

## Chapter 2.3.

### PARENTING AND MIGRATION IN ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS: WHAT IS SEEN TO BE ‘TROUBLING’?

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#### Introduction

For researchers studying family life in migration, shifting care arrangements and fluid relations between parents and children have always stood at the center of their study subject. Starting with the seminal contributions made by Parreñas (2005) studying migration in Philippines and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) focusing on the Mexican experience, the researchers have identified various parenting patterns adopted by emigrant parents and demonstrated how caregiving circulates in the transnational space (see Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2011; Baldassar and Merla, 2014).

The experience of parenting in migration can be extremely diverse due to the fact that the Western Europe attracts emigrant flows from different parts of the world – the Philippines, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Migration researchers have identified a wide range of family configurations, care practices and systems of meanings associated with parenting in migrant families. They demonstrate that parenthood is a dynamic social institution that is situationally affected by social factors mirroring predominant ideologies (Arendell, 2000), and that parenting as a cultural arrangement is far from immutable across space and time (Baldassar and Merla, 2014). The scholars studying the subject emphasize that parenting tends to reproduce, reshape, and represent different expectations and gender relations either in the host country, or in the country of origin as well as in cross-border family relationships (Phoenix and Bauer, 2012; Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2013).

A large number of academic publications draw attention to a changing balance of power relations in migrant families’ arrangements that lead to new variations of division of childcare responsibilities on a gender basis. As Phoenix (2019: 2319) asserts, ‘when feminist work disrupted gender blindness about transnational migration, ‘transnational motherhood’ came into view in new ways’. She referred to the seminal works of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), Lutz (2008), and Parreñas (2005) to figure out the key points of gendered practices targeted by social pressures of ‘good mothering’

for migrant women. When providing the conceptual map of diversity in transnational parenting, Bonizzoni and Boccagni (2014: 79), similarly, remark that ‘while fathers’ migration is often understood as a natural expansion of their providing role (with no major effects of stigmatization or social alarm), mothers’ migration is more frequently associated with new, and potentially conflicting meanings and practices of care’.

Thus, the researchers report that mothering and fathering are highly socially regulated phenomena linked to the social constructs of ‘good parenting’ and the moral imperative of ‘putting children first’. The understanding of family life based on the low mobility discourse leads the researchers to see parenting in migration as ‘troubling’. Although the concept of ‘troubles’ has a long history (see Gordon, 2008; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2000), it gains new prominence in the context of family migration. The elevation of ‘the child’ as the privileged subject of the family relations has been highlighted in a substantial body of migration scholarship. A myriad of case studies reveals how child-centered analysis of the consequences of migration created new ‘troubles’ for parents (see Ribbens McCarthy, Hooper and Gillies, 2013; Spyrou and Christou, 2014; Phoenix, 2019).

In this chapter we seek to examine how the understanding of ‘good parenting’ based on the low mobility discourse provides grounds for portraying migration-induced child caring practices as ‘troubling’. We analyze how Lithuanian researchers portray parenting within the host country, after return from emigration and in transnational family settings, and whether/ how are these portraits gendered.

## Research Methodology

To select academic publications writing on the topic of family relations in the context of migration, in January 2018, we queried two academic publication databases accessible at the Vilnius University: the Lithuanian electronic academic database eLABa and international academic database EBSCO. First, we gathered academic publications from eLABa using the keyword ‘*migr\**’. The search was also limited to a specific time range: from January 2004 to December 2017. Upon eliminating publications not focused on the Lithuanian migration (e.g. publications on migraine, migration of animals and cells), we established a corpus of 400 academic papers. Second, we queried the EBSCO database using keywords ‘*migr\**’ and ‘*Lithuan\**’ in order to avoid including publications focused on migration from other countries.

Upon eliminating the duplicates (including publications already returned in the eLABa query), we were left with 59 additional publications. All bibliographical information about 459 publications (including the titles and abstracts) was stored in a bibliographical management tool Zotero. Third, we reviewed our publication sample and selected 82 academic papers referencing family relations in their titles and abstracts. Most of the selected articles were published between 2008 and 2011 (49%); only 6 publications (7%) were published before 2008 (earliest in 2005). In terms of the discipline breakdown, most of the papers came from the fields of sociology (42%), educational sciences (35%) and psychology (9%); the rest of the set (a combined 15%) consisted of papers in the fields of law, philology, political science, health and economics. The primary focus of the most publications (71%) were migrant children, about one fifth (20%) analyzed migrant families, and the remaining few (6%) studied the (elderly) parents remaining in Lithuania.

### **Moral Claims for Parents**

In our previous publication (Juozeliūnienė and Budginaitė, 2018) we demonstrated how transnational parenting is perceived as ‘troubling’ in the public discourse. Our conclusion was based on the analysis of the media articles, drawn from both – printed press and Internet portals, with special attention paid to discrediting representations of transnational parenting. Our study data has revealed that the Lithuanian media has discredited transnational parenting by recounting the negative outcomes of transnational practices named as *disrupted family relationships, wrongly framed parenting, parents caring for themselves, and parents abandoning their children*.

In our recent study we focus on how the moral imperative of ‘putting the needs of children first’ creates value-based representations in academic publications. We found that the moral imperative urging parents to be responsible is not always displayed directly; there are many ways to present it. The imperative can manifest itself as a narrative sowing doubts and distrust towards migrant parents’ ability and willingness to ‘properly’ perform parental duties and to ensure that children’s well-being is prioritized in all aspects of family life when living abroad. The data drawn from our research has demonstrated that researchers portraying parenting in migration raised two questions: Are parents capable of evaluating the impact of their departure on the child? Will parents preserve the Lithuanian identity of their children, when changing their place of residence or departing to live abroad?

The family researchers expressed doubts about whether parents have considered the risks to their underage children when deciding to emigrate. They would pose a rhetorical question, either indirectly or explicitly, on whether parents are willing to consider the impact of their departure on the child? For example, ‘emigration impacts not only adults, but also children that travel abroad with them. The parents like to say to themselves, when taking the little ones abroad: ‘It’s not a big deal, they are still small, they will adjust to any place. Is it really that simple?’<sup>35</sup>.

Another manifestation of doubts and distrust can be found in the researchers worrying about whether parents living abroad are determined enough and capable of performing the paternal/ maternal duty of preserving their children’s Lithuanian identity. The papers we analyzed speculated how the departure abroad will affect the Lithuanian identity, how long will the parents foster the Lithuanian language and traditions in emigration. The researchers debated whether the second generation of emigrants will bother to be Lithuanians. According to them, for each new generation in the emigration it becomes more and more challenging to maintain the Lithuanian identity, for example: ‘if you consider the data drawn from different generations, it becomes apparent that, with every generation, the efforts to use Lithuanian language at home wane’<sup>36</sup>.

Doubts about parents’ abilities and willingness to ensure their children’s well-being in migration manifested itself through the adjectives used by researchers to describe them, namely, parents are seen as ‘self-sacrificing’ or ‘offending’. The researchers attach these labels to parents based on whether the child-parent relations correspond to the idea of ‘good parenting’ embraced by them. The labels are relational in their nature and contain the meaning of ‘normal’ or ‘troubling’. For example, some articles portray parents as departing abroad for the sake of their children, they choose to ‘self-sacrifice’ for the benefit of their children: ‘... self-sacrifice as the reason to migrate. Children were told that departure from Lithuania was to ensure a better future for them’<sup>37</sup>. On the other hand, the parents are portrayed as ‘offending’ when their migratory practices lead them to violate the scripts of ‘good parenting’ and they try to ingratiate themselves with their children by indulging and pampering them: ‘...emigrant parents often feel

<sup>35</sup> Mozolevskienė, A. and S. Montvilaitė (2013). Iki mokyklinio amžiaus vaikų tautinio identiteto formavimo(si) ypatumai emigracijoje, *Pedagogika*, 109, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Jakaitė-Bulbukienė, K. (2014). Lietuvių kalbos išsaugojimas emigrantų šeimoje: JAV atvejis, *Tai-komoji kalbotyra*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Batuchina, A. (2014). Children’s perspective on parental involvement in the emigration country, *Changing education in a changing society*, 169.

guilty, because they try to soften the situation by ‘pampering’ the kids and showering them with extra attention<sup>38</sup>; ‘parents didn’t/ don’t force their kids to learn the Lithuanian language, avoid being seen as too strict, all to ensure that their children don’t turn on them’<sup>39</sup>.

### **Parenting in Different Migration Contexts**

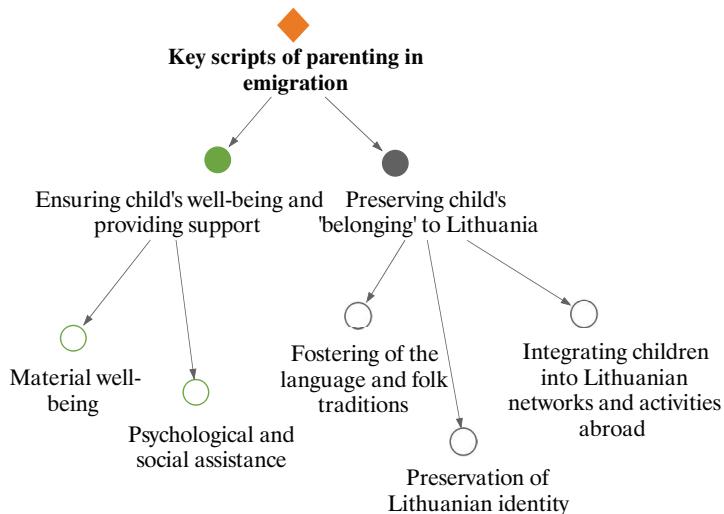
The topic of parenting in migration has received much attention in the migration academic literature, especially in publications on changing care obligations and practices (Bernhard et al., 2009; Boccagni, 2012). Researchers point out that people who migrate are exposed to a new set of opportunities and constraints forcing them to modify various forms of care they are engaged in, among them also the childcare, and depart from the ways in which these were practiced before migration. We set out to examine how these modified sets of childcare practices are depicted by researchers in academic publications, and whether the descriptions of parenting in migration differ across different migration contexts, namely, living in a host country, upon the return to the country of origin and in transnational space.

#### **Parenting in the Host Country**

We carried out analysis of the content and abstracts of the selected academic publications, using MAXQDA software. We identified a total of 5 main codes, which we then grouped into two categories representing the key scripts of framing parenting in emigration. The Lithuanian scholars portray parenting abroad through two distinct lenses: ensuring the well-being of the child and preserving children’s ‘belonging’ to Lithuania. The former lens focuses on ensuring the material well-being of the child, providing psychological and social support to ensure his/ her successful integration within the new cultural environment; the latter is preoccupied with the upbringing of the child in the host country with a focus on the fostering of the language and folk traditions, enlisting children in the Lithuanian networks and activities abroad (see Figure 1). Our analysis shows that the demands concerning children-parents physical co-presence/ absence and emotional proximity do not appear in portraying parenting in the host countries, rather the researchers focus on parents’ efforts and quality of parenting practices to fulfil childrearing obligations in new ways.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 18.



**Figure 1.** Key scripts of parenting in emigration in academic publications in Lithuania

**Ensuring child's well-being and providing support.** While analyzing emigrant parents' portrayal we came across the Lithuanian academics' preoccupation with new, distinctive manifestations of parental responsibilities and parenting practices in host countries. As we highlighted in our analysis, when parents fail to fulfill these imagined responsibilities of 'good parenting', the researchers label parenting in emigration as 'troubling'.

**Material well-being.** The researchers discuss how parents work towards providing financially for their children. What distinguishes the narratives of parenting in emigration? Economic migrants working abroad earn a higher income allowing them to devote more resources to ensure the material well-being of their children. The researchers emphasize that the emigrant parents have more financial means at their disposal, making it easier to meet the needs of their children, when providing both – formal and informal educational opportunities: '... the majority of the Lithuanian economic migrants who move abroad with their school-age children dispose of better or even significantly better financial means allowing them to cover the costs of children's education and informal instruction'<sup>40</sup>. When describing parents-children relations in emigration, the researchers highlight the practice of using material resources to facilitate the integration

<sup>40</sup> Rupšienė, L. and A. Rožnava (2011). Lietuvos darbo migrantų galimybės apmokėti mokyklinio amžiaus vaikų mokymosi ir neformaliojo ugdymo užsienyje išlaidas: kaitos aspektas, *Tiltai*, 56(3), 376.

of children into a new social environment. The researchers consider these parental practices to be ‘troubling’, because indulging children amplifies the negative outcomes of upbringing in emigration – aware of their parents’ improved financial standing, children exploit the opportunity: ‘children know that parents can support them with extra resources and parents often oblige in order to soften the child’s adaptation to the new environment’<sup>41</sup>.

***Providing social and psychological assistance in a new cultural environment.*** Another topic at the center of many publications is the social and psychological assistance the parents in emigration provide to their children. Supporting children in adapting to a new environment constitutes a significant part of ‘good parenting’ practices in emigration. For example, parents are portrayed as key actors in helping children to manage their anxiety and stress, their aim is to ensure that their children feel safe: ‘... communicating helps the child to feel safe in the new environment; it boosts his confidence and relieves the stress after the school day. Also, when confronted with problems, the child needs someone to confide in and ask for advice’<sup>42</sup>.

The publications highlight how the parents look for ways to integrate their children into new social networks, for example, by introducing children to neighbors, family friends or encouraging them to take up part-time employment to have an opportunity to interact with local residents<sup>43</sup>. The researchers describe how parents assist children who join a new educational system. Although helping children with homework is not always an option, on the whole, parents care for the child by overseeing how (s)he adapts to a new school: ‘while direct help with homework is not something parents can do, they are involved in the child’s adaptation to the new school, in fact the respondents have indicated that once abroad parents pay more attention to what is happening at school. They often ask their children for updates on school life, go through assigned tasks and take an interest in the child’s academic achievements’<sup>44</sup>.

**Preserving child’s ‘belonging’ to Lithuania.** The analyzed publications have introduced a new, critical parental duty for families living abroad – the preservation of children’s Lithuanian identity. Traditionally, scholars consider the key sources of preserving the Lithuanian national identity to

<sup>41</sup> Batuchina (2014), 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 169; Drungilaitė, V. and R. Šiaučiulienė (2014). Emigravusių šeimų paauglių socialinė adaptacija Didžiosios Britanijos ugdymo institucijose, *Mokytojų ugdymas*, 23, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Batuchina (2014), 169.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 170.

be the language and folk traditions. Whenever the academic publications talk about Lithuanian families living abroad, they always bring up this topic. We identified three features of portraying parents: (1) the preservation of the Lithuanian identity; (2) fostering of the Lithuanian language and folk traditions; (3) integrating children into Lithuanian networks and activities abroad.

***The preservation of the Lithuanian identity.*** The researchers deem parental efforts to play a critical role in preserving the identity: ‘...while articulating one’s national identity and reconciling it with other identities is up to the children themselves, it is imperative to make sure that children internalize as many resources as possible – competencies, contexts, social ties, and so on – necessary for the Lithuanian component of the identity’<sup>45</sup>. Parents who fail to actively preserve the Lithuanian identity are regarded as ignorant of the consequences of such a monumental decision: ‘emigrants from this group are not aware of the consequences to the children of losing the connection with parents’ ancestral culture. Although parents might think that children are not turning their back on the Lithuanian identity, the center of their cultural and personal identity clearly rests in the country of emigration, while their relation to parents’ culture is tenuous’<sup>46</sup>.

Other authors maintain that the parents lack motivation because they don’t plan to return to Lithuania. The researchers also assume that emigrants lack information: ‘the lack of information is another problem. Back in Lithuania, there is no shortage of studies – various institutions publish brochures on relevant topics, but the surveys we have conducted indicate that the relevant information often fails to find its target audience or reaches them in a fragmented form’<sup>47</sup>. Practical obstacles like busy schedules and long distances can also impact parental efforts to foster the Lithuanian identity.

***The fostering of the language and folk traditions.*** Parents who look for ways to ensure that their children retain/ learn the Lithuanian language and adhere to the Lithuanian traditions are motivated by a variety of reasons. (1) It might stem from the intention to return to Lithuania in the future: ‘...they might be considering returning to Lithuania. In such case, the knowledge of Lithuanian is necessary to ensure that the children easily adjust upon the

<sup>45</sup> Šutinienė, I. (2009). Lietuvių imigrantų požiūriai į lituanistinį vaikų ugdymą. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 20(4), 313.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>47</sup> Gruodytė, E. and L. Liutikienė (2008). JAV gyvenančių lietuvių vaikų ugdymo problematika, *Oikos: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 1, 38.

return<sup>48</sup>. (2) Other parents might be swayed by nostalgia for the homeland and be keen on maintaining ties with the rest of the family in Lithuania: ‘...parental decision to use the Lithuanian language and pass it on to the children is often motivated by ongoing friendships, memories<sup>49</sup>. (3) Yet others consider the Lithuanian identity to offer an ‘additional identity’, an ‘extra culture’ enriching one’s personality: in the last case, the Lithuanian ancestry is not interpreted as an imperative to propagate the Lithuanian identity but rather as a way to foster a multicultural identity or enrich and vary the other national/ cultural identity<sup>50</sup>. (4) Parents find preserving the Lithuanian language important not only because it contributes to the sense of personal identity, but also because it counterbalances the invasion of other languages, keeps Lithuanians from losing their national identity: ‘commenting on the language itself, the woman claims that both – her parents and she wanted to preserve the language within the family, because it was widely believed that Lithuanians in Lithuania might be Russified and lose their unique language<sup>51</sup>.

The academic papers emphasize how parents go out of their way to teach a proper version of Lithuanian: ‘the parents want to teach children to speak Lithuanian the way native speakers do in Lithuania<sup>52</sup>. In a pursuit to teach proper Lithuanian, the parents make an extra effort to abide by the grammatical and syntactic rules of the language<sup>53</sup>, prioritize Lithuanian language fluency when hiring nannies: ‘... parents consider it to be important that nannies use proper Lithuanian when talking to children<sup>54</sup>.

The researchers portray two distinct types of the host country parenting based on the attitudes of emigrant parents towards preserving the Lithuanian language and identity of their children. The first group of parents, the ones always seeking out ways to retain the national identity while living abroad, were portrayed as promoters of the Lithuanian identity. The academics maintain that ‘many emigrants regard the knowledge and use of Lithuanian to be a key component of the national identity defining the expression and continuation of being Lithuanian. Neglecting this

48 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė, K. (2015). Lietuvių kalbos išlaikymą emigrantų šeimoje lemiantys veiksnių JAV atvejis, *Taikomoji kalbotyra*, 16.

49 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 8.

50 Šutinienė (2009), 315.

51 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 20.

52 Ibid, 25.

53 Mozolevskienė and Montvilaitė (2013), 35.

54 Ibid.

component is tantamount to losing one's sense of national identity<sup>55</sup>. Moreover, the researchers consider the language to be a part of the family identity: '... family life without the language is impossible to imagine and families make a conscious effort to retain it'<sup>56</sup>.

The second group of parents were portrayed as 'neglecting their Lithuanian heritage'. It refers to parents who believe that their children will never need to speak Lithuanian abroad<sup>57</sup>, that speaking Lithuanian is not the sole way of preserving the Lithuanian heritage and that, for example, upholding traditions is more important<sup>58</sup>, and to parents who put the use of the language on autopilot<sup>59</sup>. Referencing the public opinion on parents' efforts to foster the Lithuanian heritage in the host country, the researchers claim that promoters of the Lithuanian heritage are respected<sup>60</sup>, while those who 'neglect this heritage' are stigmatized: '...those parents who fail to promote the national heritage are believed to be lazy, lacking effort, showing disrespect to the history of their family'<sup>61</sup>.

***Integrating children into Lithuanian networks and activities abroad.*** The analyzed academic publications take a keen interest in practices adopted by parents to ensure that their children retain the sense of the Lithuanian identity. According to the researchers, parents send their children to schools teaching Lithuanian<sup>62</sup>, prefer schools that actively practice Lithuanian traditions<sup>63</sup>, develop an interest in teaching Lithuanian heritage<sup>64</sup>, become members of local Lithuanian communities<sup>65</sup>, maintain Lithuanian traditions<sup>66</sup>, speak Lithuanian at home<sup>67</sup> and teach their kids how to do the same<sup>68</sup>. Some adults believe that language skills should be

55 Šutinienė (2009), 312.

56 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 12.

57 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 37.

58 Gruodytė and Liutikienė (2008), 37.

59 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 13.

60 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 30.

61 Ibid, 30.

62 Šutinienė (2009), 313.

63 Mozolevskienė and Montvilaitė (2013), 35.

64 Gruodytė and Liutikienė (2008), 37; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 9.

65 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 9; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 8.

66 Mozolevskienė and Montvilaitė (2013), 35; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 9; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 8.

67 Mozolevskienė and Montvilaitė (2013), 35; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 8; Šutinienė (2009), 314; Cigaitė, E. and R. Ivoškuvienė (2014). Daugiakalbių vaikų kalbos sutrikimų identifikavimas ir logopedinės pagalbos būdai, *Specialusis ugdymas*, 2, 17.

68 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 7–8.

supported naturally<sup>69</sup> and muster patience<sup>70</sup>, others – on the contrary – offer their children incentives for speaking Lithuanian<sup>71</sup>. Parents read with their children Lithuanian books<sup>72</sup>, give their children Lithuanian names<sup>73</sup>, bring/ send their children for holidays to Lithuania<sup>74</sup>, make an effort to set up their children with other Lithuanian friends<sup>75</sup>. Some adults deliberately look for partners of the Lithuanian background<sup>76</sup> and encourage their own children to start Lithuanian families<sup>77</sup>.

### Parenting after the Return from Emigration

In general, the researchers don’t have much to say about parents who return to live in Lithuania together with their children. The few descriptions that we managed to find emphasize two things (see Figure 2).

Firstly, the researchers promote children’s informal education as a way to facilitate their adaptation to Lithuania. For example, when discussing how parents manage children’s education, the researchers examine the possibility of signing children up for after-school activities, varsity teams, hobby clubs: ‘The act of establishing communal relations by the way of enlisting children to play sports or practice hobbies helps not only children; in the long run, it becomes a source of support for the whole family. Parents engaged in extracurricular activities with their offspring have an opportunity to expand their social circle as well as discover new skills that do not necessarily manifest themselves in the school environment’<sup>78</sup>.

Secondly, the authors of publications report about parents’ indecision to staying in Lithuania permanently. The researchers highlight the cases when parents’ decision to return to Lithuania was not a final decision but rather as an attempt to re-establish themselves in the home country, with the possibility to depart again: ‘families that have not put down roots in Lithuania consider the possibility of leaving again, because the country from which they have recently returned is no longer seen as an intimidating uncertainty, but rather as a place with well-known opportunities and

69 Ibid, 19.

70 Ibid, 1.

71 Ibid, 20.

72 Mozolevskienė and Montvilaitė (2013), 36.

73 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2015), 9.

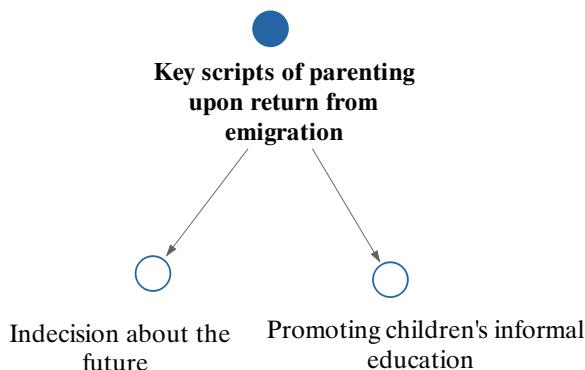
74 Cigaitė and Ivoškuvienė (2014), 37; Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 26.

75 Ibid, 25.

76 Ibid, 9.

77 Ibid, 9–11.

78 Ruškus, J. and D. Kuzmickaitė (2008). I Lietuvą grįžusių šeimų vaikų ugdymo ypatumai: „Šeitinio“ mokyklos atvejis, *Oikos: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 2, 112.



**Figure 2.** Key scripts of parenting upon returning from emigration in academic publications in Lithuania

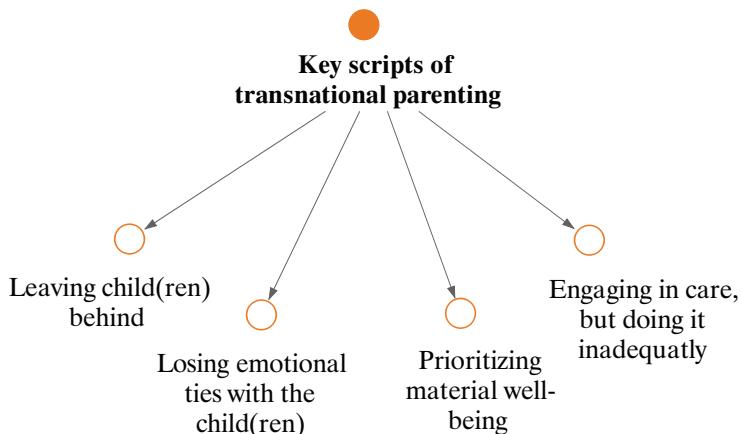
advantages, a place that binds with emotional ties and is inhabited by friends and acquaintances<sup>79</sup>.

The academic publications view such indecision in negative terms due to the fact that it leaves the family in limbo and prevents the returned children from successfully integrating in Lithuania. This script echoes the discrediting script of wrongly framed parenting. Parents' indecision and them discussing their intention to depart once again provides the basis for labelling such parenting as 'troubling'.

### Transnational Parenting

This section focuses on the portrayal of the transnational parenting scenario, defined as an arrangement where mother, father or both parents leave to work abroad, while their children continue to live in Lithuania. In contrast to the way the researchers portray parenting in the host country and upon return home, depictions of transnational parenting, by and large, focus on the negative outcomes of violating all the 'good parenting' scripts. The narratives of transnational child-parent relations are based on physical absence, disrupted emotional proximity, and failure to provide baseline childcare, as claimed by the moral imperative aimed at parents. We highlighted four categories that reveal the discrediting scripts of transnational parenting. Parents from transnational families are depicted

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 114.



**Figure 3.** Key scripts of transnational parenting in the academic publications in Lithuania

as (1) leaving their children behind; (2) losing emotional proximity with their children; (3) prioritizing material well-being; (4) even when willing to take care of their children, they are discredited by recounting the ‘wrong ways’ of doing so, as a number of publications have shown (see Figure 3).

**Leaving child(ren) behind.** The depictions of transnational parenting are bound up with discrediting scripts, conveniently obscuring the fact that they originate in the researchers’ value judgements. When characterizing the departed parents, the researchers use labels with negative connotations. Firstly, the authors frequently use the term ‘left behind’ and its various permutations. The analyzed publications also contain a would-be accusation against the parents: ‘one also comes across cases, where one or both parents leave entrusting the long-term foster care of their children to relatives or strangers, and – in some instances – even failing to arrange for proper care of their children<sup>80</sup>.

The portraying parents as leaving their children behind without arranging for proper care, in the eyes of the authors, demonstrate parental lack of responsibility and negligence, easily illustrated by drawing up a list of examples where parents ‘forget’ their children: ‘as they leave, the parents entrust the care of their children to grandparents, relatives or neighbors,

<sup>80</sup> Motienė, R., J. Daukšienė and Ž. Šerkšnienė (2014). Paauglių potyriai tėvams išvykus į užsienį, *Sveikatos mokslai*, 64.

while some parents simply forget about their children<sup>81</sup>. Far from being seen as a neutral event, parents' departure is presented as a loss through the use of such phrases as 'temporarily orphaned children'<sup>82</sup>, 'children who lost one or both parents'<sup>83</sup>, 'children who lost one or both parents due to economic migration'<sup>84</sup>.

**Losing emotional ties with a child(ren).** The analyzed publications depict transnational parenting as distinguished by the loss of a connection with the child (for example, 'when parents fail to participate in the child's daily life, parents and children can grow emotionally distant'<sup>85</sup>); parents' withdrawal from the child's education (for example, 'as a result of infrequent communication between parents and children, they lose an intimate connection, parents don't participate in the child's upbringing process'<sup>86</sup>) and other types of behavior pointing to the fact that parents neglect their moral commitments to their underage children: 'as both parents depart abroad, children are left to live alone; parents rarely or ever talk with their children, separate brothers from sisters; parents (or temporary guardians) fail to stay in touch with the child's school'<sup>87</sup>.

**Prioritizing material well-being.** The articles convey the message that departing parents think solely about wealth and fail to consider all the possible negative outcomes linked to this decision: for example, 'temporarily emigrating parents have the bug of quick riches while failing to consider the possible negative outcomes facing the family, the child'<sup>88</sup>. One of the papers attributes such behavior to the parents' lack of education: 'parents who lack specific knowledge, typically accumulated through education, often fail to understand the graveness of the situation experienced by the child and this way pave the way for future crises'<sup>89</sup>. The researchers note that such parents

81 Gumuliauskienė, Butvilas and Butvilienė (2008), 147.

82 Laurinavičiūtė, J. and N. Cibulskaitė (2008). Paauglių, laikinai netekusių tėvų globos, emocinės būsenos ypatumai, *Ugdymo psichologija: mokslo darbai*, 37–46.

83 Gumuliauskienė, Butvilas and Butvilienė (2008), 146.

84 Laurinavičiūtė and Cibulskaitė (2008), 37.

85 Kaniušonytė, G., I. Truskauskaitė and L. Gervinskaitė (2012). Psichologinės migracijos pasekmės šeimai: vaikų emocinių ir elgesio sunkumų prevencija: metodinė priemonė, Vilnius: Leidykla 'Edukologija', 18.

86 Gumuliauskienė, Butvilas and Butvilienė (2008), 148.

87 Lelūgičienė, I., L. Rupšienė and L. Plavinskienė (2005). Tėvų išvykimo dirbtinių užsienių įtaka vaikų socializacijai, *Specialusis ugdymas: mokslo darbai*, 1(12), 42.

88 Malinauskas, G. (2006), Ar vaikas išgyvena krizę? Tyrinėjant laikinosios darbo migracijos įtaką vaikui, *Oikos: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 2, 43.

89 Ibid, 47.

‘are more concerned with the financial and physical well-being of their children’<sup>90</sup>, while flatly ignoring their other needs.

The researchers use depictions of the departed parents to support broader generalizations about the ‘family dysfunction’ and using this concept synonymously with the term ‘family breakdown’: ‘parental absence from the family upon their departure to work abroad is one of the factors causing the family dysfunction. This change disrupts the performance of many functions, among them – socializing the children. By leaving their children behind, migrants – in a sense – voluntarily refuse to carry out this function. There is reason to believe that such a voluntary refusal to perform the key family function is not only an outcome of prioritizing a single function (namely, the economic function of ensuring the family’s financial well-being), but also a sign of shifting attitudes towards the family and children that have recently been emerging in Lithuania’<sup>91</sup>.

**Engaging in care, but doing it inadequately.** A small fraction of the academic publications we studied shows how parents tackle the challenges posed by transnational family practices, but the researchers describe these efforts as inconsistent and their outcomes as poor. For example, on the one hand, the authors scrutinize the cases when: ‘transnational mothers and fathers want to stay in touch with the family left behind, talk to their children even when separated by great distances’<sup>92</sup>. On the other hand, they emphasize that such form of care is inadequate, that parents fail to consider the negative impact on the children: ‘although the parents do not relinquish or give up the child, he/ she is forced to live without them (or one of them); although the parents take care of the child, their care is limited to ensuring the material well-being; the parents cannot perform other functions due to the distance separating them’<sup>93</sup>. We consider these narratives as revealing the researchers’ willingness to ‘give voice’ to those parents who left to work abroad while their children continue living in Lithuania and to ‘listen and hear’ parents’ arguments about their attempts of doing parenting across borders. At the same time, the negative judgements underpinning the portrayal of transnational parenting lead the researchers to label parents’ efforts as inconsistent.

<sup>90</sup> Butvilas, T. and J. Terepaitienė (2008). Tėvų emigraciją patyrusiu vaikų asmenybiniai bruožai ir jų emocinį ugdymą sėlygojantys socialiniai mitai, *Jaunųjų mokslininkų darbai*, 1, 72.

<sup>91</sup> Leliūgienė, Rupšienė and Plavinskienė (2005), 37.

<sup>92</sup> Laurinavičiūtė and Cibulskaite (2008), 37.

<sup>93</sup> Leliūgienė, Rupšienė and Plavinskienė (2005), 36.

## Parenting as Gendered Experiences

Studies of caregiving in migration are often marked by a strong emphasis on the gender dimension. Transnational parenting (motherhood particularly) has always been at the center of the debate, and the primary target for stigmatization, in the media and in the public discourse. As Parreñas (2005) notes, female labor migration challenges the constructs of motherhood based on physical and emotional proximity and contests the social constructs of fatherhood grounded in male-only breadwinning. The researchers regard transnationalization of care practices as the key trend subverting gendered social expectations of family relations. In the overview of literature on motherhood in migration, Bonizzoni and Boccagni (2014: 81) note that ‘one of the reasons that female migration is depicted as especially ‘problematic’ lies in the transfer of care obligations to other caregivers. Substitute caregivers – as a widespread fear has it – may be unable to properly replace biological mothers. This would result in children receiving less affection, nutrition, medical care, schooling, disciplining and control’.

The aim of our study was to analyze how mothers and fathers are portrayed in academic publications and to find out if there are any gendered scripts to frame parenting in migration. Contrary to our expectations, which are largely based on the previous study of how transnational families are portrayed in the mass media and reports of rigid gender role definitions uncovered by similar studies of Western researchers, the papers we studied construct generalized narratives about the families living in emigration and returned to Lithuania as ‘parents-emigrants’ or ‘emigrated parents’, without providing separate portraits of emigrant mothers and fathers.

In rare cases, when a paper chooses to talk about departed mothers and fathers separately, depictions of the mother are dominated by specific activities aimed at preserving the Lithuanian language<sup>94</sup>, while that of the father is devoted to more general activities of fostering the child’s Lithuanian identity<sup>95</sup>. While our study does not allow for broader generalizations, we can discern the representation of traditional gender roles within the family in the constructs of a departed mother and father: the mother is tasked with speaking to children in Lithuanian on a daily basis, something that is guaranteed by routine household chores; meanwhile, the father is charged with preserving the child’s national identity, the task that carries a larger

94 Cigaitė and Ivoškuvienė (2014), 17.

95 Jakaitė-Bulbukienė (2014), 18.

social significance and involves a more diverse range of activities (for example, transferring values through the use of historical accounts, the use of memories and so on).

The gender dimension is more pronounced in the publications about transnational families. These publications spend more time describing transnational mother than father, although the portrait of the mother is being constructed by making comparisons with the father. The differences in portraying transnational mothers and fathers are found in the three areas of parenting: (1) communicating with their children more frequently (2) maintaining emotional proximity with their children and (3) feeling more anxious about the children left behind. For example, the researchers depict emigrated mothers as maintaining ‘more frequent contact with their children<sup>96</sup> than emigrated fathers. Moreover, mothers are credited with expending more effort organizing childcare across borders, as it is required by the moral imperative for ‘good mothers’. The author of publication assets, that ‘staying in touch with the child is a duty that, by and large, falls to mothers, not fathers working abroad<sup>97</sup>.

This holds equally true for both – mother-daughter and mother-son relationships: ‘the children (both boys and girls) maintain a closer contact with mothers: mothers take interest in their children’s daily routines, learning outcomes, relationships with friends, they send home the money intended to support the child<sup>98</sup>. The portraits of emigrated mothers more often highlight concerns about their children. Academic publication states, ‘mothers living abroad are more concerned about the children they left behind in Lithuania and care more for them than fathers<sup>99</sup>. Meanwhile, the role of departed fathers is more inarticulate, fathers are assigned fewer family commitments (‘the father rather plays a supporting role and this trend is not confined to the families we studied, but also many other families’<sup>100</sup>).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the scripts of migrant parenting within a host country, after return from emigration and in

96 Leliūgienė, Rupšienė and Plavinskienė (2005), 39.

97 Motienė, Daukšienė and Šerkšnienė (2014), 66.

98 Kasparavičienė, A. and R. Čepienė (2007). Emigravusių tėvų laikinai palikti vaikai: socialinės situacijos pokyčiai ir psichinės būsenos ypatumai, *Tiltai: humanitariniai ir socialiniai moksmai*, 1, 213.

99 Leliūgienė, Rupšienė and Plavinskienė (2005), 39.

100 Kasparavičienė, A. and R. Čepienė (2007), 213.

transnational settings to show how value judgements rooted in the low mobility discourse are reproduced in academic publications on family and migration and lead the researchers to regard and portray parenting in migration as ‘troubling’. Our data sheds light on how descriptions of parenting in migration are bound up with the image of ‘good parents’ and moral imperative for the responsible ‘Adult’ to ensure the appropriate care of the ‘Child’ (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2000).

It should be noted that depictions of parenting in different migration contexts vary a lot. The description of parenting within host countries mainly reflects the challenges posed by new social environment and concerns the eroding sense of ‘belonging’ to Lithuania. Parenting upon the return from emigration remains a highly overlooked study subject. Short history of return migration prevents researchers to discuss the practices adopted by returning parents in more depth. So far, they mostly focused on negative practices, that is on describing how parental indecision creates the atmosphere of a temporary return and places the family in a limbo, preventing children from adapting to the life in Lithuania upon return.

The researchers regard transnational parenting practices as the most ‘troubling’. In contrast to the depictions of parenting within host countries and upon the return from emigration, transnational parenting is portrayed by recounting exclusively negative outcomes of parenting, caused by parents violating the requirements of ‘good parenting’. The narratives of transnational child-parent relations are based on the depictions of physical absence, disrupted emotional proximity, and failure to provide baseline childcare, as defined by the moral imperative for parents.

When analyzing the gendered scripts of framing parenting in different contexts of migration, we conclude that the Lithuanian researchers create generalized narratives of parenting, without constructing mother- or father-specific depictions; only transnational motherhood receives an occasional mention. In rare cases, when a publication chooses to talk about departed mothers and fathers separately, depictions of mothers are dominated by specific activities aimed at preserving the Lithuanian language, while those of fathers are devoted to more general activities of fostering the child’s Lithuanian identity. The topic of transnational fathering is largely overlooked by the Lithuanian researchers, while transnational mothers are portrayed as more willing to follow the scripts of moral imperative of ‘putting the needs of one’s children first’. More specifically, emigrant mothers are described as more often referencing their responsibility of staying in touch with their children, as actively looking for ways to maintain close ties with children and showing more concern about changing family arrangements and their outcomes.

The data presented in the chapter leads us to conclude that the Lithuanian researchers tend to approach migrant family studies with the assumption that parenting before migration excluded ‘troubles’, while migration reshaped traditional parenting practices and made them ‘troublesome’ in many ways.

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