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LIVES APART? EXPERIENCES OF TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD  
BY GEORGIAN LABOUR MIGRANTS TO ITALY AND THEIR CHILDREN

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## ABSTRACT

International labour migration processes of the last decades saw increasing numbers of solo female migrants employed primarily in the domestic care sector of the developed countries. Many of these women were mothers who left their children in the sending countries and thus gave rise to a controversial phenomenon of transnational motherhood. The present thesis is based on the first empirical study of intergenerational narratives of mothers, Georgian labour migrants to Italy, and their children, left behind in Georgia, who shared their experiences of separation and transnational motherhood.

Considering the complexity of international migration, a single discipline cannot explain it thoroughly. Four theoretical insights are employed in the present thesis to understand experiences of transnational motherhood: sociology of international migration, sociology of the family, gender studies and sociology of emotions. The following approaches are of particular importance: an analytic perspective of transnational migration and theories of self-selection of international labour migrants with close ties with their communities of origin; different migration experiences of males and females, and recent trends of feminization of labour migration; traditional and “alternative” ideologies of motherhood and changing motherhood practices in transnational families, that are of central interest to the present research project. When studying transnational motherhood, it is impossible to avoid very close attention to emotional aspects accompanying transnational family life, which, so far, have been largely overlooked by migration scholars.

The very fact of mothers’ international labour migration is a challenge to the traditional, deeply rooted ideology of motherhood. Often unconsciously, migrant mothers adhere to “alternative”, “rational”, future-oriented model(s) of parenting prioritizing “long-term projects of care” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012), although they often continue to live their experiences considering traditional understandings of motherhood. This is the first of a series of “dualities” that accompany experiences of transnational motherhood. The traditional ideology of motherhood appears to be unequipped to “frame” transnational motherhood as, within its framework, mothers’ choice to leave their children is reprehensible, yet transnational mothers’ physical absence is not an equivalent of “leaving” their children.

Informants’ narratives strongly suggest that long periods of physical separation did not jeopardize bonds between mothers and children in transnational families. While informants’ selection bias is probable, the mother-child bond was not “broken” and the very essence of motherhood remained intact. Thanks to constant communication and involvement in joint family projects mothers and children were present in each other’s lives and cared about each other’s feelings; in many families, certain “distant affective” motherhood practices were created. Some children noted that during their mothers’ emigration – and, to a certain extent, thanks to it – they grew closer to their mothers as, paradoxically, they were managing to communicate more, and had more quality communication. Thus, while physically absent, migrant mothers maintained a strong presence in their families both mentally and emotionally (not to speak economically). Many forms of mothers’ and children’s online co-presence were documented during the interviews. Its importance notwithstanding, interviews also prove that the Internet cannot be considered a solution to the problem of family

separation. It may reduce the pain caused by separation, but cannot be a complete substitute for mothers' physical absence from their families.

Two profound and, at the same time, highly mismatched sentiments strongly featured in interviews with migrant mothers. On the one hand, mothers were consciously sacrificing their years in emigration, to the extent that, often, their lifestyle was, de-facto, self-denial filled almost exclusively with hard work. At the same time, they reported strong feelings of guilt, repeating over and over again that they hoped their children would eventually forgive them for this separation. In fact, mothers felt guilty for full devotion to their children who, in their turn, saw no guilt in mothers' actions – on the contrary, were grateful to them. This paradox seems impossible to understand and explain rationally as it appears to be based chiefly on migrant mothers' emotional reactions.

Separation was experienced painfully by both mothers and children. However, when informants' feelings were contrasted with a rationalization of separation as a consequence of a calculated choice made for the good of the family, mothers' emigration appeared to be the right decision despite the pain it caused. All but one interviewed mothers said they would not change their migration decision if they could go back in time. Moreover, they almost univocally reported readiness to "*keep going on*", and continue working in emigration to help their children (and, often, newly arrived grandchildren) until they were physically able to do so, because, as they put it, "*motherhood never ends*".

## INTRODUCTION

A habitual family structure as described in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature (e.g. Amato & Booth, 1997; Coontz, 2000; Heintz *et al.*, 1975) has been challenged in numerous ways in light of social changes of the last decades.<sup>1</sup> Following the classical sociological approach, a family is still seen as one of the major examples of primary social groups (Lee, 1964). By the 2020s, though, novel types of families have emerged, many of which would have been impossible to imagine even half a century earlier. While the present thesis does not aim to exhaustively discuss a multiplicity of profound changes in traditional family structure and describe all new types of families, it does focus on one of these, namely – transnational families.

Families divided by state borders have existed for as long as the very phenomenon of international migration. Numerous historical examples are known of families with family members separated from each other for extended periods of time by thousands of kilometres (e.g. Abramitzky *et al.*, 2012; Levitt *et al.*, 2003; Piché, 2013; Portes, 2003; Weinberg *et al.*, 1992). Such arrangements were, and still are commonly caused by international labour migration, when workers migrate alone to minimize their expenses and remit their earnings to their families left behind in the sending country. Compared with earlier periods, present-day transnational families are characterized by two new and distinct features: **(a)** increasing numbers of solo female labour migrants, many of whom are mothers who leave their children behind and thus give rise to the phenomenon of transnational motherhood, and **(b)** universal accessibility of modern communication technologies that make it possible for migrants to keep in touch with their family members in the sending communities with regularity and intensity that were not possible before.

As has been discussed previously, any type of international migration “affects the lives of both family members who migrate and those who remain behind, having important consequences for kinship ties, living arrangements, and children’s well-being” (Bernardi, 2011, p. 788). However, the specific impact of migration depends on which member of the family unit migrates, hence – which household tasks and social functions are to be redistributed between family members who stay behind. When migrants are fathers, and the rest of the family stays behind in the sending country, the families’ – and, in particular, children’s – well-being is not perceived to be threatened, as fathers are seen to be fulfilling from afar their “natural” duties of breadwinners, in accordance with the traditional “culture of fatherhood”. Fathers’ emigration would have relatively little impact on families’ daily routine as, until very recently, many cultures did not expect fathers’ involvement

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<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, scientific developments (most importantly, new reproductive technologies) have also contributed to these changes.

in routine housework and childcare, as these were, and sometimes still are seen as exclusively women's tasks. When, on the other hand, migrants are mothers, it takes more effort for the family to adjust and redistribute those "women's tasks". Moreover, migrant mothers' long-term physical separation from their children challenges one of the cornerstones of the traditional understanding of a family: a mother caring for her child(ren), personally and, preferably, around the clock. Thus, international labour migration of women, in addition to challenging long-established cultural norms, is believed to produce "transformations in the family organization and structure, which tend to be more profound than when men migrate" (Illanes, 2010, p. 206; see also Parreñas, 2001, pp. 382-383).

Mothers do migrate, though, and in increasing numbers (ILO, 2021). Their labour migration abroad has seemingly simple economic goals to achieve, which usually prioritize the provision of better opportunities for their children. Upon their arrival in the destination country, new migrant mothers find themselves in situations where they have to cope with a number of new, diverse and, often, difficult challenges: find a new job and adjust to new working and living conditions with new people around; adapt to a new cultural and social environment; learn a new language; manage their new social and economic role; try to build new social relationships, friendships, etc. At the same time, they continue to be mothers and follow their children growing up, doing this from afar, while other people (ideally, their close relatives) take physical care of the children.

It has been well documented that, over time, labour migrants' initial plans often change, especially regarding specific migration destinations or the expected duration of migration. For all categories of labour migrants, including migrant mothers, migration tends to last much longer than originally envisioned: once primary ("subsistence") needs are satisfied, new needs appear, and migrant's return home becomes a more and more distant perspective (Illanes, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Vietti, 2019). Often, labour migration lasts for over a decade; long physical separation inevitably affects relationships with family members. Migrant mothers may find themselves facing unforeseen difficulties, which "might include a strained relationship with their children" (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011, p. 705; see also Banfi & Boccagni, 2011, p. 297). Importantly, neither the migrants themselves, nor their family members – and, especially, children – are, usually, prepared beforehand for the unforeseen consequences or "social and emotional costs" of migration; not only are they lacking the emotional resources to cope with these consequences, but they cannot envisage them.

Mothers' migration leads to manifold changes in the family. On a personal (micro-) level, family members have to find and get used to new modes to communicate at distance and deal with

new, unexpected and, often, difficult emotional challenges caused by separation. At the meso-level, family members remaining in the sending country need to adjust to mothers' absence, which also means redistribution of housework tasks that used to be performed by mothers. Finally, at the macro level, mothers themselves, their children irrespective of their age, other family members and, finally, the society at large eventually have to renegotiate the traditional concept of motherhood, and that of a family as well, considering the new realities of transnationalism.

While challenges of transnational motherhood are discussed in the scholarship on migration along with many other aspects of transnationalism,<sup>2</sup> there is a rather moderate pool of studies that focuses exclusively and thoroughly on the experiences of transnational mothers and their children left behind (e.g. Ambrosini, 2015; Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Carling *et al.*, 2012; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Gálvez, 2019; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Illanes, 2010; Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012; Nobles, 2011; Olwig, 1999; Orellana *et al.*, 2001; Parreñas, 2001). These studies are almost exclusively based on the empirical evidence presenting migrant mothers' perspectives, occasionally – based on the interviews with children's caregivers (most often – grandmothers) in the sending countries, but, so far, lack first-hand evidence of transnational children's experiences. The importance of further studies focused on children growing up in transnational families and providing first-hand evidence of their experiences has been highlighted extensively (e.g. Adserà & Tienda, 2012, p. 7; Graham & Jordan, 2011, p. 764; Illanes, 2010, p. 222; Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002, pp. 784-785; Pessar, 2000, p. 58).

Content-wise, the existing literature on the well-being of transnational children very often analyses information about their physical or psychological health, usually – based on second-hand assessments of caregivers, which are, at best, very approximate. This literature typically discusses the situation in migrant-sending households in the Global South, while the evidence from the countries in Eastern Europe is rare and inconsistent (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Cebotari *et al.*, 2018; Fedyuk, 2012; Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012; Vietti, 2019).

A new migration route from Georgia to Italy remains, so far, understudied, although there has been certain scholarly attention to the issue of feminization of labour migration from Georgia (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013; Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010). Experiences of female labour migrants working in the EU countries are of increasing interest to the Georgian media (Batumelebi,

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<sup>2</sup> Such studies can hardly be found in the scholarship about motherhood or family studies. Studies of international migration, on the other hand, have been paying close attention to the issues of transnational parenting (more often focusing on mothering rather than fathering) for some decades. Feminist authors tend to use the topic of transnational motherhood to discuss issues such as “hierarchical gender division of labor in immigrant families” (e.g. Moon, 2003, p. 841), but this aspect is beyond the focus of the present research project.

n.d.; Lursmanashvili, 2021), as well as to policymakers (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, forthcoming). And while domestic workers from Georgia are occasionally mentioned in publications discussing labour immigration to Italy, quite understandably, they always remain in the shadow of much more numerous groups of immigrants from other post-Soviet countries, especially – those from Moldova and Ukraine (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Cvajner, 2018; Vietti, 2019). Even in the volume devoted to the experiences of post-Soviet female migrant workers in Italy, almost no information about Georgian immigrants’ specific experiences is provided (Cvajner, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Although immigrants from the post-Soviet countries share certain characteristics, and often have similar occupational “profiles”, there are quite important differences in the migration experiences of domestic workers from Moldova and Ukraine, on the one hand, and from Georgia, on the other hand (Vanore & Siegel, 2015). To name one of the most salient of these differences, geographical proximity and visa liberalisation agreements with the European Union (European Commission, n.d.) make it possible for migrants from Moldova and Ukraine to regularly and relatively frequently visit their families irrespective of their legal status in Italy. Despite a similar visa liberalisation agreement between the EU and Georgia, migrants from Georgia do not have such a possibility, as their country is more distant from Italy. They almost exclusively travel by plane, which is more expensive and, more importantly, represents an option for documented migrants only, unless the return to Georgia is final. These different options become especially important to consider when transnational mothering practices are examined.

The present study aims to fill the above-mentioned gaps, focusing on the experiences of Georgian migrant mothers who work as domestic workers (commonly referred to as *badanti*) in Italy and their children, separated for indeterminate periods of time due to mothers’ labour migration.<sup>4</sup> Empirically, the study focuses with equal attention on first-hand narratives of mothers and children, providing their perceptions of separation and transnational motherhood practices, as mothers and their children describe them.

The following are the main research questions that guided the study:

- How do Georgian labour migrants to Italy and their children experience transnational motherhood?
  - *To what extent are they aware of each other’s experiences?*

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<sup>3</sup> When considering immigration statistics in Italy, the share of Georgian care workers is extremely modest; from the Georgian perspective, however, over the last decade, Italy has become one of the most attractive destinations for Georgian labour migrants, as discussed below.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed methodology of the study is presented in Chapter 3.

- *How does long-term separation affect motherhood practices and mother-child relationships?*
  - *Are there any indications of estrangement between migrant mothers and their children, and if so, how are these handled?*
- What are the images of motherhood, as well as those of a family, that bring forward transnational mothers and their children?

The above questions, which are relatively specific, eventually inform the more general one:

- **Based on their experiences, how do transnational mothers and their children renegotiate a traditional model of a family and, specifically, motherhood?**

Considering Georgia's exclusion from international migratory processes during the Soviet period, it would be reasonable to expect that neither migrant mothers nor their children were prepared beforehand for the experiences of transnational family life; in post-Soviet Georgia, there were no earlier strategies of migration and separation that the new transnational families could have considered and/or adapted and, during the first years of the development of international migration processes, there were no previous migrants to inform them about possible risks. While adjusting to changes brought in their lives by migration, they could count only on themselves and their close kin. It is important to learn how the members of transnational families of labour migrants from Georgia handled separation, and what mechanisms, institutions or sources of information, in their opinion, could have helped them to cope with the challenges of transnationalism. Thorough first-hand knowledge about the experiences of child-parent separation will help not only better understand the existing challenges, the process of reimagining the family, but also – in the long term – will provide relevant policy solutions.

Transnational motherhood is a direct consequence of mothers' international labour migration, with various rewards, challenges and consequences that accompany it. Taking into consideration the estimated number of international labour migrant parents who leave their children behind in the sending countries, there are several million children worldwide who experience transnational parenthood and have to adjust to parents' exclusively virtual presence during prolonged periods of their childhood. Importantly, as has been pointed out in the existing literature, “[i]n migrant-sending countries, almost no policies exist that target children who are left behind by their parents” (Yeoh & Lam, 2006, quoted by Mazzucato & Schans, 2011, p. 709).

The **first Chapter** of the present thesis presents background information about the development of the process of labour emigration from Georgia after the country regained

independence in 1991, with particular attention to the feminization of labour emigration from the country and the emergence of Italy as one of the most popular migration destinations for female migrants. In **Chapter 2**, relevant theoretical insights are discussed. Provided the multidisciplinary nature of migration processes and a complex array of perspectives to consider when discussing transnational families, theoretical insights in the fields of sociology of international migration, sociology of the family, gender studies and sociology of emotions are reviewed to understand the experiences of transnational motherhood. **Chapter 3** presents the methodology of the present study, along with informants' particularly salient characteristics. Findings are presented in **Chapter 4**, structured as follows: A general overview of transnational experiences in an intergenerational "prism" in *Section 4.1*; Family members' experiences of physical separation and separations' impact on family relationships, including changing motherhood practices, in *Section 4.2*; Co-presence of highly mismatched feelings of self-sacrifice and guilt, prominently featuring in transnational mothers' narratives, in *Section 4.3*. The findings are summarized in the **Conclusion** in the light of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2.

Discussion guides used for interviews with migrant mothers and children are presented, respectively, in Appendices 1 and 2; basic information about the interviews and informants' demographic characteristics are provided in Appendix 3, along with their pseudonyms, family and interview codes used through the present thesis.

Two considerations are important to emphasize before proceeding further:

- the present study is focused on labour migrant mothers employed in the care sector, with all of them providing full-time live-in assistance to the elderly. Their employment conditions, as well as the perceived temporary nature of their migration, make it unrealistic and irrelevant to consider the possibility of family reunification in the receiving country. "[I]rregularity and cohabitation with employers contrasts with the [immigrants'] aspiration to reunite the family group in Italy, or at least to live there with their children" (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 443), thus this aspect, while generally very important, is not discussed in the present thesis;<sup>5</sup>
- while migration experience is believed to have a deep impact on any person's life, both migrants and their family members left behind, the present research project did not have any initial assumption about migration being necessarily a painful experience with negative effects on migrants' family relations and their emotional state or, conversely, about migration being an exciting experience helping to solve the problems of the people involved in

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<sup>5</sup> Informants did not discuss family reunification in Italy either; they were looking forward to returning to Georgia and reuniting with their families there.

migratory processes. The specific nature of the impact of migration is discussed based on the empirical evidence collected, and with consideration of findings of previous research.

## CHAPTER 1. Georgia's rapid transformation into a migrant-sending country

For the majority of the citizens of the former USSR, possibilities of international travel (particularly – to the countries that were not part of the Socialist bloc) were not just unrealizable, but, essentially, unimaginable (Jashi, 2017; Light, 2012; Shevtsova, 1992), as were possibilities of a more long-term international migration.<sup>6</sup> Interrepublican migration within the USSR, on the other hand, was relatively intense but was not always of voluntary nature. As regards Georgia, during the first decades after its forcible Sovietization in 1921, it attracted numerous migrants from neighbouring republics. After the 1950s, migration processes were dominated by increased out-migration of people belonging to ethnic minorities (e.g. Jews, Russians), who were returning to their “historic homelands”.

In the last decades of the Soviet period, seasonal labour migration to Russia developed.<sup>7</sup> The late Soviet labour migrants from Georgia were exclusively men working in agriculture, construction, trade or similar sectors (Zaionchkovskaia, 1994). Often, they were directed to Southern regions of Russia, i.e. regions geographically close to Georgia. Technically, this was not a process of international migration, provided that, at the time, migration took place within the borders of the same country (USSR), and the same legal context. There were, though, linguistic and cultural differences between sending and receiving regions.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, a certain share of labour

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6 Hofmann and Buckley (2013) analysed national household survey data which provide information about international trips of household members since 1965. The survey was conducted in 2008 by the National statistics office of Georgia (Geostat), collecting data on 5,450 households. As the authors discovered, “92 percent of trips were made after 1990, and nearly 50 percent were made in 2003 or later” (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 516).

7 Less numerous labour migration flows were directed toward other republics (e.g. Ukraine, Kazakhstan), but Russia stand out from the point of view of the number of migrants.

8 It is also of relevance to note that the obligatory system of population registration (“*propiska*”) in the former Soviet Union certainly did not ease population’s movements within the country – rather, it was used as a state control mechanism over the population’s movements. While internal migrants within the USSR did not need any visas to move within the country, they did need internal passports with a stamp indicating the person’s one, and only place of residence, known as their “inscription” (“*propiska*”). The stamp was requested for numerous activities and could be routinely controlled by law enforcement personnel. The “*propiska*” system was highly inflexible and, often, corrupt; it was notoriously difficult to change one’s legal place of residence and, hence, the stamp. After 1960, “living without a *propiska* in Soviet Union for more than three days was a criminal offense” (Manaev, 2021; see also Kessler, 2001).

migrants from Georgia eventually settled in Russia; some of them brought to Russia their families as well. Combined with later flows of migrants from Georgia to Russia, they constitute the most numerous stock of migrants from Georgia with over 450,000 people in 2017 (SCMI, 2019, p. 14).<sup>9</sup>

The last Census of the population of the Soviet Union in 1989 revealed that 95% of ethnic Georgians were still living in Georgia (Jashi, 2017, p. 113). The population of the republic, was, though, impressively multi-ethnic, with its 30% composed of well over 100 different ethnic minority groups, the most numerous of those being Armenians (comprising 8,1% of the population of Georgia in 1989), Russians (6,3%) and Azerbaijanis (5,7%) (Demoscop Weekly, n.d.).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the quality of life in Georgia declined radically. Ethnic conflicts in the breakaway regions, civil war in the capital, and a complete collapse of the local economy and energy sector led to a rapid and radical deterioration of living conditions and high unemployment; the population lost all their savings. UNICEF estimated that 80% of the population of the country was below the poverty line in 1993-1995 (Papava, 2001, p. 3). Economic hardships were unforeseen; more importantly, after the post-WWII recovery population was no longer accustomed to any major economic problems.

There were no financial resources or institutional mechanisms in the country to help the population. Salaries of those who were still employed were inadequate; in addition, these salaries were often paid with several months' delays. Medical care was becoming unaffordable for the majority of the population; many hospitals, as well as educational institutions, could not provide heating during the winter and were suffering frequent power cuts throughout the whole year.

To make ends meet, more and more people started turning to various formal or informal money-lending institutions or individuals for high-interest loans. Many failed to pay those loans back and lost the houses they had put up as collateral to secure the loans.<sup>10</sup> For many families, labour emigration of at least one household member became the only possibility to get through the difficult period. Like in many other regions of the world where the population was facing similar difficulties, labour emigration from Georgia evolved as an economic strategy conditioned by “transformations of social and economic structures in sending and receiving countries” (Pedraza, 1991, p. 308).

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<sup>9</sup> Worldwide, the number of international migrants born in Georgia was estimated at 838,082 people in 2017, thus more than half of them were residing in Russia. In comparison, according to the same dataset, 167,553 people born in Georgia were residing in the EU countries, 12,441 of them – in Italy (SCMI, 2019, p. 14).

<sup>10</sup> All post-Soviet countries faced such challenges, with the population adopting similar strategies, as described, for example, in Banfi & Boccagni (2011), Fedyuk (2012), Vietti (2019).

Georgian migration statistics were rather unreliable through the 1990s and 2000s (Abashidze *et al.*, 2009; Geostat, 2018; Hackert, 2017; ICMPD, 2015; ISET, 2010; OECD/CRRRC-Georgia, 2017; Tsuladze *et al.*, 2008), but existing estimates agree that approximately a quarter of the adult population of the country had emigrated by 2010 (Cebotari *et al.*, 2018, p. 1; Gerber & Torosyan, 2013, p. 1280). Based on the existing knowledge, the ISET policy institute identified three major phases of post-Soviet emigration from Georgia (ISET, 2010). The **first phase** comprises the very first years after regaining independence, the period between 1990 and 1995. The estimates suggest that, on average, 135,000 people per year left Georgia during this period (Jashi, 2017, p. 115). These were predominantly people of ethnic minority background; as mentioned, this type of emigration existed before the dissolution of the Soviet Union as well (e.g. Rajzman & Semyonov, 1997, p. 111), but was arguably intensified by the breakup.

The “ethnic” nature of emigration from Georgia during this period is noticeable when comparing census data on the ethnic composition of the population of the country between 1989 and 2014: the share of Armenians residing in Georgia decreased from 8,09% in 1989 to 4,53% in 2014; the share of Russians decreased much more drastically, from 6,32% to 0,71%; and the share of Greeks, the fourth most numerous ethnic minority, decreased from 1,86% to 0,15% (Demoscop Weekly, n.d.; National Statistics office of Georgia, 2014). Rather surprisingly, the share of Azerbaijanis, the third most numerous ethnic minority, slightly increased during this period, from 5,69% to 6,27%. The share of the ethnic Georgian population, on the other hand, increased from 70,12% in 1989 to 86,82% in 2014.

Reliable empirical studies are particularly lacking about this first phase of emigration. Specifically, it is not known to what extent were economic “push factors” pertinent for emigrants leaving Georgia in the early 1990s. Although it is usually assumed that they left to return to their “historic homelands” (e.g., Armenia, Russia, Israel), relevant evidence is missing, and it would not be justified to exclude the possibility that they went to other countries, e.g. to Western Europe or North America.

During the same period, as a result of military conflicts of the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of people fled the conflict zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Mooney, 1995; Kharashvili, 2013). While approximately 300,000 IDPs settled in conflict-free regions of Georgia, no information is available about the possible subsequent emigration of the displaced persons to foreign countries.<sup>11</sup>

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11 As for asylum seekers from Georgia, their numbers, compared with the most conservative estimates of the number of labour emigrants, have been extremely low through the entire post-Soviet period.

Although labour emigration must have started during this phase, there is, again, no specific information about its quantitative and/or qualitative characteristics. It would be safe to assume, though, that before the mid-1990s, labour emigration from Georgia directed toward the countries outside of the former Soviet Union (FSU) was still extremely limited in its scale, taking into account important considerations highlighted by Rogers Brubaker back in 1991: “the barriers to exit [from the FSU space – *TZ*] lie less in legal provisions than in the absence of hard currency; in the great difficulty involved in paying for international travel with rubles; and in the absence (for the Slavic groups, with the partial exception of Ukrainians) of networks abroad that would facilitate migration” (Brubaker, 1991, p. 955).

During the **second phase** of emigration from Georgia, from 1996 to 2004, specifically, labour emigration developed and, gradually, became widespread.<sup>12</sup> During this period, in 1997, the World Bank registered for the very first time labour migrants’ remittances sent to Georgia, amounting to 284 million USD (World Bank, n.d.). Continuing the late Soviet pattern, labour emigrants leaving Georgia in the late 1990s were predominantly men who were following the familiar routes: most often, they were going to work in Russia and, relatively less often, to other former Soviet republics, and were mostly employed in construction or petty trade (Tsuladze, 2005). It can be claimed that this phase, while a direct continuation of interrepublican migration that took place during the late Soviet period, combined characteristics of internal and international migration (Brubaker, 1991, p. 953). Remarkably though, countries of Western Europe and North America were not yet considered as possible destinations, since potential emigrants still did not have any resources, human or financial, to go to these countries.

Until 2001, a visa-free regime between Georgia and Russia was an important factor facilitating migration between the two countries. However, the Russian government introduced a unilateral visa regime for Georgian citizens in 2001, hindering further labour migration from Georgia. By then, Russia was already becoming a less attractive destination for Georgian labour migrants. On the one hand, anti-immigrant attitudes were on rise in Russia, and were particularly strong toward immigrants from the countries of the South Caucasus (Gudkov, 2005).<sup>13</sup> Not less

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12 Furthermore, educational emigration became relatively widespread during the last two decades; it is almost always temporary and, so far, entirely understudied.

13 According to Gudkov (2005), reported negative attitudes and hostility toward “others”, including immigrants, represented unconscious projection of one’s own fears and insecurity, as well as manifestations of negative solidarity in the Russian society. According to Levada Analytical Center’s longitudinal survey data covering the post-Soviet decades, anti-immigrant attitudes have been increasing in Russia since 1992. In July 2002, 45% reported the government should try to limit immigration; this share increased to 59% in August, 2005 (Gudkov, 2005, p. 66).

importantly, increasing diversification of migration experiences and exchange of information between labour migrants as well as between their family members in Georgia revealed that migrants' earnings in Russia were much lower compared with earnings in other countries. Subsequent emigration from Georgia was increasingly directed toward new migration destinations in Western Europe (Greece, Ireland) and North America.

Thus, during the decade from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, corresponding to the second phase of emigration, Georgia was “a country of net emigration, with migration increasingly driven by economic factors” (OECD/CRRC-Georgia, 2017, p. 49); by the mid-2000s, migration flows from Georgia started changing their direction toward the West.

The present thesis focuses on the latest, post-2004 period, which corresponds to the **third phase** of emigration from Georgia according to ISET's periodization. Migration processes have been relatively better documented for this period, although certain flaws and shortcomings are still present, and the existing knowledge is not comprehensive. During this phase, an estimated 30 to 35 thousand people had been leaving Georgia annually, their majority being temporary, albeit long-term, labour migrants (Jashi, 2017, p. 115).

Two key aspects that characterize emigration from Georgia during this phase are closely interrelated and represent a radical change compared with earlier migration patterns. By the late 2000s, new migration flows directed toward Russia essentially stopped; instead, increasing numbers of labour migrants went to the countries of Western Europe (including Italy, which became a particularly attractive receiving country in the 2010s). These countries currently represent the major migration destination for new labour emigrants from Georgia (Geostat, 2016; State Commission on Migration Issues, 2017, p. 14). As for the second key aspect of the post-2004 emigration from Georgia, since the receiving countries in Western Europe had (and still have) a specific demand for care workers, mostly women, rather than men started emigrating from Georgia for employment purposes, which led to the feminization of labour emigration from the country.<sup>14</sup>

With the increasing inefficiency of labour migration to Russia, and to the former Soviet space in general, this radical shift in the direction of emigration was inevitable. The importance of this change cannot be underestimated. As mentioned above, migration toward destinations within the former Soviet Union was a relatively simple enterprise for Georgian migrant workers, as these destinations were quite familiar to them, both culturally and linguistically; migration costs were

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14 Although there have been a number of policy reports and scholarly studies on feminization of labour emigration from Georgia, considering the short history of migratory processes in the country, it would be equally justified to speak about the “emergence of women's labour migration” (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 508).

reasonable; and migrants could count on networks of friends, relatives or acquaintances in the destination regions or settlements. Migration toward the EU countries or the US, on the other hand, was associated with too many unknowns, thus – risks, and, initially, no networks to rely on. Speaking of the very first migrants from Georgia to the EU countries and the US, it undoubtedly took them a lot of courage to head toward these destinations that were, to a large extent, unfamiliar socially, economically and linguistically. In addition, labour migrants from Georgia were, for the most part, undocumented, as they tended to enter destination countries on short-term tourist visas and overstay them; not all of them managed to legalise their status in the receiving countries.

Long years of Soviet propaganda arguably made people at the very least sceptical of the Western world and capitalism. Nevertheless, as the economic situation in Georgia was not improving, more and more labour migrants from Georgia were directed toward the EU countries and the US because of the economic attractiveness of migration to these destinations,<sup>15</sup> even though the costs of emigration were extremely high. Not having any experience in applying for visas, and of international travel in general, potential migrants sought assistance from semi-legal intermediaries who charged several thousand Euros for their services, often – without providing any guarantees.<sup>16</sup> For the absolute majority of migrants' households, emigration was not affordable, but they emigrated anyway, borrowing money and challenging the widely shared understanding among migration scholars, according to which the poorest cannot afford to migrate due to lack of resources (see Abramitzky *et al.*, 2012, p. 1836). Difficulties accompanying economic transformation in Georgia and lack of employment opportunities in the country proved to be too strong “push factors”, combined with gradually growing awareness of the employment opportunities for migrants in the developed countries. Potential migrants could not wait for migration conditions to become more favourable,<sup>17</sup> and increasing numbers of migrant workers were directed toward the EU countries despite extremely high cost of migration. To pay for intermediaries' services and to cover

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15 In addition to economic gain, better working conditions, more protected rights of migrant workers, as well as generally more welcoming climate attracted migrants to the destinations in the EU and the US.

16 According to the interviews with return migrants, fees charged by intermediaries for their services depended on the destination country and could range from 3,000 to 12,000 USD in the 2000s (Zurabishvili, 2011, p. 255). To compare, Georgia's per capita GNP for the year 2005 was estimated at \$1,560 in 2006 US dollars (Asian Development Bank, 2007, p. 3). Migration costs were particularly high for the very first waves of migrants to the EU countries (predominantly, to Greece, Spain and, later, Italy) and the US, who emigrated before migration networks with their support mechanisms were established. Furthermore, until the late 2010s, there were rather limited options of EU-bound flights from Georgia, with no budget airlines operating in the country, thus travel costs were also very high.

17 As discussed below, these conditions did become favourable in 2017, when visa liberalisation agreement between the EU and Georgia came into force.

their travel costs, potential migrants even from the poorest households borrowed large amounts of money, often at high interest rates. The availability of credit markets in Georgia was an important factor that made it possible for the household to fund migration (Moraga, 2011, p. 75). It can be argued, thus, that meticulously elaborated models to calculate economic “return from migration” and discuss migration incentives (e.g., Chiswick, 1999) were not particularly relevant for the processes of labour emigration from post-Soviet Georgia, especially after the shift in the direction of emigration toward the EU countries. Economically, throughout the 2000s and the 2010s, calculations about potential returns for labour emigrants from Georgia, most often, represented an outcome of an extraordinary simple binary choice of inadequate, or no income at all (if a potential migrant did not emigrate) versus an unspecified, but still decent and regular income (once a migrant secured a job in the receiving country).<sup>18</sup>

Available data suggest that the rate of emigration from Georgia has been increasing during the third phase, until the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the 2008 wave of CRRC’s nationwide Caucasus Barometer survey, 41% of the population reported having a relative or close friend living abroad at the time of the survey (CRRC, n.d.). A decade later, 79% reported having a close relative living abroad,<sup>19</sup> and 16% reported that their household received remittances from relative(s) living abroad (CRRC, n.d.).

The new destination countries of Georgian migrant workers in Western Europe had a very specific demand for care work for the elderly. This structural demand essentially determined the demographic characteristics of labour emigrants from Georgia during this, post-2004 phase of emigration from the country. In the families of potential migrants, emigration of male family members was no longer considered the only option; neither was it seen as the best possible option, as it was becoming increasingly difficult for men to find jobs abroad, and higher risk of deportation was associated with male migrants’ undocumented status. Many families made a reasoned – and pragmatic – choice to prioritize women’s labour emigration. Quite unprecedentedly in the Georgian

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18 Considering the importance of labour emigration for the families in Georgia, experts urged the government to work on bilateral labour migration agreements (BLMAs) between Georgia and interested receiving countries (Abashidze *et al.*, 2009). Such agreements would promote legal labour emigration from Georgia and represent an important advancement from the point of view of better migration policy and protection of migrant workers’ rights. The government of Georgia has, in fact, signed such agreements through the 2010s with Bulgaria, France, Germany and Israel. However, these agreements provide short-term and, often, limited solutions (e.g., seasonal workers can be employed in Germany for a maximum of three months; the agreement with France considers only high-skilled migrants), thus cannot be considered to be a solution for the majority of labour emigrants from Georgia and do not have an impact on the patterns of labour emigration from the country.

19 The wording of the questions slightly changed between 2008 and 2017.

history, women became the primary and, often, solo labour emigrants, thus leading to the feminization of labour emigration, which started in the 2000s (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 509; Vanore & Siegel, 2015, p. 17; Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010, p. 81). Constantly increasing communities of Georgian migrants who were already settled in the receiving countries eventually served as efficient migration networks, facilitating the arrival of new migrants.

The final important development was visa liberalisation agreement between the EU and Georgia, which came into force in March, 2017. Evidently, this marks the start of the **fourth phase** of emigration from Georgia. According to the agreement, citizens of Georgia no longer required visas for short-term (up to 90 days) visits to Schengen zone countries (European Commission, n.d.). Budget airlines entered the Georgian market soon after the agreement came into force, offering unprecedented airfares. Thus, emigration no longer required significant financial investments and no need for intermediaries; potential migrants only needed to choose their destination and buy a plane ticket. Labour migrants who arrived to the EU countries after visa liberalisation came into force overstayed the 90-days period just like earlier migrants overstayed their visas.<sup>20</sup>

Available migration statistics show increasing importance of Italy as a destination country for labour migrants from Georgia. Results of the latest, 2014 Population Census documented a total of 88,541 emigrants from Georgia, with over 1/10<sup>th</sup> of them (9,612 persons) residing in Italy (National Statistics office of Georgia, 2014). Gender differences by receiving countries were striking; migration to Italy appeared to be particularly female-dominated, with women outnumbering men by six to one (Chart 1).<sup>21</sup>

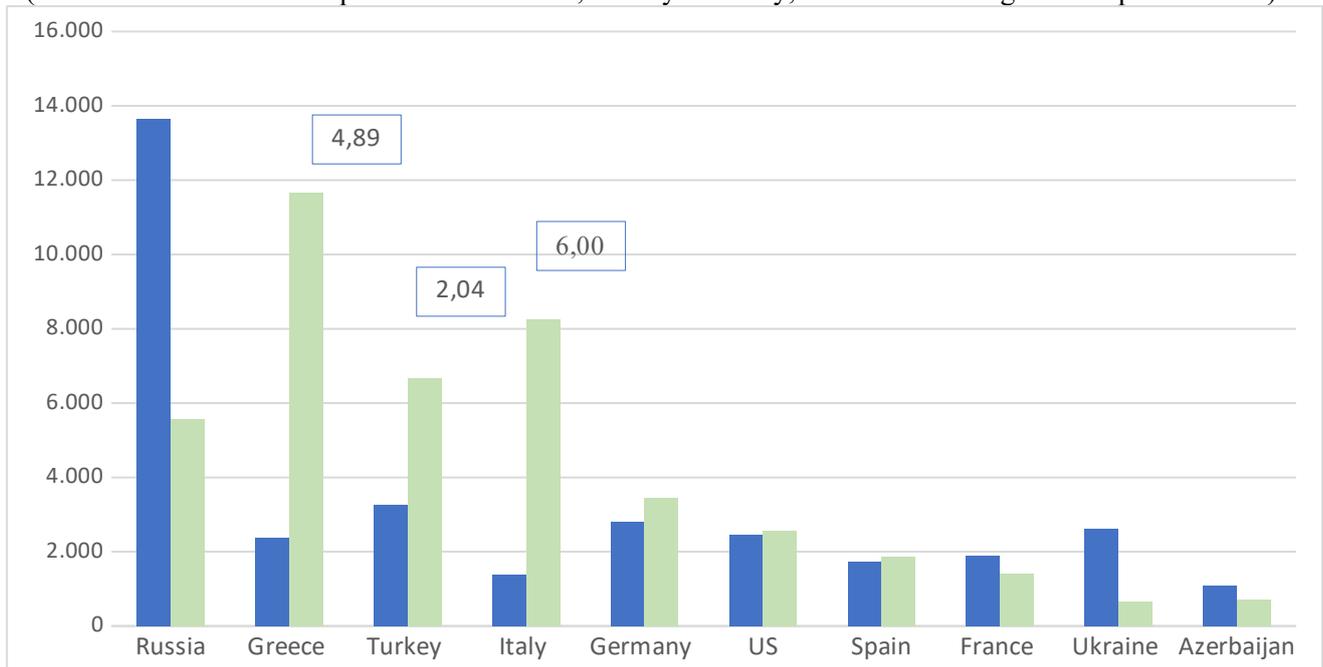
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20 The COVID-19 pandemic significantly slowed down migration worldwide, and had an impact on emigration from Georgia as well. The exact magnitude of its impact is yet to be studied.

21 While an important source of data, Census results should still be treated with caution as there were certain concerns in Georgia about the quality of data collection.

**Chart 1. Emigrants from Georgia residing in the top 10 receiving countries, by gender (N; 2014)**

(Female to male ratios are provided for Greece, Turkey and Italy, where female migration is predominant)



Source: National Statistics office of Georgia, 2014.

According to the latest available data reported by the State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) in 2019, the largest number of documented labour migrants from Georgia to the EU countries was concentrated in Italy (SCMI, 2019, p. 19), while Greece hosted the largest number of documented migrants who arrived to the country for the purpose of family reunification. Information about the amount of remittances sent to Georgia corroborates the data about the highest concentration of labour migrants in Italy: in January 2022, the largest amount of remittances was sent from Italy (33,3 million USD, i.e. 45% of the remittances sent from the EU countries). The second-largest amount (22,4 million USD) was sent from Russia, and the third-largest amount (20,3 million USD) from the US (National Bank of Georgia, n.d.).<sup>22</sup> Thus, remittances from Italy accounted for almost 20% of all remittances sent to Georgia through official money transfer channels.

While, from the Georgian perspective, Italy is becoming an increasingly important destination for labour migrants, when considering the Italian perspective, immigrants from Georgia constitute a very modest share of foreign nationals residing in the country. According to the Istat data elaborated by Italy's National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL), as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, Georgian

<sup>22</sup> The amount of remittances may fluctuate quite significantly from one month to another; the amount of remittances sent from Italy to Georgia has been steadily over 30 million USD every month since March, 2021.

citizens legally residing in Italy represented the 33<sup>rd</sup> largest group of foreign citizens (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2021, p. 14). They held one primacy though: when considering nationals of 40 countries with the highest numbers of legal residents in Italy, migrants from Georgia had the highest share of females: 82,2%, compared with 78,6% of those from Ukraine and 66,6% of those from Moldova (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2021, p. 14). This share is highly consistent with the Georgian Census data (Chart 1 above).<sup>23</sup>

Labour migrants from Georgia are almost exclusively employed in Italy as care workers, looking after the elderly (*badanti*). Many of them experience downward occupational mobility, accepting “jobs of lower status and lower prestige than those they held in the country of origin” (Raijman, R., & Semyonov, 1997, p. 109), but, often, these are the only jobs they can hope for in the new labour market, considering transferability of their skills, on the one hand, and the specific labour demand in Italy as a migrant-receiving country, on the other hand: “The Italian case is particularly emblematic of the growth of a parallel welfare system, informal and half-hidden, especially in the home care of elderly persons assisted 24h a day by immigrants, usually women, who live with them under the same roof. ... This solution is seen as cheaper and more respectful of the habits and dignity of the elderly compared with moving them into nursing homes. ... The immigrant domestic servant is no longer a status symbol of wealthy families in large cities; she is now also found, in the form of a domestic care worker, in working-class neighbourhoods, working for pensioners with lower and middle incomes, and in the most remote villages of Italy, including the south” (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 442). Although, as mentioned, overall, Georgian nationals represented the 33<sup>rd</sup> largest group of foreign citizens in Italy in 2020, they were the 9<sup>th</sup> largest group of domestic workers in Italy with 16,125 workers (Osservatorio Nazionale DOMINA, p. 41), demonstrating an extremely high concentration of Georgian nationals in this sector. Furthermore, over 79% of them were *badanti* – the highest share among the 10 most numerous national groups of domestic workers.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while care workers that come to Italy from Georgia are not numerous compared with the immigrants from other countries, they have a rather distinct “profile”, especially when the occupational niche and gender composition of this group are considered: they have the highest share of females and the highest share of domestic workers that are employed as *badanti*.

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23 As noted, these figures take into account only documented migrants. Reliable estimates of the share of undocumented migrants from Georgia in Italy, or to any other country, are not yet available.

24 Domestic workers from Ukraine had the second highest shares of *badanti* in Italia (64,4% of all Ukrainian domestic workers), and those from Romania – the third highest share (63,5%) (Osservatorio Nazionale DOMINA, p. 41).

Understandably, the data presented above is heavily influenced by migrants' legal status. Considering potentially high shares of undocumented immigrants, actual numbers should be expected to be higher. Overall, the share of undocumented immigrants is believed to be just under 20% of all immigrants throughout Europe, although there are variations by country and by type of migration. Focusing hereafter on Italy, estimates suggest that between 500 thousand and 700 thousand undocumented migrants were residing here in 2019, the third-largest number in Europe following Germany and the United Kingdom (Pew Research Center, 2019, p. 9). Fondazione ISMU estimated at 519 thousand the number of undocumented migrants in Italy as of January 1, 2021, i.e. 9,02% of the foreign population residing in the country (Fondazione ISMU, 2022, p. 66). The picture changes considerably when specifically domestic workers are considered. DOMINA National Observatory on Domestic Work reported in 2021 that 57% of the domestic work market in Italy was irregular and, in fact, irregular arrangements were traditionally the most characteristic of this market (Osservatorio Nazionale DOMINA, pp. 163-164), where labour migrants from Georgia are concentrated almost entirely. While specific estimates are unavailable, both Italian and Georgian sources indicate, albeit indirectly, that, with a high probability, a large share of the labour migrants from Georgia to Italy is undocumented.

In the light of the post-Soviet economic crisis on the one hand, and the demand for “female jobs” in the Western countries on the other hand, women’s labour emigration from Georgia was not a particularly unexpected development. Even though the Georgian society has traditionally been very conservative when it comes to gender roles, women in Georgia were, overall, rather emancipated by the time the USSR collapsed. They benefited from universal access to education guaranteed during the Soviet period, often pursued tertiary education and enjoyed the freedom to choose any carrier they wished.<sup>25</sup> With up to 80% of working-aged women been employed by the late Soviet decades (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 514), women’s contribution to their family budgets was rather significant, as was their role in their families’ decision-making process (Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010, p. 78). Extended kinship networks, as well as the spread of traditional three-generation households also facilitated women’s labour emigration, as migrant women could redistribute their domestic tasks within the close kin.

While women’s employment per se’ was not a cause for any social or cultural tensions in Georgia, the situation was complicated when mothers were migrating, leaving behind young children. It was not a widespread practice in Georgian families to “delegate” childcare to hired

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<sup>25</sup> Such a freedom may not have been absolute and universal (e.g., women, as well as men, from some of the remote mountainous regions may not have been able to benefit from educational opportunities; some professional occupations were extremely gendered), but it was very widespread.

nannies or babysitters.<sup>26</sup> Parents (almost always, mothers) were primary caregivers, even when employed. Grandparents' involvement in childcare has always been notable, as well as that of the other kin (e.g., aunts). Relevant institutions (kindergartens, schools) were also involved. A dominant expectation, though, often fiercely supported by the Georgian Orthodox church as well as the most patriarchal segments of the society, was that of a mother taking care of her child(ren).

Predictably, as female labour emigration was becoming widespread, ambiguous attitudes developed in the society. Women's participation in the labour force was not perceived as problematic *per se*. As reported in various studies, female migrants themselves claimed that, from a purely economic perspective, women were "better migrants", as, unlike men, women managed to save and remit more money to their families (Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010, p. 80; see also Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 526; this aspect is further discussed in Section 1.2). There were, however, two concurrent issues, both rooted in traditional understandings of gender roles in a family, that proved to be particularly sensitive in the case of female labour emigration from Georgia: women becoming the sole providers for their families, thus "taking over" men's traditional function of breadwinners,<sup>27</sup> and women leaving their children behind, "abandoning" them and thus "betraying" their duties as mothers.

Periodic comments of the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, usually voiced during his sermons, are most indicative of the ambiguity surrounding this issue in Georgia.<sup>28</sup> Being an extremely conservative institution, the Georgian Orthodox Church has never welcomed emigration, portraying it as a deviation from the Christian teaching and repeatedly claiming that emigration was dangerous for the country. In Patriarch's own words, reported by the Georgian media in June, 2015, "[o]ur youth goes abroad, working there as servants, meanwhile foreigners come to our motherland and take over our land" (Tabula, 2015a).<sup>29</sup>

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26 While hiring nannies or babysitters was an extremely rare practice during the Soviet period, as well as in the 1990s, a relatively visible share of better-off families has been hiring full-time nannies since the 2000s. There is, so far, no reliable data about how widespread this practice is, although it appears to be largely concentrated in the capital.

27 Remittances were of vital importance for the families of labour migrants, as discussed below.

28 The Patriarch's position is important because, in the context of a widespread lack of the population's trust in social and political institutions, the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the Patriarch himself, have been continuously enjoying an impressively high level of trust over the last two decades. Although the level of trust in the Church has been slightly decreasing after 2012, over 2/3 of the population still reported trusting it in 2019 (CRRC, n.d.). This suggests that the Patriarch's position and his comments can, potentially, have a strong influence on the population's attitudes. Important to note, however, that quite often the Patriarch's claims were not based on any actual evidence.

29 The Patriarch probably meant cases of purchase of the land (mostly, agricultural) by foreign nationals.

A few months later, in October 2015, the Patriarch specifically addressed female labour emigrants, claiming during another sermon that going to work abroad, and leaving behind husbands and children on their own, without someone to look after them, was “a vicious practice” (Tabula, 2015b), thus clearly and univocally suggesting that it was women’s job, and obligation, to look after the family. Interestingly, during this sermon, the Patriarch presented female emigration from Georgia as a new phenomenon, thus demonstrating a rather poor knowledge of the issue. He also (wrongly) claimed there were enough jobs in Georgia and encouraged emigrants to return and work in their own country.

Over time, the Patriarch’s position became relatively milder, although he still disapproved of women “leaving” their families. He did not explain the reason for changing his attitude, while addressing emigrants during the 2017 Diaspora forum: “Several years ago, I was persuading you to return to your country. Now I am telling you – be where you are. But, at the same time, be in your homeland. ... And I would like to thank you for your spiritual and material assistance to your homeland. You should help us create small and medium businesses. We have to do everything so that our children, who live abroad, will not forget the Georgian language, Georgian culture” (Tabula, 2017).

In 2019, revisiting the issue of emigration once again, the Patriarch finally acknowledged that “we live in a difficult time”, and while he admitted it was necessary to have a job and earn a livelihood, he emphasized that raising children should be the priority. He addressed mothers in his sermon: “[m]ay God give you strength, may God give you wisdom, may God grant that all mothers do their duty to God and the motherland” (Ambebi.ge, 2019).

Irrespective of the nature and strength of religiosity of Georgian emigrants (which is still to be researched), the position of the Patriarch could not reverse the course of labour emigration from the country. It could, however, provoke, or strengthen, migrant mothers’ feelings of guilt for leaving their child(ren) (transnational family members’ emotional reactions are discussed in Section 1.4).

Available statistical data do not provide information about the number of labour migrant mothers and children left behind in transnational families of Georgian labour migrants. According to the estimates by Victor Cebotari and his co-authors, approximately 7% of children in Georgia had a mother abroad at the time of the survey, i.e. between 2011 and 2012 (Cebotari *et al.*, 2018, p. 11). Their analysis was, however, focused only on the children between the ages of 10 and 18. Furthermore, the reliability of their data, in general, raises certain questions, as, for example, it suggests that “a short period of migration is more common than longer periods of migration” (Cebotari *et al.*, 2018, p. 11). While “short” and “longer” are not operationalized in the article, it has

been a widespread knowledge that labour emigration from Georgia is, on average, rather long-term, lasting for at least several years.

Undoubtedly, increased female labour emigration from Georgia significantly altered not only the “profile” of labour emigrants from Georgia, but had a significant impact on the sending context as well, especially on the meso- and micro-levels. The impact was particularly strong in cases when migrant mothers left behind young children, thus these families had to face a new reality of transnational parenting.

There is still a long way to go until sufficient empirical knowledge – both quantitative and qualitative – is accumulated about labour emigration from Georgia. While acknowledging the limitations of migration statistics, its main characteristics, upon which there is a high level of agreement among scholars and policymakers, can be summarized as follows:

- Large-scale labour emigration from Georgia evolved following the dissolution of the USSR and the subsequent economic collapse, as a response to profound and drastic social and economic transformations. While international labour migration was seen as a solution to the economic problems of numerous households in Georgia, the decision about emigration was conditioned by non-existence of other options to support the families.
- Reliable migration statistics are not available, especially concerning the first years of large-scale emigration. Approximately 20% of the population of the country is estimated to have emigrated from Georgia since the early 1990s. Most of them are labour emigrants, and many are undocumented.
- The nature of labour emigration from Georgia changed quite radically in the 2000s. Two most important, and interrelated, aspects of this change are the change in the direction of labour emigration, with Western European countries becoming the most popular migration destinations, and its feminization, conditioned by the increasing demand for domestic care work in the countries of Western Europe.
- Since the mid-1990s, labour emigration has had an important impact on the development of Georgia, both on macro- and micro- levels. Remittances constitute a vital source of income for many households, although they are rarely, if ever, invested in small or medium business enterprises; rather, remittances are mostly used for households’ daily consumption, educational or medical expenses, or are invested in real estate.

- Georgian female migrants employed in the domestic care sector in the foreign countries experience downward occupational mobility: although they often have quite advanced professional qualifications, they perform low-skilled jobs.

Labour emigration is believed to have played “a formative role in the economic and social life” of Georgia through the 1990s (Gerber & Torosyan, 2013, p. 1280). Through the 2010s, remittances sent by labour emigrants to their families left in Georgia have been steadily over 10% of the country’s GDP (OECD/CRRRC-Georgia, 2017, p. 55).<sup>30</sup> The share of remittances received by households in Georgia was reported to have exceeded, in 2018, foreign direct investments in total monetary value (SCMI, 2019, p. 8). These figures take into account only remittances sent through official money transfer channels, and do not account for remittances sent with acquaintances, bus drivers, etc., or brought by emigrants personally during their visits. Thus, the actual share of remittances should be estimated to be higher. On a household level, remittances are often indispensable for the families, and labour migrants are often seen as saviours.

Statistical data about migration processes is, undoubtedly, very important, as it provides a necessary frame that allows to better understand and assess the magnitude of the phenomenon. Often, however, knowledge about direct personal experiences – including experiences that gave rise to the phenomenon in the first place – tends to get lost behind numbers. Qualitative findings of the present research project based on the first-hand narratives of unique experiences of labour migrants and their children will be presented in Chapter 4, after discussing relevant theoretical insights in Chapter 2 and data collection methodology in Chapter 3.

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<sup>30</sup> In India, which is the world’s largest remittance-receiving country, over 83 billion U.S. dollars of remittances received in 2020 constituted only 2.7% of the country’s GDP; in China, the second-largest remittance-receiving country – 0.5% (World Bank, n.d.).

## CHAPTER 2. Four theoretical insights into understanding transnational motherhood

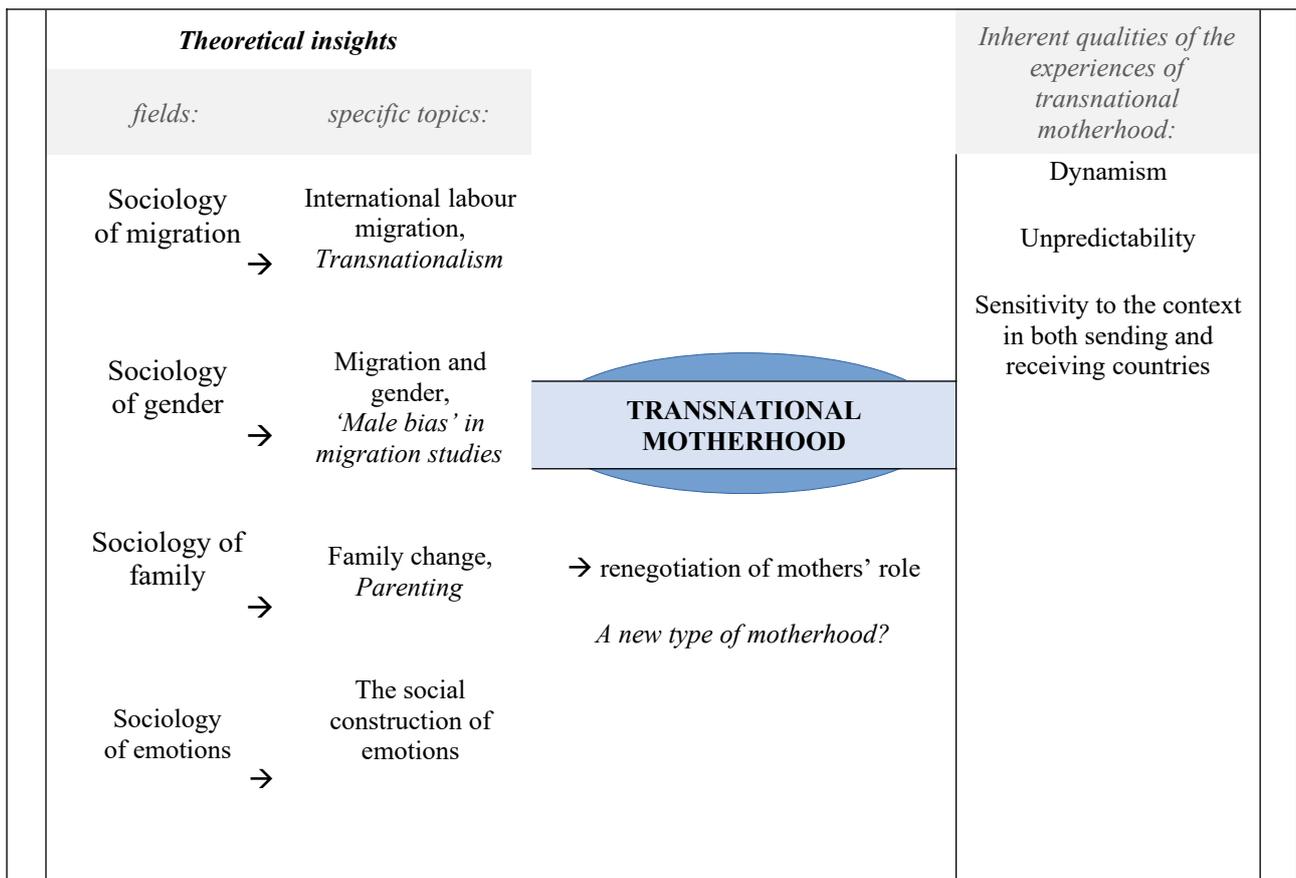
Almost three decades ago, Douglas S. Massey and his co-authors posited that, at the time, there was no “single, coherent theory of international migration” (Massey *et al.*, 1993, p. 432). Although they have proposed in their paper “an accurate and comprehensive theory of international migration for the twenty-first century” (ibid), migration processes have become, and keep becoming, increasingly complex since. It would be unrealistic, and unreasonable, to expect that a single theory or approach, no matter how sophisticated, will be able to analyse all the aspects of international migration processes (Brubaker, 1991; Portes, 1997).

Considering the complexity of international migration, a single discipline cannot explain it thoroughly. The interdisciplinary approach is, thus, indispensable to study migration processes (Gabaccia, 1992). According to Katharine Donato and her co-authors, sociologists represent the largest group of scholars in migration studies (Donato *et al.*, 2006, p. 17); in addition, Boyd & Grieco (2003) list anthropology, political science, economics, demography, law, and history as disciplines that study migration, and this list can be expanded further. When it comes to empirical data collection, mixed-method approaches (often requiring interdisciplinary research teams) are most suitable (Donato *et al.*, 2006, p. 4). Such practice exists, although is not widespread; interdisciplinary social theories addressing international migration are, on the other hand, extremely rare. The inherent multidisciplinary nature of migration studies in general, and, specifically, of international labour migration, leads to numerous theoretical approaches attempting to explain migration processes from the perspectives of these various disciplines. A variety of conceptual models, then, inevitably results in “highly fragmented” knowledge (Piché, 2013, p. 142), or inconsistent findings.

Complexity and the interdisciplinary nature of migration processes are not the only challenges that researchers face. International migration processes are very dynamic, and thus have to be observed in constant evolution. They develop in reaction to events and changes (political, economic, environmental, technological, personal, etc.) of various scales, at local, national or international levels; often, the direction(s) of their development cannot be predicted. These dynamism and unpredictability require constant updates of both empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, certain aspects of migration processes can be extremely sensitive, or deeply personal, which adds to difficulties faced by migration scholars, and which largely explain why international migrants’ individual life stories and, particularly, their emotional experiences were almost completely ignored until very recently.

Several relatively recent developments in the study of international labour migration are of essential importance for the present thesis and will be discussed in the Sections that follow. An analytic perspective of “migrant transnationalism” and theories of self-selection of international labour migrants with close transnational ties with their communities of origin aims to explain the latest progressions in the process of human migration (Section 2.1). Gender perspectives in migration, which are becoming increasingly influential, focus on different experiences of male and female migrants, also conceptualizing recent trends of feminization of labour migration (Section 2.2). Section 2.3 will be focused on changing motherhood practices in transnational families, that are of central interest to the present research project. When studying transnational motherhood, it is impossible to avoid very close attention to emotional aspects of migration experiences, which, so far, have been largely overlooked by migration scholars (Section 2.4). Thus, multiple theoretical approaches, influenced by various branches of sociology, are inevitable in the study of international migration. Key components of the analytical framework employed in the present research project to study transnational motherhood are presented schematically in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key components of an analytical framework to study transnational motherhood



## 2.1. Transnational migration and self-selection of international labour migrants

*“Transnational actors ... maintain steady relations with each other (i.e., providing economic, social, and emotional support and keeping family relations, loyalties, and obligations alive) across borders.”* (Guarnizo et al., 2003, p. 1213)

Mass migrations throughout the 1900s, combined with the processes of globalization, shaped a new world, radically different from that of agrarian society, where “most people lived and died within a few kilometres of where they were born, spending all their lives within a community of friends and relatives they knew personally” (Massey, 2002, p. 12). Very first theories of international migration often assumed that once settled in the host societies, migrants no longer looked back at their past, people left behind in the sending communities, hence scholars did not ask how migrants’ relations with their communities “of friends and relatives” were developing after migration. These questions came into the spotlight in the 1990s, when more specific theories of transnational migration evolved, originally – within the field of anthropological studies of migration (Glick Schiller, 2009, p. 27). Long-term international migrants who maintained close ties with their countries of origin even decades after their emigration were seen by scholars of migrant transnationalism as a rather distinctive phenomenon, particularly important in the context of immigration to the United States, where, despite its “melting pot” assimilation ideology, immigrants were not necessarily willing to completely “blend” into the host society; neither did they cease contacts with people and places they had left behind.

The newly emerged transnational perspective on migration “acknowledged not only the multiplicity of cross-border ties maintained by migrants but also sought to understand the implication of these transnational connections for all of the localities and states to which the migrants were connected” (Glick Schiller, 2009, p. 28). As influential migration scholars noted, new theories of transnational migration essentially gave name to realities that already existed; it would be hard to object that “[t]ransnationalism represents a novel perspective, not a novel phenomenon” (Portes, 2003, p. 874). It may have taken long months for former Polish peasants in America to hear back from their families left behind in rural Poland, but their migration experience, recounted by Thomas and Znaniecki in the late 1910s, not only influenced sociological thought well beyond migration studies, but was one of the first known accounts of (proto-)transnational migration experience (Wiley, 1986).

It can be claimed that the transnational perspective challenged the status-quo in migration studies, adding to the complexity of the field, but also leading to its further development. Importantly, this new perspective spotlighted specific experiences of migrant transnationalism that

had been largely overlooked in the previous academic discourse. According to Waldinger and Fitzgerald, social scientists who were studying transnational migration were “looking for new ways to think about the connections between “here” and “there,” as evidenced by the interest in the many things called *transnational*. ... Observing that migration produces a plethora of connections spanning home and host societies, these scholars proclaim the emergence of transnational communities” (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 1177).

Despite the short history of the transnational perspective in migration studies, some significant changes in the understanding of transnational practices can be highlighted, that are relevant to the focus of the present research project. When the concept of transnationalism was first applied to the studies of international migration, it was almost exclusively used in the political context (e.g. Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1995; Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003), with a particular interest toward its impact, both actual and potential, on cross-border political processes, and, specifically – international migrants’ formal involvement in these processes (e.g. voting; adherence to grassroots movements; financial or other types of support to political parties in their countries of origin). Gradually, though, studies of migrant transnationalism inevitably included a wider range of processes and focused on people for whom “the daily context of their lives, the resources on which they depend, and their patterns of decision making are shaped by their relations with people who are geographically distant, embedded in other nation-states and governed through diverse concepts of citizenship” (Glick Schiller, 1995, p. 31). Researchers realized that, when discussing transnationalism in the context of international migration, a wide range of non- or apolitical processes and actors were to be considered.<sup>31</sup> Social and political activism may have had importance in the lives of international migrants, but, like all people, most of them would rather continue to be involved in, and prioritize events in their personal lives, involving their families and friends. As Guarnizo’s and his co-authors’ quantitative findings convincingly demonstrated in the early 2000s, only about 1/6<sup>th</sup> of Colombian, Dominican and Salvadorian immigrants to four US cities (corresponding to their major migration destinations: New York City, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and Providence, Rhode Island)<sup>32</sup> reported in the winter of 1997-98 to have been engaged in transnational political activities in their countries of origin, i.e. electoral participation, membership in a political party, financial support of these parties, or involvement in political campaigns. About

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31 If a broad definition of political processes is applied, many aspects of contemporary life can be viewed as influenced by political processes at least to some degree. Here, a narrow understanding of politics and political processes is applied, i.e. processes directly linked to formal aspects of political organization.

32 The authors claimed that the survey results were “representative of each immigrant nationality in its principal areas of concentration” (Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003, p. 1223).

twice as much, up to a third of immigrants, were involved in either regular or occasional non-electoral activism (e.g., were members of a hometown civic association, financially supported civic projects in their communities of origin or made donations to charity organizations sponsoring projects in their home countries),<sup>33</sup> leading the authors to conclude that their finding “contrasts markedly with past ethnographic descriptions of transnationalism as a form of political action adopted by entire immigrant communities” (Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003, p. 1225). This work was an important milestone in the studies of migrant transnationalism, contributing to the “depoliticization” of the field, thus – promoting attention to its non-political aspects, including transnational family relations.

As regards immigrants’ integration into the host society, theories of transnational migration challenged long-established theories of assimilation that dated back to the Chicago School heritage and were mostly influenced by the pre-WWII experience of immigration to the United States.<sup>34</sup> The concept of assimilation has certainly developed further over the following decades; according to one of the most recent revisions, “assimilation can be defined as the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 863). Robert Park’s original understanding of the chain of “contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation” of immigrants to the U.S. society has been subsequently questioned by many migration scholars, irrespective of whether they shared the analytic perspective of transnationalism or not (e.g. Alba & Nee, 1997). Assimilation, as re-interpreted by proponents of migrant transnationalism, meant the inevitable, complete and, often, irreversible cancellation of immigrants’ original identities, including their ethnic belonging and their parental ties with people in their country of origin.<sup>35</sup> Such a scenario, though, did not seem probable, or even sensible, except for some, rather limited occurrences or specific historical conditions. Although every migrant’s integration process is a highly personal experience,<sup>36</sup> normally, immigrants would not entirely quit their relationships with their countries of origin and,

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33 According to the authors, “[n]onelectoral activities of this type are political because they influence local and regional governments by determining which public projects receive migrants’ financial support” (Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003, p. 1223).

34 It may be true that the existing theories of assimilation are most relevant for the U.S. context, but these theories cannot be ignored for any other context where large scale and long-term immigration processes are in place.

35 There is an important distinction between assimilation as a state policy and as a social process (see Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 827). The latter is of interest for the present thesis.

36 Theories of assimilation were, however, mostly developed at a group level (e.g. Gordon in Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 830).

in particular, with their relatives who stayed behind, despite any pressure to assimilate they may have experienced.

The existence of neighbourhoods like Little Italy and Chinatown in New York City, as well as in other cities from Sydney to London and to San Francisco, strongly supports this claim and, often, evidences the persistence of transnational ties across generations. Even second- and third-generation immigrants often still have transnational ties – linguistic, emotional, cultural, social, even political – with their parents’ and grandparents’ sending societies. At the same time, when speaking of long-term or permanent international migration, it would be impossible to deny that, to a degree, immigrants’ assimilation does take place, although it is rarely “absolute”. Furthermore, basic indicators of immigrants’ assimilation, such as a certain level of fluency in receiving country’s language, participation in social and cultural activities in the receiving community, good housing conditions, children’s educational attainment etc., are indisputable indicators of a successful migration experience.

Thus, from the perspective of the theories of transnational migration, assimilation, understood as an outright cancellation of immigrants’ parental ties with their relatives left behind, is neither the goal nor an inevitable outcome of international migration, even when such migration is permanent. Staying in close touch with people or formal organizations in their home countries does not contradict immigrants’ ability to successfully adapt, or even assimilate to life in the country of destination. It would be reasonable to claim that assimilation and transnationalism theories address different, although often interrelated aspects of migrants’ experiences.

Despite the relative novelty of the concept of transnational migration, it has been at the centre of rather intense debates during the last decades. Although the transnational perspective was becoming increasingly convincing and influential, development of a strong and coherent theory of migrant transnationalism proved to be a difficult task. After almost two decades since its emergence, the field was characterized as still a “developing” one (Glick Schiller, 2009, p. 18), facing challenges of various kinds. Empirical proof of the relative unimportance of the political dimension of transnationalism, which was originally hypothesized to be its major domain, accounts for some of these challenges. Furthermore, the emerging theories of transnational migration could not entirely dissociate from the already established theories of international migration, nor could they ignore the increasing interdisciplinarity of migration studies.

Once emerged, the new field of migrant transnationalism proved to be appealing for scholars in various disciplines, but a coordinated approach was lacking, thus interest from numerous disciplines did not lead to a sound interdisciplinary approach. This partially explains why, when

addressing transnational experiences of international migrants from the perspective of different branches of social sciences, studies of transnationalism struggled to find their specific and unique “niche”. Quite often, researchers questioned the existing vocabulary in the field of international migration studies, and were tempted to alter the terminology, e.g. by suggesting using new terms that, however, did not change the concepts’ meaning – a practice that was assessed as “unwise” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 863; see also Levitt *et al.*, 2003, p. 571). Similar to terminological confusion, theoretical concepts adopted by researchers of different academic backgrounds in the early 2000s were also lacking clarity and coherence, “mounting theoretical ambiguity and analytical confusion” regarding the very concept of transnationalism (Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003, p. 1212; see also Collins, 1988, p. 244).<sup>37</sup> Insufficient knowledge about the actual types of transnational practices of either public or personal nature within different migrant populations also hindered the development of the field.

Initially, knowledge about transnationalism in international migration and initial theories developed in this field were based on case studies and qualitative empirical evidence which was not possible to generalize and, thus, did not provide reliable knowledge about the spread of the processes described. Representative quantitative data about transnational migration is still difficult to obtain, due to the very nature of migration processes.<sup>38</sup> Cases of both solo and family migration were of interest from the perspective of migrant transnationalism.

As it often happened in social sciences before, focuses on macro- vs micro-levels of sociological inquiry resulted in different understandings of the very nature of social processes. Historically, a macro-approach was more characteristic for sociology: “[m]ost of the things that sociologists think are important to explain are macro: why does revolution or economic development happen, what is the shape of organizations or communities, what proportion of the populace gets what (or gets deprived) in the realm of power, wealth, status and so on” (Collins, 1988, p. 244); the nature, and effects of transnational migration can be certainly added to the examples listed by Collins. The importance and even essentiality of the macro-approach cannot be questioned, but its absolute supremacy is obstructive for sociology, if it results in disregard for human experiences, including subjective perceptions of these experiences, as well as for human

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37 Antonio (1991) summarized contemporary challenges of development of new theories in the social sciences: ““Theorizing,” today, is too easily confused with robotic application of abstract methodological principles, with writing about poorly read and undigested texts, with mechanical adherence to empirical or normative doctrines, and especially with airy flights from disharmony through too-easy schematic syntheses of contradictory positions” (Antonio, 1991, p. 162).

38 This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1).

interaction developing at the micro-level: “[o]ur lives are micro. Whatever human experience is, high points, low points and every other existential dimension, it happens to us in micro-situations” (Collins, 1988, p. 244).<sup>39</sup> While international labour migration can, and should be studied at the macro-level, many of the migrants’ experiences of transnationalism, their emotional belonging to two different “places” are lived by migrants in “micro-situations”; for them, migration is, primarily, an important life event of travelling “to far-away and unknown places, leaving their close families and friends behind” (Olwig, 2003, p. 799). As Guarnizo *et al.* (2003) demonstrated, for migrants themselves, the importance of their cross-border relationships lies, primarily, in their personal, not institutional facet.

Thus, the original claim of the theorists of transnationalism, according to which people involved in transnational relations “see themselves as acting together to constitute, strengthen, overthrow, or liberate a homeland” (Glick Schiller, 2009, p. 33), has probably been its weakest point. Not surprisingly, many aspects of migrant transnationalism are currently considered without any reference to political processes. Scholars discuss different “transnational spaces” that can be either private or public (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002, p. 778), focusing on the individual/household level or organizational/institutional one. In either case, transnationalism is primarily seen as “a grassroots phenomenon” (Portes, 2003, pp. 875-876), reflecting both its strong local focus and its spontaneity and, most importantly, no formal obligation of any transnational liaisons. The concept of migrant transnationalism is closely connected with the concepts of globalization and multiculturalism.<sup>40</sup> The scholarship on transnationalism continues to develop, gradually expanding to include more spheres of social life, e.g. religious practices (Levitt *et al.*, 2003). It would certainly benefit, though, if it managed to overcome the abovementioned terminological and analytical confusion.

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39 A different statement, claiming the importance of framing personal experiences within a broader context of social reality, and highlighting the impact that the latter has on micro-/human experiences, would be equally justified, though. Debates between the advocates of micro- vs macro- approaches in sociology did not always proceed amicably, particularly since micro-level sociological theories gained authority after the 1970s and, as Ritzer claimed, were becoming more influential (Ritzer, 1985, p. 96). Some sociologists who focused on the macro-level analysis did not welcome, or accept the micro-level approach, as they considered it unscientific, and claimed it could lead to “theoretical impoverishment” (Ritzer, 1985, p. 90). Coser (1975) went further, referring to phenomenology and ethnomethodology as an “orgy of subjectivism” (quoted in Ritzer, 1985, p. 90).

40 To date, there is still a certain confusion about the specific nature of the relationship between the processes of transnationalism, on the one hand, and the ones of globalization, multiculturalism, development, etc., on the other hand.

Overall, the transnational migration perspective, as considered in the present thesis, is seen as a further development of theories of international migration in the context of globalization, where “capital, labor, goods, commodities, and information are increasingly mobile and transnational, yielding a new internationalization of both production and culture” (Harvey, 1990 quoted in Massey, 2002, p. 15). While the very phenomena explored by this perspective were not new, it certainly enriched the knowledge about international migration, adding a new “layer” of analysis of social, economic and political processes associated with migration across state borders. In addition to local, national, international and global levels, this perspective introduced a transnational level focused on continued and profound relations between individual and institutional actors in sending and receiving countries, made universally accessible thanks to modern communication technologies. And while institutional- and individual-level transnational processes are, often, closely interrelated, relatively understudied transnational processes and relations developing on an individual level are of primary interest for the present thesis.

Until very recently, theories of transnationalism largely overlooked aspects of transnational family relations. In 2003, a special issue of the *International Migration Review*, *Transnational Migration: International Perspectives* discussed quite thoroughly political and economic aspects of transnational migration, but did not mention transnational families as a specific field of study. However, Karen Fog Olwig argued in her contribution to this issue that there was “a need for broader, more exploratory studies of sociocultural aspects of migration that may analyze sociocultural systems in relation to migrants' life trajectories and fields of interpersonal ties, as well as the national and transnational structures that they encounter in the course of engaging in migratory movements” (Olwig, 2003, p. 808). Transnational family experiences, which represent the most intense of migrants' interpersonal ties, are of foremost importance for the majority of international migrants, irrespective of the type of migration; this is especially so for labour migrants who leave their families behind, as their entire migration “projects” develop in response to their families' needs, and are undertaken with the goal to improve their families' conditions. Thus, the present thesis argues that families represent the major “transnational space” around which labour migrants' lives evolve, and on which their affective and economic interests are focused.

Compared with labour migrants who do not have children, those who leave their children behind face additional emotional, social and economic challenges. Considering that many parents (arguably, their absolute majority), following deeply institutionalized cultural patterns of family life, would not consider long-term separation from their children, hence, they will reject the very idea of labour migration, or postpone it until the children are old enough, parents – and, particularly,

mothers – who do move abroad for employment purposes are, undoubtedly, a very particular, highly self-selected group.

Self-selection is characteristic for any type of migration, as specific preconditions and personal qualities are indispensable to carry through a migration “project”. Self-selection is particularly relevant when labour migration is concerned. Systematic ways of self-selection of both internal and international labour migrants have been addressed in migration theories predominantly from the economic perspective, focusing on migrants’ earnings and “productivity” (Borjas, 1987; Moraga, 2011). A substantial amount of work on the self-selection of international migrants is based on historical data (e.g. Abramitzky *et al.*, 2012).

Mechanisms of migrants’ self-selection differ depending on the situation in both sending and receiving countries; they also change over time. There can be no doubt, though, that labour migrants do not represent a random “sample” of the adult population of the sending countries – and, arguably, this is particularly true for labour migrant mothers who leave their children behind.

Various models have been elaborated to explain and, to the possible extent, predict migrant selectivity: human-capital model, Roy model, asymmetric information model, temporary migration model, and non-economic determinants model (Borjas, 1987; Chiswick, 1999), to name the most influential ones. All these models are based on quantitative data and, as mentioned, almost exclusively focus on labour migrants’ skills, work performance and earnings before migration, comparing these with expected economic “outcomes” of migration. However, models that were elaborated to explain migrant selectivity achieve their goal only partially. Researchers often reach inconsistent or even contradictory conclusions about how migrants’ characteristics compare to those of non-migrants, and whether migrants have been selected “favourably”, positively (suggesting that the indicators such as skills, income, etc., of those who migrate surpass those of non-migrants) or, on the contrary, negatively. The models’ most obvious limitation is caused by the lack of availability of the relevant data: reliable information on very specific characteristics of both migrant and non-migrant populations is required, often – based on longitudinal data. In many migration contexts, such information is not available. When the data is available, extremely serious efforts should be taken to accurately operationalize the variables included in the models, and the very definition of (labour) migrants as well, specifying the length of migration, relevant geographical aspects, etc. The experience accumulated to date demonstrates that these models are very sensitive about the variables included, and about the migration contexts as well. For example, potential migrants’ household composition, or distance between sending and receiving countries may significantly influence the results (Belot & Hatton, 2012, p. 1125). A close to an infinite number of

potentially relevant variables can be included in the regression models to better understand migrant selectivity, but this will almost certainly result in a large number of findings pulling in opposite directions (Moraga, 2011; Belot & Hatton, 2012). The complexity of the migration processes, as well as the existence of various types of migration flows caused by migrants' different exigencies further complicate the understanding of the processes and mechanisms of self-selection of migrants.

A particularly important limitation of the models explaining migrant selectivity relates to the existence of unobservable characteristics of both migrants and non-migrants that potentially affect migrant selectivity, but cannot be measured empirically. Recent estimates suggest that, at least in the context of migration between the developed countries, unobservable characteristics play the dominant role in shaping the selectivity of migrants, hence reliance only on those characteristics that can be observed and measured “would strongly underestimate positive self-selection” (Borjas *et al.*, 2019, p. 168; see also Moraga, 2011). Many of the unobservable characteristics go beyond economic indicators. It is, thus, imperative to consider international labour migrants' individual, personal qualities as well, that make them different from the non-migrant population and prompt their migration decisions. Both historically and presently, it may be true that, in many cases, those who emigrate to work abroad are *the tired, the poor*<sup>41</sup> – but, numerically, much more of *the tired and the poor* population remain in the sending countries, and only a small share emigrate; in most cases, labour emigrants do not come from the poorest segments of the population of the sending countries (Asch, 1994).

Economic variables can only partially explain labour migrants' self-selection. In addition to their skills, income, assets, etc., it has been noted that, compared with non-migrants, those who migrate are, on average, more hardworking, motivated, determined, capable, also – “more able, ambitious, aggressive, entrepreneurial, or otherwise more favourably selected than similar individuals who choose to remain in their place of origin” (Chiswick, 1999, p. 181). The latter characteristics, while they are of high importance, are, however, not immediately observable and difficult, if not impossible to measure. It is, thus, unsurprising that existing knowledge about specific mechanisms of migrant selectivity is insufficient. To the possible extent, quantitative

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41 The poem "The New Colossus" (1883), displayed on the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, attributes these words to the “Mother of Exiles”: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” (quoted in Abramitzky *et al.*, 2012, p. 1832).

models explaining migrant selectivity should include individual characteristics that are possible to measure, and adjust the measurement methods to consider the unobservable ones.

Migrants' educational selectivity is particularly important from numerous points of view, and has an impact on both sending and receiving contexts.<sup>42</sup> Although the existing evidence is not unequivocal, it suggests that international labour migrants are, overall, more educated compared with the non-migrant population of their countries. Greater the barriers to migration, or its costs, migrants tend to be more educated; importantly, this finding applies to both documented and undocumented migrants (Feliciano, 2005, p. 133). Sending contexts have a strong impact on the assessments of educational selectivity: “[m]igrants from more-educated populations may be less positively selected, since the possibility that they have more schooling than the average person in their home country is not high” (Feliciano, 2005, p. 133). Educational selectivity differs by waves of migration, with the first waves composed of the most educated and skilled migrants (Massey *et al.*, 1993; see also Feliciano, 2005; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010); as migration networks develop and facilitate further migration, subsequent waves of migrants are, overall, characterised by lower educational selectivity.

It is not less important to consider possibilities, and the feasibility of skills transfer, i.e. to what extent would labour migrants be able to apply their professional skills in the receiving context (Belot & Hatton, 2012, p. 1123). Most often, international labour migrants experience downward professional mobility in the receiving countries' labour market, as their qualifications are no longer valid. Lack of fluency in the receiving country's language is another very common reason for labour migrants' downward professional mobility. As discussed in Chapter 1, both these reasons contribute to the downward professional mobility of labour migrants from Georgia. Even though educational credentials may not be acknowledged and “transferred” in the receiving countries' labour markets, education remains a very important factor that shapes migration experiences, as higher levels of formal education always represent a resource that provides higher opportunities to succeed; at the very least, an advanced level of education “might help to bridge the culture gap” (Belot & Hatton, 2012, p. 1114) and facilitate migrants' adaptation in the new environment.

As “it takes a tremendous amount of resources, skills, motivation, initiative, and ambition to migrate to another country” (Feliciano, 2005, p. 139), the mechanisms of migrant self-selection,

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42 Discussions of migrants' educational selectivity inevitably lead to the issue of brain drain – which is, however, relevant when highly educated professionals are considered. For the present research project, “skills drain”, rather than brain drain, would be a more relevant aspect to consider, even though, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, the absolute majority of the interviewed migrant mothers had tertiary education and professional jobs before their emigration from Georgia.

although not fully studied yet (and, often, not entirely realized and grasped by migrants themselves) lead to migration of those who (potentially) possess prerequisites and qualities that are indispensable for migration. Migrants' "special" characteristics are important not only at the stage of emigration decision, but also during their adjustment in the receiving countries (Chiswick, 1999); and for the development of transnational relations with those who stayed behind.

In addition to migrants' economic standing and their personal characteristics, migration policies in both sending and, especially, receiving countries also affect international labour migrants' selection, as does potential migrants' awareness about labour market opportunities in the receiving countries. Potential migrants cannot avoid considering these aspects while making their migration decisions; often, they have to secure at least short-term visas to be able to enter their destination country – thus, meet respective requirements. Hence, "the immigrant flow is a product not only of individual migration decisions, but also of complicated entry rules and restrictions, which obscure the underlying economic forces" (Abramitzky *et al.*, 2012, p. 1833); clearly, though, those who become subject to scrutiny by consular officers and border authorities are already a self-selected group who have made their decision about emigration from their home country.

Migrants' self-selection, thus, takes place at various levels (Belot & Hatton, 2012, p. 1105; Feliciano, 2005, p. 132); this is a complex process involving migrants themselves, but, also, their families, broader communities, national and international labour and migration policies, as well as considerations about employment opportunities in receiving countries. While each migration decision is taken at an individual level, it is influenced by broader social, economic and political factors; and when aggregated, these individual decisions form patterns that are very specific for various migration contexts. The radical shift in the direction of labour emigration from Georgia, which has changed from post-Soviet to Western European countries (Chapter 1), clearly illustrates one of such patterns that emerge from individual decisions and choices of numerous migrants.

Thus, in almost all migration contexts, international labour migrants tend to be younger and more educated compared with non-migrants. When considering personal characteristics affecting migrant self-selection, international labour migrants are believed to be more motivated, ambitious, able, more hardworking and entrepreneurial. No general hypothesis can be found, however, about the gender aspect of labour migrants' self-selection in the contemporary period. This is not surprising, considering major changes in the gender aspect of labour migration during the last decades, discussed in the following Section.

## 2.2. A gender perspective on labour migration

*“All people are equal, according to Thomas Jefferson, but all migrants are not.”*  
(Schrover & Moloney, 2013, p. 7)

281 million people, i.e. 3,6% of the world’s population were estimated to be international migrants in 2020, with Europe hosting their largest number, 86,7 million (UN DESA, 2020; Black, 2021, p. 25).<sup>43</sup> Approximately 60% of them were labour migrants – International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated their number to be 169 million in 2019 (ILO, 2021, p. 21); globally, they constituted 4,9% of the labour force of destination countries, although the situation differed considerably from one country to another (ILO, 2021, p. 20). Women comprised 41,5% of international labour migrants; this share remained quite stable during the last decade, although the absolute numbers grew from an estimated 67 million in 2013 to 70 million in 2019 (ILO, 2021, p. 21).<sup>44</sup>

Historically, international labour migration processes were seen as an exclusively male phenomenon. While respective theories appeared to be gender-neutral, they merely did not consider gender dimension; as far as primary migrants were considered, these theories were developed with solely male actors in mind. Evidence of labour migration flows where primary migrants were females was largely neglected (Pedraza, 1991; Pessar, 2000; Portes, 1997; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997), most probably because images of “female breadwinners” did not correspond to cultural and social norms in traditional societies.<sup>45</sup>

Primary female labour migrants became “visible” only in the 1970s, when, analysing specific migration flows, “scholars began to argue that gender was a constitutive element in the migration process” (Donato, 2012, p. 191) and not just a variable to consider. Increasing attention has been paid since to the gender dimension of international labour migration, female and male migrants’ different experiences, opportunities and barriers in this process.<sup>46</sup> Subsequent structural developments in the global economic system led to constantly growing involvement of women in

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43 International migrant stock increased by over 100 million people from 2000 to 2020 (Migration Data Portal, 2021a), until COVID-19 pandemic significantly hindered further increase in the number of international migrants (Black, 2021).

44 Speaking of international migrants in general, irrespective of whether they are employed or not, UN’s Population Division estimated females to comprise 48,1% of the global migrant stock in 2019 (UN DESA, 2020).

45 “Solo” female labour migrants performing domestic work in the receiving countries have been documented since the late 1800s, particularly visible in the US context (e.g. Sinke, 2006). Predominantly young and often unmarried women from poor families in various regions of Europe migrated to North America hoping to find employment there.

international labour migration as primary and, often, as solo migrants within certain migration flows,<sup>47</sup> which researchers could no longer overlook. The “male bias” in international migration studies was, thus, largely over, as gender aspects were “brought into” migration scholarship and, specifically, in transnational migration research (Pessar & Mahler, 2003).

There is currently a strong consensus among both migration scholars and policymakers that international labour migration is not a gender-neutral process. Male and female migrants have a wide range of shared experiences when they transfer to work abroad; yet, many stages of migration are different for men and women, to the degree that women’s and men’s migration experiences are increasingly viewed as “fundamentally different” (Feliciano, 2008, p. 142). Men and women can expect different benefits from migration and, on the other hand, often face gender-specific challenges. Migrant workers in general, and female migrant workers in particular, may be victims of unfair remuneration practices; female workers may also face greater challenges in balancing home and work responsibilities. While migration leads to increased vulnerability of all migrants, female migrants are considered more vulnerable compared to men, as they may be at a higher risk to suffer discrimination, including gender-based or sexual violence, or have a higher probability to become victims of trafficking.<sup>48</sup> Some sending countries may take quite radical measures to mitigate such risks: there have been numerous reports from Southwest Asia, where governments periodically restrict or directly ban certain types of emigration, ostensibly – in order to ensure migrants’ safety. Importantly, “migration bans have been applied, almost exclusively, to women migrant domestic workers [MDWs], who are widely perceived to be at greater risk of harm due to the circumstances of their employment” (Shivakoti, Herderson & Withers, 2021, p. 2; see also Malit & Youha, 2013; UNFPA, 2006).<sup>49</sup>

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46 Interestingly, the first theories of transnationalism in migration were developed approximately at the same time (Sinke, 2006).

47 According to the existing estimates, the overall share of female international migrants has not changed globally during the last 60 years (Migration Data Portal, 2021b). However, when specifically labour migration is concerned, changes may be rather substantial for certain migration flows, or certain sending or destination countries. Processes of labour emigration from Georgia (described in Chapter 1), and from other former USSR republics, may serve as such examples, with evident trends of feminization of migration flows directed toward the EU countries.

48 UN’s Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) adopted in 2018 recognized these diverse risks and urged to address them globally, promoting gender-responsive migration policies (UN General Assembly, 2018).

49 Such bans, however, have been documented to lead to increased vulnerability of female migrants who were pushed to seek illegal channels to emigrate (Shivakoti, Herderson & Withers, 2021).

All labour markets have gender-specific employment sectors. Not surprisingly, a majority of female labour migrants worldwide “cluster in just a few occupations”, which are, predominantly, nursing, domestic service, hospitality sector and garment industries (Pedraza, 1991, p. 314). International Labour Organization estimated that almost 80% of female international labour migrants were employed in the service sector; the respective share for men was estimated to be much lower, 56,4% (ILO, 2021, p. 24).

Virtually all societies see men as “natural” breadwinners, thus when they earn relatively high income as labour migrants to support their families left behind, it is usually taken as given. Female international labour migrants’ earnings, on the other hand, get controversial attention. Economic security provided by their income is usually seen by scholars, policymakers or social activists as an empowering experience, not only from the economic point of view, but in a broader sense as well (Bachan, 2018; Foner, 1975; Miller, 2019; Zurabishvili *et al.*, 2018). Labour migration significantly alters migrant women’s economic role; often, they not only support their families during the entire duration of their migration, but, also, make considerable investments in real estate in the sending countries. The economic success of labour migration is, however, often accompanied by difficult social and emotional challenges. Analysing female migration from Mexico to the U.S., Curran and Rivero-Fuentes (2003) argued that, compared with men, women faced more barriers both before and during emigration, as their emigration from Mexico did not fit into traditional societies’ expectations about women’s role; as discussed in the following Section, this issue becomes particularly acute, and delicate, for migrant mothers. According to some studies, emigration causes higher stress for women than for men (Salgado de Snyder, 1987, quoted in Pedraza, 1991, p. 321). The mental well-being of either female or male international labour migrants is, so far, understudied, primarily because of the sensitivity of the issues involved.

While reviewing existing studies on the economic participation of migrant women in various destination countries, Rajjman & Semyonov (1997) reached two important conclusions: compared with immigrant men, “economically active immigrant women face greater hardships in the labor market,” especially when professional, high-status jobs are considered (p. 109). The studies reviewed by Rajjman & Semyonov also suggest that socioeconomic situation, as well as disadvantages experienced by immigrant women, differ by their country of origin, with women from less developed countries being the most disadvantaged in the receiving countries’ labour markets (Rajjman & Semyonov, 1997); the same, however, might be true for immigrant men as well.

Female labour migrants may experience double, or even triple disadvantage in the receiving countries’ labour market. Being immigrants may have a negative impact on their employment

prospects; in addition, being women may have a similar impact. Belonging to certain racial groups or coming from certain sending countries which are considered to be less developed, often adds a third “layer” to disadvantages experienced by female labour migrants (Boyd, 1984; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997; UNFPA, 2006). Studies also suggest that downward occupational mobility is more pronounced for migrant women than it is for men (Raijman & Semyonov, 1997, p. 116). Female labour migrants are rarely, if ever, proficient enough in the receiving countries’ language to consider relatively high-status female-dominated occupations, e.g. teachers or clerks (Raijman & Semyonov, 1997, p. 120).

Unlike male migrants, female international labour migrants may enjoy certain advantages when employed as live-in care workers. They usually can work for many years and, sometimes, decades even if undocumented, without running the risk of being deported. Their working arrangements also help them maximize their savings, as, normally, they would not have any rent-related expenses. At the same time, while having convenient arrangements from financial and legal perspectives, live-in care workers often face difficult emotional challenges and feel isolated at their workplace. As ILO claimed, “domestic workers experience a degree of vulnerability that is unparalleled to that of other workers” (UNFPA, 2006, p. 51). Their working hours tend to be very long and, sometimes, unregulated; their social life is, often, very limited. If undocumented, they would not be able to travel to visit their families during vacations (and some may not have formal vacations altogether).

Convincing evidence demonstrates that male and female labour migrants are characterized not only by different migration behaviour in general, but, also, by very different remittance behaviour. Overall, women are believed to be “better”, more efficient remitters, as they remit more reliably, more regularly, and send home a higher percentage of their income – not only thanks to their housing arrangements, particularly when they are live-in care workers, but also because they tend to have much less unforeseen or uncontrolled expenses compared with men (Abrego & LaRossa, 2009; Ambrosini, 2015; Le Goff, 2016; Osaki, 1999; Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010). Furthermore, studies also found that women were more active in sending to their families parcels with gifts, items of clothing, medicines, etc. (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 447),<sup>50</sup> suggesting their fuller involvement in caring at distance about their loved ones.<sup>51</sup>

While societies never opposed men’s labour emigration, the attitudes often changed when emigration of women as primary labour migrants was concerned. Notwithstanding vital importance

50 Vietti (2019) provided detailed description of how the business of sending parcels from Italy to Moldavia was organized.

51 This aspect is discussed further in the following Section.

of female labour migrant's remittances to their families, traditional societies (or patriarchal segments in less traditional societies) may not welcome women's and, particularly, mothers' emigration and stigmatize female migrants as, from their point of view, women's emigration challenges and, potentially, threatens many aspects of a traditional social structure of "masculine domination" (Bourdieu, 2001). Some societies, including the Philippines which has a long history of female labour emigration, are characterized by particularly strong negative attitudes: "Although the prolonged absence of either a father or a mother leads to emotional costs, including emotional distance, in the family, the transnational family of women working outside the Philippines is often construed as more pathological" (Parreñas; 2001; pp. 382-383). A majority of female international labour migrants become breadwinners for their families, which inevitably changes their, as well as their husbands' position in the families. Furthermore, compared with non-migrant women, migrant women are more likely to take important decisions on behalf of the family, noncompliant with the idea of being a "second sex" (de Beauvoir, 2018) – which, again, may be unacceptable for a patriarchal mindset.

Although the situation varies by specific societies, globally, women tend to be responsible for more housework and childcare tasks than do men (Eurostat, 2020), thus when women emigrate, it has a profound impact on the division of tasks within households. Gender roles in female labour migrants' households change far beyond the economic sphere, especially when childcare is concerned. Women's emigration, thus, may be interpreted by opponents as an abandonment of their families, as women can no longer take personal care of family members left behind. Migrant mothers leaving behind young child(ren) represent the most controversial scenario of female labour migration, discussed further in the following Section.<sup>52</sup>

Women's international migration has a more profound social impact on the sending counties than does men's emigration, as women contribute more to an exchange of ideas and customs between sending and receiving countries, acting, to a certain degree, as "envoys of globalization". Women are more inclined to "transfer" social remittances (opinions, knowledge, new skills, behaviour patterns), that potentially influence traditional attitudes and practices in sending societies (Levitt, 1998). It can be claimed, overall, that women's active participation in international labour

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52 This issue has recently reached a literally cosmic level in the public discourse in Italy, when, just days before her second space mission in April 2022, female astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti was asked by a journalist about her childcare arrangement while she'll be on the space station (which, in a certain sense, can be seen as an analogue of labour migration). "Would anyone have ever asked such a question a male [astronaut]?" – was the reaction in the media (Pizzimenti, 2022).

migration as primary migrants has significant consequences non only for their families' well-being, but also for social and cultural life in sending countries.

When emergency periods declared in various countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic end, it would be reasonable to expect that the rate of female labour migration will resume its growth, as developed countries will likely need more immigrants as domestic workers and care workers for the ageing population. This work is universally believed to be best performed by women. Two different structural factors in the major sending societies also support this expectation: (a) in the following years, it would not be realistic to expect the economic situation in many sending countries to improve significantly, and to ensure employment of potential international migrants locally, thus labour emigration will continue to be a predictable and unavoidable option for many families; and (b) women in sending countries are becoming increasingly autonomous, influential in family decision making processes and get increased access to their families' financial resources, which can help them finance their migration. Relations between the members of transnational families will inevitably alter, and all family members will need to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities. Relationships between spouses may be put to the test, as well as relationships between migrant parents and young children left behind. Women's response, both rational and emotional, to their migration experience, with a very high probability, will depend on whether or not they leave behind their children.

### 2.3. Motherhood and distance

*“[T]raditional notions of mothering haunt migrant women transnationally.”*  
(Parreñas, 2001, p. 387)

Loretta Baldassar confidently claimed that “[a]ll migrations result in fractured family and community histories as the migrants and the stay-behinds experience a variety of breaks and limitations on their relationships” (Baldassar, 2015, p. 83). In a similar vein, transnational families are occasionally referred to as “split households” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 363).<sup>53</sup> Following Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Maurizio Ambrosini described a transnational family as “a post-industrial household structure with preindustrial values” (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 455), referring to dissonances that seem to be inevitable in its functioning. Scholarship on transnational migration appears to be convinced about rather pessimistic prospects for families divided by state borders, voicing a strong perception of the inevitability of breaks, fractures, splits, separations, estrangement between the

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<sup>53</sup> If discussing specifically Philippine context, “transnational households may be considered “abnormal,” called “broken homes,” and therefore viewed as a social and cultural tragedy” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 381).

family members, etc. Of many possible aspects of transnational family relationships, the present thesis is focused on motherhood practices, a particularly sensitive issue. If transnational families cannot avoid being “fractured”, is transnational motherhood destined to fail in every family with a migrant mother? Does a “normal” motherhood end after mothers’ emigration? Is the loss of the mother-child bond inevitable, thus becoming a price to pay for separation between labour migrant mothers and their children; and is such a loss permanent?

To answer these questions, a traditional concept of motherhood is first discussed in Section 2.3.1., followed by a review of a relatively modest body of scholarship on transnational motherhood based on the available empirical evidence worldwide, in Section 2.3.2.

### 2.3.1. The way things were: a traditional ideology of motherhood

Motherhood is universally understood as one of the most profound human experiences, which represents a major – if not **the** major – aspect of any mother’s personality, “the centrepiece of female identity” (Hochschild, 2008, p. 48). Societies, including numerous mothers, often define womanhood as motherhood (Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011, p. 13), implying that a women cannot be “complete” unless she becomes a mother. Motherhood is seen as a source of genuine happiness, that gives mothers a major life-long purpose, which is often complemented by a higher social status and deep respect due to the very fact of being a mother (De Tona, 2011, p. 105).

In truth, the concept of motherhood is highly ideologized in any society, although it is rarely acknowledged so. “Motherhood”, “maternal love” are concepts (and experiences) that are, usually, considered unethical, even immoral to challenge. Like any other ideology, though, mythologized motherhood offers a one-sided and thus biased perspective; worse yet, it may be used to impose social control on mothers.

Following a long-established tradition rooted in religious systems, motherhood is seen as sacred – but only as far as it is in accordance with the prevalent social, legal, religious norms. For centuries, mothers giving birth to illegitimate children were disgraced and dishonoured across the globe; often, so were their children as well. The enchantment and magic of the myth of motherhood, its sanctity did not apply to them (de Beauvoir, 2018). Furthermore, within the traditional ideology of motherhood, difficulties that may accompany the experience of being a mother are, usually, ignored. These difficulties, however, exist, and can be both relatively simple and self-resolving (sleep deprivation, fatigue), or, sometimes, serious (loneliness, isolation, depression) (Ambrosini & Stanghellini, 2012).

Throughout human history, the concept of motherhood has been widely used for the purposes of religious, national and/or ethnic propaganda, especially in turbulent historical periods, and

Georgia was never an exception (Image 1). Long before the emergence of the field of sociology of the family, numerous works of art, both classic and contemporary, aimed to interpret the topic of motherhood, often romanticizing, heroizing and idealizing it. Modern art, literature, as well as contemporary entertainment industry also took a keen interest in the topic of motherhood.<sup>54</sup>

Image 1. “Mother of Kartli” statue in Tbilisi, Georgia<sup>55</sup>



The monumental statue by sculptor Elguja Amashukeli was installed in 1958 on the top of the hills overlooking Tbilisi. It was made of wood and, according to the original plan, had to be a temporary decoration to celebrate Tbilisi’s 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, it quickly became symbolic of Tbilisi and Georgia, and was never removed.<sup>56</sup> The statue is widely believed to represent Georgia and the (stereotypical) Georgian character, as the woman is, symbolically, welcoming friends with a cup of wine in her left hand, at the same time holding a sword in her right hand, indicating her readiness to fight enemies. Interestingly, the statue has three “sisters” in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan; in the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, and in the capital of Albania, Tirana (Tabula, 2018). All these statues are of pronounced Socialist realism style. The Georgian statue is the oldest of the four, and the only one with the “welcoming” motive of the cup of wine. In the context of this Section, it is important to reiterate that in all these cases female, not male figures have been chosen to symbolize the countries, and all of them are referred to as “mothers”, suggesting the utmost importance of mothers and the strength of the concept of motherhood in respective cultures and traditions.

Photo: Abeona Travel

Even in its most romanticized versions, motherhood entails strict obligations and duties, which can never escape social control. These are “culturally constructed normative ideals about kin roles and obligations that serve to maintain family and community networks” (Baldassar, 2015, p. 83). The affective side of motherhood, mothers’ love which is regarded as both the strongest and the

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<sup>54</sup> Importantly, motherhood is no longer idealized in many of its contemporary artistic interpretations. Of the recent works that focus on the challenges of motherhood, some are particularly good examples that bring forward non-traditional, difficult or even “wrong” aspects of mothers’ experiences. To name a few, Elena Ferrante’s 2006 novel, *The Lost Daughter*, and Maggie Gyllenhaal’s 2021 movie based on this novel (Brody, 2022; Li, 2022); Jessamine Chan’s 2022 novel *The School for Good Mothers* (Gilbert, 2022); as well as British TV series *Motherland* launched in 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Kartli is one of the historical regions in Georgia where the capital of the country, Tbilisi is situated. Over the course of the Georgian history, Georgia was, on occasion, identified with Karti.

<sup>56</sup> The statue was renovated in 1963, when the original wood was covered by aluminium. In the 1990s it was replaced by a copy as the original was in very poor condition.

most sacred feeling ever, is intertwined in the most complicated ways with obligations mothers have toward their children, and toward the rest of their families. Unconditional love and complete selfless devotion to her child(ren), as well self-sacrifice for children's sake are expected of mothers. A closer look reveals, though, that the claims about selflessness may be exaggerated – as Baldassar (2015) noted, explicit or implicit “generational contracts” are in place, according to which “parents care for their young who in turn care for them when they age” (p. 82). Nonetheless, many cultures openly require that mothers should always put their children's interests and needs above their own. Societies' expectations of devoted motherhood are an integral part of young girls' socialization – they grow up with an awareness and, often, with dreams that, one day, they will become mothers. By the time that day comes, they will internalize social expectations, as they have been “socialized to sacrifice their social personae, to become full-time, omnipresent, and devoted mothers” (De Tona, 2011, p. 102). Although they usually are not prepared for the possible difficulties of this experience, many of the mothers, usually, succeed: as one of Seungsook Moon's respondents put it: “You know, our [Korean] mothers are like that. They don't have their own lives and all they know are their children” (Moon, 2003, p. 849).

In a traditional family structure, fathers are expected to be breadwinners, while mothers usually have a central role when it comes to childcare and daily management of family life. To various degrees in different parts of the world, but it is mothers' duty, globally, to give children not only love and affection, but also to take physical care and ensure their well-being: feed them, keep them clean, organize their daily tasks, talk with them, comfort them, provide educational support, take care of their health, etc. The traditional culture of childcare is highly gendered: fathers' episodic involvement or periods of absence are, largely, acceptable, while mothers' – are not, as they are seen as primary caregivers. According to the traditional ideology of motherhood, a mother cannot leave her child(ren), voluntarily separate from them. Without a mother who is constantly around, children are believed to be lacking necessary care, as well as affection.

Researchers agree, however, that the very concept of a perfect – or, to simplify, that of a good mother – put forward by the ideology of “intensive mothering” (Hochschild, 2008) is unattainable. In real life, even the most devoted full-time mothers are not able to get close to this ideal, which often leads to frustration and feelings of guilt (Kavash, 2011). Feminists are particularly known to challenge this ideology, occasionally claiming mothers' love to be a myth, and portraying motherhood as a “form of unpaid carework” (Moon, 2003, p. 840).

Fulfilment of obligations that mothers are believed to have toward their children becomes increasingly difficult during periods of turmoil, including economic instabilities. In many countries,

urbanization and modernization led to an increase in female labour force participation within local communities. For many families, employment of both spouses was necessary to make the ends meet, so mothers were returning to work after having child(ren). Mothers' wage employment, thus – their absence from home during working hours became common, and even very patriarchal societies gradually learned to tolerate it (Levitan & Belous, 1981; Moore, 1978; Psacharopoulos & Tzannatos, 1989; Takahashi & Arai, 1989). In addition to kin networks helping working parents to take care of children (most importantly, grandparents), childcare was partially institutionalized with accessible kindergartens and schools; private babysitting practices have also developed. As a result of mothers' employment, motherhood practices were altered in many societies, but the basic postulates of the ideology of motherhood did not seem to be affected. Undoubtedly though, widespread female employment within local communities was a precondition for the possibility of the development of female labour emigration.

The relatively recent phenomenon of mothers' labour emigration, on the other hand, proved to be far more sensitive, as it contradicts more sharply with the “culturally inherited image of motherhood” (Illanes, 2010). It thus represents a bigger challenge for the traditional ideology of motherhood. Many societies, including transnational mothers and transnational children themselves, find it difficult to accept that mothers of young children leave for work to another, often – distant country for long periods of time. The traditional ideology of motherhood appears to be unequipped to “frame” transnational motherhood as, within its framework, mothers' choice to leave their children is reprehensible, yet transnational mothers' physical absence is not an equivalent of “leaving” their children, as demonstrated below.

### 2.3.2. A new vision of motherhood?

Maurizio Ambrosini refers to transnational motherhood as a “new trend” (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 441), although a few years earlier *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* devoted a special issue to the topic of transnational parenthood (Carling *et al.*, 2012).<sup>57</sup> As mentioned, families divided by state borders do not represent a new phenomenon. Similar to traditional, “mainstream” families, every single transnational family is unique; as a family type, transnational families are unquestionably different from other families, and they change over time. The most recent – and radical – of these changes took place when in addition, or instead of husbands/fathers, wives/mothers started emigrating from developing countries to work abroad, leaving their children behind, thus, becoming transnational mothers – a term they often were not even familiar with.

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<sup>57</sup> Parreñas (2001) noted that the term “transnational families” is used when mothers migrate; when migrants are fathers, though, the term “split households” is often used (pp. 361-362).

A migrant mother can no longer be “(omni)present” in her family; she will no longer cook for her children, look after them, comfort and hug them. She will depend on other people to perform these tasks. Her physical absence from home will change her central role in the family. Does this mean she becomes, or should feel like less of a mother? Would her children feel so? The most resolute adherents of the traditional ideology of motherhood reject the very concept of mothers “caring at a distance” for their children (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012); in their opinion, migrant mothers’ family members and, first of all, children will unavoidably suffer from a “care deficit”, as mothers fail to fulfil their duty to care for them. Mothers’ emigration has been labelled as a “care drain” (Ambrosini, 2015), leading, further, to the concept of “global care chains,” with female labour migrants from developing countries performing care work (babysitting or caring for the elderly) in their employers’ families in developed countries, while their own children and elderly are taken care of by someone else (Basa *et al.*, 2011; Nadasen, 2017; Parreñas, 2000; UNFPA, 2006). Employers in destination countries are, thus, seen to “extract” love and care from the women from the sending countries (Hochschild, 2008, p. 49) – a process that can be seen through the prism of “transnational forms of inequality” (Nguyen *et al.*, 2017, p. 200); as Parreñas maintained, “[t]hese labor demands squeeze domestic workers of the energy and supplies needed to provide emotional care to their own families” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 364).

One part of the scholarship about the experiences of transnational children left behind after their mothers’ emigration appears to emphasize “the often-unrecognized hardship of receiving less “love, support, attention, and affection”” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 379); for these children, remittances and gifts sent by their mothers do not seem to compensate for their mothers’ absence; rather, money is considered less important compared with affection that migrant mothers’ children lack (Parreñas, 2001). Within global care chains, migrant mothers “provide love and affection to their employer’s children in exchange for earnings that can improve the quality of life of their own children – whom they sometimes never see for many years” (UNFPA, 2006, p. 25).

Migrant mothers’ perspective, however, is often different. As labour migrants, they take the responsibility to provide for their families’ economic needs, and by doing so, they fulfil their duty as mothers. Leaving their home and their country is not their choice – they leave only because, just like their husbands, they cannot find a job in the local labour market. By emigrating, they actually increase their responsibilities, and, in a certain sense, are trying to attain an attainable goal, as they still take care of their children’s needs, including emotional ones, to the extent the distance makes it possible.

Convincing evidence of labour migrant mothers' "caring at a distance" has been found by researchers (Baldassar, 2015; Cebotari *et al.*, 2018; Gálvez, 2019; Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012; UNFPA, 2006), which suggests that concern about the well-being of transnational children may be rather exaggerated, as there is no reason to believe that they necessarily suffer, or do worse than "normal" children of their age. Various studies did not find evidence of migrant parents' children being disadvantaged, troubled "or face greater psychological difficulties. A nationwide study in the Philippines found that more children of migrants were on the school honour roll and were less likely to repeat a grade than children of non-migrants" (UNFPA, 2006, p. 33). There is, further, evidence that, even though absent from their homes, migrant women still play a decisive role when it comes to addressing the healthcare needs of their family members in their countries of origin (UNFPA, 2006, p. 30). Children, especially at an early age, are known to be able to form multiple emotional bonds, "while retaining the central importance of the mother-child bond" (Frankel, 1994, p. 86).

However, available conclusions were made based on incomplete findings, and are rather inconsistent; in many cases, either the data or the analyses performed are not entirely convincing. As mentioned in the Introduction, children's experiences in transnational families have not been studied first-hand in a systematic manner, and their perceptions are, largely, unknown. In addition, "the effect of parental migration on children left behind is not so clear cut, in part because the positive effect of remittances may be overwhelmed by the negative effects of parental absence from the home" (Antman, 2011, p. 645). It has not been possible to find a common denominator which would help compare these two types of effects.

Thus, while Ambrosini claims that children in transnational families suffer from "emotional deprivation" due to their mothers' emigration (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 441),<sup>58</sup> according to another observation, "the overall relationship between migration and children's health is positive or neutral. This finding suggests that more often than not, the benefits of migration overshadow the potential costs of separation" (Cebotari *et al.*, 2018, p. 17). Overall, it would be partial and inaccurate to conceptualize the challenges of transnational families as a binary opposition of "[g]reater family income versus disruption of the family" (Asch, 1994, p. 179), or, following Pratt (2012), as conflicts of work versus love. Improvement of their families' economic situation is labour migrants' primary goal, but their income, those "migraeuros", following Massey & Parrado (1994), have very specific meaning for the members of transnational families: this income "translates" into indispensable healthcare, housing, education, tangible prospects for a better, more secure future.

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58 According to Ambrosini, transnational children's emotional deprivation "has become the emblem of a new form of social inequality that crosses national borders" (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 441).

There is no expectation of a “disruption” of the family, rather – a belief in a stronger family that can overcome the difficulties of temporary separation.

It is also important to remember that emigration is not the only form of parent-child separation. This is not to say that transnational children do not face quite specific challenges; there is, however, evidence that children find it more difficult to deal with parents’ divorce than with the emigration of either of the parents (Cebotari *et al.*, 2018, p. 4).

Mothers’ emigration inevitably leads to the adoption of different mechanisms and concepts of care, which transnational family members develop in the process of their new experiences, “along the way”, as there are no relevant “educational” resources available. New, transnational forms of parental care and mothers’ “co-presence across distance” have been encapsulated by Baldassar (2015): “*virtual* - provided by phone conversations, skype calls and emails; *proxy* - transmitted via special objects, including gifts, photos and recipes or persons who embody the longed for loved one; *imagined* - through regular evocations of distant kin, such as daily prayers and conversations with proximate family and friends; and *physical* - achieved during visits, which are a common feature of transnational family relations” (p. 83).

Leifsen & Tymczuk (2012) introduced an important and relevant distinction between “immediate” parental care, focused on children’s survival and well-being, and “long-term projects of care, such as investment in future housing and education” (p. 226). In the context of transnational family arrangements, the latter includes the former, as migrant parents secure their children’s “immediate” needs, albeit not personally, before proceeding to long-term “projects”. It is safe to assume that labour migrant mothers prioritize the “long-term projects of care”; this choice, most probably, represents a further aspect of their selectivity (discussed above in Section 2.1), although there is, so far, no empirical evidence to support this claim. Ambrosini (2015) found the best way to summarize this line of thinking: in his words, labour migrant parents’ “affection for the children takes the form of extreme separation from them in order to provide them with a better life, feed them, give them medical care, give them better housing, finance their studies” (p. 441).

This, apparently different type of care and responsibility does not straightforwardly fit the traditional ideology of motherhood and may be fiercely rejected by its adherent, although, in essence, it does not go against it and may, in fact, represent a more “advanced” type of care, a future-oriented one. A mother who goes to work in a different country does so to fulfil her parental obligations as best as she can and, provided the absence of better options, it can be argued that she is choosing a more difficult, probably riskier path to provide for the family. She hopes to take better care of her child(ren) through provision for their needs and, potentially, ensuring their better future,

rather than taking physical care of them in the context of daily financial struggles and a few, if any prospects.

Migrant mothers may not realize that their labour migration challenges the traditional ideology of motherhood. They have no intent to rebel against it when they make a choice to emigrate for the good of their children. From the perspective of a “standard” lifestyle, transnational motherhood may contradict traditional (“normal”) models of motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 549), but migrant mothers still have the aspiration to be good mothers, and this concept may still be understood by them in rather traditional terms. After emigration, their experience helps them redefine the very concept of “care” – which, again, may not be an intentional and purposeful process. Certain families may reject a habitual understanding of “care” and develop a novel one. Motherhood practices change, but this does not suggest a disappearance of mothers’ role; neither does it mean a decrease in its importance.

By challenging the dominant ideology, even if inadvertently and involuntary, mothers’ labour emigration emphasizes the existence of a multiplicity of parental care practices – and, possibly, a potential multiplicity of ideologies of motherhood. In this sense, migrant mothers alter the traditional ideology of motherhood. Their approach is a future-oriented and forward-looking one, while the traditional ideology is focused on the present (or, rather, on the past); in traditional societies, this approach may not be understood and given support to.

Presently, the traditional ideology largely overshadows this different, forward-looking understanding of motherhood when it comes to dominant social attitudes. Narratives of “transnational mother blame” may develop in traditional societies (e.g. Gálvez, 2019; Parreñas, 2001), accusing labour migrant mothers of betrayal of their “mothers’ duty”, thus making them targets of stigmatization in their home countries’ public opinion (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 441). At the other extreme, based on the analyses of female labour emigration from Mexico, Gálvez (2019) reported migrant mothers are referred to as “national heroes” in the sending communities (p. 577).

Mothers’ central role in the families’ daily lives, including housekeeping and housework, inevitably changes after migration. Families decide about the redistribution of tasks and decide whether or not they need to call for “outside” help. Evidence from various sending countries shows fathers’ limited involvement in housework both before and after their wives’ emigration and a crucial role of the extended family (Parreñas, 2001, p. 379). Childcare is, probably, the most important aspect of transnational family life. “When a migrant mother leaves behind adolescent children, the children are often left to care for themselves. In this case, the elder daughter (or a

daughter-in-law) may have to look after younger siblings and often after fathers” (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011, p. 295-296).

A new division of tasks in transnational families does not inevitably mean, though, that mothers’ role will become less important, especially provided mothers’ new status of breadwinners. As Olwig discovered during her research of Caribbean transnational families, “a great deal of the children regarded their absent parents as an integral part of the household, where they grew up. ... [T]he household was not defined by physical residence alone, but also by economic and social presence in the domestic unit. ... [W]hile the children may miss their parents, due to the latter's physical absence in distant migration destinations, they can develop close relations to their parents and a secure sense of belonging in the family home if the parents maintain a strong social and economic presence in this home” (Olwig, 1999, p. 280; see also UNFPA, 2006, p. 33).

In certain cases, separation of labour migrant mothers from their families may last for as long as 16 years (Parreñas, 2001, p. 370), as the present research project also confirmed (Appendix 3). Long periods of separation lead to the risk of estrangement between migrant mothers and their children, to the extent that “the mother, after years of separation, tends to become a kind of step-parent, with whom the restoration of trust and intimacy is not immediate” (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 451). Various forms and levels of estrangement between transnational mothers and their children have been reported in the literature.<sup>59</sup> To a large extent, estrangement appears to depend on the age at which children were left behind, with a much higher probability of estrangement of younger children. As reported by a Polish mother working in Italy, her son, who was left behind with his grandmother, “calls my mother ‘Mummy’, he says that he has a second mother and that’s me. I am not the first mother, I am the second one...” (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011, p. 297).

Based on the data from the Philippines, Parreñas discussed intergenerational conflicts between labour migrant mothers and their estranged children left behind, who considered transnational mothering unable to provide care for the children: “First, children disagree with their mothers that commodities are sufficient markers of love. Second, they do not believe that their mothers recognize the sacrifices that children have made toward the successful maintenance of the family. Finally, although they appreciate the efforts of migrant mothers to show affection and care, they still question the extent of their efforts [*i.e. mothers’ visits home - TZ*]” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 375). As Parreñas reasonably suggested, these conflicts are largely caused by “socialized expectations of traditional mothering”, “traditional ideological system of the patriarchal nuclear family” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 380).

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<sup>59</sup> It should be noted, however, that estrangement can occur between family members who never separated.

Modern communication technologies play an important role in transnational motherhood practices, helping transnational family members stay in touch, avoid or minimize estrangement and, specifically, helping in the development of specific “distant” practices of motherhood, which are, often, unique for each family. Even before the Internet and social networks, migrant mothers stressed importance of regular phone conversations with their children; as a Ukrainian mother declared speaking of her son and daughter, “I brought them up by the phone, as I happened to call them ten times as day” (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011, p. 297).

Some studies suggest that transnational parenting practices vary depending on the distance between sending and receiving countries, hence – easiness and affordability of regular travel, as well as transportation mode (flights vs overland). Migrant mothers stress the importance of periodic visits home, “co-presence” with their family, “for the maintenance and strength of long-distance care relationships” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 229-230); periodic visits were also named by Baldassar (2015, p. 83 quoted above) as an important form of transnational parental care. However, when focusing on the possibility of migrants’ visits home, there are more aspects to consider in addition to distance alone; “geographical distance influences the possibilities, ease, and cost of travel, but may, at this point in history, be of lesser importance than other considerations in shaping transnational practices” (Orellana et al., 2001, p. 577). Receiving countries’ entry requirements shape labour migrants’ and their family members’ experiences. Visa liberalization agreements not only simplify international labour migration and remove most of the financial constraints, but also, often, influence “migration logistics”. As described by Vietti (2019), labour migrants from Moldavia to Italy, who benefit both from geographic proximity between the two countries and from visa liberalization agreement with the EU, have few, if any incentives to legalize their status in Italy. Instead, they prefer to regularly travel between the countries, in compliance with the requirements of the visa liberalization agreement, and thus are able to see their family with an approximate frequency of every 3 months. Such arrangement helps them stay more involved in their families’ lives and take personal care of their children more regularly; it also reduces the risk of estrangement between family members. On the other hand, when sending and destination countries are distant, migrants’ legal status is very important, as the possibilities to travel home are, usually, rather limited for undocumented migrants. As it has been noted, migrants’ “illegality produces immobility, and immobility implies that migrant parents are separated from their children for a considerable time period” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 225). The high cost of travel can also be the cause of the immobility of migrants, even if they are documented (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 229).

Scholarship on transnational motherhood suggests that migrant mothers are, generally, highly motivated to ensure the success of their migration projects and achieve their migration goals in the best possible way. For them, failing as mothers would be the most painful failure, thus they make their best efforts this does not happen. They often realize that “the telephone calls they make, and the money, consumer goods and gifts they send, tend to be weak resources in the provision of care to children at a distance” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 229); nevertheless, some of them tend to overcompensate for their absence with gifts and money sent to their children – the “*proxy*” type of transnational parental care mentioned by Baldassar (2015, p. 83 quoted above). Such overcompensation, however, does not appear to be consistent with the forward-looking understanding of motherhood.

Since its emergence, the phenomenon of transnational motherhood became one of the most controversial challenges of a traditional family structure. It is not surprising that mothers’ labour emigration, as well as other situations of mothers’ physical absence, created the most profound “cultural tension with the image of motherhood” (Illanes, 2010, p. 211) and required renegotiation not only of the mother’s and her children’s roles, but, often, that of the entire family structure, significant “cognitive adjustment and cultural reframing” of these (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013, p. 530). When a mother leaves, the remaining family members find unexpectedly many roles and functions to be reimagined. While there is evidence that husbands’ role in transnational families changes only marginally, transnational mothers, quite unexpectedly, find themselves in a situation where they need to create “new definitions of good-mothering standards” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997, p. 567) and, simultaneously, have the strength to endure the criticism of their decision to emigrate.

A practice of “non-traditional”, “alternative” transnational motherhood is a result of a difficult choice between psychical, emotional and economic responsibilities that mothers try to balance. Along with reports on unsuccessful experiences of transnational family arrangements, strong evidence has been accumulated of transnational mothers fulfilling their “mothers’ duty” in spite of separation and distance, continuing to take care, even though in different ways, of their families and, in particular, of their children, who represent a “hard core” of their transnational family ties (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 455). As the knowledge available so far indicates, it is possible that a new “ideology of motherhood” develops in this process, based on different understandings of care, rather unconventional views of parental responsibility, and oriented toward the long-term well-being of children.

As mothers' labour migration leads to manifold changes for the entire family, various emotions accompany transnational motherhood – a highly underestimated, and insufficiently researched aspect of transnational family experiences. It would be impossible to dispute that transnational families face specific “emotional strains” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 362); all members of these families undergo certain emotional pressure, as discussed in the following Section.

#### 2.4. Social construction of emotions in transnational family life

*“If ... the job of sociology is to trace the links between private troubles and public issues, the sociology of emotion is – or should be – at the heart of sociology.”*  
(Hochschild, 2008, p. 47)

A thorough analysis of emotions accompanying migration processes in general, and mothers' international labour migration in particular, has been regularly overlooked in migration studies, although the issue “has always been relevant and evident” (Baldassar, 2015, p. 81; see also Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 169; Fondazione ISMU, 2022, p. 278; Massey, 2002, p. 2; Parreñas, 2001, p. 363). Labour migration has been analysed almost exclusively focusing on its economic and/or legal aspects, to a lesser extent – on its demographic and social aspects. Migration scholars expressed very little interest toward feelings and emotions of migrants and their family members who stayed behind, arguably because, implicitly, emotions were regarded primarily biological rather than social, and were seen as having only personal importance, thus – hardly relevant for understanding migration processes. In addition, emotions were usually considered irrational, thus hardly an object of social science research.

This approach is changing in the recent scholarship on transnational migration, with the rising awareness that emotions, that may not be entirely rational, have a strong impact on migrants' perceptions and behaviour. They have importance far beyond uncontrolled personal feelings, hence “economic and emotional dimensions cannot be productively separated in migration studies” (Baldassar, 2015, p. 87). An understanding that emotions shape many aspects of migration experiences – and human experiences in general – is becoming relatively acknowledged, as more is known about emotions' role in migrants' decision-making, including their economic decisions. Emotions are particularly important when transnational family relations are considered; Parreñas sees the “central paradox” of transnational households in that “achievement of financial security [goes] hand in hand with an increase in emotional insecurity” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 386). Not only do emotions play an important role in shaping migrants' behaviour at all stages of migration, but they also largely determine how migrants assess their migration experiences; perceptions of migration

experiences as traumatic (Abrego, 2014) largely depend on migrants' and their loved ones' emotional reactions.

Generally, the field of the sociology of emotions, although relatively institutionalized since its emergence in the 1970s, has been struggling to dissociate from psychology and, so far, did not produce particularly significant and coherent works. The field's most valuable impact was the acknowledgement of the social significance of emotions. Sociologists of emotions insisted that emotions were social as long as they represented reflections, or reactions to interpersonal relationships (both real and imagined; in the past, in the present and in the future) and as long as they were socially and culturally constructed. Emotions were social also as long as they affected, and helped explain social behaviour. Turner & Stets (2006) considered sociological analysis of emotions as "one of the cutting edges of theoretical work in sociology" (p. 25), echoed by Conradson & McKay (2007), who further asserted emotions' central importance for the analysis of social life (p. 172).

At the same time, the sociology of emotions does not underemphasize the biological "basis" of human emotions (Turner & Stets, 2006, p. 46). While describing the structure of the human brain, Massey speaks of the "emotional brain" and "rational brain" as its components, each having its own functions and memories (Massey, 2002, p. 21). He presents evidence according which emotional reactions are connected with the oldest parts of the human brain, thus these reactions precede and "strongly influence" the rational brain, to the extent that emotional impulses may overwhelm rational cognition (Massey, 2002, p. 17).

Compared with other fields of sociology, sociology of emotions thus contributes to a different understanding of human beings, who are no longer perceived as entirely, and constantly rational. Quite the contrary – According to Massey, "[a]ttempting to understand human behavior as the outcome of rational cognition alone is not only incorrect – it leads to fundamental misunderstandings of the human condition" (Massey, 2002, p. 2). Rationality, as it developed throughout human evolution, "did not replace emotionality as a basis for human interaction. Rather, rational abilities were gradually added to preexisting and simultaneously developing emotional capacities. ... To the extent we possess rational cognition, it necessarily rests on a preexisting emotional foundation" (Massey, 2002, p. 15).

The field of sociology of emotions also asserts that emotions are rooted in culture (Hochschild, 2008, p. 47). Following Bericat, "[u]nderstanding an emotion means understanding the situation and social relation that produces it" (Bericat, 2016, p. 495).

However, like everything that is social, emotions are subject to social control. Certain “emotion cultures”, or “ideologies about emotions” develop, that may be different in different societies and, often, change over time, but in every given moment and place influence people’s understandings of appropriateness of certain emotions and the ways to express them. “Emotional norms” encourage certain emotions in certain contexts, and discourage others (Thoits, 1989, p. 334). More than emotions per se, i.e. the way people feel, societies control expressions of emotions; this duality may become a cause of internal conflicts between a person’s “true” feelings, i.e. “internal emotional experience” (Bericat, 2016, p. 494) and socially and culturally acceptable expressions of those (Turner & Stets, 2006, p. 27). To find a balance, people learn “emotion management” during the process of their socialization (Thoits, 1989, p. 323) – a process which is believed to be both social and rational, and which represents a focus of the “dramaturgical analysis” in the sociological study of emotions (Zurher, 1982).

Whether controlled or not, emotions can, and do influence human behaviour (Thoits, 1989, p. 317), although the causal mechanism of experiencing specific emotions and the direction of their influence on behaviour may be almost impossible to predict, as emotions are both highly personal and contextual; they vary depending on the specific situation and have to be understood within the actors’ own “cultural frames” at a given moment of time. Positivists, social interactionalists and social constructionists may strongly disagree in their interpretations when analysing the same person’s very same emotional response.

Emotions’ inherent subjectivity and complexity lead to unprecedented challenges pertaining to empirical data collection and analysis. No reliable and, particularly, valid measurements of emotions are possible, as their measurement is highly dependent on subjective interpretations by both actors and researchers. “Internal” emotions cannot be observed; and while emotional expressions are visible, their understanding and interpretation are rarely straightforward and obvious. Actors cannot be expected to give detailed (and valid) reports about emotions they experience, especially provided that emotions are not necessarily rationalized – they often “operate” unconsciously, thus people may not be fully aware even of their very existence (Sabini & Silver, 2005, p. 4; see also Turner & Stets, 2006, p. 47); and even when people are well aware of their emotions, these are far from uniform – any emotion can be experienced in many different, “personalized” ways. It is also highly probable for informants’ reporting about emotions to be influenced by social desirability bias. In addition, people often experience multiple emotions simultaneously, as “it is obvious that individuals do not feel emotions in an isolated and independent manner” (Bericat, 2016, p. 505). This led researchers to hypothesize existence of a

process of emotions' "blending" with each other (Sabini & Silver, 2005, p. 8); it would be impossible to separate most of the "blended" emotions analytically, isolate one emotion from another, as, in practice, they have many overlapping aspects.

Difficulties in the identification and measurement of emotions lead to further challenges in the comparability of emotional states of different people, and/or over time, and/or in different contexts of human interaction. With these complexities in mind, what researchers can analyse are, almost exclusively, "emotional expressions" (Zajonc & McIntosh, 1992, p. 70), i.e. socially acceptable expressions of emotions, both verbal and non-verbal; and even this analysis can never be exhaustive. Complexities of such analysis have been well documented: when analysing facial expressions or body language to identify underlying emotions, researchers are known to complain that "five minutes of recorded interaction can require literally hundreds of coding hours" (Thoits, 1989, p. 331).

Thoits claimed in 1989 that the field of the sociology of emotions was, at the time, in its "early childhood" (Thoits, 1989, p. 338); almost three decades later Bericat (2016) still claimed that "a macrosociology of emotions remains to be developed" (p. 505). Similar to other relatively new fields of the social sciences, including the studies of migrant transnationalism (Section 2.1), sociologists of emotions were facing challenges that are common to many relatively young social science disciplines. The most pressing of these was the need to develop a systematic theoretical approach, a "cumulative theory" in the sociology of emotions (Turner & Stets, 2006, p. 49), which would incorporate existing approaches of symbolic interactionism, dramaturgical theories, interaction ritual theories, power and status theories, and exchange theories.

Considering the very subject of its study, the sociology of emotions is highly interdisciplinary, and the "borders" between the specific disciplines are not always strictly defined; thus, the works may be strongly influenced not only by psychological, but also by biological and physiological approaches, or relatively less known "psychophysics" (Sabini & Silver, 2005). Multidisciplinarity may explain certain inconsistencies in terminology, the "lexicalization" of emotions, to the extent that the key terms, "emotions", "feelings", "sentiments", "moods", "affects" are, sometimes, used interchangeably, but can be referred to as having different meanings.<sup>60</sup> As a specific example, discussions are still ongoing on whether the feelings of shame, embarrassment,

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<sup>60</sup> The terms "feelings" and "emotions" have, usually, different meaning in psychology: emotions are considered to exist on the subconscious level and are associated with the "body", while feelings, which have a broader meaning, are associated with the "mind". However, the distinction between these terms may not always be well defined, and they may still be used interchangeably.

and guilt are essentially different or not; and if they are – to what extent are they different (Sabini & Silver, 2005, p. 5).

Unlike psychology, the sociological approach rarely distinguishes between basic and non-basic emotions, and does not differentiate between feelings and emotions (as well as sentiments, affects, moods, etc.), suggesting that these phenomena are seen as identical within the discipline of sociology (there is no “sociology of feelings”, or a “sociology of affects”, or a “sociology of sentiments”). Neither are they differentiated in the present thesis: the terms “feelings” and “emotions” are used as synonyms, to refer to people’s reactions to events and experiences in their lives. Discussions of emotions and emotional aspects of transnational family members’ experiences in the present thesis are based on the understanding of emotions as social (and cultural) constructs, “relational rather than intrapsychic, ... fundamentally concerned with adjusting [interpersonal] relationships” (Baldassar, 2015, p. 81).

As a complex experience, international migration involves a variety of emotions, both general and migration-specific. Ignoring emotional aspects of migration will, at the very best, provide only a limited understanding of the process. The emotions of migrants as well as their family members left behind in the sending countries are equally important for the analysis of migration experiences. Although the scholarship on the role of emotions in the process of international migration is not yet particularly voluminous, the topic has attracted considerable attention during the last decades. The very event of migrants’ spatial mobility, while presenting numerous challenges, is seen to provide “opportunities for new forms of subjectivity and emotion to emerge, ...[such as] happiness, sadness, frustration, excitement and ambivalence” (Conradson & McKay, 2007, pp. 168-169). Fielding (1992), while analysing internal migration in the United Kingdom, highlighted rather negative emotional reactions, namely, migration’s potential “for inducing disturbing senses of rupture, loss and even failure” (quoted in Conradson & McKay, 2007, p. 169).

Transnational family experiences, involving long periods of separation from the loved ones and, specifically, mother-child separation are particularly rich emotionally. The “emotions of separation” in transnational families are commonly described in migration scholarship as negative (e.g. guilt, anxiety, pain), and strongly influenced by existing social norms, including the traditional ideology of motherhood discussed above (Section 2.3.1). On the one hand, “[t]he normative expectations of ideal family caregiving ... assume kin must be physically present to adequately care for each other”, but, as Baldassar (2015) noted, “the act of migration, by causing physical separation, absence and longing, places the migrant in a difficult moral bind, in particular

concerning their obligations to care” (p. 82).<sup>61</sup> Parreñas (2001) goes further referring to the effects of mother-child separation in transnational families as “emotional wounds” (p. 386); she claimed, “(e)motional strains of transnational mothering include feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loss, guilt, and the burden of loneliness”, as well as helplessness (Parreñas, 2001, p. 371; see also Abrego, 2014). Banfi & Boccagni (2011) quote their respondent, a transnational mother from Ukraine, speaking about her perception of separation from her family: “[i]t seems like there is a war, without shootings, but there is a war, this is the feeling” (Banfi & Boccagni, 2011, p. 297). Labour migrant mothers who are care workers and are involved in “global care chains” (Section 2.3) are believed to be performing jobs that are “heavy in emotional labor” – which, arguably has a particular impact when it comes to “emotional costs” of their migration (Hochschild, 2008, p. 47).

While the above perspective is one-sided and entirely overlooks the positive opportunities provided by migration, it does describe a salient part of emotional reactions accompanying transnational motherhood. Migrant mothers may “negotiate these emotional strains in three central ways: the commodification of love; the repression of emotional strains; and the rationalization of distance, that is, they use regulation communication to ease distance” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 371).

The above evidence, as the scholarship on the “emotions of separation” in transnational families in general, markedly overlook transnational children’s points of view, emotions and reactions. Parreñas (2001) partially filled this gap, claiming that “the ideological construction of the family controls not just the opinions of children but also their feelings and emotions concerning family separation” (p. 383). She presented a rather pessimistic outlook of transnational children’s emotional reactions though, including the likelihood that migration to cause deep estrangement and misunderstandings between the members of transnational families. Specifically, she found evidence in Filipino transnational families that children “do not believe that their mothers recognize the sacrifices that children have made toward the successful maintenance of the family” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 375). As one daughter confided to her, “[i]n Christmas, I hated the fact that our family was not complete and I would see other families together” (Parreñas, 2001, p. 378).

Table 1 represents an attempt to summarize the existing knowledge about emotional reactions of transnational motherhood from both mothers’ and children’s perspectives.<sup>62</sup>

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61 The quoted passage discusses the obligations of adult migrant children from Italy to Australia to care for their ageing parents left behind in Italy; however, the issue is relevant from the point of view of transnational motherhood as well.

62 The list of emotional reactions of transnational mothers and children in Table 1 is not exhaustive, as it would be unrealistic to try to list all possible emotions experienced by them. The inclusion of a reaction in the Table does not imply it is necessarily experienced by all transnational mothers and/or children. The reactions are listed in alphabetical order.

Table 1: Emotional reactions pertaining to the experiences of transnational motherhood

<b>Emotional reaction</b>	<b>Positive or negative?</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Related emotional reactions/ behavioural responses</b>	<b>Predominantly attributed to ...</b>
Ambition	Can be either positive or negative	Labour migrant mothers have a strong desire to see their families' situation improve, and see their children successful through the achievement of certain life goals – educational, carrier-related, sentimental, etc. Labour emigration is seen as a means to achieve these goals.	Hope, pride, competitiveness	Mothers
Anger	Negative	Transnational children may feel angry at themselves or their fathers for not being able to prevent their mothers' migration; or they may be angry at their mothers for “abandoning” them. Anger may develop also because children miss their mothers, miss their families being “complete”.	Insecurity, guilt	Children
Anxiety	Negative	The unfamiliar situation in which transnational family members find themselves may lead to anxiety, insecurities, preoccupations.	Fear, helplessness, insecurity	Both mothers and children
Courage	Mostly positive	International migration involves numerous situations which migrants cannot control, and in which they have to face circumstances or people they are not familiar with. Labour migration leads to a significant increase in their responsibilities. Migrant mothers need to constantly leave their “comfort zone”, solve novel problems on their own. Risk is an integral component of international migration. Leaving children behind is also a risk migrant mothers are taking, with the hope that their migration will help improve their families' situation and create better opportunities for their children.	Risk-taking, hope	Mothers
Fear	Negative	Fear has a lot of individual and contextual nuances. For migrant mothers, it may include fear for the children's well-being, concerns about them; in the receiving context – fear of losing the job and no longer being able	Anxiety, insecurity, anger, tension, helplessness,	Both mothers and children, although they experience fear differently

		to provide for their families. Both mothers and children may experience fear of the unknown, of the uncertainties of the future.	vulnerability	
Gratitude	Positive	Unless they are too young, children realize that their mothers' emigration was primarily motivated by their desire to provide opportunities for their better future.	Hope, achievement	Children
Guilt	Negative	Migrant mothers' feelings of guilt are mostly caused by the incompatibility of labour emigration with traditional, culturally established understandings of "correct" motherhood practices discussed in Section 2.3. The latter see emigration as "abandonment" of children, while the former – as the fulfilment of parental responsibility to ensure their well-being. <sup>63</sup>  In the Georgian context, this feeling may be influenced by frequent statements made by the Patriarch.	Insecurity, tension, overcompensation	Mothers, but occasionally children as well
Helplessness	Negative	Once abroad, migrant mothers can no longer be part of their families' "normal" everyday life, and be there for their loved ones in case of an emergency, or in case of a simple sickness. The same is true for the family members left behind.	Fear, guilt, anxiety	Mothers, but occasionally children as well
Hope	Positive	Hope is, usually, a driving force behind mothers' labour migration – they emigrate hoping they will be able to improve their families' economic situation in general, and, specifically, will ensure better prospects for children, e.g. by providing them with better educational opportunities.  Labour migrants also often hope that their time in emigration will be quite short, and they will return to their families soon.	Ambition	Mothers; to a relatively lesser extent - children
Insecurity	Negative	Migration causes various uncertainties for migrants and, to a lesser extent, for their family members left behind.	Fear, vulnerability,	Both mothers and children

63 Baldassar (2015) provided a rather detailed analysis of guilt experienced by adult migrant children from Italy to Australia. She also indicated some potentially positive functions of this generally negative feeling, as a "motivating force in maintaining and sustaining relationships over time and distance" (p. 87).

		Early weeks and months of migration are particularly marked by disorientation, often accompanied by fear.	confusion	
Loneliness, solitude	Negative	As solo labour migrants, mothers are on their own when real-life challenges are considered. Virtual relations, moral support and encouragement aside, they rarely, if ever, have anyone to count on during their migration. Not surprisingly, they may often feel lonely.	Insecurity, fear, vulnerability	Mothers
Nostalgia	Mostly negative	Homesickness, longing for home and family develop despite the possibilities offered by modern communication technologies. These emotional reactions may have a strong impact on transnational motherhood, and the emotional well-being of all family members, particularly – in case of indeterminate length of migration, and/or in case of irregular migration which makes impossible short visits to the family. <sup>64</sup>  In the worst-case scenario, acute nostalgia may lead to depression.	Pain, sadness	Both mothers and children
Pain	Negative	Most commonly, pain is caused by separation and/or feelings of guilt. Missing loved ones, missing their previous (pre-migration) way of life are some of the biggest challenges of international labour migration, particularly when migrants' visits home are not possible (due to travel costs, distance, or migrants' illegal status). Often, these periods of separation are perceived as painful, to the extent that people may feel physical pain as well.	Sadness	Mothers; to a relatively lesser extent - children
Regret	Negative	Members of transnational families may have second thoughts about their migration "project", especially if it is not developing the way they had hoped, or if they are overwhelmed by nostalgia, feelings of insecurity, guilt, etc.	Guilt, anger	Both mothers and children

64 In transnational families, nostalgia may not be for the past per se, but for the pre-migration period, when the families were not separated.

Sadness	Negative	The difficulties encountered during the migration process, loneliness, as well fear for the events both in the sending and receiving communities often result in transnational family members feeling sad.	Insecurity, hopelessness, nostalgia	Both mothers and children
Self-esteem	Positive	Considering labour migrants' families' economic struggles before migration, and lack of perspectives in the sending context, what migrant mothers achieve through their migration is, often, close to impossible by pre-migration standards. Often, these achievements overshadow the costs of migration, including its emotional costs, and make mothers proud of their achievements.	Sense of accomplishment, hope, ambition, pride	Mothers
Sense of accomplishment / achievement	Positive	Achievement of certain migration goals (either big or small – from purchasing an apartment to sending home a modest parcel with holiday gifts) leads to a sense of accomplishment and increases confidence in one's abilities.	Ambition, hope, pride, self-esteem, (economic) empowerment	Mothers
Sense of duty / responsibility	Mostly positive, but may have stressful (negative) aspects	Migrant mothers see their labour emigration as the fulfilment of their parental duty toward their children, providing what they believe to be essential for their well-being. Understanding of “mothers' duty”, though, differs depending on the traditional vs “alternative” vision of motherhood (Section 2.3.2).  Importantly, labour emigration is seen as the very last resort, the only remaining option, and takes place only after local possibilities are exhausted.	Sacrifice	Mothers, to a relatively lesser extent - children
Tension	Negative	International labour migrants, especially in the early stages of migration, have a constant impression of being in a struggle, having to solve numerous challenges, learn a new language, adapt to a new lifestyle, etc.; in addition, they worry almost non-stop about the loved ones left behind and, often, feel guilty for being away.	Stress, nostalgia, guilt	Mothers, to a relatively lesser extent - children

What can be considered an important inference of Table 1 is that mothers and children share many of the emotions accompanying transnational family life, although specific expressions and impact on their personalities may still differ due to their different roles and experiences. The coexistence of some of the emotions that accompany transnational motherhood (regret and self-esteem; courage and fear, and others) may seem incompatible, but they are interrelated in rather complicated ways. Different understandings of certain actions lead to different emotional reactions, which will, in turn, frame actors' experiences in radically different ways. Thus, perceiving their mothers' labour emigration as "abandonment" will make children angry and/or disappointed and/or saddened, which will probably lead to their estrangement from mothers and, overall, negative emotional experiences of migration for both mothers and children. Seeing mothers' labour emigration as a fulfilment of parental responsibility, on the other hand, will make children feel grateful, as well highly appreciated, leading to positive emotional experiences of migration – although some may still feel guilty for not being able to prevent mothers' emigration. From mothers' perspective, their emigration may lead to feelings of either guilt or pride, depending on how they see their impact. These feelings will, further, inevitably affect the development of long-distance relationships between migrant mothers and their children, leading to either harmonious or conflictual transnational families.

Members of transnational families may try to hide some of their negative emotions from their loved ones, in order not to upset them. Both visible and hidden emotions experienced by transnational mothers and their children have an impact not only on their emotional well-being and development of family relations across borders, but also on their behaviour, decisions they make regarding their present and future. Empirical evidence of experiences of transnational motherhood of the informants of the present research project, including previously overlooked emotional reactions, will be discussed after a detailed discussion of the methodology in the following Chapter.

## CHAPTER 3. Data collection: Interviews across borders

### 3.1. Data collection method: Why intergenerational interviews?

Accurate lists of international labour migrants are available in exceptionally rare cases; when available, such lists usually cover only a limited geographic area of sending or destination country, or specific enterprises that employ migrants. As many immigrant workers do not manage to legalize their stay in receiving countries, especially during the first years following their arrival, their undocumented status represents a major problem when it comes to their enumeration for statistical purposes, including population censuses. About a decade ago, International Labour Organization reported that labour migrants’ “increasing proportion ... are now migrating through irregular channels, which has understandably been a cause of concern for the international community” (International Labour Office, 2010, p. 2); there is no reason to believe that the situation changed significantly after the publication of this report.

Unsurprisingly, international migrant workers who do not possess proper documents for their lawful residence in destination countries tend to get employed in the informal economy, thus they are often invisible in the official employment statistics as well. Their quantitative characteristics (overall number, male/female ratio, age distribution, geographic distribution, etc.) can only be based on more or less accurate estimates; different estimates, however, often significantly differ from each other. Consequently, no reliable sampling frames are available to draw representative samples of various sub-groups of labour migrants.

Furthermore, one of the salient characteristics of international labour migrants, irrespective of their legal status, is their dynamism. Many of them are seasonal workers, making frequent trips across borders. Those who are not seasonal employees are also characterized by high levels of mobility even after settling in the receiving country: they may change their job, or “follow” their job to a new location; they may move to a new settlement, or even to another region of the country in search of better employment opportunities and/or housing conditions. As a rule, it is impossible to predict with certainty the length of their stay in the receiving country. Often, they gradually improve their working and housing conditions over the course of migration, legalize their status, especially when they aim to reunite with their family members in the receiving country (Ambrosini, 2019); some eventually obtain its citizenship. It is, therefore, safe to assume that international labour migrants cannot be characterized as a static group.

The characteristics of the existing stocks of international migrants, i.e. “persons residing outside their country of birth or citizenship” (International Labour Office, 2010, p. 15) represent a

serious challenge for empirical social research using quantitative methods. Leading international agencies have repeatedly highlighted difficulties in producing reliable lists of international migrants – and, specifically, labour migrants (e.g.: Global Migration Group, 2017; International Labour Office, 2010; Migration Data Portal, 2021a; Zlotnick, 1987). Without the knowledge of migrants' quantity, their basic demographic characteristics and geographic distribution, representative studies of migrant populations become impossible (Ambrosini, 2015).<sup>65</sup> Lack of empirical data about the experiences of migrants, in turn, hampers further development of theoretical understanding of international migration processes, as well as efficient migration management in both sending and receiving countries.

Considering the focus of the present research project, in-depth interviews were deemed to be the best suited method to learn about experiences of transnational motherhood (Weiss, 1995). Qualitative interviews with international migrants are widely relied upon when studying migration experiences (e.g.: Abrego, 2014; Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Cvajner, 2018; De Tona, 2011; Gálvez, 2019; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012; Olwig, 1999; Orellana *et al.*, 2001; Parreñas, 2001); observation and case studies are relatively less common, provided access issues (Fedyuk, 2012; Vietti, 2019).

As the practice of motherhood inevitably involves two sides, it was considered of essential importance to interview both mothers and children and learn about their specific perspectives in a series of intergenerational interviews. At the stage of the preparation for fieldwork, it seemed reasonable to expect that, although living through the same experience of family separation, children and their mothers would have perceived transnational motherhood in different ways. Only listening to the voices of both, learning about differently lived experiences of migrant mothers and their children would ensure that the collected data is not one-sided, and would provide knowledge about the specific experiences as seen from both angles of the mother-child relationship. For the highest possible efficiency of this approach, the original research design envisaged interviewing mothers and children from the same families, rather than unrelated ones.<sup>66</sup> The informants from the same family would inevitably share their history, experiences, as well as kinship network; they would discuss the same events, often – the events that they have lived together; and it was very important to see how, if at all, their memories and perceptions of mothers' migration and its impact

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65 A number of experimental approaches, such as a Centre sampling technique are being developed to make possible representative sampling in the absence of a sampling frame (e.g. Baio *et al.*, 2011).

66 It was to expect that, in some families, it would not be possible to interview both a mother and her child(ren). Yet, the goal of the research project was to collect as many “paired” mother-child interviews as possible.

on their families differed, what was remembered as important aspects of their experiences, and what was forgotten or omitted during interviews.

Children's age would undoubtedly influence their experiences, as well as their memories. When planning the research project, a choice was made to focus on the experiences of families when at least one child was a teenager (approximately, between 13 and 18 years old) when the mother emigrated. This age was believed to be best suited for the aims of the present study as children would no longer be too young, would have spent considerable time with their mothers before their emigration and thus remember their presence, and would understand the changes in their families.

Taking into consideration potentially highly sensitive and very personal nature of interviews for the present research project, it was deemed indispensable to make sure that each informant was interviewed individually. Interviews one-to-one with the researcher were expected to maximize informants' openness and sincerity, provided that the researcher would be successful in gaining their trust and create an atmosphere where the informants would feel comfortable talking about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Preliminary discussion guides were tested before the fieldwork. As is the case of all qualitative projects involving in-depth interviews, though, discussion guides were adjusted for every single interview, taking into consideration specific characteristics of the informants' situation, as well as their individuality (Weiss, 1995). Generic versions of discussion guides for mothers and children are presented, respectively, in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

### 3.2. Timing of fieldwork and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 were marked by a high degree of uncertainty. As the nationwide lockdown in Italy considerably restricted the possibility of travel within the country for several months, the beginning of fieldwork was delayed compared with the original plan. Eventually, it became evident that, during the period available for fieldwork, it would be impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews neither with mothers in Italy nor with children in Georgia. While the practice of online and phone interviews had been developing prior to the pandemic (e.g. Carrozza, 2018), these were hardly the most desirable mode to discuss transnational motherhood; however, these were the only options available.

Most of the interviews were thus conducted online, mostly – using video calls on Facebook Messenger; and several interviews were conducted by phone, due to internet access issues or, in a few cases, when informants were not Facebook users. Each informant chose the most convenient mode of the interview.

Interviews were conducted between September 2020 and February 2021. An important implication of the online/phone mode of the interviews was that the selection of informants (mothers) was no longer limited to Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany regions of Italy, as was planned originally. Rather, it became possible to interview migrants working in any region of the country, thus informants residing in Apulia, Lazio, Liguria and Lombardy were also interviewed.

### 3.3. Selection of informants

The target population was composed of (a) labour migrant mothers from Georgia working in Italy as care workers (*'badanti'*), and (b) their children left behind in Georgia.<sup>67</sup> Informants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball techniques, which were the only possible options considering the absence of a sampling frame.<sup>68</sup> At the stage of informants' recruitment, mothers were identified and contacted first. To best address the research questions, the following criteria were used to select them:

- She had to be a labour migrant from Georgia who had been working in Italy for at least two consecutive years before the date of the interview; the maximum length of her stay in Italy was not specified.
- At the time of her emigration, she should have left teenage child(ren) (mostly, aged between 13 and 18) in Georgia.
- She could have emigrated from any Georgian settlement, and could have been working in any settlement in Italy.

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67 FAM\_14 (following family codes provided Appendix 3) represents an exceptional case in this regard. As Lela's sons did not consent to be interviewed, she suggested an interview with her mother, Tsiala. Lela left her two sons with her mother, thus she felt Tsiala would be able to tell about the boys' experiences of transnationalism. In terms of the present research project, this was the only interview with a migrant's mother.

68 While inevitably producing certain bias, snowball sampling is, at the same time, a rather powerful tool to identify informants in qualitative research, especially when dealing with so called "hidden populations" (e.g. Cohen & Arieli, 2011; TenHouten, 2017; Watters & Biernacki, 1989). It also contributes to informants' higher trust toward the researcher, as the latter has been referred by a friend. Interviews with informants of the present research project identified via snowball sampling were, overall, the most informative.

- Her legal status in Italy was not taken into consideration.<sup>69</sup>

Initially, informants were located through personal contacts (mine, my relatives', friends' and colleagues'). Any attempt to contact a migrant mother without referring to an "intermediary" she trusted (e.g., when getting in touch "independently" with mothers active in migrants' Facebook groups) inevitably resulted in refusals. Even when relying on personal networks, though, quite a lot of potential informants refused to be interviewed, claiming that the topic was too sensitive for them, as they experienced very painfully separation from their children. As one mother explained her refusal to be interviewed: "*The years of my emigration are a black stain which I do not remember and I would prefer not to specify anything about [this period], as it is very hard. ... I do not want to remember, I leave the days behind and do not look back to remember them*". In some cases, potential informants were alerted because of the prospect of their children being interviewed as well, and chose to refuse to be interviewed altogether.

In all cases but one, mothers were interviewed first.<sup>70</sup> When first contacted with the request about the interview, they were informed about the goals and the nature of the study, including my interest in conducting further interviews with their children. During the interviews with mothers, I discussed again the possibility to interview their children, and, if they did not mind, asked them to put me in touch with them. None of the interviewed mothers objected for their children to be interviewed. However, whenever a mother had two or more children, it was the mother's choice which of her children would have been contacted, thus, with a very high probability, these were the children mothers felt most comfortable with. Thus, selection of children depended on their mothers' decisions, unless a mother had only one child.

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69 While these criteria proved to be both efficient and reasonable, there are also several alterations in the eventual pool of informants, as it was deemed relevant and interesting to learn about different cases as well, in order to enrich the data. One of the migrant mothers, Lamara (fam08\_M), had arrived in Italy a year before the interview was conducted, leaving behind an 18-year-old daughter and 23-year-old son; Natalia (fam18\_M) and Nina (fam21\_M) have been in Italy longer, but they have also arrived less than 2 years before the interview; George (fam12\_S) and Shota (fam07\_S), on the other hand, were relatively older (respectively, 22 and 26 years old) when their mothers emigrated. Furthermore, interviews with two migrant mothers (FAM\_04 and FAM\_16) were not used for the analysis (hence they were excluded from the Table in Appendix 3) as the informants' migration histories deviated in more significant ways from the specified criteria (in FAM\_04, a toddler was left behind, while in FAM\_16 – adult sons in their 30s). There were also specific issues pertaining to these informants' verbal competence, as detailed in footnote 72 below.

70 Anastasia (fam06\_D) was interviewed before the interview with her mother was scheduled. Anastasia and her mother were informed simultaneously about the present research project during my exploratory pre-fieldwork visit to Florence in January 2019. They had no objections, thus I contacted them soon after I started the interviews. The daughter replied first, and the interview was conducted; her mother, however, eventually chose not to be interviewed.

Similar to the approach adopted with their mothers, children were also informed about the study when they were contacted with the request about the interview. Thus, in case of the interviewed children, a double consent was obtained. Although they were legal adults at the time of the interviews (except Sophia (fam21\_D), who was 17), mothers' consent was first obtained to contact them (in most cases, their mothers coordinated this process themselves). Yet, not all of the contacted children consented to the interview, hence some of the interviews with mothers result not having a corresponding interview with child(ren) (these are FAM\_01, FAM\_03, FAM\_11 and FAM\_13). In FAM\_02, Nineli's both children consented to the interview, and they were both interviewed.

Overall, representatives of 19 families have been interviewed, for a total of 34 individual interviews.<sup>71</sup> Dali's was the longest emigration, she arrived in Italy in 2004, leaving behind her husband and son (FAM\_12). Three migrant mothers had previous migration experience, to Turkey (Nineli, fam02\_M and Nina, fam21\_M) and Russia (Magda, fam15\_M). Five interviewed mothers had only one child; Rusudan, on the other hand, arrived in 2006, leaving behind five children (FAM\_10). In the informants' families, Lisa was left behind at the youngest age – she was only 4 when her mother, Nana, emigrated in 2015 (FAM\_20).

It is important to note that in cases of migrant mothers who emigrated over a decade ago, at the time of the interview their children's age could have been around 30 years old;<sup>72</sup> some of them got married and had children of their own, thus the migrants could have already become grandmothers. In such cases, the primary focus of the interviews, i.e. experiences of transnational motherhood, did not change, although discussion of experiences of “transnational grandparenting” inevitably became part of the interviews.

As interviews progressed, some of the interviewed mothers kindly put me in touch with their friends or acquaintances who were willing to be interviewed and were meeting the abovementioned

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71 As experiences of motherhood (and, specifically, those of transnational motherhood) are highly personal, it would be rather difficult to reach a saturation point in the data; the number of conducted interviews was thus primarily influenced by timing and availability of informants willing to share their experiences. Still, diversity of informants' and their families' basic characteristics has been ensured (place of residence in Georgia; year of mothers' emigration; family size; etc.). As noted in the Introduction, basic facts about the informants and their migration experience, their pseudonyms, family and interview codes are provided in Appendix 3. I am extremely grateful to all informants for their availability, collaboration, sincerity, and generosity with their time.

72 In all cases, when referring to children of transnational mothers, the word “children” is used throughout the present thesis, irrespective of their age at the time of the interview, as they were adolescents when their mothers emigrated.

criteria, thus making it possible for the snowball sampling approach to be implemented (Flippen & Parrado, 2015; Obućina, 2013; Prusinski, 2016).<sup>73</sup>

It is important to consider the very strong impact of informants' (primarily, the mothers') selection bias for the interviews. Although all of them talked about the difficulties and pain of separation from their loved ones, and numerous problems they had to overcome in the process of their migration, the narratives suggest that the informants who agreed to be interviewed felt relatively comfortable about their lives and, arguably, managed to make their transnational families work.<sup>74</sup> Of the interviewed mothers, four were widowed; none of those who were married reported any trouble in their marriages. Despite the difficulties they had encountered during their emigration, overall, they viewed their experiences in a rather positive light.<sup>75</sup> Importantly, they were also well placed job-wise, did not report having any problems with their current employers. However, both mother and children informants referred during the interviews to certain dysfunctional cases of transnational family life of their acquaintances, suggesting that such problematic cases exist, but are not present in the interviews conducted for the present research project. Hence, it would be reasonable to suggest that the narratives collected during the interviews represent examples of successful, "functional" models of transnational motherhood and, broader, transnational families, albeit with numerous challenges to deal with and, often, characterized by a lack of certainty about the future.

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73 When interviewing migrant mothers contacted through previously interviewed informants, often it was not possible to check beforehand the formers' level of verbal competence. The interviews were conducted anyway; as mentioned in footnote 68 above, two interviews with migrant mothers were not used for the analysis since their migration histories deviated quite significantly from the specified selection criteria. Furthermore, due to the informants' specific style of verbal communication, these interviews did not provide any additional insight into the experiences of transnational motherhood, with one of the mothers providing extremely laconic answers where "yes", "no" and "I don't know" were dominating; while the opposite was true for the other informant, who provided extremely lengthy responses that, often, significantly deviated from the issues discussed. As for the interviews with the children, their verbal communication skills also were not tested beforehand, but all interviews were deemed useful, although on several occasions the informants were inarticulate, they struggled to express their thoughts and feelings.

74 Baldassar (2015) had a similar consideration about her informants' availability to participate in the study: "most of the families who elected to participate (though certainly not all) are generally on good terms with each other" (p. 83).

75 It is important to highlight, though, that none of the informants reported being happy about separation from their families.

### 3.4. Interview process

With migrant mothers who were potentially willing to be interviewed, the following communication “scheme” was implemented:

- **Pre-interviews**, either by phone or via Facebook Messenger’s video call, during which the research project and its goals were explained in detail, the participants’ confidentiality was guaranteed, and potential informants’ all questions were answered. Pre-interviews were indispensable to establish initial contact with the informants and ensure their informed consent. Only one mother refused to be interviewed after the pre-interview; in the rest of the cases, interviews were conducted soon after the pre-interview (usually, on the following day).
- **Interviews**. In most cases, one complete, uninterrupted interview was conducted. On several occasions, interviews were interrupted (due to the informants’ work schedule) and, usually, resumed on the following day (such cases were still considered as one interview). As mentioned, most of the interviews were conducted via Facebook Messenger’s either video or audio calls (according to the informants’ choice).
- **Follow-up**. With several mothers, follow-up informal conversations took place after the interviews, mostly via Facebook chat. Often, the informants would initiate these chats, remembering something specific and thus providing further information about the topics discussed during the interview. On occasion, conversations would continue after an exchange of Christmas/Easter/birthday greetings. While these conversations are not considered interviews per se, they often provided a deeper insight into informants’ experiences.

The same approach was followed during the interviews with children as well. However, as they were first informed about the research project by their mothers, they already had a basic knowledge about the interview process, so pre-interviews with children were, overall, relatively shorter.

All interviews were conducted and transcribed in Georgian. To ensure informants’ confidentiality, they were assigned pseudonyms, and the transcripts were anonymized to eliminate any statements or remarks (e.g. specific places, organizations, or relatives’ names) that could potentially lead to the identification of the informants. Norms of ethical interviewing were scrupulously followed through the entire period of fieldwork and data analysis (Reamer, 2013; Schrum, 1995; Walker, Holloway & Wheeler, 2005).

The data gathered through intergenerational interviews offer a unique opportunity to juxtapose migrant mothers' and their children's perspectives of migration experiences as lived by migrants themselves and by their children. The informants were willing to share their experiences, even the difficult ones. Overall, mothers seemed to feel more comfortable during the interviews, although for both mothers and children it seemed quite unusual to discuss or "describe" concepts like "motherhood".

In the summer and early autumn, 2021, when the COVID-19 emergency was relatively under control, it became possible to arrange face-to-face post-interview meetings with six migrants in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany: Nineli (fam02\_M), Anastasia (fam06\_D), Natela (fam09\_M), Magda (fam15\_M), Natalia (fam18\_M) and Nana (fam20\_M).<sup>76</sup> These meetings provided further insights into how the migrants lived their transnational motherhood experiences, as it was possible to observe their routine online communication with their children in Georgia. Information about these meetings was recorded in fieldnotes.

### 3.5. Visual data

Mothers and children interviewed at the beginning of the fieldwork were asked to share one or two recent photos exchanged, respectively, with their children and mothers, which preferably did not contain images of people or places that could lead to their identification. It was hoped that photos would help elicit further knowledge about experiences of transnationalism in their family, in line with a popular saying, "*[a] picture is worth a thousand words*".

Modern-day photo elicitation interviews, based on an approach originally developed by an American anthropologist John Collier in the 1950s (Collier, 1957), are becoming increasingly influential in empirical social research on various topics. To a large extent, photo elicitation represents a specific type of probing conventionally used during focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1996; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015), that can be adapted for individual interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative interviews can rely on various types of images to generate more empirical data, and, to a certain extent, "translating" visual data into verbal. Images are proven to

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<sup>76</sup> These meetings were of rather informal nature, although they proved to be very important as they made it possible to deepen the accumulated knowledge. Informants based in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany were contacted and asked about their willingness and availability for such meetings, which resulted in these six meetings. Further, they provided an opportunity to make acquaintance with Natalia's and Nana's friends, also *badanti* from Georgia, who accompanied them; Anastasia's mother, who previously refused to be interviewed, was also present during the meeting with her daughter.

lead respondents to discuss further aspects of their experiences and to provide more details about the issues the research project is focused on. Often, images used during interviews can substitute verbal questions, and lead to discussions that researchers would never anticipate, as respondents may interpret images based on their unique experiences and reflect on questions “researchers might never have asked” (Ammerman & Williams, 2012, quoted in Williams & Whitehouse, 2015, p. 312).

Speaking specifically about photos used during qualitative interviews, they can be:

- Researcher-generated, respondent-generated or universally available (e.g., from media sources);
- Prepared beforehand or during the interview (Williams & Whitehouse, 2015).

Fedyuk (2012) discussed several types of photographs exchanged between labour migrants from Ukraine to Italy and their family members left behind in Ukraine: (1) portraits / family members’ images / events (weddings, etc.), which show what people look like at the given point in time, and how they live; (2) photos of presents received from migrants and used by the family members in Ukraine (toys, clothing, etc.); (3) images that document the development of a “common (economic) project into which a migrant invests money”, e.g. house construction or renovation (Fedyuk, 2012, p. 292). Furthermore, migrants tended to send photos from their vacations, visits to cultural and historical sites, as well as those that document their participation in activities related to Ukraine in one way or another (celebrating Ukrainian holidays, including religious ones; cooking Ukrainian meals, etc.). Fedyuk further suggested that migrants would auto-censor themselves when choosing photos to send back home, as they had to be “extremely cautious not to stir up the mistrust and jealousy of their spouses, gossip within extended families and neighbours, or feelings of neglect in their children” (Fedyuk, 2012, p. 294).

Fedyuk also maintained in her article that the importance, value of photos were higher for migrants than for the family members who remained “at home”, with the former being “much more dependent” on these photos (Fedyuk, 2012, p. 293) and implying higher vulnerability of migrants compared with the rest of their families. She also put forward an interesting hypothesis, although not entirely supported by evidence, according to which photos sent to Ukraine by migrants were static, demonstrating “non-change”, while the opposite was true for photos that “travelled” from Ukraine to Italy (Fedyuk, 2012, p. 297).

Visual information exchanged between the members of transnational families represents, without doubt, an important aspect of these families' experiences. The ease of producing and sending photos and videos, to which virtually no technological and financial limits apply, brings to a new level of transnationalism. According to the original design, it was hoped to use for the present research project respondent-generated photos taken before the interviews – “usual” photos taken with the goal of a standard, even routine exchange with family members. The photos would have been selected by informants during the interviews, or shortly afterwards; the selected photos would have been discussed with the informants, to let them explain the importance of the selected photo(s). The same photo(s) would have been discussed during the interview with the informant's son/daughter (in case of mothers' photos) or with the informant's mother (in case of children's photos), to understand the photo(s)' meaning from the recipients' point of view.

Important to note, it was not expected that the photos, shared via internet communication channels, would have been available physically, in forms other than image files on informants' cell phones or similar devices. Thus, the aspects of the physical display of images were not relevant in this case, as opposed to other research projects where images have been analysed (e.g. Drazin & Frohlich, 2007, p. 68; Fedyuk, 2012, p. 288). The most helpful potential added value of photos would have been a better understanding of migration and separation experiences and the generation of new perspectives on transnational motherhood. Having both documentary and emotional value, photos would help learn more about informants' experiences and add valuable details about how these experiences were lived. It was also hoped that photos would help generate data that was unforeseen at the stage of planning the research project and preparation of discussion guides. The photo elicitation component would also modify the “power dynamic” between the informants and the researcher, leading to informants' higher engagement and control (Harper, 1988; Pauwels, 2015; Williams & Whitehouse, 2015). The latter would have been particularly important when interviewing young people, who might have felt the researcher's dominance to a larger degree.

No major difficulties were envisioned in respect to this aspect of the interviews, as there was no doubt that numerous photos had been routinely exchanged in translational families, as an indispensable element of family members keeping in touch with each other. Almost universal availability and accessibility of smartphones with decent photographic devices built in, as well as often uninterrupted internet access of family members in both sending and receiving countries would ensure an extremely large pool of photos to share from. However, for the most part, informants were rather surprised by the request to share photos. They did share them, but, although the request was for photos that would not contain images of people or places that could lead to their

identification, the shared photos were almost exclusively portraits where people were easily recognizable – photos that Fedyuk (2012) would place in her category of portraits and images. As a result, most of these photos cannot be used without compromising the informants' confidentiality. Some of the informants' photos that provide a deeper insight into the experiences of transnational motherhood, illustrate their narratives and cannot lead to informants' identification will be used in the presentation of the findings (Chapter 4).

### 3.6. Supplementary data

Two expert interviews were conducted in October 2020 with a government official working on migration management issues in Tbilisi, Georgia, and a practicing psychologist, Ms.N, working in Tbilisi with labour migrant mothers' teenage children left behind. These interviews were also conducted online. The latter interview provides particularly valuable insights based on Ms.N's extensive experience of working with children and teenagers left behind. Often, these young people come from relatively disadvantaged environments and thus do not share mostly positive experiences reported by informants. Ms.N's input, thus, helps balance the impact of informants' self-selection discussed in Section 3.3.

In addition, informants (both migrant mothers and their children) gave me their consent to follow their public Facebook feeds and use any relevant data. Most of the informants were actively present on Facebook; it could be claimed that, for them, “[d]igital space is embedded in the larger societal, cultural, subjective, economic, imaginary structurations of lived experience and the systems within which we exist and operate” (Sassen, 2002, pp. 368-369). Since Facebook became universally available in September 2006, the number of its users constantly continued to grow, and reached roughly 2.85 billion monthly active users (i.e. those who have logged on during the past 30 days) in the first quarter of 2021 (Statista, 2021a), thus making Facebook the most widely used social network worldwide. The development of its mobile application contributed to its further growth, as, according to January 2021 data, 81% of the users used Facebook exclusively via mobile phones (Statista, 2021a). The majority of mothers interviewed for the present research project, undoubtedly, also belong to this latter category. The children, on the other hand, arguably used Facebook both via their mobile phones and laptops, especially those of them who were still students at the time of the interviews.

As D. Murthy claimed over a decade ago, social networks represent “a previously unavailable type of ethnographic data” (Murthy, 2008, p. 844), although this source of data has not yet been

used to study international migrants' experiences. Their study has been coined netnography (Kozinets, 2019), and has the potential to "provide unique in-depth autobiographical accounts of scenes and respondents" (Murthy, 2008, p. 846). Murthy recommended, though, to treat social networks not as the main, but, rather, as an additional data source which would supplement interviewing or "physical ethnography", to come up with a "balanced combination [which] gives researchers a larger and more exciting array of methods to tell social stories" (Murthy, 2008, p. 839). Such an approach was implemented in terms of the present research project as well, as elements of "digital ethnography", along with post-interview meetings with informants, aim to supplement the core findings from the interviews. As it was the case during interviewing, norms of online research ethics were rigorously followed when analysing informants' Facebook posts.

Migrant mothers' Facebook posts were important to follow, as they often documented informants' everyday lives, feelings, thoughts, motherhood practices, challenges they were going through and hopes they had for their own and their children's future. Informants who came to Italy in the pre-Facebook period remembered difficulties of extremely limited communication with their families in the early 2000s. The present-day possibilities offered by social media platforms radically changed their experiences, and migrant mothers took advantage of all the opportunities modern communication technologies had to offer. Often, their Facebook posts represented public display of their sentiments towards their loved ones, being, sometimes, "more personal ... compared with face-to-face interviewing and standardized questionnaires, confirming Miller and Slater's (2000: 183) conclusion of the sometimes greater 'intimacy' of data collected online" (Murthy, 2008, p. 842). In addition to virtual celebrations of their families' important dates, e.g. children's birthdays, it was not rare for the informants to cite (or repost) poems or songs in their Facebook posts, or to write an imaginary dialogue with a son/daughter. Children's Facebook feeds were, overall, more restrained, although they also had numerous emotional personal posts. Often, comments to the informants' posts were not less relevant and important from the perspective of the present research project.

Although it is very challenging to use public social media content and yet preserve the authors' confidentiality, respective data has been used in Chapter 4, strictly limited to relevant posts which would not risk exposing the authors' identity.<sup>77</sup>

Interviewed mothers who were active on Facebook were members of public groups that aimed to virtually bring together migrants from Georgia, share their experiences and helpful information.

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<sup>77</sup> As an additional measure to protect informants' confidentiality, when referring to their Facebook posts in Chapter 4, specific dates of these posts are not indicated.

Some of these groups were specifically targeting migrants working in Italy. Posts appearing in the public group “Italiis tsis kvesh – L’anima Georgiana” (“Under the Italian sky – The Georgian soul”) were monitored in 2020 and 2021. The group was moderated from Bari; by the end of 2021 it had over 28 thousand members. The content of the posts was of general interest, referring to Italian culture, language, ongoing events in Italy, in Georgia and worldwide, requests for charitable donations, etc. Occasionally, the theme of transnational motherhood was also discussed, however it was not a frequent topic.

### 3.7. Informants’ stories

Informants’ family backgrounds and family histories were all but simple and straightforward; their migration experiences often developed in the most unexpected ways. In addition to basic facts about informants and their migration experiences provided in Appendix 3, a brief overview of their family histories and most distinctive facts about their current situation is presented in this section.

Marina’s (**FAM\_04**) life history exemplifies one of the most typical situations that led to emigration of many women from post-Soviet Georgia. A family of professionals living in the capital city and raising their three children was hit hard in the early 1990s by the closure of the enterprise where Marina’s husband worked as a senior executive. Marina also lost her job soon afterwards. To be able to provide for the family, the husband tried to start his own business, but ended up in debt to his co-investors and, later, banks. As debts were accumulating, the family eventually lost their apartment. Not being able to find a solution, the husband started drinking heavily, which only aggravated the situation and put his health in jeopardy. In 2009, Marina emigrated to Italy, to Apulia, as she saw emigration as the last hope to help the family. She described herself as unprepared for emigration, being in a state of confusion at the time. She took another high-interest loan to pay for the services of intermediaries who helped her arrive in Italy. Her oldest daughter was already married by then; younger children, aged 25 and 13, stayed with their father, in a rented apartment. However, two months after Marina’s emigration, her husband passed away from heart failure. Due to her undocumented status, Marina could not return to Georgia for her husband’s funeral. After over a decade of hard work in Italy, she paid off all the debts, supported her children (including the married daughter) during the whole period of her emigration, made sure her youngest son got tertiary education and bought a new apartment. Her long-term plan was to return to Georgia, but she was not sure this would happen in the nearest future.

Her youngest son, who was also interviewed, was 13 when his mother emigrated. He was 24 at the time of the interview, had already graduated from the university, was living in a brand-new apartment purchased by his mother, had a job that he liked, and was about to get married. A few years earlier he had a chance to visit his mother in Italy together with his fiancée. He was hoping his mother would return to Georgia soon and help raise kids he hoped to have soon. When asked about the most important person in his life, he immediately answered it was his mother.

Nana (**FAM\_20**) also suffered a loss in the family after her emigration, that of her mother. Also a mother of three, she emigrated in 2015 and left her children who were 19, 18 and 4 years old, with her husband. It was agreed that her mother, who lived nearby, was still quite young and in a good health, would help them on a daily basis, thus Nana was sure that the children would be taken good care of. A teacher, Nana decided to emigrate to be able to ensure better educational opportunities for her children, although leaving them behind – especially the youngest one – was very hard. At the time, she did not expect her emigration to last too long. Soon after her arrival in Italy, though, her mother had a stroke, which left her bed-bound for four long years. Although the family hired a nurse to take care of Nana’s mother, her daughter, Salome, who was 18 when Nana emigrated, was also closely involved in taking care of her grandmother. In addition, following her grandmother’s stroke, Salome became a primary caregiver for her little sister. To manage her new and unforeseen responsibilities, she transferred to a university closer to home, which, however, she strongly disliked. Due to her family responsibilities, she had to take semester-long leaves from her university several times over the course of her educational program.

Salome was 23 at the time of the interview. She was about to graduate from the university, about two years later compared with a “normal” schedule of her BA program. After her grandmother passed away, she got a job, still taking care, together with her father, of her little sister. She was hoping that her earnings would contribute to family finances and, eventually, will make possible her mother’s return from emigration as soon as possible.

Migrants’ children interviewed for the present research project demonstrated impressive levels of maturity. Tamuna (**FAM\_19**) was 15 when her mother emigrated, but she remembered that she and her sister were not spending much time with their mother before her emigration either, as she had a very demanding work schedule. Tamuna was 24 at the time of the interview, had a full-time job, was very proud to be good at her job, and, like Salome, hoped to do her part in ensuring her mother’s return home as early as possible. She strongly believed young people of her age should be able to provide for themselves, and not depend on their parents financially or otherwise.

Her mother, Nanuli, emigrated in 2012. She worked as a babysitter in Georgia, and had to spend most of her time with the family she worked for. She decided to emigrate to make sure her daughters would be able to get tertiary education. They both did, but as it happened, none of them was working according to their professional qualification, as they found jobs in completely different sectors of economy. Despite economic success of her emigration, Nanuli was concerned about the years spent away from her daughters, and was hoping to return home as soon as possible.

Eliso (FAM\_17) left behind three teenage children in 2008, technically – in her husband’s care, but in reality her oldest daughter, Tamta took over a big part of the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. Tamta was a university student at the time, studying in a different city. She had to make weekly trips on the weekends to take care of the family, cook for them, help with school. Usually, it was her responsibility to attend parents’ meetings at her siblings’ school, as her father was not very much willing to do so, although he did his best otherwise to be there for his children.

Tamta was working for several years after graduation, but then lost her job. Rather than being unemployed, she was willing to join her mother in Italy and, like her, work as a *badante*. Her mother strongly opposed this idea, insisting that a person should not leave his/her homeland, so Tamta stayed in Georgia. During the interview, she provided impressive details about how much her mother, who emigrated over a decade ago, was still involved in the family’s life, how she tried to make sure everything was in order in their house.

Natela’s (FAM\_09) sons were 13 and 14 when she emigrated. The boys were doing very well at school, and, similar to Nana (fam20\_M), Natela wanted to make sure that nothing hampered their further education. While the boys were still at school, the family was managing financially. However, they lived in a small town, and, as Natela and her husband looked ahead, sending the boys to a university in a big city would lead to expenses the family would not be able to meet (rent, living expenses, possibly – university tuition fees<sup>78</sup>). Labour emigration seemed to be a solution; being aware of the availability of “female jobs” in Western European countries, the spouses agreed that it had to be Natela who would emigrate.

Natela did her best to prepare herself and the rest of the family for emigration: she explained to her sons why she decided to leave; for several months before her departure, she’d been training them to take care of themselves and the house while she’d be gone; and, with a self-teaching guide, she actually learned to speak some Italian before emigration. Of the labour migrants interviewed,

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<sup>78</sup> Tertiary education funding scheme in Georgia is described in footnote 82 (Chapter 4).

only she and Nanuli (fam19\_M) arrived in Italy with a certain knowledge of Italian.<sup>79</sup> And her efforts paid off: she found a job on the third day upon her arrival, thanks to her command of the language and her insistence.

Natela believed, she and her husband succeeded well in their efforts to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their sons. Both of them were university students at the time of the interview, with excellent academic records. The older son, Alex, who was also interviewed, once visited his mother in Italy. During his visit, he lived in the family where Natela worked at the time, and they made him feel very welcome.

Liana's background was rather different from the situation of all other interviewed mothers (FAM\_01). A few years before coming to Italy for work, she spent a semester at an Italian university as an exchange student. Upon her return to Georgia and graduation, she changed several jobs, but, as she remembered, her and her husband's joint monthly salary would, at best, last for two weeks. The family was renting an apartment, thus the goal to purchase a house or an apartment was a very important incentive for Liana to emigrate. Although her daughter was in her early teens and still in middle school, Liana and her husband were already concerned about her future education, and were determined to make sure she would be able to get a decent tertiary education. Once the decision about emigration was made, Italy was an obvious choice, as Liana had lived in the country before, felt comfortable in Italy and spoke some Italian.

Interestingly, Liana's mother was also a labour migrant (in a different country), thus Liana had a first-hand experience of being a migrant mother's daughter. She talked about this experience rather painfully (she had trouble sleeping, eating), although she was already an adult (32 years old), and a mother herself, when her mother emigrated. According to Liana, the reason she had so painful reaction to her mother's emigration was that she was already a grown-up, not a child, and could understand the challenges her mother was going through, and how difficult was the emigration for her mother.

Liana's daughter, Anna, was 12 when Liana emigrated. Anna stayed with her father, and Liana has been virtually present in their lives as much as her job permitted her. According to Liana, her daughter understood very well her decision to emigrate, when Liana explained it to her. Liana also told her she'll try to make sure Anna will be able to study in Italy, so she believed she managed to show her daughter a different prospect for the future, *"like a fantasy, but a real one. Real. I*

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<sup>79</sup> Liana (fam01\_M) also spoke Italian, although her situation was specific, as described in the following paragraphs of the present Section.

*mean, I did not lie to her. <...> I explained that we needed this. I needed to leave. <...> I don't know whether it will take one year, two years or three years, I will save money to simply make sure my child has a roof over her head, her own house to live in – I'm not speaking about me or my husband, what matters is the child".*

A divorced mother, Nina (**FAM\_21**) had been taking care of her teenage daughter, Sophia, and her mother who had some health issues and needed constant medical attention. Following her friends' advice, she spent some time in Turkey working as a babysitter. During this period, she was able to come back home for short visits several times per year, and her daughter also managed to visit her in Turkey, as it was very easy to travel between the two countries. Upon her return to Georgia, Nina worked several jobs, but the income was still insufficient and her savings were running out. It were, again, her friends who convinced her to emigrate again, this time – to Italy. Although she had already lived an experience of separation from her daughter, Nina claimed during the interview that the separation was more difficult during her second emigration, because she could no longer travel back and forth due to her irregular status, and her daughter could no longer visit her either.

At the time of the interview, Sophia was about the graduate from high school, and was working hard preparing for university entrance exams. She wanted to start a law school in the capital, thus move away from her hometown. She was confident she would get admitted, the only question was whether she'd be able to secure state funding for tuition fees. If she did, it would help her mother a lot, as it would drastically reduce expenses related to education. Meanwhile, Sophia was living with her grandmother, and they were taking care of each other, trying to make sure Nina would not be worried about them.

Similar to Nina, Nineli (**FAM\_02**) also had a previous emigration experience in Turkey, where she spent 10 years working extremely hard, "*day and night*". Her husband spent most of the time with her, and the children – a teenage daughter and a younger son – would visit during their summer holidays. For the rest of the year, the children lived in Georgia with their aunt, who was "devoted" to them; in fact, the children used to call her "Mommy-Aunty".

Nineli's emigration to Turkey had two goals: to provide for the family's basic needs and to make sure the children were not held back in their post-secondary education. Both these goals were achieved, but just a few months after her return from Turkey Nineli emigrated again, this time to Italy. Her new emigration goals were to provide better housing conditions for the family,

specifically – to purchase separate apartments for her children in the capital. In the meantime, her daughter got married and had children of her own.

Nineli was quite fond of Turkey, yet, as she said, there were radical differences in the working conditions, as well as enumeration, between Turkey and Italy. While she considered her employment experience to be much better in Italy, the experience of family separation, on the other hand, was much tougher during her first years in Italy, before she got her first residence permit and was able to visit her family in Georgia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, she used to visit Georgia every summer during her vacations, but neither her husband nor children managed to visit her during the 12 years she'd been in Italy.

Nineli's both children were interviewed. Similar to many other families, these interviews provided evidence of a gendered division of responsibilities in this family, with females primarily (sometimes – exclusively) responsible for housework. Nineli's daughter, Shorena, was the one taking care of her aunt after her cardiac insult. She reflected on how it was different having her mother far away earlier, when she was a teenager, and later, when she grew up: *“I was missing her just as a child back then, but I really need her next to me [now], it's now that I need my mother most, because Dad is getting old, aunt is bedridden after her [cardiac] insult, for the third year already, and then the children – well, they first had a Skype-Granny, that's how they knew her, now we have a Messenger-Granny, they miss her and every time she goes back [to Italy after her vacation in Georgia], they cry”*.

Natalia's husband died suddenly due to an unexpected health complication, leaving her the sole caregiver and provider for their two children and her mother-in-law who was not in good health (**FAM\_18**). Natalia worked double shifts; to save on public transportation, used to walk to her work despite the long distance. She did her very best, but the family could not make the ends meet, although Natalia's parents were also helping. As she remembered during the interview, she took the decision to emigrate to Italy “suddenly”, and, thanks to the Visa liberalisation agreement between the EU and Georgia, a week later she was already in Campania. Although she had relatives who were already working in Italy and whose help she was counting on, her employment history in Italy was complicated in the beginning, but about a year after her arrival she started working for a “wonderful” family in rural Emilia-Romagna, where she hoped to stay for as long as possible.

Her daughter, Elena, who was 20 at the time of the interview, finished high school and started university after her mother's emigration. She and her younger brother lived with their paternal grandmother, but she was not well, so ever since Natalia emigrated, Elena has been in charge of the

housework, all the finances her mother has been sending from Italy, and has been taking care of her young brother, who was 11 when Natalia emigrated and who started acting out after his father's death and mother's emigration. Probably because of her son's behaviour, and the increased responsibilities of her daughter, Natalia felt particularly guilty for "leaving" her children, and was hoping they could forgive her.

After her husband passed away, Lamara (**FAM\_08**), just like Natalia, saw emigration as the only way to provide for herself and her teenage daughter; and, to the possible extent, help her older son as well. She relied on the help of an extended network of earlier labour migrants to Lombardy, including her sister who has been working in Italy for over a decade by the time Lamara emigrated. Still, it took her a long time to find a job, and during this initial period she was not able to help her children in any way.

Her daughter, Nini, a student, accompanied her mother to the airport when she left for Italy. She remembered her pain when she got back home from the airport, and her Mom was no longer there. Despite being a younger sibling, similar to other daughters of migrants, Nini took over most of the housework after her mother left (cooking, basic household chores). Although she reported being very close with her brother, she said they never discussed their mother's emigration. Avoiding this topic appears to be quite common for the children of labour migrants.

Magda (**FAM\_15**) had a previous migration experience in Russia, where she followed her husband. Their daughter, Ketevan, was also with them. The family returned to Georgia following a propagandistic campaign of a previous government, which was encouraging emigrants to return, promising them a better life in their homeland. These promises did not come true, though.

Ketevan got married, had a child, and both families struggled, so Magda decided to emigrate to Italy, this time – alone. On the one hand, she did not want to be a burden on her family, and on the other hand, she felt she could – and should – be helping her daughter and grandchildren. Her husband passed away soon after her emigration. While Magda was sending her daughter most of her earnings, she realized her grandchildren "loved more" their other grandmother with whom they lived together in Georgia.

Diana, on the other hand, never had any previous migration experience (**FAM\_07**). A single mother, she grew up and lived her entire life in a small town. As her son, Shota, was growing up, her modest income as a teacher seemed to be constantly shrinking. Labour emigration seemed like the only hope to improve her family's financial situation. She emigrated in 2007, soon after her son got married.

She started working just a week after she arrived in Apulia and was very thankful to the very first family where she worked, as they helped her a lot to learn Italian and adapt to the new life. Since 2007, she never went back to Georgia due to the lack of proper documents. The worst memories of her emigration period are of the moment when she learned about her mother passing away; and of the time when her son had to undergo a serious emergency surgery back in Georgia, followed by a long period of recovery.

Two years after his recovery, Shota and his wife, with their 9 years old daughter decided to join Diana in Apulia. This is when Diana could finally meet her granddaughter for the first time. Since then, Diana and her son's family have been living nearby. While Diana continued to work as a live-in *badante*, Shota and his wife rented an apartment with the help of Diana's previous employers. Shota worked seasonal agricultural jobs, his wife did occasional house cleaning jobs, while the child went to a local school, doing very well. Neither Diana nor Shota were sure about their plans for the long-term future.

Anastasia (**FAM\_06**) was also reunited in Italy with her mother.<sup>80</sup> Although her mother was very much against it, she insisted to come, and eventually joined her mother in Tuscany. At the time of the interview, Anastasia and her mother were working as *badanti* in neighbouring towns, regularly meeting on their day offs.<sup>81</sup>

Anastasia was 15 when her mother emigrated to Italy, as the family was struggling financially, accumulating debts. Anastasia and her younger brother remained in their father's and grandmother's care. She remembered having developed certain anger toward her father, as, according to her, *"It shouldn't have been my mother [to emigrate], it should have been my Dad. Not my mother. I mean, those were the family's debts, and it shouldn't have been my mother's responsibility to pay those off. This is what I was protesting against, and what I could not accept."*

Anastasia was 29 at the time of the interview. She remembered having had a challenging teenage period, during which, though, she grew particularly close to her grandmother, "my big mother", as she called her. She got married quite young, but the marriage did not last long. After the divorce, she got the idea to follow her mother in Italy.

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80 Legally, the cases of Anastasia (FAM\_06) and Shota (FAM\_07) would not be considered family reunifications as the children were already legal adults at the time of their arrival in Italy. In the context of these interviews, though, legal aspect is not of primary interest. From the informants' point of view, their families were reunited (the reunification of FAM\_06 was partial, as Anastasia's brother and father were still in Georgia).

81 As explained above (Section 2.3), Anastasia's mother eventually cancelled the interview, as she felt very emotional about her migration experience and did not feel comfortable talking about it.

Back in Georgia, Anastasia's brother got married meanwhile, and had a child. As for Anastasia, she believed her work in Italy would help her provide for a better future; she was hoping to save for her own apartment in the capital city, Tbilisi, as she no longer saw herself in the small town where she grew up.

A deeply religious mother, Dali (**FAM\_12**) worked as a teacher in a small town in Georgia, but decided to emigrate to Italy to help her family escape poverty. She left her only son, George, with her husband. Of the mothers interviewed for the present research project, Dali's emigration is the longest one – she had been working in Italy for 16 years. Her emigration lasted much longer than expected because, as it often happens, once the family's basic needs were secured, new needs appeared: on the one hand, the family decided to do extensive renovations in their house, and, on the other hand, George got married and had two children, and Dali was willing to (financially) help raise her grandchildren.

George remembered both him and his father being very worried about Dali upon her arrival in Italy, especially before she started her first stable job. Lack of certainty about the duration of her emigration made them feel even more anxious. On the other hand, it was very important for George that while in Italy and thus, thanks to her emigration, his mother managed to get the medical care she needed. George did not believe she'd get such a good and efficient care in Georgia, hence in this respect, he saw his mother's emigration as her "salvation". He also noted that the family would not even dream of the improvements in their financial situation to the levels that Dali's remittances made possible.

A long-term migrant, Rusudan (**FAM\_10**) left behind five children, aged between 12 and 23. The family struggled financially, had debts, but, for quite a long time, Rusudan did not consider emigration, as she could not leave the children. She emigrated once she felt her older daughters were old enough to take care of their younger siblings. The oldest daughter got married and by the time of Rusudan's emigration was no longer living in the parental house. Mtvarisa, her second oldest daughter, who was also interviewed, took over most of the household chores (washing, cooking, etc.) for the rest of the family.

When Rusudan emigrated in 2006, emigration from Georgia to Italy was not so widespread yet, so she left without hoping for someone's help. At the time, it took a lot of courage to emigrate. Migration networks were not developed yet, and the risks associated with emigration were high. Rusudan took a very complicated route to arrive in Apulia – "*but I was not afraid, I've never been afraid, and I'm very glad I [emigrated]*". Even after so many years of emigration, though, evenings,

the hours after work, were the most difficult for her, with the feelings of being alone, away from her loved ones.

Rusudan believed, all her children were quite settled by the time of our interview. Her daughter Mtvarisa was still helping her father and brother with the housework, although she was married and was no longer living in the house where she grew up. Fourteen years after her mother's emigration, she was still finding that house "empty" and said she only went there because of the sense of duty toward her father and brother, as it was very painful not to see her mother there.

Also a long-term migrant, Guliko (FAM\_11) arrived in Italy in 2006, when it was very difficult for Georgian citizens to get a Schengen visa. In fact, the Italian consulate refused her visa application, and she only got her Schengen visa when she reapplied through the Consulate of the Czech Republic. She had to pay a large sum for intermediaries' services, as she was not sure how the system worked. She left behind her 16-year-old son and an adult daughter (28 years old) who was already married. Interestingly, her son moved to Sweden a few years ago, and settled there with Guliko's help.

Besides a general goal to improve her family's financial situation, one very specific goal of Guliko's emigration was to save money for her daughter's infertility treatment – by the time of Guliko's emigration, her daughter had been married for five years and did not have a child yet. The treatment did not go well in Georgia. When Guliko found a stable employment in Italy, she arranged for her daughter to be treated in a clinic in Turkey. Eventually, over a decade after her marriage, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. To Guliko, this child justified all the difficulties and challenges she had to face during her migration: *"It was hard, but one ought to have the willpower to do what s/he has to do."*

Lela (FAM\_14) left for Italy in early 2019, leaving her sons, aged 16 and 19 at the time, with her parents. Her sister was also very involved in their lives, both before and after Lela's emigration. Lela's friend who emigrated to Italy years ago helped her during the initial period, when she felt close to getting depressed. Two years on, Lela was convinced her emigration was the right decision. She was helping financially not only her family, but her former students as well.

Full-time work as a *badante* still left enough space for her life-long passion for music. According to her mother, Tsiala, Lela "spread her wings" in Italy when it came to her artistic life. Before the pandemic, Lela was participating in concerts in Apulia and volunteered to teach music to children in her free time. Tsiala pictured her daughter as very accomplished in Italy, and most probably not considering returning to Georgia in the foreseeable future. *"As [Lela's sons] saw their*

*mother's success [in arts], they were no longer worried [about her] that much, they are very happy about their mother's achievements.”*

After 12 years of working in Italy, Naira (**FAM\_03**), who was 68 years old at the time of the interview, was considering returning to Georgia and being with her family. All her daughters already had grandchildren, and she was looking forward to spending as much time with them as possible. Although the family was struggling in the mid-2000s, which was the reason for her emigration in 2008, by 2020 none of her immediate family (her three daughters' independent households included) had any financial difficulties – they were all working hard and doing well, according to Naira. Thus, she was convinced her migration goals were achieved, and rather successfully, and it was time to return home.<sup>82</sup>

Although her entire migration “project” developed rather smoothly, and she believed she had been extremely lucky with the families where she worked over the 12 years in Italy, she still reported a pain that accompanies labour migration and that, according to her, only people with labour migrants' experience can understand. She assessed the years of emigration both as (economically) successful, helpful and important for her family, but also, at the same time – as lost, “spiritually devastating” years.

A teacher, Valentina (**FAM\_13**) was actively involved in her hometown's social life. Economic hardships and political developments that she considered unacceptable eventually led to her emigration in 2007. In addition, her husband had potentially serious health issues, and it was only a matter of time before he would need to undergo a costly surgery; Valentina wanted to make sure they could cover the costs of his treatment.

While appreciating certain aspects and achievements of her emigration experience, Valentina was the only informant who said that if she were to make the decision about emigration today, she would not leave her family. *“I am afraid to wake up, I am afraid to go to sleep, emigration kills the soul.”*

### 3.8. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was performed to analyse informants' narratives (Buetow, 2010; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Lacity & Janson, 1994). An inductive approach was used, major themes and findings were generated based on the data collected, with particular attention to shared

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<sup>82</sup> As follow-up communication with Naira confirmed, she did return permanently to Georgia a few months after our interview.

experiences and perceptions across the interviews. Mothers' and children's narratives were collated to better understand intergenerational differences in informants' experiences of transnational motherhood. Findings were contextualized within the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2.

As mentioned above, it is reasonable to expect that collected narratives depict positive and, to a large extent, successful models of transnational motherhood. Thus, the interviews can provide insights into what it takes for transnational family relations to work, and, specifically, for transnational motherhood to be efficient.

The findings presented in Chapter 4 are focused on the following major themes:

- General experiences of separation and the process of adjustment, both behaviorally and emotionally, to the new realities of transnational family life. Interviews provide extensive evidence of intergenerational differences in this process.
- Virtual presence and care at distance, focusing on changing practices of motherhood from the perspectives of both mothers and children. Interviewed mothers and children provided evidence of taking care of each other's feelings and being present in each other's lives even throughout estrangement episodes.
- Labour migration, seen as mothers' sacrifice for the well-being of their children, yet coexisting with evidently incompatible strong feelings of guilt experienced by mothers for being away from their children. Interviewed children, on the other hand, while understanding and appreciating their mothers' sacrifice, did not indicate any feelings of resentment toward their mothers.

### 3.9. Limitations

All efforts have been taken to make sure that the best quality data was collected. It is, however, important to consider unavoidable limitations of the information gathered, that are intrinsic to the characteristics of the target population and the major data collection method used, i.e.:

- Exclusively verbal data has been collected. Verbal data cannot be considered a completely reliable source of knowledge about any social phenomena, as, due to several objective and subjective reasons, it may lack objectivity (Shceff, 1997). Informants' perspectives are

inevitably subjective, although it can be argued that qualitative interviews, first and foremost, are looking for this very subjectivity.

As mentioned above, visual data has also been gathered to the possible extent, but the available visual data is very limited and unsystematic; interpretation of the photos provided by informants was, again, based on verbal data. However, during the face-to-face post-interview meetings with migrant mothers in the summer and early autumn, 2021, it was possible to enrich the data, albeit to a rather limited extent, with elements of participant observation. Together with Nineli (fam02\_M), we visited Natela (fam09\_M) in the very family where she worked, spending together an afternoon and witnessing both mothers' ongoing communication with their children via Facebook Messenger. Entire days were spent with Natalia (fam18\_M) and Nana (fam20\_M) on their days off, visiting historical and cultural sites in Bologna and Florence, respectively. Both Natalia and Nana were constantly communicating with their children, involving me in their video calls; during these visits, they also met and introduced me to some of their friends, other *badanti* from Georgia working in respective regions in Italy, which help to get a better understanding of how their free time was organized.

- A historical component was very pronounced in the interviews, as an important part of the experiences discussed by informants happened years, sometimes – decades before the interviews. Reliability of the recollection of past events is always to be challenged, as human memory is designed to be selective. This aspect is especially important in cases of interviews with young informants who were asked to remember events of their teenage years. Without a doubt, their memories were bound to be selective, often – without them realizing this selectivity.
- Following the original design of the research project, migrant mothers and, whenever possible, their children were interviewed. Fathers were left out, and their voices and experiences have not been accounted for in this project. One explanation for this approach is an expected high rate of refusals, as men are, usually, less willing to be interviewed. Nevertheless, fathers' experiences of transnational family life are important and undoubtedly merit being studied thoroughly.
- As it has been widely discussed, interviewing is a formal, rather artificial process, thus human behaviour and, to a certain extent, narratives generated during interviews, may also tend to be somehow artificial; interviews conducted online are even more artificial from the

perspective of “normal” human communication. It is possible that informants would have been more open, and more sincere if the interviews were conducted in person, or if repeated interviews were conducted.

- As any other qualitative data, the collected narratives are not, and were not meant to be representative. They provide valuable information about the informants’ experiences, but give no knowledge about the extent to which these experiences are widespread.

## CHAPTER 4. The narratives

In light of the theoretical perspectives on transnational motherhood (Chapter 2), both migrant mothers’ and children’s experiences are presented in this Chapter, based on their narratives and the review of their social media profiles. Motherhood practices developed *ad hoc* following mothers’ labour emigration are analysed through the prism of the traditional ideology of motherhood, as well as its alternative understanding (Section 2.3).

As the interviewed mothers repeatedly stressed, they would not have considered emigration and, hence, separation from their families, if there were a possibility to meet their families’ needs while earning their livelihood in Georgia. Their children also saw mothers’ emigration as the very last resort. Looking back at the time when emigration decisions were taken, neither mothers nor children could think of other options for their families. Importantly, informants were concerned about rather basic, not sophisticated needs that led to emigration: adequate housing, nutrition, healthcare and education; in some cases, families had accumulated debts that had to be paid back, but there were no resources to do so.

Debts put aside, expenses for family members’ healthcare and education were among the most pressing challenges named. By the time of emigration of most of the informants, the population of Georgia could not yet rely on any kind of state support when it came to healthcare; in case of a family member’s health condition that required serious medical care, the families were expected to cover all medical expenses, and the bills could reach sky-high amounts.<sup>83</sup> As for educational opportunities, while general education (a total of 12 years of study at primary, basic and secondary school levels) is free in Georgia, tertiary education fees may be prohibitive for an

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<sup>83</sup> Universal Health Care Program was introduced by the government of Georgia in February, 2013. While the program was underfunded and was, overall, far from perfect, it was an important resource for the population. The program was, however, modified quite significantly in May, 2017, introducing “differential packages” and no longer granting any assistance to people with annual income above 40,000 GEL, i.e. approximately 14,000 EUR according to the average exchange rate in 2017 (Verulava *et al.*, 2017).

average household, especially if the family does not live in the same settlement where the university is located (hence, housing and living expenses are to be added to tuition fees).<sup>84</sup> Understandably, parents wish to give their children the best possible chances to get higher education, especially when a child is doing well at school, thus demonstrates a potential to succeed further. If a young person gets admitted to the university, but the family cannot afford tuition fees or other expenses related to education, this would be perceived as a major parental failure. There appear to be numerous labour migrants from Georgia who have decided to go to work abroad primarily to make sure that their children would not have to reject their tertiary education opportunities because of their families' limited financial resources. Nineli (fam02\_M) was one of them, and her daughter remembered during the interview how important it was for Nineli to make sure both her children continued their education:

*“I was about to apply [to the university], and this was the reason [for my Mom to emigrate]. [She said], I can’t leave Shorena in the middle [of her educational path]... There is no university in [town] where we were living, so we had to move to Tbilisi, and we did not have an apartment there, so we had to rent an apartment and all those other expenses...”*<sup>85</sup> (Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)

In this prism, mothers' labour migration should be considered to be of a forced nature. They left for Italy, hoping to solve their families' pressing economic problems; like the rest of the family members, they saw employment abroad as the only feasible coping strategy for their families to make ends meet, ensure necessary healthcare and/or to pave the road to a better future for the children. Many, if not all of them did not feel they had a choice to stay.

Decisions about emigration were taken after years of economic hardships, and, along with hope, were influenced by a certain degree of desperation. Migrants themselves, as well their family

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84 In Georgia, all university applicants have to take unified entrance exams. Several types of state grants covering up to 100% of university tuition fees are awarded annually to applicants who perform best at the Unified National Exams. Significant regional and, in particular, rural/urban disparities in access to higher education in Georgia have also been documented. A further aspect of inequality to access to education is related to a universally acknowledged need for private tuition to prepare for Unified National Exams. Due to a poor quality of teaching in the absolute majority of secondary schools, the applicants cannot expect to perform well at the Unified National Exams unless they take private lessons during the last school year at least; many take private lessons for several academic years. This situation disproportionately favours applicants from well-off families who can afford private tuition, as well as those living in big cities where, compared with villages or small towns, the choice of efficient tutors is much bigger.

85 All quotes have been translated from Georgian, and all efforts have been taken to maintain the informants' style of conversation as much as possible. All information that could potentially lead to the identification of the informants or their family members has been removed from the quotes.

members, were primarily focused on the prospect to improve their families' economic situation and did not usually consider the complexity of a migration "enterprise", its potential risks and possible social and emotional costs for both migrants and those who stayed behind. To a certain extent, this desperation explained the lack of basic preparation for their relocation to Italy, most importantly – absence of basic language skills. Difficulties were, usually, unforeseen. Furthermore, as some of the interviewed mothers noted during the interviews, the way many labour migrants portray their lives in their Facebook posts did not accurately reflect their experiences. According to these informants, Facebook posts of some migrants they were personally acquainted with and knew about their lives first-hand, were, often, either "glamorizing" their lives, or, on the contrary, making them look rather miserable (Liana, mother, fam01\_M). Importantly, these posts may often be an important source of information for potential migrants, thus the latter would be misinformed about what to expect in migration.

During the years of emigration, interviewed mothers succeeded in significantly improving their families' economic situation, thus migration was a rather efferent solution in this regard. However, the length of their emigration, which was often estimated to be "just a few years" at the time when emigration decisions were made, proved to be much longer, because of constantly appearing new needs which made migrants revisit their migration goals and their migration's timeline. In this process, they usually found it very difficult to balance the two sides of their migration experience: successfully achieving economic goals and managing their emotional state, maintaining emotional well-being – their own and that of their family members left behind.

As migrants were not prepared for the emotional challenges of migration beforehand, lack of awareness made these challenges more difficult to deal with. According to informants' accounts, unpreparedness and inability to cope may lead to extreme consequences. Although this was not the case of any of the informants themselves, they talked about some extreme cases of their acquaintances, when, as a result of mothers' migration, relationships between family members were ruined, migrants were effectively exploited by their family members, or when emigration caused a separation or eventual divorce of the couple. They also referred to cases of migrants who failed to cope with the challenges of immigrant life altogether, and eventually had to face serious mental issues:

*"Several Georgians lost their minds [in emigration], they were wandering streets – all because they did not know [well enough] what they were coming to do [in Italy], where they were coming, why they were coming... The only thing they thought of was that they'd get their salaries and that would be it. ... I also heard [before coming to work in*

*Italy] that salaries were 1,500 Euro [per month], but at my first job, I only had 650. This was the reality, right? If there were anyone to warn me, it would have protected me from that initial shock, I would not keep thinking all night long how come I came [to Italy] to earn 650 Euros. This was not what I expected, this would not let me achieve anything.” (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)*

With only a few exceptions, in the informants’ families children were not too young when their mothers left. But they were not old enough to influence their parents’ decision about emigration in any way. Interviews revealed that, despite their parents’ explanations, they did not fully comprehend the changes that were to come in their lives with their mothers’ departure. However, as they grew older, they got accustomed to their new lifestyle and separation with their mothers. Transnational lives of these, and many other families in similar circumstances, were all but habitual, but these were their lives. Going through numerous changes and adjustments, all family members redefined, often – unconsciously, the “standard” concept of motherhood in the course of their experience.

The findings are primarily focused on two major dichotomies of transnational family experiences that markedly featured in informants’ narratives: (i) migrant mothers’ physical absence from their families and, at the same time, their strong emotional (as well as economic, “logistical”, etc.) presence, and (ii) perception of mothers’ labour emigration as a sacrifice for the sake of their children, which tends to be shared by all family members, combined with highly mismatched strong feelings of guilt toward their children, reported by mothers during interviews.<sup>86</sup> Before discussing these rather striking dichotomies, respectively, in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 of the present chapter, descriptive Section 4.1 summarizes narratives of informants’ experiences through an intergenerational prism, focusing both on similarities and discrepancies in the mothers’ and children’s accounts.<sup>87</sup> As suggested in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3), it is reasonable to expect that collected narratives depict successful models of transnational motherhood, as well as of migration in general. Thus, they can provide insights into (pre-)conditions for a transnational family to work, and, specifically, for transnational motherhood to be efficient.

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<sup>86</sup> There are many different ways to organize and discuss various aspects of transnational motherhood, as these aspects are closely interrelated. The present structure has been chosen, after careful consideration, due to the importance of these aspects for the theories of transnational migration and/or family studies, and because of the particular salience of these aspects in informants’ narratives.

<sup>87</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, at the time of the interviews migrants’ children were already legal adults, except Sophia, who was 17 (fam21\_D). However, they are referred to as “children” throughout the present thesis, to focus on their relationship with migrant mothers.

#### 4.1. Mothers and children: Dissimilar experiences of transnationalism

*„They say sometimes, emigrants are heroes – no, our [family members] who stayed behind, they are heroes.”*  
(Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)

Very often, mothers described their decision about emigration as a sudden, even an abrupt one. Nevertheless, all interviewed mothers said they talked to their children about this decision before their departure, explaining its reasons, importance, inevitability and benefits it was expected to bring to the family and, specifically, to the children. Mothers also described to their children a certain “timeline” of separation, as they imagined it before emigration, and set a certain date they would get back home and the family would be reunited.

Children’s narratives suggest, however, that while remembering these conversations before their mothers’ departure, they did not necessarily comprehend what this news meant and how it would affect the following years of their lives. They were too young to be able to foresee the actual changes that their mothers’ emigration was about to bring either in near future, or in the long run. None of the informants expected that instead of the planned “just a few years” of separation, in some cases, family members would stay apart for over a decade, without being able to meet again.

Mothers’ and children’s narratives suggest that they did share the understanding that employment abroad would help ensure a better economic situation and living conditions for the family, as well as better opportunities for children, thus, from this perspective, emigration was considered a right thing to do. In some of the families, mothers’ and children’s opinions differed in respect to who had to emigrate. Mothers, whose decisions about emigration were usually taken after thoughtful discussions with their husbands and who were well informed about the structural demand for the “female” jobs in the sector of care work in the developed countries, were prepared to perform these jobs, even at the cost of separation from their family and inevitable downward occupational mobility. They believed it would work best for their families if they were the ones to emigrate, although they often misjudged the expected duration of their emigration. As Natela (fam09\_M) noted during the interview, every family in Georgia has had an elderly relative in poor health, who was looked after by family members, thus performing this type of care was a rather familiar task for women in Georgia; in fact, two of the daughters interviewed for the present research project, Shorena (fam02\_D) and Salome (fam20\_D), had been taking care of their elderly relatives themselves after their mothers’ emigration. None of the interviewed mothers who were married mentioned, or indicated any discontent with their husbands for “letting” them emigrate,

instead of emigrating themselves, as they were convinced it would have been much more difficult to find “male” jobs in the EU countries. Furthermore, as many of the interviewed mothers emigrated following long periods of economic hardship in their families, they were rather pleased, and relieved, to be able to change things for the better; they were also proud they could not only support their families, but also help some of their friends and relatives. Many of them, particularly Valentina (fam13\_M) and Nineli (fam02\_M), were regularly donating money to various charities, often – to help disadvantaged and/or sick children in Georgia.

Interviewed children, however, were not entirely convinced that it had to be their mothers to emigrate. As quoted in Section 3.7 above, Anastasia (fam06\_D) reported a strong resentment toward her father for letting her mother emigrate and take responsibility for the family’s economic problems. Tamuna (fam19\_D) also felt resentment toward her father, although she expressed it more mildly. Several of the interviewed children felt sorry they were too young at the time of their mothers’ emigration. As they said, if they had been older when their mothers left, they would have emigrated to work themselves, this way protecting their mothers from the difficulties they had been through (George, fam12\_S; Shota, fam07\_S). As further communication with the informants demonstrated, children’s intentions were serious. During the follow-up meetings with informants in the summer and autumn, 2021, Nana (fam20\_M) shared her news: her 25-year-old son had emigrated to another European country to work there and help his mother save money for an apartment the family intended to purchase. Nana was hoping to permanently return to Georgia by the summer, 2022. She also had news from Nanuli (fam19\_M), who had recently returned to Georgia permanently, as she believed her migration goals were accomplished and her daughters could take over the task of providing for themselves.

Nanuli’s emigration lasted for almost 10 years. Her eldest daughter devoted her a Facebook post on her birthday, where she remembered how angry and upset she was when her mother left for Italy, leaving behind her and her sister. However,

“... as time passed, I realized that your tireless work, incredible commitment and unbounded love you have for us made possible my happy childhood, happy teenage years and the years that came after ❤️ ... You are the best as a mother, as a daughter, as a friend and as a person. You don’t even know how much I love you.” (The post appeared on the Facebook feed of Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)<sup>88</sup>

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88 Nanuli’s youngest daughter, Tamuna (fam19\_D) was interviewed for the present research project. This post was written by the informants’ eldest daughter who was not interviewed.

All interviewed mothers remembered very painfully their very first departure for Italy; they also remembered the exact date when it happened, as it indicated a beginning of a radically new period in their lives.<sup>89</sup> Not all of the children remembered in detail their mothers' departure, although they remembered how they said their goodbyes. Children did not necessarily accompany their mothers to the airport, especially if a mother was taking a flight from an airport situated in a different city.

Although to different degrees, for everyone in migrants' families mothers' emigration meant the inevitability of facing the unknown, tightly linked to feelings of insecurity. While family members hoped for the better, nobody could foresee how the "migration project" would work out. Many years after her mother's first emigration, Shorena remembered mixed feelings she had at the time:

*"We did not have such an experience yet, [that of] living apart, separation for a long time... I remember that I could not really understand well what I was feeling, what was that emotion. In a way, we had expectations as well... [that the family's economic situation would improve]." (Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)*

Compared with the family members who stayed behind, mothers' lives changed in much more significant ways after emigration. Basically, everything in their daily lives was different in Italy, as were the people they were interacting with. As far as their everyday lives were concerned, they had to build whole new routines in a completely unfamiliar context. Children, on the other hand, stayed at home, in familiar circumstances and with family members and/or relatives they were closely familiar with. Often, their mothers' physical absence was the only real change in children's lives, for which they had been provided detailed reasons and explanations.<sup>90</sup>

Childcare arrangements were made with the best interests of children in mind. Immediate family members (most often, fathers and/or grandparents) were taking care of children after their mothers' emigration; often, grandparents had been living nearby, or as an extended family even before the mothers' emigration. None of the informants had to rely on hired help, as kinship

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89 Just the year of emigration was asked during the interviews, but interviewed mothers provided the exact date – day, month and year of their first arrival in Italy; some of them remembered which day of the week was it. This detail seems to be highly indicative of the importance of their migration experience to informants.

90 Ms.N, the psychologist interviewed for the present research project, discussed the situation of transnational children who did not, or could not stay in their homes after their mothers' emigration, and moved to live with their relatively distant relatives (sometimes – to a different settlement). Ms.N believed that, combined with their mothers' departure, such arrangements could often cause children's disorientation, with specific reactions depending on the child's age and character.

networks are, generally, widespread and rather efficient in Georgia. In some cases, though, when older daughters were in their late teens or older, they would take care of themselves and, often, of their younger siblings and/or fathers, without any help from older relatives. Fathers, even when they were characterised as rather involved in household chores, were in charge of childcare and housework only in two families (FAM\_01 and FAM\_12). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the collected data is not representative, thus no far-reaching claims can be made, but the interviews strongly suggest that household chores in migrant mothers' families were largely perceived to be a female responsibility. When the children were old enough, daughters, not sons, took over their mother's roles in housework, looking after younger siblings or, in some cases, caring for older relatives with health issues. Importantly, none of the childcare arrangements was reported to cause any disagreement among the family members.

Mothers talked during interviews about fellow labour migrants who had to cut short their migration and return to Georgia to take care of their children just a few months after their arrival in Italy, as their childcare plans did not work out, and they could not jeopardize their children's well-being. Informants also reported several cases when unforeseen life events intervened in their families' lives, making them alter their plans in general, and childcare arrangements in particular. *"You can't really foresee what is going to happen in life"*, commented Shorena (fam02\_D). The most painful of these events were the ones when family members passed away, often – unexpectedly (migrants' mothers passed away in FAM\_07 and FAM\_20; migrants' husbands passed away in FAM\_04 and FAM\_15; and migrants' mother-in-law passed away in FAM\_09). In FAM\_02 and FAM\_20, elderly family members developed health conditions due to which could no longer take care of themselves; they needed special medical attention and care at home. In parallel with part-time nurses, these family members were taken care of by migrants' oldest daughters, who assumed new, adult responsibilities in the absence of their mothers,<sup>91</sup> while medical bills were paid thanks to migrant mothers' remittances.

Even when migrant mothers were convinced to have left their families and, in particular, their children "in good hands", they still wanted to have constant confirmations that the children were doing well. To a possible extent, mothers were also willing to be involved in their families' daily life events, even the most simple and insignificant ones. Their children, on the other hand, also wanted to know how their mothers were doing. Interviewed children reported being particularly worried about their mothers during the first weeks of their emigration, when there was a lot of uncertainty in their mothers' lives.

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<sup>91</sup> A specific example of Salome (fam20\_D) is described in more detail in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7).

Once migrant mothers managed to secure jobs in Italy, they and their family members in Georgia started developing new “daily rituals” at distance. As highlighted repeatedly in the studies of transnationalism, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of contemporary communication technologies, most importantly – WhatsApp and/or Facebook Messenger, that allow transnational family members to stay in touch almost constantly. Currently, communication between the members of transnational families can be virtually unlimited, and the interviewed mothers and children appreciated this possibility. Contrary to Baldassar’s (2015, p. 88) interpretation, the informants did not indicate feeling any obligation to be in touch with each other, arguably caused by the accessibility of communication technologies – informants were constantly communicating with each other by choice, because they wanted to be informed about the lives of their loved ones. Interestingly, migrant mothers and their children did not communicate exclusively privately – their communication took place in private as well as in public spheres, i.e. via their public Facebook posts (and subsequent comments).<sup>92</sup> Migrant mothers often posted their children’s photos and videos, as well as thoughts or quotes about motherhood (e.g. Images 2 and 3 below). Often, they celebrated with Facebook posts milestones in their children’s (and, later, grandchildren’s) lives, such as birthdays, graduations, various accomplishments, engagements, marriages, etc. Such posts usually attracted numerous comments with an abundance of heart emojis, including those from fellow migrant mothers.<sup>93</sup> To a degree, these Facebook posts combined features of several forms of “co-presence across distance” identified by Baldassar (2015, p. 83; Section 2.3.2): virtual, imagined, but also (although not in the strictest sense) – proxy.

Migrant mothers often posted (and re-posted) their children’s photos and videos even without a particular “trigger”, such as a birthday or another life event. Thoughts or quotes about motherhood were also quite frequent, often accompanied by sentimental and/or tender images (e.g. Image 2).

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92 Obviously, every person’s Facebook feed, even when consisting of public posts, is rather personal and reflects this person’s individuality.

93 Important to note, public Facebook posts addressed to, or devoted to family members are not characteristic of transnational families only. It would be hard to gauge whether or not members of transnational families communicate with their family members via public posts on social media platforms more actively compared with the non-migrant population. It is certain, however, that such communication takes place, and can be rather lively.

Image 2. An image reposted by Natalia



The caption reads:

*“Only when you have a child, you can realize that there exists a life that is more precious than your own.....”*

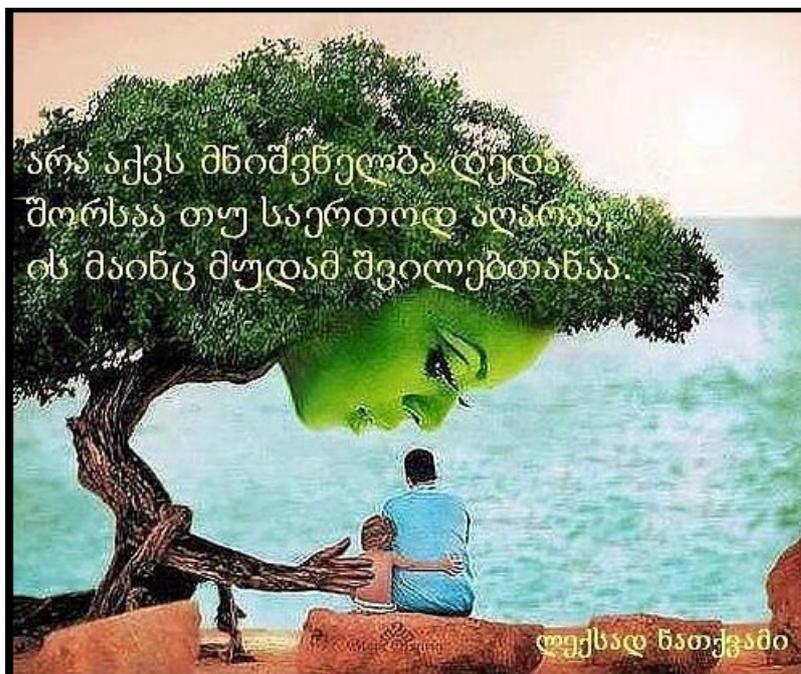
(Source: Facebook feed of Natalia, mother, fam18\_M)

In addition to several photo albums devoted to her children, Nanuli (fam19\_M) put together a special photo album devoted to the topic of motherhood in her social media profile, with images and quotes depicting motherhood. The images are, for the most part, borrowed from various websites; many recall an image reposted by Natalia (Image 2 above). Many quotes and images in Nanuli’s album reflect the very core of the traditional ideology of motherhood, often in its most orthodox spirit. The album praises the strength and eternity of maternal love, a mother’s readiness to sacrifice her life for her child(ren). Several images urge to pray for mothers, while others remind of the supranatural force of maternal love. These images and quotes present motherhood as mothers’ “entire sense of life”. Of the quotes by well-known authors, Nanuli’s album contains Honoré de Balzac’s “A mother who is really a mother is never free”, as well as several quotes from an esteemed Georgian poet Vazha Pshavela, among which: “I’d call a God(ess) a mother who has gracefully brought up her child”, and “It would be much better to die than to upset [one’s] mother”.

Supreme importance of motherhood is claimed in virtually all images in Nanuli’s album, and none seems to diverge from the traditional ideology of motherhood. Interestingly, in addition to her own experiences of motherhood, Nanuli refers to her mother’s experience of motherhood as well, hence – about her own role as that of a daughter, thus suggesting certain continuity. As the album was created several years after Nanuli’s emigration from Georgia, it can be confidently assumed that she did not see her experience of transnational motherhood as conflicting with these images,

and thus with the traditional ideology of motherhood; and it certainly proves the importance of this topic to her, the importance of motherhood to her identity. One image from this album seems particularly relevant from the perspective of transnational motherhood, as it refers to the spiritual presence of a mother with her child and husband, even though she is physically absent (Image 3).

Image 3. An image reposted by Nanuli



The caption reads:

*“It does not matter if a mother is far away, or if she is not with us anymore, she is always with her children anyway.”*

(Source: Facebook feed of Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)<sup>94</sup>

Such images and posts were rather characteristic of interviewed transnational mothers, but not of their children. Importantly, no images or posts were encountered in mothers’ social media profiles that would contradict, or challenge the traditional ideology of motherhood.

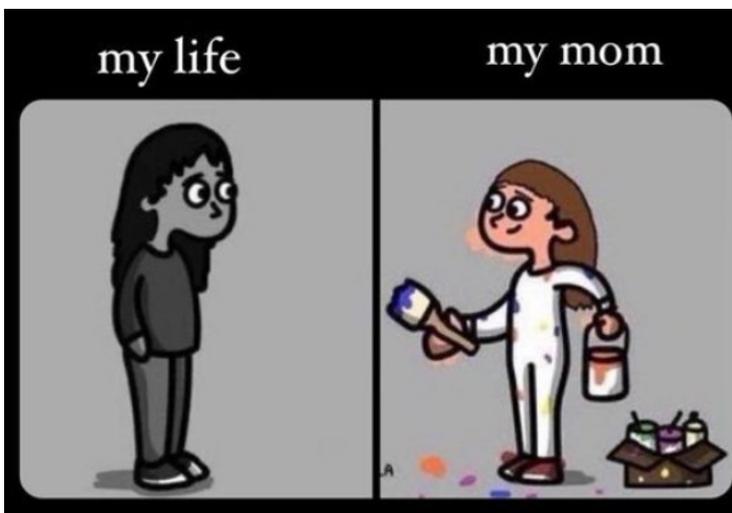
Mothers’ Facebook posts, accompanied with photos and/or videos, also often described how they spent their free time; whenever possible, they tried to do some sightseeing, visit friends (almost exclusively, other migrant mothers from Georgia). As *badantes* in Italy usually have half day off on Thursday afternoon and a full day off on Sunday, meetings are often agreed upon on a weekly basis. Many migrant mothers take particular care of their looks for their day-offs to make sure they look good in the photos. They also try to cook Georgian meals for these meetings, which also get photographed and posted on their social media profiles.

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94 As anticipated in Chapter 3, when referring to informants’ Facebook feeds, the dates of specific posts are not indicated in order to ensure the confidentiality of informants.

Public Facebook posts referring to the topics of separation, absence, nostalgia; complaining about missing their loved ones appeared to be very common for migrant mothers' feeds, much less so – for the children's feeds. However, this impression is not based on systematic evidence, bearing in mind that the data collected for the present research project is not representative. Overall, children seemed to be relatively less active on Facebook. For the most part, they posted their own photos/selfies (either alone or with friends, sometimes – with family members) or posts about their lives, including their social lives; their studies; their achievements in various areas. Some of them enjoyed reposting from various sources entertaining photos or GIFs, occasionally tagging their mothers and, this way, “communicating” with them on the subjects brought forward by those illustrations (travel, cooking, family life) (Image 4).

Image 4. A vignette reposted by Elena



Elena tagged her mother in this post.

(Source: Facebook feed of Elena, daughter, fam18\_D)

Overall, both in the interviews and, as appears, in their Facebook profiles, interviewed migrant mothers focused on and described their separation experience as more painful compared with the children. Mothering from afar was, in their own words, unbearable, as elaborated further in the following Section.

Children's accounts of transnational family life and, specifically, that of separation were, overall, relatively less painful. To a certain degree, being separated from their mothers might have become, over years, a new “norm” for them, to which they could get accustomed easier than their mothers, provided that they were living in a familiar environment, were protected, as much as possible, from any risks; in addition, their younger age also contributed to an easier adaption. In

some families, children/teenagers saw female relatives who were taking care of them as certain substitute figures for their mothers. Anastasia remembered calling her grandmother, who became her primary caregiver after her mother's emigration, a "big Mother" (fam06\_D). Similarly, Shorena remembered calling her aunt who was taking care of her and her brother after their mother's emigration "Mommy-Aunty" (fam02\_D). It appears, her classmates were quite confused:

*"All those years [at school], my classmates thought my aunt was my mother, because... well, I don't know why. ... All these years [after school], every single time when we meet, they remind me how shocked they were to learn that Maria was, in fact, my aunt."*  
(Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)

Nonetheless, all interviewed children claimed to be close to their mothers and stressed the very high importance of their mothers in their lives; they were also highly appreciative of what their mothers were doing for their family, and for them personally. There was no mention in children's narratives of feelings of abandonment, or resentment toward their mothers, or any indication of emotional distancing between interviewed children and their mothers.<sup>95</sup>

Many of the interviewed migrants' children got employed at a rather early age. At the time of our interviews, they reported being ready and willing to take financial responsibilities not only for themselves, but also for their families, to facilitate their mothers' return to Georgia in the nearest future. It should be noted that, in general, financial independence, not to speak financial responsibilities are not typically characteristic of young people of their age in Georgia, thus the interviewed young people stand out in this respect compared with their peers. Plausibly, migrant mothers' self-selection (Section 2.1) may "extend" to the rest of the family, uncovering rather distinct qualities of their children as well.

Beyond economic aspects as well, both according to their self-assessment and based on the information they provided about themselves, migrant mothers' children appear to be rather independent compared with their peers. Undoubtedly, personal characteristics, their individualities were decisive in how they handled their mothers' absence, with siblings reporting rather different emotional and behavioural responses, and being aware of having reactions different from the ones their sibling(s) had (e.g., FAM\_02, FAM\_19). Overall, though, interviewed transnational children claimed to be able to take care of themselves, and be able to handle emotional pressures.

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<sup>95</sup> Although there is no reason to suggest that any of the informants was insincere, undoubtedly, this finding is highly influenced by selection bias and by social desirability bias. While there can be no doubt that this statement accurately reflects perceptions of interviewed transnational children in the respective period of their lives, Nanuli's eldest daughter's Facebook post quoted in the beginning of this Section demonstrates well how radically can children's attitudes change over the course of their mothers' migration.

*“My Mom, she’s like: ‘Here, I left you everything ironed! Here, it’s ready to eat...’ And when I no longer had this, I’m now more independent in life, there was no other way, I became more independent.”* (Shalva, son, fam02\_S)

Interviewed children were, overall, more resolute in their position that all possible measures should be taken to prevent a mother’s labour emigration from any family. They could not, however, think of any alternative option to provide for migrants’ families’ needs while children are still very young.

Overall, mothers appear to express more openly their feelings about transnational motherhood, manifest their joy or worries both privately and publicly, albeit in what they perceive to be socially (or situationally) acceptable format. Children’s emotions, including their concerns, seem more concealed. Often, only indirect indicators may signal how transnational children feel about their family arrangements, and what they think about their lives. As highlighted above (Section 3.7), they avoided discussing their mothers’ absence even with their siblings and with their closest friends, as reported by Shalva (fam02\_S), Anastasia (fam06\_D), Nini (fam08\_D), George (fam12\_S) and Tamuna (fam19\_D). This finding was surprising, particularly considering that many of their close friends had emigrant mothers themselves. Such behaviour may suggest a latent trauma caused by separation (Abrego, 2014; Pratt, 2012), although further evidence is necessary before such a conclusion is made. In terms of the present research project, this finding cannot be developed further; however, it could be an important focus for a thorough psychological study and would allow to learn better about experiences of transnational family life as they are lived by migrants’ children left behind.

#### 4.2 Absence, yet presence

The first of the two major dichotomies in informants’ narratives of their experiences of transnational motherhood regards migrant mothers’ strong emotional/spiritual presence in their families (in addition to their financial and organizational presence), despite their physical absence. Themes of both absence and presence, along with separation, distance, longing are quintessential for the experiences of transnational mothers and children.

#### 4.2.1 Enduring separation

*„She’s all alone there.”*

(Repeatedly mentioned by interviewed children when speaking about their migrant mothers)

The issue of lengthy separation of family members from each other particularly stood out in informants’ narratives about their transnational families.<sup>96</sup> Although the present research project was not designed to specifically focus on emotional aspects of separation, and no specific questions about separation were asked during the interviews, this theme “emerged” from the data as a major concept framing informants’ multifaceted migration experiences.<sup>97</sup> References to separation were more pronounced, and much more emotional, in migrant mothers’ accounts. They referred constantly to the pain caused by separation from their loved ones, and from their children in particular; they unanimously claimed that this pain was “impossible to bear”.

Length of emigration did not seem to make a difference, as separation was reported to be very painful by relatively “new” migrants and by those who emigrated over a decade ago; all of them were deeply missing their families, their homes, their “old” way of life. Apart from informants’ personality traits, separation experiences differed depending on migrants’ legal status, as those who were undocumented were not able to travel to visit their families.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, while it would be reasonable to hypothesize that documented migrant mothers’ annual visits home helped ease the pain of separation, this does not seem to be necessarily the case.<sup>99</sup> These visits were, undoubtedly, very important and made a positive difference in their migration experiences, but did not provide a long-term solution and did not make separation easier.

A discussion of the importance of emotional experiences of separation from their families (and, specifically, the pain that migrant mothers were referring to during the interviews) is

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96 Long-term physical distancing between family members is intended when the word “separation” is used in the present thesis. The word is used here without any legal or psychological connotations and refers only to migrant mothers’ absence from home due to their labour emigration, which usually causes some of the strongest emotional reactions listed in Table 1 (Section 2.4): sadness, loneliness, nostalgia, but also a sense of accomplishment and sense of duty, to name a few.

97 Baldassar (2015) reported a similar experience in her data referring to migrants’ feelings of guilt toward their ageing parents left behind.

98 Of course, none of the labour migrants was held against their will, and their return home was never absolutely impossible. Those who were undocumented could certainly return to Georgia at any time, but they would not manage to go back to Italy and resume their work, thus their families would lose their primary source of income. The migrants (and their families) could not afford this.

99 Being a subjective category, pain is almost impossible to reliably measure, or compare its strength either between different individuals or over time.

underrepresented in the academic discourse on international labour migrants' transnational experiences. Interviews conducted for the present research project suggest, though, that this issue is of pivotal importance, and significantly determines migrant mothers' well-being, as well as the quality of work they perform. Analysing emotional reactions to mother-child separation is a challenging task; as discussed in Section 2.4, all emotional reactions are very personal, depend to a large degree on individual characteristics, a person's character, his/her life experience as well as on specific situations. Feelings accompanying separation do, however have several important social and psychological determinants and consequences and affect transnational family members' perceptions of their experiences.

Nineli (fam02\_M), who spent ten years working in Turkey before migrating to Italy, could compare separation experience during her "Turkish period" and the Italian one. She perceived those as very different. Geographical proximity, as well as ease and low cost of travel between Georgia and Turkey, made it possible for Nineli's children to regularly visit her during school/university holidays, but they have never visited her during the 12 years Nineli had been working in Italy. Her first years in Italy, before Nineli got her very first residence permit, were the most difficult for her, because she could not visit Georgia either. As she remembered, the years she spent in Turkey

*"were not unbearable for me, were not that hard, not like the times when you can only cry out, 'Help me, God!' ... Although there was no Internet yet, no such possibilities, we used to make telephone calls with phone cards. But during summer holidays, and winter holidays, we were all together, the whole family."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

Regular communication with the family, awareness that they were doing well were indispensable, but, similar to trips home, did not necessarily help migrant mothers. The night hours, when they had free time, were reported to be the most difficult. In the morning, those mothers who were particularly active on social media, would occasionally post on their Facebook profiles:

*"The night can't sleep, tired of thoughts. ... Here comes the sun to dry the tears. Good morning, World! ♥♥♥"* (Facebook profile of Nana, mother, fam20\_M)

Being away from home for long periods of time often led to increased fears about children's well-being. Despite being in touch with them almost constantly, mothers often reported being unquiet, anxious, unable to stop worrying about their children. Feelings of powerlessness were also pronounced in mothers' accounts of transnational motherhood:

*"[Soon upon arrival in Italy,] when I was going for a walk on my day off, I could not stop the tears. I was missing them, missing them although we were talking every day. ..."*

*My heart was crying anyway. I've been like this all the time. And I'm still like that.*"  
(Diana, mother, fam07\_M)

*"You keep thinking [about the family] day and night, and open the window, look up and pray: please, God, may they be well. And you only hope for God, all you can do is pray, right? You cannot help [them]. It's very unbearable, this pain inside you... But then you have to remind yourself – there is nothing to do, this is how it has to be today, so you have to [pull through]... This destroys you internally. No matter how much sympathy someone shows us – a friend, a family member, or even a stranger, you can't describe this, no one can actually understand this if s/he has not lived in emigration."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

The above quotes suggest that, despite their undeniable importance, present-day communication technologies cannot be considered a solution for the problem of separation of the members of transnational families. As much as they are vitally important, and as much as they help transnational family members to keep in touch with each other, video calls, messages, exchanges of images etc. cannot fill the gaps caused by mothers' physical absence from their families and cannot substitute a simple hug migrant mothers and their children are often dreaming of.

Even under "normal" circumstances, coping with separation was reported to be very difficult, but if someone in the family was facing serious health issues, or in case of a loved one's death, migrant mothers experienced it in a particularly painful and anxious way, as they were away from home and, often, did not have a possibility to return.<sup>100</sup> In a certain sense, as Nineli claimed in a quote above, migrants could not help their family members from afar, but, as Diana's (fam07\_M) experience showed, there could have been situations when the opposite was true. When Diana's son had emergency surgery in Georgia, Diana's remittances made it possible that he got the care he needed, both during the surgery and during the long recovery period afterwards. At the time of Diana's son's medical emergency, there was no medical insurance in Georgia, or any state support to cover medical expenses (Verulava *et al.*, 2017; see also footnote 82), so the patients/their families had to pay all bills. In Shota's case, these expenses were rather substantial, so Diana spent all the money she had saved during the previous years of emigration to purchase a house.

As Diana, who is a rather emotional person, remembered, when her daughter-in-law called her from Georgia about her son's condition,

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<sup>100</sup> Baldassar's (2015) findings suggest the same (p. 87), although she discussed a somewhat different migration setting.

*“[m]y heart stopped. I was crying, I was groaning. ... [Years later,] I am still devastated. Everything was falling out of my hands. I was crying while taking care of my ‘grannies’, but I was hiding my tears, because they [back in Georgia] needed the money. My son would have died if I didn’t work. Nothing could be done without money. ... It was about saving my son’s life. ... I don’t care about all that money, I thank God I managed to do this. I saved my son’s life. I saved my son.”* (Diana, mother, fam07\_M)

In the informants’ narratives collected for the present research project, Shota’s (fam07\_S) was not the only case of a serious health issue resolved for the best thanks to migrant mothers’ remittances. Other health emergencies were resolved as well: Valentina’s remittances made possible her husband’s complicated and costly surgery (FAM\_13); Nina’s remittances were indispensable to cover her mother’s medical bills (FAM\_21). One of the principal goals of Guliko’s (fam11\_M) emigration was to finance her oldest daughter’s treatment for infertility in Israel, as, according to Guliko, doctors in Georgia were not able to help. In fact, after a few years of her treatment in Israel (and about a decade after she got married), Guliko’s daughter gave birth to a healthy baby. To Guliko, this child had justified all the difficulties of emigration. In all these cases, migrant mothers’ remittances made it possible that their family members got the medical care they needed, thus separation did not lead to their helplessness; rather, the families would hardly be able to accumulate the necessary financial resources otherwise.

When possible and relevant, migrants also mobilized their social capital resources, contacted their acquaintances back in Georgia to help solve their family members’ health problems. Natalia’s (fam18\_M) example can be considered quite characteristic in this regard. Her mother got COVID-19 and needed hospitalization, but the family was told that the local hospital was full and no longer had a possibility to admit new patients. Natalia’s mother’s life was, however, at risk if she were not admitted to an intensive care unit as soon as possible. Natalia, who used to work as a nurse before her emigration to Italy, mobilized the contacts she had with health professionals and made sure her mother was eventually admitted to the hospital of a neighbouring city, where she received the medical care she needed and got well. Natalia was the one who succeeded in finding a hospital for her mother, yet, in her Facebook post, she publicly asked for her mother’s forgiveness for not being next to her in this difficult time.

Traumatic experiences aggravated by separation become particularly dramatic in cases of deaths of loved ones. As mentioned above (Section 4.1), mothers of Diana (fam07\_M) and Nana (fam20\_M), and husbands of Marina (fam04\_M) and Magda (fam15\_M) passed away when the

informants were in Italy. None of the informants was documented at the time of their loss, thus they did not manage to travel to Georgia to attend funerals. In addition to grieving, they felt guilty for not being next to their loved ones during the final weeks and days of their lives, and also for missing their funerals. It appears, many migrants share the distress of loved ones' loss aggravated by their inability to pay their last respects; as an undocumented labour migrant interviewed earlier for an online newspaper said, "When my father died [and she could not travel to Georgia for the funeral - TZ], I realized you need to be fortunate even to be able to see your loved one after s/he passed, and grieve and to cry next to him/her. ... This pain will never pass, I couldn't cry my father's death next to him" (Otiashvili, 2019).

Interviewed mothers were in agreement about how indispensable it was to have the emotional strength to not give up, not to be overwhelmed and overpowered by feelings of pain, solitude, nostalgia; to do everything they could to achieve their migration goals despite the difficulties. As mentioned above, they did not consider in advance specific aspects and expected emotional challenges of their migration; before leaving their families, neither did they have any friends or relatives who could help them with relevant advice. Thus, they had to learn on their own, one step at a time, how to handle the challenges encountered along the way, how to cope with separation and solitude, and, also, how to continue to be mothers at a distance.

One protective response to the pain of separation was migrant mothers' commitment to "shield" their children from a similar experience. With only a few exceptions, not only did they strongly oppose to their children's labour emigration to any destination, but, in many cases, using all the influence they could exercise over them, they firmly discouraged their children from leaving Georgia for other than short-term, purely touristic purposes. Transnational mothers' conviction was extremely strong that nowhere else could their children – and people in general – be as safe as "at home", "sleeping on their own pillows", indicating, again, the presence of a traumatic response to their migration experience.

Another possible way to deal with the pain of separation appears to learn to coexist with it:

*"We get used to this separation, like, God forbid, we never forget about the death of a loved one, but we somehow manage to live [afterwards], right? So, we somehow manage to live [with] this separation too, this distance, this being apart..."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

To a certain degree, while being physically away from their homes and deeply missing their families, migrant mothers were "carrying" with them all the time elements of the world they were

missing: in their cell phone memories, as numerous photos and videos received from home, and in their online activities, as chats and video calls with their family members. When possible, they tried to create for themselves some micro-spaces in their temporary Italian homes, that would emotionally “take them home”. Many migrant mothers developed an efficient custom that helped them reconnect with their pre-migration lives: they would cook some traditional Georgian dishes for holidays, those that they would normally cook in their families before emigration. They would invite their employers’ families to enjoy these dishes; whenever possible, they would visit, or invite fellow migrant mothers from Georgia as well. Mothers would send photos of these dishes to their children and other relatives back in Georgia and also, quite often, share them on their social media profiles (Image 5).

Image 5. Naira’s traditional bean-stuffed bread for Saint Barbara’s Day



Naira baked this bean-stuffed bread (*lobiani*) in Lombardy for Saint Barbara’s Day, a religious holiday which is widely celebrated in Georgia. When she posted this photo on her social media account, she accompanied it with the following text:

*“Lobiani baked in a foreign land, in strangers’ home. A candle lit next to saint icons. A prayer for the family, children, grandchildren and emigrants that are scattered all over the Earth like violets. ...”*

(Source: Facebook feed of Naira, mother, fam03\_M)

Migrant mothers often claimed that certain personality traits, certain qualities of human character were decisive for the success of labour migration. In addition to the strength and determination mentioned above, patience was considered an extremely important quality, one that could help live through the difficult experience of separation, even if it lasted for over a decade.

In both mothers’ and children’s narratives, separation experienced as a painful feeling contrasted with separation as a consequence of a rational, calculated choice made for the good of the family. Whenever migrant mothers tried to rationalize their experience, emigration, their absence from home appeared, eventually, to be the right decision despite the pain it caused.

According to them, they did not have any other choice, emigration was the only option they could think of to help their families and ensure a better future for their children.

#### 4.2.2 Practices of 'alternative' motherhood

*“And so we are, [my daughter] is doing her homework, I am preparing to eat [for the employers] and have my phone next to me. With the Messenger [on]. Yes. The phone is on, sometimes we don't even talk, each of us doing what we have to do, but we are both there. We're on. ... We are together almost all the time.”*  
(Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Informants, both mothers and children, reported being very well informed about each other's lives despite separation. Mothers were in constant contact with their children and their caregivers and commonly reported they were informed about their children's whereabouts at any given moment. In addition to direct communication with children, they would discuss with their husbands and other caregivers what was going on in their children's lives, how were they doing, if there was anything they needed. If their children were of school age, mothers were regularly in touch with their teachers, as well as their classmates' parents; they were members of respective online groups and chats where school-related issues were discussed. Whenever a child needed any kind of special attention, or had a specific problem to deal with, mothers would step in and discuss the issues with relevant people as thoroughly as possible; they would insist that certain actions were taken considering the child's best interests.

Thus, when it comes to migrant mothers' involvement in the lives of their families, both subjectively (based on informants' perceptions) and objectively (judging by the intensity of communication and diversity of its style) mothers' absence is only physical. Their emotional presence, on the other hand, appears to compensate for their physical absence. While difficulties of a “direct supervision” of children by transnational mothers have been justifiably highlighted (Parreñas, 2001, pp. 381-382), for as long as their separation allowed, the interviewed mothers still managed to supervise their children, and often this supervision could have been considered as (emotionally) direct one.<sup>101</sup>

The importance of modern communication technologies for transnational families has already been highlighted (Section 4.2.1). At present, members of transnational families take for granted the possibility to stay in touch with each other almost constantly. Although online communication cannot be seen as a complete and effective substitute for “normal” human communication, the role

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<sup>101</sup> Transnational mothers' economic presence and participation in their families' budgets is not discussed in detail here as this is the very goal of labour migration, thus such participation is taken for granted.

of communication technologies is hard to overestimate. Mothers who migrated to Italy over a decade ago remembered very painfully limited possibilities of communication with their families back in Georgia. They could communicate exclusively via landline phones, calling only one or two times per week. To make those calls, they had to purchase expensive phone cards, and the calls could only last for a few minutes. In addition, often it was not possible to coordinate in advance the exact timing of these calls, thus, as informants recalled, they were not always able to talk to all members of the family, as they might not have been at home.

Such complications are no longer an issue as a result of the development and close to the universal accessibility of modern communication technologies. The already old-fashioned telephone service, both landline and mobile, is, in fact, no longer used by international migrants and their family members who stayed behind in sending countries. Important to note, the modern technologies offer not only secure and accessible communication, but also a very versatile one, including audio calls, video calls, audio messages, text messages, emojis, possibility to exchange photos, videos, etc. Depending on the subject of communication, as well as on the context and the time available, informants could choose the most appropriate type of online communication with their families. Whenever possible, mothers reported trying to be online, virtually together with their children, like in the situation described by Liana (fam01\_M) at the beginning of this Section: a mother cooks in her Italian employer's kitchen, her daughter does her homework in their house in Georgia, they are connected with a video call, and although they may not be talking to each other, they feel being together. Such communication, if regular, can undoubtedly help diminish perceptions of the mother's absence from home, while creating an appearance of presence.

Once social media platforms became widespread, migrant mothers rather promptly provided their children back in Georgia with personal communication devices (smartphones, tablets or laptops). Even adolescents opened their social media accounts (Facebook Messenger was the most commonly used one by the informants interviewed for the present research project). Thus, they could directly communicate with their mothers, and, as they claimed, they communicated daily; often, they were constantly in touch, and had either voice- or video calls several times per day, even though these were not necessarily long ones.

The interviews, as well the analyses of informants' Facebook feeds left no doubt about the paramount importance attributed by the members of transnational families to their communication across borders. A mother-child bond was particularly prioritized, especially by migrant mothers:

*"I told [my children]: when I'm calling you, even if you happen to be with the President, excuse yourself, explain that your mother is calling you, and answer me.*

*Because, everybody can wait, even the President, but a mother cannot wait. A mother whose heart is beating with impatience, who can't wait to hear her child's quiet and lovely voice, and to whom a second of a delay feels like a century.*" (Facebook feed of Valentina, mother, fam13\_M)

As further evidence of mothers' presence in their families, interviewed mothers remembered cases when they resolved, from distance, issues between the family members left behind, e.g. tensions between siblings, or arguments between children and their fathers. When Liana noticed something was wrong between her husband and daughter,

*"I made them sit [in front of the cell phone camera – TZ] and told them, 'Now, listen to me very carefully!' They used to call me 'The Boss' when I was still at home, like, I was the Boss in the family. So I told them: 'Listen to me. If I hear once again about the two of you not even arguing, but just discussing anything – and you know I will know about it even if you try to hide it (I don't even know how, but I always feel it...) – I will block both of you, on your phones, on the Facebook, everywhere, I will block you so you will never know about me and my whereabouts. Looks like it worked, they seem very friendly since."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Eliso had a very similar story to tell about how she resolved the tension between her husband and their son (fam17\_M).

One of the most important decisions to be made by parents who consider labour emigration is about primary caregivers for their children. When mothers emigrate, husbands usually are not considered a "satisfactory" option as they are not used to any housework or childcare all on their own. Across the globe, including Georgia, grandmothers or, when available, aunts are usually the preferred option:

*"It was easier on our family, as we had our aunt,<sup>102</sup> and I was sure, we all were sure that [the children] would get all the attention they needed, all the love they needed, and, so to say, the family would not lack a 'female hand'. I mean, when I left, I was sure the family would not suffer without me... I knew everything would be taken care of, and ... well, whatever [money] I was sending home, it would have been used reasonably. Nothing would go wrong."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

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102 Nineli referred to her husband's sister who never married. The aunt shared the house with Nineli's family, so she looked after Nineli's children, Shorena and Shalva, and was involved in their lives since their birth, even before Nineli's emigration.

Another, very specific form of migrant mothers' virtual presence in their families was described by some of the daughters interviewed, including Eliso's daughter. As it was very important for the mothers to be sure that the family was taken good care of and everything was in order at home, during video calls they would occasionally ask their children to let them see the kitchen, or the wardrobe, or some other specific place at home, to make sure it was kept in order. Mothers and children also regularly shared images of how they celebrated various holidays, with festive tables in their homes in Georgia often being indispensable features in those photos (Image 6). Among other things, these photos let mothers see how their remittances were transforming into beautiful settings, tasty dishes and a festive atmosphere – everything they wanted to provide for their children.

Image 6. New Year's Eve in Eliso's family in Georgia



Tamta sent this photo to her mother to let her see how the family was prepared to welcome a New Year.

(Image shared by Tamta, daughter, fam17\_D)

Empirical evidence is strong that, despite mothers' emigration and their long absence, their presence in their homes, their bond with their family remained strong even when many years have passed after emigration. Rusudan's family's example is very characteristic (FAM\_10). She emigrated in 2006, leaving behind her five children (the youngest of which, her only son, was 12) and her husband. Over the years, the daughters got married and moved out of the paternal house, so eventually, only her husband and the youngest son remained there. One of the daughters, who lived closest to the paternal house, was regularly visiting her father and brother to help them with housework, and they were very dependent on their help. Rusudan noticed, however, that ever since her husband and son remained on their own, they were calling her more and more often whenever they needed some help or housework advice that could be done remotely (e.g., finding some items

they needed). 14 years after her emigration, her involvement in her family's simple acts of everyday life was still indispensable.

Thus, both mothers' and children's accounts of their transnational experiences suggest that despite their physical separation, they stayed emotionally connected and present in each other's lives, albeit "remotely". Some children noted that during their mothers' emigration – and, to a certain extent, thanks to it – they grew closer to their mothers as, paradoxically, they were managing to communicate more, and had more quality communication. They felt they had found more in common with their mothers, although, according to Tamuna (fam19\_D), it was also important to consider that she grew older, which also contributed to changes in communication style between her and her mother. Arguably, the quality of communication in transnational families may often be higher, less superficial compared with "normal" families, as family members may tend to be more attentive to each other.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time, both mothers and children felt compelled to keep certain, often – temporary "secrets" from each other. In most cases, they would choose not to share with each other some potentially worrisome information until the problems were resolved. Mothers did not want to bother their children with the difficulties they were going through, those related to their work or the emotional challenges of separation described in the previous Section. Children did not want to upset or frighten their mothers, make them worried about small problems at home they believed they could resolve on their own, including simple health issues (e.g., the flu). Interviews provide ample evidence of how mothers and children were doing their best trying to take care of each other's feelings and ensure each other's tranquillity at a distance. Shorena summarized these efforts rather comprehensively:

*"We try to hide from [my mother] any negative news, because she's alone there, and we kinda protect her, I'd say. And when the issue gets resolved, and everything is OK, then we tell her, that there was such and such issue, and all is well now. We have come up with this way of being over the years, we'd solve the problems on our own, so that she wouldn't know, and wouldn't worry. ... We feel sorry for her, because, well, we are all together here, the whole family, and she is alone. It's tough to be alone, not to have anyone to talk to, to share things with, so we would 'hide' bad things from her, it has become a habit already. ... Like, before giving birth, I did not tell her I was going to the hospital, so she would not be worried about me. But as soon as I'd given birth, I*

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<sup>103</sup> Presently, this statement is a hypothesis which needs thorough testing with further research.

*immediately called my Mom, as soon as [the nurse] told me, 'It's a girl', her weight, and so on. I took the phone and immediately called my Mom.*" (Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)

Trying to appear cheerful and carefree during the video calls with the family, even when they did not particularly feel this way, was a further aspect of the same effort, characteristic of mothers. They were doing their best to look during the video calls their very best – it was important for them, and, as they believed, for their children as well:

*"I'm always cheerful [when talking to the daughter]. Even when I am tired, and very worried, even when I did not sleep at night, I never tell her that I'm tired. I wash my face, put on some makeup and call her, so that she wouldn't notice. Because I know for sure, she'd be worried if she noticed. ... Of course, I lie to her. Of course."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Despite their mothers' best efforts, children often reported noticing that their mothers were trying to hide from them how tired, or how stressed they were. The interviewed children tended to believe that mothers were hiding from them more (mostly, difficult aspects of their work) compared with what they were hiding from their mothers.

*"I know where [mother] lives, what she's doing, things like that, but speaking of what she's going through, I only know as much as I can notice myself, based on what I can 'read' on her face. But I have probably missed a lot about this..."* (Salome, daughter, fam20\_D)

Being aware of their own "tricks" and "strategies" to avoid upsetting their children, mothers sometimes feared their children could do the same, and hide from them some difficulties they were going through. Thus, mothers were particularly attentive during their conversations with their children, trying to "catch" any subtle indication of "hidden issues". They were often double-checking information about each of their child's well-being with their other children, husbands, other relatives or friends. Questions like "What if they are not telling me?" / "Are they really doing well?" / "Would they tell me about everything that's been bothering them?" crossed their minds from time to time, increasing their fears; however, these doubts and fears were not reported to be causing any problems in the mother-child relationship. While trying to "spare" each other, both mothers and children were quite aware that the "other side" was doing the same trying to protect them, to avoid making them worry.

Although the qualitative data collected in terms of the present study does not allow for reliable comparisons, it suggests that, emotionally, mothers found it most difficult to leave behind the youngest children. They also found it much more difficult to explain the reasons for their departure, and separation to their youngest children. And it was only in the case of the youngest children (although not all of them) that migrant mothers had to deal with various types of their children's challenging behaviour. Natalia's son Gela is 7 years younger than his sister; he was 11 when Natalia emigrated (FAM\_18). The children stayed with their paternal grandmother, as Natalia's husband passed away a few years earlier; the children had been living in the same house ever since they were born. For several months after his mother's emigration, Gela refused to talk to her directly. He would only listen to – and obey – his sister. At the time of the interview with Natalia, she was hopeful to fully “re-connect” with Gela soon, but she was also worried about what would his upcoming teenage years be like. On the other hand, Natalia's separation from her daughter, Elena, who was 18 when Natalia emigrated, did not cause any difficulties – Elena was very understanding and supportive, did her best to take good care of her brother, and continued to excel in her studies. She was also managing all the remittances sent by her mother, and Natalia was surprised, and pleased about how well she could control the expenses.

In several other families as well, when communicating with their children after emigration, mothers noticed that younger children's reactions, their behaviour could have been rather unpredictable.<sup>104</sup> Mothers could not always manage or control it from a distance, and, in such cases, almost entirely depended on the caregivers they left behind.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the younger the child left behind, the more mothers feared that s/he could forget them.

Children's concerns about their mothers' emigration might be quite different though. Older the children left behind, up through their adulthood, there is evidence that, cognitively, they found it more difficult to deal with their mothers' absence.<sup>106</sup> A possible explanation for this could be that

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104 It would be very difficult to come up with a specific “threshold” age after which it can be considered relatively safe to leave children behind, also because individual and family factors strongly influence the situation. Tentatively, pre-teenage children can be considered as “younger” ones, and teenagers (13-19-year-olds) – as relatively “older” ones.

105 This aspect of transnational families' experiences, children's reaction to their mothers' absence, often associated with various aspects of child psychology, is one of the specific examples that demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary studies of international migration, highlighted in Chapter 2.

106 Here as well, personal characteristics, a person's character and individuality are of crucial importance. While the data point in the direction of this thesis, it does not allow for formal conclusions. In addition, different people's emotional and cognitive reactions may be rather different, and may play a different role at different ages.

young children may get distracted easier, re-focus on playing with friends, readjust more smoothly to new realities, including their mothers' absence. Older the children, on the other hand, they understand better the sacrifices their mothers make, as well as the challenges they face, and are worried about these much more than their younger siblings.

Liana's case provided more insight into different reactions to separation from a mother at different age (FAM\_01). Liana left behind her 12-year-old daughter and husband. For her, labour emigration to Italy was, to a large extent, about long-term planning, primarily focused on ensuring the future well-being of their daughter:

*"I know for sure – all this, financial problems, our housing problem, that we don't own a house and have been renting for all these years, my child's education, university, about which I cannot be sure whether she'll get the state funding or not – I foresaw all this. And since I know for sure that I wouldn't be able to solve any of these with me and my husband working there [in Georgia], so I've decided that during this, I don't know, one year, two years or three years, I'd save money and achieve something. Simply, to make sure my daughter has a roof over her head, her own house where she can live. It's not even about me, about me and my husband, I'm not talking about us. It's the child who matters."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Only several years before Liana's emigration to Italy, her own mother emigrated to work in another country, and although Liana was already an adult (she was 32 then), was married and had a daughter of her own, she remembered her mother's emigration as a very painful experience, because she was very attached to her mother and also because she knew too well about the difficulties her mother was going through:

*"For me, it was, I don't know, a disaster. I did not sleep, I did not eat. When [she] sent us her first salary, well, a part of it, what we needed, and my husband bought some fish – I threw it away, I have terrible memories about it..."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Considering her reaction to her mother's emigration, it was very important for Liana to manage to return to Georgia while her daughter was still quite young, so she would not have similar experiences.

In addition to children's age, their gender also made difference when it came to transnational motherhood practices. Generally, daughters' and sons' reactions and behaviour were – and, often, were expected to be – different, as was their communication style with migrant mothers. According

to their self-assessment, and also according to their mothers and sisters, male children tended to be much more reserved when talking with their mothers, and rarely shared very personal news; females, on the other hand, seemed to be franker and more open with their mothers, including when chatting about their personal lives. It is, however, impossible to know whether the situation would have been any different had the family members all been living together. Shota, who was described by his sister as a rather reserved person, was convinced that he would have been prepared to share with his mother exactly the same amount of information about his personal life no matter whether they were living together or across numerous borders (fam02\_S).

One very specific and, as it seems, widespread example of gender-specific practices in transnational families was older daughters', not sons', involvement in housework (cooking, taking care of the house, etc.) while the mothers were absent from home.<sup>107</sup> As their narratives suggest, in certain contexts interviewed mothers had different expectations regarding their daughters and sons. In many cases, older daughters took over many of their mothers' housekeeping responsibilities, while sons, if they had older sister(s), did almost none of these chores. Even after older daughters got married, they would still regularly go back to their parents' house and do cooking, laundry, housecleaning, etc. (provided, however, that they did not live too far away from their parental house after marriage), as did Mtvarisa (fam10\_D).

Importantly, increased household responsibilities of migrant mothers' daughters, and much less so of their sons, were perceived to be natural, a normal arrangement, and none of the family members, including the older daughters themselves, questioned it. Neither did Salome (fam20\_D), who, at the age of 18, unexpectedly found herself as a primary caregiver for her grandmother who had a stroke soon after her mother's emigration, and her 4-year-old sister.

*“Soon after Mom left, my Grandma’s problems started, and I did not manage to realize up until a few months ago... just after my Grandma passed away, I realized that ... I was not really understanding how much responsibility I was left with. Actually, I ended up with responsibilities I never signed up for. When my Mom left, grandma was to take care of us, she was very healthy then, and Mom was sure we’d be fine. ... I think a lot about this now, what could have been done differently... But I don’t know. ... The biggest pain I feel, it’s about my sister. She was so little when Mom left. I did my very*

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107 Sons (and husbands) are rarely involved in housework in Georgia irrespective of whether a family has any migration experience or not (CRRC, n.d.). The distinctiveness of transnational families with migrant mothers relates to the finding that older daughters appear to be routinely taking the responsibility for the tasks that would otherwise be taken care of by their mothers.

*best... From the minute she was born, I'd been involved in bringing her up, from the very minute she was born, not just like a sister, but like a mother, even when Mom was still here [in Georgia]. I tried my best to give her all the love and care I could. But no one in the world can ever substitute a mother. ... And it is very important that a mother brings up her child. ... My Dad is very caring, gives her a lot of attention, they have a great time together, she lacks nothing. But I myself developed this [attitude], since our Mom isn't here, I have to be with her, I just can't leave her for a long time.” (Salome, daughter, fam20\_D)*

Increased household responsibilities also meant that Salome had to hold back on her education after her mother's emigration. She transferred to a local university from a much better university in the capital, and had to take several semesters off to be able to take care of the family. In other families as well, in one form or another, older daughters were taking care of their younger siblings after their mothers' emigration. Quite similar to Salome, Elena became her brother's primary caregiver; they were, respectively, 18 and 11 when their mother emigrated (FAM\_18). Tamta, who was attending an university in the capital, was making weekly trips to her hometown to help her father take care of her younger siblings during the weekends (FAM\_17). After Marina's husband passed away, her youngest son, who was 13 at the time, moved to his sister's family, who was already married (FAM\_04).

17-year-old Sophia, who did not have siblings, was living with her grandmother who was in rather poor health, and the two of them were, effectively, looking after each other (FAM\_21). Many of the interviewed daughters were looking after elderly relatives who were no longer self-sufficient – a responsibility that would normally be their mothers'.

*“Without my mother being around, I take over her tasks as well, things that she would easily do, and which she takes care of when she comes to visit. ... It's hard to live with increased responsibility, it makes you stressed. I have this increased responsibility because I have the elderly and the children to take care of. ... I am constantly in this 'mode' of responsibility, so I have to be alert even when I sleep, can't relax mentally... And when finally my Mom is here [on vacation – TZ], during that one month when she's here, I can relax. It's like, I share this responsibility with her, and I am left with a little bit less responsibility, and I am quiet.” (Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)*

Apparently, daughters' availability to take over many of their mothers' family tasks is an important condition for the success, both economic and emotional, of their mothers' labour

migration and, broadly, for their families' efforts to improve their conditions. In these families, a slightly different variety of "global care chains" developed (Section 2.3), that did not involve any actors outside the migrants' immediate family, and neither hired helpers, but, instead, relied on migrant mothers' daughters, who were in their late teens or older. Although they were not prepared for their new responsibilities, the interviewed daughters reported to be happy to be able to help, as the migration "project" is clearly seen to be a joint family operation.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the interviewed children had an opportunity to visit their mothers in Italy: Such visits became much easier to organize once EU's visa liberalisation agreement with Georgia entered into force in March, 2017 and, subsequently, numerous budget flights became available.<sup>108</sup> David (fam04\_S), Alex (fam09\_S), Ketevan (fam15\_D), Tamuna (fam19\_D), Salome (fam20\_D), Shota (fam07\_S) and Anastasia (fam06\_D).<sup>109</sup> After having seen their mothers in their new environment, they realized much better how hard their mothers worked, and how devoted they were to their families. They also saw very clearly how hard their mothers tried to hide pain and the difficulties they were going through during their internet communication with the family back in Georgia.

*"I had no doubts that it couldn't have been easy for [mother] to live in a foreign country without us, but during those two weeks that we were [visiting her in Italy] ... and, I'm not speaking about my mother only, but also about other emigrants who we met there, [mother's] friends... I understood better the difficulties they were going through, and realized, when I was there, that all those smiling photos that we see on the social media, when they smile, seem to have fun ... it's not their real face. I saw it very clearly. [Instead, there is] a lot of pain, a huge responsibility they have, the heavy burden they carry."* (Salome, daughter, fam20\_D)

The very first period of separation of the members of transnational families, until their first meeting after mothers' emigration, is usually the longest, due to both legal and financial reasons. Long-awaited meetings after these long periods of separation proved to be very difficult for both mothers and children. Even though they were constantly in touch online, meetings in person let them see in a much more evident and, sometimes, striking manner how much they have missed in

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108 Nevertheless, some transnational mothers chose not to invite their children and/or husbands to the destination country as their families' coordinated economic strategy maximize their savings and thus minimize the duration of migration.

109 Anastasia's and Shota's cases were different, though – as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7), they did not travel to Italy with a short visit to see their mothers, but moved to Italy following them, and eventually became labour migrants themselves.

each others' lives. Completely unforeseen and even unimaginable things may happen, like in the case of Natela (fam09\_M): when she went to get her son Alex at the airport, she passed by him several times in the Arrivals hall before she recognized him. They did see each other regularly online, but Natela could not see on Messenger how tall he was. Alex grew up much more than his mother had expected. Natela just could not imagine that the teenage boy she left at home a few years earlier could turn out to be the young man he'd become. This meeting made her realize that video calls fail to show how much the kids actually grow up, thus how insufficient was, in fact, online communication, irrespective of its frequency and availability of video tools.

Salome's and her little sister's two-week-long visit to Apulia to see their mother, Nana, was very emotional in many regards. As mentioned, the youngest daughter, Lisa, was only four when Nana emigrated. While her mother was away, Lisa became increasingly attached to her older sister who became her primary caregiver. Four years after Nana's emigration, the girls were to meet their mother again. As Salome recalled the first moments of the meeting:

*"... it was very painful to watch. Lisa couldn't be as open with her own mother as she was, for example, with me. I still get very emotional when I remember this. ... It only lasted a few hours though, and then I could feel the warmth, the bond between them, it was still there, despite separation."* (Salome, daughter, fam20\_D)

Estrangement, of various lengths and various depths, may be unavoidable when long separations take place, especially – when children are involved. Informants who had the experience of estrangement did not negate it, but did not feel comfortable about this sensation and were not particularly willing to discuss it during the interviews. As they said, neither did they discuss it with their family members. Estrangement was, though, described mostly as an episodic phenomenon which did not last for a long time. It did not seem to affect profound attitudes either. The informants could not accept it lasting long, as for both mothers and children, accepting having been estranged from each other may have been an indication of a failure of their families.

*"Estrangement happens. In the beginning, you are in touch [with family members] daily, every single day. Then you miss one day. Then two days – I am busy, the family member is busy, we become distant, estranged. Then we get used to it: [we] have not talked one day, then two days, three days, four... And so it goes, and we get used to it. So, I try to be in touch as frequently as possible. Looking forward to the vacation, so that I can go visit, or bring them to visit me here."* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

When mothers could, at long last, go to Georgia for vacation, often, in parallel with the joy of being together again, both mothers and children had to learn to live together anew:

*“It took [mother] a long time to get her [legal] papers in Italy, so we had not seen each other for a long time. She definitely had this moment [of estrangement when she came to Georgia]. I did not have it, she had. ... [T]here were some awkward moments [in the first few days after her arrival home]. ... We could feel she was struggling, something was not right. ... She’d ask about everything – can I do this? Can I do that? Can I wear that? Like, about everything. As if she weren’t in her own family... But then it passed. ... We no longer feel anything like that. At all.”* (Shorena, daughter, fam02\_D)

According to Shorena, constant online communication was a crucial factor thanks to which they no longer had those awkward moments of estrangement during her mother’s following visits. In some migrants’ families, experiences of estrangement and tensions between migrant mothers and their children were not so simple to resolve:

*“I left [the youngest son] at the age of 12, and then, when I used to go [to Georgia] for vacation, we just couldn’t understand each other, I couldn’t find a “common language” with him. It felt as if it wasn’t me who raised him. I don’t know, it’s very... I don’t know. ... He was too young when I left. When I try to discuss something with him now, I can see that we can’t understand each other. ... Somehow, we just can’t ‘click’.”* (Rusudan, mother, fam10\_M)

Findings also indicate that there may be various specific types and forms of estrangement, including very subtle ones. According to a general, and unsurprising trend, the younger the children were left behind, the less they remembered specific details about their mothers, the less they were used to their company and thus higher was the probability of estrangement. Alex was 14 when his mother emigrated. Eight years after his mother’s emigration, he admitted:

*“My Mom... As I remember her... Frankly, I don’t remember her that well. Of course, I know what she looks like, her face from the video calls. But I feel like I don’t remember her character. ... Even though we are always in touch, and during all these 6-7 years that she’d been away we’ve always been in touch, but it’s like I’d forgotten what kind of person she is.”* (Alex, son, fam09\_S)

David, on the other hand, seemed to have a rather clear idea of his mother’s character (fam04\_S). David was 13 when his mother emigrated, and 24 at the time of the interview. His and

Alex's mothers' migration histories were very similar, with one important difference: David's mother was documented; she used to visit the family every year during her vacations, while Alex's mother was still undocumented, and had never come back to Georgia since her emigration. Interestingly, both David and his mother, Marina (FAM\_04) described situations when the two of them disagreed on certain pastime choices, most of all – David's enthusiasm for computer games, which, according to his mother, took too much of his time. This disagreement, however, did not put at risk their relationship and deep mutual esteem; evidently, no relationship can be expected to develop of people being in absolute and constant accord with each other.

Similar to many transnational children, for Sophia (fam21\_D) her mother's place in her life was all but straightforward. Since the age of 11, she's been living with her grandmother except for her mother's rare and short visits home. 17 years old at the time of the interview, she said:

*“Actually, Grandma and I get along better than me and my Mom, because, well, Mom has always been [away], so, I and my Grandma have always been together and we know exactly what each of us likes, or dislikes... Also, Grandma is less demanding.”*  
(Sophia, daughter, fam21\_D)

Sophia and her mother, Nina, were closely in touch through the entire period of Nina's emigration. As comfortable as she felt with her grandmother, Sophia preferred to discuss her university plans, and her future in general, with her mother; she felt she and her mother were more like-minded as Nina's ideas were, understandably, more modern compared with those of her mothers'. Similar to the situations of other transnational children, Nina's emigration inevitably transformed some of the aspects of her relationship with Sophia and, quite certainly, led to Sophia's extremely close bond with her grandmother. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that, as a result of Nina's emigration, her role, and her significance in her daughter's life became of secondary importance.

Thus, the above quotes from the interviews with Alex and Sophia indicate specific instances of distancing, or estrangement between migrant mothers and their children, as seen from the children's perspective. However, neither these informants, nor other interviewed children provided any evidence of being emotionally detached from their mothers. In most cases, they were aware of the estrangement, could make sense of it, understand its' reasons and, often, its' inevitability, but these episodes did not last long, and did not define their relationships with their mothers. Informants interviewed for the present research project reported having overcome almost all episodes of migration-related estrangement from their mothers/children, if they had any. More serious cases of

estrangement, reported by several mothers who had difficulties “connecting” with their sons left behind at a young age need to be studied further.<sup>110</sup>

When trying to understand transnational families and, specifically, estrangement between the members of transnational families, one general and very important challenge is the impossibility to know how the relationships between family members would have developed if migration did not take place. Estrangement, lack of mutual understanding, family conflicts and other challenges are not characteristic of transnational families only; people may get emotionally distant or have serious conflicts in their relationships when living together. While it would be impossible for a family member’s migration, or any other form of long-term separation, not to affect relationships between family members, it would be mistaken to assume this effect to be necessarily, inevitably and deeply negative.<sup>111</sup>

From the informants’ perspective, thus, migrant mothers’ physical absence generally did not lead to emotional distancing or ruptures between family members. Importantly, such perceptions were reported by interviewed mothers and children likewise, even in cases when mothers’ emigration lasted for 12-15 years. While emigration inevitably led to changes in some specific aspects of the relationship between mothers and children, as well as to changes in practices of motherhood, by and large, the very essence of motherhood remained intact. Even when children developed particularly close bonds with their caregivers (siblings, grandparents) and perceived them as their “second” mothers, this did not result in their “first” mothers becoming of secondary importance. Informants provided evidence of taking care of each other’s feelings and being present in each other’s lives notwithstanding the distance that separated them, and even through estrangement episodes. According to informants, they overcome estrangement quite easily and in a short time. This, however, was not always true about some of the youngest children, with whom interviewed mothers were still hoping to “reconnect”.

While, overall, education featured prominently in mothers’ thoughts about their children, a rather surprising finding was that neither mothers nor their student children considered continuing their studies in Italy (or, generally, abroad), and did not have basic information about such possibilities which could, potentially, let them spend a lot of time together. Only Liana (fam01\_M),

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110 These sons were not interviewed for the present research project as, arguably, mothers preferred to suggest interviews with those of their children they felt most comfortable with, as suggested in Section 3.3.

111 Financial difficulties are known to lead to serious family conflicts and are among the most frequent causes of divorce. Without labour migrants’ remittances, economic situation of their families would have been extremely difficult. It can be argued, thus, that labour emigration, to a large degree, prevents conflicts in a family caused by financial difficulties.

who had been an exchange student at an Italian university herself, partially considered such a possibility for her daughter, Anna, but eventually “retreated”:

*“I do have this idea, but I can’t plan anything right now. I can’t plan, because I don’t know about the future, how it’s going to be five years from now, what will be the situation in Georgia, or in Italy; and what documents will be required, whether we will be allowed to bring someone [to Italy]. ... And it depends on Anna as well, what she’s going to think about this.”* (Liana, mother, fam21\_M)

Thus, based on informants’ narratives and keeping in mind the probable selection bias toward successful, “efficient” cases of transnational motherhood, migrant mothers’ continued distant presence in their families after their emigration appear to be an important and versatile element of transnational motherhood practices, outlined as follows:

- **constant communication.** Transnational mothers and children have several video calls per day with each other, and, arguably, exchange an uncountable amount of messages. Not surprisingly, are very well informed about “small” and “big” events in each others’ lives. While the video calls have different subjects and may be of different duration, mothers make sure to spend some quality time with their children, even if virtually, which evidently helps to keep a strong bond between them. It follows logically that not only interviewed children did not feel estranged from their mothers, but, on the contrary, some reported to have grown closer to them after their emigration, even if they were in their early teens when their mother emigrated.
  - o In addition to being constantly in touch with their children, mothers closely follow their lives through their communication with children’s caregivers, other relatives, friends, school personnel, etc., as well as following their children’s social media accounts. They are using all available means to know as much as possible about how their children are, how they feel, what is going on in their lives.
- Taking a thoughtful **decision about caregivers** before departure appears to play a crucial role in how the family relationships will evolve transnationally. Leaving the child(ren) in the care of a relative who has been closely related to the family and was a part of family life even before mother’s emigration helps avoid a stressful transition. For some families, the choice of a caregiver can be a very natural one, as it was in the case of Nineli’s sister-in-law (FAM\_02) or Anastasia’s, Sophia’s and Alex’s grandmothers (FAM\_06, FAM\_21 and FAM\_09) and Lela’s mother (FAM\_14). As Nana’s and Marina’s (respectively, FAM\_10

and FAM\_04) families' cases illustrate though, sometimes life events may painfully affect people's plans, leading to a necessity for emergency adjustments.

- It is also indispensable to ensure that migration goals are understood and **shared by all family members**, the entire family is together in this "project". This will help avoid, or minimize any discontent and/or resentment, as well as prevent misuse of remittances. This goal may be the most difficult to achieve, but it is fundamental. Problems in communication with their youngest children reported by Rusudan (FAM\_10) and Natalia (FAM\_18) highlight this importance. Their youngest children were too young to be able to see their families' situation beyond their own sentiments and to understand the reasons for their mothers' emigration; based on basic, simple explanations, apparently, they could not understand the "rational" model of motherhood, hence their older sisters' crucial role in their subsequent adjustment.

### 4.3. (Self-)sacrifice and guilt

*„The only way to continue to live is to not let the memories control you.”*

(Facebook post of Nina, mother, fam20\_M)

Notwithstanding their continuous and extensive involvement in their families' lives, and their decisive role in securing their families' well-being, interviewed mothers compared their experiences of transnational motherhood as incomplete, as “not having the right hand,” or “not having the eyes”. Often, they were inclined to consider their emigration as “lost years” as they realized how much they had missed in their children's lives despite continuous (online) communication with them, and how irreversibly did the time flow.

*“[T]here are so many things I've missed in my children's lives. They finished school, both my grandchildren were born when I could not be next to my daughter, could not support her.”* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

*“I went to Georgia eight times [since emigration], and in these 10 years [of emigration] I say, I actually lived those 8 months only. The rest of the time, I did not live my life.”* (Marina, mother, fam04\_M)

*“Sooner or later, the family will pay off the debts, they will have some money, surely, but that money will not be able to buy that love between a mother and a child, their bond, it just can't.”* (Liana, mother, fam01\_M)

Two profound and, at the same, highly mismatched sentiments strongly featured in interviews with migrant mothers. On the one hand, mothers were consciously sacrificing their years in emigration, to the extent that, often, their lifestyle was, de-facto, self-denial filled almost exclusively with hard work. Their main – and, often, the only – motivation was to economically strengthen their households, ensure well-being of their children, and the rest of the family. Interviewed children reported a similar understanding of their mothers' migration goals; they were well aware that the primary reason for their mothers' emigration was an aspiration to ensure their well-being and a better future (Mgaloblishvili, 2020). They concurred with their mothers' migration's assessment as a sacrifice made with their better future in mind and expressed genuine gratitude to their mothers, mixed, to a certain extent, with feelings of sadness (for separation) or guilt (for not being able to prevent their mothers' emigration), less salient compared with mothers.

Surprisingly, though, mothers also reported strong feelings of guilt, repeating over and over again that they hoped their children would eventually forgive them for this separation, for leaving

them. They never used the word “abandonment” though. Importantly, interviewed children’s narratives do not suggest any indication of perceptions of their mothers being guilty of anything, or holding them responsible for any wrongdoing – on the contrary, they had a very clear understanding of what an important difference did their mothers’ emigration make in their lives and highly appreciated their mothers’ commitment. Thus, intergenerational differences are evident in these attitudes as well. This paradox seems impossible to understand and explain rationally: mothers feel guilty for full devotion to their children who, in their turn, see no guilt in mothers’ actions. This paradox appears to be based chiefly on mothers’ emotional reactions, not on rational considerations. It is described and illustrated in the present Section and, to the possible extent, discussed in the light of theories of emotions (Section 2.4).

Mothers live their migration experience with a great multitude of sentiments which would be impossible to arrange in order of their importance, their strength, or by any other criteria. As suggested above, labour migrant parents prioritize “long-term projects of care” (Section 2.3.2), although they do not consider minimizing the importance of “immediate” and affective parental care, although, as demonstrated in the previous section, expressions of affection inevitably change in transnational mother-child relationships. In a certain sense, migrant mothers strive to achieve the impossible: work full-time in a different, distant country, yet remain in their family; not seeing their child(ren) for many years yet keep alive the strongest possible bond with them. And while the narratives collected for the present research project indicate that, against all odds, they may be close to achieving this goal, they also show the high emotional “price” migrant mothers pay for their accomplishment – including separation (Section 4.2.1) and sacrifice.

For interviewed mothers, their entire migration experience is a sacrifice for the good of their loved ones, primarily – for their children. Leaving their homes in search of jobs in foreign countries, mothers often expose themselves to numerous risks, certainly move out of their “comfort zones” and, it could be claimed, “sentence” themselves for years of loneliness and separation; as discussed in Section 4.2.1, they greatly suffer from this separation and, in addition, they suffer from the awareness of being absent from their children’s lives. Years in emigration, while vital for the improvement of their families’ economic well-being, are often perceived as “lost” from the “human”, and “spiritual” points of view.

Perceptions of mothers’ labour migration as a sacrifice were widespread, from the perspectives of both mothers and children (and, arguably, the rest of their families). Mothers reflected on it a lot. Occasionally, stories about particularly devoted mothers from the World history surged migrant mothers’ Facebook feeds. Perhaps the most impressive one, reposted by mothers

numerous times and from different sources during the period of data collection, was a story of a British woman, Mary Ann Bevan, a former nurse and a mother of four, who suffered from a hormone disorder known as acromegaly. She was widowed in 1914. To feed her children, she participated, and won a contest for the title of “the ugliest woman of the World”, after which she had been touring with a U.S. “freak show”, capitalizing on her appearance until her death in 1933 (Image 7).

Image 7. A story of a mother’s sacrifice for the sake of children, shared by several informants (a fragment)



Important to note, Mary Ann Bevan’s story was entirely framed from the perspective of the traditional ideology of motherhood, with very characteristic phrases: “A loving mother will do anything for her children. ... She did the impossible. ... Who knows what she was feeling when people were ridiculing her. ... She was tolerating all those insults for the sake of her children. ... Despite her appearance, she became a hero.”

Even though the story of Mary Ann Bevan’s sacrifice was a rather extreme example, migrant mothers could connect with it, as they were seeing themselves also living lives of sacrifices. Surely, their sacrifices were different, and interviewed mothers never referred to themselves as heroes; but their sacrifices were not easy: separation, loneliness, fears, insecurities, demanding work schedules, as well as significant downward occupational mobility, to name only some of those. Repeatedly, they were reporting an impression that the “real” life was escaping them while they were working.

*“I’ve become like a robot.” (Valentina, mother, fam13\_M)*

Mothers also often reported they kept telling themselves that they had to endure, pull through no matter what, as they had no other option. Repeatedly, they mentioned being surprised to find out how much strength they had. A mini-dialogue following Natalia's (fam18\_M) Facebook post about missing her children is rather characteristic:

Natalia: *"My heart hurts when I think of my situation. ... Yes, we are strong. We are Georgian mothers."*

A fellow migrant mother's reply: *"I know what you feel, but exactly because you are a Georgian mother, you have to make it work, you have to do the impossible."*

Migrant mothers claimed, that doing their best to endure has become their mode of life in emigration. One thought that particularly helped them was the thought of supporting their families, awareness that their work abroad, as hard as it was, could ensure a better future for their children and for themselves, no matter how much they were missing their families. Often, they were finding strength in their children's encouragement, as well in their successes or, simply, in their smiles. Nana (fam20\_M) remembered how little Lizi, left behind at the age of 4, once told her during a video call: "Don't cry Mom, I miss you too, but I manage to cope". Nineli, on the other hand, explained this more rationally:

*"Apart from that emotional side, those sentiments, difficulties you have to face, being away from your family, not being able to see your children, [while] you want to be with them and encourage them in their lives – you 'compensate' all this, [thinking] that if I were there [in Georgia with the family - TZ], I'd have no job, I'd have nothing, I'd depend on [my children], while now, I can help them. And this motivates you. Well, it's difficult and unbearable to be an emigrant, but seeing its effect, its outcome, it, somehow, gives you some peace."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

Missing their children is, arguably, the most difficult part of migrant mothers' sacrifice. Many of them felt better talking, writing, posting about their children:

*"You are the sense of my life and my future. I can move mountains for you, fight with the entire world, and will let the whole universe know how much I love you and miss you."* (Facebook post by Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)

Mothers also often reported being surprised to find out, based on their own experience, how much a person can endure, when needed.

“Human beings – they are creatures that can do virtually everything. The Creator gave them strength, it may be tough, but, as they say, what does not kill us, makes us stronger. People have the strength to do anything. And we get used to everything, whether we want it or not. Sometimes we think we can’t do it, but we can do anything while we breathe.” (Facebook post by Nana, mother, fam20\_M)

Rather than rewarding themselves for their sacrifice, migrant mothers appear to distress themselves with feelings of guilt. They felt guilty because they had missed how their children were growing up, they were not at their side when they finished high school, passed university entrance exams and graduated, got engaged, got married, had a child. And while their children also noted how sorry they were because their mothers were not at their side during important events in their lives, none of them implied any reason their mothers should feel guilty about it.

One comprehensible cause of mothers’ feelings of guilt could have been them “leaving” the family, their children; however, such reasoning is not quite convincing as mothers’ emigration was a forced choice, as demonstrated above. Similar to the situation in many migrant-sending countries or regions, the economic realities of post-Soviet Georgia effectively forced many mothers to seek employment abroad, so they emigrated to make sure their children were fed, clothed, and educated. There was, however, a certain cruel irony in the trade-off they had to accept: their emigration was driven by their eagerness to fulfil a mother’s duty, to do their best as mothers, adhering, however, to an “alternative” vision of motherhood (Section 2.3.2). Yet this very emigration could be interpreted as children’s abandonment, i.e. the very opposite of a mother’s duty, and some people and social institutions were rather willing to note this.<sup>112</sup>

Although informants of the present study were, mostly, very young at the time of their mothers’ emigration, they also believed this emigration was, at the time, the only option for their families to overcome severe economic hardship; this awareness, with a very high probability, was crucial in that they did not report any feelings of abandonment or resentment toward their mothers; the feelings of guilt reported by their mothers were in no way “mirrored” in children’s narratives. Importantly though, the latter did not report discussing their families’ “transnational” nature with their friends, suggesting this issue was too personal and, most probably, painful.

It is possible to make sense of the sentiments of mothers’ sacrifice and guilt, when taken separately. What is difficult to rationalize and explain is their co-presence – which, however, appears rather widespread. Migrant mothers are aware of this inconsistency, but

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112 The position of the Georgian Orthodox Church toward mothers’ labour emigration is discussed in Chapter 1.

*“[w]e can’t explain it either We may talk for hours, but we can’t explain, just keep going around in circles. My friend, she’s a psychologist, she says – we are doing everything for them [children], what do we blame ourselves for? ... And whatever we do, we have a guilty conscience. Toward our children. When my daughter came to visit, 6 years later [after emigration], I didn’t sleep those 10 nights. I just couldn’t understand, how could I ever sleep, in those 6 years, and not hear her breathing? She finished school without me, prepared for university exams without me, passed those exams without me... ... Aren’t those years torn out from our lives? What did I do for her, what did I give her, that would be similarly precious? Who knows, how many times she needed me...”* (Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)

During the post-interview meeting, Magda (fam15\_M) elaborated further on her feeling of guilt toward her daughter. She feared, the family’s long and diverse migration history influenced Ketevan’s life chances, and she considered it possible her daughter could have achieved more in her life, (namely, as far as her educational attainment was concerned), if the family had offered her more stability.<sup>113</sup> Ketevan did not report similar considerations. Although she was already married when Magda emigrated to Italy, she was well aware that her mother left for Italy to help her, provide further financial resources for her young children:

*“She helps me immensely, but I think I will feel stronger, united, complete, so to say, when she comes back and we’ll be together.”* (Ketevan, daughter, fam15\_D)

When reflecting on their migration experience and its outcomes for their families, migrant mothers also often noted that, while successfully resolving some of the problems for their families, they may have created new, unforeseen problems or complications – which, in turn, reinforces feelings of guilt. Occasionally, they would also question whether their remittances had the intended effect, or a rather opposite one, potentially encouraging, or risking to encourage, their children’s idleness.

*“What we [migrant mothers] do for our children, it’s sometimes more of a hindrance than a help. I know this lady [a fellow Georgian labour migrant in Italy], ... her son graduated [from a university], tried to start a job, but eventually just ended up on his couch at home. Because his mother is paid well, and keeps sending him money. If we weren’t sending them money, they would accomplish more. I think they would. We probably do some harm as well.”* (Marina, mother, fam04\_M)

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<sup>113</sup> As highlighted in Section 3.7, as well as in Appendix 3, the entire family had previously lived in Russia.

*“We are compensating. We are guilty of removing the word “no” from our vocabularies. We refuse nothing, trying to fill [absence], but we can’t fill it, and sometimes, on the contrary, it’s more of a hindrance than a help. And we make things worse.”* (Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)

Considering mothers’ perspective, the sentiments of sacrifice and guilt are closely related to the “culturally inherited” understandings of an “ideal mother” discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3) and are, in different ways, caused by tensions (usually, unconscious) between the “ideal”, “culturally defined moral obligations” (Baldassar 2015, p. 82) on the one hand, and the “reality”.

In labour migrants’ families, migration decisions and subsequent experiences of all family members essentially emerged as an outcome of a choice, usually unconscious, between “affective” versus “rational” models of parenting and, specifically, mothering,<sup>114</sup> which reflects, respectively, traditional and alternative ideologies of motherhood (Section 2.3). Once labour emigration came into the family’s sight as a possibility to consider, parents had to make a difficult choice between two quite opposite ways of taking care of their children:<sup>115</sup> (a) affective, but passive (to be with them, nurture them, do their best to protect and take care of them personally, but basically change nothing, not introduce any significant changes in the family’s life, even if the family is struggling to meet basic needs and children’s future could be jeopardized) or (b) more rational, arguably more calculated, more focused on specific goals, even if distant, certainly more active and potentially associated with certain risks (to introduce more or less radical changes in the family’s life, including either internal or international migration); an analogue of “long-term projects of care” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012). Affective parenting leaned toward a traditional way of life; choosing this model indicated a preference for going with the stream. A rational model of parenting, and particularly cases when emigration was considered, was all but conventional considering Georgia’s recent history of isolation within the former Soviet Union and exclusion from international migration processes (Chapter 1). It was bound to be perceived as more complicated, uncertain, risky; arguably, it took a lot of courage to make this choice. None of these two scenarios, though, was an easy one for the families in serious financial difficulties; moreover, in none of these scenarios could the parents foresee the long-term outcomes of their choice and confidently know in advance which

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114 This classification of the models of parenting has been developed in the process of data analysis. “Affective” and “rational” models of parenting represent provisional abstract categories that help illustrate and explain various types of parental decision making.

115 According to interviewed migrant mothers, although, very often, they were the first to consider labour emigration to improve their families’ economic situation, the actual migration decisions were taken jointly with their husbands (if not deceased) and, often, extended family as well. Thus, husbands’ “agency” cannot be excluded when discussing these aspects.

choice was the right one, how their families' lives would evolve in case of either of the decisions they would make.

Although migrant mothers interviewed for the present research project often described their emigration decision as a “sudden” one, and their narratives reveal desperation about their families' economic conditions before emigration, the very fact of emigration intonsure better opportunities for their families and, primarily, for their children, despite anxieties of separation in both “halves” of transnational families, demonstrates that the “rational” model of parenting had been prioritized in the families of labour migrants:<sup>116</sup> parents chose to accept difficulties associated with a certain period of family separation (which, however, was never expected to last as much as it actually lasted), as well as the risk to be stigmatized, with the hope to reunite as soon as the family would get stronger economically, and/or specific educational, healthcare or other goals would be achieved.

While making this choice, the parents evidently did not have any abstract “models of parenting” in mind, and certainly did not use the proposed terms of affective and rational parenting. No matter how rational their choices were, they did not mean to reject affective aspects of parenting – in their understanding, they were temporarily (as they hoped – for just a few years) transforming those aspects from “real” into “virtual”. Contrary to how parents' labour migration is often seen by its commentators, migrant mothers did not see their labour emigration as a choice of “money versus affection”, as they never considered depriving their children of their affection. As informants' narratives, as well as the review of their Facebook feeds demonstrate, a certain “distant affective” motherhood practices were created, where video calls, text and voice messages, heart emojis and stickers, as well as emotional social media posts substituted physical proximity and physical care. In addition to their own posts about their children, migrant mothers were actively commenting on similar posts of their friends, relatives and acquaintances. As mentioned, they were also reflecting a lot about motherhood, its importance and significance.

*Post scriptum: Looking forward*

*“When, where did all those years go? I look at [old] photos and I think, nothing justifies being away from my children.”*

(Natalia, mother, fam18\_M)

Irrespective of how “rational” and goal-oriented migrant mothers' behaviour, the collected evidence suggests that a crucial factor for the emotional well-being of the members of transnational families and, particularly, of migrant mothers is their ability to find a certain balance between two

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<sup>116</sup> It would be relevant to reiterate that decisions about labour emigration were taken only after the parents felt all other options have been exhausted, and believed emigration was their very last hope to improve their families' economic conditions.

“extremes”: emotionally, all informants admitted it to be extremely difficult to be separated from their loved ones for long periods of time; on the other hand, though, it was very important for them to know that they were getting closer to their goals. Thanks to their work abroad – and through the sacrifice of separation they were making – they were able not only to provide for their families and resolve some of their families’ big financial problems (debts, education, housing), but also, once their families’ urgent needs were met, had some of their lifelong dreams come true. This can be considered an additional aspect of the complexity of the migration experience: along with numerous difficulties, it certainly offers important rewards that would otherwise be unattainable. These rewards go far beyond migrants’ financial contributions to their families’ needs, and may be of a rather manifold nature; to name some specific examples from the informants’ experience:

- while working in Apulia, on her day-offs Lela managed to pursue further her passion for music together with some of her new friends, fellow labour migrants from Georgia; they organized several concerts before the COVID-19 outbreak (fam14\_M);
- for Dali, living in Italy made it possible to take good care of her serious medical condition and improve her health, as she was cured by much better doctors than the ones in her hometown in Georgia (fam12\_M);
- Nanuli learned a new craft of embroidery and developed it to artistic levels (fam19\_M); she enjoyed creating personalized gifts for her friends both in Georgia and in Italy (Image 8);
- several migrant mothers further admitted they had been fascinated by Italy and its cultural heritage since their childhood. While they could not even dream of visiting Rome, Venice, Milan or Florence during the Soviet period, emigration made this possible and they were grateful for these opportunities:

*“Italy is certainly the country where my dreams came true. ... As a child, I’d always dreamed of going to Paris, walking around the Eiffel Tower. And I was very curious, it was my childhood dream, to see Venice, Florence and Rome. The cities of my dreams. Although, I should say, [the whole] Italy is incredibly beautiful. ... So, I’ve fulfilled these dreams, I have not been to Paris yet, but I’m sure I’ll go there as well. ... Well, Turkey is very beautiful too, very unique, exotic,<sup>117</sup> but ... this [working in Italy] made my dreams come true. When I was a child, I could never imagine this could become possible, we were a closed Soviet Union then... And besides, in addition to these dreams [to visit the Italian cities], I also had a dream to have a house in Tbilisi. I love*

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117 As mentioned (Section 3.7 and Appendix 3), before her arrival in Italy Nineli worked in Turkey for 10 years. According to her, however, working in Italy was much more efficient.

*Tbilisi... So, I did this too. I say, it all became possible thanks to Italy.*” (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

Whatever the rewards, the “added value” of mothers’ emigration was, their children were informed about this, and considered their mothers’ activities very important and beneficial for them. They were glad for, and proud of their mothers’ artistic talents, new friendships, or simply interesting, albeit rare weekend getaways. Despite the difficulties of migration, the capability to see its positive aspects has a significant positive impact on transnational experiences. Interestingly, various artistic talents developed by labour migrants have been reported by the Georgian media outlets as well (e.g., Otiashvili, 2019). In media interviews, migrants noted how various artistic activities (painting, singing) helped them relax, de-stress, calm down.

Image 8. An embroidery by Nanuli (a detail)



(Source: Facebook feed of Nanuli, mother, fam19\_M)

Based on rational considerations, interviewed mothers considered their decision about emigration to be the right one, despite all the difficulties and painful emotions. When asked, what would they have done differently if they were taking the decision about emigration now, with the experience they had accumulated over the years, all but one interviewed mothers said they would do the very same thing – emigrate and go through all the difficulties of separation with their families, thus, choose again the “rational” model of parenting. Yet, if they were to give a friend their migration advice, their main message would have been to avoid leaving home at all costs.

As the families' migration experiences demonstrate, the decision about migrant mothers' definitive return home is no less complicated than any other aspect of their migration "projects". Similar to many other questions pertinent to labour migration experiences, there can be no simple answer to the question about the "right" time for migrants to return home. Initially, at the time of their arrival to Italy, migrant mothers had rather modest goals: to improve and stabilize their families' financial situation, ensure their children's education, probably do some modest renovation works in their homes and get back to their families as soon as possible. However, after a number of years of working in Italy they found themselves facing new needs – either the ones that appeared in the course of their families' lives, or the ones that existed before; although the migrants were not considering those earlier, at some point they decided to address those as well, and changed their initial migration goals and plans in order to meet as many new needs as they could. A further reason for the postponement of return was a very clear awareness of the lack of employment opportunities in Georgia. Migrant mothers knew that the economic situation in Georgia has not improved since their emigration, and they did not hope to find any adequate employment there.

*"I am not that disconnected from Georgia, I know what the situation is like there. ... When I go back to my village, I see how people struggle, have no jobs... I see how difficult are their lives. ... [If I had not emigrated,] I'd be in the same situation, wouldn't I? If I had to decide [anew] whether to leave or not, I'd emigrate anyway. ... I know how people struggle, [so] when I visit [Georgia], I try to help them, with whatever I can, apart from gifts and some sweets, I also give them some money. This gives me a lot of satisfaction. ... And if I were living in Georgia, facing that reality, I would take that decision [to emigrate], to be able to take care of myself and to be helpful to my children. And to have the pleasure of helping at least a little bit my friends and relatives, give them some joy. I would decide [to emigrate]."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

While three of the interviewed mothers (Naira, fam03\_M; Nanuli, fam19\_M and Nana, fam20\_M) had specific return plans, in most cases, migrant mothers were highly uncertain about their future. They hoped to "keep going on", keep working and investing in their families' needs back in Georgia for as long as they would be physically able to do so. The fact that their children have grown up did not seem to affect mothers' tendency to keep taking care of them, feeling responsible for their well-being. Especially so if grandchildren were already in the picture. Interviewed migrant mothers were determined to avoid at any cost that their daughters (or sons) would, in their turn, find themselves in a situation when they are forced to consider labour

emigration, and hence share their mothers' fate. Instead, they would rather prolong their own emigration and help their children raise their families. Many of them were trying to come up with a certain "retirement plan" for themselves upon their return to Georgia, as they deemed it necessary to ensure their financial independence upon their return, yet have resources, even very modest ones, to continue helping their children. Having been primary breadwinners for their families during the years of emigration, they could not accept idleness, or the very idea of being financially dependent on their children or even on their husbands, become a burden.<sup>118</sup>

Interviewed mothers had occasionally commented how their disposition and willingness to help their children no matter how old they were seemed odd in the Italian and, broader, European context, where children become independent at a rather young age. Informants did not have any "age limit" when it came to "being a mother" and fulfilling their mother's duty, as they saw it:

*"As you know, [in Georgia] a 90-year-old mother is still thinking about her 70-year-old son or daughter, trying to do something [for him/her]... They [the Italians] can't understand us, and we can't understand [them]."* (Nineli, mother, fam02\_M)

This position, however, was not shared by interviewed children – as highlighted above (Section 4.2.2), independence was one of the most salient impacts of their mothers' emigration on their personal development. Intergenerational differences were evident when considering informants' reflections about the future and, specifically, migrant mothers' return. Children were looking forward to their mothers returning home and wanted this to happen as soon as possible. Importantly, they believed their families were in good financial shape, and there was no longer a real necessity for their mothers to prolong their emigration.

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118 It has been documented that remittances that households in Georgia receive from labour migrants are not usually used "productively", but, rather, are spent on family consumption, educational or medical expenses, purchase or renovation of real estate (OECD/CRRC Georgia, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

*„Once upon a time, there was a little girl who wanted to give a hug to her Mommy.”*

(From a Facebook post about a fairy tale a labour migrant’s 5-year-old daughter came up with, reposted by Dali, fam12\_M)

International migration has been universally characterized as a complex phenomenon. The findings of the present research project further manifest the complexity and multidimensionality of the lives of transnational families of international labour migrants, with accompanying “concrete historical changes in human meanings”<sup>119</sup> (Wiley, 1986, p. 32). These complexities are structural as well as emotional, involving matters of legal, societal, economic, political, historical, sentimental nature, all interconnected and interdependent in the most complicated ways. The magnitude of these complexities, exemplified by the collected narratives of migrant mothers and their children, suggests that, to date, existing theoretical insights aiming at a better understanding of transnational migrants’ experiences, as well as policy documents aiming at managing professions of labour migration in sending as well as in the receiving countries, consider only some fractions of these. And although these fractions can be (and, often, are) of utmost importance, they provide only a partial, thus incomplete understanding of how transnational families function, overlooking the amplitude and the “wholeness” of relevant experiences. This incompleteness can potentially compromise the integrity and coherence of our knowledge about transnational families, and about transnationalism in general, until genuinely interdisciplinary theories addressing international migration are developed.

Therefore, the major inference that can be drawn based on the present research project primarily urges for a maximally complete, contextualized, multifaceted and hence thorough understanding of how family life and family relationships evolve following a family member’s international labour migration, and, specifically, how mothers’ emigration affects transnational motherhood practices.<sup>120</sup> The neoclassical economic theory can quite convincingly address the causes of mothers’ labour migration, i.e. the pre-migration stage, and human capital and migrant network theories address, to a large extent, the logistics of the migration process (the trip) itself. However, these theories prove to be of extremely limited value without consideration of strong self-

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119 The term “(human) meaning” is used in this quote following its usage by Thomas and Znaniecki in their classical work “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America”, as a “real or possible activity,” an action (Wiley, 1986, p. 30).

120 While the data collected for the present research project are based on interviews with Georgian labour migrant mothers working in Italy and their children left behind in Georgia, the findings on characteristics of transnational motherhood can be considered in a broader context.

selection mechanisms of migrants, and, in addition, fail to address migration experiences once migrants are already settled in the receiving countries. These theories particularly overlook long-term experiences of migration (an oversight that has been partially taken care of by transnational migration theories) and their emotional aspects, as they erroneously consider international labour migrants as unquestionably rational actors (Massey, 2002, p. 25). No existing theory explains how a traditional model of a family, and that of motherhood, are renegotiated over time in families with labour migrant mothers and how family roles are altered in these families.<sup>121</sup> The findings of the present research project offer the first steps in this direction.

To contextualize the complex context of mothers' international labour migration and the development of transnational motherhood practices in their families, the following closely intertwined factors/aspects should be taken into consideration:

- (a) Mothers' labour emigration is an act of desperation (both at a personal and the family levels), following years of economic hardship. Usually, the sending context would not allow for rational planning and thorough preparations, including preparation from the emotional point of view. Thereby, all members of transnational families would be characterized by an evident **lack of readiness** for their new family arrangements.
- (b) Considering an objective impossibility for any of the parents to find a fairly compensated job in the country of residence, mothers' labour emigration is a **forced choice**, the very last resort; it is not a desirable course of action. The "push factors" leading to mothers' emigration are beyond the control of any of the members of their families.
- (c) Extended **kinship networks** (primarily, availability of grandparents, and also of aunts) can facilitate childcare arrangements. These networks can be very efficient, and often become a determining factor at the stage of decision making about emigration. However, as the data demonstrate, kinship networks may not be always available and, in some cases, may be rather fragile.
- (d) **Modern communication technologies** virtually changed experiences of transnationalism in both sending and receiving countries. Possibilities offered by online communication undeniably help international migrants and their families, reducing the anxiety caused by

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<sup>121</sup> It is important to reiterate, though, that, with a very high probability, findings of the present research project are based on positive, successful experiences of transnational motherhood, i.e. families that have succeeded in adjusting to their new realities after mothers' emigration. While informants referred to negative or even failed cases of transnational family life of some of their acquaintances, it was not possible to interview representatives of such families.

separation. At the same time, online communication does not appear to be a complete solution to the problem (and the pain) of separation, even when family members can reach each other at any time.

Transnational motherhood experiences of interviewed Georgian labour migrants to Italy and their family members in Georgia were framed by the factors listed above, and many transnational families in other countries would relate to this. Numerous aspects at micro-, meso- and macro-levels, such as personality traits (“character”), educational attainment, relationships between family members, family atmosphere, personal and professional networks, community cohesion in both sending and receiving contexts, national traditions, to name only a few, had an impact on how these experiences were lived.

The data emphasize the importance and relevance of the theories of self-selection of migrants (Borjas, 1987; Chiswick, 1999; also, Moraga, 2011); informants themselves were well aware that certain personality traits were indispensable for a successful migration. Labour migration to a foreign country, learning a new language as adults, adjustment to an unfamiliar environment with numerous “unknowns” and potential risks is not an endeavour that any person would feel comfortable undertaking, especially when speaking about emigration from a country like the former USSR, that was almost completely isolated from the rest of the world as far as ordinary people’s lives were concerned. Migrant mothers from Georgia, thus, could not have been other than “positively self-selected”, considering primarily their personality traits. Based on their collective self-description, as well the analysis of their narratives, commitment to their families, determination, courage, endurance, patience, as well as emotional strength are among the indispensable qualities of this very particular group. A remarkably noteworthy aspect of their self-selection is prioritization, arguably in accordance with their husbands, of the “long-term projects of care” for their children (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 226). No less important is their ability and willingness to work hard, with full devotion to the people they take care of as “*badanti*”.

Assessment of the role of the receiving country’s immigration policy in migrant mothers’ self-selection is rather complicated though. Informants’ experience proves that domestic workers can *de facto* work in Italy, even when undocumented, for as long as they choose to. All interviewed mothers overstayed their visas or visa-free short-term stay periods. While some of them legalized their status afterwards, the collected evidence suggests that whether documented or not, migrant mothers succeeded in achieving the economic goals of their migration.

In the case of their children, though, self-selection was no longer the case. It is reasonable to suggest, however, that mothers’ self-selection had a secondary impact on their children;

furthermore, it would be highly improbable to imagine that experiences of transnational family life did not affect them.

As interviewed children repeatedly noted, they were too young at the time of their mothers' emigration and could not influence their mothers' (often – their parents' joint) migration decision. At the same time, they were old enough to understand that their mothers' emigration, while not desirable by anyone in the family, was unavoidable if the family wanted to improve living conditions and have better prospects for the future. Children were well aware that they were the primary reason for their mothers' emigration: their mothers' goal was to secure children's future well-being, often – to provide for their better education. And once mothers emigrated, both children and adults in every transnational family had to understand, all on their own, how to reorganize their lives under the new circumstances.

Arguably, and quite logically, as a result of emigration mothers' lives changed in much more substantial ways compared with their children's lives. Interviewed children stayed in their homes, with family members they had been living with before. For them, their mothers' absence was the only real change that followed their mothers' emigration, but all possible efforts were taken to make sure they would be taken good care of. Mothers' lives, on the other hand, were completely different after their emigration; in most cases, they could not count on any practical, hands-on assistance from family or friends and could only rely on themselves in case of any difficulties. Importantly, children were aware that emigration was particularly difficult for their mothers, for the very reasons mentioned above. *“She [the mother] is all alone out there”* was a common refrain in almost all interviews with children.

Interviews provide abundant evidence of how migrant mothers' and their children's experiences of transnationalism differ. Informants' narratives strongly suggest, however, that distance and physical absence did not jeopardize bonds between family members and, specifically, between separated mothers and children in transnational families. Contrary to some warnings based on geographically sparse evidence and suggesting that mothers' emigration may cause a split in the family (e.g. Ambrosini, 2015; Baldassar, 2015; Parreñas, 2001), mothers' emigration does not unavoidably “split” or break the families, at the very least – not the families of the informants of the present study.<sup>122</sup> In accordance with the conclusions of a number of earlier studies claiming that “cohabitation is not a precondition for ‘holding the family together’ – i.e. for achieving the social

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<sup>122</sup> There can be no doubt that negative experiences of transnational motherhood also exist, and are present in any migration flow, including labour migrant mothers from Georgia to Italy. Importantly, though, evidence of successful, positive experiences that has been accumulated in terms of the present research project demonstrates with certainty that the latter are far from marginal.

cohesion that makes a family into a sharing and inter-related collective. ... staying in touch, caring for each other, and creating and maintaining familial intimacy can be achieved despite geographical separation” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 233), informants of the present study provided ample evidence of taking care of each other’s feelings and being present in each other’s lives, while separated for many years by thousands of kilometres.

Findings strongly suggest that, instead of an “affective” mode of parenting, associated with a traditional understanding of motherhood, migrant mothers prioritized a different, “rational” mode, a future-oriented and forward-looking one, but also more controversial, more difficult, riskier. Interestingly, migrant mothers, as well as their children, were not necessarily aware of challenging the deeply rooted and, in the Georgian context, extremely powerful traditional ideology of motherhood – rather, their narratives, as well social media profiles evidence their conformity to it. This is, though, just one of many striking “dualities” that accompany experiences of transnational motherhood and coexist in informants’ perceptions – and, also, prove limitations of exclusively rational interpretations of human behaviour.

Whether a mother’s emigration lasted for only a couple of years or over a decade, both mothers’ and children’s narratives indicate that physical separation did not lead to an emotional distancing between mothers and their children, provided that children were old enough to understand the motives and the purpose of their mothers’ emigration, as well as emigration’s necessity for their families’ well-being. Importantly, this conclusion is viable even in the light of various reports of estrangement episodes between migrant mothers and their children throughout mothers’ emigration. While a certain degree of estrangement was unavoidable, it was described by the informants as a periodic phenomenon that did not last for long and did not appear to have affected profound attitudes. Although transnational experiences inevitably changed specific practices of motherhood, the very essence of motherhood, as understood by informants, remained intact, from the points of view of both mothers and children, and motherhood is not destined to fail in transnational families.

Mothers did their best to present themselves in the best possible shape during their regular video calls with the family. Both mothers and children avoided sharing with each other potentially worrisome details of their everyday lives, and did their best to resolve any difficulties on their own. Apart from these “little” and, usually, temporary secrets, mothers and children were almost comprehensively informed about each others’ lives. As shown in Section 4.2.2, at any given moment mothers, with a very high probability, knew the exact whereabouts of all their children. Often, they were managing to monitor how the family was coping while they were away, and,

thanks to video calls and/or exchange of photos, kept an eye on how the house was looked after, or how culinary preparations for a particular festivity were going on. While physically absent, migrant mothers were strongly present in their families emotionally and mentally (not to speak economically) – at the very least, considering the informants’ families, although, arguably, at a much larger scale. The reported level of migrant mothers’ involvement in the daily lives of their families left behind is a further empirical confirmation of the primary importance of personal, family ties for transnational migrants, as opposed to their potential political interests (discussed in Section 2.1)

Needless to say, such intensity of mothers’ presence and involvement in their families’ lives back in Georgia could only be made possible thanks to the modern communication technologies. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of WhatsApp and/or Facebook Messenger, which allow transnational family members to stay in touch almost constantly. Only two decades ago, empirical evidence of transnational families keeping in touch, reported by Parreñas (2001), was drastically different: “[m]ost of my interviewees phone and write their children at least once every two weeks” (p. 374). Previous studies suggested that migrant women were more inclined to communicate with their family members left behind, compared with male migrants (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 447); Leifsen & Tymczuk (2012) found, however, that transnational communication was particularly important for migrant mothers at the initial stages of migration (p. 226). Interviews conducted for the present research project strongly suggest that the importance and intensity of communication of transnational mothers with their children never decrease; informants reported being almost constantly “online” with their families, sometimes even silently. Various forms of “co-presence across distance” (Baldassar, 2015) have been documented during the interviews.

Interviews also prove that the Internet, its importance notwithstanding, cannot be considered a solution for the problem of family separation. It can only help mitigate the challenges of separation, “shrink barriers and bridge the gap in long-distance social interaction” (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012, p. 232); may reduce the pain caused by separation, but cannot be a complete substitute for mothers’ physical absence from their families.

Mothers’ narratives about difficulties of separation are extremely emotional and, often, eloquent (Section 4.2.1). The intertwined feelings range between maternal love, the pain of being away, concerns about children’s well-being, powerlessness, sense of duty. Considering the topics discussed, and in line with Baldassar’s (2015, p. 81) account, the present research project “elicited”

rich data on emotional aspects of emigration.<sup>123</sup> Being reluctant to accept the realities of emigration, mothers may go as far as to report feeling actually alive only when they communicate with their families, or during their visits to Georgia, while the rest of their lives was perceived as just “survival”, “endurance”. Several of the interviewed mothers were strongly against their children ever leaving Georgia, as they saw it as a way to protect them from the experience that proved to be very painful for them. Children, on the other hand, discussed separation and its challenges much less during the interviews. While their lives did continue in a familiar context after their mothers’ emigration, and, as it can be argued, children do, in general, find it easier to adapt to new realities, it would not be quite accurate to conclude that they experienced separation easier compared with their mothers. Interviewed children reported they did not talk about their mothers’ emigration with their close friends and, often, neither with their family members. Avoidance of this topic is an important empirical indicator of their emotional state and demonstrates how difficult it was for them separation from their mothers.<sup>124</sup>

Emotional difficulties notwithstanding, interviewed children did not report any perceptions of their transnational experiences as a deviation from a “normal” way of life, or as an “unnatural” arrangement, and did not see their relationships with emigrant mothers as an “alternative” practice, as suggested by some opponents of transnational families. While being frank about the difficulties they were facing, and the difficulties they believed their mothers had to face, interviewed children, arguably, accepted their situation at face value and tried to do their best to live their lives – study, build personal relationships, careers, or start their own families. The data indicate, though, that children’s age and gender may influence their experiences of transnational motherhood, and that these experiences change as children grow up. While qualitative interviews cannot provide enough evidence for far-reaching conclusions, some of the interviewed mothers reported having tense relationships with their youngest sons who were still very young (approximately 10 years old) at the time of their emigration. Specifically, a lack of mutual understanding was mentioned, and mothers assumed the problems were caused by their emigration. No such experience was reported with respect to any of the daughters. However, as interviews with Shalva (fam02\_S), David (fam04\_S), Alex (fam09\_S) and George (fam12\_S) convincingly prove, not all of the sons that were left behind in their middle childhood had problems in maintaining harmonious and cordial relationships with

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123 Baldassar (2015) referred to projects focused on transnational family relationships between adult migrant children and their ageing parents.

124 The data collected in the framework of the present research project does not allow, however, to measure the effects of separation either for mother or for children. Further research would be needed to learn more about this issue, with an interdisciplinary research team involving psychologists.

their mothers. Thus, the present research project provides limited evidence that, in some cases, migrant mothers' young sons may perceive their family arrangements to conflict with a "traditional image of motherhood" (Illanes, 2010), or, rather, the practice of motherhood they would desire, and their overt or covert protest may be manifested in straining their relationships with their mothers. Further research is necessary to learn more about this aspect, as well as about a more general issue of the role of children's age in their perception of transnational family experiences.<sup>125</sup>

A very clear awareness of the necessity and, to a large extent, the inevitability of mothers' labour emigration "for the good of the family" and the good of the children, in particular, combined with the awareness of the temporary nature of emigration (even though, in some cases, it may last for up to two decades) appear to be crucial variables that determine how transnational motherhood is experienced by migrants' children. Labour migrants mothers from Georgia are no different from migrant mothers from around the globe, for whom "their concern for their children is the main reason for their departure" (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 449). Informants' ability and readiness to acknowledge the positive outcomes of migration, of the good it has done to the family as a whole, and its specific members, further determine the perception and assessment of migration experience, both by mothers and by their children.

In many cases, the efficiency and success of transnational motherhood depends on the availability of migrant mothers' oldest daughters (who were in their late teens at the time of their mothers' emigration) to take over some of their mothers' responsibilities in terms of housework and care for their younger sibling(s) (Section 4.2.2). This might be the most controversial finding of the present research project, as, on the one hand, the daughters were too young and unprepared for the adult responsibilities they had to face, but, on the other hand, they appear to have accepted these without objections, with some of them reporting they were glad they could help their families. The "global care chains" that followed large-scale female labour migration (Section 2.3.2) appear to be slightly modified in the Georgian context, as, in many families, it were no longer hired helpers or adult relatives who were "substituting" migrant mothers and performing their tasks in their families, but, rather, their own teenage daughters.<sup>126</sup> They would not only keep the house in order, cook, do

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125 It is also very important to consider that tense relationships may be present among family members who have never had any migration histories. It is impossible to know how the relationships between these mothers and their sons would have evolved had the mothers never emigrated. Evidently, there may be numerous potential causes of misunderstandings between mothers and children, that are not necessarily explained by mothers' emigration.

126 Speaking about female immigrants to Lombardy, it has been noted that their main "interlocutors" in their families left behind were, primarily, their children, not their husbands (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 446). However, Ambrosini considered, primarily, migrant mothers' communication with their children and, less often,

laundry, but also take care of their younger siblings, including the “rebel” brothers that their mothers reported having trouble with.<sup>127</sup> A very similar arrangement was described by Banfi & Boccagni (2011). Importantly, it was specifically daughters, not sons, or husbands, who were expected to do the housework, mirroring widespread patriarchal attitudes in the country with its highly gendered division of roles in a family. Husbands’ limited involvement in housework after their wives emigration has been discussed in many sending countries’ contexts (Ambrosini, 2015, p. 447; Parreñas, 2001, p. 379). It should be noted, though, that in different cultural contexts as well, e.g. the Italian one referred to by Baldassar, (2015, p. 82), females “shoulder a far greater burden of care and generally give more than they receive”.

Arguably, this inevitability to share responsibilities when caring for loved ones may be a crucial component that contributed to mothers and children growing closer during the period of emigration, despite long years of physical separation. Children and, particularly, oldest daughters could understand from their own experience their mothers’ lives, while mothers become both immensely proud and thankful to their daughters for their help.

At the national level, the very fact of mothers’ emigration, as well as the increasing intensity of the process of feminization of labour migration from Georgia, can be seen as a sign of changing gender relations in the country. Importantly though, interviewed mothers did not have any feelings of resentment toward their husbands who stayed behind. They believed, their, and not their husbands’ emigration was the right decision considering employment prospects in the Western European countries, and were highly satisfied as they could be the ones who helped their families and thus made a difference in their children’s future. From different standpoints, though, their emigration was also perceived as a sacrifice made for the sake of their children, primarily considering the pain of separation from their families. Mothers felt they were sacrificing their present for the well-being of their children, to the extent that, often, their lifestyle in emigration became, de-facto, self-denial. However, they saw their sacrifice as a fulfilment of a “mother’s duty”, thus, as the right thing to do. The understanding of mothers’ emigration as a sacrifice was shared by their children and, arguably, other family members as well. Quite strikingly, though, they

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remittances sent directly to them, once they were “of a certain age”. He did not speak about children’s involvement in housework and, specifically, reliance on older daughters in this respect.

127 As noted, fathers and other adult relatives were helping, to the possible extent, the older daughters who were actively involved in housework after their mothers’ emigration. Still, these teenagers had to deal with an increased amount of workload and responsibilities. While it goes beyond the analysis of transnational family life, these arrangements are heavily gendered, influenced by patriarchal understanding of the division of roles in a family – as mentioned, it were daughters, not sons, who were expected to, and who were taking care of the housework.

also often reported strong feelings of guilt toward their children – which is a further “duality” of the experiences of transnational motherhood. To a certain extent, migrant mothers seem to have internalized the “transnational mother blame” (Gálvez, 2019) for leaving their children behind, although interviewed children did not indicate any feelings of resentment toward their mothers and provided no indications of feelings of being abandoned.

As findings further suggest, a crucial factor for the emotional well-being of the members of transnational families and, particularly, migrant mothers, is their ability to find a balance between two extremes: emotionally, all informants admitted it to be extremely difficult to be separated from their loved ones for long periods of time; on the other hand, though, they found it very important and gratifying that thanks to their work abroad – and through the sacrifice of separation – they were able not only to provide for basic, “immediate”, as well as long-term needs of their children, but also, once the basic needs were met, had (or were hoping for) some of their lifelong dreams come true.

Importantly, all but one interviewed mothers said they would not change their migration decision, if they could go back in time. Moreover, they almost univocally reported readiness to “*keep going on*”, continue working in emigration to help their children (and, often, newly arrived grandchildren) until they were physically able to do so, because, as they put it, “*motherhood never ends*”. This suggests that, still bearing in mind informants’ probable selection bias, their rational migration goals have been met quite successfully, and, despite the difficulties, they managed to handle the emotional challenges of migration.

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## Appendix 1

### Generic discussion guide for mothers<sup>128</sup>

#### *Pre-migration period*

- Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. To start, could you please tell me how did you decide to move to work to Italy? What were the most pronounced thought and feelings you remember about that period?
  - Why did you choose Italy?
  - Where did you get information from? Who helped you with migration arrangements?
- Please tell me about your family in Georgia at the time you were about to leave.
  - Why were you to emigrate?
- How did your family members participate in the decision to emigrate? [Which of the family members participated in this decision, and which not? (if any)] What were their feelings about it? What arguments do you remember about their support or opposition to this decision?
  - What can you tell me about your child(ren)? How did [they] feel about your emigration?
    - How and when did you explain this decision to your children?
  - What arrangements did you make about your children? Whom did you leave them with? Why did you decide so?
    - Did you discuss these arrangements with your children?
    - Did anything about the initial arrangements change during the period that you've been away? Why/How?
  - If you could go back to the time before your emigration, would you take the same decision again? Why/Why not?
    - [If not:] What would you change, and how?

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128 Basic demographic information about each informant (age, settlement before emigration, family composition, occupation before emigration, etc.) was recorded either during pre-interview, or in the very beginning of the main interview.

### *First experiences of emigration*

- When did you arrive in Italy? Where? Did anyone help you settle? What can you tell me about your first impressions?
  - In your opinion, how well were you prepared for emigration? Is there anything specific you wish you'd known beforehand?
    - Where would you have preferred to get this information from?
  - What were particularly unexpected aspects?

### *Current situation*

- If you were to think about the most positive aspects of your emigration, what are these?
- And what are the most difficult aspects of your emigration experience?
- To what extent would you say you have achieved your original emigration goal(s)?
  - What do you see as your emigration goal(s) at this stage?
- Imagine a friend of yours is about to emigrate to Italy. What advice would you have for her?
- Before the pandemic, did you have the possibility to periodically visit Georgia?
  - [If yes:] When was the last time when you were in Georgia? For how long?
  - What is it that you miss about Georgia the most?
- Could you please tell me about your child(ren)'s current [occupation]?
- How often, and how do you communicate with your children?
  - What do you talk about most? What do they ask about most often? And you?
  - In your opinion, what do your children need most at this point? How can this be provided?
  - Have [they] visited you in Italy? / Are you considering them visiting Italy at some point? Why/Why not?
    - [If yes:] When and for how long? Could you please tell me about their visit(s)?
  - How would you describe being a mother from afar?
    - What kind of mother are you?

- If we were to imagine a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 corresponds to the position *“I feel I know everything about how my children live,”* and 0 corresponds to the position *“I feel I know close to nothing about how my children live,”* where would you place yourself on this scale? Why so?

*“I feel I know close to nothing about how my children live”*

*“I feel I know everything about how my children live”*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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- And if we were to think the other way around – how much do your child(ren) know about your life?
- If you ever feel sad, what helps you to lift your spirits?
- [Photo elicitation component] When talking to your children, I would imagine you exchange some photos/images. Would you mind showing me a few recent photos you sent them, or received from them?
  - What is this? Where/When was it taken? What do you find particularly special about this image?

*Future*

- What do you think about your return?
- In 10 years from today, in an ideal situation, how would you like your life to be? Where would you be living? Where would your child(ren) live? What would you be doing? What would [they] be doing?
- Would you like to add anything to what we’ve discussed today?

Thank you!

## Appendix 2

### Generic discussion guide for children

- Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. What can you tell me about yourself and your life?
  - How old are you, what do you do, who do you live with, what is your favourite pastime?..
  - Whom would you name as the most important person in your life? Why him/her?
- How do you remember your life before your Mom's emigration?
- How old were you when your Mom left for Italy? What do you remember about that time?
  - How did you feel about her leaving? [How about your sibling(s)?] Do you think there was another option, so that your Mom could have stayed home?
  - How did she explain her decision?
  - As your Mom was leaving, she had to arrange for you [and your sibling(s)] to live with someone to take care of you. Did she discuss this with you? What has been the final decision? How happy were you about it? Why/Why not?
  - Did anything about the original arrangements change while your Mom's been away? Why?
- What is the most important thing that changed in your life since your Mom left?
  - What were the most unexpected aspects of your life since your Mom left, if any?
- Overall, would you say you were ready for your life after your Mom's emigration? Why/Why not?
  - Is there anything specific you wish you'd known beforehand about what to expect?
- Serious events that happen in our lives may have both positive and negative "sides". What do you think are the positive aspects of your Mom leaving for Italy? Why do you think so?
- And what are the most difficult, or negative aspects? Why do you think so?
- Now please tell me how do you communicate with your Mom nowadays?
  - What do you talk about most? What does she ask about most often? And you?
  - In your opinion, how does she feel?

- Is there anything you wouldn't tell your Mom about? What is it? Why wouldn't you tell her about it?
- Would you like to visit her in Italy at some point? Why/Why not?
  - [If yes:] When and for how long?
  - [If already visited:] Could you please tell me about your visit(s)?
  - What's your image of Italy? What kind of country is it?
  - Do you, or have you considered at any point to go to study in Italy?
- Do you get a feeling that you grew up without your Mom?
  - Do you think that she might be thinking you have such a feeling?
- If we were to imagine a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 corresponds to the position *"I think my Mom knows everything about how I live,"* and 0 corresponds to the position *"I think my Mom knows close to nothing about how I live,"* which code would you chose to represent your case? Why so?

*"I think my Mom knows close to nothing about how I live"*

*"I think my Mom knows everything about how I live"*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

- How would you say this "score" changed over time, since you were very little?
- [Photo elicitation component] As you know, I talked to your Mom [a few days ago]. She showed me this photo you've exchanged recently. Do you remember it?
  - Why do you think she'd show me this photo? What is this? Where/When was it taken? Is there anything particularly special about this image?
- How would you imagine the time when your Mom returns home?

- In an ideal situation, how do you imagine your life 10 years from now? Where would you be living? Where would your mother be living? What would you be doing? What would your mother be doing?
- Imagine your close friend's Mom is about to emigrate. Based on your experience, what would be your best piece of advice you could give your friend about how to handle this change in his/her life?
  - Is there anything you've learned as a result of this experience?
  - Did it change you in any way?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you!

## Appendix 3

### Basic information about informants<sup>129</sup>

<i>Family code / Interview code</i>	<i>Informant's pseudonym, status and age at the time of the interview</i>	<i>Interview date(s)</i>	<i>Year of emigration to Italy</i>	<i>Occupation before emigration</i>	<i>Child(ren) left behind, their age at the time of the interview // their age when mother emigrated<sup>130</sup></i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Informant's location at the time of the interview</i>	<i>Notes</i>
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
<b>FAM_01</b>								
fam01_M	Liana, mother, 36 y/o	September 27, 2020	2019	Hotel manager	Daughter, 13 // 12 y/o	Married	Lazio	<p>Prior to her labour emigration, Liana spent two years in Italy participating in a professional training program, thus she was away from her family during that period as well.</p> <p>Although there was an initial agreement to interview Liana's daughter as well, this did not prove possible, as the teenager changed her mind.</p>

129 Throughout the Table, light blue highlights are used in the rows where information about mothers is recorded, and light green highlights are used in the rows where information about children is recorded. Columns D, E and G are not relevant for children. In Column F, children's age at the time of mother's emigration is provided in the rows where information about children is recorded.

130 In cases of multiple emigrations (e.g., FAM\_02) – child's age when his/her mother emigrated for employment purposes for the very first time.

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Informant</i>	<i>Interview date(s)</i>	<i>Emigration year</i>	<i>Occupation before emigration</i>	<i>Child(ren)</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<b>FAM_02</b>								
fam02_M	Nineli, mother, 69 y/o	October 26, 2020	2008	Teacher	Daughter, 38 // 16 y/o Son, 36 // 14 y/o	Married	Tuscany	Before her emigration to Italy, Nineli had been working in Turkey for 10 years. She emigrated to Turkey in 1998. Before that, she was working as a teacher.  She returned from Turkey to Georgia in 2008. She spent only five months at home, and then emigrated to Italy. She was not employed during those five months.
fam02_D	Shorena, daughter, 38 y/o	November 1, 2020			16		Tbilisi, Georgia	
fam02_S	Shalva, son, 36 y/o	November 14, 2020			14		Tbilisi, Georgia	
<b>FAM_03</b>								
fam03_M	Naira, mother, 68 y/o	October 26, 2020	2008	Veterinarian	Daughter, 44 // 32 y/o Daughter, 43 // 31 y/o Daughter, 35 // 23 y/o	Married	Lombardy	By the time Naira emigrated, her eldest daughters were already married and were no longer living in the parental house.

<b>FAM_04</b>								
fam04_M	Marina, mother, 61 y/o	October 28, 2020	2009	Small business entrepreneur	Daughter, 39 // 28 y/o Daughter, 36 // 25 y/o Son, 24 // 13 y/o	Widow	Liguria	By the time Marina emigrated, her eldest daughter was already married and was no longer living in the parental house.
fam04_S	David, son, 24 y/o	January 20, 2021			13		Tbilisi, Georgia	
<b>FAM_06</b> <sup>131</sup>								
fam06_D	Anastasia, daughter, 29 y/o	November 1, 2020			15		Tuscany	There was an initial agreement to interview Anastasia's mother, but she changed her mind after the interview with Anastasia was completed.
<b>FAM_07</b>								
fam07_M	Diana, mother, 66 y/o	November 3, 2020	2007	Teacher	Son, 39 // 26 y/o	Single	Apulia	
fam07_S	Shota, son, 39 y/o	December 2, 2020			26		Apulia	With Diana's help, Shota and his family (his wife and daughter) also arrived to Apulia a few years before the interview.

131 As noted in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), interviews with two migrant mothers (FAM\_04 and FAM\_16) were not used for the analysis, thus they are omitted from this Table.

<b>FAM_08</b>								
fam08_M	Lamara, mother, 56 y/o	November 16, 2020	2019	Salesperson	Son, 24 // 23 y/o Daughter, 19 // 18 y/o	Widow	Lombardy	
fam08_D	Nini, daughter, 19 y/o	November 21, 2020			18		Kakheti, Georgia	
<b>FAM_09</b>								
fam09_M	Natela, mother,	November 18 and 19, 2020	2012	Salesperson	Son, 22 // 14 y/o Son, 21 // 13 y/o	Married	Tuscany	
fam09_S	Alex, son, 22 y/o	November 23, 2020			14		Tbilisi, Georgia	
<b>FAM_10</b>								
fam10_M	Rusudan, mother, 59 y/o	November 18, 2020	2006	Housewife	Daughter, 37 // 23 y/o Daughter, 35 // 21 y/o Daughter, 31 // 17 y/o Daughter, 28 // 14 y/o Son, 27 // 12 y/o	Married	Lombardy	By the time Rusudan emigrated, her eldest daughter was already married and was no longer living in the parental house.
fam10_D	Mtvarisa, daughter, 35 y/o	November 30, 2020			21		Kakheti, Georgia	Mtvarisa had a small baby and was available for the interview for a very short period of time.

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Informant</i>	<i>Interview date(s)</i>	<i>Emigration year</i>	<i>Occupation before emigration</i>	<i>Child(ren)</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<b>FAM_11</b>								
fam11_M	Guliko, mother, 66 y/o	November 30, 2020	2006	Employee in a local enterprise	Daughter, 42 // 28 y/o Son, 30 // 16 y/o	Married	Tuscany	
<b>FAM_12</b>								
fam12_M	Dali, mother, 65 y/o	November 30, 2020	2004	Small business entrepreneur	Son, 38 // 22 y/o	Married	Apulia	
fam12_S	George, son, 38 y/o	December 3, 2020			22		Kakheti, Georgia	
<b>FAM_13</b>								
fam13_M	Valentina, mother, 55 y/o	December 7, 2020	2007	Teacher	Daughter, 34 y/o // 21 y/o Daughter, 29 y/o // 16 y/o	Married	Tuscany	
<b>FAM_14</b>								
fam14_M	Lela, mother, 41 y/o	January 9, 2021	2019	Teacher	Son, 21 // 19 y/o Son, 18 // 16 y/o	n/a	Apulia	
fam14_G	Tsiala, grandmother, 61 y/o	January 20, 2021					Kakheti, Georgia	

FAM_15								
fam15_M	Magda, mother, 63 y/o	January 14, 2021	2012		Daughter, 34 // [26] y/o	Widow	Tuscany	Magda had previous labour migration experience in Russia, where she went following her husband. For some period, their daughter was also with them, but Ketevan returned to Georgia before her parents did.
fam15_D	Ketevan, daughter, 34 y/o	January 27, 2021			[26]		Tbilisi, Georgia	Ketevan was 26 when her mother left for Italy, but the family had been separated before, when she was in her late teens. Her parents were working in Russia; Ketevan spent some time with them, but then returned to Georgia.
FAM_17								
fam17_M	Eliso, mother, 52	January 20, 2021	2008	Teacher	Daughter, 29 /// 17 y/o Daughter, 28 // 16 y/o Son, 23 // 11 y/o	Married	Tuscany	
fam17_D	Tamta, daughter, 29 y/o	January 22, 2021			17		Mtskheta- Mtianeti, Georgia	

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Informant</i>	<i>Interview date(s)</i>	<i>Emigration year</i>	<i>Occupation before emigration</i>	<i>Child(ren)</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<b>FAM_18</b>								
fam18_M	Natalia, mother, 40 y/o	January 26 and 29, 2021	2018	Nurse	Daughter, 20 // 18 y/o Son, 13 // 11 y/o	Widow	Emilia-Romagna	
fam18_D	Elena, daughter, 20 y/o	January 29, 2021			18		Kakheti, Georgia	
<b>FAM_19</b>								
fam19_M	Nanuli, mother, 50 y/o	January 30, 2021	2012	Babysitter	Daughter, 27 // 19 y/o Daughter, 24 // 16 y/o	Married	Apulia	
fam19_D	Tamuna, daughter, 24 y/o	February 1, 2021			16		Tbilisi, Georgia	
<b>FAM_20</b>								
fam20_M	Nana, mother, 48 y/o	February 2, 2021	2015		Son, 24 // 19 y/o Daughter, 23 // 18 y/o Daughter, 9 // 4 y/o	Married	Tuscany	
fam20_D	Salome, daughter, 23 y/o	February 4, 2021			18		Imereti, Georgia	

**FAM\_21**

fam21_M	Nina, mother, 39 y/o	February 4, 2021	2019	Teacher	Daughter, 17 // 11 y/o	Divorced	Emilia- Romagna	Before emigrating to Italy, Nino spent five years working in Turkey. She was working as a kindergarten teacher before her emigration to Turkey.
fam21_D	Sophia, daughter, 17 y/o	February 5, 2021			11		Imereti, Georgia	Sophia was 15 when her mother left for Italy; she was 11 when her mother emigrated to Turkey. While Nina was working in Turkey, she was often travelling home, and Sophia was also visiting her frequently during her school holidays.

