to a social unit which exceeds the migrant man.

Indeed, the ability to provide resources for the family is a main demonstration of masculinity and through migration and the sending of remittances, Neel achieves such masculine ideal, despite possibly degrading and ‘feminized’ work abroad.

7.2.4 ‘It is not a female job’

Theodor: In my job I clean, I cook, I do the washing, I have to be organized and precise...I don’t think a woman would do it better than me, because men can do women’s work, men can do the chores...men have the capacity to care, just in a different way....

Serena: Can you describe the difference?

Theodor: Maybe we don’t touch as much or say kind words all the time...it’s more covered but I think my caring is of the same degree as the one of a woman...I took care of my mother when she was sick, I fed her and washed her...that’s how I became patient and gentle and now I realize it was useful because I use this in my job...

Unlike Andrei and Neel, Theodor does not make a rigid distinction on which duties are more appropriate for which gender. In his opinion, men and women can do the same tasks and exchange roles, claiming to be as good as a female worker in his job. Theodor feels that biology is no grounds for excluding him from caregiving work. Indeed, according to Theodor, the qualities related to domestic chores, as well as the ones associated with caring are not natural but result from practice and experience. Theodor recalls his personal experience in assisting his sick mother as a crucial experience to develop characteristics such as kindness. From Theodor’s narrative, emotional labor is made visible. However, Theodor underscores that there are differences in the way he, as a man, performs care labour compared to a female care-giver. He takes distance from the most nurturing and tender aspects of caregiving which, in his view, belong to a more feminine way of practicing the job. Instead he emphasizes the masculine components of the job, the more “technical tasks” such as lifting, feeding, and carrying. Such activities require physical strength and are considered more appropriated for a man.

7.2.5 Men do it better

The last strategy I identified to make domestic and care work compatible with male identity is to claim that men might be better than women in domestic work. Men, for example, can lift the person they care for or heavy weights in the house, as claimed by Ghebru.

I think this is definitely not a job for women, because you need to be strong to be a care-giver. For example if Maria (the elderly person he works for) falls, I am able to lift her, it happened sometimes...but a woman probably couldn't do it and will have to call someone, and it's a mess...Also because she is alone in the house, it makes her feel more secure that there is a man with her...I think that's why they hired me (Ghebru, Eritrea)

In his narrative, Ghebru explains why caregiving is not a female job but rather an occupation that suits him as a man. The argument that men are better domestic workers than women bases on qualities and skills, such as physical strength or ability to protect, which Ghebru considers exclusively masculine. Ghebru uses biological differences between men and women to explain his role within domestic work and exaggerates them in order to legitimize his masculinity. A man's physical strength is needed to move the person being helped; consequently caring for old or disable people is not a "woman's job" but it is upgraded to a job for real men.

Ghebru distinguishes himself from female workers, emphasizing the "masculine" aspects of the job is above all a strategy used by Ghebru to legitimize his occupation. In a sense, therefore, he is responsible of defining these tasks as masculine and shaping a special position within the profession that allows him to keep his masculinity within a feminine context. In domestic service, work relations tend to be precarious and recruitment largely depends on informal networks and word-of-mouth advertising. As a result, through his strategy Ghebru is securing new employers and coping with being confronted with a majority of female competitors on the market and with the employers' gendered expectations (Kofman et al. 2000).

As my informants' narratives illustrate, male care-giver workers feel the urge to justify their occupation as compatible with traditional male gender role activities. They perceive a conflict between their presence in a female-dominated occupation and the maintenance of their masculinity. For this reason they develop various strategies to solve this tension in a way that preserves their masculinity intact and avoids being considered unmanly.

All my informants recognize the economic gain as a main positive aspect of this occupation which consents them to provide financially for their family, preserving their masculinity. The other ways of coping with the situation differ considerably from person to person. The different strategies presented by my informants, therefore, disclose the existence of different masculinities. Andrei who

has the most negative approach towards domestic work, lives with frustration an occupation that is far from his ideal of hegemonic masculinity. His way of dealing with it is mainly hiding and denying his working situation. Instead he attempts to regain his masculinity in other activities outside the professional sphere such as playing football and drinking beer.

On the contrary, Theodor and Ghebru have a complete opposite idea of masculinity, in which practicing caregiving work does not clash with their masculine identity. Paradoxically, Ghebru highlighting the manly characteristics required to be a good domestic worker, claims that domestic work accentuates his masculinity. Finally, Carlos' strategy is to underscore the differences between Italy and El Salvador, claiming that his 'real identity' is the one adopted when back home. His account stresses the changing nature of masculinity. In fact, he is giving to his gender identity a different meaning when in Italy and when at home.

8. Conclusive remarks

The aim of my research is to examine the phenomenon of transnational families through the experiences of migrant men working as care-givers in Italy. Since transnational families rely on the sense of 'being a family' in spite of geographical distance, the maintenance of transnational ties is a fundamental tool for coping with a prolonged physical separation.

Transnational family life is perceived by my informants to be a temporary condition, a constraint they have to live with, while attempting to reduce the distance with constant emotional involvement and practices of transnational care. Despite the fact that such practices are highly changeable, their existence questions the assumption that physical proximity is a necessary condition for the exchange of care. Indeed, although disconnected from any bases of physical proximity, transnational care circulates among distant kin as a way to demonstrate home-bound obligations, attachments and belonging.

Focusing on care circulation between 'here' and 'there', I dissect migrants' involvement in the well-being and even in the daily care of those left behind. Doing so, I became aware of the fact that although physical absence affects family relationships in terms of emotions, trust and intimacy, transnational fathers are able to exert a significant influence on their children's everyday lives beyond cultivating a feeling of closeness. Migrants attempt to enact a sense of continuity, somehow

bridging physical distance by fostering future-oriented life projects such as a new house or a family business.

Judging from the personal accounts I have collected, migration changes the way migrant fathers think about their families and geographical distance leads them to be more aware of their feelings and emotions. They create, therefore, a new way of doing transnational fatherhood, which distances from the hegemonic version of masculinity that expects fathers to be emotionally inexpressive. I claim that transnational fathers want to be engaged in the upbringing of their children and take important decisions in their lives. In other words they attempt to be emotionally present even though physically absent and they perceive their relationship with their children as inherently significant and impregnated with moral and affective dedication.

It is in their role as distant fathers that I identified the greatest paradox of transnationalism: relationships at a distance may turn out to be far more significant than relationships based on co-presence in migrants' everyday life back home.

Among the different challenges that characterize transnational parenting, one is especially worth underlining as it can be glimpsed in the narratives of many of my interviewees. This is the risk that fathering may turn into a relationship of mere 'money transfer', as the fathers fear physical distance might lead to growing emotional detachment and weaker communication. However, this is not necessarily the case as cross-border care practices involve much more than financial provision and my informants try to expand their fathering beyond the role of economic provider.

Such a new way of doing fatherhood relies mainly on virtual communication, increasingly supported by new 'online' media. New media render the border between absence and presence blurred by allowing the re-creation of an idea of co-presence and shared space despite distance. In such virtual space my informants exchange emotional remittances filling the gap created by physical separation. However, the quality of care is challenged by the passage of time and by the absence of daily, shared points of reference. Despite new media, family relationships are often pervaded by a sense of insufficiency and guilt for not 'being there'.

One of the main findings of my research is that the role of distant father and husband is characterized by complexity and contradictions. From my informants' narratives, a recurrence of

terms connected with loyalty and sacrifice strongly emerges. Caring practices, such as sending remittances and keeping regular communication, are connected to a sense of moral obligation towards their families and to their reputation among the community back home. They are very much concerned, therefore, with fostering an image of themselves as good husbands and fathers solely dedicated to their families. However, a different aspect of their life in Italy exists. Migrant men enjoy an amount of freedom and have to face different temptations as a consequence of prolonged separation.

If distant fathers are afraid of being perceived only as 'cash dispensers', on the other hand they emphasize their role as family breadwinner, as a confirmation of their masculinity and their role as head of the family. This becomes even more relevant in a situation in which gender roles are reversed. Effectively, as a result of migration, traditional gender roles overturned and both migrant men and wives left behind face unprecedented tasks and responsibilities.

Apart from the changes in my interviewees' family arrangements, their traditional gender roles are drastically jeopardized in the professional sphere. Being employed as care-givers, they perceive their sense of masculinity as under threat, mainly due to the fact that reproductive work is traditionally a feminine task, therefore not considered appropriated for a man.

My thesis illustrates how domestic workers elaborate different strategies in order to deal with such challenge. Those, have the general aim to reconstruct care-giving work, in order to make it more suitable with their idea of masculinity. Such approach reinforces the gender division of labour and the existence of male and female occupations. Besides rethinking domestic labour, my informants elaborate their own, masculine way of performing domestic work as a way to differentiate from women. Thus, they create a masculine niche inside the occupation, which tends to question its association with femininity. However, although they perform a female job, my informants are paid to be care-givers. This puts them in a different position than women who are often unpaid, as care-giving is an assignment which is expected from them in the realm of the family.

I contend that, on one hand, my informants maintain an hegemonic version of masculinity. This occurs as they leave their family to guarantee a better future for their children, confirming the role of man as the economic provider and head of the family. Simultaneously, however, they subvert such idea of masculinity by virtue of their position in a non-traditional occupation but also in their

way of performing fatherhood. They try to combine their role as domestic workers and their role as fathers, creating a new way of doing masculinity. This masculinity allows nurturing and caring behaviors both in the private and in the professional sphere. However, since this new masculine identity is not located at the top of the hierarchy, many of my informants have difficulties accepting it or do not recognize it.

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