

Kasia Karpinska and Pearl Dykstra

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Intergenerational ties across borders: a typology of relationships of Polish migrants in the Netherlands and their ageing mothers.

Extended abstract

The question of how intergenerational relationships are maintained when family members are separated by national borders has been increasingly gaining scholarly attention. Maintaining transnational relationships is unquestionably simplified by increasingly accessible communication means like telephone or social media (Dekker en Engbersen, 2014) or cheap travels, and offering (financial) support can also become more available (Baldassar, 2007). While some studies suggest that migration has a disruptive effect on family relationships, others propose that although interdependence in migrant families may diminish in terms of practical support, emotional support will remain stable.

Studies of intergenerational solidarity in transnational context often focus on the so-called “old” or traditional migrant populations in Europe. For instance, in their recent paper, Royakkers, de Valk and Merz (2015) distinguished child-parent relationships of Turkish, Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands and their mothers living in the countries of origin. While this focus offers important insight into transnational family ties, much less is known about how the “new migrants”, e.g. recent migrants from Central and Eastern European countries, maintain their family relationships across borders. This question is particularly relevant in case of Poland as many Polish citizens left the country after the EU accession in 2004. Estimates suggest that between 2004 and 2007 alone, at least one million people emigrated from Poland (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2013). For the Netherlands, Poland has become the main sending country—the number of Polish migrants entering the country is greater than the traditional migrant groups taken together (Gijsberts & Lubbers, 2013). In this paper, we examine structures of transnational relationships of Polish migrants in the Netherlands and their ageing mothers living in Poland.

To this goal, we performed latent class analysis using the Families of Poles in the Netherlands (FPN) study. In total, 1131 Polish migrants aged 18-59, who entered the country

after the EU enlargement in 2004 participated in the study. The data were collected between October 2014 and April 2015. The sample was drawn from the population registers by means of simple random sampling, offering national coverage of respondents. The FPN contains detailed information on exchanges of money, practical support, and emotional support, background information on the family of origin, espoused family obligations, and marital and parenthood histories. Although the data contains detailed information on exchanges with both parents (if they are alive), we focus here on mothers, who are often kin-keepers maintaining family relationships.

Following earlier studies on child-parent relationships in transnational context, we combined information on given and received emotional support, given financial support and frequency of contact (face-to-face and via social media). Moreover, we complemented the analyses with the information on perceived child-mother conflict. Ambivalence has been shown to arise as people attempt to meet their own, their family's and society's contradictory demands and expectations (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). We argue that migration form a situation where such tensions can occur.

In the analysis three types of transnational child-parent relationships were distinguished: harmonious, obligatory and detached. The first type is characterized by a high probability of emotional exchanges (i.e. from mother to child and vice versa) and a high probability of contact, both face-to-face and via social media. The second type, obligatory, is also characterized by a high level of contact, however this contact is not complemented by close emotional exchanges. The detached type is characterized by low levels of both emotional exchanges and contact. Contrary to our expectations, conflict and financial support did not distinguish between classes. The latter is in line with what Royakkers et al. (2015) found for traditional migration groups. Given that mothers of migrants in the sample are still relatively young and healthy, it is plausible to assume that there is no need to offer this kind of support.

Multinomial analyses showed that characteristics such as gender, education and number of sibling were important predictors of the relationship assignment. Females and highly educated migrants were more likely to form harmonious relationships, while discordant relationships are more likely to be formed by males, lower educated, older migrants and those with a larger number of siblings. None of the predictors used in the analysis has proven to be a significant predictor of the obligatory type.

The majority of migrants in our sample have less close ties with their mothers (i.e. obligatory and detached relationships) which poses the questions about the durability of the transnational relations. The study of intergenerational relationships of traditional migrants groups in the Netherlands propose that frequent emotional exchanges help maintaining mother-child relationships and suggest that emotional exchanges might compensate for the lack of practical support (Rooyackers et al., 2015). In case of recent Polish migrants it is contact (both face-to-face and via social media) rather than emotional closeness that defines the relationships. Financial support did not play an important role in defining those relationships. Following the migrants over time will offer a possibility to study whether the relationships will be maintained in the same form as the time of separation increases.

References

- Baldassar, L. (2007) Transnational Families and aged care: the mobility of care and the migrancy of ageing. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(2), 275-297.
- Connidis, I.A. and McMullin, J.A. (2002). Sociological Ambivalence and Family Ties: A critical perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(3), 558–567.
- Dekker, R. and Engbersen, G.B.M. (2014). How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration. *Global networks: a journal of transnational affairs*, 14(4), 401-418.
- Engbersen, G., Leerkes, A., Grabowska-Lusinska, I., Snel, E. and Burgers, J. (2013). On the differential attachments of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe: A typology of labour migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(6), 959-981.
- Gijsberts, M. en L. Lubbers (2013). *Nieuw in Nederland. Het leven van recent gemigreerde Bulgaren en Polen*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
- Grzymala-Kazłowska, A. (2013). Migration and Socio-Demographic Processes in Central and Eastern Europe: Characteristics, Specificity and Internal Differences. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, 2 (1), 5-11.
- Rooyackers, I.N., Valk, H.A.G. de en Merz, E.-M. (2015). Mother-child relations in adulthood within and across national borders: non-Western immigrants in the Netherlands. *Ageing and Society*. Online First: August 2015.