Transnational Relationships between Romanian Grandparents and Grandchildren: Materiality, Cultural Identity, and Cosmopolitanism

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1 Introduction

Interrogating transnational family relationships between Romanian grandparents (generation zero) and grandchildren (second generation) who are the sons and daughters of Romanian-born migrants (first generation) (Nedelcu, 2009), this chapter explores the 'migrant worlds' articulated through the co-presence they are able to create across borders and generational differences through the circulation of material objects. Emphasis is placed on the contrasting identitarian meanings of these exchanges, such as 'Romanianness' as something less explicit than full-fledged national identity and 'cosmopolitanism' as general openness to other cultures and to the world at large. Therein, we aim to analyse family practices as the context where the exercise of the rights to family, one's culture, and agency happens.

The number of Romanians who live for various periods abroad has been rising, especially since 2007—the year of Romania's accession to the EU. By 2015, 3.4 million Romanians lived abroad. Because the main reasons for migration and residence abroad are work and study, most Romanian migrants have initially been young. They were often followed after a certain amount of time by their families or have married and established their own families in their country of stay, which has led to a rise in the number of Romanian children born abroad. Furthermore, many first-generation Romanian migrants who live abroad have meanwhile become transnational grandparents, through their children in Romania becoming parents.

In 2019, almost 600,000 children with Romanian citizenship were registered as living abroad—about 18% of the total number of children compared to an average of 7% in the EU and only 4% for Poland (300,000 children, second in absolute numbers). Many of these children had grandparents in Romania with whom they kept in touch. On the other hand, at the end of 2017, over 17,000 Romanian children had both parents, while in 2018, almost 65,000 children had at least one of them abroad. The majority of children stayed in the care of relatives.

The next section outlines the theoretical concept of materiality and traces changes in Romanian materiality over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to date. The sections that follow examine different categories of materiality, followed by a summary of the role of materiality in extended family relations.

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2 Emerging Interest in the Materiality of Zero: Second-Generation Transnational Relationships

Early studies on transnational families (Coe, 2011), especially those centred on transnational motherhood, have emphasised consumer goods and other material things like audio tapes and letters that the migrants sent back to their countries of origin (Madianou & Miller, 2011). These goods marked a sense of well-being as well as attitudinal openness to difference witnessed in more economically developed countries (Vertovec, 2009). In Romania, during the first post-revolution period of 1989–2007, the influx of material objects from the West played an important economic role in the life of transnational families. In our fieldwork during the summer of 2008, referring to the pre-2007 period, a transnational mother recounted how she had been sending home from Italy all of the items her family needed on a weekly basis, because Italian goods were cheaper or better quality, whereas supplies in Romania were limited, unavailable or subject to hyperinflation (Ducu, 2013).

Following Romania's 2007 accession to the EU, transnational relations between the migrants abroad and those remaining in the country gradually changed. The circulation of necessary products for daily use sent by family members abroad ceased. Information and communication technology (ICT) developed an essential role in transnational relations as remittance money-sending methods came to the fore. Many items which had been only available abroad became purchasable within Romania. Hence, migrants shifted from parcel-sending to money transfers, which were used to purchase goods in situ.

With less migration of entire migrant nuclear families, either due to economic or institutional reasons such as schooling and the onset of the Covid pandemic, there have been profound changes in transnational relationships such as the international care regime (Brandhorst et al., 2020). In this context, material objects, as embodiments of social togetherness, became more important as migrants continued to receive them or, when visiting their home country, return to their countries of destination with products of a Romanian character or special emotional significance (Hossu, 2019). For example, one transnational grandmother described in the fall of 2015 sending small presents that were specialities of Romania to her granddaughter in Canada twice a year, for her birthday and Christmas. She faced a very high postal rate, roughly equivalent to her monthly pension (Ducu, 2020).

In the spring of 2019, during fieldwork on the CONSENT project (see acknowledgements), a strangely eerie as well as amusing case of children's peculiar material awareness was revealed by a mother recounting the family's migration history. Contrary to initial plans, she decided to join her migrant husband in Norway after just a few months of virtual transnational communication, together with their three-year-old son. Before her decision, during the father's visit to Romania, the little boy woke up in the middle of the night, came to the parents' room, and checked the existence of the lower half of his father's body. Being used to only seeing his father's upper torso on the screen during online conversations, he was not sure he had not dreamed it.

The looming question is to what extent does the exchange of material objects and digital communication between transnational family members, particularly children and the elderly, compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication in the limiting context of virtual communication.

3 Theoretical Background

Materiality should be understood as '[a] term that refers to the material capacity of an object; that is, what the object is made of, its form and shape, what the object can do or allows us to do' (May & Nordqvist, 2019: 184). The 'material turn' (Basu & Coleman, 2008; Morgan, 2016; Wang, 2016) has been—in parallel with the cosmopolitan and transnational turn (Nowicka & Rovisco, 2009; Vertovec, 2009; Telegdi-Csetri & Ducu, 2016;

Telegdi-Csetri, 2018)—a major and '. . .broad intellectual project in the social sciences that [has sought] to explore how artefacts and the materiality of things and organisms, for example, the human body, have an impact on the social world in their own right and cannot be regarded only on the level of "the symbolic". It emerged in the late 1990s as a reaction to the "cultural turn" of the 1980s, which emphasised on the role of the symbolic, language, and culture in social life' (May & Nordqvist, 2019: 184).

Beyond the general theoretical interest in a material, as opposed to discursive ontology, many theorists felt it was time to surmount the impasse of postmodern social constructivism (Spyrou, 2019). The concept of materiality has increasingly evidenced a productive symbiosis with the transnational situation. As methodological nationalism faded within research and geographically and politically diverse social phenomena came to the fore, there was an obvious need for new dimensions to address the new 'worlds' emerging therein. The materiality inherent in earlier research under the general heading of 'practice' came in handy for understanding the transnationalisation of societies globally, as revealed in Rouse's (1991) study on the transnational circulation of goods and objects as well as in Basu and Coleman's (2008) concept of 'migrant worlds'. The new focus on materiality that emerged within transnational studies is here seen as providing an opportunity to 'broaden our vision and diversify perspectives in the study of migration, diaspora, and mobilities' (Wang, 2016: 3).

Conceptualising 'worlds' materially and symbolically, current research on transnational families has addressed the impact of migrants on 'stayers' (those who remain in their home country) in helping develop cosmopolitan attitudes in home countries (Mau et al., 2008; Vertovec, 2009). While numerous studies on the diaspora focus on how the cultural identity of migrants is maintained, only a few emphasise the role that stayers have in this, including through transnational family practices (Burholt et al., 2016; Mata-Codesal & Abranches, 2018).

While social remittances (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011) have been discussed as foundational for social, cultural, and political change, objects have usually been viewed simply as goods, not as vehicles for such remittances. Yet, 'objects can be important for reasons of personal attachment, practical usefulness, or their "everydayness" in a person's life—regardless of where that life is being enacted' (Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht, 2013: 47), hence salience of material goods exchange in shaping transnational family relationships needs more interrogation. Moreover, the practices of 'doing' and 'displaying' families (Finch, 2011; Morgan, 2011; Ducu, 2020) as central to the creation of 'co-presence' (Sørensen & Vammen, 2014; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016; Nedelcu, 2017; Ducu, 2018a, 2018b) ultimately belong to the 'migrant worlds' which rely heavily on material content. It is, therefore, a matter of interpreting whether and how an object of daily use signifies belonging rather than merely being (Povrzanović Frykman, 2016).

Transnational family practices have mostly been addressed in a disembodied—communicative, performative, cultural, or educational—perspective. As we see it, materiality exists on a continuum with communicative and symbolic contents, being situated on the opposite pole of the same axis of social relationships. The space of co-presence built by family members at a distance supersedes the physical space of immediate cohabitation in favour of an affective and communicative space, dependent on material embodiment to make its real contents graspable (Stark, 2013). Reaching beyond issues of 'feeling at home'; (Sandu, 2013; Povrzanović Frykman, 2016), this chapter seeks to shed light on how objects establish 'palpable connections' (Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht, 2013), spanning different places.

In the context of intergenerational relationships, as seen in childhood studies (Bankovska & Siim, 2018; Spyrou, 2019) applicable to the elderly as well, the concept of 'co-agency' (Leonard, 2016) in a relational ontology (Alanen, 2017) is decisive, expressing the need for shared support and participation for the

enactment of dependent members' own but not autonomous agency (Wyness, 2013). We see the issue of children and the elderly's rights exercise in this context, specifically with respect to their rights to voice, to access to their culture, and the exercise of their rights vis-a-vis the actions and decisions of other family members, where materiality, taking the form of material exchange of objects, can enhance or limit the exercise of these rights.

4   Methodology

Within our qualitative sociological study in 2018 and 2019, 65 multi-generational interviews were taken both on-site and online by 29 student interviewers within the research practice 'Different faces of transnational families', coordinated by Viorela Ducu at the Faculty of Sociology of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. These were structured as: one child (older than 12), one parent, and one grandparent, and all were individual interviews. Respondent selection has followed transnational grandparents–grandchildren relationships; biases are possible through students identifying respondents through personal social connections.

The field research was centred on Romania as the country of origin with no focus on specific countries of destination. Our migrant respondents come from the major target countries for Romanian outward migration, namely Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Germany, and the USA or Canada. Most migrant workers were low-skilled, some high-skilled; some grandchildren were pursuing higher education.

The study focused on observing the relationships between zero–second generation transnational family members—irrespective of which were the ones abroad—through the mutual exchange of physical objects—comprising mostly gifts, pictures, books, and food. In contrast to previous research where materiality surfaced collaterally (Ducu, 2013), the fieldwork specifically targeted the exchange of material objects and their relevance in the perception of home or foreign countries, i.e. of identity and otherness.

This approach presupposes both familyhood and its tentative co-presence expressed through materiality, leaving the spatio-temporal continuum of this co-presence open-ended. The social significance of these material items—food, clothing, books, religious objects, pictures, or personally crafted items—and the various practical and cultural meanings they carry, become expressive of different forms of embedded family practice. While some of these practices may seem obvious, such as reading in one's national language or possessing pictures of one's family members, others carry meanings that necessitate further interpretation.

The three-generational background of the interviews, with one or two of the generations in question being in another location—interviewed through the phone, online, or on WhatsApp—added a dimension of complexity and completeness to the research. For example, it created an interpretive complexity such as the one in which a photo album was presented and interpreted in one location by an in situ respondent (the grandmother) and interpreted in their own way by the two other distanced interviewees (the son and granddaughter of the respondent, see fragments at 6.3.5).

5   Types of Materiality Circulating between Transnational Family Members

This section reviews the movement and functional meaning of the material objects mentioned by the respondents, pertaining to Romanian national or vernacular culture or to the otherness of the destination country's culture and general cosmopolitanism.

5.1   Food Items

Cultural identity is transmitted by those at home (grandparents or grandchildren) through physical objects with the significance and aim of reinforcing elements associated with being Romanian. As such, traditional food cooked

from products grown in their own households (e.g. livestock raised at home or home-grown vegetables) prepared in a traditional style was the most often cited as part of the contents of packages sent from Romania:

> Yes, [I do send gifts] when I have the occasion, for example, the must-have cheese pie or the lightly smoked bacon.
>
> (Jeni, grandmother, Romania)
>
> . . . traditional food: jam, pickles, cheese, sausages, all made at home.
>
> (Mariana, grandmother, Romania)
>
> . . . I [usually] send him, [and specifically] now for Easter I have sent him [my grandfather] sweet-bread, egg paint, since they had none there in England, and I sent him '*pasca*', I [also] sent him a note.
>
> (Maria, granddaughter, Romania)
>
> . . . I like the jam made by my grandmother a lot. But I also like the vegetable spread from Romania.
>
> (Yannis, grandson, abroad)

The consumption of homemade food in post-Communist Romania has not been, until the recent past, primarily symbolic, but rather an economically well-grounded family practice (Sava, 2019). The forced industrialisation and urbanisation of the Romanian Communist society, with its strong state control over economic resources (specifically food), kept people dependent on the output of the local peasant household economy, the practices of which were imported into urban working-class and even intellectual households (Mihăilescu & Iancu, 2009).

Pig slaughter in rural, as well as the urban milieux, was both an ethnographically symbolic and economically relevant event of annual household planning (Bărbulescu, 2018), while autumn vegetable and fruit processing in the home had an important role in ensuring winter food sources. These practices created both a sense of family-hood through a sensation of relative food sufficiency and welfare and one of general social cohesion in the face of an oppressive social superstructure that failed to ensure the daily needs of its subjects. Ready-made commercial food for purchase being virtually non-existent, all households

had to rely on home cooking, making family members responsible for others' physical maintenance and receivers of daily direct care (Mihăilescu & Iancu, 2009).

These experiences in recent Romanian history help explain the importance of attitudes towards food that strongly connect it to the perception of 'home'. Even while these attitudes are less economically important now, they continue to carry communitarian meanings. A pervasive emphasis on the personal touch in food preparation is seen as expressing a sense of Romanianness, while the ritualistic status of certain food items' preparation makes them stand apart from the global availability of commercial foodstuffs.

Local food from the destination areas of migrant family members is, on the other hand, also present in packages coming from the West. In this way, culinary messages from various countries reach the most remote villages in Romania, offering those at home an openness to other lifestyles:

> . . . foods that are specific for Italy, for example, pasta or various sauces and I think that's about it.
>
> (Alex, grandson, abroad)
>
> . . . [I send food] in order for my grandmother also to taste English dishes.
>
> (Nelu, grandson, abroad)
>
> . . . I send more stuff with an Italian character, since it is normal . . . but also things of strict necessity that they need.
>
> (Vasilica, grandmother, abroad)

Note the emphasis on the cultural component of the food consumed (Povrzanović Frykman, 2018) with an awareness of its specificity, hence its symmetry with food from 'home' (Sarkar, 2019).

5.2 Traditional Clothing and Religious Items

Products coming from the home country also include items such as traditional clothing and ones reflecting Romanian Eastern Orthodox religion.

I have made Elena (the granddaughter) a folk costume to take to Spain or here if she goes to a wedding somewhere for people to see that she is a Maramureș girl and for Paul (the grandson) I made a nice little costume so that both can be properly clothed.

(Gica, grandmother, Romania)

. . . folk clothes, for example folk shirts, in order to keep our tradition alive for them.

(Jeni, grandmother, Romania)

. . . a consecrated bracelet, a consecrated rosary. Elena and Paul's parents are believers and are an example for the children to follow. When we shall be no more, I would like the day to come when they will remember my name and say: 'Grandmother taught us about God and faith'.

(Gica, grandmother, Romania)

. . . [I am speaking about] an icon received from my grandmother.

(Nelu, grandson, abroad)

Recent Romanian history has been impacted by Ceaușescu's strongly nationalistic late Communist ideology, one that conferred 'national' values in a top-down manner. Myths of national origins were ideologically conceived and pseudo-historically narrated, being promoted through traditional clothing, music, and objects. National identity paradoxically became both conflated with ideologically falsified vernacular ethnicity while the authentically traditional folk culture survived nonetheless.

In the 1990s, however, Eastern Orthodoxy has come to the fore as a much deeper layer of identity for Romanians than nationality. Given the Romanian Orthodox Church's being a national organisation and the persecution of religion during Communism, a national-religious revival was natural in this period (Stan & Turcescu, 2007). Even if this movement remains controversial and has been significantly displaced by Neo-Protestantism (in addition to extant Roman and Greek Catholicism and old Protestantism), Eastern Orthodoxy has remained a deep and organic layer within the self-perception of many Romanians.

The objects relating to folk culture or religious rituals reveal of this layer of identity in a performative manner: at social events, religious remembrance of grandparents, as well as being on display (religious icons). The connection between identity and the personal meaning and everyday proximity of such objects reveals of their double function as markers of both relationships and identities.

5.3   Items Thematically Related to Language and Culture

Many grandparents who reside in Romania post packages of educational materials to help their migrant grandchildren learn and practice the Romanian language.

I have sent my granddaughter a book with proverbs and sayings, and she promised me that she will learn one each day. I believe this helps her to have a stronger connection with Romania.

(Ghiță, grandfather, Romania)

My parents care a lot that their granddaughter practices the Romanian language as much as possible, so they send her all kinds of books and dictionaries.

(Ileana, Ghiță's daughter, abroad)

I, as a grandmother and mother, send books from the country: fiction, fairy tales and atlases [. . .] books with animals, with tales, atlases, dictionaries, all in Romanian.

(Mariana, grandmother, Romania)

Books in foreign languages are also sent by grandparents abroad to grandchildren at home, offering them a more cosmopolitan outlook towards the world:

. . . (grandmother) buys her a lot of books (in English), since she has been passionate about reading since she was small.

(Ruxandra, Raluca's mother, daughter, Romania)

[I send her] books for the development of universal culture (in English or Spanish).

(Doina, Raluca's grandmother, abroad).

These items are considered carriers of language and culture rather than being sent for their entertainment value. Retaining the Romanian language and culture is seen as connecting with the

country. As well, the physical books are viewed as carriers of symbolic values and as material objects that are both presentations and representations of culture, not just for improving language or cultural awareness (Povrzanović Frykman & Humbracht, 2013; Hieta, 2016).

5.4   Special Foreign Products

Besides food, the Communist national economy heavily restricted the availability of most commercial items, ranging from cars through home appliances to clothing and imported products, including body care items, exotic fruit, coffee, chocolate, and tobacco. In contrast, the precious little choice of branded foreign products Romanians could come by brought a magical sense of cosmopolitanism into their experience. As such, possession of Adidas shoes, Pepsi, Kent, video players, and blue jeans became the distinctive marks of the lucky few who happened to have relatives abroad, special access to hard-currency 'shops', or permission to travel abroad.

This perception created a strong preference for certain types and brands of products that were associated with this imagined freedom, contributing to the background of Romanian attitudes towards materiality today. Even now, when Romanians can find the same products in Romania as in Western countries, items coming from the West are nonetheless considered superior and of greater value, since they are perceived as pertaining to a higher level of material culture.

Along these lines, we notice how objects coming from the West, sent by migrant family members offer stayers the chance to physically come into contact with the otherness of foreign countries and encourage cosmopolitan openness.

> When it was her birthday, I usually sent her a gift or stuff that didn't exist in Romania since those brands are unknown, mostly clothing or sweets.

(Alex, grandson, abroad)

> My grandmother is delighted with the sweets here. We send her chocolate, [different kinds of] coffee, cleaning solutions, cosmetics. She usually tells us what her needs are, and when we have that opportunity, we take that into account.

(Anca, granddaughter, abroad)

> Well, we buy them clothes, we buy them sweets, we buy each a ticket to see a show . . .

(Floarea, grandmother, abroad)

> . . . [speaking about] a tractor they sent us so we can manage in the field. [My granddaughter Elena] brought me a scarf like they wear there [in Spain].

(Gica, grandmother, Romania)

5.5   Crafted Products, Photographs, and Written Messages

Within the circulation of material things travelling across borders, some possess special significance, carrying greater affective connotations: handwritten letters, photographs, and objects handcrafted by grandchildren.

> Yes, I made her a flower, I made her a flower and sent it to her.

(Maria, granddaughter, Romania)

> Yes, she sends me postcards, and last time she also made a paper flower at school and wrote a note saying she was missing me.

(Ioana, Maria's grandmother, abroad)

> 'Objects that are made manually, that is, [handmade objects in the form of] small letters for grandmother'

(Larisa, granddaughter, abroad)

> . . . even one of his drawings or a letter [from my grandson] delight me enormously; when I was in Italy, she [my granddaughter] wrote me letters that I have kept ever since, letters that not all grandmothers [. . .] have the opportunity to receive, being handwritten by their grandchildren.

(Vasilica, grandmother, abroad)

As may be noted, the emotional value and the specifically affective intention are carried by the trace-like character of self-made items. While the material object as a signifier may fade, the physical imprint of its maker's act transforms it into the graspable carrier of the other's presence.

Photographs are also emotionally loaded. While in recent years, digital photos have become far more common than prints. Almost all

respondents (with one exception) mentioned that physical pictures of their family members were present in their homes. Most were received electronically and then printed, but some were physically posted in parcels. Three family members of the same family told about a transnational album of a departed granddaughter at a grandmother's home:

> Yes, sometimes she also sends me pictures from the places she visits, [as well as] from school, and I put them into an album, one that she made herself, and each time when she sends another picture, I put it in there and I look at it when I miss her. I could say it has become a kind of habit, ever since she left we began sending [each other] pictures, she sends more of them, and when she comes to the country I show her the album for her to see how I arranged them.

(Ana, grandmother, Romania)

> I send her photos taken at the school year's closure or during the school year. It is a habit. Over here, it is rather like a habit, when we have our pictures taken at school we always get several copies in order to share with loved ones.

(Anca, Ana's granddaughter, abroad)

> My daughter once made her [her grandmother] a gift, an album with pictures, and every time she goes on a trip, she prints the pictures in order to send them [including the grandmother] to the country, it has become a kind of a habit and they [granddaughter and grandmother] like this thing very much.

(Alexandru, Anca's father, Ana's son, abroad)

5.6   Limited Circulation of Material Objects

There are some families in which none or only one family member sends packages. This is sometimes due to the cost of sending packages being too high for those at home:

> I would like to send them [things] [to my family abroad], but I cannot send anything physical. (Raluca, granddaughter, Romania)

In some cases, migrants prefer to send money to their family in Romania, due to the lack of time:

> We send foodstuffs, we send full boxes, what I can send from here, from Romania, and they send the empty boxes back… I accidentally find some small things, a €100 bill, pictures, greeting cards for soothing our longing for them, coffee, and what they can pack over there.

(Rodica, grandmother, Romania)

While co-presence is felt, imagined, and intended in family relations and the intention to send material objects exists, lack of affordability or time limits the actual exchange. The intention is instead transformed into sending money for buying similar items—which stand *in lieu* of intended gifts. In other cases, the exchange takes on an accidental character, serving as a (welcome) surprise, a mere token of affection. However, the very act of sending empty boxes back after receiving them full, is perceived as a liminal mode of exchange.

6   Reconstructing Meanings Expressed through Materiality

6.1   New Actors: The New Significance of Objects

The presence of objects in the lives of transnational families has often been presented from the perspective of adult migrants, with the research focusing on how these objects reveal their transnational position sliding between two worlds. In contrast, in the data above, new actors (Telegdi-Csetri & Ducu, 2016) have also come forth. Namely, children and grandparents of transnational families are now seen as actors within the circulation of objects—a rarely studied group thus far (Hieta, 2016).

In the experience of these actors, family members' relationship with objects circulating across borders reveals more of the presence of sending 'other', rather than the recipients' memories of their own cultural space. Moreover, for transnational family members who have never lived in the country, the object is coming from, it is likely to be devoid of memories of their personal life history.

Beyond their practical value, the significance of these objects must be estimated from the effect of their being sent. Namely, transmitted objects carry meanings referring to the sender's social setting and are appropriated by the receiver as significant items from the sender, thereby also appropriating the carried meaning. The final result has a mixed meaning, being both personal and cultural, while at the same time also 'cosmopolitan' and 'national'. In exchanging such items, each family member category convivially interweaves what they call a 'Romanian' way of life with openness towards others.

6.2 Circulation and Directional Material Movement

In contrast with the univocal model of remittances from abroad and familiar objects sent from home, the direction of movement and the meaning within the circulation of objects become less noticeable. Moreover, the very act of 'sending' and 'receiving' objects has changed: sending may refer to mere empty boxes, while receiving may include signals transmitted back about the symbolic appropriation of the object. We may thus speak of a continuum of circulating materiality upon which all participants at each end project their relationships, thereby creating socially meaningful objects.

The economic, as against the symbolic significance of exchanged objects, is often also blurred, as in the case of homemade food items, and their polarity evened out, moving in both directions. Such a shared distribution of material objects means a more general sense of togetherness-through-objects where their intimately interpersonal meanings point far beyond their existence as objects of consumption towards the fundamental human relatedness of transnational families.

6.3 Specific Meanings Transmitted through Materiality

Through the circulation of physical objects between them, grandparents and grandchildren send messages with intrinsic meanings revealing their performed relationship. While simultaneously embodied in the object, these messages may be broken down into a typology of ontologically separate strata. Among these socially generated ontological meanings, we could distinguish: the very existence of the object as the focus of social practice; its pragmatic value whereby it makes another life-world present; and the interpersonal function as the embodiment of the absence of a person.

At the centre of such social aspects of materiality stands the message associated with the practice of sending objects as a practice of displaying, thereby simultaneously showing each other and the outside world that these families are functioning. At this first level of practice, conferring and recognising same-family membership is performed through gestures of intrinsic affection, solidarity, and care.

Second, the 'national' or 'cosmopolitan' connotations of material objects' exchange open up 'foreign' and 'home' worlds to each other, creating familial conviviality (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Hemer et al., 2020; Nowicka, 2020). Members born abroad are exposed, at an everyday level, to the materiality having a national content; migrant members may remember home and non-migrant family members acquire membership in the world of migrants. The emancipation entailed is reciprocal: both migrants and stayers learn languages, whether Romanian or a foreign language (Telegdi-Csetri & Ducu, 2019), absorb Romanian or foreign traditions (Ducu & Telegdi-Csetri, 2018) and appropriate religious mindsets (Ducu & Hossu, 2016; Ducu, 2018a, 2020), namely, and most importantly for grandparents, Eastern Orthodoxy.

Third, and most difficult to access is the 'presence in absence', where material things, especially handcrafted items and pictures, as well as homemade food and highly personal items of daily use, become a surrogate of the very person sending them. In this sense, they go beyond the virtual co-presence created through communication, effectively embodying the absent other in a graspable, material, and everyday presence.

6.4   Absent Presences

Virtual communication between transnational family members involving simultaneous family practices through digital technology usage generates co-presence (Nedelcu, 2012; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). However, neither very young children nor many older people can access virtual communication methods without the mediation of a third person; hence such immediate co-presence is rarely at hand in their case. This mediation may require complex arrangements that elevate everyday communicative moments into genuine family events.

Older children, adolescents, and young adults have their time fragmented between school, extracurricular activities, and most importantly, friends, making their communication with grandparents, especially in a different country, more difficult to manage and less frequent. Physical items on display in the home permanently remind others of the existence of the one who is absent by living beyond the border. For example, an icon in a young man's bedroom in the UK reminds him of his grandmother in Romania every time he looks at it, pictures of grandchildren are displayed proudly in transnational grandparents' rooms, and actual rooms are waiting for grandchildren to spend a portion of the year on vacation at their grandparents' home (Ducu, 2020).

These absent presences are reflected in the declarations of family members. For example, one grandmother, Ana, recounts how she follows her granddaughter, Anca, growing from year to year by regularly updating her photo album—a testimony of parallel threads of time. In contrast, another granddaughter, Elena, dresses in the folk costume sent by her grandmother, Gica, only to pose briefly in the dress at the Orthodox Easter midnight sermon so that the photograph could be sent back to her grandmother in Romania. For the adolescent girl raised in English culture, the grandmother's desire for her to dress or behave as a Romanian feels like a burden—a type of tension that emerges among generations in other migrant families (Bishop & Medved, 2020). Still,

she plays this role for a few brief minutes to be immortalised in a picture that gives her grandmother the feeling of togetherness during that Easter night despite the physical distance that separates them.

6.5   Rights

Through the materiality of transnational relations, children and the elderly as transnational family members exercise their right to family, as stated in Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), along with the right to access their own culture as stated in Article 30. Furthermore, within the transnational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, the obligation of grandparents to provide direction and guidance to their grandchildren, as stated in Article 5, is also tentatively fulfilled. These rights exercise is evidenced, first, through family relations maintenance across generations; second, through grandparents' indirect access to the dominant culture of the child's environment. Thus, a bridge is created between those in Romania and those living or born abroad, whom we have previously named the 'strangers' within transnational families (Telegdi-Csetri & Ducu, 2019).

7   Final Remarks: The Role of Materiality in Extended Family Relations

This chapter aimed to outline the construction of relatedness at-a-distance between zero and second generations of Romanian transnational family members through the reciprocal transfer of material objects. As for interacting actors, they have been mainly ignored in the study of transnational families, where the focus is on the pragmatic household provisioning of the first-generation migrants, notably their breadwinning, caring, and education-provisioning activities, while they also define the family's identity.

In the three-level generational structure, however, especially where the children live abroad

with their migrant parents while the grandparents remain in Romania, these components are arranged differently. While parents remain the primary breadwinners and decision-makers, affective and identity-related components, hence allegiances are emphatically redistributed to involve all three generations (Hărăguş et al., 2018, 2021; Hărăguş & Telegdi-Csetri, 2018). We may thus observe how the practices directly constitutive to the family—such as care practices of the parents—also give way to relations of affection and identification between the grandparents and their grandchildren.

How materiality shapes and expresses these relational ties is telling because the practices described above are not primarily based on digital communication creating a virtual space instead of the shared material life-world, but rather on forms of togetherness between grandparents and grandchildren through sharing food, books, clothes, pictures, and handmade items (Sinanan et al., 2018). The meaning of material objects circulating in transnational spaces has been fundamentally altered as economic circumstances improved and the generational exchange of material items between grandparents and grandchildren became more conspicuous. The transfers took the form of reflective, self-aware expressions of affection and identity formation of a physically tangible and symbolically meaningful nature at the same time.

This kind of creation of meaning is, at the same time, peculiar in the transnational space of 'migrant worlds' since the content of exchange is unique to the specific generational pattern and geographical location and would receive a pretty different significance if grandparents and grandchildren lived in the same region. On the one hand, the exchange re-enacts a sense of Romanianness by transmitting Romanian specificity tokens. On the other, however, the exchanges also lead to cosmopolitan consequences, given that they are transmitted through materiality carrying otherness that is accepted through them, hence integrated and appropriated within the recipient's life-world. This entails communication of interpersonal meaning by which cosmopolitan attitudes implicitly enter the recipients' *habitus* as a convivial constituent of the two generations' respective social worlds.

While the emergence of ICTs has enhanced transnational communication, profoundly contributing to building a co-presence between migrants and stayers, the absence and necessity of non-virtual contacts also persist, especially in the case of reciprocal material exchange between zero and second generation. Bridging the distance and generation gap adds to the more extensive, affective, and identity-related capabilities of transnational families and fundamentally enhances dependent members' agency. The most significant outcome is interpersonal togetherness-at-a-distance or absent presence embodied in material objects *in lieu* of family members' physical presence. Through simultaneously carrying both affective and identity-related meanings, these objects succeed in creating convivial encounters between national and foreign allegiances, thus performing an implicitly cosmopolitan practice.

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