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## Introduction

Countless political, cultural and communication developments have allowed people around the globe to look for better opportunities somewhere else, creating this way the ever growing transnational society. Recently there are more and more people migrating to other countries for better economic opportunities to support their families. This is also the case of individuals studied in this project. They are migrating to provide support to their families by taking care of elderly abroad. According to Lutz (2010) and Yeates (2009), this category of migrating people can be defined as the ‘migrant care workers’. Migrant care workers appeared in the Western nations’ market due to its ageing population. As it was recorded, there are two million more people every year, which are over the age of 60 (European Commission, 2009 in Anderson 2012). *“Ageing populations will place demands on expensive retirement and care systems and there will be fewer prime-age workers to meet a range of economic demands”* and also fewer and fewer native-born people who are able to take care of elderly ones. (Spencer, Martin, Bourgeault, & O’Shea, 2010 p. 8). Traditionally it was expected that a daughter, or daughter-in-law would take care of older relatives, however in the present times women actively participate in labour market or simply live in other countries therefore there is a decline of families that can take care of their older relatives. These all-complex changes have led to a higher demand of migrant caregivers (Anderson, 2012).

In this MA Thesis I will focus on female migrant care worker who are employed by German families, to provide care to their family members, and at the same time take care of their own family back home in Poland. Such a caregiving presents a complexity of the concept of care, since different types of attachments, obligations, conflicts and inadequate resources may be noticeable. I decided to concentrate my attention on female migrant care workers since they are the ones mostly recognizable as taking care of the family, at home, while men should be the ones, breadwinning for the families. In Polish sociological studies (Graff 2009, in Botterill 2014) the family is positioned at the top of hierarchy of values and Polish woman, projected to as in polish “Matka polka”, is understood from the catholic faith iconography as the “heroic mother of sons, a sign situated between myth and stereotype, central to the

country's national identity and its homo social dimension". According to Graff (2009) this representation is still valid nowadays in the modern Polish households. This role of Polish women definitely makes it easier for them to work as migrant care workers since stereotypically they are very familiar with all the obligations they have to fulfil in the households; however in the same time how do they manage to take care of their families that they leave in their homelands? In this paper I will particularly concentrate on the mechanism migrants care workers activate to maintain transnational family ties and how this is interpreted by the family in Poland and migrants care workers.

This emergence of new social organisations of care in the interaction between different nations, ethnic groups and social classes, is defined by Hochschild as the global care chain, which in her word is 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid and unpaid work of caring' (Isaksen, 2011). Care though has a very broad meaning, because it can be defined in physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs features of one or more people (Standing, 2001 in Raghuram, 2012). According to Raghuram (2012) care most of the time is not only one sided. The pull of affective relations is stronger with those whom we are the most intimate, and that is where the caring lies in. Meaning that caring is always two sided (Raghuram, 2012). In proximate family relations the exchange of care is constituted by ritualised practices of everyday life such as face to face conversations, bodily contact, shared meals and daily interactions by family members, characterised by physical co-presence (Falicov, 2007). Therefore when there is an observable absence and distance between family members, the assumption is that the exchange of the caregiving is diminished. Nevertheless many manage to live together across the distance by developing alternative caregiving practices, because despite the geographical distance, people still need and want to care for each other (Baldassar, 2007).

This situation, where a migrant has its own attachments back in the home of origin, creates transnational families by distancing family members. As Basch (1994) argues, the new trans migrants differ from the old migrants in the extent to which the former engage in political and social life of the two countries (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994). Sometimes migrants, who travel back and forth between the

country of origin and the receiving society, very well represent that situation. This experience is referred to, as circular migration or in other words temporary migration, in which people come to a receiving country for some months or years and then return for some time to their homelands (Castles & Miller, 1993). That might make it easier for migrants to keep in touch with their family members. Hugo (2009) argues that this type of migration is a part of wider process of transnationalism, 'involving regular electronic interaction, frequent visiting and regular reinforcing of intentions to eventually return' (Hugo in Baldassar and Merla, 2014). This circular interaction, as Hugo mentions has a strong degree in terms of intimacy and frequency that was unthinkable until recently.

### **Problem Formulation**

Being apart from each other definitely makes caring intimacy more difficult and exchange of care is limited, however not impossible. Understanding how family relationships work beyond national borders, and redefine themselves in the transnational space is crucial in this project. Additionally I intend to investigate the changing role of female migrants care workers in the context of transnational families. That had me to state the following research questions:

**How polish migrant care workers in Germany involve in creating and maintaining their family ties over time and space? How is their female role shaped in the migration process?**

## Literature Review

In this part of the project I will try to present the literature I decided to use in this research paper. Trying to explore the practices among transnational family members and the symbolic creation of Polish women in the migration process led me to include the Global Care Chain, Transnationalism and Gender concepts and theories. Subsequently I have adjusted concepts and theories in an academic perspective. The theories are widely described here, however the detailed presentation of what specific parts I have decided to use will be in the theoretical framework some chapters below. Even though there is not much research made on this subject in a way that I decided to conduct it, there was one paper that really stood out to me because of its similarity to my research. Serena Vanotti decided to write about the transnational practices among Italian migrant care workers and their negotiation of masculinity when performing this job (Vanotti, 2014). I have taken the inspiration from her Master Thesis, but I have developed it in a personal way, particularly referring to transnational family members.

### Global Care Chain

Arlie Hochschild in 2000 first used the concept of global care chain to refer to ‘a series of personal links between people across the globe based on paid or unpaid work of caring’ (Hochschild A. , 2000). Her work is an innovative in theoretical construction between globalisation, migration and care (Yeates N. , 2011). Hochschild explained this phenomenon from the point of view of women that from poorer countries migrate in order to take care of children or elderly people elsewhere, creating in this way a caring vacuum in the country of origin. The concept explains that a woman leaving behind her family; dispense the daughters or parents under the care of others, while she leaves to take care of somebody else, thus creating a chain of care.

These chains of paid or unpaid care are increasingly spreading. This is of course linked to the increase in women’s labour force participation, shortage of public care and changes in the family structure. That is among many other examples the demand side of the global care chains, on the other side, the supply one includes the economic

trends, as the growing inequalities between high and low-income countries, instability due to economic crises and gender related factors such as family abuse, conflicts or discrimination (Fudge, 2012). Mainly because of these reasons women migrate supplying in this way their families back in the countries of origin. Hochschild argues that many in the sending countries advantage from being recipients of this care – children, parents, other relatives, and local church (Hochschild A. , 2013). Hochschild adds that at the end of this chain there is a ‘care drain’, which stands for the loss of care in the Third World and that is the global injustice. However I am going to take a distance from this point of view where a migrant care worker is presented as a passive victim of globalisation and enhance the project with other researchers’ point of views when it comes to the global care chain.

One of the next contributors to the concept of global care chain is Nikola Yeates from Ireland, who points out that the study lacks its fixity in a critical international political and economic perspective and is narrowed only to one group of migrant care workers (Yeates N. , 2011). Yeates argues that the concept of care covers various tasks and activities to promote the personal health or welfare of people who are not able to, or cannot organize these tasks themselves. Care may be a range of services starting from social, sexual to simple ones as cooking, and maintenance responsibilities. She adds that there is a distinction between physical labour when someone takes care for, and the emotional labour, when someone cares about by being concerned for the other. Yeates claims that the Hochschild’s study should be extended “by embracing other migrant care labour groups that are at different levels of their skills and occupational hierarchies, different family types, (maternity, sexual orientation, and marriage status, etc.), working in institutions or domestic work places, or providing different types of care, starting from education, health, social care services or sexual ones. She also argues that the study must embrace the necessity of locating the time periods, since the care service may also be dated back at least to nineteenth century (Yeates N. , 2011). By Yeates’ contribution, the concept is extended not necessarily only to Third World individuals and moreover represents not solely female workers.

While this concept represents a major innovation in the research of care chains, some scholars proposed an approach of conceptualizing migrants as agents of

change (Lutz, 2008). There has been some critique on Hochschild's work as she presents the female domestic workers as helpless victims of global economy (Ryan, 2011). Lutz though, argues that some migrants choose to be independent and take their choice of empowerment. In some cases it is not only financial reasons that push the women to migrate (Yeates, 2011). That is also the case with the participants presented in this research. They all have different stories and decided if they want or need to leave. Hochschild also presents the effects of Global Care Chain through the loss of physical contact time and the transfer of love to the new family. Whereas others, including Yeates argue that emigration does not close down migrants care practices, these practices are just transformed into another ways. Care giving practices still function through the distance. Another critique is that Hochschild refers to care left back home to only left children, where care can be multidimensional and may include different family members (Parrenas, 2001 in Yeates 2012). Yeates also argues for extension of Global Care Chain into "the complex intersections of gender with social divisions of race, ethnicity, religion, class age, disability, sexuality and locality" (Yeates N. , 2012).

Even though the concept of Global Care Chain provides an important background to the phenomenon described in this project, I decided to add another perspective since not all my informants have children or elderly they need to take care for back in their home countries. Some of the people they leave behind are other family members they feel obligated to care for. Also my research focuses on multidirectional flow of care and support, which is more broadly presented by Baldassar and Merla.

### **Transnational families and Care**

Firstly I started to analyse the conducted interviews and concentrated particularly on the acculturation theory of Berry, and psychological attachment theory developed by Van Ecke. The combination of these two approaches presents the immigrants living simultaneously in two different cultures, and having an attachment – either it is children or sick parents left behind (Van Ecke, 2005; Borholomew & Horowitz; Van Oudenhoven, 2006), as not being able to adapt fully to the host culture; However I have realised that I needed an alternative which is more migration approach friendly. The work of Levitt and Schiller (2004) resulted particularly valuable for this research.

They provide an holistic analysis of all the approaches within migration studies and detect the defects and possible improvements. Levitt (2004) presents it as if the Home means more than One Country. She refers to migrants who belong to two or more societies at the same time (Levitt, Migration and Policy Institute, 2004). Similarly to Levitt, Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) in Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla and Wilding (2014) write about transnational family members that “maintain the sense of family hood by continuing to feel they belong to the family, even though they may not see each other or be physically co-present very often or for the extended periods of time”. They also mention that in spite of long distances, families still feel responsible for household’s wellbeing. In the case of Polish migrant care workers I have interviewed in this project, retaining the sense of kinship by being far away from each other is very important. That is why discovering how they keep this sense of belonging across the distance and how do they create this flow of care to each other is so important.

The flow of care also brought me to the research of transnational motherhood presented in the book by Isaksen “Global Care Work: Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies” where the distant mothering is occurring on the daily basis by e.g. sex migrants in Denmark (Dahl & Spanger, 2011). That also led me to the research of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila of how the meanings of motherhood is transformed and accommodated in these spatial and temporal separations (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997).

These, among many other papers offered me with the view that transnational families are possible to live in, even if there might have been challenges met on the way. Baldassar and Merla’s (2014) concept of transnational families and the circulation of care is particularly relevant for the study I want to conduct. They write that the circulation of care is sometimes uneven – women who give more of care, receive the less of it, however care is all the time negotiated between family members and even in the times of difficulties. Baldassar and Merla argue, that family care is reciprocal in a way that it is exchanged and circulates back and forth between family members, and it is asymmetrical, whereas the care exchange is sometimes uneven and the return of care may not be immediate, but there is an expectation and obligation that care will be returned one day. In their new book, Baldassar and Merla present also the examples

of fatherly care and men's caregiving practices, which were earlier, neglected in the research on transnationalism, care and family migration.

### **Gender and International Migration**

In the third part of the literature, I focus on the categories that the Polish migrant women carry with them while leaving their families in Poland. For many, transnationalism complicates the definition of household since there is lack of some members to share the responsibility, however transnationalism still challenges us to rethink the gender roles some may play in the households. Reading the literature of transnational motherhood and feminisation of migration (Zontini E. , 2004) and the roles that women play to maintain family ties, or their identities in the migration process (Salih, 2003), Salih decided to concentrate more on the transnational activities and movements that Moroccan women are engaged with between Morocco and Italy. She is concentrating on the phenomena in which Moroccan migrants construct home between these two countries but she also adds that their “activities are conditioned by a set of normative and cultural regulations based upon hegemonic interpretations of gender roles”, which condition their activities both in Morocco and Italy. Even though she also includes a lot about nation-states, her paper on identities of these women was definitely an inspiration for me to include the symbolic representation of “Matka Polka” (‘Virgin Mary’, ‘Mother Pole’) figure in this research, who is going to be explained in the next sections of this project.

In the last years there has not been a visible effort to incorporate gender into the theories of international migration. In the 1960s and 1970s migrants and their families were symbolised as men migrants and their wives and children. Women were invisible in the whole migration process and were treated as passive. From the 1970s and 1980s differences between men and women began to be visible and in the neoclassical economic models and push-pull demographic models, migration was seen as the outcome of the individual decisions. Though, on-going developments in feminist theory throughout 1980s and 1990s contributed to the gender focus rather than one based on individual decisions between men and women. The view that sex is defined as a biological outcome of chromosomal structures, gender is socially constructed is the most important. In feminist theory, gender is seen as matrix of

identities, behaviours and power relationships that are constructed by the culture of a society in accordance with sex (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). As a matter of fact the expressions of masculinity and femininity will vary among societies.

Studies on gender as a social construction left two important questions that fuelled the research in the study of women and the migration process. The first relates to hierarchies of power and control men use to rule women, so how does that affect the women's ability to migrate. And the second question is related to interpersonal relationships between men and women after migration and how is the women's relationship to family members reconstructed within migration process (Boyd & Grieco, 2003).

As mentioned before feminist research is the main key to identify gender in the migration theory. With that, they derived the concept of intersectionality that will be used in this research, because of its explanation of how different social categories such as gender, ethnicity, class age, sexual orientation or nationality intersect to shape people's transnational identities experiences on e.g. inequalities. But also the concept can be a useful analytical tool in tracing how certain people seem to get positioned.

My research seeks to contribute to the academic research of polish migrant care workers' experiences as transnational mothers, daughters, grandmothers and partners. In doing so, I argue that it is important to examine how polish women are associated in the category of polish mothers that should always stay close to their family members and provide them care. My informants stay away from this perspective as they migrate to Germany to provide care to someone else's family. I centre my analysis on their narratives of how these women perceive themselves despite of placing them earlier within the certain categories and behaviours.

## Methodology

Prior to any in-depth account over philosophy of science, an explanation of the preliminary assumption and formulation of the study is here necessary. I became very interested in the study of migrant care workers, especially the ones coming from Poland to Germany, because of my personal experience associated with that situation. As a young person, I became quickly very independent, as my mother started her migration journey in Germany. She was going back and forth, staying three months in Germany and coming to Poland for another month. I was staying under the responsibility of my father, however because of his endless travels, I needed to take care of myself on a daily basis. Having my own responsibilities I also tried to support my mother in her difficult times abroad. After couple of years I went to the university in Denmark, while my mother was still working in Germany. Until now, my mother supports me and I try to support her, however my father is no longer in this picture. They separated this year due to various reasons and because of this situation I believed that not every family could stand the migration process.

Therefore I tried to look at the individual experiences of women working in Germany, expecting that most of their families were vulnerable. However while conducting the interviews I noticed the tendency of them talking about their partners, I decided to look closer at the phenomenon of transnational families and the actions to maintain its family ties. Therefore I also decided to concentrate on the side of the family members and notice how they negotiate their family relations. Since every family member has a role in these close relations, I also focused my research on women and their perception of self in the migration process while still maintaining the status in the family. Therefore the concept of intersectionality came into play and involves the unique perception and story from each interviewee. Subsequently in the frame of this thesis there is already more than one single and universal worldview. How the researcher perceives the reality has a consequence for the entire research (Guba, 1990). Therefore it is important to present here my research paradigm.

## Research Approach

From that point on, I realised that it is very dangerous to make prior assumption regarding the migration experience of polish women. Because every family is different and has a different story, I have decided to conduct the individual interviews to understand the similarities and differences between them.

Ontology is concerned with the inquirer's assumptions about the nature of truth and realities, whereas epistemology is concerned with the nature of relationships between the inquirer and the 'known' (Guba 1990).

On that note, I adapted an interpretivist stand; through the in-depth interviews I tried to understand people's lives and gain an empathic understanding of how people feel inside. While looking at different perceptions that the interviewees hold I tried to remain open to unexpected findings or the new subjects that were not thought of earlier. That was possible because the objective was not to test any theories, but to inspire the collection of empirical data and to help analysing it thereafter. Interpretivist stance concentrate on:

*“Understanding human nature, including the diversity of societies and cultures... Context is considered as most important since research on human activity must consider an individual's situational self-interpretation... The outcome of the research then takes the form of specific explanations of cases, but also of refined concepts for the analysis of future cases”* (Della Porta & Keating, 2008 p.26-28.).

From an ontological perspective social constructivism is the theory of science that this research is based on. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and setting in understating what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Social constructivist agrees, “phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2012). Meaning that the social reality can be constructed through social interplay and it is under constant change. Through social actions and interactions, social reality is under constant revision. The researcher should also be aware that his or her lens is just as uniquely coloured as those of his or her informants. In this line the generated knowledge is

made up by subjective meanings and investigating this social phenomenon through the experiences of migrant women and their families appears functional. In the context of this thesis I believe it is important to acknowledge that my own experience within this phenomena of transnational families will influence many steps in this study, because it has not only affected my choice of this research problem but also the way how I analyse the data.

My research is rather an inductive process that emerged from the specific phenomena based on data collection.

### **Research Design and Methods**

In the case of this study the qualitative research design is the most suitable way to organise the research. I wanted to listen to the individuals and understand them and I knew it would not be possible by e.g. usage of surveys and quantitative methods. According to Bryman, quantitative methods “relate poorly to people’s actual behaviour” (Bryman, 2012) and exploring this paper’s research question obligates me to analyse the individual’s behaviour and interpret it so that it is possible to answer the research question. Every individual is important and has its own story to tell which deserves attention. By the usage of qualitative research design I will provide with a detailed narrative description and holistic interpretation that captures the complexity of behaviours, experiences and events in their natural context (Kalaian, 2008). Qualitative research permits me to understand the way people make sense of themselves and the world around through interaction in a given society, meaning that in this project getting to know about the actions and behaviours they hold to their family members will let me understand their personal self as well. Given these considerations I opted for qualitative research design of an in-depth interview study.

First it was important for me to gather all the information, however I already had some hypothesis regarding the theoretical framework. My study was inductive, however in order to prepare to the interview I had to do some background research and plan my interview guide. My interview was semi-structured based on the selected literature what allowed my participants to share their stories and let their interpretation of the world be presented. However my theoretical framework has been

established in response to what I noticed in the interviews as the most significant replies. Therefore my method to gather the relevant data was narrative. Narrative method may be found in written material, in electronic communication, in visual forms such as photo diaries or films or in speech such as interview (Riessman, 2008 in Wells 2011). This approach focuses on the lives of individuals as told through their own words. Also it emphasises on the experiences chosen individuals went through exploring their significance in their lives. Even though this kind of method is viewed as very subjective because it is based on personal meaningful experiences, this is what I am looking for to explore my research question, gathering qualitative data. This style of exploring the research allows me to examine the information from other perspectives, the ones that I did not think were relevant before. Also in regards to semi-structured interviews, replies to the questions as well as the new revised literature the questions were under constant adjustment. The first set of questions and people interviewed enabled me to identify the most general topics, however after some time I needed to re-interview some of the participants again to gain access to the more specific and detailed data.

### **Recruiting Informants**

When I decided, I am going to use qualitative data method research the question of where I should look for my informants appeared. I used two sources for that matter, the personal network and the web search, however the second one was the most difficult. Since I never worked as a care worker in Germany I did not have that big of a personal network and most of the times the women are spread all over the country meaning that sometimes there is only one care worker in the whole German village. Fortunately, as mentioned before as the interest of my topic, my mother has engaged in this work for many years now and she promised her help. Therefore I received a list of contacts of some of the Polish women she met while on this journey and I could contact them personally. However I only managed to get in touch with five of them. The other two women did not have a time or willingness to speak and one has unfortunately passed away last year. I find the personal network method the most appropriate because even though I do not know the women personally they knew my mother and I feel like they felt safe and had already some trust towards my person.

However, it was very difficult to get in touch with the women I was looking for across the web. I posted many information about my research and the people I am looking for on one of the social media sites (Facebook) focused on the groups of Polish migrants living in different cities in Germany, however there was only two replies and they did not want to talk verbally, but were willing to write me their story. I also tried the polish website and its forum (Opiekunki24) that is especially for Polish migrant care workers that are working 24/7 and there is registered over 10 000 women. Nevertheless the moderator deleted any post that I have written and I could not get in touch with any of them what was very disappointing for me. In order to complete the study I also needed to access some of the family members of my informants. That part was not easy as well since my informants seemed that they want to protect them in some way, and I gained access only to two of them and I will be the third person speaking of my own experience.

First I was concerned that I do not have enough amounts of people to be interviewed, however every research is different and as Kvale (2008) adds there is no rule in an appropriate amount of people to be interviewed in the qualitative research. I know I need to have a desired amount of data gathered in order to conduct my research and sometimes it is better to have less people to interview although more significant My data was gathered between March and April 2015 and later again in June and July the same year. The first part of the interviews took part through Skype and the second one in person while I was in Poland to gather this information or in some case still through Skype. I wanted to make these interviews in person, which I think made an incredible difference than a talk through the social space. People gained more trust faster and they seemed more open what surely contributed positively to my research.

## **Data Collection**

I decided to use the semi-structured interview as this method allows my interviewees to elaborate freely and even go off the topic. I decided to use this qualitative data collection to interview the women and ask them questions that could not be answered by any other method of the quantitative interviewing. The questions I tried to ask were to be answered to challenge the research question and provide me

with an idea of how the whole situation looks like through the eyes of real examples that I could talk to. The interviews were quite flexible but still mainly focusing on the subjects I wanted to touch upon. As mentioned before some of the interviews were conducted two times in order to get a greater understanding. In the first phase though the questions were mostly concentrated on the general knowledge that I could receive in order for my informants to introduce themselves. They were mainly about my informants name, age, their previous work experience, their work experience currently and the short family description. They appeared for me necessary in order for my interviewees to feel comfortable with me and to allow us for longer conversation that may not be that easy for them, as talking about family for any migrant may be very sensitive. Most of the conversations were around 60-80 minutes long and I knew, I need to be very patient waiting for some answers. As always, some of the informants were not talkative at all and I was the one stimulating the conversation all the time. Some of the informants on the other hand were the storytellers were I knew, they needed to talk to someone and share their experience. Some of the participants did not agree for the verbal communication and they wanted to share their story in a written material. I could notice that the replies were short and not constructed in a way that I wanted my interview to go, however they decided what they wanted to write and what not and I needed to understand that. Some of the document materials are also used for the analysis part of this research. Clearly I could not forget about my own experiences in that matter, therefore my own reflections are also provided in this thesis.

The interviews were recorded and the text materials are enclosed on the DVDs. Unfortunately it is all in the mother language of the interviewees because I believe this will contribute to the better conversation flow and elaborations on the specific subjects would be more authentic though the automatic reply in the mother language. Also Polish language would feel more comfortable for my informants, allow them for easier replies and save their and my time to look for other words in German or English that would maybe not be that suitable to what they apprehend in their response. However all of the material that I believed was relevant I gathered to the data analysis and translated it into English as precisely as I could.

## Limitations and Ethical Considerations

While working on this research I met on my way some obstacles I needed to accept or deal with. Writing the thesis is not an easy process, especially when doing it on your own. Having no one else to discuss the ideas and points of view could limit some of these research important sections. I also believe that having someone else would contribute to the data collection and its analysis. One person can perhaps miss some of the relevant points while the other one would definitely provide another point. An additional consideration here is the interviews and the number of participants, which was described in the previous section. Maybe I would never be satisfied with the number of participants however hopefully I received a qualitative and valuable contribution to my research answers and information from the ones that I have.

Another point I would like to make here is that I feel limited that I could not experience this whole situation myself and work for some time as a care worker. This experience that I planned to achieve unfortunately need to be moved in time because of some of the family issues I needed to go through. Nevertheless I feel that the experience I would gain there would contribute to my research, maybe would also limit it in a sense that I would know that it is only for some time, not for my whole life and maybe I would experience it differently compared to my informants. I also regret that I did not include in my research the ethnographic method, where I could observe for some days the participants and their daily interaction with family members by e.g. living with them for some times. However I hope that my own participation in these whole phenomena is helpful to answer the research question.

I am also aware that my own contribution to this research may be quite dangerous especially looking at the fact that the unity of my family did not survive this transnational setting however even though I hold my own construct of the reality, I am advised not to let my personal values intrude this investigation to an unnecessary high degree (Bryman, 2012). Meaning that I could include in this research some of my views but only to some degree and concentrate mostly on the perspectives that my informants provided to me.

Unfortunately not all of the women agreed to the verbal communication what might have limited my understanding. As mentioned before I also experienced a non-talkative person that agreed for the interview however did not want to share a lot. Some of my informants did not have a time or willingness to talk to me again, what have also influenced this research's data. I also feel that the first interviews and the Skype call also limited somehow the flow of the conversation because we could not see each other personally what would maybe allow my informants to speak more freely about their feelings.

When it comes to ethical considerations I needed to remember that Polish women protect their families in any cases and would not share too much information about their misfortune. Polish people are usually very reserved when it comes to talking about these matters to a stranger in order to avoid gossiping in the neighbourhood or at work. I knew I needed to respect what they told me and my questions needed to be very careful, not to hurt anyone's feelings nor invade their privacy. That's the ethical consideration I needed to have in mind at all times but also the limitation that influenced my project. I believe that more data and information could enhance this project even more. Another point here is that all of my participants asked to be anonymous what is understood and respected in this thesis. I tried to change the participants' names and I did not include here the cities of their work place. Also the informants were aware that they can terminate the interview at any time and as promised they will receive this paper to read if they wish to.

## Theoretical Framework

### Transnationalism Theory

In the 1960s, most of the times the term transnational was referred to economic processes that occurred in more than one state. However the anthropologist and social science scholars have been using this word as an adjective to indicate the fall of national boundaries and this usage cannot be found in the standard dictionaries (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995).

For many years, scholars have been deeply interested in how migrants are incorporated in the new cultures, taking an example in Germany, where they believe that foreigners will assimilate or in United States where they believe that migrants need to forget their unique culture and adapt a new one in the host country. Nevertheless, nowadays it is more and more recognised that the migrants are strongly influenced by their social ties in the home countries that actually stretch the national borders (Levitt & Shiller, 2004). The conceptualisation that Basch advocates is that transnationalism is a ‘process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries.’ According to their words these processes are seen as part of a broader phenomenon of globalisation, where the nation states decrease, and the world cities of accumulation, communication and control increase (Glick Schiller et al. 1995).

According to Salih migrants have become transnational in so far, as they manage to live simultaneously in two countries (Salih, 2003). Researchers that study migration argue that the transnational processes are situated within the life experience of individuals and families, *“making up the warp and woof of daily activities, concerns, fears and achievements”* (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995 p.56)

Another important aspect in transnationalism in the field of migration is pinpointed by Levitt and Schiller, who advise a need for reformulation of the concept of society in terms of citizenship, family or nation-states. They argue that it is difficult nowadays to understand the people by studying them only within the perspective of national boundaries (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). People move globally and maintain

connections all over the world, and migrants are not exceptions in the phenomena. Sometimes those migrants live simultaneously within, and beyond the boundaries of a nation-state because of an easier access to developed ways of communication. The authors refer to this occurrence as transnational social fields.

A fast development of new, ways of technologies allow the members of these transnational social fields to maintain social, cultural, reproductive and economic links, despite of being separated geographically (Zontini E. , 2007). That means that even by being in a receiving society, a migrants that is in a contact with its relatives will always somehow have an influence on the relatives left behind. Either it is by sending remittances, or talking on the phone. The lives of many migrants cannot be just looked at from the perspective of one country, because what is shaping their experiences are also the family members they leave back home, local services and institutions they need to deal with, homes and places both locally and elsewhere (Ganga 2006 in Zontini 2015).

### **Transnational Social Spaces**

When referring to transnational social fields I use the definition of the concept presented by Schiller and Levitt (2004). They base their social field definition on Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994). They describe social field as a “*set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organised and transformed*” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995 p.57). In opposition to national social fields, where those that stay within national boundaries communicate and interact with each other, transnational social fields work beyond any given border what allows actors to relate to each other in direct or indirect ways. While mentioning this term it is important to understand that there are different ways of being and ways of belonging in social fields.

Ways of being are associated to the social relations and its practices between the actors, rather than to the identities created with their actions. Since social fields contain institutions, organisations and experiences, they generate categories of identities that the actors choose. However not all will identify with any label, even though they have a possibility to do so. On the other hand, ways of belonging present

us with the practices that signal an identity, which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are not symbolic, but visible that in fact, mark belonging, such as wearing Christian cross, flying flag or choosing a particular cuisine. Different people may show different actions, and some of them may be engaged with a lot of people from their homeland, but not identify at all as belonging to their home of origin. They can also eat certain food, but not show their identity but because it is a routinized practice. In this particular instance they are engaged in transnational ways of being. Also there are other migrants, who are not engaged in any relation with others from their home country, but because of their memories or nostalgia, they may want to show that they belong to a particular group. Then they are also entering the transnational way of belonging in the social field in their life.

As the authors argue, people change depending on the context, therefore scholars cannot think fully about the full assimilation or transnational connection but the combination of both. The challenge in this thesis is to analyse the variation that migrants create depending on their connections and how the receiving and the sending societies and other transnational ties influence each other.

### **Emotional Transnationalism**

Transnationalism is not an easy process, not all transnational migrants can manage their family obligations from afar, and that leads them to the feelings of sadness and guilt. Ways of being and ways of belonging are very similar to the emotional transnationalism, that is why this is the sub-section of the Transnational Social Spaces segment.

(Fabes, Valiente & Leonard 2002 in Takeda 2012) Since every family interactions are shaped by emotions and are related to family's development, that is the reason why I decided to include this concept into this research. Maintaining family ties is always connected to emotions and the concept of emotional transnationalism within the theory of transnationalism is an essential one. Many of my interviewees speak about their experiences through their emotions. I use many of their words in the analysis

section, where it becomes easier to analyse their understandings of the world because of their feelings.

The concept of emotional transnationalism was first introduced by Diane Wolf in 1997 and was an outcome of emotional fights that the second-generation migrants from the Philippines went through. They were struggling with contradicting cultural values of individualism and differences between their home country and the U.S. (Wolf, 2002). Wolf defines emotional transnationalism as the process of sustaining transnational connections between migrants and family members left in the home country at the level of emotions and ideologies. She also argues that the feelings to their homelands may be imaginary, because they may have never been in the Philippines, however they call their parents' country of origin 'home' because of their stories. Taking a point of departure from this conceptualisation, there was also lots of scholars writing about transnationalism in relation to migrant women and their gender roles (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997, Perrenas 2001). They write about women's subjective opinions and feeling on emotions and highlight their roles they need to fulfil at home. Scholars bring to the research the thoughts of feeling guilt, sadness or regret. Takeda in her study presents emotional transnationalism in a case of Japanese migrant women in Australia and their feelings of guilt of not being able to fulfil their roles as daughters to their parents left in Japan.

### Remittances

In many less affluent societies, remittances play a huge role of reduction of poverty and increased consumption capacity. For some countries these external sources of finance are crucial for functioning the country because sometimes they are bigger than foreign direct investments or official development aids (Munzele Maimbo & Ratha, 2005). However there is also another way of looking at remittances, especially when it comes to the concept of the global care chain. Vertovec, among many others presents how remittances maintain social relations including relations of care. Remittances are one of the ways in which migrants continue to keep connection with its transnational family (Singh, Cabraal, & Robertson, 2010). "*Remittances reinforce previous social ties and commitments, which maintain trust networks and emotional bonds across distances*" (Tilly, in Castañeda, 2009 p.107). That means that migrants

in order to keep family ties across the distance send remittances as a way to show trust and support. Migrants doing it expect the loyalty and membership in the families and communities of origin (Castañeda, 2011). Castañeda also explains that for the economic wellbeing of others, migrants are able to sacrifice their own well-being. Castañeda adds that those who migrate feel an emotional moral duty to provide for their family as an act of love, not always looking at what emotional and economic consequences this might have:

*“In the case of transnational household economies it is not just that emotions are embedded in remittances, but there is a dialectical relationship between the economic logic of migration to provide for the family, and the emotional logic of remitting as a moral duty and an act of love – ironically overlooking the economic and emotional costs that this decision will have” (Castañeda, 2001 p.97)*

The idea introduced by Vertovec is indeed crucial to this research as remittances are not solely seen as an economic bond, but also the emotions embedded in care relations.

## The concept of Care

### Circulation in Migration

I decided to introduce the circulation of migration concept because later on I will refer to this as a circulation of care. This is going to provide a reader with a brief contextualisation. The term circulation is not new in migration studies as it was first referred to the season labour workers, travelling back and forth between their countries of origin and host countries. This situation is mentioned in migration books as circular migration and this notion of circulation is still being revitalised. There were already lots of cases where migrants were coming back and remigrating again. Therefore, traditionally the movement of migrants and their return to home countries has been defined as return migration (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

However Hugo in 2009 claims that the *“return migration needs to be considered as part of a wider process of transnationalism involving regular electronic interaction, frequent visiting and regular reinforcing of intentions to eventually return”* (Hugo 2009 in Baldassar and Merla, 2014 p.45). As we can notice from this quote the circulation, even though so accurate to this research where Polish migrants travel back and forth, refers not only to the geographical movement of people but also the other sources of interaction as e.g. communication methods. This circulation may also include the exchange of goods, information, and symbols triggered by international labour migration (Caglar 2001 in Baldassar and Merla, 2014).

By enhancing these views Baldassar and Merla point out the importance of circulation of care that can occur in all families no matter of their socioeconomic status or where they reside. Their concept of care circulation recognises the diversity among families within and across cultures and sustaining commitments to different people, not only family related.

### Care

The term of care reflects a wide variety of meanings drawing from a care to people we love to the care of people we need to work for. Care means support, either it is physical, or emotional (Daly, 2002). Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding draw on Finch's (1989) five dimensional definitions of care as economic, accommodation, personal,

practical, emotional and moral. From all of them, personal care is the most difficult to fulfil while being a transnational migrant, because it requires being physically co-present, however it is possible to achieve it through visits at home countries. The oldest of all of them is probably the economic one, where remittances play a huge role. Practical care involves exchanging information or advising, while the emotional and moral is expressed by support and can be done in proximate or distant contexts.

While some of these dimensions of care require physical co-presence to be fulfilled, others can be exchanged across the distance, through virtual communication. This exchange of care is referred to as a circulation of care among family members (Baldassar and Merla, 2014). This flux of care is defined by its flows back and forth often in multiple directions. This care circulation framework conceptualises migrants as both providers of care and its receivers. This care circulation is characterised by its reciprocity and asymmetry, what means that these exchanges are not immediate or equivalent but symbolised with the expectation that care will be returned one day. Therefore these exchanges of care are under constant negotiation of commitments over time. When support in family members is not a normative obligation anymore, there is still sense of moral commitment to it. Even though sometimes members may be inactive in the circulation of care and in some reactivated. Bonvalet and Ogg (2006) add though, that the reactivation of care happens in times of crisis as a sign of solidarity in the family (Bonvalet and Ogg 2006).

Baldassar and Merla (2014, p.51) also refer to the circulation of care and its emotional aspect. This constant management of separation and absence and concern on emotions are an integral part of a kin work. Migrants of family members may experience stress, fear or nostalgia because of the separation or changes in the family roles among many other causes. However the concept of emotional transnationalism was explained in the transnationalism theory and it is very relative to what Baldassar and Merla describe here. The emotion of longing though, provides a higher motivation to stay in touch and to try to create a sense of shared presence and involve people imagining transnational family life into being (Baldassar, 2008).

## Virtual Presence

This co-presence can be constructed by proxy (objects or people whose physical presence embodies the spirit of longed-for absent person or place), physically (when visiting), through imagined co-presence or virtual – various communication technologies (Baldassar 2008). Researches on the communication practices between transnational family members conclude that people will use whatever new technology available to them to circulate the care (Baldassar 2007, Wilding 2006). Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck demonstrate by their research that transnational migrant care workers from Poland working in Germany are always up to date with what is happening with their family members. Family members express their feelings through skype calls, or by sending warm text messages. Mothers also want to show their interest by helping their children with their home works by being virtually present. Because of developed ways of communication, this *“mothering from a distance appears to be a sensitive combination and coordination of absence and proximity, the quality of contact, and the management of emotions”* (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012 p.42)

Madianou and Miller (2012) present how polymedia have become an integral part of the creation of transnational family members experiences and their daily lives. Also the ability to use these technologies regularly is defined by people’s access to those. Some of the new technologies depend on the state provision of infrastructures and services, while others on the knowledge and skills to use them (Baldassar 2008). In particular personal computer, the cell phone and the access to the Internet have become an essential to create and maintain transnational networks, while reinforcing and shaping the sense of individual and collective identity (Glick Shiller 1992; Horst and Miller 2006; Hayothorntwhite 2007; Cohen 1999 in Oiarzabal & Reips 2012). The growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the international migration create new opportunities for transnational family members, as e.g. mothers to reframe, negotiate and construct gendered parenting ideology (Peng & Wong, 2013). In the case of Parrenas regarding the Philippine mothers and their relation with children the negotiation of gender parenting ideology has not occurred yet. Falicov also discovers how migrant families fight the national boundaries and geographical distance to strengthen their connection, identity and survival by usage of

ICT. This type of communication creates a sense that transnational migrants are present and active in the daily lives of the families left behind (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011).

Wilding though adds that even though ICT is helpful to maintain family interaction, it is just a tool to extend the family practices, and it is essential to remember that effects of distance cannot be eliminated by usage of Information and Communication Technologies. (Wilding, 2006)

These communication flows are used for an extensive exchange of information and sometimes compensate the absence of beloved ones (Licoppe, 2004). When communicating, the feelings of isolation are somehow reduced. Although there might be sometimes a growth in feelings of sadness and guilt - not being together in a particular moment may be the reason of it (Wilding, 2006). However communication increases the level of support that migrants can receive and provide, what definitely creates a smaller distance in this virtual space of families' wellbeing.

## Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the concept of intersectionality in 1989 and it has its roots in identity and standpoint theory. The concept is usually ascribed to the black feminist movement in North America and Crenshaw (1989) wants to break the tendency of the dominant framework of discrimination to treat all women as white and all blacks as men (Crenshaw, 1989) as the black women were invisible in the American legal system. Intersectionality from then on is synchronised between (hetero) sexism, racism, class marginalisation and other classic 'ism' linked to sociocultural categories (Staunæs & Søndergaard, Intersectionality: A Theoretical Adjustment, 2012). Since Crenshaw, the concept has developed into surrounding social divisions, which are closely connected to inequalities. Critical feminist race theory has widened the concept and found its usage in analyses on the gender, race and class in relation to black women and their positioning as “the outsiders within” (Collins 1998 in Staunæs 2003). Their positioning was introduced as ‘others’ in a structural system where wealthy, heterosexual, white, male, Christian, young and slim people were ideal. Collins work is also based on standpoint theory, where again racism and sexism, oppression and discrimination in the structural system is where the focus stands.

Lykke adds that intersectionality is not the sum of the inequalities that people face but the intra-action of these inequalities and the point of analysing this phenomena is to examine the differential ways in which social categories are concretely structured by each other, as opposed to finding several identities under one. The major problem with this concept is that it lacks a well-defined methodology, which makes it more difficult to use the theory to directly address the inequalities.

According to the gender scholar, Nina Lykke, the concept of intersectionality can be used for many different aspects of life. The point that I am going to be taking in this research is a usage of analytical approach to sociocultural categories of identification and differentiation. As a matter of fact, the “Matka Polka” is a sociocultural category that is assigned to Polish women, therefore I will try to elaborate it on the examples of my informants and their migration experiences.

Staunæs (2003) argues that the theory of intersectionality needs a reconceptualization. According to her the concept is a good analytical tool in examining how certain people get positioned as different, sometimes marginalised. However the concept lacks the consideration of how these categories work and intersect in the lived experiences of concrete subjects (Staunæs, 2003). To reconceptualise the intersectionality, Staunæs first explains the concept of subjectivity as the person's sense of a self. Compared with the concept of identity, subjectivity can hold stability, but also change and rupture. In fact subjectivity is an on-going process of becoming and includes the social categories people are appointed to. The social categories used to be understood as something unchanged, as "Turkish" or "boy" is something you are when it comes to certain socialisation or biological traits. However this perspective was changed in the 1980s where it was argued that social categories are not something you are or have, but as something you do. This perspective changes the focus from essential being to constructed becoming (Staunæs, 2003).

## Background of Care Work in Germany

Poland is a country with a long tradition of labour migration from the nineteenth century. The state that was always under occupations and enormous internal problems has created the transnational Polish society. Poland since the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century did not exist on the political map of Europe. This of course had a huge impact on the education, culture and study of history. In German and Russian textbooks Poland was presented as a historical failure in all aspects of the country (Wandycz, 1992). Eventually, after the gaining of the independence, Poland witnessed many other issues. One of the well-known examples that everyone remembers about is the decade of Edward Gierek, who came to power in 1970. His political reforms were centred on the modernization of the country following the Western example. In order to achieve his goal, he borrowed from the bank of United States and West Germany around US\$100 million to be used for technological developments and modernization of Poland. The authorities in these times could provide proper wages for the workers, free health services, and a bigger consumption capacity for everyone. Massive investments were made and many expected that by export of Polish-made products the debt would be soon paid-off. However this whole plan faltered because of worldwide recession and increased oil prices (Colin, 2006). Poland's foreign debt rose from US\$100 million in 1971 to US\$6 billion in 1975 and still continued to rise. Then consumer goods began to disappear from the shops, and Gierek's industries also began to be mismanaged and did not provide any incomes. That was just one example among many others that resulted in a big disapproval of Polish society towards its government. Alongside the perceived corruption of the government, for the reasons explained above Polish people found themselves poorer and began a trend of migration towards Western nations that still holds today.

Already, after the World War II people were leaving with their whole families without any hopes of return and the short-term labour migration were happening only inside the socialist block (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, *Care Workers, Care Drain, and Care Chains: Reflections on Care, Migration and Citizenship*, 2012). The German Federal Agency for Labour counted 100,000 Polish workers in 1991, that number had tripled when Poland became a formal member of European Union in 2004 and these

numbers do not include the non-registered employment of Poles in Germany (Kalter, 2011). However after the legalisation of border regimes the pattern of migrating as a family changed significantly. The dominant form of current migration is the transnational labour migration, in terms of migrants “commute at intervals ranging from one week to several months while their families stay behind” (Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, *Care Workers, Care Drain, and Care Chains: Reflections on Care, Migration and Citizenship*, 2012).

This phenomenon would be easily understandable since not all family members want or need to move to another country and start their life all over again. However it is not only men that migrate to support their family, “feminized migration” is a phenomenon that has been observed within the domestic and care work migration until now (Lutz 2011 in Lutz & Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012). This is more clear when we look at the fact that the German care system is failing to provide any feasible solutions for care-dependent elderly patients and their families and is dependent heavily on carers from abroad (Neuhaus et al., 2009). The authors argue that Germany is still based on premises that are no longer existing: that the families live close to their old members and take care of them. It is also believed that an affordable alternative to the 24/7 care arrangement is a nursing home, however this alternative is not socially accepted as relatives argue that ‘our elderly deserve better than that’ (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2010).

In the German welfare state, 70 % of all the families receiveing money from the state use it for care arrangements in their own houses, where the service is mostly delivered by family memebtrs or as a combination of family members and nursing services (Statistisches Bundesamt 2007 in Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012). However the same direct financial support to the family members seems to be the elements of German care system that boost the employment of live-in migrant care-givers in private households (Van Hooren 2008 in Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012). Elderly have been paying taxes for the public care insurance however the German Legislation recommends them to pay also the additional inurances privately in order to ensure the comfortable life and be able to pay for the nursing houses. However the demand of rooms in elder care facilities is lower than the actual availability, thus demonstrating that family members find it more more satisfying but also affordable to employ the

live-in migrant care worker. Hence, these cheap and very flexible care workers have become already an integral part of the care regime in Germany, to the point that this system would collapse without the “angels” from the Eastern Europe (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2010). Even though German professional care organisations argue that the Eastern European domestic workers are non-professional and have weak language skills that can eventually cause care harm for the elderly given this lack of expertise, German employers consider them good live-in carers with warm heartedness and a hands-on attitude (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2011). As Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck (2011) argue, the German employers also look at the sex and age of employed workers as important criteria of selection. Older women are much more appreciated as they have innate social and emotional competencies and are already stable in their life compared to the outgoing and potentially sexually more active young women (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2011)

## Analysis

### The Definition of Care Work

While mentioning care and domestic workers, it is relevant to define here its meaning and let my readers understand what my informants' responsibilities consist of. It is also important to mention it here since my informants negotiate their roles between the care givers and care providers while working in the domestic settings. The International Labour Organisation interprets the domestic work that includes housekeepers, child-care workers, home-based personal care workers, domestic helpers and cleaners. Their responsibilities are wide: from taking care of children, elderly and even domestic animals to cooking, gardening and cleaning (International Labour Organisation, 2012). The care-giver worker not only helps with cleaning, shopping, getting dressed and cooking but also supports the elderly or children with physical or mental disabilities (Drentea, 2007). The care workers may be professional as nurser or unprofesional as au-pairs. Mainly when the work takes place in the household, the domestic as well as care work may overlap. As migrant live-in workers spend 24 hours in the household sometimes they might be treated as family members which makes the boundary between work and home slowly disapear (Vanotti, 2014). As they are treated as the family members there is also no limit in what should they do unless there are some boundaries arranged before the work begins. Some of my informants noted the difficulty of working 24/7 while officially they are being paid for 12 hours. And while for some gardening and cleaning the house is an extra activity they should be paid for separately, others do it with pleasure as a hobby and a way to forget about their responsibilities.

As it is noticeable the distinction between the care work and the domestic one is barely seen and therefore they might overlap. As the domestic work can also include the support activities for the elderly or the children I use these terms as equally relevant. Preparing the meals or cleaning the house is a domestic service, but this service can be used also to talk and listen to elderly and children in need as a way to show support.

In order to have a clear picture and not only the theoretical background of care/domestic work in Germany I decided to provide the readers also with the interpretation of it from one of my informants – Teresa.

*“The work of the Polish care workers in Germany is that... we were, we are and we are going to be all exploited. The same as I am, no matter if the family we are going to is good or not, I am being exploited without any limits. It is not true that this work is for 8-9 hours, because this is non-stop working. The grandmother (care receiver) can wake up on purpose during the night 11 times and you need to go to her (...) Besides the caregiving, you need to do laundry, cooking, cleaning, washing, do some ironing for other family members because they think you are there to do so.”*

Teresa describing the work uses strong words as ‘exploitation’ presents the readers with the view that live-in-care labour migrants may be treated as people that should do everything as they are being paid for it. The example that Teresa illustrates provides a clear of what are the work responsibilities for many live-in migrant care workers that take care of elderly. All interviewees mentioned the same responsibilities as Teresa. However, among the interviewees the working conditions differ. Teresa is the only one who terms her working experiences ‘exploitation’. Other interviewees explained that their work is to only take care of the elderly and any extra work for other family members must be paid for separately. As a live-in migrant care worker in Germany, they have the right to discuss their contracts and argue for their rights.

## Matka Polka – The Mother Pole

*“The construction of images is one of the central practices that produces culture and gives meaning to people, objects and events, so that members of the same culture who think and feel about the world in a roughly similar manner share specific sets of images” (Hall, 1997:4 in Seibert, 2001 p.60)*

The image of „Matka Polka“ is deeply rooted in tradition and culture and every person in Poland seems to be acknowledged with this term. The quote above explains that some of the images must be constructed in a society in order for the people to share the same manners and understand each other better. It does not surely mean that these images must be true with the reality however they are constructed so that people associate with the specific nation. And this gender specific image helps in constructing the national identity.

### Matka Polka Background and Description

One of the social categories that Polish women face in their environment is to be a Mother Pole. The influences of the church and the politics created a complex range of images of Polish women, and some of them created by the media do not necessarily reflect the reality of Poland after the 1989 (Seibert, 2001). Nevertheless the images created by the media help to construct an insight into the cultural practices in the country.

The image of Matka Polka was created in the times when Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, and it represents a woman in a black dress surrounded by many children and grandchildren. The woman is mourning for husbands, sons and brothers who have died fighting for the country, but also for the loss of independent Poland (Seibert, 2001). Family became the bastion of national identity as the Polish language and tradition were forbidden to be cultivated (Sokolowska, 1976 in Seibert, 2001). The women were expected to take care of children and grandchildren and take care of the family businesses and farms. Mother Poles are seen as the ones who support their children and grandchildren morally. For the crucial role in children rearing the women were considered the protectors of the family and teachers of the national tradition and culture. However only women who were mothers and grandmothers, or potential

mothers could deserve to be called 'Matka Polka' (Seibert, 2001). Matka Polka would usually wear a cross on her neck symbolising that she is loyal to her husband, religion and the country. Even after the death of her husband she was expected to remain faithful only to him. Matka Polka would only be permitted to fulfil herself only through religion, motherhood and patriotic activity. That is why she was also associated many times to the symbolic catholically 'Virgin Mary' (Seibert, 2001). In this explanation Polish women would have to do everything in their power for their family and for the country.

### **The Political Influence**

The year of 1989 is seen as the date of revolution in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in Poland. Polish people's waves of strikes against the Soviet communists resulted in the official recognition of the opposition by the government and the Round Table Negotiation. The Round Table Negotiation's consequence was the first free elections. In the 1990's Polish borders were open and people could hold their passports at home, what was earlier impossible, since those were held at the police station. People started to travel and acknowledge the different world. Poland started to change from very grey country to a colourful-western leaded one. Polish people became more interested in a wealth accumulation and consumerism. There were lots of imports, local production and subsequently the increased consumption of everything that started to be available, from the toilet paper to luxury cars (Seibert, 2001). Earlier almost everything was sales-restricted, people could find in the shelves only limited amount of products. Seibert argues that the ability to consume among Polish women is something very valuable to them and they see this as a positive change in Poland after the 1989 revolution (Seibert, 2001).

### **Changes in Women Role**

Family in the Eastern Block has been observed as a large network of relations between people that were based on socio-economic necessities and traditional values, including religion (Ross and Sicinski, 1987 in Seibert). Polish society is rather family based oriented (collective) rather than an individualistic. This is influenced by the

country's large history of external dangerous impacts, where the family environment was the only safe place (Podgórecki, 1995).

The mass entry of Polish women in the job market encouraged by the government in the 1980s played a huge role in the structure of the family. That has led to the weakening position of the father as the head of the family. That was all happening in the communism period, where the people were employed by the state and dependent on the state-provided services such as health care, education or housing. However the individuals were very restricted by the state in their budgets. As mentioned earlier, there was limited availability of fresh food or shortage of kindergartens (Seibert, 2001). This has led the Polish women to simply become multitasking, as they were the ones active in the job market, growing food in the gardens among many other tasks, and taking care of the children, as well as the old parents.

### **The Church Influence**

The Church also plays a huge role in the Polish society. Catholic religion is not only religion but also the lifestyle of people and as a matter of fact the social position of Polish women is also strongly influenced by the Church (Seibert, 2001). Its powerful character acknowledges its role in preserving the country and its people under the strong threats that Poland went through for example after the World War II or the communist period, as the main, recent ones.

Many Polish political parties are closely linked to the Polish church and reflect their teaching in their policies (Seibert, 2001). Poland has been many times criticised for the role the Church has played in shaping its political landscape. The Polish Church has been also many times criticised by the west for its traditional approach to family, for its points on e.g. contraception and abortion. Polish Church always believed and spoke that the women in Poland should do everything for their family and should not participate in the job market on the costs of the family. (Seiber, 2001) In contemporary Poland, the Church uses its political power to ensure that all their values are retained (Seibert, 2001). Many may think that from 2001 and Seibert's paper, many things have changed, however the Church holds still a powerful role in

the Polish society and consequently that influences the role women should ‘play’ in a it.

People in the past would associate Polish women with the person who would stay home with the children and grandchildren, taking care of their households and men that would be coming back from work. They would be only active in the job market if it was in the name of the state, otherwise they should take care of their families.

According to Seibert, in contemporary Poland, the image of ‘Matka Polka’ seems to follow the past ideology. Polish women do everything to retain their marriage and divorce happens only in the extreme cases. Motherhood seems to be a fundamental part of being a woman (Seibert, 2001).

### **Matka Polka Identity Abroad**

Being aware of the image of ‘Matka Polka’ that is associated to women in the Polish society, it is essential to explore migrants’ perceptions on this phenomenon. It is going to be explored in this section, as well as in the sections below. Being a mother as well as migrant, may change some of the identities that are associated to women. In fact, migration does not only suggest a physical displacement, but also concerns a greater aspect of migrants’ identity that might be linked to profession, status or social-class (Sarti, 2010 in Vanotti, 2014).

Jolanta (35), the migrant care worker who left her children and husband in Poland says that she does not understand why men should migrate and earn for their family. In the same way she shows her strength and bravery that she is able to do it. She suggests that everyone is equal and women could also be the breadwinners of the family. Jolanta as a mother is happy and proud that she could see the first important events in her children’s life and by being away she is also aware that she misses some of these relevant steps. However this is the life she chose in order to support her family. Her primary goal is the well being of the children and the family, and her actions present it very well. It was her who left Poland, breaking the stereotype that it should be the men. Being a transnational mother and a wife she sacrificed important stages in her and her children’s life in order to provide a better future for them.

*„I don't know why everyone thinks that it's the man who should migrate. Of course I know and I say that the child needs a mother and a father equally. I also know that I lose the days of my child, but I saw the first tooth and his first step and his first smile, and it was me who saw it first, from the whole family! But we do it all [work abroad] because of love and because we feel responsible for them!“*

Jolanta by mentioning the fact that she was the one participating in the first relevant events of her son suggests that by being away for some time, she is still a very good mother and migration does not change this. By stating that all the migrating mothers feel responsible for their children, Jolanta gives the impression that the term 'Matka Polka' is present in her life even when the mother is away. She will do everything for her children even if the sacrifice is so big that she cannot participate in important family events or be close to her husband on a daily basis.

On the other hand she is also explaining herself, and the action of leaving. Migration may cause a feel of guilt of not being close to the loved ones, and the justifications sometimes help a migrant to acknowledge himself that what he/she is doing is worth it. Magdalena, another of my informants also uses justifications that migration is better for everyone, especially her children, because they wouldn't have a mother if she would be back in Poland. Because of the low earnings in Poland, she believes that mothers in Poland are not good examples for their children. They are stressed, and do not have time or patience to be good role models. Her being away, according to her standpoint, is the best chance Polish mothers have to fulfil their duties.

*“It's all about the stereotypes among the people! In our case my husband could not go anywhere, and I could not earn in Poland for the needs we have. If I would stay and I would have my children close, I would work in two places, the whole day and I wouldn't have the time, the strength and the patience. So in my home there would only be my body and the stressed soul. I worked already in Poland like that when my daughter was young and I know how this system works. It doesn't!”*

When Magdalena is away she can fulfil her duties as a mother better, than when she is at home. By suggesting that, maybe she does not only want to fulfil herself as a mother but also as a woman. Magdalena by leaving the family behind and earning the

money for their needs shows that she feels responsible for the whole family, but she is also aware that she was a bad mother before, because she was all the time stressed due to work. Now that her income is higher than in Poland, she can be more patient, have more strength and be less stressed, a situation that affects her not only as a mother but also as a woman.

When Justyna was asked what does it mean for her to be a 'Mother Pole' she argues that she is not one. Justyna is the head of the family and as she explains that every mother is the head of the family. Justyna clarifies that when a mother passes away, the family is broken. According to her, mothers play a role of retaining the family ties. Being away and maintaining an exchange of information with her family members means a lot to her and this way she fulfils herself as a mother and head of the family.

Justyna: *"I am a mother, not a 'Matka Polka'. Just a mother. It means you need to be good, respected; help the others, not only your family members. As a mother you are the head of the family. Every mother is the head of the family. And when the mother dies, the family is lost, it is broken. Because everyone go in different directions, also the children. That is from my experience and not only mine."*

Aleksandra: *"So by being away you feel that these relations are broken?"*

Justyna: *No, because we call each other.*

In Maria's opinion being a 'Mother Pole' depends on the character, however she fulfils herself fully as a mother because as she mentions, she helps financially. Due to migration she misses the times spent together however she still is a mother that supports her child. She admits that now while she is away everyone lives their own life, however by being away she is also able to support her daughter and the family.

*"I think it depends from the character and not from the myth of 'Mother Pole'. But the obligations are that you need to provide your child with the good life, education, meaning that you need to buy books, computer or any other equipment. And this way I try to help. I try to help financially. And by being away you are always a mother. And I miss the most sitting together, going out together, participating in my child's life and now everyone lives his own life..."*

My every informant defends herself from the myth of 'Mother Pole'. They do not want to admit that they feel associated with this identity. Some of them may still associate this term with its political and religious influences and that may be the reason they do not want to adjust to this image, as the times have changed. However some values that are hidden behind the image of 'Matka Polka' are still performed by my informants, though on different basis, the more distant ones. It is presented in a way that family is the most important for them, and the work they perform abroad is realized for the better future of their families. This way they can fulfil themselves as good mothers that are able to support their children but also they can fulfil themselves as women that are needed in the job market and are able to succeed. More experiences of Polish migrant care workers and their role in the family are in the following sections of this analysis.

## Transnational Families and Caring Practices

In this section I am going to concentrate on my informants' and their family members caring practices, their feelings of absence, communication techniques and involvement in the daily lives. I am going to do that in order to understand how the transnational social spaces are maintained within distant families. It is going to be examined through the interviews I managed to attain and the personal life experiences of migrant care women and some of their family members.

### *Reasons for migration and the family left behind*

This section is going to demonstrate the information on why my informants decided to move and work in Germany.

Justyna (54), one of my informants left Poland seven years ago to work in Germany. She lost her job in a shoe factory in Poland when she was 48 years old and then she decided to migrate to Germany. Her sister, Maria, was already in Germany for two years working as a care worker in a family. Knowing her difficult situation at home she decided to help and provide Justyna with a host family. Despite her lack of competencies in German, Justyna knew she had to leave. When in Poland, Justyna lives in a two-room apartment with her partner, two adult children, Adrian and Kasia and Kasia's daughter – Wiktoria. Justyna's third daughter, Marlena, lives with her husband. From the time she worked at the factory Justyna always took care of Kasia's and Marlena's daughters when they needed to work. Due to financial problems Justyna left the grandchildren under the care of their mothers and left to Germany. Now she is working as a live-in domestic caregiver in Germany and her children are unemployed, however this situation is better financially for her family, as she says.

*"I left because of my economic problems, to make our life better. And money doesn't bring you the happiness but they make your life much easier. And you always think about the family because you do it to provide a better prosperity for them. (...) I want to do this because I know how it was difficult for me and I want to help them"*

Justyna's main reason to migrate was her family's economic situation. As she explained me, her partner earns monthly 200 euro, her daughter 150 euro and her son Adrian is unemployed. By leaving to Germany she would be able to provide for them around 900 euro per month. She prefers to work for the whole family, despite her age, while their young daughters will be unemployed. Justyna covers the role as a breadwinner and is the main economic provider of the family, she feels obligated and responsible for her adult children. She fulfilled the role of 'Matka Polka' for some time, while her main task was to take care of her daughters' children, however she stopped doing so. Previously, when Justyna stayed home with her grandchildren, she provided the physical, proximate type of care, now when she is away she feels obligated to provide a transnational care in a financial way.

Justyna receives the help from her sister, Maria which is an example of how transnational networks function and how transnational families are engaged in a transnational social field between Poland and Germany. The relation of help and support that exists between Justyna and Maria is an instance of a transnational social field as a system of communication full of social assistance and emotional support that the two sisters share.

On the other side there is Maria who left her 15 years old daughter, and her husband – the breadwinner of the family. Her decisions to leave were rather different.

*Maira: My economic situation and change in my family were the main reason why I decided to go to Germany. I decided that I needed to support the family's budget and also start earning my own money. In the same way I need to challenge myself.*

*Aleksandra: Can I ask what does it mean change in the family situation?*

*Maria: I hope you are not going to encounter this, but in the situation where the husband stops taking care about the family, about his wife and that is also connected to finances.*

Maria's economic situation at home was not bad. Her husband was earning money and he was the main breadwinner of the family, however he did not want to support his wife after she lost her job as a wedding planner. Maria started noticing that her husband stopped helping her in her daily life and her future. That was the reason why

she decided to go to Germany in order to challenge herself in a new job. Even if it required leaving her daughter she needed to change something in her own life in order to help her daughter later in the future.

Maria's household situation presented a strain in the traditional gendered care pattern: the man is not always the economic provider for the family and did not fulfil his duties as breadwinner, according to Maria. Consequently Maria decided to change the role in the family's life and leave her daughter under the occupation of one parent – her father. Maria needed to change her life situation and transform her mother role through a distance. The financial support that flows towards her daughter is an example of a form of care that is established in this family and it underlines a crucial change of roles occurred within the family.

That situation and the following one, provide us with an example that sometimes women migrate not only to support their families economically but because they need to escape their environment. Aneta (38), even though supporting her family financially, decided to leave her alcoholic husband and her sick father in order to work in Germany as a live-in-care worker.

*“I was working earlier as a director in one of the supermarket chains, but earning in Poland allows you only to pay for your own needs. My husband in his own situation... also he needed to pay money for his children from the previous marriage and that was too much for him... He was in the army, now he is retired and he is receiving 1300 PLN (380 Euro) and the money he needs to pay for his children is 1500 PLN and besides all that he took a debt with his (ex) wife and he needs to also pay for that, so there is no life for us with Polish earnings and that is why I, speaking the language, decided to leave and try it all in Germany.”*

Aneta did not say that she wanted to leave her husband, however talking about trying something in Germany and leaving to work and supporting the family herself, I can only assume she wanted to escape her environment. Living in Germany, earning her own money and her husband's needs will allow her to be independent and to decide over her life and not think about the problems she has on a daily basis. She does not need to take care of the alcoholic husband by being there with him anymore. However

she still cares about him and wants to show that to him by helping economically, and supporting but only through the distance.

### The Family's Perspective

As mentioned before, as an author of this project I also have some personal migratory experience. I was around sixteen years old when my mother decided to go to Germany. I remember this moment as a new stage in her life and I was excited for her. I hoped she will be happy by earning her own money, and I was also happy to be independent and unrestricted. As sixteen years old I wanted to go out more and my mother was always worrying about me. At the same time I was also worried that someone may cheat on her and they might take her somewhere. That is why we stayed in touch almost every day and I knew my mother needed my support.

Baldassar (2008) suggests that when the family members support a decision about migrating, the transnational ties are easier to maintain than when this decision meets with disapproval. For example Justyna's partner, Pawel, admits to be unsatisfied with her choice to migrate.

*"I told her not to leave. I said we are able to manage the difficulties and we are here to take care of Kasia's and Marlena's children, and since they are young, they can easily work. I told Justyna she deserves to rest now after so many years of hard work [in a factory] but she did not want to listen to me. Her children are the most important and she is able to do everything for them. Even if it requires leaving me. (...) After a year of her migration I proposed to her and she said yes, it's now over 5 years and we are still not married and she is still not here..."*

When Justyna talks about Pawel she mentions that:

*"It's not good anymore, we have some misunderstandings in our relationship. There is lots of families that separate, argue because of this distance, if one person migrates. I need to explain everything to him, and he knows that if he doesn't like to be with me he can search for someone else, the one that does not migrate. It's easy and logical. Why should we fight with each other?"*

When looking at Pawel and Justyna's situation and his disapproval I can assume that Pawel has trust issues towards Justyna and that is why he did not want her to go. Also the fact that he proposed to her may be the example that he wanted to make sure she is committed to him and one day they will leave together. Justyna on the other hand does not plan currently to come back to Poland as she still has the obligations towards her daughters and she, as the main breadwinner of the family feels fine by working in Germany. She mentioned that she visits Poland only for a week and then she goes again to work. Her words that are cited above suggest that she will not stop working in Germany for Pawel and if he needs to, he can find another woman. By saying that he can find another woman, Justyna shows her independency and the path of life she wants to follow herself. Pawel needs a proximate care that unfortunately is not provided to him by Justyna. His emotional needs are not met due to Justyna's migration process. On the other hand, Justyna by providing care to her family financially thinks that she is transmitting the care in this way, however according to Pawel this intimate relationship should not work like that. Therefore there is many conflicting issues in this family, as the negotiation of care is misunderstood by these two sides. They expect different things in life. Nevertheless Justyna is still engaged to Pawel and even though she visits Poland once for three months, she still needs him in her life as a great source of emotional support.

### **Feelings of longing**

As discussed in the theory chapter, emotions are an enormous part of transnational family members lives. Dealing with women that migrate and leave their families behind presented me with lots of examples that while being away, these women still care to be a part of the family. For some, it is actually easy to adapt to new situations and at the same time but some of the migrant women struggle with the feeling of anxiety connected to distance. This section analyses the complexity of keeping in touch with the family members left behind. In order to maintain family ties and overcome the feelings of anxiety of distance, family members talk regularly across borders however for some this communication is difficult. There are also important feelings that migrants deal with that are a firm part of transnational family ties communication.

As an example of what has been described above, Justyna misses her family and she describes the short visits at home as “an unforgettable pleasure in her life”. However looking at her infrequent visits to Poland we can assume she is fine with being away and tries to look at positive aspects of this work.

*“I can't be in Poland for more than two weeks. It is becoming too crowded for me”*  
(Justyna, 54)

On the other hand, when we look at Aneta, who left her husband at home, and her elderly father in need and sister that takes care of him, we can notice another feeling of longing in her speech compared to Justyna:

*“I miss the contact with my family, I don't have my friends around, we are living here of someone else's life, not our own or our family. (...) I am all the time stressed. I am not scared of what I am going to meet in Germany, but what I am going to encounter in Poland. I leave my father in Poland, he is going to have another surgery again soon, my sister gave a birth and I was not there with her because of my work. Also she had many problems with getting pregnant, the same as me, so this is the only child in the family. I hope the baby will be fine for the rest of our lives... I have a feeling that a lot of family important events, meetings, weddings, they are all passing by and I am not there. And these short visits are not able to recompense the months of being away.”*

Aneta left her father under her sister's responsibility and her husband is on his own. Aneta talks with him every day for several hours, however it is only him that she keeps a continuous contact with. Not having an extended family Aneta is continuously worried about the whole family situation because she is aware that there are few people replacing her work as supporter of her father and close family.

Justyna on the other side contacts her family every day and talks regularly with her daughters, her son and her partner. Merla (2012) suggests that extended family networks helps migrants to overcome the issues and obstacles to transnational caregiving (Merla, 2012). Justyna's extended family networks make her feel calm and

secure about her grandchildren or daughters. There is always someone to be there for them and that may be the reason she may fulfil herself in the workplace.

On the contrary, Aneta having a small family and talking only to her husband feels she is lonely. There is only one family member supporting her through the social space. She feels guilty she cannot participate in important family events and in the important day of her father's surgery. Being scared of what she is going to encounter in Poland means that she lives in Germany however feels guilty of not being there with her family to say goodbye when the time comes. This situation shows the emotional cost of transnational migrants in today's world.

A third informant, Jolanta (35) left her young children in Poland together with their father. She expresses a dilemma of being a transnational mother from far.

*“This is a fact. It really hurts. The separation, the distance with the children... Sometimes when I hear from my friends ‘we know how you feel’ I get a high fever! Those that did not experience that, they have no idea what does it mean to leave your treasures for two or even more long months. It’s a high price we pay (...) I try to get used to it now, but after every skype call I can’t sleep. You just want to hide in the corners and cry”*

Transnational mothers argue that their new role in the family is not easy for them, especially while having young children. Sometimes they pretend everything is fine and in the moments when nobody can see them, they lost the control over their emotions. Example of Jolanta presents her feeling of helplessness and loneliness. Even though she talks on a daily basis with her child and husband, she is trapped between the need of material benefits and the painful distance barriers. She feels misunderstood by others and she knows she needs to get used to this new situation because she is the breadwinner for the family.

Maria (51) adds that when being a migrant care worker, a person is no longer sure where his home is. Taking care of the family members and thereafter getting attached to the elderly they need to also take care of, it is easy to lose a sense of reality where a person belong to and who is he.

*“Every woman that has children will always miss the home, the family. There are situations where the human being is wondering where is his real house. This separation is sometimes as a personality split.”*

Sometimes it is also possible that some of the feelings that migrants should provide for its family members are offered to other people.

*“I shouldn’t say that but I can really notice that I feel attached to my patients and I give them a lot of myself. Lots of emotions you know? And these emotions were earlier reserved only for my child...”*

Maria being a transnational mother away from her daughter realises that migration is an obstacle of providing the physical presence care. Her care obligation circulates. It is delivered not only to her family members but also to people she needs to work for. I do not want to claim that when that happens, the daughter receives less of her mother’s attention however it is possible that the physical absence may in some way influence the family relations. Transnational migrants do have regrets over separation, however by accommodating love to the person they take care of, they feel more secure of having there someone that will love them in return. Someone they can feel as the second family for them.

Barbara (56) mentions this situation in her interview.

*“Since I do not have a big family, I want to feel good in Germany and I want to be supported. Therefore I provide the best work I can and I want to feel there as if I am at home. I want Germany to be my home because then it is much easier to adapt and have your own place on earth.”*

### **Care Practices and Remittances**

This section of my analysis is going to present the reader with the care practices that my informants perform towards their family members. The distance gives the perception that nothing is possible to maintain the family ties. However when people trust and want to take care of each other, there are no boundaries. This section is

going to present examples that migrant women leaving their families want to still retain strong family relations by different activities they perform.

Parreñas argues that transnational parents feel that they need to overcompensate for their absence with material goods ( Parreñas , 2001). It is the material goods, support or any other activity that will make the migrant women feel as if they fulfil their role as a Mother Pole (Matka Polka).

One of the many ways my informants show care to their family members is by bringing them some gifts while coming home, or simply going shopping reminds them of their family members. Jolanta performs that also to manage her longing to the family. Shopping is a way for Jolanta to fulfil her duty of being a mother. By saying that she honours her duty at least in this way we can notice in her speech that she also feels sorry that she cannot be there with her children on daily basis and do more as a mother.

*„Missing them is proportional to shopping. I always buy them many clothes. In that way I know I am doing something nice and they are always happy to receive something from me! And I fulfil myself at least in this way...”*

Salih (2003) suggests that migrant women through their consumption practices construct their home and social status by objectifying themselves in something they bring back and forth (Salih, 2003). In the case of my project, women by consumption for their families manage that way their feeling of longing but also the feeling of guilt. Small gifts make them feel as if they are good mothers even though they are not there for their children. This way they want to recompense for their absence.

Teresa also adds that her *„only way to fight the longing to the family is to go shopping, to give them something they deserve.”*

Maria: *Wherever I am, I like to buy and get to know other tastes and bring gifts. Maybe I do it more for myself because everything is available in Poland nowadays, but I still buy a lot.*

Aleksandra: *And why is that?*

Maria: *I am happy I can share everything with my daughter.*

Maria is aware everything is available in Poland however this is another example that by going shopping she fights this way with her feelings of guilt to be away. She also feels excited that she can share a bit of her life with her daughter because this sharing shows her daughter that she is still important for Maria and that she wants her to be a part of her life even though of being far away from each other.

Migrant mothers also express care by supporting their children with funding for their university degrees.

*„I worked in Germany because my daughter was studying, and that was my base. And that is totally different money than you can earn in Poland. (...) I didn't give a birth to my child to satisfy myself. I think it's an obligation of every parent. If she wanted to study and develop herself, here you go, but obviously universities are very expensive in Poland, she worked part time also but of course I helped her a lot. That's why I decided for children, and it is my responsibility as a mother to help as much as I can, to give her a good start in life.”*

Teresa fulfils this way her responsibility as a mother. Her daughter is over 18 and she decided to work for a higher education degree. However in Poland only some of the universities are publicly funded and the rest is private. Only the best students in the universities are able to receive a scholarship that will help them in their daily, young lives. The scholarship is around 100-150 euro depending on the universities. Young students need to depend on themselves or their parents if they wish to study. Teresa, as many other women supports her child by sending her money for her studies. As she claims that was also the reason she decided to migrate. As a Polish mother she feels obligated for her child to attain an university degree and live a good life. Many people in Poland believe that their children after finishing high school need to go to university, as without the diploma no one would have a good job. Mothers believe that if they support their children even in their adulthood as a way to show care for them, this care will also be returned one day. Jolanta adds that she *„gave them so much love that I could give and I hope that one day they will share this love with their families.”*

Lutz and Mollenbeck add that when migrant mothers come home, it is becoming an event in their families' lives and in this time mothers will not enjoy fully the leisure time but must take care of neglected household tasks and compensate their absence from their children (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011). Aneta does not have children, however her speech represents all the women I have had the interviews with. Migrant women after coming home, they all admit that the first two days or even more they try to be home and take care of their households. That seems very important for them.

*“I come home for ten days to two weeks, so it's very intensive. I come home and my husband tries to manage everything, but the man can't do it so good, so I have this day or two for managing everything in the apartment on my own.”*

The women perform these tasks because they feel the house is still theirs and it is the woman's job to take care of the household. Men will not do it as well as the women can. Migrant women also want to feel needed. By managing the household on their own they want to present that it is their job to take care of the family and the environment they live in. By taking care of the neglected household tasks they show care to their family members as proper “Mother Poles”.

*“Coming to Poland from Germany, I am always leaving this emotional stress that is connected to the pain of my patients, but I know that when I cross the border, I am in Poland, I am here, and I can make this boundary and that's it. It's the time for myself. I can start living MY life now.”* (Teresa)

Migrant women when coming home they do not want to mix their professional life with the private one. Therefore they try to live their life in Poland the same way as it was before the migration. They do not wish that their emotional stress could influence somehow their family members. That is why they also do not call from Poland to Germany to ask about their patients. They want to spend this time on taking care of the household, their family members and their own needs.

Coming home after two or three long months abroad is an important event for the migrants and their families. Some of them prepare for it weeks before.

*„When I am here in Germany I count the days when I will be home, it's two weeks now, it's one week, and in my mind I think already about Poland that I will sit down, I will wear my comfortable pyjamas, we will turn on the tv, we will drink a good wine together, we will sit like that and talk. And we can talk for hours. I am waiting for these moments.” (Aneta)*

Planning is important for migrants as this way they remind themselves that they have some kind of support that is waiting for them. By planning different activities for their family members they present that they want to keep these family ties alive for as long as possible. As it is also visible from another narrative, they maintain the family relations by doing different activities when they are already there.

*„I try to spend with my daughter at least two times per year a nice vacation somewhere. The short, but it is always something. And we like to spend time together what is really, really nice.” (Maria)*

My informants have this possibility of coming home to Poland, as it is very close to Germany. In these days they always try to perform different tasks to keep the family members happy. Either it is by participating in different events or going for vacation. That seems very important to my informants since as they mention, they can start breathing in these moments. The work they perform and the separation from their family members is very stressful for them and very limiting. Most of the times they need to spend time with their old patients, sitting at home and managing all of the tasks there. From the conversations with my informants I know that during the day they can go shopping but only for one hour or so. The caregiver needs to always be there to provide care for his patients and leaving them without any guardianship is irresponsible. By organising different events they want to forget about their monotonous life but it also seems like they want to do some of these things for their family members.

*„I like to plan some activities for us, either it is a trip to the mountains or to the sea, even for two or three days. Just to make sure that my husband has a good time, not to be so monotonous I try to find something for him, either it is the tennis, so I bought him the tickets. If we are home together we try to go to the theatre, but the most I miss the evenings together where we can rest together. By doing that with him I feel alive.”*  
(Aneta)

Aneta even when she is in Germany she pays for different activities for her husband through the Internet. It seems like she wants him to enjoy his time while waiting for her. As it was mentioned before her husband has a problem with alcohol and maybe this way she wants him to stop thinking about that and start doing something else. By paying for these different activities for him she shows that she still cares about his health and his life.

Teresa, another informant was living very close to the Polish border. From her work place to home she had around 500km what gave her the possibility of visiting her family members. She claims that her patients' family were not satisfied about this decision, because they were the ones that needed to take care of the house while she was away for the weekend. However it seemed very important to come home for Teresa as her children were still underage and stayed home without any care. There was only sometimes an aunt or uncle coming to cook or clean the house.

*„I never neglected my family obligations! I will explain. I never did something over the price of my children or my family members! I have some responsibilities as a mother! I could come in to the Sinbad (the bus company) during the night on Friday, take free from work on Saturday and Sunday, and on Sunday evening, go all night again and come back to Germany. I always saw my children once per month this way and I did not neglect this. The work and the money are important, yes. But there is nothing more important than the kids or the family. Work will always be there, either I am cutting trees or cleaning the streets. But if I lose the trust of my children, I will lose their love and unity, I will never get it back on the same way as I worked for it as a mother. If I earn 1000 euro and if I would be sitting alone in the room, why do I need this? I wouldn't even talk to them. Nonsense.”*

Teresa's narrative explains that nothing is more important than the family members. For her the love, trust, conversations and the unity with her children is something that she is able to fight for. Polish mothers feel very close to their children and unfortunately the situation in Poland does not allow some of them to be close to them. However for my informants there is always the way to maintain the relations they have created. They will always take care of their children even while they are away. Being a mother is extremely important for Teresa and she claims that she works for her children's needs, especially her daughter's college. But she will always do something to keep in touch with them because she does not want to lose them. She is also aware that by losing them she will have no one else to support herself. She does not wish to sit alone in the room only with the money because she will have no pleasure to spend it on her own needs. By that statement she also shows that she migrated to earn the money, so in one way they are important for her, however they are only important if she cannot share them with her family.

As an author of this project, I remember when my mother was working as a care worker, she always invited me and my father to Germany. My father visited her at least three times and I remember myself going there twice. That was all before my studies in Denmark. This situation gave me the opportunity to learn German and make my mother happy. This way I could see that she also felt supported and needed. We were going shopping together and she always felt satisfied when she could buy me some clothes from Germany. Cooking for me also gave her a lot of pleasure. However I felt somehow limited there because it was not my house and my mother knew she needs to take care of her patient, that is why she could not be away in the city for a long time. Therefore whenever she was coming home to Poland, I always waited for her with flowers and some cake. When my mother was living in Poland before migrating, she always bought lots of flowers and I knew that this is something that she loves.

Knowing my mother very well I knew it would mean a lot to go to Germany and visit her. That is why I was doing that. By visiting my mother I showed that I want to support her in the hard times. The separation did not mean that we stop caring for each other. Sometimes I think it even connected us more. I knew she has hard time in Germany being far away and that is why I tried to make her different surprises.

Buying her cake and flowers became a routine that was making her happy. As my house was always full of fresh flowers, by filling the house with them for her, I wanted her to make herself as if she is back at home, the place where she belongs. This way I wanted to show her that she is awaited here.

### Communication and virtual presence in Transnational Space

Distance is something that my informants are very familiar with. The physical separation though, creates the new ways that migrants can connect in on a daily basis. They are absent physically but present virtually. The Transnational Space is never empty when it comes to maintaining family relations across borders. Migrants use different ways to communicate exchange of care, from phones, e-mails, SMS texts and skype (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011). The purpose of this section is to present another way of keeping in touch with migrant's family members. This section is also going to present that the way technology works can be helpful in exchanges of care in the family relations.

*Justyna: I always talk on the phone. It is every day but short, because you know it also costs money. I ask them how are they and if there are some problems I always think.*

*Aleksandra: Do they talk to you about the problems?*

*Justyna: I can always feel it, when something is happening.*

*Aleksandra: And what about your own problems? Do you talk about them?*

*Justyna: I prefer to keep my own problems for myself. I don't want to say it to my children. But my children talk to me about their problems and I always need to explain them everything. What should they do, how should they behave. They always listen, because I am 55 years old and I am experienced.*

Justyna and her family talk to each other on the phone. As she says the conversations are very short, but keeping in touch every day helps her to be informed of what is happening. Despite the distance Justyna can still feel as she is a part of the family and participate in the daily issues and achievements her family members go through. By listening about the children's issues in life and providing them daily advices, Justyna performs her duty as a virtual mother. Even though there is a distance between them, she can still be intimate in those aspects of their life. Justyna by talking to her children

and her partner every day is an example of moral commitment they have towards each other. By being separated around 8 years now, Justyna could simply forget about her partner and live her own life. Pawel has the same possibility, however they feel somehow obligated to care for each other through daily phone calling. Even though the phone calls may be very expensive they still perform these activities every day. That shows their big engagement and emotional support towards each other.

As the mother of the family she knows she has the respect of her children and that they listen to her. It seems also important for her that she does not talk to her children about her issues. In this way she protects them from being worried about their mother. She prefers to deal with homesickness or depression on her own because she knows that her children would worry too much about her. However as her partner says they always say that if something is wrong she should come home.

*„I do not want to speak to Justyna about my issues with her children or any other aspects that may worry her... I know she is stressed about other things so why do I want to tell her bad things? And she also always says that everything is fine, but her children always scream ‘what is wrong? Mummy come to Poland, you can always come back here because you are going to get tired of this work...’ ”*

Pawel is aware that Justyna’s children always talk to their mother about every little issue that is why he does not want to worry her with his own problems. Justyna’s family always encourages her to come home because they are aware that this work is not easy. Justyna surely feels supported when receiving these words, however she can not stop working for now. She feels financially responsible for her children and grandchildren. Pawel also does not speak to Justyna about his issues in order to protect her and sometimes this may also cause earlier mentioned misunderstandings in their relationship.

*Aneta: My biggest dream is to come back to Poland and be with my husband because it is very difficult for me. There are tears every time we separate. We are lucky that we can talk through skype without limits.*

*Aleksandra: Do you maintain this contact every day?*

*Aneta: Every day, for many hours.*

Aleksandra: *And what do you talk about?*

Aneta: *We talk about everything. We support each other in every way. Also every time I am leaving to Germany we set some goals. And I earn to achieve them. Last time, it was the transformation of our apartment. But there is also the most important goal, where we can be together and work in Poland. It will be difficult but at least we can be together.*

Aneta through the usage of Skype has the possibility to be in constant contact with her husband. By talking to each other every day for couple of hours they can feel as if they are together. They are up to date with all their daily activities. Despite of their absence in everyday life, skype has created the 'virtual connectedness' for their relationship. Hearing their voices and looking at each other through the screen helps them to recreate the moments when they lived together and shared their days. This visual tool is very powerful in shaping the migrants relationships. Video calls make the boundary between absence and presence blurred, however they will not replace the physical co-presence. As Aneta states, she is just waiting for the moments when she can be with her husband every day. Despite talking to each other every day, the virtual connectedness will not replace the touch that every other person may feel. Because of this virtual communication tool Aneta and her husband are able to plan their future life together and create a stronger sense of proximity in their physically absent life.

Through Aneta's narrative we can also notice how working abroad is important for her and her value of maintaining the family ties. As a woman, she is able to work in Germany and earn the money for her and her husband common goals. By investing in the apartment in Poland she shows that one day she wants to come back and live there with her husband. She may also live this imaginary life where she invests on something that will never happen, as her husband is an alcoholic and maybe she does not want to come back to this apartment and live there with him. By talking to him every day and supporting him this way, she is aware that she is a good wife, however will there ever be enough courage to come back and live the normal life in Poland?

*"My daughter supports me every day and she believes in me. She reminds me that I am strong and she uses different ways to do so. We use our phone, skype to talk and*

*discuss, the encouragements for different decisions. I feel that this communication is different. It's obvious that if I would be there with her, it would be different. She supports me and I support her, and we try to solve everything together. Before I went to Germany, she would go to my husband, her friends or boyfriend, because her mum would always be there... ” (Maria)*

Maria's daughter supports her through different media channels. Maria acknowledges that this way they support each other. She also mentions that before she left, her daughter was always sure that her mother will be there so she did not appreciate her that much. Nowadays when they are separated they talk more on the phone and they are connected in this way. In this case we can notice that virtual communication provides an useful addition to caring practices and that sometimes virtual communication connects its members more than it would in physical co-presence. Taking some things for granted, Maria's daughter did not need to talk to her mother so much, and now, while they are separated, they became friends that support each other in every little crisis. They also use phone and skype to instantly share different information, discuss issues or negotiate different decisions.

*Maria: I also use whatsapp every day. I send and I receive pictures of what I am cooking, what I am doing.*

*Aleksandra: Fine, and why do you do this?*

*Maria: Because I would do the same thing at home. I would also say what I am cooking today. I would also ask if everyone is fine with this choice.*

This narrative of Maria is another example of 'virtual connectedness', where meals play a crucial role. Maria by sending her daughter pictures of her dinner feels closer to her and feels a sense of a family. As she states that she would tell her family members at home what they are having for dinner this day she underlines the fact that she misses these times when she was cooking something for them. That is why she feels it is important that they can share through the virtual communication their sense of closeness. Short messages on the phone application, whatsapp are a great way to keep in touch with the family members. Short 'good morning' text or a picture of today's meal or walk may be a tool for showing care and maintaining family ties.

From my own experience, I can also add that my mother and I perform the same activity, we try to send the emotional care by short text messages and images of how our day looks like. Every day we send the pictures of food, the training we performed or the newly fresh flowers we bought.

Due to my observations on the new media sites, I have also noticed that my informants use Facebook or Instagram to connect to their family members and keep updated with their friends. By posting images of their daily activities, walks, dinners or their children they feel, as they want to share their life with someone. Posting the pictures of their children or partners will show their family members that the mothers miss them or they feel lonely and need to hear some words of support.

Media became an integral part in transnational migrants life by creating the possibility for migrants to intensify their sense of closeness.

## Conclusion

The aim of my research is to examine the phenomenon of transnational families through their experiences connected to circular migration and care work. Together with that I also tried to explore the identity of migrant care workers and their role in the family relations.

The migrant care worker informants seem to treat this job as something temporary, working to provide a better future for their family members and themselves. They believe that one day they will live happily with the loved ones, but until then they all fight with feelings of longing through different ways of communication to retain family ties. Even though it seems that distance does not break any of these relations that were earlier created with proximity, it is definitely an obstacle that my informants need to face. My informants perform their care activities to their family members through sending remittances or going for shared holidays as well as presents such as tickets for events in which they cannot take part. Additionally, when going home, they bring gifts for their family members as a way to show they care and think of them. Polish women I have interviewed treat consumerism as something very valuable because this way they feel as they can fill up the gap caused by their absence at home. This is also they way to show their family members that they think about them and that they still want to be a part of the family community.

Relationships at distance influence also the way family members feel towards each other. In some cases when there is lack of conversation, or exchanges of information, that may cause the mistrust. With this emotion, there comes also the disapproval of a kin being abroad and some of the relations may become quickly damaged. However when family members contact each other every day, I noticed that the family relations may become even stronger than the relationships based on co-presence.

The exchange of emotional care and support that bonds the families happens with the usage of new media methods. I discovered that my informants treat phone calls, Skype, whatsapp, text messaging and video calls as an inseparable part of their life. With its usage they are able to improve their day by one phone call. Also it is their

tool to be in constant contact with their family members and they can be up-to-date with what is happening. However this quality of care is challenged by physical absence in important family events. This also causes the sense of guilt of 'not being there on this day'. And the constant usage of the new media unfortunately cannot replace the proximity.

As it was exposed in the analysis section, sociocultural categories created by the society are negotiable. In Poland motherly roles are still perceived in a conservative way, but migrant care workers challenge this concept and reframe it. My informants being mothers and wives decided to leave their domestic obligations for some time and perform their duties as migrant care workers. However by leaving their domestic obligations, as cooking or cleaning they did not leave their families forever. As the time is passing, the world changes and migration does not mean neglecting families. This project has recognized the migration as an opportunity to gain economic resources that will provide a better future for the family members. Together with that, women are able to satisfy their needs not only as mothers and wives but also as being breadwinners of the family. The gender roles can be transformed because of migration, however mothers will still be mothers and they will do everything to maintain their family relations. They provide care nowadays not with caring for their household through a physical presence, but with caring across the distance sometimes using the various ways to show it.

My approach and perception of care migration is not necessarily a negative one. It is indeed true that migrant workers undergo and suffer painful moments and situations by being far from their beloved one, however, on the other hand, what has been shown is that many of these women do not actually see their living abroad as a deficiency and a failure but a chance to demonstrate, although in a very different way as Mother Pole would do, their love and care. Furthermore, when husbands are irresponsible or cannot honour their duties as breadwinners, women migrants perceive it as the one life chance to a new definition of roles and become themselves providers for their family.

This non-traditional illustration of 'Matka Polka' confirms the role of Polish women as the ones doing everything for their families. They still support morally and

financially their children and families, meaning that they still fulfil themselves as mothers. By guaranteeing the better future for their families their role as mothers is established. They try to combine the role as domestic care workers with the role as mothers, creating a new way of being a 'Mother Pole', even though they claim they are not one. However I believe that it is the actions that speaks about one's identity and my informants truly deserve to be called 'Matka Polka' as they perform a great job in caring for their families across the distance and also by performing a job where they can fulfil themselves as women.

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