Chapter 1.2.

FRAMING THE STUDY OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN LITHUANIA

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Introduction

This chapter aims to place the study of Lithuanian transnational families[1] within a broader body of the most recent theoretical frames through which to understand personal lives (Smart, 2007), family practices (Morgan, 2011; Finch, 2007) and the ways family relationships could be perceived as 'troubled' (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2013). To date, the Lithuanian academic community does not theorize migrant families, particularly transnational families, as contemporary family forms in their own right. Normative ideals of physical proximity, gender roles and moral imperatives to put children's needs first obscure the literature on families and migration and lead to the consequent assumption that 'distance' and 'absence' (Baldassar and Merla, 2014) prohibit the 'normal' practices and processes in 'good' family life.

Against this background, building on transnational family perspective (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002, amongst others), as well as on my fieldwork (carried out with my students and colleagues) this chapter addresses the transnational families' research frames worked out at Vilnius University since 2004. In analyzing transnational family life, I chose to go beyond the 'family-migration nexus' (Boccagni, 2010) and to engage in the transnational family debate. In my pursuit, I looked at multidimensional and diverse nature of cross-border relations making it clear that these relationships cannot simply be equated with the separation or reunification. The overview of the research frames presented below consists of three parts: firstly, I present how I constructed theoretical and methodological basis for studying Lithuanian migrant families; secondly, I explain how I defined the

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1   In this edited collection, the Lithuanian 'transnational family' means a family whose part of the members have left Lithuania for other countries for work or career opportunities, while other family members (e.g. spouse, cohabiting partner, children, parents) have remained in Lithuania. The study of transnational families deals with the lives of cross-border families. The concept of 'migrant families' is broader. It applies to families with migration experience, i.e. those families which have left Lithuania to live in another country, those that have returned from abroad to live in Lithuania and those living in several countries.

toolbox of analytical concepts framing the empirical data from our studies and underpinning the research design; thirdly, I look into how the two study topics focused on transnational families – family practices and family troubles – came about. This overview will provide an introduction to the empirical research data discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this edited volume.

Researching Transnational Families in Their Own Right

The research methodology and ideas underpinning the academic work on transnational Lithuanian families presented in this chapter are, to a large extent, the results of a fruitful collaboration between a group of sociologists at the Vilnius University and eminent Swedish and Norwegian family researchers Jan Trost and Irene Levin. Since 2004, the theoretical approaches championed by these sociologists – Trost's dyadic family approach (Trost, 1988; 1990; 1993; 1996; 1999; Trost and Levin, 1992; 2000), which takes its origin in symbolic interactionism, and Levin's visual family research methodology (1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1997a; 1997b; 2004), which is designed to 'give voice' to research participants – constitute the basis of transnational families study at the Vilnius University[2].

Drawing on these ideas, I have set up a research team[3] designed to study changes in family life induced by migration. Building upon the concepts of 'frontiering' and 'relativizing' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002) to study families across borders, our team sought to examine the ways in which global migration comes to restructure family configurations and relational dynamics of family lives, while family members look for ways of maintaining a sense of familyhood. In our research, Trost's (1993; 1996; 1999) dyadic approach turns into an analytical tool for studying transnational family conceptualizations in Lithuania. Our work extends the original list of constellations presented by Trost to also include transnational family variations. And we have raised the question of whether cross-border families are classified as families at all. And what criteria qualify transnational arrangements to be perceived as a family? What kind of attitudes do Lithuanians maintain towards parents who decide to work abroad and let their children stay behind in Lithuania?

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2   I have presented Trost's theoretical perspective to the Lithuanian academic community by the means of a science monograph (Juozeliūnienė, 2003); while Levin's method has been initially described and further expounded in an educational aid (Juozeliūnienė and Kanapienienė, 2012) and in a science monograph (Juozeliūnienė, 2014).

3   The research group dedicated to migration families included the following students of mine: L. Kanapienienė, A. Kazlauskaitė, Ž. Leonavičiūtė, G. Martinkėnė, R. Sinkevičiūtė, I. Čerauskytė-Šimoliūnienė, V. Abaravičiūtė.

In addition, we used Levin's (1993) three-stage 'My family' mapping method to interview transnational family members (mothers/ fathers, children, grandmothers/ grandfathers). The reason we decided to adopt this method for studying transnational families lies in the innovative visual nature of the said research method. In the analytical examination of this method, I have highlighted several of its key features, namely, visualizing individual conceptualizations and enabling a nexus of verbal and non-verbal representations, using within-method triangulation procedure and creatively engaging participants in the research process (Juozeliūnienė and Kanapienienė, 2012). Our practical learnings later led us to extend Levin's visual research methodology into a four-stage interview technique we named the 'Role-making' map method (Juozeliūnienė, 2014: 118–210). This method offered us an opportunity to go beyond analyzing solely 'my family' conceptualizations. It helped us to map a variety of changes in migrant family commitments, modes of relating to close people in new ways, and highlight reshaped identities.

Our work on the theoretical underpinnings and research methodology of studying transnational families (see Juozeliūnienė, 2008) produced research studies supported by the Vilnius University and the Lithuanian State Foundation for Science and Education[4]. The research data has revealed unique features of conceptualizing cross-border family arrangements exhibited by Lithuanians (Juozeliūnienė and Leonavičiūtė, 2009). Our analysis of transnational family representations in the public discourse showed that migrant family life has created new sources of social stigma. The examples of such stigma could be found in our study of how Lithuanian dailies and the Internet portal Delfi portray migrant families and left-behind children as well as in our overview of routine daily situations where these children would be stigmatized (Juozeliūnienė et al., 2008). We have further analyzed how the representations of migrant families within meaning-making institutions like the Lithuanian legislation on managing migration flows and TV documentary films (2006–2010) are shaped by official family ideology and internal ideology espoused by the editorial boards of the TV channels. In doing this, we examined how TV producers employ professional techniques to produce 'truthful' images of migrant family life (Juozeliūnienė and Martinkėnė, 2011).

The qualitative migrant family research was carried out by the means of both, Levin's 'My family' mapping method and the 'Role making' map method, designed in our fieldwork. We sought to 'give voice' to transnational family members (mainly mothers, their children, and grandmothers) on the topics chosen for the study: how transnational family configurations are conceptualized, how individuals evolve their family commitments and maintain the relatedness transnationally, how family members preserve the sense of familyhood in the face of physical absence, and what stigma management strategies they employ (Juozeliūnienė, Tureikytė and Butėnaitė, 2014: 79–92; Juozeliūnienė, 2014: 98–117).

Since our interests extended beyond economic migrants, we also studied how highly mobile, elite families structured their life across borders: in this case we have investigated the identities of left-behind teenagers from families of Lithuanian diplomatic corps (Ibid: 164–185). We further analyzed how individuals maintain the sense of familyhood in three-generation families (Ibid: 185–210). Family maps drawn by our study participants using visual research methods went far beyond a single household and a single country. In this respect our research data confirmed the assumptions reported by many researchers of cross-border families (Boccagni, 2010, amongst others).

To summarize, our research group has employed a wide range of study methods: we surveyed Lithuanian population using purposive theory-based sampling, analyzed the legislation documents and the ways in which transnational families are represented in the media, and conducted qualitative visual research of transnational family members. In terms of the subject matter, our studies have covered the topics of how migration changes structural family configurations, what criteria are used to establish family membership; we determined how both, kin-based and non-kin based transnational arrangements were defined as families, the ways family commitments are re-distributed in transnational families, and how family members reshape their identities and the sense of belonging.

In my opinion, the key contribution of this body of research studies lies in promoting the understanding that migrant families undergo changes on many levels, which opens them up for being studied from different perspectives and employing diverse research methodologies. Highlighting the complexity of cross-border family relations made it possible for me to adopt complementary theoretical approaches in my research and to build core concepts of family life provided by Carol Smart (2007; 2011) into follow-up studies.

**Locating Transnational Family Research in Smart's Theoretical
Frame to Understand Personal Lives**

The experience gained in the research projects outlined earlier convinced
me to pursue the studies of transnational families further by focusing on new
areas of family life, on the one hand, and integrating emerging theoretical
ideas on the other (see Juozeliūnienė, 2013). The research studies I have
conducted in the context of the project 'Emigration and Family: Challenges,
Family Resources, and Ways of Coping with Difficulties', financed by the
Lithuanian Research Council in 2012–2014[5] drew on Smart's toolbox of
analytical concepts, namely, on the four of her five concepts: 'imaginary',
'embeddedness', 'relationality', and 'memory' to form a new mode of
analyzing transnational family relations and their conceptualizations.
The concept of 'biography' was partially integrated into quantitative and
qualitative data analysis by the means of two sets of questions covering
intergenerational relations and family memory topics. A more thorough
analysis of these topics will have to be undertaken in future studies through
the use of research methods focused on personal biographies. To test how
Smart's concepts can be applied to the study of transnational family life, I
posed four research questions: how do transnational family configurations
and relations exist within individual's imagination; to what extent are
relations 'embedded' within and across generations and among friends/
acquaintances; how are individual identities reshaped as a result of family
role-specific commitments and role-making activities being renegotiated;
and whether/ in what way does familial memory participate in maintaining
cross-border relations.

In examining the 'imaginary' our research team invoked already tested
and extended Trost's family constellations (Trost and Levin, 1992); building
on Parreñas' (2005) typology of transnational families we constructed the
types of families with different childcare arrangements after departure of
one or both of the child's parents: a child cared for by mother, father, relatives
(grandparents, uncles/ aunts), friends/ acquaintances, and children cared
for by the state.

We integrated the concept of 'embeddedness' by invoking the
intergenerational solidarity perspective (Bengtson, 2001; Silverstein, Bengtson
and Lawton, 1997) which allowed us to study relations across generations. By

shifting the focus of our study to relations with close kin (Nauck and Becker, 2013), we expanded the study of solidarity within and across generations. The analysis of personal networks based on Milardo's and Wellman's (1992) methodology – allowed us to outline the networks that include 'significant persons': family members, kin, friends, acquaintances, and so on.

When explaining the concept of 'relationality', Smart (2007: 47) states, that: 'The concept of relatedness therefore takes as its starting point what matters to people and how their lives unfold in specific contexts and places'. Her ideas about the active nature of relating stand in stark contrast to the static view of relations – often perceived as given and unchanging, and one's position in a family as fixed. This interpretation has encouraged me to define 'relationality' as a key concept to investigate when examining how the experience of migration reorganizes relational dynamics and identities in transnational family arrangements. In integrating Smart's concepts, I relied on the ideas of Finch and Mason (Finch, 1989; Finch and Mason, 1993) about the reasoning, actions, and experiences of actors to argue that reshaping of family relations takes place at the level of renegotiations. Moreover, drawing on my earlier studies steeped in the symbolic interactionism perspective, I suggested to apply analytical tools of 'keying' (Goffman, 1974/ 1986) and Turner's (1978) conception of 'role-person merger' in researching transnational family members' role-making activities and reshaped identities.

When embodying the concept of 'memory' in our research study the team has referenced Smart's idea that memory 'relies on communication to become a memory and on context to be meaningful' (2011: 18). A set of questionnaire questions covering the topic of 'family memory' was designed by my colleague Laima Žilinskienė (2015; 2018; Žilinskienė and Kraniauskienė, 2016). She applied the concept of 'memory' by invoking the work of Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) and examined the channels used by and the content transmitted through family communication. Considering that memories are interwoven with emotions (Misztal, 2003), she has examined family memory by focusing on the quality of intergenerational relations.

To avoid the limitations associated with relying on a single method or data source, I have adopted a mixed method research design. Firstly, our research team has conducted a national representative survey of the Lithuanian population (N = 1 016) (April 2013). Secondly, the team became a part of an international comparative research study 'Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations' (VOC-IR) (June-August 2013)[6].

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6 For more information see Trommsdorff and Nauck (2001).

The sample of the Lithuanian study included four target groups: individuals from three generations, drawn from a single family (mothers with adolescents (N = 303), the target adolescents, age 14–17 (N = 300) and adolescent's grandmother on the maternal side (N = 100)) and mothers with young (age 2–3) children (N = 300). As a third step, we used the visual mapping methodology consisting of the 'My family' (Levin, 1993), 'Role making' (Juozeliūnienė, 2014) and 'Concentric circles' (Pahl and Spencer, 2006) mapping methods. The research team has also performed qualitative interviews (January-June 2014) with five transnational families having three generations of individuals (parents, children (6–18 years old), and grandmothers), diverse solidarity parameters and migratory experience. The interviews included eight women and seven men.

Our research data has offered us an opportunity to conduct multi-level analysis of the subject and enabled us to place the outcomes of our research within the broader literature on transnational family life.[7] While analyzing 'imaginary', we identified that the location of the left-behind children in the imagined care networks was the key criteria to define particular constellation as family/ not family. These findings echo the literature on moral imperative for parents to 'put children first' (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards and Gillies, 2000), and confirmed, that the concepts of 'family', 'mothering' and 'fathering' are highly socially regulated phenomena linked to the normative constructions of 'good' family life.

To avoid equating transnational parenting with studying exclusively women (Carlin et al., 2012), we have examined different types of gender-structured transnational families (mother-away, father-away, both parents-away). Our data showed that mother was not necessarily viewed as a primary caretaker. The networks of relatives were deemed to be child-friendlier arrangements than letting a single parent (whether mother or father) to care for the child. These findings lend support to discussions claiming that migrant families witness a 'gender convergence of family roles' (Tolstokorova, 2018). Our analysis of the role that kin and non-kin relations play in imagining of transnational relations contributes to further analysis of the quality of distant relations in transnational families (Reisenauer, 2018) and extends our understanding of configurational structure of families (Widmer, 2010) in the cross-border context.

The data we used to explore the concept of 'embeddedness' has demonstrated how vertical and horizontal ties with family members, close kin, friends, and acquaintances manifest themselves. It also demonstrated how migratory experiences can make these ties intensive and meaningful. Our data quantifies the size and composition of significant persons networks as social capital capable of affecting the dynamics of transnational family networks. In this respect, the study provides useful data to the academic literature examining the functioning of intergenerational relations across borders (Kilkey and Merla, 2014; Haragus and Telegdi-Scetri, 2018).

Our investigation of the 'memory' mechanisms demonstrated how shared memories could equip family members with a sense of shared history, which positively affects the efforts of preserving family unity in the context of physical absence. Our study details how family memory is shaped by as well as communicated through intergenerational and kin networks in Lithuanian families; how family memory exists in a permanent 'enrollment' mode: it continuously on boards other members of the family network and adapts to newly emerging situations.

The investigation of the concept of 'relationality', similarly, yielded interesting insights on how transnational life alters relational dynamics between parents, grandparents, and children. Our qualitative study lists specific activities and measures undertaken by family members living across borders to renegotiate and sustain their relations; it shows how commitments stemming from multiple family roles become intertwined; and it reveals how personal identities evolve by attributing meanings to these changes. Similar to studies examining how women elaborate new meanings and ways of being 'daughters', 'sisters' in transnational settings (Erel, 2002) and how adult children redefine the normative notions of mothering (Phoenix and Bauer, 2012), our analysis shows how mothers, fathers, and grandmothers rework the ways of being in a family. Some examples of redefined identities we found include a 'cheated super mom,' describing a double bind of commitment overload and fears about husband's infidelity; a 'sister-like mother', describing transnational mother's new type of relations with her left-behind daughter; a 'guest-like-father', describing the outcomes of transnational fathering; and a 'family-keeping grandmother', describing the pivotal role some grandparents assume in sustaining the familial 'we' across borders (Juozeliūnienė, 2015).

The study has helped us to test both – theoretical approaches and research methodologies. The outcomes of the study have demonstrated the value of applying the modified research methodology of conceptualizing transnational families, based on Trost's family constellations; our decision

to incorporate the intergenerational solidarity perspective, derived from Bengtson (2001), Nauck and Becker (2013) works, and the analysis of 'significant others', suggested by Milardo and Wellman (1992), similarly, yielded many methodological benefits. These ideas allowed us to analyze the network ties of migrant families and link them to migratory experiences of study participants and the functioning of familial memory. The insights we drew from the study have provided ample justification to using Smart's concepts as a conceptual tool for thinking about the intersection of transnational family relations. At the same time, we have identified a number of topics in the need of a more detailed analysis, for example, what are routine transnational 'sets of activities which take on a particular meaning, associated with family, at a given point in time' (Finch, 2007: 66). It is also important to note that the insights I have encountered encouraged me to go beyond examining the routine transnational practices exceptionally on a qualitative research level and led me to adopt both qualitative and quantitative levels of analysis of family practices. The data from our analysis of representations of migrant families in the mass media propelled me to testing the frame of 'family troubles'.

Invoking 'Family Practices' and 'Family Troubles' to Study Transnational Families

When constructing the theoretical and methodological frame of the ongoing research project 'Global migration and Lithuanian family: family practices, circulation of care and return strategies', financed by the Lithuanian Research Council in 2017–2019[8], I aimed at extending the theoretical background of research project by invoking the approaches capable to shed light on the issues we came across in our previous transnational family research. When examining cross-border family relations, I suggested to invoke the family practices' approach introduced by Morgan (1996; 2011) and further elaborated by Finch (2007; 2011). I also considered the language of 'troubling' families (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2013) to be a useful analytical tool for examining how transnational families are portrayed in official documents and academic publications in Lithuania.

Morgan's approach seemed to suggest the most relevant way to study transnational family life as a dynamic, situated and gendered set of routine

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8   This time, the study group was led by I. Juozeliūnienė and consisted of L. Žilinskienė V. Česnui-tytė, doctoral student I. Budginaitė-Mačkinė, and Master program student I. Bielevičiūtė. There were also British scholars – J. Seymour (Hull York Medical School, UK) and M. Ilic (University of Gloucestershire, UK) – involved in the project.

interactions at a distance, through which a variety of family related activities are re-articulated. To answer the question of how family displays can be done across borders, we draw on Finch's (2007) definition of 'family display' as a set of actions carried out by a group of family members to demonstrate to others that they are a family that 'works.' Family practices approach enabled me to examine how families are done despite geographical distance, which way re-shaped identities are enacted and displayed to the close people and to the wider audience. Other important sources of ideas for designing the quantitative research frame included the family practices approach elaborated in Seymour's (2015), Seymour and Walsh (2013) publications; qualitative analysis of family displays in maintaining transnational intergenerational relations by Walsh (2015; 2018); and Brahic's (2015; 2018) findings on doing family and doing gender across borders and cultures in bi-national families through qualitative interviews.

By considering how practices approach can be usefully applied to examine transnational family life on a quantitative level our research team worked out the questions to be included in the survey's questionnaire. More specifically, we sought to examine what remote ways of communication are undertaken to preserve the relations with family members living across borders? How do survey respondents' displays are done across borders? Questions pertaining to the quantitative analysis of doing and displaying transnational family, transnational mothering/ fathering, caring for elderly parents across borders by adult migrant children, designated careers of children/ elderly parents living in Lithuania were designed in collaboration with my students Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė, Indrė Bielevičiūtė, and Gintė Martinkėnė.

In my attempts to involve both 'family practices' and 'family troubles' approaches in the theoretically framing the research study on transnational families in Lithuania, I address Morgan's (2019) statement that the term 'troubling families' adds further levels of complexity of researching the actions and reactions which continually constitute family life to do with the boundaries between public and private. The author asserts, that when particular modes of representing troubles go beyond the family itself then the private becomes public.

Shifting focus to 'family troubles' as suggested by Ribbens McCarthy (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2013) has opened up a meaningful space in transnational family study enabling researchers to engage with the question 'how troubled and troubling families perhaps normalize their lives, and when 'changes' and 'troubles' may be considered to become 'harm', and by whom?' (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2018). Our study deals with exactly

the type of cross-border family lives that both policy makers and family researchers may view as 'troubling'. In our previous publications we have addressed the question of transnational family representations in the Lithuanian legislation (Juozeliūnienė and Martinkėnė, 2011) and tested the 'troubling' and 'normalizing troubles' approach to examine how transnational mothering is portrayed in the public discourse in Lithuania (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė, 2018). In this edited volume we set out to explore the 'troubling' family approach as a tool for studying the portraits of transnational family and parenting in the legislation and academic publications.

A separate set of questions to study the topic of doing families across borders was designed by Vida Česnuitytė (2014; 2015). Building upon her previous findings on the forging of 'we' in Lithuanian families by ways of maintaining family traditions and organizing the leisure, the author extended the earlier set of questions to study cross-border family relations. Laima Žilinskienė continued researching family memory by adding the family practices methodology to her set of questions on the family memory. She redefined the questions in the questionnaire with an aim to examine family communication channels in more depth. Updated questions are now calibrated to explore the intensity of family communication channels and to account for an extended network of family and kin members potentially involved in the transmission of family memories.

To answer the questions we have posed, the study design had to incorporate multi-level analysis and utilize a hybrid research methodology. In the context of the project, we have performed the following research: (1) analyzed the highlighting of social questions in the Lithuanian policy documents (2011–2018); (2) examined the framing of Lithuanian family and migrant families in the Lithuanian legislation (1995–2018); (3) analyzed academic publications (2004–2017) with an aim to highlight how migratory family life is portrayed by Lithuanian researchers; (4) In 2018, interviewed 7 experts with a goal to identify the challenges of return migration; (5) In June-July 2018, carried out a national representative survey of the Lithuanian population (respondents 18+ years, N = 1005); (6) In August-September 2018, carried out a quota-based survey of the Lithuanian residents (18 years or older) with migratory experience (since 2004) who at the time of the departure had either dependent children (up to 18 years old) or parents requiring care (N = 406). We have surveyed 4 quota-based (100) population groups: mother-away families, father-away families, both parents-away families, adult children away-elderly parents in Lithuania families.

This volume presents the data drawn from four studies: the analysis of framing Lithuanian family and migrant families in the Lithuanian legislation (1995–2018), the analysis of academic publications (2004–2017) highlighting how migratory family life is portrayed in publications of Lithuanian researchers; the national representative quantitative study (June-July 2018), the quota-based study of the Lithuanians with migratory experience (August-September 2018).

Concluding Remarks

This part of the edited volume provides a short overview of theoretical approaches and research methodologies I used since 2004 to frame the study of transnational families in Lithuania. By exploring how theoretical ideas and research instruments can be fruitfully applied to examine transnational family life, I was lucky to work alongside prominent scholars like Jan Trost and Irene Levin, Julie Seymour, Bernhard Nauck and Melanie Ilic and collaborated closely with my colleagues – Laima Žilinskienė, Danutė Tureikytė, Vida Česnuitytė and my students, who carried out the field work and contributed with their analysis of the research data.

Our studies of transnational families – both quantitative and qualitative – drew on already established frames of transnational family research (especially Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Parreñas, 2005; Lutz, 2008), we revisited classical ideas utilized to study stigmatization (Goffman, 1963; Roschelle and Kaufman, 2004), and continued iterating on the ideas of symbolic interactionism (Sh. Stryker, 1968; Denzin, 1989; Trost, 1993; 1996). Encountering the multilevel nature of migrant family life, we invoked Smart's toolbox of analytical concepts to form a new mode of analyzing transnational family relations and their conceptualizations. Most recently, our research findings led us to the decision to examine migrant family lives through the lens of family practices' and family troubles' approaches.

In this volume, the researchers involved in the currently ongoing project 'Global migration and Lithuanian family: family practices, circulation of care and return strategies', financed by the Lithuanian Research Council in 2017–2019 present how the theoretical frames of family practices and family troubles can be empirically applied to study transnational families.

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