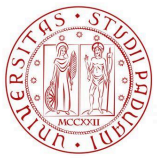

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The culture of money and transnational family practices for Romanian care workers in Italy

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses the meaning(s) Romanian care workers in Italy, especially those in live-in employment, construct when deciding how to use money earned abroad. Departing from economistic approaches dominating the literature on remittances, this dissertation contributes to an understanding of how social relationships and economic exchanges are intertwined in family migration of marginalised, low-wage population.

Drawing on ethnographic research carried out from April 2021 to May 2022 in the region of Veneto, Italy, this dissertation examines: (1) how is money embedded in the social relationships of migrant women; (2) how women experience and negotiate the social norms and collective expectations for monetary transfers in their transnational families; (3) and what are the ensuing consequences of these for the migration projects of women.

Based on migrant women's own narratives, the meanings assigned to money create three distinct 'pieces of money'—each corresponding to different amounts, regularity of transfer, and types of commitments to relationships as the respondents feel and experience them. Firstly, 'communal money' transfers are dedicated to improving the living standards of 'loved ones.' It consists of a large percentage of women's wages abroad and is distributed especially among one's children and grandchildren. As a currency of solidarity, communal money keeps multi-generational families connected as they navigate unpredictable economic circumstances. Secondly, 'courtesy money' transfers are offered as a cash gift to extended family members 'back home.' It consists of small sums ritually integrated into yearly celebrations. As a currency of care and love, courtesy money becomes the materialisation of feelings and emotions. Thirdly, 'pocket money' are sums care workers set aside for their personal consumption in Italy. As a currency of sociability in Italy, pocket money appears to provide women with opportunities to help emancipate themselves from their class- and gender-subjugated conditions.

Finally, this dissertation shows that older migrant women often postpone their return 'home' and continue to work abroad as they adapt to new care demands and respond to the changing needs and capacities of their families by (re-)adjusting their migration project when they realise that grandchildren do not need hands-on care; what they need is money. Consequently, this dissertation also considers how money is tied to distinct gendered and

generational subjectivities of respondents. It explores how being a migrant mother and grandmother may be instantiated in the ways that money is used, saved, given, spent, valued, and experienced, and discusses the effect of these on migrant women's migration projects. In essence, this dissertation reveals the multifaceted role of money beyond its economic value, highlighting its significance as a key medium for transnational family practice.

This thesis is dedicated to all those who struggle to ensure well being and dignity for their loved ones.

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Last but not least, I am grateful to all those whose stories fill the pages of this dissertation. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel for them giving their time and opening their hearts to make this research project possible. This piece of work is a tribute to them.

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List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NELM	The New Economy of Labour Migration
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1. Introduction

In a small town in Eastern Romania, Vio lived together with her husband and their two school-aged children in a communal apartment[1] secured prior to the collapse of communism through the workplace of her husband. They did not own the approximately 15 square metre room which served as both sleeping and dining space and instead paid an affordable monthly rent to the municipality. In November 2002 news came out that the building would be privatised and residents would be given priority to buy and own their rooms. As Vio and her husband were working on minimum wage barely able to make ends meet, they became increasingly anxious as the date for the first payment instalment was fastly approaching. The continuous discussions with her husband and children regarding which is the best course of action rendered no viable solution, and the prospect of becoming homeless with her entire family thrown out in the streets terrified Vio. A solution to their problem came from her husband. He proposed to move the family away to live with his elderly parents in the countryside. In the village, there were no work opportunities so Vio and her husband were to abandon wage labour and make a living by engaging in subsistence agriculture and trade of any surplus household produce. Vio outright rejected the idea. She had left the countryside many years ago and promised to herself to never go back, not under any circumstances, as she still vividly remembers the toil of working in the fields, the absence of modern domestic tools and technical devices to ease household chores, and the resulting frustrations of dealing with prevalent male drunkenness and domestic violence that was all too often accepted as reasonable and understandable in the village. Yet in crafting her argument to shut down her husband's proposition to move the family away from the town where they resided, she did not emphasise staying for her own benefit but for that of their children, 'I said to him "what kind of future do you want to give them in a place with no good school, no hospitals, nothing of

[1] Following the Soviet Union's policies, communal apartments were built in Romania as a solution for housing scarcity during communist era. A communal apartment is located in a building block where each family has a small private room. Shared common spaces, such as the kitchen and bathroom, are located on each floor. With time, most families refurbished their rooms. Nowadays it is not uncommon for these lodgings to accommodate private kitchenettes and bathroom facilities.

this sort?"' She had a point. Marked by poor social infrastructure (Mocanu et al., 2017), lack of employment opportunities (Stănescu, 2022), high rates of poverty (Mitrică et al., 2020), and low dwelling quality (Mocanu et al., 2017), among others, rural areas in Romania are shaped by out-migration (Mitrică et al., 2020).

When Vio's husband was presented with the option to migrate abroad to earn the money needed to pay off the apartment by doing construction work in Italy, she felt a weight lifting from her shoulders. Like others I interviewed, Vio listed how money can be exchanged for shelter, food, and support. This emotional relief was, however, short-lived. Her husband came back home after only two months abroad, attributing his return to chronic back pain and the challenging physical demands of informal migrant construction work, deeming it impossible for him to continue. At that time, Vio remembers, there were already three women in her communal apartment building and another four among her friends and acquaintances who had already left to work as live-in care workers in Italy. Every once in a while she received news of more women leaving their husbands and children behind for the promise of a better wage and the prospect of an improved economic situation for themselves and their families. She kept in touch with her friends only sporadically, and did not have a good grasp on how life and work was 'over there.' Still, she figured, it could not have been harder than raising a family on minimum wage under the threat of eviction and with no one to turn to for assistance and support.

In preparation for her migration, Vio orchestrated all necessary domestic arrangements a week in advance. To ensure additional caregiving support for her children, she reached out to her friend and neighbour. She did not trust her husband to step up his care responsibilities and wanted to be reassured by having these 'extra' arrangements in place. When Vio boarded the bus to travel to the small town in the south of Italy where one of her friends secured work for her as a live-in care worker in the home of an elderly Italian couple, all Vio could think about was her children. Did they do their homework the night before? Had their father remembered to pack their school lunch? How will they manage to get through the upcoming months in her absence? These were the thoughts that ran through Vio's mind as she rode the approximately 30-hour bus trip to Italy.

1. The Romanian migration to Italy

Vio's narrated migration history reminds of many of the earlier studies on Romania's migration processes. Since the early 2000s and 2010s, a growing number of sociological and

anthropological studies explored Eastern European women's migration for care work in Italy (e.g. Vianello, 2013; Marchetti & Venturini, 2014; Vietti, 2019 [2010]; Näre, 2007; among others). The negative consequences of socio-economic transformations in Romania and Italy have shaped much of this migration route as I explain next.

After the collapse of communism in Romania, persistent economic crises and an increase in social inequalities have marred people's expectations for a brighter future. Decades of neoliberal policies aimed at facilitating the 'transition' from a planned to a so-called 'free market economy' transformed Romania into 'a low wage, low benefit country' (Ban, 2016:67). The 1990s was marked by heavy de-industrialisation and privatisation of previously state-owned workplaces which left many without jobs and income. During this period, private companies seeking low-wage and flexible workforce initially collaborated with subcontractors in Romania, subsequently relocating to other Eastern European countries as Romania began its accession to the EU (European Union) and imposed a slight increase in salaries and improved workplace protection for workers (Redini, 2020). Despite a slightly stable job market in the early 2000s, salaries remained depressingly low and inflation high, reaching 40% on food (Potot, 2002). The minimum monthly salary of $100 in 2002 was insufficient to cover the bare necessities, let alone a decent level of living (Potot, 2002). Although it increased towards 2009 (Anghel et al., 2022), along with household debt (Duguleană, 2011), salaries plummeted again following the recession and subsequent implementation of austerity measures, which forced people to accept drastic pay cuts. For many working-class families in Romania, international migration of at least one family member became the only solution to survive. Most of my respondents arrived in Italy in the early 2000s and 2010s where inadequate salaries and high levels of unemployment rendered many people income deprived. Over the last 3 decades, the number of Romanian migrants abroad has consistently increased, rendering Romanians one of the largest migrant population group in EU in terms of international migrant stock and as a percentage of estimated migrants relative to the total population in the home country (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018; OECD, 2019; IOM, 2020). If 10% of the Romanian working age population had migrated abroad at least once from 1990 until 2001 (Horváth & Anghel, 2009), then by 2010 26% of the Romanian households had at least one family member that had migrated at some point (Stănculescu & Stoiciu, 2012). Current figures estimate the number of Romanian migrants abroad to be between three and five million people (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018). The preferred migration destinations of Romanians have changed over the past years, and migration flows to Italy have declined considerably; nonetheless, Italy remains home to the

largest number of Romanian migrants living abroad (Sacchetto & Vianello, 2016). As of 2022, data from Istat (2023) reveals that Italy was home to 1,083,771 residents of Romanian origin, constituting 21% of the total migrant population and making Romanians the predominant migrant community in the country.

In Italy, the demographic changes that resulted from a growing number of old age population coupled with an increase in women's participation in the labour market (Solari, 2019), have posed challenges to traditional family norms and expectations. The primary responsibility to care for dependents, including elderly, was historically placed on the shoulders of women in the family (Marchetti, 2022). To address these societal transformations, the Italian state implemented a cash-for-care policy that allows Italian families to manage and organise their care needs, essentially transferring the responsibility for care provision from the public to families and individuals. With no restrictions on the allocation of funds, many families opt to hire and pay for (migrant) women's care services, often as live-in workers (King-Dejardin, 2019; De Vita & Corasaniti, 2022; Scrinzi, 2019). The gradual commoditization of care services in the household opened up a new labour market niche, and the implementation of cash-for-care policies enabled the accessibility of these services to the larger Italian population, irrespective of their socio-economic status (Marchetti, 2013). Statistics recurrently show that a significant portion of care workers in Italy are women; the majority of them are of migrant origin, including Romanians, who moved to Italy to supply the high demand for domestic and care services in the household. They perform traditional tasks earmarked for women in the family. Many Romanian women in Italy transitioned to different professions of work after their initial period abroad, such as the manufacturing, hospitality, and hotel industry, especially after 2007 when Romania acceded to the EU (Sacchetto & Vianello, 2016). The prevalence of this occupation remains notably high within the Romanian migrant group. According to Francesca Alice Vianello (2022), current official statistics estimate the population of care workers in Italy at approximately 400,000. With 145,000 care workers, Romanians constitute the most numerous migrant group engaged in this profession, accounting for 21.6% of the total migrant population in this sector (DOMINA, 2022). However, many scholars warn that the actual figures may be significantly greater due to the informal nature of this sector of work.

Against this background of continuous socio-economic transformations in Romania and Italy, working-class families in Romania, especially mothers, deal with a difficult dilemma. How should mothers solve the profound contradiction between the normative ideal of providing hands-on care for one's children and the structural impediments that make work

and family life in Romania unsustainable? Faced with the difficult trade-off between care and economy, the women I spoke with for the writing of this dissertation saw the potential of money from Italy for alleviating some of the immediate hard-pressed economic needs of their families, particularly their school-age children. Over the course of my fieldwork in Italy, I met many care workers who forgo the most basic personal needs and desires in Italy to advance family economic goals. They considered their stay in Italy temporary, aimed to maximise their gains and advance the family's economic goals. However, their time abroad went on, and their return 'home' was continuously postponed for an imagined future moment when their family no longer needed financial assistance. As this thesis will show, women's initial intention to migrate temporarily for clearly defined short-term economic goals which, in our conversations, they often referred to as 'paying off the apartment,' 'renovating the old house,' 'building indoor toilet,'and a 'modern kitchen,' 'lifting a home,' 'settling debts,' 'educating children,' 'putting food on their table,' 'keeping a roof over their head,' 'and clothes on their back,' turns into a long-term migration project as these women, who age abroad, maintain their desire to return, but find their time abroad stretched for years, even decades. During this time women spent abroad, their families shrink and expand to accommodate new members. Their children grow, finish school, enter the labour market, establish families, and have children of their own.

The stories presented in this dissertation touch on a second dilemma that these older migrant women deal with. This dilemma is posed by their prolonged stay which entails ongoing separation from their grandchildren. The question specifically concerns mothers-turned-grandmothers abroad, which was the case for several of my respondents. The questions are raised in the Romanian context where grandmothers are socially expected to be morally and physically involved in the rearing of grandchildren (Ducu, 2020; Preoteasa, Vlase & Tufă, 2017); how do migrant women negotiate the evolving roles within their families from afar, and what are the unintended consequences of these negotiations for their migration project? As this thesis will show, migrant women aim to reconcile their roles as mothers- and grandmothers-away, though imperfectly, through the transfer of remittances. I was often told throughout my fieldwork in Italy that 'money solves many problems.' And that 'when you have money, your family is happy.' The respondents understand perfectly well that leading a harmonious family life is measured in terms of money. But money is hard to earn and is never enough. In the families of my respondents, the competition over the low incomes of migrant women is often eclipsed by the paucity of money. I often found myself thinking about the many problems that money could potentially solve if only there were more

to go around. The practical, concrete solutions that a windfall of money from Italy provides are worthwhile. Non-migrants use remittances to repair broken fences, buy firewood for the winter, replace dirt floors with concrete ones, install indoor plumbing, and pay utility bills, food, and healthcare expenses, among others. However, as the narratives of migrant women's dealings with money show, remittance transfers are not typical economic transactions on the marketplace. Migrant women's contribution to the family budget extends way beyond their economic value. As I show in this dissertation, this statement is true even for the smallest amounts of money.

2. Overview of the debate

The sociological approach to remittances employed in this study differs from policy and scholarly discussions in migration studies where migrants are often portrayed as 'saviours' of the economy and 'modernising agents' (Mădroane, 2016, 2021), and their money is primarily analysed as an economic resource at national and household levels (Vasile et al., 2023). According to the World Bank, remittances to Romania showed a significant increase after 2002 and reached a record high of $9.3 billion in 2008 (Încalţărău & Maha, 2012), equivalent to 5.5% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (De Sousa & Duval, 2010). The recent World Bank (2023) data estimates the value of remittances at $7.63 billion, the equivalent of 3.1% of the country's GDP. Based on this data, remittances have a significant impact on the economy, making a substantial contribution to the GDP. Over the years, Italy has been continuously singled out as one of the countries from which the largest share of migrant money is transferred into the origin country (CESPI, 2019; Bunduchi et al., 2019; Mehedintu et al., 2019). Scholars link remittances to development. They contend that money migrants sent home stimulate economic growth by increasing consumption and investments in productive activities. The argument states that by elevating household income levels, remittances can positively impact individuals who access goods and services that were previously beyond their means, and are empowered to make investment decisions in productive business enterprises (for a literature review on the migration-development nexus see De Haas, 2020).

Departing from these economistic approaches dominating the literature on remittances, the money use I observed throughout my fieldwork evaded economists' expectations in multiple ways. From my observation, remittances have quite unspectacular and even mundane use. Rather than being invested in the so-called 'productive' activities,

such as initiating small businesses or entrepreneurial ventures, remittances were more commonly channelled into household economies and committed to covering those expenses deemed necessary for the family's social reproduction. Remittances require careful planning to ensure prudent saving and handling of funds. The transfers vary in both amount and frequency, encompassing anything from modest sums to significant proportions of women's earnings abroad, and can occur as one-time payments or regular transfers. Money is often earmarked for 'special purposes' and committed following family decisions made jointly about future enhancement. Lastly, rather than unilateral transfers of money from migrants to non-migrants, remittances circulate in ways that are not immediately obvious. For instance, Mădălina mentioned she offers her non-migrant mother €500 in cash each yearly trip home, citing concerns that pensions in Romania are insufficient to cover the bare necessities. Her mother saved the money and offered it back to her as a cash gift on her wedding day. Thus, only apparently unidirectional flows of money emerging from individual choice, remittances are part of a social practice (Mahmud 2021; Page & Mercer 2012; Meyer, 2023). As part of a social practice, money holds diverse and 'compound material, emotional, and relational elements' (Carling 2014: S219). Understanding monetary transfers in the context of family migration implies adopting an interpretation of money and economic activity that 'combines individual priorities with social norms and collective expectations' (Meyer, 2023:13) as they unfold unevenly across time and space.

This dissertation aims to investigate the monetary transfers of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy, focusing especially on the perspectives and experiences of those in live-in employment and their social roles, moral obligations, and expectations surrounding monetary transfers in the context of family migration. Adding to the literature on the sociological dimension of remittances, this thesis recognises that different dimensions of money coexist in people's everyday lives, even if not always in an harmonious fashion (Zelizer, 2010b). In addition to their economic potential in alleviating family members' material concerns, recent research emphasises that remittances encompass moral obligations (Simoni, 2016), signify the materialisation of the feeling of love and care (Singh, 2016) that enables family belongingness across time and space (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015), and can symbolise status and power (Thai, 2014; Small, 2019). Furthermore, in making contributions to this body of research, this thesis takes a step further as it aims to simultaneously consider the different 'pieces of money' (Wilkis, 2017) in the economic lives of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy. The stories presented in this dissertation show not only that money holds multiple dimensions in the context of family migration but also that multiple money is at play in the

lives of migrant care workers. The interviews I conducted revealed three different pieces of money that Romanian migrant care workers abroad earmark for special purposes and which make up the empirical chapters of this dissertation. Firstly, communal money transfers are dedicated to improving the living standards of 'loved ones.' It consists of a large percentage of women's wages abroad and is distributed among one's children and grandchildren. As a currency of solidarity, communal money keeps multi-generational families connected as they navigate unpredictable economic circumstances. Secondly, courtesy money transfers are offered as a cash gift to extended family members 'back home.' It consists of small sums ritually integrated into yearly celebrations. As a currency of care and love, courtesy money becomes the materialisation of feelings and emotions. Thirdly, pocket money are sums that care workers set aside for their personal consumption in Italy. As a currency of sociability in Italy, pocket money appears to provide women with opportunities to help emancipate themselves from their class and gender-subjugated conditions.

3. Research questions and outline of the argument

In this dissertation, I explore the central role of money in the everyday life of Romanian care workers in Italy. The paucity of money, migrating for money, sending money home, are ubiquitous themes in the interviews I collected. These observations induced me to explore the social meaning of money (Zelizer, 2021[1994]) for Romanian transnational families, from the perspective of Romanian care workers in Italy. I also examine the intricate relational dimensions of money that shine through the everyday economic practices of migrant care workers abroad. To this end, I formulated the following research sub-questions that guided the investigations of the meaning, role, and use of money in the transnational families of Romanian care workers in Italy: (1) How do Romanian migrant care workers manage their income and remittances in Italy and Romania? (2) How is money embedded into the social relationships of migrant women beyond family life?; (3) How do women experience and negotiate the social norms and collective expectations for monetary circulation?; (4) What are the ensuing consequences of these for the migration projects of women?

To answer these research questions, I conducted 13 months of ethnographic research from April 2021 to May 2022 in the region of Veneto, Italy. According to DOMINA (2020) the majority of care workers in Veneto are women of migrant origin, most of them Eastern European. It is worth noting that the prevalence of Romanian migrants in this region is high, holding the fourth position in Italy to accommodate this group of migrants (Istat, 2023).

During this period I spent time with and interviewed Romanian care workers, the vast majority of whom were in live-in employment.

As mentioned previously, the empirical chapters of this dissertation explore three 'pieces of money' (Wilkis, 2017) that dominated the accounts of migrant women I interviewed. What I call 'communal,' 'courtesy,' and 'pocket' money use can be observed in the daily economic lives of Romanian care workers in Italy. In analysing these types of money and the uses, meanings, and roles surrounding these, I focus on three key aspects that characterise all of them. Firstly, I show that the uses of money constitutes one of the important aspects of the daily life of my respondents. In various places across the ethnographic chapters of this dissertation, I describe the most common and pragmatic expressions of money use encompassing cost management and expenses control in Italy, remittance budgeting and allocation, decisions surrounding remittances use, and—on occasion—personal expense budgeting in Italy. Secondly, I show that the uses of money are seldom unrestricted. Monetary transactions are socially framed by my respondents and their families. Drawing on the concepts of relational work (Zelizer, 2010b), I argue that earmarking money (Zelizer, 2021[1994]) is not solely a budgeting exercise of domestic finance through which migrant women allocate resources for necessary expenses. Rather monetary transactions of Romanian care workers in Italy reflect notions of moral obligations, status, and self-worth that distinguish between the 'good' and 'bad' ways of handling money according to one's role and position within the transnational family relations. Thirdly, I show that distinct meanings associated with the earmarking of money correspond to different amounts of money, regularity of transfer, and types of commitments to relationships as my respondents feel and experience them. Taking these commitments into account makes it possible to introduce the effects of gender, age, and generational considerations into the analysis of money meaning and use in transnational families, from the perspective of Romanian care workers in Italy. Consequently, this dissertation also considers how money is tied to distinct gendered and generational subjectivities of respondents. It explores how being a migrant mother and grandmother may be instantiated in the ways that money is used, saved, given, spent, valued, and experienced, and discusses the effect of these on migrant women's migration projects. In essence, this dissertation reveals the multifaceted role of money beyond its economic value, highlighting its significance as a key medium for transnational family practice.

4. Outline of the dissertation

With this in mind, this dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical underpinnings that have guided this dissertation. Following the iterative process specific to a Grounded Theory approach as described by Strauss & Corbin (1998), theories and concepts utilised in this study are developed through a continuous dialogue with the fieldwork data, analysed in conjunction with existing scholarship from three distinct research domains, which have not traditionally intersected: sociology of money, feminist economy, and migration studies. Building on previous research, I propose a working framework that integrates cultural aspects into a sociological investigation of money in the economic lives of respondents.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological tools that were employed in this study. Interviews, conversations, and participant observations are core empirical materials that were collected for this study. This chapter is informed by feminist scholarship insights into debates on the researcher's positionality. Here I also reflect on specific ethnographic encounters where my positionality during fieldwork was challenged, and emphasise the importance of reciprocity in doing fieldwork.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the socio-economic transformations that created the context for my respondents' migration for care work in Italy. This chapter sets the stage for the following empirical chapters by providing the backdrop against which to understand my respondents' experience with work, money, family, and other aspects of their social life both in Italy and Romania.

Chapter 5 sheds light on changes in money behaviour throughout care workers' migration projects. Linking previous findings and theoretization of Eastern European women's migration for care work to Italy, this chapter discusses Romanian women's money behaviour according to two typologies of care workers proposed by migration scholars (e.g. Vianello, 2016), namely care workers 'in transit' and 'permanent.' It exposes how these migrant care workers groups approach matters of consumption, planning for the future, and savings in Italy. Simultaneously, it highlights that the emergence of three types of money, i.e. communal, courtesy, and pocket money, produced and used by my respondents differently, arguing that migrant women's money uses over their period abroad is influenced by the evolving relationships and social positioning of migrant women in their families as they traverse different life stages.

Chapter 6 discusses communal money transfers that consist of a large percentage of women's wages and are dedicated towards improving the living standards of their children

and grandchildren. Communal money provides migrant women with an opportunity to financially support what they consider to be family's worthwhile economic goals in circumstances of non-migrants' insufficient cash and savings. In this chapter, I show that rather than simply adopting a narrative of family obligation which gives primacy to moral responsibilities as opposed to the logic of interest and calculation, relationships with money, in the transnational families of my respondents, are made up of arrangements. I discuss various cases of arrangements between migrant women and their non-migrant family which make it possible to collaborate collectively to accomplish common family goals. Paying attention to the practice of earmarking communal money, I show that the issue of transnational family budgeting is built on expectations of mutual support and assistance. These expectations can sometimes test the limits of solidarity between transnational family members.

Chapter 7 discusses courtesy money transfers that play a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of family relationships in the context of migration. These small(er) sums of money are distributed widely during return visits and ritually integrated into yearly celebrations. In this chapter I show that courtesy money symbolises an act of care and love, and these transfers are a means through which migrant women form and maintain long-term and long-distance connections with their extended families. For my respondents, alongside the idea that money serves as a symbol of love and affection, facilitating the expression of tangible commitments by migrant women toward their 'left-behind' loved ones, also develops the recognition that monetary aspects hold immense significance within familial bonds, which run the risk of taking priority over affective sentiments.

Chapter 8 discusses pocket money, which differs significantly from communal and courtesy money as it is reserved for personal use in Italy and is not part of the transnational household economy. Earmarked for personal consumption in Italy, pocket money is dedicated towards what my respondents refer to as 'little luxuries,' small indulgences that enable migrant women to regain a sense of self abroad and boost their social connections in Italy. While past literature on migration for care work in Italy has outlined different aspects of the care work regime that leads to women's exploitation and discussed their migration as depriving 'left-behind' family, especially children, of motherly love, this chapter focuses on the largely uncharted economic lives of care workers in Italy. Despite their small sums, pocket money is perceived by my respondents as a form of empowerment. This is particularly true for live-in care workers whose social positioning in Italy is characterised by multiple forms of intersecting vulnerabilities.

Finally, Chapter 9 reiterates the main findings of this dissertation and outlines the conclusions of this study.

Chapter 2. Theoretical approaches

This dissertation is informed by a feminist critique that challenges standard economic models and methodologies by problematising the essentialisation of differences that structurally constitute the economic and social as separate spheres, and that consistently works against the interests of gender equality and social recognition for women (e.g. Folbre, 2009; Folbre & Nelson, 2000; Zelizer, 2010b, 2021[1994], 2005b[1998]; Kessler-Harris, 2014, 2018; England et al., 2012; among others). Universalist theories of money, markets, and economic behaviour associated with impersonal, rational, and 'cold' calculations are constructed in opposition to (and inherently incompatible with) other social spheres populated by personal, emotional, and 'warm' interpersonal relationships (Zelizer, 2005b[1998]; Hochschild, 2017). These dichotomies have given rise to a series of dualistic understandings including the division between public and private sphere, productive and reproductive work, money and emotions, among others. Roundly criticised by feminists, these approaches fail to accommodate the examination of everyday economic interactions and activities other than those deemed as productive, and which are relegated to social domains coded as feminine, such as domestic and care work, household economy, consumption, among others. As a result, they offer limited insights into the diverse experiences and roles of women. In this dissertation, I challenge this view by emphasising the ways in which money and care often intersect. I analyse the content of economic activities carried out by migrant care workers that involve money as well as feelings, conflicts, and tensions, and the meanings of money which are revealed in these migrant women's ways of thinking about and using money as they strive to meet needs and navigate decisions related to care practices in their transnational family relationships.

Following the iterative process specific to a Grounded Theory approach, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), theories and concepts utilised in this study were developed through a continuous dialogue with the fieldwork data, analysed in conjunction with the existing scholarship from three distinct research fields: sociology of migration, feminist economy, and sociology of money. While conducting a comprehensive literature review across all three research areas exceeds the scope of this dissertation, this chapter outlines traditional and contemporary theoretical approaches to money in transnational families where

women have migrated for care work by accomplishing three objectives. Firstly, it discusses theories of gender and migration used to analyse Romanian women's migration for care work (Section 2.1). Secondly, it introduces some theoretical and empirical contributions to the comprehension of remittances that have influenced the current dissertation (Section 2.2). Thirdly, it puts forth a working framework for understanding money in the family relationships of Romanian care workers in Italy that best aligns with the collected empirical material (Section 2.3).

2.1. Gender and migration

One of the major contributions of feminist scholarship was to show that key elements of entrenched gender inequality lie in the configuration of labour both within families and international labour markets (e.g. Marchetti, 2022; Folbre, 2021; Fraser, 2020; among others).

Feminist scholarship (e.g. Di Leonardo, 1987; Fraser, 2016) recurrently emphasises that the responsibility to care for dependents is socially distributed for not all people in society care equally for their children, elderly, and ill, and thus the role of caregiver is experienced by some more than others. Different expectations, opportunities, rights, obligations, and responsibilities for women and men define the role of the caretaker and assign the responsibility of care to those who are expected to assume it based on socially and culturally constructed ideas of how care work should be organised and who should perform it. Historically, women's work was organised around those activities that are necessary for the social reproduction of individuals. Traditional economies relied on the unpaid work of women in the household who were relegated the bulk of domestic and care responsibilities. While men were engaged in paid productive labour outside the private sphere, women were doing the cooking, cleaning, scrubbing, washing, ironing, shopping, birthing and rearing children, and assisting the sick, elderly, and disabled, among others. This gendered and economic hierarchization of family organisation dictated each individual's role within the family. The role of the man as a wage earner and that of the woman as a caregiver were bound together by a form of mutual obligations and dependence in which the breadwinner had the duty to economically support the caregiver and compensate for her unpaid domestic and care work within the private sphere of the household (Fineman, 2017).

Given these representations of women and their role within their families and society, it is not surprising thus that, when migration began to be researched, women played only a marginal or passive role. What dominated the analysis of migration was the portrayal of

migrants as young males (Christou & Kofman, 2022), living in rural and agricultural areas, and crossing international borders, either through authorised or unauthorised methods, in search of stable, industrial jobs (King, 2002). The phenomenon of migration was explained as driven primarily by economic factors (Kelegama & Weeraratne, 2016; O'reilly, 2022). The argument goes that increased economic disparities between origin and destination countries prompted migrants, i.e. young males, to turn to migration as an individual and/or family strategy through which they aimed to improve their personal and/or familial economic circumstances (O'reilly, 2022). Notably, within this established discourse, female migrants were frequently cast in the role of passive participants, and their presence in international migration was predominantly contextualised in terms of family reunification, wherein women typically pursued the path of accompanying their husbands abroad. Commenting on the analysis of women's role in migration, Mirjana Morokvasic argues that 'in important work on migration, the symbolic references to women as migrants' wives and their stereotypical presentation as wives and mothers has led to a conceptualization of migrant women as followers, dependents, unproductive persons, isolated, illiterate and ignorant' (Morokvasic, 1983:16).

The feminisation and internationalisation of migration that has resulted from increased mobility of women who migrate alone to take up employment as domestic and care workers abroad (Lamas-Abraira, 2022), has challenged dominant views on migration. Commendable efforts have been made by scholars who have sought to increasingly incorporate gender relations analysis in their research. By the early 90s scholars began to consider women as active agents in shaping not only their own migration paths but those of their families too. Women are seen as pioneers of migration, initiators of migration in their families, and breadwinners for their 'left behind' families (e.g. the works of Castles & Miller, 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Campani, 1995, among others). The shift in the understanding of women's mobility from family reunification to labour migration opened the door to exploring new migration trajectories as women no longer fit into categorical distinctions of 'permanent,' 'temporary,' and 'return' migrants. New mobility strategies have appeared as scholars begin to study migrant women's economic incentives to move. Breaking from the stereotypical depiction of women as 'followers' of their husbands, and family reunification as the main reason for women's migration, a migration system approach begins to develop which acknowledges that various forms of mobility can exist simultaneously (O'reilly, 2022). In Italy, for instance, scholars observed that different migrant groups of care

workers engage in a circulatory pattern of migration, seeking to combine periods of stay home with the earning of a salary abroad (e.g. Odynets, 2021; Marchetti, 2013).

Analysing gender differences in migration, scholars argue that migration is a gendering process in that it shapes outcomes, opportunities, and strategies differently for men and women (Christou & Kofman, 2022). The increasing incorporation of intersectional approaches in the analysis of migration is a welcomed addition since it means that scholars take steps to acknowledge that together with gender other social categories and identities such as nationality, class, age, for instance, simultaneously shape the position of individuals and groups in society. Intersectionality approaches, importantly, do not aim to produce a hierarchy of oppression based on the multiple, accumulating social categories and identities of individuals and groups, but rather pay attention to the intersection of axes of differences (Anthias, 2001; Toffanin, 2012; Lutz & Amelina, 2021) that structure the inequality of power relations within societies and shape the lives of people. Intersectional approaches have guided and informed much of the research for this dissertation. For instance, in the following section, I illustrate how I applied intersectionality to understand the experiences of respondents. Specifically, in Section 2.1.1 of this chapter I argue that the experiences of migrant women in Italy are not solely shaped by their gender but are profoundly influenced by the intersection of their gender and age. Furthermore, intersectionality has also informed much of the methodology underpinning this dissertation as I reflect on the researcher's positionality during fieldwork. Specifically, in Section 3.3 in Chapter 3 I discuss how—while I shared with my respondents a vulnerable position in the global power hierarchy emerging from our common national belonging—a combination of other social categories and identities that differentiated us were made salient during fieldwork which forced me to subtly negotiate the power dynamics that were brought to the forefront of my fieldwork interactions.

Women-led migration has incorporated gender into the analysis of mobility studies through two different theoretical approaches, which I discuss next. First, I refer to the global care chain theory (Hochschild, 2000) which analyses migration through a neo-Marxist lens (Dumitru, 2017) and interprets women's migration as a consequence of the international economic restructuring of reproductive labour (Parreñas, 2015 [2001]). The core argument posits that global capital expansion compels economically disadvantaged women from impoverished regions and countries to seek opportunities in Western capitalistic economies where they are recruited into jobs earmarked for (migrant) women. Second, I turn to empirical evidence of migration flows to discuss how women manage, negotiate, and perform their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and relatives in the context of transnational families.

I refer to the emergence of new concepts such as transnational care circulation which emphasises the multiplicity of care arrangements and actors involved in the provision of transnational care over time, space, and generations.

2.1.1. Women's labour migration and global care chains

The focus on women-led migration over the past decades has inserted women into the debate through the lens of 'global care chain' (Hochschild, 2000) or 'international division of reproductive labour' (Parreñas, 2015 [2001]). This scholarship builds on feminist debates on women's role in the household, as briefly discussed above. The division of labour in families across gender lines in traditional economies is facing challenges in Western contemporary economies. Efforts to promote increased women's participation in paid work, codified in policies, have raised questions regarding their identities and roles as caregivers, triggering the reassessment of long-standing beliefs concerning the family structure and, particularly, women's role within it (Kessler-Harris, 2018). As the number of women entering the labour force in Western countries increases, their identities have expanded to include, beyond their traditional roles in the family as wives, mothers, daughters, and so forth, the newly acquired roles of economic contributors to their families. With increased opportunities for gainful employment outside the home, and with the progressive withdrawal of state services for caregiving (Farris, 2015), working women cope with the demands of caregiving for their families by turning to hiring services in the household rather than relying on male family members to shoulder this workload. Previously, procuring care and domestic assistance in the marketplace was a prerogative primarily enjoyed by affluent women (Hoschield, 2003). However, recent scholarship highlights a shift in this trend, with researchers observing that hiring the services of a (migrant) woman in the household has become a 'cheap luxury' (Rugolotto et al., 2017). This phenomenon is exemplified by the growing number of middle- and working-class women, particularly in Western Europe, who are increasingly opting to hire household services (see Marchetti, 2013; Da Roit, 2010).

Feminist scholars have sketched out a global chain connecting people from far away places, of different ethnic backgrounds, and social positioning, who buy and sell care and domestic services on the market. Following the conventional push and pull theory of labour supply and demand (Dumitru, 2017), global care chains arise in response to the new labour demand for care and domestic services in the household as economically disadvantaged

women, often migrants, step in to fill in the caregiving gap left by Western women's participation on the labour market (Hochschild, 2014). As outlined by Arlie Hochschild an illustrative example of the global care chain dynamic involves '(1) an elder daughter from a poor family who cares for her siblings while (2) her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a migrating nanny who, in turn, (3) cares for the child of a family in a rich country' (Hochschild, 2014:250). In other words, linked together by their caregiving responsibilities for their dependents, the working mother in Western countries hire the services of a migrant woman who, in turn, hire another woman to care for her 'left behind' children. The last link on the care chain is represented by the eldest daughter of the woman hired to care for the 'left behind' children of the migrating mother. The eldest daughter, unable to escape or delegate her caregiving responsibility, is forced to assume the role of the caregiver in the family.

The commodification of care and domestic services in the global market is described by Hochschild (2003) as a 'care drain' whereby care flows to richer countries and regions which 'extracts love' and 'emotional resources' (page 193-194) from the children (and other dependents) of women migrating from poor countries and regions to take employment as domestic and care workers. The migration of women is thought of as depriving their own children (and other dependents) of the emotional care and physical presence as simultaneously their care recipients in the Global North, where care is imported, reap the benefits of the love and care provided by their migrant caregivers. Scholars argue that the reproductive and emotional labour performed by migrant women care workers generates a surplus value for their employers (Hochschild, 2014; Herrera, 2020). The care drain left behind by migrating women has exacerbated the disparity between poor and rich countries and regions. This divide is now characterised not only by stark contrasts in material wealth but also by variations in the accessibility of caregiving and affection (Hochschild, 2003).

Furthermore, the increasing global trend toward the commodification of care and domestic services within households describes processes through which a strongly gendered, classed, and racialised labour force (Marchetti, 2018, 2022; Amelina & Lutz, 2018; Sabio et al., 2022) is increasingly incorporated into frequently irregular and informal employment (Ambrosini, 2022), often as live-in care workers. The relationships of domination and subordination that describe the power dynamics and negotiations going on on a daily basis between care and domestic workers and their employers are well documented (Glenn, 1992). These power differentials are even more pronounced in live-in arrangements where care work is provided in the intimate setting of employers' homes where the work and home spaces of

migrant workers overlap (Boccagni, 2018). Within this highly asymmetrical employment relationship, employers often wield great degree of discretionary power. As argued by Bridget Anderson, live-in care workers are not only dependent on their employers for their wages but also rely on their employer's goodwill for fundamental necessities such as providing ‘her food, water, accommodation and access to the basic amenities of life.’ (Anderson, 2000:6). In essence, this dependency on the employer places the live-in care worker in a vulnerable position within the employment relationship.

Across studies on the global care chain, women play a central role as the vehicles of love and care extracted from the Global South by the Global North (Christou & Kofman, 2022). By unwittingly participating in the global care chain, migrant women are perceived to be depriving their own children of emotional support and care in exchange for the remittances they ‘send home,’ effectively engaging in a ‘global heart transplant’ (Hoschield, 2003:190). On an individual level, women divert the feelings they carry for their children towards the care receivers abroad, thereby furnishing them with ‘the love and care they wish they could provide their own children’ (Hoschield, 2003:190). Rhacel Parreñas echoes this argument citing Sau-ling Wong to support the claim that care work is ‘diverted mothering’ because ‘time and energy available for mothering are diverted from those who, by kinship or communal ties, are their more rightful recipients’ (1994:69 as cited in Parreñas, 2015 [2001]:44-5;see also Parreñas, 2003). In addition, ‘time and energy,’ adds Hoschield (2003), ‘are not all that's involved; so, too, is love‘ (page 190).

The roles of women as mothers and care workers participating in the global economy are not easily reconciled. Acting as vehicles of love and care when women migrate, they inadvertently leave their own children and dependents without the essential caregiving they require (Christou & Kofman, 2022; Raghuram, 2012). Studies examining the locations where care is extracted from, conceptualise women’s migration as economically necessary migration, portraying it as a sacrifice mothers make for the betterment of their own families, particularly children (e.g. Parreñas, 2015 [2001]). Assessing the consequences of women’s migration, specifically the resulting emotional trauma experienced by children with mothers away, they emphasise the repercussions of mothers’ absence for children’s emotional well-being (e.g. Parreñas, 2005b). Empirical studies find that children with mothers-away are more likely to be depressed and anxious (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2019). Mothers’ migration affects childrens’ school performance (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011), increasing the probability of school drop out (Giannelli & Mangiavacchi, 2010). The virtual equation of women’s role with that of the caregiver in the family and physical care as the most desirable

and valid form of caregiving, present in much of the literature on the global care chain (Lamas-Abraira, 2022; Christou & Kofman, 2022), has been subjected to numerous criticism.

One important criticism involves upholding a Western heteronormative view of a nuclear middle-class family that assumes an ideology of intensive mothering (Lamas-Abraira, 2022; Chib et al., 2014). Sharon Hays (1996) describes the ideology of intensive mothering model as a labour-intensive brand of parenting which demands substantial emotional involvement and material support on the part of mothers. Although this parenting model may be present in Western capitalist societies, it is by no means universal. Intergenerational living and caregiving arrangements are common in many parts of the world (see, for example, for Nicaragua: Yarris, 2017; for Ghana: Coe, 2013; for Sri Lanka: Gambur, 2020; among others). The critique of adopting an ideology of intensive mothering when analysing women-led migration is particularly relevant in the context of migration flows from Romania where there exists a long-standing expectation that grandmothers play an active and integral role in the upbringing of their grandchildren (Ducu, 2020). When applied to migration flows from Romania, global care chains can only partially explain the experiences of these migrant women. Respondents are part of this global dynamic in that they are women who migrated from poor to wealthy regions to supply the growing demand for care and domestic services, leaving behind their own family members in need of care, and relying on other (usually female) family members and friends to assume care responsibilities at home, thus filling the care gap they leave behind. However, as the case of the respondents suggests, the increasing incorporation of older migrant care workers in global care chains suggests that the transfer of care is not limited to migrating mothers but also includes grandmothers. For the Romanian migrants in my sample women's care burden for their families can be attributed not only to their gender but also the intersction of their gender and age. Migrant women often assume the role of providers of material support not only for their adult children, but also, frequently, for their grandchildren. Although existing literature on women's mobility primarily focuses on the migration of mothers, most of the respondents in this present study are often grandmothers. At the time of the interview, none of the live-in care workers had young children, though many of them migrated from Romania when their children were in their late teens or early twenties. Accordingly, the migration of Romanian elderly women to Italy is driven not only by the demand for care services in Italian households but also by the changing needs for care in the households of migrant sending countries. Particularly, as women realised that what their adult children and young grandchildren need is money and not hand-on in-person caregiving. To understand how respondents deal with changing needs for

care in their transnational families, I turn to the concept of moral economy, which I discuss in Section 2.3.2 of this chapter.

A second critique involves the ways through which care is conceptualised. Western scholars may identify the need for physical in-person care and emotional investment for non-migrant children's development as paramount importance. In contrast, migrant women themselves may view their children's material well-being through the provision of remittances as more significant. For example, Deirdre McKay argues that although parents away are aware of the widespread concerns about the emotional effects of long-term separation on children's development briefly mentioned above, 'they judge that the alternative–a life of poverty and malnutrition with quarrelling parents–would undermine whatever emotional advantages his parents' presence might bring' (McKay, 2007:188). Giving primacy to the voices and perspectives of individuals may reveal that, in certain cases, providing material and economic support to one's child and family is perceived to be more important than verbalising feelings of affection and care (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

Indeed, a host of empirical studies show that local conceptions of care can not only accommodate but also encompass material interests in family relations. The concept of the 'materiality of care' proposed by Coe (2011) underscores that parents of working-class background assert their love by willingly sharing their resources and meeting loved ones basic material needs, showing that developing intimacy in families separated by national borders through economic transfers is significant for the constitution of emotional bonds. Returning to the criticism of privileging physical proximity and emotional intimacy as the epitome of mother–child relations in the analysis of the global care chain and international division of reproductive labour, I agree with Speranta Dumitru who argues that 'discrediting remittances as a way to care about one's family is also a way to discredit those family's needs' (Dumitru, 2014:209) In several parts of this dissertation, and especially in Chapter 7, I discuss the symbolic meaning of money constructed in the context of family migration, underscoring that care and money are not mutually exclusive, they are, in fact, constitutive of family relationships.

2.1.2. Care and changes in gendered relations due to women's migration

More recently, new approaches to women's migration have investigated the potential of women's migration to reconfigure identities and roles in the migration process as they acquire

new statuses in their families. This body of literature is particularly concerned with gaining insights into the local conceptions of care and affection (e.g Hannaford, 2016; Huennekes, 2018; McCallum, 2022), and explores culturally and historically caregiving arrangements that are available to migrant women within their countries of origin and their families (Herrera, 2020). Empirically, this body of research shows that, migrating mothers rely on other (usually female) family members, friends, and even neighbours, to ensure their children benefit from the care they need (for Romania see Ducu, 2020; for Caribbean see: for Nicaragua: see Yarris, 2017). Under these transnational care arrangements, care provided by individuals other than mothers does not inherently signify the lack of care. The perspective advanced in these studies reframes conventional depictions of women's migration, moving away from being viewed as contributing to a care deficit, and positioning it instead as a form of care redistribution—a strategy necessary for the social reproduction of the family.

New concepts emerged in the study of women's migration as scholars sought to accommodate a wider definition of family in which physical distance and intergenerational caregiving are part of everyday family life, contributing to critique of ideal notions of families as nuclear units. In the context of this debate, the concept of 'transnational' or 'multi-sited' families has come to the fore. To define migrant families, scholars refer to 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood,' even across national borders' (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002:3). Throughout this dissertation, I refer to transnational families to avoid reproducing the ideal model of family which was historically defined as heteronormative family unit of the nuclear family captured in a cohabiting heterosexual married couple with at least one child (Morgan, 1996, 2011). The resources in this type of family are assumed to be equitably distributed among all family members. As discussed in the previous section, many feminist scholars point out, this model of family is significantly different from the empirical reality in which people operate. As I show in various places in this dissertation, the economic challenges confronting the respondents have progressively splintered their families. Although many of the respondents portrayed their family ties as if stable marriages were a standard, my inquiries have revealed a more intricate reality. In actuality, marital ties often endured significant strain and ultimately disintegrated in several cases. Although migrant women may choose not to formally divorce their husbands after migration, they often describe their relationship as estranged. On their return home, they prefer to lodge with adult children and grandchildren. Being welcomed into the homes of their children is no less in part for the consistent and continuous monetary commitment as

their monetary transfers spread across multiple households in Romania (a topic discussed in Chapter 6). Furthermore, the widespread practice of intergenerational living in extended households suggests that emotional bonds of intimacy may not be exclusive to nuclear families as it is typically assumed. Respondents followed the path of extended family whereby family-like relationships (Morgan, 1996, 2011) best describe the circulation of emotional and material support to and fro migrants and non-migrants bound together by different family ties including but not limited to biological ties: grandmothers, grandchildren, mothers, children, siblings, aunts, cousins, affinal relatives, close friends and so on.

As the definition of family broadens to encompass those families impacted by the mobility of their members, notions of care have evolved to accommodate wider shifts in the experiences of transnational families. Concepts of care draw on the empirical research that discusses tensions and negotiations over how care is perceived and manifested among transnational family members. These concepts have adapted to respond to the possibilities of transformations in gender roles and responsibilities potentially held by the migration of women in the family. Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla (2014a, 2014b) propose a care circulation framework to understand various forms of reciprocal yet asymmetric exchanges occurring between family members and over the life course of transnational family members. According to the authors, the notion of global care chains focuses on the two ends of care, namely, the location where care is imported, on the one hand, and the location from where care is extracted and replaced with financial returns, on the other hand. By contrast, the care circulation framework allows researchers to capture the entirety of migrant women's social networks within which care circulates, as well as changes in these networks as the family enters new life stages and shifts care needs.

Within the literature on care circulation, scholars account for multiple forms of care provision and activities of transnational family members. Baldassar and Wilding (2022) argue that family members 'care about' each other, expressing these sentiments by upholding regular communication practices that establish an emotional presence within their transnational families (e.g. Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016); they 'care for' each other when they undertake practical responsibilities to assist those in need, such as providing material and practical support (e.g. Baldassar, Baldock & Wilding, 2007; Thi Nguyen, Baldassar & Wilding, 2023). Transnational family practices which encompass forms of care that do not require in-person, hands-on involvement, highlight a mode of care provision described by Baldassar et al. (2014) as disembodied or virtual, made possible by the increasing availability and affordability of new forms of media communication. As Madianou and Miller (2013)

discuss, contemporary migration unfolds within what they refer to as a polymedia environment, characterised by access to various forms of information and communication technologies (ICT communication). New ways of 'doing' and 'displaying' family (Morgan, 2011; Finch, 2011; Ducu, 2020) as well as 'doing care' transnationally (Baldassar, 2014) emerge as studies indicate that family members utilise variety of communication methods available to them such as video calls, phone conversations, text messages, sharing photos, among others, to sustain a sense of 'being together,' despite prolonged geographical and temporal separations, through 'virtual co-presence' (Baldassar et al., 2016). Thus, the ability to partake in the advantages of virtual co-presence necessitates access to material infrastructure such as internet and technology devices, a privilege that is not uniformly distributed among all members of transnational families (Frenyo, 2019; Ducu & Telegdi-Csetri, 2023). Differential access to ICT communication may be shaped, among other factors, by a spectrum of informality women encounter in their employment arrangements abroad which can significantly influence their capacity to maintain communication with their non-migrant family members (Greschke, 2021). This is evident in situations where employers restrict women's access to phones, or when they are required to work extended or unconventional hours.

The form of care involving emotional support through constant communication mediated by ICT may be most prevalent in transnational families (Merla et al., 2021), it is by no means singular. Care that entails physical co-presence continues to be an essential part of family practices across national borders. It may take the form of providing support with accommodation (Baldassar, 2007), return and care visits (Thi Nguyen, Baldassar & Wilding, 2023), which can run both ways, from migrant to non-migrants, and vice versa. For instance, in the Romanian context, scholars show that migrant women may temporarily suspend their migration to return 'home' to solve immediate care needs for their children (Ducu, 2014), and/or their ageing parents (Hărăguș & Telegdi-Csetri, 2018). Similarly, non-migrant family members may adopt a circular migration pattern when confronted with changes in the care needs of their transnational families, as exemplified by Romanian grandparents who become first times migrants in order to provide in-person care for their grandchildren abroad (Wyss & Nedelcu, 2019; Hărăguș & Telegdi-Csetri, 2018; Nedelcu, 2023). Ageing parents living in the Romanian countryside, where winters are harsh and housing conditions do not allow for comfortable living, temporarily relocate abroad to live with their children (Hărăguș & Telegdi-Csetri, 2018). These aspects of intergenerational care are discussed at length in this dissertation as I show that migrant women in Italy are called upon to be mobile in order to

respond to the changing care needs of their families either by providing proximate care (see Section 8.4 in Chapter 8) or material care (see Chapter 6, especially Sections 6.1 and 6.3).

Taking a life course approach to the study of care circulation brings an important temporal dimension to family migration and it can explain why and how migrant women deal with changing care needs and family configuration across national borders. Only scarcely applied to the study of migration (Ciobanu & Bolzman, 2020; Vlase & Voicu, 2018), the life course approach also draws attention to the experiences of older migrant women as they deal with life events and stages in their transnational life cycle that shape their migration trajectories (see Horn, 2022). In this dissertation, a life course approach adds another layer to the experiences of migrant care workers by considering the events, social relationships, and transitions that mark their life biographies and profoundly impact their further migration trajectories and the evolutions of intergenerational relationships in their families (Alwin, 2012). By paying attention to migrant women progression through different personal and familial life pathways (as they migrate, become care workers in Italy, have grandchildren, for instance) which mark changes in their migration, employment, and family roles we gain a sense of the social location they occupy which tells us something about the 'traits, values, gestures, behaviours, attitudes, and choices' of migrant women (Vlase & Voicu, 2018:4).

2.2. Remittances

As discussed in the previous section, within the traditional literature of migration, mobility was framed as a male endeavour (Christou & Kofman, 2022), and motivations to migrate were primarily driven by economic rationale. Neoclassical approaches to migration analysed wage and economic developments disparities between countries (Van Hear et al., 2018) and argued that individuals responded to the international demand for labour force as they sought to maximise their own earning potential and thus moved to countries with better wages and employment opportunities (Massey et al., 1993). Given the overemphasis on the economic dimension that frames migration, it is not surprising that research on migrants' money view remittances as central to economic development and modernisation (de Haas, 2020; Meyer, 2023). Developmentalist viewpoints tend to either extol remittances for their capacity to drive economic development in the origin communities and countries or criticise them for their perceived failure to foster economic growth. Some scholars following the development model view remittances positively, contending that they stimulate economic growth by increasing consumption and investment in productive activities. The argument goes that by elevating

household income levels, remittances empower individuals to make investment decisions and access goods and services that were previously beyond their means. Conversely, scholars adhering to the dependency model contend that remittances only engender short-term economic growth and may lead to long-term dependence on remittances as a means of reducing poverty and promoting economic growth.

In contrast to neoclassical and structural approaches, the New Economy of Labour Migration theory (NELM), which gained prominence in the la 1980s and 1990s, emphasises the importance of the household, as opposed to focusing solely on individuals alone, in the decision-making and organisation of migration for their family members. Influenced by this theory, Lucas and Stark (1985), contend that migration emerges from an implicit contractual arrangement between family members, and sending remittances is a way of honouring that contract. In their seminal work, they explain what exactly enforces compliance with the implicit contractual agreement between migrants and non-migrants by laying down three determinants for remittance behaviour. With their 'pure altruism' motivations, they sought to explain migrant behaviour as emerging from migrants' selflessness. Migrants voluntarily comply with the implicit contract because they are genuinely concerned about the material deprivation non-migrant relatives face 'back home' and therefore they send remittances to support their families. The 'pure self-interest' motivations point at reasons to remit that may, in the long term, benefit migrants. 'Self-interested' migrants send money as a way to secure non-migrant relatives' support for their return visits or in the event of permanent return. The third motivation for remitting, 'tempered altruism' or 'enlightened self-interest', captures elements of both 'altruistic' and 'self-interested' migrant behaviour. According to this perspective, remittances are seen as part of a mutually beneficial contractual arrangement between migrants and their families back home (Carling, 2008). Migrants may remit money not only to support their families but also as a way of repaying the costs of their migration or education if these costs were borne by their families. They may also send money to diversify income at home and insure the household as part of a risk-reducing strategy.

Despite NELM's contributions to incorporate the family/household unit as the focus of analysis, moving beyond a sole emphasis on individual migrants and considering factors beyond economics to explain remittance behaviours, critics contend, it does not fundamentally clash with the neoclassical economic perspective. This criticism arises from the treatment of the household as a homogenous entity, which is presumed to act according to family members' collective economic self-interest (O'reilly, 2022). Remittances, therefore, continue to be regarded mostly in terms of the economic functions they perform, that is

despise shifting the unit of analysis from individual to migrant household. This approach overlooks variations within households, namely between family members, regarding access to remittances and decision-making (Mahmud, 2020; Bakewell, 2010). According to Åkesson (2011), 'the emphasis on economic utility obscures the fact that remittances also have important implications for social and cultural dimensions of everyday life, such as kinship, exchange, and morality' (Åkesson, 2011:326). Thus, questions pertaining to the context of exchange, moral values and beliefs, gender differences in remitting behaviour, and other influential aspects that invariably shape remittance flows often remain obscured.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on empirical evidence that highlights gender differences in remittance behaviour. Central to understanding this gendered dimension of remittance are studies that explore the broader question of how migrant women might achieve empowerment, in their families, through money (Kunz & Meisenbacher, 2021). I show that studies which address this question can be split into two lines of research with distinct underlying assumptions. Lastly, I discuss the analytical framework of scripting remittances put forwards by Carling (2014), highlighting its strengths and shortcomings.

2.2.1. Gendering remittances in migration

As discussed in Section 2.1 of this chapter, with the increase in women's migration flows, gender relations have become increasingly incorporated into the study of migration. New directions opened up that investigate women's role in sending, receiving, managing, and using remittances in transnational families. Empirical findings show that compared with families that have one man abroad, families with women abroad thrive economically (Abrego, 2009). Women sustain a closer relationship with 'left behind' family members and are more 'loyal remitters' (King, Castaldo & Vullnetari, 2011:397, see also Bastia & Piper, 2019). Compared with men, women remit smaller amounts of money but a higher percentage of their salary (King, Castaldo & Vullnetari, 2011). They are more constant remitters and include extended family members in their remittances circuit (Petrozziello, 2011; Kunz, 2008). They often prefer to remit to their female rather than male relatives (Rahman & Fee, 2009) and their daughters rather than husbands (Parreñas, 2005b). King, Castaldo and Vullnetari (2011) suggest that variations in the amounts of remittances can be explained by the differences in channels of money transfers. Men's remittances are easier to track as they tend to utilise official channels of money transfers, whereas women tend to send money

through informal channels. In certain instances, they secretly or covertly sent money, for example as in-kind gifts, making it difficult to capture these remittance flows. In the remittance-receiving context, overall empirical findings show that when women, as opposed to men, manage the common household budget, children fare better, including in cases where households deal with fewer resources (Kennedy & Peters, 1992; Yarris, 2017), as spending decisions benefit children and improve their health, housing conditions, and educational opportunities.

Sociological articulations of money in women's migration address the deeper question regarding women's potential to acquire empowerment through money (Kunz & Meisenbacher, 2021). For example, feminist scholar Rhacel Parreñas (2005b) argued that the inclusion of women in the international labour market holds the real possibility for women's emancipation from their submissive roles in traditional families. The argument is that as women migrate abroad for work, they become financially independent, and take on a key role as providers for their families. Their ability to materially support those 'at home' may translate into positive effects on their status within the family. The assumption is that women can leverage their newly acquired roles as the main 'breadwinners' in the family to negotiate, from a better position, new meanings of motherhood that can accommodate the reconfiguration of family care and relations across borders.

As I discuss below, evidence regarding the empowering capacity of remittances in the context of women migration is inconclusive. To account for remittances' ambivalent value, two lines of research emerged whose theoretical assumptions differ significantly. Firstly, one line of research explores gender ideology to explain why money does not reach its potential to lead to women's empowerment in family migration. Scholars argue that economic practices are subsumed to internalised gendered norms, developed through early socialisation; these norms dictate how each individual should behave based on her role within the traditional family ideology (for review, see LeBaron & Kelley 2020). After reviewing empirical evidence on changes in migrant women's status and roles in their families as a result of their migration and remittance sending, Supriya Singh (2018) concludes that traditional gender roles and family relations are fixed and bound and therefore resistant to change. They continue to maintain a strong grip on how individuals handle money in their families, so much so that they override the specific transnational arrangement or organisation of the household itself.

Feminist migration scholars argue that the normative expectations placed on women who migrate are contingent upon the social roles they inhabit in their family relationships

(e.g. Parreñas, 2005b; Singh, 2019). Embedded in family relations (Åkesson, 2011) and shaped by complex moral economies (Simoni & Voirol, 2021), money reflects broader tensions, expectations, and obligations that are informed by gender and intergenerational solidarity norms instantiated in a moral discourse of what people consider 'good' and 'bad' ways to behave according to one's social role and status in the family. In the context of family migration, economic exchange is governed by moral evaluations through which family members construct their identities and obligations, and frame their transactions. Studies show that, through remittance circulation, people evaluate each others' moral character and construct ideas of what it means to be a 'good' relative (Simoni & Voirol, 2021), a 'good' son (Singh & Sidhu, 2022; Singh, 2016; Meloni, 2020), a 'dutiful' daughter (Sobieszczyk, 2015), and a 'sacrificial' mother (Katigbak, 2015). The act of framing remittance transactions in terms of 'good', 'duty', and 'sacrifice' sheds light on the culturally-informed rules and norms that define these distinctions, and which are not gender neutral. On the contrary, they reinforce a clear definition of gender itself. Men who generously remit money 'home' are perceived as 'good' and virtuous. In contrast, the obligation to remit that women take on constitutes them as 'dutiful.' Women are expected to attend to the care needs of their family members from abroad and to 'sacrifice' their ambitions, goals, and desires to express familial commitment. For instance, when examining perceptions of 'left-behind' children in the Philippines, Parreñas (2005b) discovered that children tend to more readily accept their father's labour migration compared to their mother's for they believe that a father's occasional or distant involvement in care provision is more closely aligned with his role as a breadwinner (see also Hoang & Yeoh, 2015).

Migrant women find it difficult to resist the social pressures to remit money 'home' even when they face dire economic conditions in their countries of destination. The moral demands placed upon low-wage migrant women, which create new forms of care needs and material dependence in their 'left behind' families, can have serious consequences for migrant women by making them vulnerable to exploitation on the labour market as they may feel compelled to remain in disadvantageous (or even exploitative) economic situations to uphold the moral obligation to remit (see, for example, Marchetti, Basa & Guzman, 2012; Solari, 2019; Thai, 2012; Åkesson, 2009; Vietti, 2019 [2010]). Therefore, the moral obligation to continue care from afar and express that care through a constant flow of remittances can '[lock] women even further into the global care chains' (Basa, Harcourt & Zarro, 2011:12).

2.2.2. Money and changes in gender relations in transnational families

The second line of research which addresses the broader question of how migrant women might achieve empowerment, in their families, through money, pays attention to cultural values and beliefs that influences gender differences in remitting practice, which scholars consider to be rather malleable and adaptable to change with migration experience. Despite acknowledging that remittances mask and reproduce broader gender differentiation in transnational families, as discussed in the previous section, these scholars argue that money simultaneously retains the capacity to challenge inequality in family relations (Zelizer, 2023). They pay attention to moments of negotiations and contestation of monetary practices which has the potential to lead to the breakdown of gendered roles in traditional families. Evidence suggests that migrant women's ability to materially support those 'at home' translates into positive effects on their status within the family. The increasing prevalence of women as primary earners in transnational families allows women to exercise greater decision-making power that can challenge and modify traditional gender ideologies (for Vietnamese see Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; for Korean Chinese see Kwon, 2015; for Ghanaian see Coe, 2011).

Transformations in gendered roles and family relations through money are most clearly manifested in instances when migrant women deploy bargaining power in their remittance handling. Women exert their influence over remittances by choosing to whom, how much, and how often they send money 'home.' In addition, women impose their requests over the management of money. They request remittances be used and spent in specific ways, for example, buying property, paying for education, and covering healthcare fees (e.g. Simioni & Voirol, 2021; Thai, 2014). Being away means that women cannot exercise full control over the use of remittances; they must rely on trust in others to commit money according to their instructions. Managing remittances carefully signals the virtue of non-migrant family members who are entrusted to put remittances to 'good use' (Kwon, 2015). However, migrant women may return 'home' to find that non-migrants did not comply with their instructions as they may have spent 'hard-earned money' on matters deemed unworthy by migrant women such as gambling activities and bets (e.g. Yeoh et al., 2013), celebrations and consumption goods (e.g. Simoni & Voirol, 2021; Thai, 2014; Hanneford, 2016). In the event of broken trust, migrant women may exercise their authority as money owners. They rework their social ties to reflect changes in their familial obligations and commitments, and may even end up excluding untrustworthy relatives from the remittance circuit (e.g. Yeoh et al., 2013). Accordingly, they assert their power and control over

remittances, ensuring that the money is directed to identified goals and shared with recipients willing to collaborate.

Transcending the focus on the economic function of money and avoiding the tendency to subsume money to the cultural order within which it circulates, remittance typologies proposed by Carling (2014) as an analytical tool to investigate money in the context of migration provide better venues for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of migration and money. This sociological reading of remittances articulates both the economic and symbolic values of money and inscribe remittance-sending behaviour in a social practice embedded in family and community relations (Meyer, 2023; Page & Mercer, 2012). As a social practice, earmarking remittance is influenced by 'structures of expectations for specific types of situations' that establish each person's 'roles, actions, and statuses' which are 'recognized by a social group', even if implicitly (Carling, 2014:S221). Put differently, in the context of transnational family migration, family members draw upon available cultural scripts when they deal with money. These consist mostly of implicit knowledge that creates a shared meaning of each person's social position engaged in a context-specific transaction. (I return to the discussion on cultural scripts in the next section.)

Based on a systematic review of empirical evidence on remittances, Carling (2014) proposes twelve 'scripts' that guide people in their practice of 'sending money home.' These are compensation, repayment, authorisation, pooling, gifts, allowances, obligation and entitlement, sacrifice, blackmail, help, investments, and donations. Della Puppa & Ambrosini (2022) found that, most frequently, remittances are construed as a form of 'compensation' wherein there exists an implicit understanding that the physical absence of migrants necessitates 'compensation.' In this frame, non-migrant family members often feel 'entitled' to receive remittances, viewing them as 'gifts' from migrants who they believe have a familial 'obligation' to send money back. However, remittances can also serve as 'compensation' for services rendered by non-migrant family members, particularly hands-on caregiving. Additionally, remittances can be characterised as a 'repayment' when migrants refund the costs associated with their migration, especially if these expenses were initially borne by their families. Finally, remittances can be framed as dedicated 'investments' when migrants direct their monetary contributions toward economic objectives intended to diversify either their own or their family's income within their home country. Importantly, however, rather than blindly following the scripts available to them, people actively and creatively engage with scripts to conform to or change their meanings (Carling, 2014). In this reading of remittance, money became a way of social positioning in migrants' families that

allows individuals to deal with conflict, negotiate demands, and other emotional challenges because they can draw on remittance scripts to accomplish their goals by mixing personal aspirations, social norms, and collective expectations (Meyer, 2023) .

Despite important achievements in revealing the highly diverse ways in which migrants navigate issues of obligation, morality, care, as well as conflict and tension in their transnational families, the analytical framework of scripting remittances (Carling, 2014), however, has two notable shortcomings in my view. Firstly, although the remittance typology effectively steer clear from attributing monetary behaviours solely to cultural influences (such as gender ideologies), it tends to neglect gender-specific nuances in economic transactions. Secondly, since it is primarily focused on the social significance of remittances as they are diffused in the transnational household economy, it portrays discontinued representations of migrant money. The source of women's remittances as wages from work performed abroad and women's everyday experiences with budgeting money and prioritising remittances remain unacknowledged. Consequently, the unique challenges faced by migrant women as they strive to balance their well-being abroad with their family responsibilities towards those 'left behind' are not adequately addressed. Borrowing from the sociology of money, as I discuss in the next section, this dissertation reconstructs—through the lens of money—different aspects of migrant women's collective and individual lives, including work, family, and consumption. The three pieces of money earmarked by the respondents described and analysed in the empirical chapters of this dissertation reveal continuity in the economic lives of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy for whom money is not only earmarked for transmission 'home' but also for personal consumption in Italy. I show that money earned from their wages as live-in care workers abroad is earmarked by migrant women as communal money and framed as a family 'obligation' (see Chapter 6), as courtesy money and framed as 'gifts' (see Chapter 7) when transferred home. Moreover, migrant women also retain from their salaries pocket money for themselves, framing it as their own 'entitlement' for their stay abroad and for the sacrifices made for the benefit of their loved ones (see Chapter 8).

2.3. The social meaning of money

Economics and classical sociology discuss money strictly in terms of its functions. The recurring identification of three fundamental functions portrays money as a uniform and fungible entity. It is viewed as an abstract and universal medium of exchange, serving as a

widely accepted unit of account[2] (Gilbert, 2005; Dodd, 2016; Zelizer, 2010b, 2005b[1998]; among others). This understanding can be traced back to classical sociologists. For Simmel (2011[1900]) money is a 'technically perfect' tool (page 137) highly efficient for economic exchange. The author contends that money's most distinctive attribute is its quality as 'the value of values' (page 263), which is solely determined by its quantity. This value-neutral view of money serving solely as a symbolic means of exchange places utmost importance on money's universal fungibility and limitless capacity to circulate between different social spheres (Bandelj, Wherry & Zelizer, 2017; Gilbert, 2005; Dodd, 2016; Zelizer, 2010b, 2005b[1998]; among others).

This structuralist view which renders money as an 'absolutely fungible, qualitatively neutral, infinitely divisible, entirely homogeneous medium of market exchange' (Zelizer, 2021[1994]:10) concedes that money is a fundamental category capable of driving social change in modern societies (Baker & Jimerson, 1992). Simmel (2011[1900]) saw societies as 'progressing' from 'primitive' towards modern, and money played an important role in mediating this transition. As goods and services increasingly become available for buy and sell on the market through money, money creates an ever-expanding market. The proliferation of money in modern societies implies that it is decoupled from the closely knit networks of personal relationships structured by forms of alliances based on kinship or loyalty characteristic of 'primitive' societies, towards more loose networks of impersonal affiliations bound together by the exchange of money. Unencumbered by cultural or social norms and indifferent to 'particular interests, origins, or relations' (Simmel, 2011[1900]:478), money acquires 'absolute freedom from everything personal' (Simmel, 2011[1900]:156). Its unremitting orientation to 'abstract economic value' (Simmel, 2011[1900]:127) transforms non-economic values, including moral and emotional considerations, into an 'arithmetic problem' (Simmel, 2011[1900]:481). Closely linked to money's indifference to the cultural meanings and social relations that create the context for exchange is a process of reification described by Simmel through which money thus endowed with 'economic consciousness' (Deflem, 2003: 72) leads to rationalisation that progressively expands into all aspects of social life. In modern societies, money wields its impact by reifying social connections into impersonal cost-benefit alliances, rather than emotional and personal bonds that are structured by kinship or loyalty-based alliances, which are typical of 'primitive' societies.

[2] The case of Romania prompts special interests as durable, valuable goods, such as real estate, are advertised with their price in euro (unit of account), though only lei, the national official currency (medium of exchange), can be used for exchange.

Cultural perspectives of money are articulated within anthropological studies that seek to re-embed money within social relations. They provide accounts of pre-modern money that stress its constructivist nature and examine it as cultural products embedded in power relations and kinship structures (Baker & Jimerson, 1992). Centering their analysis on 'pre-modern', 'primitive', or otherwise called 'limited purpose' currencies (Polanyi, 2001[1944]), that is currencies that circulate in non-capitalist and non-market societies, anthropologists explore the extra-economic factors involved when people in non-market societies earmark their money. Anthropologists emphasised that within certain 'primitive' societies, money acquired distinct qualities. For instance, building on Polanyi's (2001[1944]) distinctions between 'limited purpose' and 'general purpose' or 'all-purpose' money, economic anthropologist Paul Bohannan (1959) shows that before their colonisation by the British, the Tiv economy consisted of different 'spheres of exchange' where multiple currencies circulated simultaneously. Each object had a 'limited purpose' in that it belonged to a certain sphere exchange where it could only be transacted for something similar from within the same sphere. Restricted in the purposes for which it could be used, foodstuffs belonged to the basic sphere of necessities where it was obtained through social ties, and could not be exchanged for prestige goods such as slaves and wives. The 'special purposes' of currencies limited not only how they could be used but also who could legitimately negotiate different types of exchange across spheres of value that were morally and ritually ranked (Maurer, 2006). Bohannan (1959) shows that, in the Tiv economy, currencies exchanged within the same sphere did not raise any concern, as they were morally neutral 'conveyance' as opposed to morally charged 'conversions' across different spheres of value and exchange. Despite their valuable contributions to exploring the cultural dimension of money and its influence on economic behaviour, anthropological viewpoints run the risk of perceiving culture as a rigid structure, constrained by customs and social rules which necessarily determine people's economic behaviour. Alternative explanations of culture and economic activity are offered by sociologists who take 'modern' money in capitalist market economies as their object of investigation.

The theoretical approach underpinning this dissertation is informed by a cultural perspective in sociological articulations of money (cf. authors such as Viviana Zelizer, Ariel Wilkis, Nina Bandelj, Supriya Singh, Hung Cam Thai, among others), which provides an analytical lens for studying transnational household moral economy. From a cultural standpoint, the sociology of money focuses on the values, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals that shape economic activities carried out by means of social interaction. In this framework,

culture is not perceived as a detached force influencing or transcending social life but as an integral component of social relations (Tilly, 2008 as cited in Zelizer, 2023:14). This approach views culture as a dynamic and context-contingent collection of 'shared understandings and their representations in symbols and practices' (Zelizer, 2010b:2) which inform economic activity and interaction.

Sociologists of money highlight cultural scripts and interpersonal ties as crucial elements in understanding economic transactions. In this dissertation, I conceptualise money meaning as a cultural script (Bandelj et al., 2021) or toolkit (Swidler, 1986) that individuals use to pursue their interests by means of economic exchange. Money meanings are important when migrant women attempt to convey their family sense of belonging across time and space in their dealings with money, as I discuss in Chapters 6 and 7. Furthermore, money meanings are also important when migrant women allocate money for their own personal use, as I discuss in Chapter 8. As I show, money meanings are not solely the outcome of individuals' interactions but they are embedded in a family structure and influenced by what people consider 'good' and 'bad' ways to behave according to one's role and position within that structure. These aspects descend from the two dimensions of cultural scripts. Firstly, cultural scripts are rooted in enduring cultural norms and beliefs, infused with an emotional undertone (Bandelj, 2009; Bandelj & Kim, 2023), moral evaluations (Zelizer, 2010b; Bandelj et al., 2017), and power asymmetry (Bandelj, 2012). These scripts provide individuals guidance on how they should act, behave, and feel in given situations, based on commonly held assumptions regarding their social roles, identity, and positioning in a given social interaction. Secondly, cultural scripts manifest in social interaction as individuals, who, instead of merely applying them, draw on available cultural scripts in their pursuit of accomplishing economic activities (Bandelj et al., 2021). They adapt and negotiate these scripts in socio-cultural settings that create the context of their exchange.

2.3.1. 'Special money'

The idea that 'special purpose' money exists in market economies as 'earmarked money' was further elaborated on by feminist sociologist of money Viviana Zelizer (1989, 2010b, 2021[1994]) who shows that people using market money in capitalist societies continue to distinguish between their money and integrate it in their relationships in meaningful ways. Situating the practice of earmarking within the sphere of household economy, Zelizer (2010b)

documents how money in middle-class families in the late 19th and early 20th century USA (United States of America) has more uses which include economic and extra-economic considerations. Her historical investigation unveils the existence of distinct 'domestic currencies', including 'pin money', 'family wage', 'housekeeping allowance', and 'child allowance'. Each of these forms of payment carries distinct social connotations, intertwined with differences in gender and social position of economic actors. For instance, the term 'pin money' was assigned to women's earnings, suggested small sums earned by women, and portrayed them as a supplementary source of income within the household economy. Pin money stood in contrast to men's earnings which were regarded as the 'family wage.' Despite the actual usage of pin money for household provisions and their substantial contribution to family finances, women's funds were considered suitable only for self-indulgent expenditures (Zelizer; 2010b; see also Staves, 1985; Harkness et al., 1997; Traflet, 2008; Kessler-Harris, 2014). By being money earned by working women, pin money bore gendered characteristics that transcended the confines of the household and reflected societal norms regarding women's 'appropriate' role in society. In the prevailing ideal family model, women were expected to prioritise their commitment to the home and their primary role as caregivers (see Section 2.1 in this chapter). Consequently, they were not anticipated to provide financial support for themselves or their families. These assumptions were reflected in the compensation level for working women which legitimated employers' exploitation by underpaying women since women's livelihood was considered to not depend on their earnings. The function of women's wages was to ensure that they remained dependent on the wages provided by their husbands and that their primary commitment remained to their families. Just as women's work roles were secondary to their family roles, their pin money is secondary to men's family wage. Therefore, the small sums of women's money are not only quantitatively distinct but also carry symbolic weight in that they capture the ensuing social anxieties about women's access to wage labour and their workforce participation. Read in this way, despite being a domestic currency circulating in the private sphere, the belittling of women's wage or pin money as insignificant to the family's budget reveals a perceived threat to men's family wage (Zelizer, 2010b; see also Folbre, 2009; Kessler-Harris, 2014, 2018).

Zelizer deploys archival evidence, and her research primarily focuses on exploring the historical aspects of money in previously overlooked economic areas, such as the household economy in Western societies (England & Folbre, 2005). However, I contend that it is crucial to recognise that the true importance of her work lies not so much in the precise significance of money within a particular time and space but rather in understanding how market money

can embody meanings that surpass its numerical value. As I will show in this thesis, the earmarked remittances carry significance within the context of family migration. Allocating, budgeting, and transferring money for 'special purposes' are evident practices among the respondents.

The 'special vocabulary' used to create and demarcate between different categories of otherwise fungible money (Zelizer, 1989), shows that—apart from the intervention of state authorities that are uniquely endowed with the ability to create and enforce the use of currencies, thereby rendering money homogenous (see, for instance, Fine & Lapavitsas, 2000; Ingham, 2001)—people rely on cultural scripts to introduce additional dimensions to economic transactions in their social relationships that go beyond the mere economic value of money, which itself is the result of political intervention. As a practice, earmarking implies that people assign different meanings to money that reflect moral evaluations which place restrictions on who can claim money, how it can be used, and who should allocate money, thereby ensuring that 'not all dollars are equal' (Zelizer, 1989:343). Furthermore, by assigning different meanings to different money people engage in a practice through which they distinguish between their money, on the one hand, and between different social ties with the intention of indicating the nature of these relationships, on the other hand (Zelizer, 2010b, 2005b[1998]). Alternatively, Bendelj noted that 'not only is money earmarked for different uses, but money earmarks relations' (Bandelj, 2020:259)

For instance, Carling argues that 'when a mother gives money to a child, it carries different meaning in a context where she cannot simultaneously provide physical affection' (Carling, 2014:230). Parreñas found that, for migrant mothers, remittances are 'not just a cash transaction' but one of the ways through which they 'establish intimacy across borders' (Parreñas,2005a:324). The entanglement of emotional and economic transfers that circulate alongside in transnational families has been investigated in recent years under diverse terms such as 'affectionate remittances' (McCallum, 2022), 'emotional remittance' (Huennekes, 2018), and 'intimate remittance' (Hannaford, 2016). Each of these concepts refers in some way to how the spheres of economy and family life intersect and interact with one another, and how individuals in transnational families manage long-distance intimacy. Thus, rather than a simple household budgeting or typical economic transaction in the marketplace, a migrant mother earmarking money for her 'left behind' child is a relational process. In the context of mother-child separation, where opportunities for accomplishing acts of care are fewer, remittances receive a symbolic significance as sending money home serves to

strengthen rather than weaken the mother-child bond, and becomes the means through which migrant mothers acknowledge and fulfil their motherly responsibility from afar.

Because the 'special vocabulary' of money may, at times, be at odds with how individuals themselves seek to personalise money (see the example of pin money above), in this dissertation, I do not regard remittances as having a unifying meaning that extends over all transnational families. Empirical studies suggest that remittances can have different meanings depending on how people incorporate money into their relationships. For instance, in Indian transnational families, remittances may, at times, act as a 'medium of care and belonging' across national borders (Singh et al., 2012; Singh, 2016). Singh (2016) shows that the effectiveness of money in expressing feelings of care hinges upon the quality of communication between transnational family members. Specifically, when communication is frequent and instantaneous, family members view monetary transfers as the symbolic expression of care that it stands for. However, when communication is strained, remittances are insufficient to replace the deeper emotional connection that migrants wish to convey through their monetary transfers. Then money has the potential to exacerbate feelings of emotional separation thus becoming a 'medium of distance' (Bandelj, 2020). In addition, in the same context of transnational families, Singh (2021) and colleagues (Singh & Sidhu, 2022) show that money can also turn into a 'medium of economic abuse' if migrants resort to covert or overt forms of violence to coercively and abusively extract resources from their spouses to support their 'left behind' family members. Alternatively, the meaning of money is also shaped by who has access to remittances and the social context in which they are spent. In Vietnam, remittances are seen as a 'currency of status' with migrants spending money on frivolous consumption during return visits to elevate their status as low-wage workers in the USA (Thai, 2014). For non-migrants in the same social context, remittances become a 'currency of imagination', inspiring hopes and desires of social mobility through migration (Small, 2019). In light of the above, I agree with Carling (2014) who argues that, in family migration, 'money is special in different ways' (page S252). In this dissertation I pay attention to how negotiations and contestation of the meaning of remittances and practices occur in migrant women's families.

Another author whose ideas inspired this dissertation is Ariel Wilkis (2017). He expanded on the Zelizerian framework of multiple money, illustrating not only that money holds multiple meanings but also that different types of money co-exist in the lives of low-income, marginalised people. Wilkis (2017) conducted ethnography among the residents of a slum near Buenos Aires, Argentina. Reconstructing the various pieces of money in the

economic lives of the poor, Wilkis distinguishes between a total of six pieces of money which are illustrated in his book: 'earned' money derived from income in the informal and (sometimes) illegal economy; 'lent' money enabled through the family network and associated with the growing financialisation in the economic lives of the poor; 'donated' money which refers to the recent establishment of conditional cash transfers in Argentina; 'political' money that includes various forms of payments which express mutual obligations among the political actors and their supporters; 'sacrificed' money associated with transfers to churches and charity work; and, finally, 'safeguarded' money associated with family networks of economic support. He shows that each piece of money carries distinct moral meanings based on users' perceptions regarding how money should be managed, received, spent, lent, and saved. Functioning as 'moral accounting units' each piece of money reveals, through its circulation, the moral standing of individuals which informs the places they occupy in power relations within their own family and community, and ultimately the social order within which money circulates.

Although the author concentrates primarily on the economic lives of residents in slums, his work is pertinent to this dissertation as it prompts a series of inquiries. Specifically, within the moral economy framework of family migration in post-socialist Romania and the economic activities of care workers in Italy, particularly those engaged in live-in employment, how does this cultural context influence care workers' meanings and uses of money? What distinct pieces of money, different from those exposed by Wilkis, may appear relevant for care workers and can be identifiable in concrete situations? Thus to a certain extent, this thesis is inspired by the work of Wilkis (2017). The common thread of our analysis of money is to understand how different pieces of money can co-exist, even if not always in a harmonious fashion, in the social life of low-income, marginalised people. However, unlike Wilkis who investigated the link between money and morality reflected in the social hierarchy that money conveys as it circulates in social relations revealing social inequalities on a national level, this dissertation adopts an emic perspective incorporating a culturally specific perspective on money in the research, and contributes by asking what kind of pieces of money 'emerge' from the narrative of Romanian care workers in Italy as important in their lives? And why?

The empirical chapters of this dissertation discuss the emergence of three pieces of 'special money' that I observed doing fieldwork with Romanian care workers in Italy. Utilising the concepts of communal, courtesy, and pocket money, each imbued with its unique meaning and used for different purposes, I construct the overarching argument in this

dissertation that each piece of money carries distinct social significance beyond its financial value. These three pieces of money help contextualise the diversity of money and its use among Romanian live-in care workers in Italy.

As I discuss in this dissertation, the meanings and uses of communal, courtesy, and pocket money have categorical overlaps. While I describe the pieces of money from the perspective of care workers in Italy, how non-migrant family members use money may transgress the special purposes for which they were intended. For instance, courtesy money, destined for indulgences and small treats, can be used by non-migrants to improve housing conditions (see Section 7.2 in Chapter 7). Similarly, communal money destined for advancing the family's economic goals may be misused by non-migrants who spend it on parties and celebrations (see Section 6.3 in Chapter 6). Furthermore, beyond these three pieces of money, there emerged other types of money that are not given attention in this dissertation. I discuss one example of loaned money in Chapter 5.

Central to the earmarking of special money (Wherry, 2016; Bandelj, 2020) is the concept of 'relational work' (Zelizer, 2010b). It seeks to put forth the argument that, despite symbolic boundaries seeking to separate economic and social spheres (Zelizer, 2005b[1998], 2010b), the manner in which people blend personal with economic considerations in their transactions suggests that, in practice, economic and cultural factors intermingle and influence economic exchange. Relational work is comprised of four elements (Zelizer, 2005b[1998], 2010b): (1) Relations range from deeply intimate to entirely impersonal, from enduring, long-lasting to momentary, fleeting. They are based on durable commonly shared understandings, practices, and obligations between two or more people; (2) Transactions include all forms of social interaction that imply any form of economic exchange, such as production, consumption, and redistribution of goods and resources; (3) Payment media encompass the diverse means by which economic exchanges are facilitated. While money is a prominent example, media includes other tokens such as gifts, or favours; and finally, (4) Negotiating meanings related to rules that govern relations, proper behaviour regarding transactions, and afferent types of payment media that correspond to the type of relation people are trying to establish, maintain, reinforce, or subvert by means of relational work.

Feminist economic sociologist Nina Bandelj (2015, 2020) contends that much of the relational work involved in economic interactions can be concealed when transactions follow established, ritualised, or habitual patterns of engagement. For instance, using the context of everyday shopping, she distinguishes between different socio-cultural settings, namely the supermarket and the flea market, to illustrate that relational work becomes more visible when

explicit negotiation is expected to accomplish economic transactions, such as haggling for a better price. While certain standardised interactions, like the expectation to pay a fixed price at a supermarket rather than bargain for a better price, referred to as 'routinized scripts of interaction' by Bandelj (2020), may be in place to ensure economic activities follow a standardised format rather than being negotiated from scratch, it remains true that all economic exchanges involve some degree of relational work, even if it operates in the background. This is because people take great care to ensure that they establish 'viable matches among relations, transactions, media, and boundaries.' (Zelizer, 2005b[1998]: 36).

Expanding on the concept of 'relational work,' Bandelj (2012; 2020) includes power negotiations in economic interactions. When relational work is obscured in routine interactions, power differentials are also obscured in return. These power differentials are 'part and parcel of relational work' (Bandelj, 2012:180) and are attached to social categories that determine where one is positioned in the uneven field of economic exchange. Nevertheless, assessments relating to the social category one belongs to are always at play in the economic exchange, including in ways that are not immediately obvious. These assessments inform whose interests take priority in the allocation of resources (Zelizer, 2012). Roscigno (2011:352) contents that economic 'actors often gauge the worth and strength of exchange partners' based on 'historically and culturally proscribed status hierarchies' that signal where others are located in the social order based on the social categories one belongs to, such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Bandelj et al. (2021) introduced the concept of 'gendered relational work' to underscore the influence that assessments regarding one's gender, and which structure relational work, have on maintaining inequalities in the exchange. By drawing on social interactionist theories of gender performance (West & Zimmerman, 1987), Bandelj et al. (2021) argue that gender is constructed and reconstructed across a variety of economic interactions. According to the authors, people rely on 'gendered cultural scripts' to frame their economic behaviour, and these scripts are shaped by cultural expectations which inform how one is expected to act and behave in a given context according to one's gender. This means that how individuals perform gender is intertwined with how they handle money, i.e. 'how one "does gender" intersects with how one "does money"' (Bandelj et al., 2021:15).

As mentioned previously, relational work is made visible in moments in which people *need* to make the additional effort to explicitly justify their reasons for matching certain relationships with transactions and payments media in their economic exchange. For instance, care chain literature that investigates the effects of migrant women's higher income on their

position in the family found that women try to mask the changes in earning power and childcare provisions within their transnational families. Parreñas (2005b) shows that migrating Filipino mothers make their migration acceptable to their families not only by remitting large portions of their wages but also by engaging in intensive mothering from afar (see Section 2.1.1). For fear of being labelled as 'deviant mothers,' migrant women who become breadwinners for their families, respond to the social pressures to continue their roles as carers even from afar by engaging in intensive communication with 'left behind' family members thereby ensuring that children are taken care of (Parreñas,2005b; see also Chib et al., 2014). According to Bandelj et al. (2021) these 'gendered dubious' transactions in which women challenge the traditional male breadwinner's role as they assume primary responsibility to provide materially for their families necessitate women to perform gendered relational work through which they enact the traditional ideology of male breadwinner/female caregiver to preserve the economic identities of the family members and maintain their role as carers, even if from afar. Apart from negotiating gender differences in family relations, equally significant for rendering relational work visible are 'morally dubious' transactions, as I discuss next.

2.3.2. Moral economy framework for studying money in transnational families

Historian economist E.P. Thompson (1971, 1991) puts forth the concept of the moral economy to emphasise that individuals, as members of their community, possess the ability to act purposefully based on historically informed customs and morally guided evaluations of fair and just economic practices (Bolton & Laaser, 2013). E.P. Thompson (1971, 1991) investigates spontaneous food riots that occurred in 18th century England during the rise of the market economy. These riots were sparked by the combination of high unemployment rates and escalating prices that turned bread, the main staple of the people's everyday diet, into an expensive commodity accounting for a significant portion of people's expenses. This event sparked fury among the impoverished and led to clashes between workers and owners of factories and stores. Mothers played a decisive role in rebellions by violently confronting bakers and grain sellers and making demands for price decreases. E.P. Thompson goes on to argue that not just poverty and hunger prompted these reactions, for the poor in the pre-capitalist English economy were guided by moral assumptions through which they judged the price of bread according to moral assumptions of 'fairness' and 'deservingness'.

When prices were raised beyond what the poor could afford 'it appeared to be "unnatural" that any man should profit from the necessities of others' (Thompson, 1991:253). People expected society to function according to a moral economy: 'within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate [economic] practices' (Thompson, 1991:188).

Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta (2016) observe that, departing from the original Thomposonian approach, the literature applying the moral economy framework emphasises values to the detriment of economic aspects of transactions. The growing attention to norms and values *per se* at the expense of a thorough investigation of the material and conflictual dimensions of economic exchange, diverge from the original rumination of moral economy. As originally proposed by Thompson, moral economy is a framework for articulating a conception of norms and values that are not rooted in 'the thin air of "meanings, attitudes and values"' (Thompson, 1991: 7) but in historically inherited norms and values and shared experiences of the material context where power asymmetries, exploitation, and class struggles play out (Bolton & Laaser, 2012). These historical legacies and shared experiences create expectations of just and unjust economic practices which, to be understood, necessarily require paying critical attention to the tensions and conflicts arising out of divergent positioning of economic actors within the social fields of inequalities (Edelman, 2012). As warned by Thompson (1991) and reiterated by other moral economists after him, the decoupling of 'moral' from 'economy' results in culturalization (Fassin, 2011) and depoliticisation (Edelman, 2012) of economic concerns, which, in turn, weakens the analytical purchase of a moral economy framework.

Expanding on this approach and drawing from my fieldwork observations, the remittance transfers among the transnational families of my participants could be examined through the lens of a moral economy framework as previously described. Early on in my fieldwork, I observed that all economic transactions had at their core a blend of moral and economic considerations. The moral dimension was reflected in how respondents assessed what constituted 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' money use which signalled to them something about the moral worthiness of the person handling money. Simultaneously, the economic dimension was evident in the fact that all transactions inherently involved the exchange of money and sometimes included other goods and resources.

The study of moral economy as an analytical framework in the context of family migration is relatively rare. Simoni and Voirol (2021) claim that migration scholars have not explicitly addressed the moral dimensions of remittances, which have been embedded into

broader discussions of familial obligations and subsumed to the unspoken rules that guide the behaviour in family relations (as discussed in previous sections of this chapter, see also Simoni, 2016). To prevent diluting the analytical capacity of a moral inquiry into economic practices in migration, they introduce the term ‘moral remittances’ as a heuristic tool to study the ways in which beliefs, values, and customs are embedded into remittance transfers. Thompson (1991) argues that ‘the moral economy is summoned into being’ (page 340) when people reflexively and explicitly respond to what they acknowledge as moral deficiencies of economic practice. Drawing on this argument, Simoni and Voirol (2021) propose that the moral dimensions of remittances are made evident in ‘moments [of] moral breakdowns’ (page 2518). These ‘moments of crisis’ when remittances fail to fulfil their symbolic significance or when migrants do not meet the social and cultural obligations that are linked with their roles and responsibilities (see also Cohen, 2021), require migrants to reflexively and explicitly justify their actions, thereby making evident moral obligations and expectations regarding remittances.

Considering this, engagement with a Zelizerian model of money can shed light on the negotiations that go on between family members separated by migration and can reveal the empirical dimension of the moral economy of remittance. For Zelizer, money does not have any inherent meaning but it is rather people who impute meaning onto money. Relational work is a concept that allows researchers to understand how people constantly navigate the morally fraught terrain of interpersonal and economic interactions (Bandelj, 2017). When considering culture, as discussed in this chapter and applied in this thesis, as shaping values, beliefs, and customs that draw the boundaries between transactions considered as legitimate or illegitimate, thus creating the cultural scripts that people engage with to craft their behaviour and responses in economic interactions, the key question shifts away from socially and culturally imposed moral categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ economic exchanges. Instead, the focus turns to how people invest money with moral meanings that delineate what is considered acceptable, fair, and good from what is deemed unacceptable, unjust, and bad forms of economic exchange. In this light, the entanglement of morals and money is not necessarily corrupting but rather exposes those moral assessments that individuals already possess as they use money to create distinctions in their social ties (Zelizer, 2010b,2005b[1998]), and on occasions, to morally evaluate and judge others (Wilkis, 2017).

It is in this context of performing a moral economy that I understand the normative moral dimensions of economic practices of my respondents. Following Simoni (2016) who argues for the privilege of the viewpoint of those engaged in economic exchange, this

dissertation pays attention to the moral justifications that respondents attached to their practices, expectations, and demands underlying economic transactions. Rather than dismissing these as mere outcomes of socio-cultural constraints imposed by notions of family in specific cultural settings, this study aims to take seriously the moral reasoning through which migrant women justify their behaviour and evaluate others' as they navigate economic and interpersonal exchanges.

Chapter 3. Methodological challenges and reflections

3.1. Personal interest in the research topic and entrance in the field

This chapter is informed by recent feminist insights into qualitative research which considers the researcher's positionality and its pivotal role in shaping the research process (Naples, 2003; Moser, 2008). Common conceptions on positionality discuss similarities and differences between the researcher and researched participants in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic background, among others, and often debate the advantages of 'sameness' for conducting ethnographic field research. When the ethnographer shares similar identities and social position it confers her some degree of 'insider' status which she can capitalise on to gain access to places and people 'researched.' Leveraging previous knowledge and drawing upon existing social networks becomes strategic tools for ethnographers to negotiate their entry into the field (Reyes, 2020). But more than the sum of social differences and similarities, the varying subjectivities the researcher brings and confronts into the field need to be examined carefully. Through the lens of reflexivity, feminist scholars argue, the researcher can consciously and explicitly acknowledge and examine the assumptions that have guided and shaped the research project at various stages (e.g. Naples, 2003; Shinozaki, 2021).

Contributing to this discussion, I argue, that the researcher's reflections of her positionality begin long before she ventures into the field. Her personal biography and lived experiences shape her motivation and interests that prompts her to gravitate towards a particular research topic. It can hardly be so since our sociological imagination (Wright-Mills, 2000[1959]) develops as we seek to understand our own personal predicaments, which, in turn, necessitates comprehending how factors and actors far removed from our immediate social context have shaped our circumstances. My motivation to investigate the experiences of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy, especially those in live-in employment, stems from my own experiences as a member of a Romanian working-class family who has had to endure the emotional strains of long-term and

long-distance separation from my father, and eventually my mother. Growing up during the so-called 'transition' to 'free market' economy, when job opportunities that provided decent pay for decent living were limited, international labour migration was often presented to me as the 'only' solution for meeting the family's most basic needs for shelter, food, education, and healthcare. In the summer of 2010 when I first visited my mother abroad, I spent weeks walking through the quaint cobbler streets of a picturesque Northern Italian city. With time I began to record the presence of women, many of whom were around my mother's age, diligently going about their daily routines. They pushed wheelchairs, assisted the elderly with their steps, and carried hefty bags of groceries. These women conversed in Romanian language about their work, family, and social life in Italy. Listening into their conversations a sense of familiarity engulfed me. I found myself grappling with a question that I was not, at that time, able to put into words but a lingering curiosity stayed with me for many years to come: how do migrant women manage and experience their social and economic lives in Romania and abroad?

As a PhD student, again in Italy but this time in a different city located in the North Eastern region of Veneto, the question of money—the lack of money, migrating for money, the burden of financially supporting family 'back home,' the importance of money for building social connections abroad—ubiquitous in the lives of my respondents, gradually became guiding posts for this dissertation. This dissertation aims to (albeit) partially answer these concerns. To gather data among this particularly 'invisible' research population, the best approach was to conduct ethnographic research. Immersed myself in the daily lives and routines of Romanian care workers in Italy, I visited them weekly, attended church services, waited with them on park benches, and accompanied them in their daily activities as they runned errands and socialised with friends and family in Italy. In this way, I gained a sense of the richness of care workers' everyday economy. As I returned to Romania in the 'writing-up' stage of this dissertation, I connected with non-migrants whose mothers, aunts, and sisters were employed as live-in care workers in Italy. As I spent more time with them I was struck by the limited knowledge that they seemed to have with regards to the lives of their family members in Italy. The knowledge they possess seems to be limited to 'Italian sindrome,' a term introduced by Ukranian psychologists to describe a set of debilitating symptoms affecting returned Eastern European migrant women who had previously worked as live-in care workers in Italy (Redini et al., 2020). Surprisingly, the emotional suffering of migrant women is vaguely depicted in Romanian national media and political discourse, despite an increasing number of returned migrant women with symptoms of depression

admitted in psychiatric wards across many cities in Romania, including my hometown. A person employed for a large psychiatric ward, with expertise in assisting women returning from Italy, shared concerns about the lack of comprehensive data on this issue, expressing worry that the Romanian government may not be fully aware of the extent of the situation. These discussions in Romania provided valuable insights, enhancing my understanding of the experiences of live-in care workers in Italy.

The core empirical research material that forms the basis of this dissertation draws from ethnographic research carried out from April 2021 to May 2022 in Veneto, one of regions with the largest concentration of Romanian migrants in Italy. Data collection was carried out in and around Padua, Chioggia, Venice, Abano Terme, among other places. In most of my interviews respondents admitted that these locations were not the initial places of migration to Italy. Many of them moved around and about Italy. Especially migrant women migrating before 2007, when Romania was not yet part of the EU, would arrive in the south of Italy were they found it easier to secure employment in the home of their employers, often without a contract. After they earned and saved enough money my respondents migrated North where they describe better wages, work opportunities and conditions.

Over a period of 13 months, I conducted 32 digitally recorded interviews and around 80 informal interviews with live-in and live-out Romanian care workers in Italy. A total of nine respondents belonging to four (extended) families were interviewed together and separately. These family interviews included three men. I found it useful to incorporate into the data collection the experiences of as many family members as possible, and always asked respondents to connect me with their family in Italy. This allowed for the emergence of a better picture with regards to the decision making processes regarding money management and control in the transnational families of my respondents. Interviews conducted together gave me the opportunity to observe how respondents express themselves as family. Additional eight interviews were conducted with key informants from the Romanian community in Italy as follows: two members of different Romanian socio-cultural associations; two operators working for one of the largest international parcels transportation catering for Romanians in Italy; three Romanian priests. In addition, I have also interviewed an Italian operator working for a non-governmental organisation that delivers financial education classes for migrant women in Italy.

This dissertation focuses mostly on the perspective of Romanian live-in care workers in Italy. In terms of the social category to which my respondents belong, I recruited respondents of different ages, gender, family situations, household configurations, with a

large majority of women engaged in care work occupation, often as live-in. The inclusion of a larger sample in the data collection of this dissertation was due to limitations I faced early on in the fieldwork. My respondents engaged in live-in employment experience isolation in the homes of their employers (see Chapter 5), and setting up interviews with them often required laborious organisation. Facing their unavailability for an interview, I revised my strategy and expanded my sample to include Romanian migrant women working in low-wage sectors such as hospitality industry, cleaning services, but often also as live-out care workers. Doing this I was surprised to learn that virtually all of the women I spoke with worked, at some point in their migratory experience (usually in the early years of their migration), as live-in care workers in Italy, as I will further discuss in Section 5.1 in Chapter 5 and Section 6.2 in Chapter 6.

These early fieldwork interactions, however, were pivotal in gaining access to live-in care workers. For instance, when discussing the difficulty of finding live-in care workers willing to sit down for an interview with me, respondents would surprise me by recommending new places where live-in care workers gather to spend their free time from work, such as certain public parks and squares around the city. Several contacts described this relation between live-in care workers and the streets by referring to them as 'stray dogs.' Geta, for example, commented: 'They wander the streets like dogs. What else can they do in their breaks if they are all alone in Italy.' This street-level presence marked by gender, occupation, and economic position of migrants, as well as their status of 'being alone' in Italy, which was reiterated by several of my respondents, opened my eyes and I began recording migrant women's presence in places beyond those indicated by my respondents. I learned that live-in care workers take breaks at 'unsociable' times in the day when the city is empty as most people are at work or retreating to their homes. In the absence of people to visit and errands to run, migrant women spent their free time in public parks and squares. I therefore decided to spend more time engaging in informal interactions with live-in care workers at the 'street level' and continued to meet people where they were. This approach proved most fruitful as I managed to approach migrant women 'in the streets' for public parks and squares doubled as spaces for socialisation. But it also gave me a sense of the precariousness of live-in employment as migrant women spend their time off from work in public squares as part of a strategy to save money abroad, a topic I discuss in Section 5.2 in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

From these initial important ethnographic fieldwork sites, such as streets, parks, public squares, I was able to recruit respondents who kindly agreed to meet up, and this

allowed me to couple informal conversations with in-depth interviews, and expand my respondents network in significant ways. I found it important to give respondents the freedom to choose the interview location as I aimed to create a comfortable atmosphere where they could freely share personal information. Additionally, I was curious to explore new places and experience the surroundings from their own unique perspectives as they often shared personal memories tied to the locations we were visiting. Interestingly, live-in care workers often comment on seeing the interview setting as an opportunity to socialise outdoors, often suggesting we meet for a cup of coffee instead of proposing their home/workplace.

3.2. Data collection

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, I did manage to gain access to participants. The rich empirical material onto which this dissertation is based meant that data collection was adapted to suit the specific context in which conversations and fieldwork took place.

Data collected derives from interviews and ethnographic fieldwork and forms a heterogenous source of empirical material that includes recorded interviews, a collection of conversations and stories heard, observation and participant observation, calls and texts, and a collection of artefacts in the form of photos, videos, and audio recordings either shared with me by my respondents or taken by me (whenever permission was granted).

Interviews progressed in different ways. According to the principles of grounded theory outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), throughout my ethnographic research, I consistently focused on several overarching 'generative questions.' Beyond capturing essential biographical details such as age, origin, migration history, and family structure of the respondents, my inquiry delved deeper. Specifically, I aimed to explore how practices of sending money 'back home' are enacted and experienced by my respondents, how they changed over time, how money is managed, and how economic decisions regarding money 'sent home' are being made. Understanding which actors participated in these practices and decisions, and why, was also a key aspect of my research. I structured the question to cover these specific topics that were of interest to this dissertation while, at the same time, allowing room to explore other themes and topics that were spontaneously introduced by my interlocutors in discussion (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 4 hours but the vast majority of them lasted around 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Informal conversations usually started with questions about my respondent's family and work in Italy, and they proceeded quickly to discussion about money. The topic of money was generally introduced by my respondents. My respondents often openly calculated their expenditure for those 'at home,' sharing with me extensive reports on how they make, manage, save, and send money 'home.' Interviews were carried out in Romanian language which is the mother tongue I share with my respondents. All interview excerpts in this dissertation were translated into English by me.

Time spent with respondents varied from one afternoon to a whole day during which I engaged in daily activities alongside my respondents. On my part, I tried to spend as much time with respondents as they would allow, applying the qualitative research technique of 'deep hanging out' (Geertz, 1998). I spend time with my respondents preparing lunch, eating together, shopping, taking long walks and short trips to nearby touristic spots. But for the most part, my fieldwork consisted in waiting on benches in public squares and parks, the main recreational activity of live-in care workers, in attending weekly Church services, and in chatting with care workers at a frequented international package delivery point. Thus apart from one-off meetings, I forged ongoing relationships with several respondents whom I regularly met, typically on a weekly basis. These next encounters provided the chance to stay updated on their current life situation. On occasions, I would seek their insights on various topics that emerged from my fieldwork. These respondents are featured prominently in the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

As mentioned earlier, for this study I recruited a diverse group of respondents. The sample included Romanian women in Italy who were engaged in the low skilled professions, including live-out care work employment. Their ages range from 36 years old to 65 years old. They are often married with young children in Italy. Importantly, they did not have ongoing financial obligations that necessitated regular remittance transfers to Romania (see Chapter 5, especially Section 5.4). They are featured prominently in Chapter 7. The inclusion of male respondents (related to the female respondents) in the research sample adds informative insights regarding money uses in families, especially in the context of migration. Although their narratives are not presented in this dissertation, they informed the background analysis for this dissertation.

Despite the somewhat diverse research sample, in this dissertation however, I refer mostly to the experiences of live-in care workers. Live-in employment, as I discuss in various places of this dissertation, allows for earning and remitting larger amounts of money as women do not have to pay for out of pocket expenses entailed in live-out employment and

instead depend entirely on their employers to cover basic living expenses, such as food and accommodation. These aspects of migrant women's economic lives prove fruitful for understanding how family practices are enacted and experienced across national borders. The ages of live-in care workers respondents range from 56 years old to 69 years old. With their families remaining in their country of origin, these women have progressively extended their duration of stay in Italy. The majority of them are married or widowed, and have adult children and often grandchildren 'back home.' The stability of marital ties was however fragmented with the transnational experience. Nonetheless, migrant women sometimes prefer to stay married even when they no longer share intimate and economic ties with their spouses (see the cases of Elena in Section 6.3 in Chapter 3, and Cassandra in Section 8.4 in Chapter 8)

3.3. Positionality in the fieldwork

Doing research within my 'own' national group abroad posed several dilemmas in a context in which my respondents and I share both commonalities and dissimilarities. On the one hand, similarities in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language, gender, and socio-economic background confer me an 'insider' status that opened doors to places and people 'researched.' Being a Romanian migrant woman in Italy has facilitated many opportunities for interactions with other migrants. For instance, my respondents would often introduce me to their friends and family as a 'Romanian girl' encouraging them to 'talk to her' because 'she is one of us.' Some introduced me as a 'friend,' 'acquaintance,' and even a 'niece.'[3] Several respondents saw me as a confidant on a few issues unrelated to my topic of research. And some, in recounting their own stories of migration for care and domestic work, gave me advice on how to navigate the Italian society and labour market so as to not end up like them, 'wiping old people's bottoms.' Reflecting back on my fieldwork experience, my 'insider' status certainly enabled me to collect data in various culturally intimate contexts. As discussed previously, I was invited by my respondents into their homes, to attend birthday celebrations, important religious events, and extended family reunions, among others.

[3] In the Romanian language, a 'niece' or 'nephew' can suggest kinship through blood ties, i.e. children of a sibling, but they can also suggest a close personal relation with someone who is your junior.

Furthermore, following Reyes (2020) who argues that sharing personal stories highlighting similarities can open lines of communication between the researcher and the respondent, I sometimes disclosed details of my biography to my respondents. For instance, I recounted to respondents my own personal experiences as a member of a transnational family with extensive history in low-wage labour migration within the EU, including Italy. I chose to share this personal information with the hope it will create a space for my respondents to freely exchange their own narratives and experiences, comfortable in the knowledge that I do not judge. My own insights into the challenging choices that family members confront when considering labour migration, where they must weigh material security against physical proximity, encouraged respondents to open up and share stories that exposed the emotional entanglements of money in family relationships.

At the same time as I shared with my respondents a similar socio-economic background there were occasions when my respondents related to me differently. Those who saw in my position as a graduate student at a Western university a 'good' example of upwards social mobility, sometimes contrasted their own familial (and migratory) experiences with mine. These differences in positionality were entrenched in conversations which forced me to subtly negotiate my own status and the distance between my respondents and myself. An example of this was my ongoing interactions with Livia, whose 33-year old daughter, despite holding a PhD degree awarded by a Romanian university, struggled to make ends meet in Romania. Livia viewed me—a young woman of similar age and social background, 'lucky' enough to be abroad for educational purposes rather than for work—as the embodiment of her own aspirations and desires for her daughter. She frequently compared and contrasted the benefits of being enrolled in a PhD program at a foreign as opposed to a national university institution, highlighting advantages such as the comfortable lifestyle enabled by decent monthly stipends, which included opportunities for international travel and meeting new people. As I interviewed Livia several times throughout my fieldwork, I realised that Livia's willingness to share her story relied on a reciprocal exchange of information. She showed a keen interest in learning about my educational path and life experiences, seeking knowledge about educational opportunities in Italy and beyond. Her aim was to gather information that could benefit her daughter, enabling her to access better prospects than what was available to her in Romania. Furthermore, I was sometimes made aware of the differences in age and generation between my respondents and I who, at times, viewed me as someone who could have been their daughter. This has certainly impacted the type of information they shared with me and data I collected.

In light of these shifting similarities and differences in positionality that I encountered early on in my fieldwork, it became clear to me that simply adopting an 'insider'/'outsider' framework which focuses on listing differences and similarities in socio-demographic characteristics between my respondents and I, is a rather unproductive intellectual pursuit for it does not reveal the complex realities and experiences that emerge during fieldwork as we occupy multiple, and sometimes shifting, positionalities. In view of these considerations, feminist scholars doing qualitative research have called for ethnographers to engage more deeply with positionality in the field (Naples, 2003; Moser, 2008). In response to this call, I aimed to carefully examine my own assumptions and biases regarding the conception of the insider status thus taking seriously the advice of feminist scholar Nancy Naples to those researchers doing research within their own national group to 'reexamine taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes "indigenous" knowledge and how researchers draw on their commonalities and differences to heighten sensitivity to others' complex and shifting worldviews' (Naples, 2003:49). Unpacking what being an insider means in specific contexts demanded that I pay careful consideration to the ethnographic encounters in which the status is constructed and expressed.

Furthermore, following Paul Lichterman who advocates for a positionality approach that focuses on using ethnographic material from the field to explore events that expose 'mistakes, gracelessness, hard-won insights' (Lichterman, 2017:5), I reflect on my own research encounters that did not go as planned. Paying particular attention to unsuccessful attempts to establish communality and leverage my own positionality to gain access to places and respondents, I specifically examine instances where the 'insider' status is explicitly questioned, where communication between my respondents and myself broke down. In doing so, I reflect on and make evident my own assumptions regarding my 'insider' and 'outsider' status, and how these assumptions were challenged during my time in the field. I also explain why it became important for me to consider and work through dichotomous distinctions when confronted, in varied ways, with situations that highlighted the complexities of my positionality.

In the first subsection, I attempt to flash out the ambiguity of inhabiting multiple social roles and positions by way of an example. I reflect on my encounter with Narcisa who positioned herself strategically in her group of reference (care workers in Italy) and exposed my status as a graduate student doing research while playing down other social identities that we both shared (being Romanian migrant women, for instance). In the second subsection, I discuss how the shifting terrain of positionality can be productive as long as it is understood

as an ongoing process and is incorporated into the research project. Drawing from conversations with respondents in the field who self-presented as 'rural women,' in that subsection I want to suggest that building (better) relationships with respondents does not necessarily require researchers to share identities and lived experiences with their respondents. I found that being open to engaging in mutual, reciprocal exchanges and practical support I can negotiate differences between my respondents and I from a better position.

3.3.1. Living with ambiguity

On a Sunday morning after the church service, as I pondered how to approach and introduce myself to a group of women deeply engaged in discussing the logistics of organising a luncheon, I noticed Narcisa confidently walking up to me. Upon learning that I was a Romanian Ph.D. student studying the experiences of live-in care workers in Italy, she introduced herself as a 'leader in the Romanian community in Italy,' highlighting her active involvement in various Italian and Romanian associations during her time abroad. Her prior experience with live-in employment, she said, proved invaluable to these organisations and fellow migrant women alike whom she often helped with various information and practical support (see Chapter 8). Because of her background and expertise, Narcisa was a key participant in two research projects in the past, as she proudly mentioned.

Having agreed to participate in my research, Narcisa graciously extended an invitation to conduct the interview within the intimacy of her home over lunch. As the day approached, I prepared a small gift for her. Heeding my mother's counsel never to visit someone's home empty-handed, and drawing inspiration from Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) fieldwork experience who mentions that receiving flowers is always appreciated among women, but at the same time, wary about the cut-flower industry and its effect on the environment, I brought with me a potted orchid as a small token of appreciation, to show my gratitude to Narcisa for welcoming me to her home. Soon after I made myself comfortable at the table she had beautifully decorated for us, Narcisa bluntly expressed her belief that I, like other researchers, would simply collect the stories shared by migrants, including herself, without any tangible outcomes:

> ‘Ok, *we* (care workers) talk to you, we tell you our problems, and then what? What happens next? How will *our* lives change?’ (Narcisa, 65 years old, live-out care worker, 22 years in Italy; her emphasis)[4]

Her comment took me aback. I had expected that the invitation to lunch together was intended to create an intimate setting for us to facilitate the collection of data, an activity that we planned together. Instead, I found myself forced to subtly negotiate the power dynamics that were brought to the forefront of our interaction. Narcisa’s comment threw into sharp relief our contrasting social position from the offset of the interview. My status as a PhD student collecting data for research purposes was suddenly made salient. In Narcisa’s eyes I represented the ‘academia,’ while she situated herself in the practice of ‘community’ activism. The corollary implications of being a PhD student was that researchers have the possibility to influence research’s outcome. This privileged status, Narcisa contended, comes with obligations and responsibilities. The implication of Narcisa’s question is a marking of what constitutes a desirable research outcome, namely that any research should drive positive social change in the researched ‘community’ evinced by her questioning me: ‘how will our lives change?’. Narcisa, emphasised my positionality as a PhD student doing research in a way that outweighed social identities we both shared (being ‘Romanian,’ a ‘woman,’ and a ‘migrant’) and that we generally associate with the status of an ‘insider.’ By confronting my presence in the field and bringing *it* to the centre of our interaction, she constructed my ‘otherness’ by appealing to my ability to ‘exert authority’ on deciding research’s outcomes.

Naively, I produced an explanation highlighting the significance of amplifying marginalised voices. Narcisa acknowledged my point but side-lined it. Afterall, she had been interviewed for research purposes before without any real consequences to her work in the care sector; so what made *this* encounter any different? Narcisa must have recognised that I was not the social actor she wished could be relied upon to lead the way toward much-needed and longed-for significant reform in the care work sector in Italy. I speculate that, despite this realisation, she must have decided that my heart was in the right place, for she allowed the conversation to regain momentum and move beyond the initial deadlock. The awkwardness of this conversation made me feel uneasy, and I was relieved when the topic moved on to something else. But I regret not exploring some of the conceptions that Narcisa appeared to

[4] In this dissertation, with each interview excerpt, I include in brackets the respondents’ age, employment status, and the duration they had spent in Italy as of our most recent interview.

hold with regards to 'the community' of care workers in Italy and the presumed unitary set of interest that they share.

This ethnographic moment stayed with me throughout my fieldwork. Narcisa made me realise how inattentive I had actually been to the fragile agreements of establishing access into the field. In hindsight I realise that while I was counting on communalities to establish agreements with respondents, even if fragile, so that I could ultimately proceed with my research and secure the interviews, the respondents themselves held their own perceptions of my social role and presence in their lives. The interview setting, I came to understand, was a context co-constructed through mutual interaction and ongoing interpretation (see Lichterman, 2017). In that sense, I learned, obtaining respondents' agreements to participate in the interviews did not shield me and my work from being subject to their scrutiny.

3.3.2. Building bridges through reciprocity

The shifting terrain of positionality, which can introduce discomfort and tension in ethnographic encounters, I argue, can be productive as long as it is understood as an ongoing process and is incorporated into the research project. I want to suggest that building (better) relationships with respondents does not necessarily require researchers to share identities and lived experiences with their respondents. Researchers can negotiate differences by being open to engaging in mutual and reciprocal exchanges.

I turn, again, to my ethnographic material to illustrate this point. I draw on my experiences with conducting research among Romanian migrant women who, in presenting themselves as 'rural women,' invoked certain experiences that were unavailable to 'outsiders' such as myself. For instance, Mădălina, a live-out care worker, reminisced about her life before migration, presenting contrasting evidence of a life marred in poverty yet rich in opportunities for an idyllic pastoral existence. 'Running barefoot on the hills,' 'eating fruits straight from the orchard,' 'enjoying nutrient rich vegetables untainted by pollution,' and 'growing up leading parents' sheep to pasture' evoked images of a certain carefree life. Interviews with migrant women who presented themselves as 'rural women' were sometimes hindered by my lack of knowledge on the specificity of everyday life in rural areas of Romania with all that it entails: dialect, accents, practices, stuff, and celebrations. I would sometimes interrupt respondents' stories to ask about the meanings of certain activities they would describe or words they would use. My lack of knowledge led to me being evaluated as

a ‘city girl,’ an identity which became the subject of playful teasing at my expense. Banter always remained in good humour, and I laughed, together with them, at the silliness of my asking ‘inappropriate’ questions. Nevertheless, my respondents would still proceed to patiently explain in laborious details the ‘realities of life’ to me—a seemingly inexperienced young woman whose education and urban upbringing shielded her from the harsher aspects of existence.

What helped me relate to my respondents who presented themselves as ‘rural women,’ and become more accepted by them over time, was my ability to engage in reciprocal exchanges of favours. I aided my respondents in filling out forms, checking the online status of their medical tests, finding the most convenient aeroplane route to Romania whenever they had to run urgent errands, among others. Admittedly, my ability to surf the internet and extract reliable information quickly proved to be useful to my respondents, and certainly more important than any academic credentials. Being evaluated by my respondents as a ‘helpful girl’ opened many doors for me. After offering my support, respondents would often take it upon themselves to make time to sit down for an in-depth interview and/or introduce me to someone ‘that has a lot of stories to share.’

Farhana Sultana refers to respondents' positioning of researchers as ‘dilemmas’ which raise important moral questions of ‘how [researchers] could play with different positionalities to build rapport with different people’ (Sultana, 2007:379), especially when conducting research projects which draw on the knowledge and experiences of low-income, vulnerable, marginalised people, and which casts into stark relief the differences in power and positionality of researchers and respondents. She uses the notion of ‘acceptable outsider’ to suggest that researchers who share familiarity and differences with respondents navigate their acceptance in a field where the researcher is ‘simultaneously an insider, outsider, both and neither’ (Sultana, 2007:377). Following this line of thought, and reflecting on my own fieldwork experience, I argue that, despite gaining access to important places and people, I am not naive to believe that my respondents’ playing around with the distance between us by positioning me, at times, as an ‘acceptable outsider’ was enough to overcome the distance entrenched between us. In fact, it is most likely that because I had a less abstract idea in my mind of what it means to live in the rural parts of Romania, that I was deeply aware of the extent to which the difference between my ‘rural woman’ respondents and I, was insurmountable. For this reason, I did not attempt to ‘pass as’ an ‘insider’ through a positionality ‘gimmick’ meant to bring me fictitiously closer to my respondents by, for example, sharing true facts from my personal biography such as my extensive stays in the

eastern Romania countryside as an important part of growing up. Indeed, I find that it would have been inappropriate to position myself in this way when my lived experiences have, for the most part, been that of an 'city girl.'

Instead I found it to be my responsibility to reflect on the implications of holding different subjectivities, of being a 'city girl' as opposed to a 'rural woman,' to understand how these shapes the practices, lived experiences, and outcomes for my respondents and I, and, finally, to recognize and explore the ways in which our worldview is different. The exercise of reflexivity in which I engaged throughout all stages of this dissertation became important in working through instances in which I was confronted in varied ways with my positionality, either in the fieldwork or in writing up this dissertation. By this I mean to say that my reflections on my positionality were not limited to writing down fieldnotes, but they had subtly informed the intellectual pursuits in this dissertation.

3.4. Ethical considerations

In this section, I reflect on some of the ethical considerations of conducting research on a topic that is construed as sensitive. Investigating money in transnational families is not the easy endeavour I had initially envisioned to be when I first ventured into the field. While respondents were generally open and forthcoming about the decision making processes underpinning money uses in their transnational family economy, discussions about money often stirred up emotional responses in interviews. For instance, in recounting how hard life had been before migration, Geta, a 37-year-old live-out care worker with a husband and son in Italy, described the shame she had felt when she had to go to her high-school graduation with the same set of clothes she wore throughout the whole school year. Geta and her siblings had to stretch the little money her mother received from their father working in construction in Italy, which meant that they had to manage with 'only one change of clothes and a pair of shoes each.' As Geta recounted this story, tears streamed down her face, and her visible distress caught me off guard. In this way I was confronted with an ethical dilemma. Recognising the interview's potential to do harm by inviting respondents to relive painful memories of economic distress, and wishing to embrace and comfort Geta, I also thought that something in this encounter is of interest for my research.

A reflection on positionality also led me to accord greater attention to ethical commitments. Instead of viewing the ethical commitments of this dissertation as a bureaucratic requirement and reducing it to 'the strict codes of institutional paperwork,' (Sultana, 2007:376), I tried to think through some of the situations which posed ethical dilemmas in the field. Additionally, I sought the input of others, including peers and established scholars in the field, to collectively consider the best course of action in different circumstances. Through continuous discussions an informal ethical committee emerged addressing the integrity of both myself as a researcher and the participants involved in the ethnographic study. This collaborative effort proved invaluable in navigating the ethical challenges that arose during the course of my fieldwork.

One recurring question that we extensively deliberated revolved around how to minimise harm to the participants. The act of being interviewed by a researcher had the potential to cause harm, as the sensitive nature of the questions often triggered painful memories of domestic abuse, workplace injustices, homelessness, and other distressing experiences. This was often accompanied by tearful responses from the participants. Personally, I grappled with the feeling of potentially intruding on the lives of the people I met. I constantly reflected on ways to minimise the intrusiveness of the research, considering alterations to the formulation of interview questions, omitting questions of a more sensitive nature, or even abandoning certain lines of topics altogether. Through discussions with peers, I came to the realisation that while it is essential to acknowledge and address the potentially harmful effects on participants, it may not be entirely feasible to completely eliminate emotional responses that arise in people when conducting research on sensitive topics.

To cope with all this, all respondents were informed in advance of their rights as participants in the research. To this end, written and (most often) oral consent of their willingness to participate in the study was received from all participants. During interviews I remained attentive to the emotional wellbeing of my respondents. At various crucial moments in the interview, such as when I noticed respondents' eyes welling up, I offered them the option to take a break from the interview. I reiterated their right to end the interview at any time. I also reminded them that they were under no obligation to answer any specific questions. Additionally, at the conclusion of each interview, I ensured that participants had easy access to my contact information, including my personal phone number and email address. I made it clear that they are within their rights to request from me the exclusion of any data they had previously shared with me from being included in the research. Importantly, I emphasised that no explanation or justification was required for such a request

on their part. It is worth noting that only two respondents exercised these rights. Most of my respondents were pleased with the experience of being interviewed, even when our conversations triggered strong emotional responses. They talked about having the opportunity to reflect on things they had previously taken for granted. Overall respondents' experience was positive.

In addition to collecting informed consent and continuously reflecting on safeguarding the integrity of the respondents, I took steps to protect the anonymity of their identity and the confidentiality of their responses. Each participant in this research was assigned a pseudonym and any identifying information was carefully removed.

Chapter 4. The context of Romanian migration to Italy

4.1. The emergence of Romanian transnational family practices

Romanian scholars found that transnational family practices have historical roots dating back to the state-orchestrated internal migration during the communist era, which normalised prolonged family separations (see Mihăilescu, 2000, 2015). Compared to other countries in the former communist bloc Romania was considerably closed off as international travel was unrealizable and long-term international migration essentially unimaginable. Internal migration, on the other hand, was relatively intense and not always voluntary by nature. Internal migration was an outcome of the communist regime's effort to develop a mass industry in a previously agrarian society. The new workforce demands produced by state-forced industrialization created a new urbanised population. By the end of the 1980s, only 45% of Romania's population was still living in rural areas (Mihăilescu, 2015), compared to 80% before the instauration of the communist regime (Harsanyi, 2018). These statistics, however, do not capture the mobility of those villagers who commuted to nearby towns and cities where factories were located (Mihăilescu, 2015; see also Hărăguş & Földes, 2022; Horváth, 2008; István, 2016). The acute demographic changes that followed communist state control and the imposition of economic modernization plans were more than just simply a movement from rural to urban areas. When family members went their separate ways they had to make sense of their migration experience and carve out their responses and strategies to the painful social dislocation.

Additionally, the painful experience of the economic scarcity of the last decades of the communist era compelled individuals to depend on each other for the flow of necessary goods and services for the social reproduction of their families. The importance of the family unit for securing intergenerational support and solidarity, with a long tradition in the Romanian context (Pantea, 2017; Umbreş, 2022), was thus challenged but not completely eliminated by the communist state. The rapid economic and social reforms initiated by the communist state led to a transformation of the household structure. Romanian anthropologist,

Vintilă Mihăilescu (2000) coined the term 'diffused households' to describe this phenomenon. This concept illustrates that even as younger family members moved to urban areas for education and job prospects, leaving older family members and children behind in rural regions, family members maintained their connections and relationships. Families, connected between several localities, functioned primarily as 'a distribution network of resources in conditions of general scarcity under Communism' (Mihăilescu, 2000:9, see also Mihăilescu, 2015). Family members across 'diffused households' extended beyond the nuclear family to include among its members extended and affinal relatives as well as close personal friends. This new form of kinship formation is based on selectively selected kin relations: 'it is not so much the relatives who help each other, but those who help each other become 'true' relatives' (Mihăilescu, 2015, own translation). Thus rather than kinship established by bloodline, in Romania 'to be kin meant *behaving* like kin' (Verdery, 2003:165, emphasis in the original). One behaved like family when one engaged in exchanges of affective and practical support and met expectations of reciprocity (Verdery, 2003, Umbreș, 2022). Family members were expected to act generously towards one another. People had access to certain resources via their specific occupations. They nurtured their ties as through them they had access to education, healthcare, and scarce food when the procurement of basic necessary goods on the formal market became increasingly untenable. When villagers travelled to cities they relied on their connections to provide various goods and dwellings, secure important information, and assist in local affairs. On their part, city dwellers relied on villagers, who tended productive plots of land and engaged in animal husbandry, for the provision of scarce food. In this way, the communist era introduced new modes of 'doing family' (Morgan, 2011) which strengthened 'practical kinship' (Verdery, 2003).

In the new family established across 'diffused households', family members not only share economic and material resources but—importantly—also distribute caregiving responsibilities among themselves. Against the background of a pro-natalist policy during the communist period[5], there was a flexible and favourable attitude toward allowing working mothers to distribute caregiving responsibilities among extended female family members (Pantea, 2017; Harsanyi, 2018). In urban families, conventional norms allowed working

[5] In October 1966 the communist state passed the infamous Decree 770 which strictly regulated contraception and abortion for women. Compounding this restriction on abortions and access to reproductive care was the lack of adequate essential care infrastructure for young children, such as creches and childcare services. Without these crucial facilities, mothers faced immense challenges in balancing work, family, and personal responsibilities. The absence of accessible childcare support placed additional burdens on families.

mothers to leave children in the care of grandmothers in the countryside for months, years, or even entire childhoods at a time. The common Romanian expression 'weekend child' describes informal fostering practices where grandmothers are the primary caregivers of children thereby freeing mothers (and fathers) to fully devote themselves to study or work and visit children in their free time[6]. In the countryside, children made important contributions to the household economy as they undertook routine work such as herding, farming, and animal husbandry, among others (Umbreș, 2022).

After the dissolution of the former communist bloc, the quality of life declined radically in Romania. The 'transition' from a planned to a so-called 'free market' economy enforced in the absence of institutional mechanisms that could help mediate these transformations resulted in the total collapse of the economic sector. Romanian economic reforms beginning in 1990 aimed at integrating the country into the global economy were expedited through the closure of numerous state enterprises and the extensive privatisation of previously state-operated workplaces (Miszczyński, 2019; Stănescu, 2022, Ibrahim & Galt, 2002). Those who were employed had a hard time making ends meet as salaries lost their value (Bush, 2004; Ibrahim & Galt, 2002), and were insufficient to cover household goods. In addition, salaries were paid with delays, and workers received in-kind pay or were simply laid off (Hărăguș & Földes, 2022). Inadequate salaries and high levels of unemployment due to industry breakdown left many income-deprived in an increasingly monetized society. The monetization of social life post-communism has expanded to include areas previously covered by public provisioning such as education, housing, and health insurance. Consequently, necessary basic services such as medical care become unaffordable for the majority of the population (Bacon, 2004). Price liberalisation allowed for the prices of necessary basic goods and services to skyrocket (Ibrahim & Galt, 2002), with bread prices increasing by 450% in 1993 (Bush, 2004).

To cope with the dramatic impoverishment resulting from the collapse of income from formal employment, more and more people turned to subsistence agriculture as a solution for alleviating poverty and providing for their families. The land reform which translated into agricultural de-collectivization and the return of land to those who could document a historical claim as peasants[7] resulted in a reversal of internal migration flows. For the first

[6] Similar caregiving arrangements can be found in other regions of the world. For instance, in the Ghanaian context, Coe (2016) uses the term 'child circulation' to describe caregiving practices where children are entrusted to the care of extended family members while parents visit them during weekends and school vacations.
[7] Law Nr. 18/1991 set up the de-collectivisation of land.

time in decades, people migrated from cities back to their villages, where the cost of living was lower and opportunities for food provisioning by engaging in subsistence agriculture allowed for survival following job losses in the industrial sector (Hărăguş & Földes, 2022). Household food production became an even more important part of household economies as ordinary people relied increasingly on their own vegetable plots and animal husbandry to provide basic goods for themselves and their own (Bleahu & Janowski, 2002). The emergence of informal small-scale trade, encompassing the sale of produce, crafts, brews, meat specialties, and more, in the streets, markets, and fairs, conducted through cash transactions, became a significant source of family income and money in an increasingly monetized society.

For many families, however, international labour migration of at least one family member became the only solution to survive. Romanian scholars note an increasingly rural population as the main initiator of the early stages of international migration (Sandu, 2006). One reason for this has to do with the widespread but substantially uneven monetization of Romanian society as the loss of jobs and income affected the rural areas disproportionately (Stănescu, 2022). As most factories were located in cities and towns, the first to feel the effects of the rapid process of deindustrialisation were the villagers who were commuting to nearby factories (Horvath & Anghel, 2009; Sandu, 2005). When they failed to secure a decent job within their area, people migrated abroad as the only opportunity to improve family standards of life and provide a better future for their children.

Transnational family practices that began to form in the late 1990s, beginning of 2000s, and through the 2010s when more and more people moved to Italy (and other parts of Western Europe) have their roots in 'diffused households.' More than an explanation of how family life, fragmented by economic scarcity and state-promoted internal migration, instated new ways of 'being' and 'doing' family, Mihăilescu (2000, 2015) traces the origin of Romanian transnational families in these practices developed during the communist regime which has served to facilitate and normalise long-distance and long-term family separation. The painful social dislocations that internal migration caused laid the grounds for later trends of international migration following the collapse of the communist regimes when Romania eventually became the primary source country for East-West migration (Cingolani, 2009a, 2017). Reflecting on my data, several respondents practised internal migration during the Ceaușescu regime, and a few migrated internationally immediately after the collapse of communism in countries such as Poland, Ukraine, and Turkey where they engaged in 'suitcase commerce', a small-scale trade of a variety of products from decorative household

items to underwear, that involved moving about and crossing international borders (see Larionescu, 2012, 2016). Suitcase commerce required migrant women to engage in circular migration and be away from home and family for several weeks at a time. Migrant women drew on culturally available caregiving practices to find suitable carers and arrange care for their children growing up when they practised suitcase commerce and then again after when they migrated to Italy. I learned that migrant women relied on other women to rear and bring up their children after their migration—and importantly—they took for granted such caregiving arrangements. They preferred to entrust their children with grandmothers who they regarded to be morally fit to care for children because of their 'kindness' and 'generosity,' noting that 'they have more patience' for children's misbehaviour (similar findings are shared by Ducu, 2020). Indeed, Hărăguș et al. (2018) show that for Romanian migrant women having someone to look after children dictated women's opportunities to migrate. While grandmothers are often the primary caregivers for 'left behind' children, migrant mothers rely also on sisters, aunts, and female friends, including neighbours (see Ducu, 2014, 2020). As I discuss in several places in this dissertation, my respondents left Romania when their children were adolescents or in their early 20s. At the time of our interview, however, none of my interlocutors had young children in Romania. Their children are grown, and often with families and children of their own.

To sum up what was said so far, communist state-led industrialisation and forced urbanisation brought about a significant transformation in people's status, work activities, and family organisation. It transformed peasants whose primarily agricultural activities provided the means of their subsistence into factory workers and essentially wage labourers, dependent on industry jobs to sustain themselves and their families. With the fall of communism and the so-called 'transition' to 'free market' economy, workers eventually became transnational labour migrants whose remittances sustain the social reproduction of their transnational family when domestic work opportunities to provide for themselves and their own declined. Building on Mihăilescu's concept I argue that, in the context of international migration, the Romanian model of 'diffused households' underwent a mutation in scale and emerge as 'transnationally diffused households' in which the transnational circulation of resources serves to weld together families in new and strained dependencies, as I discuss throughout this dissertation.

4.2. Dynamic patterns of migration to Italy

The number of Romanian migrants abroad has consistently increased over the last three decades rendering Romanians one the largest migrant population groups in Europe, both in terms of international migrant stock and as a percentage of estimated migrants relative to the total population in the home country (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018; OECD, 2019; IOM, 2020). If from 1990 until 2001 10% of the Romanian working-age population had migrated abroad at least once (Horvath & Anghel, 2009), by 2010 26% of the Romanian households had at least one family member that had migrated at some point (Stănculescu & Stoiciu, 2012). Current figures estimate the number of Romanian migrants abroad to be between three to five million people (Dospinescu & Russo, 2018). Although the preferred migration destinations of Romanians have changed over the past years, and migration flows to Italy have declined considerably (OECD, 2019), Italy remains nonetheless home to the largest number of Romanian migrants living abroad. As of 2022, data from Istat (2023) reveals that Italy was home to 1,083,771 residents of Romanian origin, constituting 21% of the total migrant population and making Romanians the predominant migrant community in the country.

Scholars discussing Romanian migration into Italy highlight three waves marked by distinct patterns, challenges, and opportunities. The first wave of migration began in 1990 when movement was highly restricted and migration flows were dominated by mostly man's search for labour abroad; the second wave of migration starting in 2002 after Romanians obtained the right to travel without visa restrictions was marked by increased irregularity and described as highly feminine, circular, and temporary with (more) women migrating to take up employment as care workers, often as live-in; the third wave of migration began with 2007 when restrictions to work and travel in other EU countries were lifted. I elaborate on these three waves of migration next.

(1) Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Romanian migration statistics were rather unreliable. Sandu (2006) examined the rise in emigration during the years 1996-2001, which accounted for 7% of the total Romanian population, as opposed to 5% during the period 1990-1995. The notable increase in Romanian migration to Italy beginning in 1996 prompted the author to speak of a consolidation phase, solidifying Italy as one of the primary destination countries for Romanian migrants. Despite facing a restrictive entry policy by the Italian government, large-scale migration into Italy happened between 1996 and 2001 (Sandu, 2006; Ban, 2012; Cingolani, 2009. The regulations which translated into restrictions on travel prompted many Romanian migrants to appeal to a market for tourist visas which

they overstayed, and to heavily rely on networks for finding work and accommodation in Italy (Bleahu, 2007). With little experience in international travel, potential migrants relied on semi-legal intermediaries for tourist visa applications who charged several thousand euros (Bleahu, 2007; Piperno 2012). To finance their migration 'pioneer migrants' (Bakewell et al., 2012) would go into debt or use the cash gifts from their weddings (Anghel, 2011).

(2) The year 2002 marks the beginning of the 'open border' policy as (most) EU states, including Italy, lift visa restrictions for Romanians. The possibility to travel for short periods of up to three months led to an increase in the number of migrants arriving in Italy (Bonifazi, 2017), and a diversification of the migration flows (Sandu, 2005). In contrast to earlier migration flows to Italy, characterised by a predominance of male migrants, scholars observed a shift in the gender dynamics of Romanian migration to Italy since 2002 (Sandu, 2006; Cingolani, 2009). Women, taking on the role of primary initiators of migration within their families, predominantly originate from rural regions in Romania (Sandu, 2006). In these rural areas, women encounter heightened gender disparities related to material deprivation, and limited access to employment, healthcare, and educational opportunities (Stănescu, 2022). The migration of women to Italy was intensified by the formation of migration networks that pushed women into a limited number of labour market niches. Within these networks, women employed strategies that facilitated their entrance into a predominantly female labour market sector, most often as care workers in Italian households. I return to the discussion on the feminisation of Romanian migration flows to Italy below.

(3) The year 2007 marks the beginning of a new phase in Romanian migration. With Romania's accession to the EU restrictions to travel and work in Italy were removed and many migrants already residing in Italy regularised their residence status. The overflow of Romanian migrants in Italy commencing in 2002 and accentuated in 2007 with Romania's accession to the EU is described by scholars as increasingly individualistic. The 'individualization' of migration is explained by the shrinking and eventual dissolution of migration networks that provided travel, work, and accommodation opportunities in Italy, as they became unable to absorb the increasing number of migrants arriving in Italy (Bleahu, 2007; Anghel, 2011). Finally, migrants' reliance on networks was replaced by intensive cooperation between members of the same family (Eve, 2008). My data confirms this conclusion and shows that family migration is not reserved for members of the same nuclear family; rather Romanian migrants in Italy facilitate entrance and settling into the country to a wider family network.

Several factors explain the feminization of migration flows from Romania into Italy beginning in the year 2002. Firstly, the low costs of migration meant that more people could travel and work, often informally, in Italy. The result is an increase in the number of migrants. Secondly, the option of migrating temporarily led to a diversification of migration patterns to Italy whereby women stay abroad for short periods and return home frequently. Thirdly, migration to Italy was a response to the Italian growing market demand for cheap labour from abroad, including care services in the household. Romanian migrants supply the so-called 'secondary labour market' (Piore, 1979) which comprises low-wage, menial, and seasonal jobs in sectors that are vulnerable to economic fluctuations (Sacchetto & Vianello, 2016). Further segmented along gender lines, male migrants take up jobs in the construction, transport, and manufacturing industries, and female migrants work predominantly in the domestic and care services (Sacchetto & Vianello, 2016). The high demand for care and domestic services within Italian households meant that potential migrant families in Romania were no longer required to consider male migration as the only solution to improve family welfare. The particularities of the live-in care work meant that migrant women were comparably less exposed to the high risk of deportation associated with migrant undocumented status. Moreover, several amnesties after the so-called 'Bossi Fini' law passed in 2002 meant that migrant women working as live-in care and domestic workers could benefit from status legalisation in Italy. Consequently, many Romanian families made a reasoned and pragmatic choice to prioritise women's migration, and in many households, women became the primary labour migrant.

Statistics recurrently emphasise that the majority of people employed in the care work sector in Italy are women, often of migrant origin. The notable over-representation of Romanian migrant women in the workforce composition has consistently remained remarkably high over the years, particularly in roles involving live-in employment (e.g., Lamura et al., 2010; Cela & Moretti, 2013). While it is true that, especially after Romania's accession to the EU, many Romanian women in Italy transitioned to different professions in other sectors of work after their initial period abroad, such as manufacturing, hospitality, and hotel industry (Sacchetto & Vianello, 2016), the prevalence of this occupation remains notably high within this migrant group. As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, current official statistics estimate that there are around 400,000 migrant care workers in Italy (Vianello, 2022). Romanians, with 145,000 care workers, constitute the largest migrant group engaged in this profession, accounting for 21.6% of the total migrant population in this sector (DOMINA, 2022). Many scholars warn, however, that because of the informal nature of this

sector of work, the actual figures may be significantly greater. Anghel et al. (2016) note that a large proportion of Romanian migrants in Italy, especially women, describe their employment as informal, lacking a formal work contract. This dissertation sheds light on the experiences of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy, especially those in live-in employment.

Furthermore, scholars found that, when faced with job losses abroad, instead of returning, Romanian migrants move elsewhere in the EU (Gherghina & Plopeanu, 2020; Aspite-Berina et al., 2020). For instance, the year 2008 marks the onset of the global economic crisis reshaping the dynamics of Romanian migration to Italy once more. Men faced job losses as they were employed in sectors like construction that saw a significant contraction, while women working in care sectors—known for their resilience to economic crises (Farris, 2015)—experienced a decrease in salaries. Economic uncertainty in both Italy and Romania left individuals without definite plans for their return, and a trend of migration to other countries in Western and Northern Europe started to emerge during this period (Anghel et al., 2016; OECD, 2019). This phenomenon, termed 'onwards migration' (Della Puppa & King, 2019) has affected the lives of many Romanians abroad who draw on their social connections to garner information about life and work opportunities in countries other than those they migrated initially, suggesting that many Romanian migrants with friends, acquaintances, and family members spread across different countries are more likely to engage in multiple migration (Ciobanu, 2015). Several women I interviewed for this dissertation had migrated elsewhere before Italy; one woman migrated elsewhere in the EU and returned to Italy; one migrated elsewhere in the EU during my fieldwork; and another one returned to Romania intending to stay 'home.'

4.3. Remittances and gender in Romanian migration

Remittances are a contemporary feature of Romanian societies. During the communist period, when the vast majority of the population was prohibited from international travel, any kind of association with 'the West,' such as possessing foreign currency, was regarded with considerable political suspicion. Only a limited number of individuals, including tourists and select individuals, were allowed to carry foreign currency without repercussions[8]. They had the privilege of using foreign currency to buy foreign-branded consumer goods from state-run

[8] In 1960, Decree 210 14/06/1960 highly regulated possession of foreign currency.

stores, namely *Comturist*[9], with no fear of retribution. In an attempt to control and deter out-migration, the communist state persecuted people with families abroad by, for example, denying them access to job promotions.

After the collapse of communism, Romania followed the path of other post-communist countries, whose economies rely heavily on remittances as one of the most important and resilient financial flows into the country (see for example King, Castaldo & Vullnetari, 2011). As Romania experienced the highest increase in migration among the EU member states in the last three decades (Dospinescu & Russo 2018), it has also maintained a leading position as the main EU member state remittance recipient (Mehedintu et al., 2019). Remittances became a consistent and important source of capital flow into the country. Migrants' income abroad transferred to family 'back home' consistently overtakes FDI as the single most important source of capital for the country's GDP. The economic value of remittances increased significantly after 2002 as migration procedures simplified, and jumped in 2004, reaching the highest level in 2008 when the World Bank estimated that family members at home received $9.3 billion (Încalţărău & Maha, 2012), the equivalent of 5.5% of the country's GDP (De Sousa & Duval, 2010). The recent World Bank (2023) data estimates the value of remittances at $7.63 billion, making a substantial contribution to the country's GDP and reaching the equivalent of 3.1% of the GDP. Over the years, Italy has been continuously singled out as one of the countries from which the largest share of migrant money is transferred into the origin country (CESPI, 2019; Bunduchi et al., 2019; Mehedintu et al., 2019).

The increased dependence on remittances as an important source of money flowing into the country has transformed national political discourses with regards to handling foreign currency. The foreign currency gained favour among public officials who realised the economic potential of leveraging remittances in times of crisis and economic turmoil. Not only did representations of foreign currency in political discourses become positively valued as an important instrument of development and a way to fight economic recession, but Romanian migrants abroad garnered social recognition as 'saviours' of the economy and 'modernising agents' (Mădroane, 2016, 2021), as opposed to 'enemies of the people' and 'social degenerates' as they were portrayed in the communist past.

[9] Under communist rule, the Romanian government exerted significant control over the economy, including retail operations. *Comturist* was a chain of state-owned stores that sold strictly regulated goods.

The term ‘collective remittance’ proposed by Galstyan and Ambrosini (2022) focuses on monetary transfers that go beyond family ties and aim to link migrants’ economic and political engagements in their home countries. Investigating the transfer of remittances among Armenians in the Netherlands, authors found that migrants rely on both formal and informal institutions for monetary transfers. Informal networks, most often preferred by women abroad, were built on extensive trust between women and their intermediaries. In the context of the Romanian migrant community in Italy, how remittances are transferred home has changed over the years. When migrants worked and resided in Italy ‘illegally’ they relied on informal money transfers as a way to keep authorities off their backs. Their income was not registered so they feared money could be confiscated for they could not prove ownership. Migrants relied on a semi-legal market of intermediaries that operated regular transportation and courier shuttle services connecting migrants to their hometowns. The money envelope was handed over to the driver who delivered it at the destination. Romanian economic sociologist, Cornel Ban, called these businesses, generically registered as import-export services, ‘white van banks’ (Ban, 2012:135). With the gradual acquisition of rights to work and reside in Italy, this practice fell out of favour among my respondents. Nowadays, most of my respondents send money through banks and other formal channels. However, they continue to occasionally rely on friends, family, and acquaintances originating from the same village who are travelling back to Romania to carry money across national borders and distribute it at the destination according to their instructions. Many respondents mention that they remit through informal channels smaller amounts than they used, indicating that migrant women prefer to transfer sums through official channels and to bring money with them on their return.

Apart from remittances’ potential to lead to economic development, which has been capitalised on by political actors, migrant money is an important source of disposable income within households. Scholars note that migrants earmark remittance in ways that diverge from economists' expectations. Remittances are mainly directed towards consumption, and only a small percentage of it is used for the so-called ‘productive’ investments such as small business enterprises (Grigoraș, 2006; Horvath & Anghel, 2009; Încalţărău & Maha, 2012). Importantly, Romanian men returning home from Italy are more likely than women to invest remittances in opening up businesses ‘back home’ (Vlase, 2012) The majority of migrant income is invested in durable consumption goods such as buying cars and electronic goods, as well as in the construction, expansion, and renovation of houses and apartments (Umbreș, 2022; Grigoraș, 2006; Horvath & Anghel, 2009; Larionescu, 2012).

Viewed in this way, remittances serve a variety of roles in Romania. Throughout this dissertation, I show that the aim to improve their family's well-being and invest in decent living conditions 'at home' prompts Romanian women abroad to seek jobs as live-in care workers. This type of employment is underpinned by various forms of exploitation that migrant women endure in the everyday regimens of their low-wage work, and which is experienced by them as hardship and psychological distress but which allows women to maximise their earned income abroad by avoiding rent and living expenses associated with live-out employment (see Chapter 5). Far from ideal, these conditions that mark the lives of Romanian migrant women in Italy are tolerated as the only means through which they can accomplish the multiple familial and financial commitments towards those at home, as I explain in the following chapters.

Chapter 5. The meanings of money and their uses over care workers' extended stays abroad

Writing about money is a discouraging endeavour, and not for lack of material. In all mentions of relatedness, migrant women describe a detailed account of money earned, saved, spent, and transferred 'home.' Ethnographic material records in minute detail the expenditure of migrant women in Italy, balanced against the needs of those at home. They know how much money each family member earns and contributes, what expenses they have, the timing and management of these expenses, what desires they have, and what needs have to be prioritised and met. Money that care workers send home are earmarked for different goals and vary in amount and the type of relationship they sustain. This thesis cannot do justice to the rich ethnographic data collected on money in transnational families, yet the evidence does point to three distinct types of money that I will elaborate on in this chapter of the dissertation. These are communal money, courtesy money, and finally, pocket money.

The first findings chapter of this dissertation briefly introduces the pieces of money which will be explored in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, this thesis builds on the sociologist of money Ariel Wilkis' work on the multiple pieces of money in the lives of the poor. Wilkis (2017) conducted ethnography among the residents of a slum near Buenos Aires, Argentina. He employs Zelizer's framework of money as encompassing multiple meanings, however, unlike Zelizer, who primarily focuses on investigating one type of special money at a time, without delving into the analysis of how these socially and culturally constructed currencies interact with each other, Wilkis argues that a more comprehensive understanding of the economic lives of the poor emerges by viewing money as a 'puzzle' composed of various 'pieces' (Wilkis, 2017:14). Inspired by his work, I use the metaphor of 'pieces of money' making up the 'puzzle' of Romanian care workers' economic lives to build up the overarching argument in this dissertation. The investigation into the economic lives of Romanian care workers in Italy led me to discover the existence of three pieces of money which are produced and used differently by my respondents. These multiple types of money co-exist in the transnational family economy of my respondents. In this dissertation, I discuss communal, courtesy, and pocket money and analyse each piece

according to how care workers earmark money in order to distinguish between their uses and users. The key overarching feature of communal, courtesy, and pocket money is their sources as wages earned abroad by women engaged in predominantly female activities as care workers, often in live-in employment. As I discuss in this chapter, the economic behaviour of migrant care workers in Italy is intimately connected to their migration projects. The variety and differences in money and their uses among care workers in Italy will be explored in relation to migrant women's different patterns of migration. Francesca Alice Vianello (2009, 2014, 2016) and Olena Fedyuk (2012, 2015, 2016) distinguish between Ukrainian care workers 'in transit' and 'permanent' on the basis of their migration project. According to these authors, 'women in transit' mobilise a narrative of motherly sacrifice to justify their migration to Italy where they assume financial responsibility towards those at home and maintain a strong home orientation, viewing their period abroad as temporary, in spite of their prolonged stay abroad. On the other hand, as women remain abroad, new opportunities open up that were not envisioned at the beginning of their migration. Migrant women may transition from live-in to live-out employment (and in some cases, to other sectors of work), and shift their status from that of care workers 'in transit' to 'permanent' migrants with plans and desires to settle in Italy. These 'settled women' are less inclined to continue their family relationship over their stay abroad, and often reunite with their husbands and children in Italy. Marchetti and Venturini (2013) noticed similar patterns of migration among Moldavians in Italy. In a more recent scholarly contribution, Cojocaru (2021) explores the experiences of Moldavian care workers in Italy, revealing that those who embrace a migration project 'in transit,' tend to view their migration as temporary as a coping mechanism for dealing with precarious job conditions and downward social mobility. In spite of these authors' focus on Ukrainian and Moldavian care workers, respectively, increasing similarities speak to the data I have collected among Romanian migrant groups, as I discuss in this chapter.

This chapter is structured as follows. In Section 5.1 I delve into the broader factors influencing the choice of live-in employment for Romanian women in Italy. I emphasise that this decision is primarily driven, particularly in the initial stages of their migration, by their aspiration to earn and remit a substantial portion of their salaries, especially among those who harbour intentions of eventually returning home. Moving on to Section 5.2 I examine the ramifications of the idea of 'sending all wages home,' highlighting the social isolation faced by migrant care workers in Italy. I argue that this isolation is not solely a result of the organisation of care work in Italian society (Vianello, 2019), but is also influenced by how these workers allocate their wages, prioritising the needs of those residing 'back home.' In

Section 5.3 I examine the changes in money use as migrant women extend their stay in Italy beyond their initially planned durations. I discuss the impacts of these changes on their work and life experiences in Italy. I show that, despite remaining in low-paid and under-valued work, migrant care workers who diversify their money uses in Italy experience an improved economic situation in Italy and some degree of improved working conditions compared to those who 'sent all wages home.' Finally, in section 5.4 I analyse the life opportunities available to women who view long-term migration as a feasible project, and express their desire to move out of live-in employment in search for other areas of work that provide for less intensive emotional and physical labour in Italy.

5.1. Entering live-in employment

One's decision to leave behind one's family, home, and community comes with a promise of wages and the possibility to send money home. Scholars emphasise the particularities of live-in paid care work that have provided migrant women with an easy channel to enter the Italian labour market (Ambrosini, 2013), including to those with no prior work experience on the labour market (Anghel et al., 2016), and made this sector attractive to 'new' migrant women who come to Italy alone (Vianello, 2009a; Marchetti & Venturini, 2014), and to those who have previously been excluded from international mobility on account of their class and rural background (Sandu, 2006; Sandu, 2010).

The earnings of live-in care workers can range between €600 and €1300, depending on the specific tasks and responsibilities outlined in their employment contracts. A significant portion of my participants, primarily falling within the €800-€1200 bracket, were entrusted with the care of one or more elderly people. The money earned is underpinned by different forms of economic exploitation that migrant women endure in the everyday regimens of their low-wage work. They describe their work as demanding, demeaning, and inadequately compensated. Their perception of their experience with work in Italy is shaped by the unpredictability of an informal and highly flexible employment arrangement wherein care workers' ability to informally negotiate their rights at work plays a pivotal role. In detailing their daily routines, respondents shared accounts of being constantly available to their employers, referring colloquially to live-in employment as '24 hours' work. Many of these

workers consistently exceed their contractual work hours, complain about the employer's non-compliance with the employment contract, and about being cheated out of their wages.

Live-in employment is preferred when one disposes of little money to initiate migration as the cost for securing accommodation and food provisioning are reduced when one depends on one's employer for providing all these. The following interview excerpt expresses succinctly how all expenses are felt in the migration decision, and emphasis women's perception of the burden to provide for 'those at home':

> 'Live-in has its advantages. If you just arrived in Italy with no money and no knowledge of Italian language, live-in is the best option because you don't have to worry too much about how to get a room. And if you are live-in you don't pay any of the household expenses, gas, electricity, and food. Although you can get a good room for €200 if you add the cost of expenses and food you can reach €500 easily. If you make €800 how can you send money home? No. The most important thing is that live-in can allow you to save on rent and food, and send all the money home.'

As the quote above suggests, the costs associated with live-out employment are not borne solely by the care workers themselves but also by their non-migrant family who have to make due with less remittances when migrant women use their own funds to cover accomodation and living expenses. When weighing out the benefits and costs of their choices, migrant women decide that live-in employment is a better decision, that is despite its emotional and physical strains associated with this type of work arrangement (Redini et al., 2020; Vianello, 2022).

A significant number of my interlocutors moved to Italy during the early 2000s and 2010s. As many migrant women recalled, migration to Italy was driven to a large extent by their own job loss or that of their husbands'. During this time frame migration to Italy is described by scholars as being facilitated by migration networks. According to Francesca Scrinzi (2016) one characteristic of Eastern European domestic and care workers in Italy is their involvement in 'migration chain' as they take a leading role organising travel and work for other women (in their families), their husbands (and other male family members), and their children. For instance, Elena explains succinctly how women in her family have 'swapped' live-in care work jobs over the years:

> ‘At the beginning I went to Italy for one month to replace my cousin who came on holiday [in Romania] but then a few months later I came back to Italy. My cousin gave me the job for good because she moved elsewhere in Italy with her husband. I worked three years for that elderly lady and then I returned home for one month because of a health emergency and lost the job. After I was well enough I came back to Italy and got a job in Genoa. The employer was a little scared because I only just had my operation and he wasn't sure I can do the job properly. But my niece vouched for me. I replaced my niece but my niece before this replaced my daughter and, when I left, I gave the job to my [other] daughter.’ (Elena, 68 years old, live-in care worker, 12 years in Italy)

As Elena suggests, migrant care workers may initially come to Italy to ‘replace’ their female relatives (sisters, daughters, nieces, and so on) before they secure a long term work position of their own. Care workers who go on holiday usually find substitutes among their family and friends until their return to work in Italy. Women enter into an informal agreement where they typically take on the work contract of their female relatives without the possibility to renegotiate its terms and conditions. Only more rarely did I hear women in my fieldwork mentioning they were ‘brought’ to Italy to ‘replace’ virtual strangers they met online through dedicated Facebook groups or via ‘friends of friends.’ These situations tend to involve more risk, as the stories of deception and exploitation among Romanian live-in care workers I encountered during fieldwork seem to suggest. When women do not personally know the person they are going to ‘replace’ they are susceptible to scams, unfulfilled promises, being cheated out of their wages, and deliberate deception and misrepresentation of their future workplace.

5.2. ‘Sending all wages home’ and social isolation

In addition to being typically a first mode of entry into the Italian labour market, live-in employment, scholars argue, is particularly attractive for migrant women who are target earners (e.g. Ambrosini, 2015; Vianello, 2016). By working in private homes migrant women are able to maximise their savings and increase the amount of money ‘sent home’ as they incur no additional rent-related costs and living expenses (Marchetti & Venturini, 2014). As a

result, migrant women arrive in Italy where they plan to take live-in employment for short and medium periods of time during which they seek to cut back on their personal expenses in Italy in order to increase their economic gain and eventually return to their countries of origin where they reunite with their families. According to Vianello (2016), the typical migrant woman care worker 'in transit' initially plans to stay abroad for usually one to two years during which time she focuses her energy and attention on investing in the economic wellbeing of her family, particularly children. She shows little interest in building and participating in social life in Italy, viewing her time abroad as temporary, even though it may extend for several years or even decades (see also Vianello, 2014; Fedyuk, 2015).

The care worker 'in transit' is the most prevalent category I have encountered in my fieldwork. These elderly migrant women, often in their late 50s and 60s, migrated alone usually in the early 2000s and 2010s. While none of my respondents engaged in live-in care work had underaged children 'back home' at the time of our interview, many left Romania when their children were adolescents and young adults. In interviews they reflected on how they organised care for their children growing up and on the financial responsibilities they continue to assume for their children's, and often grandchildren's, well being. Migrant women preferred to leave their children in the responsibility of grandmothers, aunts, and even neighbours 'back home' (see also Ducu, 2014, 2020), who they trusted to provide care for their children, and were reassured that children benefited from love and had their material needs met. Given the significant role that grandmothers traditionally play, being expected to take on both physical and moral responsibilities in raising their grandchildren (Ducu, 2020; Preoteasa, Vlase & Tufă, 2017), many respondents noted that grandmothers are more equipped to care for young children since they have 'more patience' for children's mischievous behaviour (see also Section 4.1 in Chapter 4).

Noteworthy is also the fact that, unlike Rhacel Parreñas' Filipino migrant mothers who displayed signs of emotional distress during interviews by 'sobbing' (Parreñas, 2005b:115, 2008:83) and 'crying,' (Parreñas, 2015[2001]: 88, 89, 93), my fieldwork data did not evoke similar emotional reactions. In reflecting on their separation from children growing up, migrant women spontaneously compared their previous life circumstances with present ones, and expressed immense pride in their capability to support their children's upbringing by emphasising the material improvements brought about by the money from Italy. According to anthropologist Cati Coe (2023), the global care chain approach has a tendency to treat women's migration ahistorically and acontextually. To avoid this path, careful consideration needs to be paid to the long-standing caregiving arrangements that were

available to women prior to their international migration. Following with line of thought, one factor which may explain the striking differences in responses of Filipino and Romanian migrant mothers to their separation from their children could be related to the specific historical and cultural context within which such transnational care practices emerged. As discussed in the previous chapter (especially Section 4.1), Romanian scholars found that the origin of transnational families emerged historically from the painful experience of communist state orchestrated internal migration which normalised long-distance and long-time family separation, on the one hand, and of economic scarcity which forced family members to depend on each other for the flow of necessary goods and services, including caregiving, for the social reproduction of the family, on the other hand. Thus, even in the absence of international migration, there was a favourable attitude towards family separation, which was not construed as abnormal or indeed inherently traumatic for children. In light of the socially accepted norms of caregiving that linked family members through mutual obligations and responsibilities dispersed across different localities during the era of communist Romania, migrant mothers did not perceive prolonged separation from their families as inherently traumatic for their children. Instead, there is a wide agreement among migrant mothers who contend that (at least until they leave school) ‘left behind‘ children and their caregivers are entitled to a large portion of their wages as compensation for their physical absence and for the hands-on care work performed by their caregivers.

Based on my interviews, migrant women continue to regard themselves as mothers, and motherhood is their mainstay identity, despite the fact that their children are adults in their own right, often with children of their own. On their part, ‘left behind’ adult children expect mothers to generously share their resources, for economic contributions and support is considered a sign of ‘good’ mothering. Discussing the strength of intergenerational norms of solidarity in Romanian families, Preoteasa, Vlase and Tufă (2017) note that parents are traditionally expected to provide material support to their children throughout their lifetime. One piece of money which enables women to accomplish their social and moral responsibilities towards those at home is what I call communal money. Migrant women ‘sent home’ communal money, representing a large percentage of their wages as care workers abroad, to finance family economic goals that implicates everyone, especially their children and grandchildren. Reflecting on their initial intention to return home after accomplishing economic goals, migrant mothers often emphasised the new roles and responsibilities they assume for their transnational families as it enters new life cycles which prompts them to continuously postpone their return home and keeps them tethered to their jobs in Italy.

Expectations for communal money transfers to meet the costs of weddings, the rearing of grandchildren, young families 'lifting' home, among others, suggest that migrant women bear some of the responsibilities for the social reproduction of their families across time and generations (a topic I develop further in Chapter 6). Family obligation is the reason compelling many migrant women to continue work as live-in care workers in Italy beyond their initial plans. While not abandoning the idea of return, migrant women postpone their return and find their time abroad stretch for decades, and often remain abroad until their retirement.

For example, Sorina left Romania in 2009 when her husband lost his work at the nearby town factory where he was commuting daily. With little in the way of savings, Sorina's family barely survived for the first months and instead 'relied on the good graces of a few people' and 'lived on debt,' as she recollected during our first interview. When her sister-in-law proposed to finance Sorina's migration to Italy to cover her shift as a live-in for the duration of her stay home, Sorina felt as if 'I can breathe again' as she saw the possibilities of solving many problems with money from Italy. Once in Italy, Sorina remitted 'all wages home' as her husband paid off the debts incurred prior to her migration. Her desire to improve the living quarters of the family home prompted her to prolong her stay in Italy during which time her family worked together to renovate, expand, and refurbish the shared home.

Reflecting on her postponed return Sorina's comment below points at the cycles of responsibilities and financial obligations that keeps her tethered to her job in Italy, and expresses her uncertainty of the future which make her doubt her ability to return home on her own terms:

> 'I wanted to give up this work many times but new problems always came up that made me postpone my return. Let's pay this debt, let's renovate the kitchen, children are getting married and they need money…. I took care of them and now it's my grandchildren's turn. And this is how it goes. You say to yourself "I sort out this problem first and then I go back." You solve one problem and another one appears immediately. And this is how time goes by. You think to yourself 'I come here (in Italy) for one month' then you say to yourself "I stay for one year" which turns into two, five, seven… and you forget about yourself and your own needs and you lose your youth and health here (in Italy) away from your family.' (Sorina, age 63, live-in care worker, in Italy for 12 years)

Echoing the feelings of Sorina is Eugenia who, now in her pension age, reflects on her own experiences with postponed retirement from live-in employment:

> 'I keep waiting to go home. All my life I waited to go home. I said to myself I endure a little more because I need to renovate the kitchen, I need to pay for connecting my house to the water supply… But these needs never really go away. Always and always there will be new needs. Children grow, you need to help them lift their house. Then come the grandchildren, you need to keep them in school, and on and on and on. Until when can I pull at the carriage? Now, in my pension, I should be home resting, not in Italy working.' (Eugenia, age 69, live-in care worker, arrived in Italy in 2006 when she stayed for 11 years, and returned again to Italy in 2021)

As is illustrated in the two quotes above, migrant women, in their roles as mothers and grandmothers, wish to respond to the needs of their (adult) children and grandchildren who are the main recipients of communal money.

One of the ways in which migrant mothers and grandmothers fulfil their responsibilities to 'take care' of their non-migrant family members is by remitting 'all wages home.' My respondents often claimed that, as many migrant women would put it, live-in care workers sent 'all wages home.' But in point of fact these recurrent comments are an exaggeration for many of them do earmark pocket money for personal expenses in Italy which they retain out of their monthly wages. The discretion surrounding care workers' pocket money is a theme I pick up in Section 8.1 Chapter 8 Pocket money. Nevertheless, many of my respondents do send large shares of their wages earmarked for common familial goals. I interpreted their relentless emphasis on sending 'all wages home' as statements meant to suggest the centrality of family relations in the economic lives of live-in care workers in Italy.

The comment of Ilinca below is representative for many respondents who understand their salaries as part of the transnational household economy. Day-to-day life abroad comes with a price and family responsibilities and obligations play an important role in providing motivation and justification for enduring suffering (often) for longer than planned periods of time abroad.

> ‘In order to make money here (in Italy) we (care workers) sacrifice a lot... But we endure because at home they need us to move forward. They need help with… I have a son who is building his home, my daughter-in-law cannot find anywhere to work, and my grandsons are growing up and their needs also grow year by year. When I get my salary I send all [my wage] home and keep some pocket money for myself. You need money also to return (for holidays) because you can’t come home with your hands swinging. So you tighten the purse strings in Italy if you want to... When I am in Italy I do not spend money. Here when you make €1 you have to hold on to it. I don’t even buy a coke for myself, I forget what it tastes like.’ (Ilinca, 59-year old, live-in care worker, 13 years in Italy)

Sending ‘all wages home’ means that care workers are unable to build lives for themselves in Italy. My respondents consistently emphasised in interviews that their migration is a temporary project in which they endure suffering and hardships for a fixed period of time in order to advance the special meaning of money for their transnational household economy. Typically, care workers ‘in transit’ return home for a brief period of time, usually for one to three months annually, spanning the summer and Christmas holidays. Despite the fact that the majority of my respondents own homes in Romania, my respondents prefer to lodge with their children and grandchildren and other relatives. Holidays are occasions in which migrant women can address their healthcare needs, undergo full medical examinations, stock up on medicine, initiate complex dental procedures which they continue over the course of many years.

Cultivating a vibrant social life in Italy was not identified as a priority or an aspiration among those who regard their migration as temporary. Most care workers ‘in transit’ moderate their needs and desires in order to maximise their savings in Italy. Women are extremely frugal in Italy so they can remit, invest, and save money for their return trips. They perceive Italy as a place where money is earned to be shared with ‘loved ones at home.’

Data collected for this dissertation shows that migrant women’s exercise extensive control over their spendings, moderating their own needs and desires, and often calculating what, when, and how much to spend in Italy. I have observed three modes of thrift, frugality, and money-saving approaches that describe money uses in Italy of live-in care workers. First, migrant women restrict their activities and expenses in Italy to bare minimum such as the occasional foodstuff cravings, phone credit top up, and minimal travel. Second, even these expenses are informed by activities in which migrant women strategies sometimes together to

reduce costs further. Migrant women shop around for the cheapest possible product, compare prices, and inform each other where one can save a few money buying a sought after product such as phone credit. Throughout my fieldwork, I routinely saw migrant women engage in such talks at Churchs, in front of international parcel delivery services, at bus stops, and in parks and public squares while on their break. 'Chinese shops' were held in high regard for the lower prices they practised. Thirdly, migrant women choose recreational activities that do not involve the use of products and services to be purchased in order to be enjoyed and consumed, such as attending weekly church services. According to Ciobanu and Fokkema (2017) Romanian ageing migrants attend church services abroad primarily for the socialisation opportunities they provide (Ciobanu & Fokkema, 2017). Dubbed as spaces for socialisation, churches enable attendees to participate in activities which were found to alleviate feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Ciobanu & Fokkema, 2021). But in the case of Romanian care workers in Italy, equally important is their perception that these avenues for socialisation do not incur extra costs, as one migrant woman commented about her Church attendance: 'Whenever I can, I come here to talk to the girls.' Being able to partake in religious and social activities without incurring extra expenses on their behalf is an important determinant for migrant women's church attendance, especially for those who maintain a strong family and home orientation in their migration.

Sundays, often the only day off of live-in care workers, are opportunities to leave the home/workplace. But without a place of their own, and with no friends and family to visit in Italy, migrant women transform the public spaces into their own private realms of respite (Nicolescu, 2021). On their days off, live-in care workers can often be seen in public squares and parks around the city engaging in conversations with fellow care and domestic workers and video calls with friends and family. Public spaces which provide free and easy access to toilet facilities are favoured. Similarly, parks with trees that provide shelter from the sun are often preferred destinations during hot days of summer.

Commenting on live-in care workers' leisure activities marked by practices of self-abnegation was Geta, a 37-year old live-out care worker whose perspective on the lives of care workers in Italy holds significance not only due to her prior involvement in live-in employment (see Section 5.4 of this chapter) but also owing to her family's migration background. Notably, her mother Elena, whom I also interviewed (see, for instance, Sections 5.1, 6.3, and 7.3), is among several female relatives presently engaged in live-in employment in Italy.

> ‘These women only live on Sundays and meet most of the time at church or in the park. If they have a birthday to go to, if they know a family [in Italy] then they have somewhere to go. If they don’t then they meet in groups [of other live-in care workers] in areas where they have access to a toilet, they have a place to sit on a bench in the shade. These are important things... to have a hot day on your only day off and to have to be out without the possibility of going anywhere [it’s not easy]. They take food with them because they don't want to spend the money, that is, they can't afford to because they send all the money home.’ (Geta, 37 years old, live-out care worker, 12 years in Italy)

When they describe their lives in Italy, my respondents often use statements to illustrate the deprived character of a life lived outside one’s family and community ties. Respondents draw a connection between life as live-in care workers abroad and prison. In group conversations, respondents would often inquire one another about the months left on each other’s ‘prison sentence.’ Women ‘sentence’ themselves for many months at a time as they lead a life of isolation in the homes of their employers in Italy, engaged in monotonous daily activities, separated from their family and community ties. When asked about her work, Alina stated that ‘I am a prisoner in my *baba*’s[10] house’ and proceeded to describe the routine activities of a typical day in the life of a live-in domestic worker, saying that ‘Only Sundays are free, but sometimes not even Sundays.’ Although Alina keenly awaits for her Sundays’ off, she bitterly remarks that her free time is spent ‘wandering the streets aimlessly’ in search of respite and escape from the monotonous activities of daily care work and the control of her Italian employer. Similarly to many of my live-in care workers respondents, Alina furthers the social meaning of communal money by downplaying her own need for pocket money as she spends her time off from work in public parks and squares as part of a strategy to reduce costs in Italy.

As discussed, forgoing consumption in Italy is one of the ways in which migrant women economise their lives abroad, with some care workers ‘in transit’ emphasising not spending money for even the most personal basic consumption such as water, as commented by one respondent: ‘Those of us who have mouths to feed would not even buy a glass of water in Italy. We send all our wages back home.’ These aspects of women’s lives in which

[10] The Romanian word *baba* is frequently used by respondents when referring to their elderly care receivers. While it can simply mean ‘elderly lady,’ depending on the context and intonation, it can also carry a pejorative connotation similar to ‘old hag.’

they reorganise expenditure in all facets of their life in Italy in order to give priority to the sending of money home, leave them vulnerable and dependent on others who are only marginally better off in Italy, as I discuss in Section 8.2 in Chapter 8.

Self-abnegation affected the lives of migrant women in many ways. The 'total devotion' towards their families of migrant women who send 'all wages home' can be detrimental to their own health and wellbeing in Italy. Throughout my fieldwork I collected numerous stories of migrants forgoing meeting their own fundamental and essential necessities in order to enhance the social meaning of communal money. Women often ignored their own critical medical needs, continued to work while sick or injured, and pushed through illness or pain. They relied on personal connections in Italy through which they gained knowledge of herbs and medicine to treat and soothe their pains. Medical treatments made the topic of many group conversations, and I observed how migrants consulted one another on the best course of action for their described symptoms. To cope with persistent illnesses and pains, migrant women gift each other antibiotics which they carry with them from Romania. In interviews migrant women emphasised they forgo much-needed medical investigations in Italy when they perceive their time off from work would jeopardise their job and consequently their steady flow of communal money. For instance, Ilinca recounted that she suspected an irregular heartbeat for about a year but it was only after her sudden unemployment following the death of the person in her care that she was able to finally travel to Romania to have a heart health screening. Despite her awareness that her potential medical conditions can increase the risks of cardiac disease, and her constant concern that she will not reach the doctor in time to prevent a complication, Ilinca's anxieties about her personal health were overridden by a deeper concern. She expressed her worry that any interruption of work would jeopardise her earnings abroad and consequently the transfer of communal money with serious consequences for her son and family who depended on money to cover the costs of and oversee the construction of their shared home. In that sense Ilinca mirrors a common theme observed among the women I interviewed. In that sense, Ilinca is not unlike many women I interviewed whose concern for a disruption in her income was less about the impact it makes on themselves and more about their non-migrant family members, and their relationship with their non-migrant family members.

These situations suggest that rather than an economic logic which supposedly prompts migrant care workers 'in transit' to maximise the utility of their stay in Italy by saving and remitting money to their families, self-abnegation is a nuanced phenomenon. Their

explanations were not only about thrift, frugality, and money-saving approaches, but about the meaning of their communal money, which is invested with moral function.

5.3. 'Now it's different:' care workers 'in transit' diversify their money use

Linking migration to economic development in Romania, Sandu (2010) has argued that 'temporary emigration is one of the modernising factors of current time Romania acting directly at individual level' (page 286). While the living standards in Italy have consistently remained higher than those in Romania, the marked distinctions are less conspicuous today when contrasted with the disparities of the 1990s and early 2000s. According to my respondents, the improved living standards and lifestyle of their family members can be, at least partially, attributed to the continuous and consistent remittance transfers sent by migrant women during their time abroad. The economic behaviour of live-in care workers who, over the years, have sent 'all wages home' played a crucial role in Romania's economic development during the early decades of this century. At the time of my research, Romania has experienced three decades of stable but unequal economic growth.

The interview questions which aimed to record changes in money use and behaviour of migrant care workers over the years spent abroad were particularly instructive in revealing key changes. Data revealed that care workers 'in transit' who started their migration in the early 2000s and 2010s arrived in Italy where they took informal employment as irregular migrants, making many compromises in their work as they endured workplace abuses with the goal to restore some sense of financial security in their families. Now, older migrant women often feel some sense of comfort and security in Italy compared to before. This feeling is a motivation for many to diversify their money uses abroad.

Victoria, a 62 year old live-in care worker, fits the description of care workers who, as her stay abroad prolonged, has diversified her money uses. Victoria's situation is similar to that of other mothers I encountered who made the decision to migrate to work in Italy where she took live-in employment when her husband lost his job. Over her 16-years stay abroad she had made great sacrifices as she sought social mobility 'for the children.' Sending substantial amounts of her income 'back home' over extended periods of time, Victoria lists the affordance of 'money from Italy' as she highlights how remittances played a significant role in securing her children's future through investments in education and covering the downpayment of their home among others. At the time of our interview, her now grown

daughters enjoy financially rewarding careers which provide stable employment thanks at least in part to consistent flows of remittances sent over the years by Victoria from Italy. In the following interview excerpt she reflects on the changes in her money uses over her stay abroad:

> ‘Now it’s different but back then when they were growing up I sent all my wage home. Money is why I left [Romania] so I can support my daughters. It means nothing if I am there by their side but I can’t provide for them, I can’t put bread on the table. What use is saying “I love you” if they have to drop out of school and get a job because I can’t keep them in university? They know this very well. They were young when I left them but even then we always talked in our home… “Mom is doing what mom has to do. She is working hard over there (in Italy) because she wants the best for you.” With many sacrifices I put them through school and now they have a good life. One works as a public notary and the other with computers (IT sector). Now they tell me “Mom you made the right decision to leave.” They are very grateful and we are very close, but being away also meant I missed a lot of things…’ (Victoria, 62 years old, live-in care worker, 16 years in Italy)

Victoria’s remittances no longer constitute a significant portion of her salary. Apart from regularly earmarking money for her husband's monthly expenses, she sends smaller amounts, referred to as courtesy money, to various relatives within her extended family network, including affinal relatives, nieces, and nephews. As I discuss in Chapter 7 of this dissertation, these types of remittances play a ritual role in strengthening family bonds during important ceremonies, birthdays, celebrations, and visits home. Despite their modest sum, courtesy money serves as essential ‘extra‘ funds designated for non-migrant family members’ personal expenses. Apart from these regular small cash transfers, Victoria also covers for her children’s and grandchildren’s holidays in Italy. When I interviewed her, Victoria’s daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild had just left Italy to return home. Victoria listed the family activities during the trip, proudly noting that she had footed the bill for it all and her family ‘had only to relax because I took care of everything.’

> ‘My daughter came with her husband and my granddaughters, and I rented a house for them. I would go to them early in the morning at ten when I would do

> the grocery shopping for them. In the morning I didn't stay long, half an hour or so because I had to return quickly to work. But then I would visit again from around one thirty in the afternoon staying until three thirty. So I would spent these two hours with them everyday. I cooked, we ate together, we talked… Then, from Saturday to Sunday late in the evening, I took time off from work and stayed with them. It felt like a kind of vacation for me. We went to Venice, spent time together. Going alone is not something I enjoy but if my family comes, along with the children, then yes... Sometimes my husband comes [to Italy], other times my other daughter comes with her family, and that's what brings joy to me. Nothing else.' (Victoria, 62 years old, live-in care worker, 16 years in Italy)

A somewhat different experience from that of Victoria was that of Livia. While Victoria highlighted improved family conditions which eased family members' dependence on money from Italy as a reason for diversifying her money use in Italy, Livia did not mention such improvements. Instead, Livia emphasised the negative impact on her health due to consistently sending 'all wages home.' Amidst the challenges of caring for an elderly person suffering from Alzheimer, a task many respondents describe as particularly demanding, and some commented is to be avoided, Livia's experience during the first years of her migration was far from easy. The elderly person in her care would not be left alone and demanded care throughout the night. Livia described the experience as 'feeling like I was going mad.' Despite the strains on her health, Livia managed to convince herself that the monetary compensation made it worthwhile:

> 'I said to myself the money is worth it. I didn't care [about my health] at that time, I chased any opportunity to earn extra money.' (Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

Frequently, she opted to work on Sundays, attracted by the potential to earn even more money. She struck an agreement with the elderly person's children to undertake additional tasks during her time off, specifically washing and ironing their clothes, in exchange for 'extra' pay. In addition to the extra work for extra pay, Livia adopted an austere approach in managing her finances by cutting down on any 'unnecessary expenses' as she recounts:

> ‘I economised on everything. During those years, I skipped visits to the hairstylist. I chose to trim my own hair at home. I believed I was being clever not spending money in these ways.’(Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

However, a significant shift occurred in Livia’s lifestyle when she recognized the health hazards she had been exposing herself to for an extended period:

> ‘I only realised how everything had spiralled out of control when I took a walk through the streets one afternoon. It hit me that I was struggling to walk smoothly. It was like I was stumbling around like a drunk person out there on the streets. Stepping outside [after being confined to the house for years on end] made me feel completely off. Then I said to myself that’s it. Enough was enough. This isn't a life. I didn’t kill my mother, why was I to suffer so much? I switched jobs, started doing morning gymnastics, and now I relish my breaks. I treat myself to something nice every week. I do help out those at home, but not at the cost of my well-being. No more! Because there is no red carpet awaiting for me at home.’ (Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

As the quote above suggests, migrant care workers who turn to spending (part of) their wages on things deemed to bring them pleasure abroad, underscore the fairness of this decision after enduring long periods of hard work and self-abnegation in Italy for the benefit of others.

The consequences of migrant care workers’ decision to consistently earmark pocket money out of their salaries for personal expenses in Italy, and regularly keep pocket money out of the circuit of the transnational household economy, impact their economic wellbeing in Italy. As opposed to care workers who ‘sent all wages home,’ women ‘in transit’ who endorse a stronger differentiation between pocket and communal money, repeatedly praised regular allowances ‘for themselves’ as welcomed sources of discretionary money, and insisted that pocket money does not compromise their family relationships as they underscore their continual economic and affective commitments towards non-migrant family members. Importantly, those who maintain pocket money for themselves do not necessarily experience the same level of poverty as those who send ‘all wages home’ as they can enjoy their time off from work, ‘invest’ in friendships in Italy, and enjoy ‘little luxuries,’ as I discuss in Chapter 8 of this dissertation.

In addition to an improved economic situation in Italy, migrant women who stay in Italy for longer periods of time, my data shows, experience some degree of improved working conditions—that is despite the fact that virtually all of my respondents continue to work in low-paid and undervalued jobs and live at the margins of the host society. Initially, live-in employment, depicted as a temporary migration strategy to earn and remit large sums of money 'home,' may turn into a long term project as new opportunities open up which were not previously envisioned by migrant women at the start of their migration.

Interview data shows that, as migrant women regularise their status, acquire Italian language skills, develop social ties, and learn skills to navigate the local labour market, they can leverage their knowledge to increase their negotiation power in labour relations. They negotiate their salary, free time, and work responsibilities. For instance, Dumitra, who has been living and working in Italy as a live-in care worker for 14 year, commented on the 'old generation' of migrant care workers' unwillingness to compromise in their work:

> 'We no longer come to Italy to water [employers'] gardens, feed their pets, and paint their rooms. We come to take care of the old lady or old man, that's it. It's no good showing yourself willing to do this and that. Good housekeeping should only be done in one's home. When they (employer) asked me to wash the curtain I said to them that they need to bring in a specialised cleaning firm as the curtains hang too high up and it's no good for either of us if I am hurt on the job. They didn't bat an eye. Well, of course, because I am not there to do deep cleaning, I am there to care for the elderly.' (Dumitra, 56-years old, live-in care worker, 14 years in Italy)

Indeed, a recurrent trope in my data sees 'new' migrants 'in transit' more vulnerable to unfair working and discriminatory practices, and 'old' migrants 'in transit' more prone to 'putting up a fight' and involving trade unions and lawyers in their efforts to claim their work rights. Newly arrived migrant workers often do not speak the language well enough to stand up for themselves and negotiate advantageous work contracts, they are intimidated by employers, and sign their own resignation letter if they do not know their rights at work.

For instance, migrants who are hurt on the job respond differently according to their awareness of their legal protection. Contrary to the experiences of recently arrived migrants, most care workers 'in transit' who have been in the country for several years do not think twice about filing complaints. Victoria, introduced earlier, arrived in Italy in 2006. Several

months before I interviewed her she injured her knee when going down the stairs in her employer's house, and was rushed into emergency surgery. To heal the doctor prescribed medicine, regular check-ups, and bed rest for at least a month. Upon receiving the news, her employer paid her a visit in the hospital and intimidated her into signing her own resignation letter. Aware of her legal protections, she sought out help and contacted a trade union who assured her worker's compensation rights were respected, and benefited from months of medical payments. Workers such as Victoria confidently seek out legal help (and medical solutions) when they encounter problems in their work.

In contrast, Mariana who had arrived in Italy in 2016 to provide for her single-mother daughter when the father failed to assume responsibility for the child, went through several job changes over the course of her six years stay in Italy. In her previous employment she had to quit when the elderly man in her care made sexual advances that were described by Mariana as abuse and harassment. When I met Mariana, she described her current job as being isolated in the elderly woman's home, without the opportunity for free time as the person in her care required constant supervision, and the family did not arrange for a replacement during Mariana's daily two-hours break:

> 'I never take my two-hours breaks as I should but luckily I have my Sundays off. [The children of the care receiver] come by every Sunday so I prepare lunch for them and I am out the door the second they sit at the table.' (Mariana, 56 years old, live-in care worker, 6 years in Italy)

Instead of tackling her problems and actively seeking solutions for her work situation, vulnerable migrants such as Mariana, facing recurrent work problems often anticipate being wronged and cheated out of their rights at work and consequently internalise their situation in Italy in existential ways, as it is suggested in their recurrent comments that 'Whatever live-in job you find there is always some problem.' It does not help either that, despite progress in standardising and formalising care and domestic work through a labour contract that specifies employer's obligations in relation to pay, food, working hours, sick and holiday leave, and conditions for termination[11], care work in Italy continues to operate largely informally (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2019; Vianello, 2022; Redini et al., 2020). The informal character of work that results from unregulated labour relations means that whatever form the

[11] In Italy, the National Collective Labour Agreements, dating back to 1972, mediates the employment relationships between the family and care worker.

employment relationship takes depends largely on the day-to-day negotiations between parties. Consider the comment of Cassandra who describes her experience with work in Italy:

> 'I realise that I am lucky even if there were and still are problems. There were times when I worked Sundays and holidays and I was not paid. But at least I never had to deal with the problems that come with unemployment and had worked continuously, always with a work contract of never less than 40 hours. Now, it's better. Now I have a 54-hour contract.' (Cassandra, 58 years old, live-in care worker, 11 years in Italy)

The oft-recurring phrase 'I was lucky' present in several of my interviews underscores the perception of an experience with work in Italy that is shaped by the arbitrariness of an informal and highly flexible employment relationship. Whether or not a worker is 'lucky' largely depends on the economic situation of the person she takes care of; the existence of an employment contract that accurately reflects the hours worked; employer's compliance with that employment contract; and her ability to informally negotiate her rights at work.

Disagreements over 'acceptable' and 'just' work conditions, demands, and salaries between 'old generation' and 'new' care workers 'in transit' often appeared in my fieldwork. Narcissa who arrived in Italy in 2000 when she took live-in employment before she transitioned to live-out employment after 15 years comments:

> 'I chat with my fellow [care workers] at Church every Sunday. I heard that some are earning €800 to €900 per month. Well, these were the wages back in 2010, and they are still the same today. How can this be? I told them numerous times to request wages as per the national contract because they (Italians) are the ones who make the laws, not us. Plus, you should have your Sundays off and the 2 hours of rest every day. Our generation, the 60-year-olds, will be returning home soon, but another younger generation is coming to build homes, support their children through college, and celebrate their children's weddings. With just €800 per month, they won't be able to do much if they continue with these salaries. Back in 2010 you could accomplish a lot with €800, but now, with that amount, you can barely cover the cost of food for your family in Romania. I tell them 'don't work for such low wages because no one in Italy will erect a statue in your honour.' (Narcisa, 65 years old, live-out care worker, 22 years in Italy)

These disagreements, revealed in the comment of Narcisa above, suggest that 'old generation' migrant care workers, meaning those who arrived in Italy in the early 2000s and 2010s, are less inclined to accept a low salary and poor working conditions. They assert their rights by requesting to be paid according to the collective agreement as mandated by Italian labour laws, and by insisting on their work contract adhering to legal provisions, such as having Sundays off and two hours of rest each day. The comment above underscores an awareness of workers' rights and commitment to fair labour practices among 'old generation' migrant care workers who are also more prone to explicitly challenge fellow care workers who, by accepting low wages, maintain salaries within this sector of work stagnant. Referencing her own generation's imminent retirement, Narcisa adds a temporal dimension to her explanation. While in the past the wage level was adequate enough for the euro went further in care workers' origin country which allowed care workers to achieve their economic goals, nowadays with cost of living skyrocketing in Romania, it is impossible for the 'new generation' of care workers to achieve the aspirations all migrant women share in migration for the wages accepted are barely sufficient to cover the basic needs of a family in Romania.

What pushes migrant women to continue to accept low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions in the care work sectors? In addition to their strong family commitments and the highly informal nature of care work as discussed above, Escrivá & Vianello (2016) identified another contributing factor. According to the authors, migrant women's maintenance of a temporary perspective regarding their stay abroad deters care workers from forming a worker's identity which can preclude activism and significant positive change within this sector of work.

5.4. Moving out of live-in employment

As time progresses and care workers' periods abroad stretch for years, migrant women may decide that long-term migration is a viable project, and express their desire to move out of live-in employment in search for other areas of work that provide for less intensive emotional and physical labour. For these migrant women, live-in arrangement emerged as a strategy to achieve their own personal and migration aspirations. As soon as they save enough money to afford out of pocket expenses for costs associated with live-out employment, such as

accommodation, food, and transportation, among others, they may switch to hourly work in the same or different sector. Even though this thesis primarily explores the experiences of live-in care workers, it is important to note that Romanian migrants abroad are involved in various occupations. While it may have been more common before Romania's EU accession for women to primarily engage in care work, there has been a shift in recent decades as Romanian women have transitioned into different sectors of employment, predominantly in manufacturing, hospitality and hotel industry (Sacchetto and Vianello, 2016). However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of these migrant women continue to work in the care sector, whether in live-in or live-out roles (see Chapter 1 and 4).

For instance, Geta arrived in Italy in 2009 when the economic crisis hit Romania, and her husband, working as a teacher in the village highschool, was forced to accept a drastic pay cut. Initially, she took live-in employment, taking care of an elderly Italian woman, as the job allowed her to earn and spend less of her wages. Geta was one of the participants in my research who aspired to become a 'permanent' migrant, and worked towards this goal as she switched to hourly work two years into her stay in Italy. She proudly commented that during those difficult years not only was she able to provide financially for her husband and child but managed, with many sacrifices, to eventually bring her husband first and then her child to Italy. For Geta to afford her husband's migration she remained in live-in employment while securing and paying for his accommodation in a home shared with other male migrant workers. She also continued to remit money to her sister-in-law who cared for her young child. In the following quote, Geta enumerates the many ways in which she financially supported her husband at the beginning of his migration:

> 'I paid for the (husband's) room, food, everything, everything. If there was a problem with something in the apartment they would come to me to talk to.' (Geta, 37 years old, live-out care worker, 12 years in Italy)

This implied an important change in their roles as previously her husband was the sole provider for the family, and thus in charge of making most financial decisions, whereas, in Italy, Geta was providing for both. Recollecting the period prior to her migration to Italy, Geta illustrated her husband's controlling and abusive behaviour which extended over family money:

> ‘I was not allowed to speak with anyone because I was from a certain social rank, meaning my husband was a teacher, and I was a lady (ironically). I couldn't associate with those who worked day jobs, with the women from the village, no matter if they were relatives. He would tell me not to talk to this one, not to talk to that one... He kept telling me I wasn't allowed to see that person, not allowed to talk to this person, not allowed to visit the other person... I didn't have the freedom you have in a big city where you can go out without worrying about being seen or talked about... In other words, my freedoms as a wife were limited to a budget he gave me monthly with which I could go for hair removal or to the hairdresser, or to the store with him to buy clothes.’ (Geta, 37 years old, live-out care worker, 12 years in Italy)

According to Vianello (2016), in contrast to the care worker ‘in transit’ who relentlessly emphasis the sacrifices endured in Italy for the benefit of ‘loved ones,’ the ‘permanent’ care worker is less inclined to readily conform to the social expectations that demand migrant women to selflessly sacrifice themselves in Italy for the betterment of their families, particularly their children. These ‘rebel women’ (Vianello, 2016: 173) exhibit a resourcefulness in seeking alternatives to live-in employment and demonstrate a willingness to remain in Italy as a means to escape the challenges they face in Romania, which encompass limited job prospects, meagre wages, and unsatisfying marriages.

Magda fits this example. When I interviewed Magda, she characterised herself as an ambitious and assumed woman who lives up to her decisions in life. Currently she juggles a live-out full-time care work position where she provides company to an elderly woman, and an off-the-books weekend job as waitress in a cafe. Four times a month Magda works night shifts in her friend’s bakery where she prepares sandwiches for the next day. Magda’s salary fluctuates every month but was generally higher than the majority of my respondents, for she combined formal employment with cash-in-hand. When she initially arrived in Italy in 2001, Magda did what most of my migrant women respondents do. She found accommodation and work through ‘friends of a friend:’

> ‘Those were actually [my friend’s] friends, not mine, but they became my friends over time. During the two months I stayed there they helped me a lot because I came here with only €200, which is the minimum they ask for you to be able to come, apply for a visa, and come. And I spent those €200 in two weeks, after

> which they helped me. I, in turn, helped them by cleaning the house to repay them in a way. (...) Through these friends of mine, I also found work. So, the wife of one of them had come to work here in Italy and was looking for a job. They found jobs for her, but she didn't want to stay because she didn't like the place where she had to work. Plus, they told her that after two months, the family planned for her to go to the seaside with the *baba* and she didn't want the responsibility. So I had practically found work in May, and in June or July, I was supposed to go to the seaside with the *baba*.'(Magda, 59 years old, live-out care worker, 21 years in Italy)

The live-in position her friends secured for her, Magda comments, resembles more like a 'prison' than a workplace. Describing this experience, she says:

> 'I didn't have a moment for myself, *baba* wouldn't let me out of her sight. I had to sleep in the same bed with her at night, otherwise she wouldn't sleep, she would keep me up all night calling out my name to come take her to the bathroom. Go figure.' (Magda, 59 years old, live-out care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Three years into her stay in Italy, she finally pulled herself (and her family) out of the 'deep financial hole' which brought her to Italy. With sacrifice and hardship she paid off 'the bank' and other loans from friends and family she acquired before leaving Romania.

Yet Magda decided that in Italy she can achieve far more for her family than she possibly could in Romania by returning to her minimum-wage work as a cashier in a supermarket. She decided to stay and invited her husband to express the same devotion and commitment towards the family through his own financial contributions and to shoulder the financial difficulties of caring for their then adolescent daughter. Magda hoped that as a couple where both earn hefty sums of money, she and her husband would be able to save more and at a faster rate and secure a wealthier life for their family in Romania. Although Magda favoured hourly work and saw in her husband's arrival in Italy an opportunity to accomplish this personal goal, in her opinion, her husband's help was by no means an act of substantial support for her own benefit but a fatherly obligation to be fulfilled for their family's and daughter's wellbeing. Magda continued to remit communal money earmarked for 'educating' her daughter and managed to scrape together enough money to rent a room for her husband and pay for his travel expenses. A few weeks into his stay in Italy she found

him a job, through her social connections in Italy, on a construction site. However, soon after, he decided that life and work in Italy is too hard, demanding, and demeaning and announced that he was to return to his minimum wage work in Romania. Magda relates how she had dealt with her husband's refusal to shoulder the burden to provide for their family by embracing labour migration to Italy:

> 'We needed the money and in two it's easier… I paid for his bus ticket and got him a room through one of my connections in a house full of [other migrant] men. But he complained a lot because he had to share the room with another person, he had to lay low everytime he went out and in general he could not get out too much because at that time we were illegal. One day, sick of his complaints, I asked him to come to my employer's house to see how I was living. I had a tiny bed in a small room that I shared with my *baba*. I was with her day in, day out. [I had] no privacy, no time off, nothing of this sort. He at least could sleep through the night and had some privacy. Eventually, I got him a job on a construction site. It was hard work but he could make good money… In these places if you are ambitious and work hard you can move up to better jobs. He went to work for two days and decided it wasn't for him. The work was too hard. I told him "if you leave, we are done." He made his choice.' (Magda, 59 years old, live-out care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Respondents such as Magda who abandon their initial project of temporary migration for the status of 'permanent' migrants, perceive Italy's labour market to offer many economic opportunities for those 'hard working' individuals with 'ambition' to endure adverse conditions in the informal labour market in the early years of their stay for the future prospect of steady employment on the formal labour market, and eventually integration in the Italian society. Respondents expected their efforts to pay out as they regarded hard work to eventually lead to sufficient money to achieve the desired economic safety net in order to pursue their own migratory ambitions to settle in Italy, and eventually enjoy upwards social mobility often translated into moving out of live-in employment. In that sense, my live-out respondents' moral economy exhibits a strong sense of individual accountability where the willingness to take on hard work, accept low pay, and assume risky working conditions in unsafe environments becomes the measure of 'personal investment and sacrifice' (Muehlebach & Shoshan, 2012: 328).

Vianello (2016) discusses the category of 'permanent' migrant women arguing that live-out care workers continue to remit consistent amounts of money to their children even after they decide to settle in Italy (see also Fedyuk, 2021). In contrast, my 'settled' respondents stand apart from Ukrainian migrants described by Vianello, among others, as they do not offer substantial or consistent financial assistance to their family members. Instead, as migrant women become 'permanent' migrants and move out of live-in employment, they seldom provide help to their family, and only when there is a specific need for it. They spend their time off from work taking trips, socialising, and 'investing' in friendships in Italy.

In her testimony below, Mădălina, who arrived in 2002 in Italy where she took live-in employment to eventually transit to live-out employment in 2016 when she married, comments on the meaning of money that reveals the disagreements, I often encounter in my fieldwork, between care workers who remain 'in transit' and those who 'settle' in Italy:

> 'The majority of badanti who work 24 hours sent all their money home. I used to invite them for coffee but after they refused me again and again I stopped asking and gave up. They keep nothing for themselves and send all their money home, always looking for new ways to send more and more money home to their families. Sometimes I'd offer to buy them the coffee but they calculate everything. They calculate how much money they have to spend on the bus to get to the coffee shop, get it? And if it costs €2 they refuse the invitation, no matter if the coffee is free. There really is nothing else on their mind besides money, money, money. And that is simply not me. The badante who don't work 24 hours have considerably a better life because they can afford little luxuries in the sense that from time to time they take excursions nearby, they go to McDonald's or a pizzeria, they have a coffee with the girls, maybe a cake.' (Mădălina, 49 years old, live-out care worker, 20 years in Italy)

Contrasting her own experience as an hourly care worker to that of '24 hours' care workers whose need to economise is born out of a deeply stressful situation of material scarcity and insecurity, Mădălina emphasised the affordances of pocket money for those care workers who treat themselves to 'little luxuries' in Italy. As I discuss at length in Chapter 8 of this dissertation, spending money 'on themselves' provides women with the possibility of socialising which gives them a sense of fulfilment and integration in Italy.

Although becoming financially self-reliant in Italy by, for instance, endorsing a stronger differentiation between communal and pocket money, as discussed above, is necessary for care workers to transit from live-in to live-out employment, simply diversifying money uses in Italy is not by itself sufficient to prompt care workers 'in transit' to consider the option of becoming 'permanent' migrants. Analysing the working and migration trajectory of Eastern European migrant women in domestic and care work sectors in Italy, Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi (2015) note that live-in employment can 'easily turn into a trap' as they find low exit rates among migrant women whose stay in Italy prolongs. In spite of Romanian women's privileged position as legal migrants with access to wage work and formal employment granted by their rights as citizens of the EU (as opposed to other migrant groups of care workers in Italy, such as Ukranians and Moldavians), studies indicate that what deters Romanian women from exiting live-in employment, are, firstly, the effects of 'cumulative inertia' whereby 'the longer an individual stays in a particular state (place of residence, occupation, etc.) the less likely he or she is to move out of that state in the immediate future' (Obucina 2013: 566 as cited in Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2015: 1132). Secondly, women's specialisation in highly feminised professions substantially reduces their chances to be recruited for other types of work (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2015). The low professional mobility of live-in care workers prompted Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi (2018) to refer to migrant women as victims of a highly feminised labour segregation which pushes women and eventually keeps them tethered to low paying domestic and care work employment.

Notwithstanding the labour market segmentation in the host country as an important factors shaping employment outcome for migrant women in Italy, the incorporation of a transnational family framework in the analysis of data collected among Romanian care workers in Italy allowed me to understand that the constrained mobility of live-in care workers is equally shaped by factors far removed from the immediate context of their destination country. Leaving live-in employment requires migrant women to make adjustments in their financial *and* personal commitments that are not often possible. As I discuss in the next chapter, switching to hourly work in the same or other sectors of work entails extra costs for women. To renounce live-in care work migrant women need to save enough money to afford the additional expenditure that live-out work entails such as renting a room, food provisioning, increased costs in transportation, and so on. As a consequence, their non-migrant family members, especially children and grandchildren who are the main recipients of money from Italy, may experience a decrease in remittances. My respondents

reasoned that this is too high a cost to pay. For these reasons they did not express a goal towards hourly work and instead remained over long periods of time in live-in arrangements.

Before presenting a conclusion to this first empirical chapter, I want to reiterate some of the comments made in the Chapter 2 regarding the distribution of money and the diversity of money uses among Romanian care workers abroad. As previously mentioned, my aim in this dissertation was not to present an exhaustive list of types of money in the economic lives of care workers in Italy but rather to explore those that were more prevalent as I observed them. Beyond these three pieces of money there emerged other types of money that are not given attention in this dissertation. One example of this is interest free loans migrant women (particularly those in live-out employment) offer to extended family members and friends, helping them with the purchases of big expenditures such as a car, paying for wedding and funeral ceremonies, buying furniture to decorate their homes, among others.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced the pieces of money that make up the empirical part of this dissertation. I shedded light on changes in money behaviour throughout care workers' migration project, by introducing three types of money produced and used by my respondents differently, and which co-exist in the transnational family economy of my respondents: communal, courtesy, and pocket money. Linking previous findings and conceptualisation on Eastern European women's migration for care work to Italy, I discussed Romanian women's money behaviour according to two typologies of care workers proposed by migration scholars, namely care workers 'in transit' and 'permanent.' This chapter explored how these migrant care workers groups approach matters of consumption, future planning, and savings in Italy. Simultaneously, it highlighted that the emerging types of money and their use are influenced by the evolving relationships and social positioning of migrant women as families traverse different life stages

Chapter 6. Communal money

Communal money, unlike other types of money discussed in this dissertation, i.e. courtesy and pocket money, is not explicitly named as such by my respondents. As I explain next, its name derives from how my respondents talk about how and why they sent money home to relatives more broadly, and my attempt to identify specific cases as instances of communal money, as I explain next.

Broadly, communal money refers to a family obligation that has the ability to produce solidarity among individuals. Emerging from the social positioning and opportunities available to my respondents as both labour migrants and owners of remittances, communal money is tied to distinct social and gendered subjectivities of my respondents as migrant mothers and grandmothers. As mothers and grandmothers, migrant women wish to respond to the needs of their adult children and grandchildren, who are the main recipients of communal money. But their devotion is not limitless. Firstly, I see communal money as what circulates from women to their families, especially children and later grandchildren, depending on needs of those at home which fluctuates along with the working and earning capacity of family members, throughout the duration of women's stay abroad. Secondly, communal money represents a commitment for working towards a common family goal. Thirdly, communal money is not shared indiscriminately.

I deploy the phrase 'communal money' to describe specific transactions in which money is used according to commonly shared understandings of what are desirable familial goals. Focusing on everyday money use in transnational families, I show that my respondents—rather than simply adopting a narrative of family obligation which gives primacy to moral responsibilities as opposed to the logic of interest and calculation—respond to their obligations by adopting money uses which aim to produce solidarity among family members. One of the ways in which money is imbued with moral *and* economic considerations is in use and conversations which aim to frame money morally. I observed how migrant women condemned certain economic behaviour or expenditures and legitimised others. In this context, communal money, rather than simply being used as a market money

currency, is subject to restrictions and limitations as migrant women safeguard the boundaries of this special currency from those who spend money unchecked and without regard for the benefits of all, and thus from resuming its 'all purpose' money characteristics.

In this chapter, following a description of communal money and how migrant care workers get involved in remitting communal money (see Section 6.1), I turn to analysing three distinct cases of organising communal money. I argue that the routine transfers of communal money are the cornerstone of fostering intimacy and solidarity among family members who mobilise resources to accomplish common goals. These shared objectives encompass shouldering the costs of migrating abroad (see Section 6.2), providing the security of a home (see Section 6.3), and/or investing in grandchildren's education (see Section 6.4). In that sense, I show, communal money often serves as a significant source of material assistance for families 'left behind.' Migrant women's use of money, as they routinely transfer remittance for common family goals, becomes particularly crucial when their children are unemployed, unable to earn sufficient income, or when men have abandoned their own families.

6.1. Dynamic use of communal money

Communal money is the most dynamic type of money encountered in my fieldwork. The use of communal money in the transnational family economy of my respondents shifts depending on the needs of families and their children. All of migrant women who shared their stories with me cited the need to 'pay off debts,' 'put bread on children's table,' 'clothes on children's back,' and 'keep a roof over children's head' as their initial reasons for migrating and remitting money. Initially earmarked for basic needs, their wages earned abroad served as a crucial form of economic support for their families who needed to make ends meet. The previous chapter shed light on these migrant care workers 'in transit,' the majority of whom migrated in the early 2000s and 2010s to provide for their then-adolescent and young adults children, and the multiple intersecting disadvantages they experience abroad. It discussed the particularities of care work organisation in Italy which created the conditions for Romanian women holding a working-class and often rural background to participate in international mobility by migrating alone to Italy to work as caregivers for elderly Italian care receivers. It argued that live-in employment is often the preferred choice for those migrant care workers

who viewed their migration project as a temporary 'sacrifice' to accomplish economic family goals. Not incurring living expenses, and depending entirely on their employers to provide food, accomodation, among others, live-in employment allows care workers 'in transit' to earmark large chunks of their salary which they send home to their families, especially children. This comes with its own set of hardships. The incompatibility of live-in employment with family and social life in Italy (Vianello, 2022), their low-wage employment (Redini et al., 2020), and high level of poverty exacerbated by their practice of sending 'all wages home,' sees care workers 'in transit' more prone to occupying a socially vulnerable position in Italy compared to live-out care workers who can enjoy a more fulfilling social life outside work, reunify with their husbands and children abroad, as discussed in the previous chapter. Amidst these intertwined challenges and disadvantages, my respondents who turned to migration as a temporary solution to deal with economic misfortune, reveal how their decisions to remain in Italy for longer periods than initially planned are now constrained by the limited social protection and gainful employment opportunities of their now grown children and grandchildren. The stories about communal money circulation I collected mirrors the changes in care workers 'in transit' transnational family dynamics as they traverse life stages. As women age abroad and are nearing retirement, as their spouses become sick and die, as their children grow up, finish education, enter the labour market, establish families, and have children of their own, all trigger changes in migrant women's perception of family and familial responsibilities, subsequently altering the meaning of money and its use.

One important finding in my research is that communal money signifies a change in the moral order of transnational families. While in Romania grandmothers are expected to be morally involved in the rearing of grandchildren (see Chapter 4 and 5), my data suggests that migrant grandmothers share in the financial responsibilities for their grandchildren when they realise that they do not appear to need to be cared for. What they seem to need is money. Transnational grandmothers defer their personal desire to return 'home' and postpone their plans for retirement in order to help raise another generation of children, and in some cases, become main providers of material care for their grandchildren 'left behind.' Upon her return from a brief Christmas holiday spent at home with her children and grandchildren, Ilinca vividly recalled how her 12-years old grandson clung unto, imploring his grandmother to prolong her stay, commenting with evident pride 'he loves me as if I were the one raising him.' As she recounted the conversation that unfolded between them, she described how she

delicately addressed the situation by emphasising the essential role her work in Italy and subsequent remittances plays in fulfilling the young boy's desires, saying:

> 'If I don't go, who will buy you all the things you want? Your birthday is coming up and grandma needs to go to Italy to make some money for your birthday.'(Ilinca, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 13 years in Italy)

As this example suggests, grandmothers recognise that their grandchildren have desires and needs that they cannot provide for while on a low-wage salary or mediocre pension in Romania, where income barely covers the costs of day-to-day necessities. Long-distance and long-term separation is normalised as grandchildren learn early on in their childhood that labour migration is the means through which one can achieve common family goals. The high cost of emotional distress in family separation is construed by my respondents as the price to pay in order for families to be able to constitute common family goals, be it small fits such as a birthday celebration, or long-term enterprises such as the means to reach academic achievements.

Even as they are nearing retirement, migrant women perceive that they *must* continue their active role in their transnational family social reproduction, namely to cover for daily expenses, healthcare, education, among others. They persist in working abroad, in spite of hardships and ageing, because their generous earmarking of communal money proves pivotal in addressing the structural economic and employment barriers that their families may encounter in Romania. As the stories in this chapter show, in many cases, not sending communal money means their adult children cannot afford to pay the downpayment of their home, cover their mortgage loans, pay their groceries when they experience bouts of unemployment, or have to halt home-building efforts. Without communal money, grandchildren might struggle to afford their rent, essential groceries, university fees, or fulfil their personal desires such as acquiring new technology devices, cars, clothes, and toys.

The circulation of communal money within transnational families became a regular and organised aspect of many of my respondents' family life. Emphasising the routine of sending money home, one respondent commented: 'I no longer think about it. The day I get my salary I start making payments.' For them, sending money regularly remained a motherly and grandmotherly duty and a marker of moral worth throughout their extended stay abroad. Respondents engaged in the transfer of communal money felt a pronounced sense of responsibility to give whatever they can to adult non-migrant children. They felt that they

were the only source of help their non-migrant family had, and believed that they could not escape this responsibility either. Reflecting on their constrained choice of providing material care, they would often say ‘What can I do?’ and ‘If I don't help them, who will?’ Sending as much money as they can is ‘The right thing to do’ to express family solidarity and commitment, and the only means through which to help those at home, for money is conceived to be ‘The only way to move forward.’ Migrant women continue to send money ‘To push children ahead.’ But with the explosion of prices for food, goods, and services in Romania, the conversations I had with women left me with a lingering sense that more and more money is needed to not only meet those basic needs to survive but also ‘To move forward.’

6.2. Mothers and their daughters on the move: providing grandchildren with a better future

Older migrant women sometimes help their adult daughter migrate to Italy where they rarely stay more than a few years in live-in employment. By moving out of live-in employment to hourly work migrant daughters become ‘permanent’ care workers in Italy (see discussion on the transition from live-in to live-out employment in Chapter 5) where they bring their own husbands and school-age children. This move, however, is possible also with the substantial help of their older migrant mothers who shoulder the responsibility to provide ‘material care’ (Coe, 2011) for their grandchildren.

The most poignant example of this is Sanda. Sanda, a 65-year-old live-in care worker in Italy, has four children and three grandchildren. In Romania, after being made redundant from the factory where she worked for most of her life and unable to find a job, Sanda turned to subsistence agriculture to contribute to household provision. When her eldest child finished high school and expressed a desire to further his education, she realised her husband’s wage was not enough to support the family and her son’s study at the university in Bucharest. With the help of her husband, she built a greenhouse where she grew fresh produce to sell on the street market. While maintaining this livelihood, she supplemented agriculture and petty trade with the herding of livestock. She started off with a small piggery business because, as she told me, ‘Pigs are easy to fatten and there is always demand for them.’ When this business did not perform as expected, she started raising calves. Her

resourcefulness and efforts were directed towards breaking the deadlock of her family's experience with impoverishment and unemployment. Her dreams for the educational attainment of her children provided the motivation to 'carry on' as she comments:

> 'Those were difficult years, very difficult years, really. With little money we barely managed to survive. But eventually my son graduated and found a good job.' (Sanda, 65 years old, live-in care worker, 10 years in Italy)

Soon thereafter, her daughter finished highschool and moved to Bucharest for higher education, with Sanda and her husband bearing her living expenses. In 2012, faced with the recent untimely death of her husband and the subsequent decrease in household income, Sanda had no choice but to ask her sister for help. Her sister, a live-in care worker in Italy, offered Sanda a one time payment of €100 to cover basic necessities but urged her to find a long-term solution for her household's financial strains:

> 'I asked for money from my sister because I needed it to keep my daughter at the university. I asked for €100 because I didn't manage to pay for all my expenses and her expenses at Bucharest. It was too much to keep two households. And my sister told me "I will give you this money but you have to figure out a long term solution."' (Sanda, 65 years old, live-in care worker, 10 years in Italy)

She extended her support to help Sanda migrate to Italy where she had found work for her as a live-in care worker:

> 'I came to Italy. What other choice did I have? With many sacrifices, I sent money and managed to keep my children in school and now it's my grandchildren's turn.' (Sanda, 65 years old, live-in care worker, 10 years in Italy)

To 'take care' of their children's education and achieve broader long-term life goals Sanda, like most of my respondents, did not feel she had a 'real' choice, but rather her departure to Italy was the only choice to provide for her family.

In 2015 Sanda helped her eldest daughter, Vasilica, gain live-in employment in Italy. Soon thereafter, her daughter expressed the desire to switch to hourly work and bring her husband and eventually her child to Italy. Sanda took it upon herself to help the family

reunite. Sanda explained to me that bringing the family to Italy was no small fit on the part of live-in care workers. First, they need to save enough money to afford renting an apartment and the additional expenses that come from live-out employment, such as food provision, increased costs in transportation, and so on. Second, they need to find an apartment on a market where housing is scarce and apartments are hard to come by even for Italians let alone for foreigners.[12] At the same time, Sanda explains, saving rather than sending wages home means that non-migrant families experience a decrease in remittances. In order to make low-wage hourly care and domestic work affordable for their family and prevent them from 'feeling' the decrease in remittances and subsequent drop in living standards, Sanda agreed to take over the responsibility of sending money to the paternal grandmother who cared for the grandchild while parents were away. Sanda hoped that, in this way, Vasilica would be able to accomplish her goals of reuniting with her husband, and eventually, with their daughter.

Assuming the role of an intergenerational provider was a sacrifice as Sanda had to put on hold her own plans and desires to retire, and instead, remain employed in Italy for longer than she wanted. As a mother, Sanda supported her migrant daughter reunite with her husband and maintain the integrity of their family. As a grandmother, she assumes the responsibility of becoming the main provider for her grandchild by sending communal money. Despite hardships and disruptions to her life, Sanda takes great satisfaction in her ability to provide for her grandchild and views communal money 'sent home' as part of a *shared* sacrifice that is born out of the need for her family to work together collaboratively to sustain the transnational household:

> 'I had to do it. She made this decision and I think it's a good decision. What life is that when one is over here and the other one over there? And I like to see them together, getting along, to see them as a family. Now they talk about bringing my granddaughter (to Italy), but first they have to save up some money so that my daughter can cut back on (work) hours. [Granddaughter] will have a better future here (in Italy).' (Sanda, 65 years old, live-in care worker, 10 years in Italy)

[12] It is important to highlight that meeting one's needs for housing security in Italy poses an even greater challenge for Romanian Roma, as discussed by Cingolani (2016). However, since none of the respondents interviewed identified as Roma, this dissertation did not explore the ethnic discrimination faced by the Roma community in Italy.

Sanda feels she had the moral obligation to do it, to step up and assume material responsibility for her grandchild, for she considers her daughter's professional ambition for hourly work in terms of family unity that she desires for her daughter. The potential migration of her granddaughter is set against the perceived expectations for a 'better future' abroad in which (supposedly) grandchild's long-term life chances are enhanced.

The perception of a constrained choice reflects a feeling that—in absence of formal (transnational) institutional support to mediate the work-family reconciliation abroad—migrant women need to shoulder the responsibility for care of their family members. Despite Romanian care workers' privileged position as legal migrants with access to wage work, formal employment, and residence permit in Italy granted by their EU citizenship, the unique nature of live-in jobs restricts women's options for bringing their families, especially children, to Italy. What deters young migrant mothers from bringing their children and family to Italy are the labour market constraints that push migrant women into live-in employment (Vianello, 2016; Ambrosini, 2014), the virtual incompatibility of such employment with private and family life in Italy (Vianello, 2022), along with the added costs of childcare abroad. With no (transnational) institutional support, young migrant mothers who take live-in employment in Italy are left with little options for family reunification. They need to save enough money out of their salary in order to afford the out of pocket costs associated with live-out employment. Saving enough money, however, implies that those 'at home' need to make due with less financial contributions. Without the substantial material and emotional support of their migrant mothers, 'new generations' of migrant care workers such as Vasilica are unable to accomplish their personal goals to move out of live-in employment, their familial goals to reunite with their family, and their migration goals to settle in Italy. The case of Sanda and Vasilica remind us that migrants are not solely independent actors; they exist within the context of their familial bonds, and choices regarding migration are made collectively within the family. The financial costs of accomplishing migration goals are shared in the transnational pooling of resources.

Referring to the research by Pasquinelli and Rusmini (2013), Sabrina Marchetti argues that 'the new generation' of care workers 'prioritize their independence and free time over the commitment to save money to support their families in the home country' (Marchetti, 2022:54). As discussed above, for some younger, second generation of Romanian care workers their ability to transition from live-in to live-out employment or not greatly depends on the support the older, first generation of care workers are willing to offer. Their mothers are called on to shoulder the costs of live-out employment and attenuate the financial

burdens of their daughters' decision for their families by stepping in and remitting money to their 'left behind' grandchildren.

The decision to share in the costs of family reunification of their migrating children is not without tensions and ambiguity. Intergenerational sacrifices for the benefit of children and grandchildren are not easy to undertake. In order to establish a bond of love and solidarity through the transfer of money, migrant mothers sometimes found it necessary to ignore certain family members who displayed limited appreciation for their solidarity and even demonstrated disregard of their own needs so that she can maintain a sense of dignity and self-worth, rooted in sacrifices they perform for the loved ones. Sanda comments on the disagreements she often has with her family whose perceptions of monetary abundance experienced by those in the live-in employment increases expectations for continuous financial support:

> 'They (daughter and son-in-law in Italy) think that because I work as a [live-in] bandate I have so much more money, so they think it's normal that I give, give, give (money) because I don't have my own expenses. And it's true, you know, everything is paid for by my *baba*. I never go out to restaurants or cafes, no you won't see me [out]…. My only expense is a small treat I buy for myself when I feel like having something sweet. But I hardly ever buy anything for myself as it is.' (Sanda, 65 years old, live-in care worker, 10 years in Italy)

The undercurrent of frustration present in Sanda's comment suggests that a family working together towards achieving common goals is not without tensions. The sacrifices of Sanda for the benefit of her daughter and grandchild appear to remain unrecognised and unappreciated by her family. This brings to mind the concept of economic empathy coined by Emir Estrada to describe the experiences and perceptions of street vending Latina/o immigrant children in the USA who, in witnessing first hand their parents' struggles for economic survival and in 'working tirelessly' alongside them 'to help support the family' (Estrada, 2019:90), develop a 'stronger appreciation for parents and the money they earn' (Estrada, 2019:92). Similarly, one could expect that Vasilica, having had direct involvement in the live-in sector, would have a heightened sense of awareness and understanding of the sacrifices and hardships of earning communal money discussed in the previous chapter. But from our interview, I gained the sense that this may not be the case. Unfortunately, as much as I would have liked, I was not

able to interview Vasilica to understand her perceptions over her mother's sacrifices for earning communal money.

(Adult) Children's lack of economic empathy towards migranting mothers was not, however, ubiquitous in my field data. In fact, my respondents commented on the emotional support they received from grateful children who appreciated the sacrifices their mothers endured abroad to earn and remit communal money. Victoria, introduced in the previous chapter, was not unlike other mothers I interviewed whose children 'never asked and wanted for anything' growing up, suggesting a type of understanding children had towards the economic difficulties their own families, and especially mothers abroad, faced.

However, for those migrant women, such as Sanda, who were confronted with the lack of economic empathy of their family members, I discovered that sharing of resources did not depend entirely on the quality of the relationships they forge with their 'loved one.' Even when expressing annoyance and irritation with the numerous requests made by family members, migrant women do not outright reject adult children's claims on their money, particularly when these requests align with what migrant women perceive as worthwhile endeavours. Instead, they complain that adult children repeatedly seek their financial assistance, asking them to 'give, give, give' stating that the expectations placed upon them are excessive, commenting that children 'expect too much.' When their loved ones do not show appreciation for their labour, migrant mothers need to make additional efforts to invest and reinvest meaningfully the value of their solidarity that defines who they are—and most importantly—who they are not. Monetary support becomes intertwined with their identities as mothers and grandmothers, and they invoke their solidarity to help loved ones accomplish their desires and ambitions as part of their identity as 'good' mothers and grandmothers.

As mentioned above, migrant women often do not deny (adult) children claims over their money, especially when they consider familial goals towards which money is committed worthwhile pursuits. Importantly, however, economic support to family members other than one's children and grandchildren cannot be taken for granted. Money's capacity to create dissent within (otherwise) collaborative family members is reflected in women's stories that usually revolve around a particularly hurtful memory when the goodwill of migrant women was repaid with envy and ungratefulness by their relatives. Siblings may give in to feelings of envy when they find their sisters earn more money abroad than they. This is exemplified in the case of Maricica who experienced a falling out with her brother due to tensions in their relationship caused by money. Maricica helped one of her three brothers settle in Italy where she used her connections to secure work for him on a construction site and accommodation in

a shared, overcrowded house. In addition to this practical support, Maricica took financial responsibility for him, paying his rent, utilities, transportation, and food expenses until he became self-sufficient. The help extended to her brother stretched her resources thin as Maricica continued to send remittances to her mother who cared for her daughters in Romania. Yet despite her efforts, Maricica returned back to her village one summer to find that she had been the subject of gossip. She had heard a rumour that Ionel had gone around saying that 'Maricica sits on her ass all day and receives €500 while I break my back for every money I make.' Ionel referenced Maricica's €500 survivorship pension from her previous marriage with the elderly Italian care receiver turned husband as 'unearned' money and unfairly portrayed her as an idle migrant content with access to 'easy' money. Furthermore, rumours played down the vital assistance Ionel had secured through Maricica's support while her own household underwent a shortage of resources. Maricica remained silent on the matter but grew convinced that this sole incident was enough reason to end her economic assistance towards her brother. In the following year, Maricica discussed with her uncle about the prospect of buying a plot of land. He had one at the outskirts of the village which she liked and he promised to give her 'a relative's price,' namely a price lower than one would normally be expected to pay for the same good on the market. When she went 'home' to sign the paper and close the deal, the uncle confided in Maricica that Ionel had phoned him up a few days prior trying to dissuade him from offering her a better deal on the land. This episode was the straw that broke the camel's back, as Maricica comments:

> 'With him it was all about the money from the very beginning, always looking to secure the best advantages for himself and his family, nevermind me or my family… My girls got less because I was stubborn in helping him.' (Maricica, 62 years old, live-out care worker, 26 years in Italy)

Although talk about money was at the centre of the dispute, what caused Maricica to take offence and what eventually led to the breakdown of sibling relationship had, in fact, little to do with money. It was Ionel's unreasonable envy, ungratefulness, and bad mouthing that prompted Maricica to terminate the relationship with her brother. Despite the betrayal she had felt, Maricica was determined to maintain an amiable attitude so as not to unnecessarily upset their ageing mother. But after a particularly unsavoury moment involving Ionel launching at Maricica during a heated argument over what to do with the cow after their mother fell sick and was unable to care for it, Maricica purposefully avoided Ionel and never visited their

mother when he was holidaying there. In Italy, they do not keep in touch. In our interview, she presented in minute details the help she had provided to her brother over the years. As if she kept a record book of these expenses, recording every amount she ever offered to her brother, Maricica exposed to me the various sums she had spent, counterbalancing her economic support for her brother against that for her own daughters, concluding that investment in her brother's migration had been an economically disadvantageous deal, a bad business.

Therefore, under specific circumstances, migrant women might opt out of continuing their economic support towards family members, illustrating the mutable, negotiated, and unstable nature of the family ties that characterises relationships with extended family members.

6.3. Intergenerational homes as safety nets against economic uncertainty

Money towards building a common family home was a recurrent topic of conversation. According to my participants, 'lifting' the house as they would often refer to building their home, is a long-term endeavour that can span many years, and sometimes even decades, as the cost of building can only be managed in increments. As such building a home is not a singular event but unfolds in multiple stages, beginning with the collective family decision to migrate. Migrant women send money home to a designated family member, usually a male who is entrusted with overseeing the construction site. As money accumulates, the family gradually accomplishes various phases of the construction process, such as laying the foundation, erecting walls, applying plaster to the structure, installing the flooring, and so forth. During this time, family members often reside in the completed rooms made available to them while the rest of the house remains under construction for years to come. Migrant women's desire to, in their own words, 'lift' family homes arises against the backdrop of decreased housing affordability in Romania and lack of appropriate government policies to address this issue (Kennedy & Winston, 2019). With very few social housing accommodation options available, families are left alone to meet their housing needs. In recent decades, many houses were built or extended, frequently in an informal manner, without the necessary official construction permits (Umbreș, 2022). Family members often work together on the construction site to build their homes, even if they seldom have the necessary professional qualifications as builders, welders, masons, and so on. This house building strategy aimed at

reducing construction costs resulted in precarious housing, especially in rural areas, that fail meet official standards for safety.

The costs of building a home is a high burden to carry. For some migrant women it is more efficient to simply make improvements on their current home. In fact, several women described their desire to build 'modern kitchen' and 'indoor toilet' when discussing their reasons for migration and eventually prolongation of their period abroad. According to data from 2014, around 73% of the households in Romania experience extreme living conditions deprivation characterised by lack of indoor toilet and/or bath facilities (Kennedy & Winston, 2019). Their aspirations for improving their living quarters prompted many of my respondents to earmark large percentage of their wages abroad as communal money dedicated towards building, renovating, extending, and improving their intergenerational homes.

Household configurations are extremely diverse among my respondents. It is quite common for my respondents to describe their families' living situations as homes where up to three generations of family members reside under one roof. Despite owning (sometimes more than one) property in their name, my respondents prefer to lodge with their family and friends on their return visits, and only rarely in their own houses. Money illustrates these family configurations as migrant women frequently support more than one household in Romania as they consistently contribute communal money to the family budget of their children and grandchildren, and courtesy money to their wider family network that includes siblings, aunts, uncles, parents, affinal relatives, and friends, as I discuss in the next chapter. The widespread practice of intergenerational living in extended households suggests that emotional bonds of intimacy may not be exclusive to nuclear families as it is typically assumed. Migrant women's references to family which overlap with home in colloquial expressions such as 'eating from the same pot,' 'living under the same roof,' and so on, made me aware of the intimate ties that bound migrant women beyond their husbands and children. At the same time as my respondents shared intergenerational homes, they also had to make due with increasing periods of separation from their family. Furthermore, all my respondents were separated through migration from their husbands, (adult) children, grandchildren, parents, and friends. Migrant women live alone in Italy in the home of their employer, where they work as live-in care workers. They recall the crucial help provided by 'friends of friends' in the first months of their migration, who, in providing much needed shelter and food, offered substantial support to newly arrived care workers struggling to navigate the Italian labour market.

Rural homes represent valuable safety nets for migrant women reflecting on their long-anticipated retirement and the ever-present apprehension of unforeseen incapacity to continue work abroad due to injury or illness. The livelihood strategies that are available to those residing in rural areas, namely the raising of cattle, poultry, tending vegetable plots, among others, prompts many of my respondents to express their desire to retire to their rural homes, and to see investments in these houses as preparations for their own future retirement. While the decision to eventually return to their rural homes is influenced by a combination of social and cultural factors regarding, for instance, expectations for an active involvement of grandmothers in the rearing of their grandchildren (Ducu, 2020; Preoteasa, Vlase & Tufă, 2017), it is equally influenced by the skyrocketing prices for basic goods in Romania. Against the backdrop of increased cost of living, most employed people in Romania experience a high rate of poverty (Ministry of Labour Family, Social Protection and Elderly, 2014). Those who are out-of-work can barely survive on their low pensions and social benefits alone. Urban areas especially require more income in order to survive and cover for basic needs. Rural areas, on the other hand, provide some opportunities for those who can engage in a moderately productive plot of land. Engaging in household food production ensures that people can sustain themselves by growing their own fruits and vegetables and not depend entirely on money for their daily subsistence.

In Romania, non-migrant family members do not rely entirely on remittances for their daily subsistence. This is the case even for the family of the few migrant women I interviewed whose remittances were the only source of cash in their non-migrants' family household. An important source of livelihood in the Romanian countryside is related to farming activities that almost every family in rural areas engages with. The produce yielded from their crops and vegetable plots, along with eggs from their chicken, and occasionally their meat, reduce my respondents' non-migrant family members' need to use scarce cash for meeting their everyday consumption. Several respondents took pride in the fact that their children who tend a plot of land and engage in animal husbandry have everything they need as they listed the amenities of a well functioning small farm house which allows them to never go hungry, and saw in their non-migrant family members' subsistence agriculture activities a means to successfully take control of their own lives. They grow potatoes, pepper, cucumber, tomatoes, cabbage, onions, beans, corn, among others, along with fruits and nuts. Some of them have small greenhouses which allow for many months of fresh vegetables and herbs. They raise chickens, and occasionally pigs, cows, and sheep. Some engage in beekeeping. Furthermore, migrant women often spoke of their non-migrant families' various

money making operations that brought in 'extra' cash in the household economy. Money earmarked by my respondents as *ciubuc*[13] represents 'extra' cash from performing occasional and informal manual labour or from engaging in petty trade of surplus produce and homemade crafts, brews, and meat specialties.

Respondents contribute to the household economy of their non-migrant family not only with their constant remittances but also with their labour. They regularly take between one to two months holiday throughout the year, typically in the months of August and December. Summertime is dedicated to the processing of harvested vegetables and fruits at the family's rural residence. This involves activities like canning produce, transforming tomatoes into paste, cucumbers into pickles, plums into compote, apricots into jams, and more. All of these tasks are in addition to their daily responsibilities, which include milking cows, tending to chickens, watering the garden, cooking, cleaning, and so on. Wintertime is dedicated to activities inside the house, and occasionally to the slaughtering of pigs and curing meat. Women typically travel home a few days or weeks before Christmas. They assist their children and children-in-law in preparing for the holidays by shopping for food, cooking and baking elaborate seasonal dishes and cakes, looking after grandchildren during school closures, and so on. Communal money is thus an important resource in my respondents' transnational households. But in addition to transferring communal money migrant women remain involved to different degrees in offering practical hands-on support often in the form of in-kind labour in advancing the familial goals of being economically self-sufficient and securing their own livelihood.

The continued investment of communal money into intergenerational family homes gives migrant women a real stake in claiming a legitimate interest in access to shared common resources. Communal money, directed towards the improvements of living and housing conditions of non-migrant families, create visible signs of women's commitment to their families. Remittances lift walls, replace dirt floors with concrete ones, repair broken fences, dig wells, buy farming tools, build modern kitchen and indoor toilets, and, importantly, help shield migrant women from accusations of being 'bad' mothers to their adult children. Equally, as discussed earlier, the opportunities that engagement in household-farm production migrant women envision to allow, suggest that investment of communal money in rural homes is a safety net that migrant women consider in situations of

[13] In Romanian language *ciubuc* can mean both 'tips' as well as 'extra' income earned from services provided, usually outside formal employment (e.g. digging wells, plastering walls, trade of home-made produce, and so on).

withdrawals from the labour market, either because of sudden unforeseen illness or retirement.

Migrant women are actively engaged in 'lifting' the house, not only through their substantial monetary contributions but also, in some cases, women overtake men's role in supervising the construction site. Elena has previously managed the construction site of her family home. She diligently organised and spent the remittances sent by her husband working in construction in Italy, carefully selected and informally hired construction workers, and educated herself about building materials to make informed technical decisions. She obtained her driving licence and bought a car which afforded her much needed mobility when undertaking such a large-scale project, as I was often told. Driving a car and supervising a construction site rendered Elena nothing short of an oddity in the rural area where she resided. Beside supervising the construction site and assisting the workers, she cared for their four children, maintained a productive vegetable garden, a few poultry chickens, and one dairy cow. In 2008 her husband's remittances started to peter out. Gossip in the village revealed her husband had been in fact contributing part of his salary towards his sister's household expenses while Elena and her children were left alone to make due with an ever decreasing sum of remittances under pretence that life in Italy had become increasingly expensive.

> 'That was basically our downfall, money. I could not understand where they were going. He kept saying that rent [in Italy] is up, utilities are up, food is expensive. But I knew something else was going on….'(Elena, 68 years old, live-in care worker, 12 years in Italy)

These disagreements over the husband's transfers of remittances cut right at the heart of the family's relationship. His financial behaviour revealed to Elena his commitments lie elsewhere. When Elena's husband shared scarce resources outside the family he had crossed a moral line. 'You think of your family first,' she commented.

Working together towards common family goals, such as 'lifting' the family house, is often the yardstick with which to measure the commitment of family members to one another. And sharing communal money meant that family members should stand united to safeguard common interests and resources. Communal money is much more than a matter of income earned abroad and transnational household budgeting, but a way through which migrant mothers evaluate the moral worth of others and of themselves. Despite the fact that There are

no longer feelings between us,' evidenced by the fact that 'He took in another woman from the village' who he now spends money on, Elena never formally divorced her husband. She strongly believes that marriage vows are sacred and their violation through divorce is a sacrilege. They are now separated 'Each to his own house,' but her religious beliefs prevent her from formalising this living arrangement.

In 2010, and almost two years after remittances started to peter out, Elena, aided by her cousin, arrived in Italy where she had been working for the past 12 years as a live-in domestic worker. In the first years of her migration she returned home less frequently, preferring to work for longer to accumulate communal money which she committed to finishing the construction of her family home. Elena, like many of my respondents, expressed her dreams of building indoor plumbing rather than relying on outhouses for toilet facilities, and modern kitchens with tiles and running water, rather than carry buckets of water from the village fountain and wash dirty dishes in cold spring water.

However, as she advanced to retirement age, Elena now at the age of 68 returns to Italy sporadically, staying for 3 or 4 months at a time to help shoulder the expenses of her adult daughter's house building project. Asked about how she manages her income, Elena explains:

> 'I receive my pension in Romania and I save that money when I am in Italy, and whatever money I make in Italy I spend on my trips (with the church). Three years ago I went to Ukraine, last year I went to Greece, and this year I hope to go to Israel. I also promised my daughter to help pay for some expenses with their house. Windows and doors, that's.' (Elena, 68 years old, live-in care worker, 12 years in Italy)

Elena's relationship with money—why she continues to work as a live-in care worker in Italy, how she distributes her income and decides how money is spent—is a reflection of a familial obligation to help but negotiated in the context of her own needs and desires. Elena agreed to transfer communal money, imposing her own requests over how remittances are to be spent. The needs she identified as urgent was the lifting of her daughter's house, and decided to prioritise the expense of doors and windows, expressing her worries that the draft of cold air seeping into their home can make her grandchild sick. Another request Elena made was for her brother to be hired informally on the construction site as a day labourer during the summer. Elena offered to pay his salary, at a rate of 100 lei (approx. €20) per day. In this way,

Elena reinforced her relationship with her daughter who benefited from communal money to advance the work construction on her family home, and with her brother who she was able to 'give work' to during one of his recurrent spells of unemployment.

Benefiting from access to communal money means that family members need to act according to common interests and commit money to shared family goals. Vanessa, a 59-year old live-in care worker, arrived in Italy during the early years of migration from Romania to Italy in 2001. She mentioned in passing that her husband had migrated first, but returned home after only three months during which his attempts to find stable work in Italy failed. She argued, like other respondents, of being easier for women to find work (see Chapter 4).

> 'He always did his share. He organises the household, the vegetable plot requires tending, we keep some chicken, we raise a pig and we keep a cow for milk. He's the one who takes care of the household…' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Vanessa felt 'lucky' that her husband did not squander away money on alcohol. Instead, he went on with his work at the factory in the nearby town. He did not stop even after workers were forced to accept pay cuts when the factory reduced its operation, and eventually became unemployed when it closed down in 2004. In the months that followed Vanessa's husband was unable to find stable work. Instead of working informally as a day labourer—often the only solution available to unemployed men in the village—Vanessa decided he should instead dedicate his full time and attention to 'taking care' of the household where he resided together with their daughter and son-in-law. In their household, Vanessa's husband is the one who handles remittances. She trusts him to commit money to mutually beneficial goals. This arrangement is, however, recent for Vanessa used to remit money to her 35-year old daughter as well. But she became careful with how much money she remits to her daughter when she returned home during the Christmas holidays one year to discover her daughter had spent the €300 earmarked for firewood supplies for winter on a party she organised together with her friends.

> 'At that time all the money I was making was going towards building the house where my daughter, son-in-law, and my husband were living. With many sacrifices I went home and bought a wood burning heating system and then I sent

(money) to my daughter to buy wood.' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Vanessa's long-term commitment of putting her money in the family shared house left her disappointed when her daughter chose to 'waste' her hard-earned money on what she deemed frivolous consumption. She explains how her trust was broken by her daughter's misuse of money:

'I was very upset, naturally. I thought she'd be happy to have money to buy wood for the winter given that they all share the home and have to keep themselves warm somehow, right? But when I saw that what they care about is beer, cigarettes, fun, parties, and everything be damned… No, no.' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Vanessa, like most of my respondents, saw the house as a common good. Any investments or enhancements made to the house were intended to benefit all members of the family residing there. She confidently sent communal money earmarked for 'firewood' thinking that all the family will enjoy and benefit from heating the house during the cold months of winter. Yet when her daughter chose to spend the hard-earned money on partying, only she and her friends indulged in alcohol and cigarettes. In Vanessa's opinion, her daughter consuming without taking responsibility for family needs and desires, had crossed a moral line:

'For her it's just money. It doesn't matter where it came from, that it came from the sweat of my brow.' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

Aware of the culturally available framing of money as perfectly fungible, Vanessa considered this treatment of communal money as inacceptable. Communal money is a restricted type of currency that cannot be used by recipients as they please. These regular monthly large sums of money transferred 'home' are subjected to decisions made collectively regarding their spending and saving, and are revocable when recipients fail to live up to the expectation of mutual collaboration. It was, however, not only non-migrants' disregard for the source of communal money, namely the hard work and toil of care workers abroad ('It came from the sweat of my brow'), but most importantly, their treatment of money as an 'all purpose'

currency. Communal money is a special currency that has to be treated with care and invested according to collective financial decision making. Not doing so, prompted migrant women to be on the lookout for those unworthy to manage family resources.

As discussed above in the case of Elena, mismanaging communal money without accountability may prompt women to curtail the emotional and monetary exchange, which can take the more permanent form of a wife-husband separation. However, the capacity of migrant women to extricate themselves from economic ties they deemed problematic depends largely on the type of relationship that underpin economic ties. Mother-child bonds are hard to break, even when thinly stretched by long-distance and long-term separation entailed by family migration. But migrant women work around that bond and change the terms of their economic support to reflect new rules of monitoring and controlling how resources are used in the transnational household.

Once non-migrants are deemed untrustworthy to handle communal money, migrant women replace remittances with packages 'sent home' as a way to sanction transgression of moral boundaries. In this way they are able to undermine non-migrants' treatment of communal money as a fungible 'all purpose' currency easily traded for any goods or experiences available on the market. In comparison to food staples, clothes, footwear, personal hygiene products, household cleaning supplies, among others, that migrant women stack in parcels to send back home, and which are destined to be used for their intended purposes, namely feeding and clothing the family for instance, remittances are less susceptible to the control of migrant women from afar.

Vanessa, for instance, maintained affective ties with her daughter, but she made sure never to send any money directly to her ever again. Explaining her preference for packages over remittances, she comments:

> 'If you send money it may be that money is not used properly. But if you send a package, well that's a different story. Those things you put inside cannot be exchanged for money that they (non-migrant family) can use to do with as they please. Instead, those things you sent are stored away in cupboards and they know whenever they run out of something that they have some spares in the store. Money you can waste on useless things.' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

The perception that money transferred home can be wasted 'on useless things' by untrustworthy non-migrant family members appeared in other testimonies of migrant women. Apart from renegotiating the media of exchange, from money to parcels, women may choose to transfer smaller amounts of communal money when they do not trust relatives to commit money to goals identified by women as essential. For instance, Livia sees no problem in helping her 33-year old daughter and her husband with additional monthly expenses, because 'They both work hard but their salaries are just too low.' But Livia rarely extends the same support to her 37-year old son, particularly because she disapproves of his decision to leave his job as a factory worker to become a self-employed driver:

> 'I don't see it as a stable and prosperous job that secures a future. It's a very dangerous job because you're on the road, tired, and exposed to constant dangers. I disagree with it. It's a job that doesn't secure a future. I've always looked for economic stability, always thinking about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow… focusing on the future. While he's more focused on the present, at most thinking about tomorrow. I've never agreed with that idea.' (Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

Livia also disapproves of how her son and his family spend their incomes. Whenever her son seeks financial assistance from her, Livia accuses him of being dependent on her income. From time to time she assumes some financial responsibility for those household expenses she deems important, but asks to see the bills first before she remits the exact amount.

> 'I don't send money to them often because they know that I do not approve of the way they spend it. If they have 100 lei (approx. €20) in their pocket they waste it on parties, holidays… They don't often ask for money and when they do they come to me all whiny. So we have this understanding that I only cover some utility bills for them, like electricity and gas. They know I would never send money for anything else because they just don't understand the value of it.' (Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

As the comment above suggests and as discussed previously, money committed to household expenses is 'special money' that should be protected against being 'wasted' by those who do not understand its value evinced by the carefree manner in which they treat money, especially

money they did not work for themselves. Transfering smaller amount of communal money enables women abroad to act their part as mothers and uphold their commitment to provide financial assistance to young families. At the same time, this measured approach to transferring remittances serves as a form of reinforcement for responsible monetary behaviour, especially with regards to communal money.

When examining the connection between women and homes, critical feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young raises an intriguing argument. She suggests that feminist viewpoints which perceive houses/homes as inherently oppressive due to their historical and cultural legacy as sites for the constitution of exploitative relations between man/husband and women/wife (as discussed in Chapter 2) risk disregarding the positive aspects of having/building a house/home, especially in a world in which having the stability and comfort of a concrete home is genuinely a privilege (Young, 2005). Young's critique is rooted in her consideration of house-building experience as encompassing, in her words, 'critical values' that should be accessible to all. These universal values associated with safety, security, control, autonomy, and preservation are reason enough to persuade scholars not to reject the ideal of home altogether as the locus of domesticity that reinforces women's oppressive relation to the home. Furthermore, in contrast to the day-to-day domestic activities such as cleaning and cooking, which are closely tied to their roles as daughters, wives, mothers, and so forth, and which serve to maintain or preserve the home, the act of building a house/home implies progress, aspirations, and expectations (Young, 2005). While I agree with Young (2005), I qualify that it is important to look at the economic behaviour and money use of women that tie them not only to their own home but to that of their adult children and young grandchildren too. The experiences of my respondents with building a house/home represent a distinctly future oriented project within which they articulate their own aspirations, concerns, plans, and expectations not only for themselves but also for their families. Pooling resources collectively for intergenerational house-building projects could hold the opportunity for women's empowerment, as they actively participate in and shape the process of constructing homes as well as gain visible signs of their own commitment to family.

6.4. Investments in grandchildren's education as a ticket for a better future

As mentioned elsewhere, one of the main findings in this dissertation refers to the shift in the role of grandmothers from hands-on caregivers to breadwinners and providers not only for their adult children but their grandchildren as well. The constant economic crisis and insecurity in Romania changes migrant women's short- to long-term orientation in their migration project and subsequently alters their moral duty as grandmothers shifting their role as hands-on caregivers to providers for their grandchildren. This shift resonates with deeper and larger social, cultural, and economic transformations in Romanian society and that marked the fall of communist regime and affected the meanings people draw upon to establish their moral worth and their views on family life. Recurrent economic crisis, the instability of employment, increased costs of living, forces young people in Romania, as elsewhere (see for example Silva, 2013; Vianello & Toffanin, 2021), to postpone their transition into adulthood since they perceive to require economic resources they do not possess in order to live independently, marry, and have children (Vlase & Preoteasa, 2017). Young people turn inwards and rely on a network of security within their own family structure to ensure they are provided with economic support and accommodation. The regular and consistent transfers of communal money provide an important safety net that protects non-migrant family members from downward mobility, and enable young people to achieve important life milestones that would be challenging for them to achieve on their own. Communal money pays for school, homes, and wedding and baptism celebrations, among others.

Georgiana, a 63-years old care worker in Italy, has three grown children and two grandchildren. Over the years abroad, she has sent communal money to her son earmarked for the down payment of his home. Secured in his livelihood as a police officer, her son is now able to pay the monthly mortgage payments out of his own generous paycheck as a police officer, and Georgiana does not help him with any household expenses. Instead, she sends the occasional €100 courtesy money earmarked for birthday celebrations, Christmas, and Easter holidays. She has helped one daughter migrate to Italy where she currently works as a live-out care worker. The other daughter, living in Romania, graduated with an engineering degree, yet because she could not get a job in her field of expertise, she took a series of full-time low income jobs that hardly pay enough. Referring to her non-migrant adult daughter's family income, Georgiana comments:

> ‘Since my daughter lost her waitressing job she is very depressed and cannot find work anywhere. My son-in-law works but he makes nothing, you know how it is over there (in Romania)...’ (Georgiana, 63 years old, live-in care worker, 12 years in Italy)

Georgiana identifies the wages of her son-in-law in Romania as money that is not worth considering, a non-existent amount. This appreciation is based on a differentiated interpretation of *his* money’s purchasing power. Despite both working in low-income jobs, her wage is not the same as her son-in-law’s for she is able to provide for their household in ways that he is not. Apart from sending the young family monthly food parcels, Georgiana sends monthly remittances that range between €150 to €250. This money is earmarked for those expenses Georgiana identified as priorities, namely paying off household bills that her daughter’s family cannot cover from their earnings. Even when they are modest sums, communal money transfers are a stable source of income that can help families stay afloat in times of difficulties.

Georgiana’s migrant daughter, on the other hand, does not receive direct financial support but instead Georgiana shoulders the education expenses of her grandchildren. She sends monthly remittances to her eldest grandchild, Marian, who is currently studying at the university to become a medical doctor, a professional path that carries high prestige in the opinion of many respondents. Proud of his achievement, Georgiana’s monthly €200 are earmarked as ‘rent money.’ Marian’s mother, in turn, covers his food expenses by remitting €150 monthly. She also buys him school supplies, clothes, and footwear that she finds at discounted prices in Italy. In addition, Georgiana covered the €500 one time driving school fee and bought Marian a used car for his eighteenth birthday for which she paid €1100 and which he often uses to drive his grandmother to and fro the bus station when she arrives loaded with goods from Italy.

In contrast to the highly skilled Ukrainian (Vianello, Finotelli & Brey, 2021) and Moldavian women (Vianello, 2022), Romanian care workers in Italy originate from rural backgrounds and frequently lack higher education qualifications, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Without university degrees they struggle to provide educational guidance, necessary structure and skills for academic success to their children and grandchildren. But they provide tangible support for their schooling in the form of communal money. Driven by their desire for a better future for their children and grandchildren, migrant women want their children to go to university. Grandchildren are often steered into educational paths that

provide stable jobs and lucrative professional careers. Engineering and medical university degrees are held in high regard by migrant grandmothers who perceive these fields to offer high-paying and high-status jobs which supposedly shield children from menial work and low-paying jobs. Migrant grandmothers expect their sacrifices abroad to be reciprocated by grandchildren's commitment towards ensuring their own educational success by devoting time and effort to be studious in school. While they perceive their own duty to provide material support, children bear the responsibility to study, for getting good grades is perceived to be 'the *only* job they have.' Doing well in school is perceived by my respondents to eventually lead to social mobility. For instance, Ilinca often commented in our recurrent conversations that her communal money is meant to shelter her grandsons from worry, for she 'is there' to make up for any 'extra' expense the boys' parents cannot afford, while grandchildren need only worry about school. Apart from essential items like everyday shoes and clothing required for school and daily life, grandchildren often have additional expenses, such as school supplies. These supplies may occasionally include costly items like personal laptops, which fulfil both practical needs and personal desires, and that migrant grandmothers strive to meet.

Interestingly, as migrant grandmothers emphasised the importance of grandchildren's single focus on school work for improving their future prospects, they did not seem to accord equivalent importance to the singular focus on studying for their own children growing up, who, alongside their school commitments, were expected to play essential economic roles within the household, as discussed in Chapter 4. Migration scholars who consider the role of 'left-behind' children in the home note gender differences in the household tasks shouldered by children, with daughters being assigned the bulk of domestic and care responsibilities coded as feminine (e.g. Parreñas, 2005b). In that sense, the testimonies gathered among Romanian care workers are unexceptional. Geta, the 37-years old live-out care worker and the daughter of a live-in care worker, introduced in the previous chapter discussed how being required to perform household duties left her with little leisure time growing up and sometimes went in the way of school work. She did the weekly laundry and cooking, her brother plough the fields after school and on the weekends, and her two younger sisters did the cleaning. Similar testimonies were heard from other migrant women who reflected on the domestic and care responsibilities their then-children had to undertake when mothers left Romania. For instance, Victoria introduced in the previous chapter, mentioned that she did not regret leaving her family, since she saw no other choice but to migrate in order to provide for her children, what she could not come to terms with, however, was the additional

household tasks which fell on the shoulders of her then-adolescent daughters as they failed to convince their father to step up his care responsibilities with the departure of Victoria.

One explanation for the changing social valuation of children's educational attainments is proposed by Horváth (2008) who argues that, compared to communist Romania where the primary route to adulthood for young people was integration on the labour market, in post-communist Romania there is a stronger emphasis on furthering education beyond compulsory education. The communist state created the category of 'social parasite' and 'degenerate' to refer to people who have no job. But unemployment in a society that gauged individuals' societal value based on their productivity was not just a social stigma; rather it effectively provided the communist state with the means to force those without work to engage in labour activities (see Massino, 2009; Vlase & Preoteasa, 2017). Nowadays, according to Horváth (2008), higher education plays a central role in achieving higher social status and becoming a fully-fledged adult as young people today postpone their integration into the labour market. One evidence the author cites for the changing societal values placed on education is the sharp increase in tertiary education enrolment over the past decades.

Simultaneously as the importance of child (long term) education grew in Romania, however, the persistent lack of adequate public funding on education over the past decades, resulted in a transfer of the financial burden associated with pursuing university degrees from the government to the families. Romania allocates the lowest percentage of its GDP to education among EU countries (Eurostat, 2023), thus forcing families to bear the financial responsibility of ensuring access to education for their children and young adults. For instance, scholarships awarded at a public university in Romania based on merit can vary from 700 lei (€140) to 1000 lei (€200), while social scholarships amount to 580 lei (€116). In high school, these amounts are halved, with 450 lei (€90) for merit-based scholarships and 300 lei (€60) for social scholarships, respectively. Stipends hardly cover the most basic living costs, and so children and young adults rely on their families to assist with shouldering expenses.

In a context where family resources are already stretched thin, how do Romanian families cope with the rising costs? As this chapter suggested, families pool their financial resources with the specific intention of enhancing the future prospects of their children and grandchildren. The regular and organised aspects of communal money transfers serve as a resource that can occasionally propel non-migrant family members towards upward social mobility, such as when communal money is invested in 'educating' the young generation who

can then turn to lucrative professional careers to secure financially independent livelihoods. However, more frequently, communal money transfers help buffer my respondents' families against downward mobility, for it enables them to afford their homes, make improvements on their living conditions, be protected against employment insecurity, among others. Polling income transnationally provides many benefits for the children and grandchildren of migrant women. Essentially, communal money transfers not only provides important sources of 'extra' money for the transnational household budget, but they are crucial safety nets for families helping them stay afloat in times of economic insecurity when they lose their jobs, experience medical interventions that temporarily incapacitates them from work, or to single-mothers who struggle to care for their children on their low-wage in Romania. But keeping up with communal money transfers to suggest family solidarity can be particularly daunting for these migrant women can find themselves trapped under the weight of fluctuating demands from children and grandchildren in Romania who express their desires and needs to participate in a global economy in which standards of decent living—the burden for whose provisioning falls on those whose lives in Italy are ridden with sacrifices—shift constantly.

Older migrant women's commitments towards sustaining the educational attainment of their grandchildren, which they perceive to offer better chances and opportunities to find a stable and decently paid job on the labour market, are not without tension. My respondents worry about the implications of their continuous support for common family goals. Non-migrant children's inability to rely on earned income derived from their wages and to provide for their families is perceived by migrant women to endanger their own ability to save money for what they perceive to be an unavoidable moment in life when they need to stop working either because of sudden debilitating illnesses or because of retirement. For instance, as Georgiana's youngest grandchild approaches her eighteenth birthday, she is worried that her own desire to support her grandchild's university education may come at a high cost for her own wellbeing. Georgiana's personal desires and aspirations to retire and return home are suppressed as she strives to provide grandchildren with a future where investment in children's education is seen as a ticket to a better future. Referring to the practical concerns of providing for her granddaughter, Georgiana stresses the moral grounds of fairness of this decision:

> 'My granddaughter is preparing to enter university now and I have to support her too. I think it's only fair to pay for her rent, just as I do with her brother. It's not

> easy at my age. I am tired and want to retire soon. But what can I do? They know that money comes every month, with many sacrifices, money comes and they can count on it.' (Georgiana, 63 years old, live-in care worker, 12 years in Italy)

Georgiana is not unlike other migrant women I spoke with who in order to uphold what is perceived to be her moral responsibility to support her grandchild's ambition to pursue higher education she postponed her return home and extended her stay abroad for longer than she desired.

Furthermore, despite their belief in education as the path for upwards social mobility the promise of university enrolment to lead to professional jobs, stable employment, and higher salary most often went unfulfilled. Even when migrant women make great sacrifices to shoulder educational expenses and keep children in school, university degrees no longer guarantee stable professional jobs that offer a decent pay. Such is the example of Georgiana' daughter, mentioned earlier, an engineering graduate, who, unable to find work in her field of expertise, worked as a server, and succumbed to depression after losing her waitressing job due to restaurant closure during the global pandemic; Livia's daughter, a PhD in economics, who after months of unemployment resigned to working in retail, a job she found through her mother's connections; Eugenia's son earned a degree in urban planning but is currently employed as a delivery driver since the positions he secured at the city hall did not provide sufficient income to meet his rent and food expenses; Victoria's daughter who initially studied Foreign Languages aspiring to become a translator, but after two years of failing to find a job even remotely connected to her study, she sought her mothers' financial support again to purse an in-demand degree, and now works in the IT sector; For the working class families of the respondents, choosing the 'right' major and university degree is no guarantee that good jobs will be found after graduation. This unpredictable relationship between university degree and improved labour market conditions is reflected in survey data which shows that youth unemployment rates in Romania have consistently been elevated over the years (Eurostat, 2023). For those who participate in the labour market, a significant portion of employed individuals are overqualified for the roles they currently hold (Dimian, 2014).

The demands and expectations for communal money transfers creates specific challenges for older migrant women. The effects of the intersection of gender and age on the economic behaviour of care workers is particularly relevant as some of my respondents were pensioners who retired 'home' yet with little in the way of pensions and savings returned to work in Italy to accomplish family economic goals. The case of Eugenia is illustrative.

Eugenia, age 69, arrived in Italy in 2006 and took up live-in employment for 11 years before she returned home to care for her dying husband when he received a terminal diagnosis. Her son, currently employed as a driver in Romania, desires to obtain a mortgage loan but struggles to save enough money from his modest income to cover the down payment for the property. He enlisted the help of his pensioner mother, Eugenia, who, after her husband's death, and with little in the way of savings and pension, returned to work in Italy in 2021 to help him save the money needed to secure an apartment. Reflecting on the financial support Eugenia provided to her children over the years she had been working in live-in employment, she commented:

> '[Son] earns 2000 lei (approx €400) and works all day. Beside his day job he makes some *ciubuc* but still not enough to save anything. I did what I could for them… I invested in the house to have some decent living conditions. I bought them each a car. I bought an apartment for my daughter a few years ago when I was younger and more capable of working and was hoping my son would want my house after I die. But he told me 'what could I do with it?' I understand… Where I live there are no jobs, no nothing. Nobody wants to move there.' (Eugenia, age 69, live-in care worker, arrived in Italy in 2006 when she stayed for 11 years, and returned again to Italy in 2021)

Driven by a pronounced sense of obligation 'To help him as I did his sister,' as she reiterated several times during our first interview, Eugenia made the difficult decision to return to work in Italy, where she intended to stay for one year. She counted the months left before she could return home, and whenever we met updated me on the time left of her 'prison sentence' in Italy (see the discussion in Section 5.2 in Chapter 5). During this time Eugenia sent her wages back home to contribute to her son's down payment on his home. She retained, however, a strong sense of ownership over her pension benefits from the Romanian state, holding on to them for herself. Eugenia allowed her monthly pension to accumulate while abroad in the hope that it would serve as a crucial financial safety net upon her permanent return. Eugenia reported small pensions (of about €400) which she commented 'Is not enough to live off.' Despite working in Italy for many years, Eugenia does not receive Italian pension benefits as for most of her stay abroad she held irregular work contracts. And while some of my respondents were motivated by the potential Italian pension benefits to prolong their stay in Italy, as I discuss in Section 8.4 in Chapter 8, Eugenia held informal employment for most of

her stay abroad, which rendered any calculation to extend her stay and 'make up' for those years too long to consider.

Contributing substantially to the family's well being is no guarantee that those at home will reach a point in which they no longer need the help of ageing migrant women, as the example of Eugenia and that of Elena discussed in Section 6.3 of this chapter so clearly illustrates. Women who are on their pension can return to work in Italy if the pressing needs of their non-migrant family members require them to do so. Women's return, even if for brief periods of time, is often tied to their aspirations as mothers to help their children buy a home of their own. Owning a home, especially in the rural areas, where the growing of food on a vegetable plot, the husbandry of animals, petty trade of produce, among other economic activities is perceived by my respondents as a safety net, a means to sustain livelihoods, in the advent of capitalism (and, indeed, long before then, as discussed in Chapter 4).

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter discussed communal money transfers that correspond to a large percentage of women's wages and are dedicated towards improving the living standards of their children and grandchildren. Communal money provides migrant women with an opportunity to financially support what they consider to be family's worthwhile economic goals in circumstances of non-migrants' insufficient cash and savings. In this chapter, I showed that rather than simply adopting a narrative of family obligation which gives primacy to moral responsibilities as opposed to the logic of interest and calculation, women's relationship with money that circulate in their transnational families, can best be described as made up of arrangements. The chapter analysed various cases of arrangements between migrant women and their non-migrant family which make it possible to collaborate collectively to accomplish common family goals. Paying attention to the meaning and use of communal money, I showed that the issue of transnational family budgeting is built upon expectations of mutual support and assistance, which can sometimes test the limits of solidarity between transnational family members.

Chapter 7. Courtesy money

In the previous chapter, an investigation of money in transnational families led me to discuss communal money, a special currency that migrant women in Italy earmark to send home. I showed that communal money constitutes large sums of money regularly transferred home and committed for children's and grandchildren's needs and desires. The gender and social roles of migrant mothers and grandmothers who migrated for labour employment abroad intertwined with expectations to support non-migrant children and grandchildren. In this chapter I attempt to analyse another type of special currency, namely courtesy money, that emerged in my fieldwork as remittances that hold a distinct use and meaning. I argue that money my respondents refer to as courtesy money (*o atenție*, in Romanian) and describe as small sums transfers to non-migrant relatives to express care and appreciation for their family members, plays a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of family relationships in migration.

In the remittance literature, money and emotions are typically analysed separately, and treated as if they belong to two different spheres (Zelizer, 2010b, 2005a). The symbolic dimensions of monetary circulation in the context of family migration is frequently overlooked. Building on literature that discusses money gifts in family migration as currencies of care and love in places as diverse as India (Singh, 2016), Philippine (McCallum, 2022), Ghana (Coe, 2011), among others, this chapter aims to contribute to feminist readings of money and consumption. Scholar literature on money and goods in the context of family migration has confronted the Western bias against the close association of money and love (Singh et al., 2012), by showing how feelings and material interests intersect and are always at work in the formation of transnational families. These studies challenge the construction of care through the prioritisation of feelings, emotional investment, and verbalisation of expressions of love over action and material support (Baldassar et al., 2014). For instance, Cati Coe observing that in Ghanaian transnational families, money is perceived as expressions of intimacy and signs of care and proposes the concept of 'materiality of care' to describe this phenomenon, thereby confronting the 'discursive and cognitive split of

emotions and material resources that is particularly salient in the West' (Coe, 2011:8). Congruent with Zelizer, who points out that economy and intimacy do not constitute 'separate spheres' but 'intimate relations regularly coexist with economic transactions without being corrupted' (Zelizer, 2010a:270), Coe (2011) shows that monetary circulation signals migrants' desire to remain an integral part of the transnational family.

The insights provided by feminist literature on money resonate with the data collected among Romanian care workers' families where the cultural meanings of money serve to maintain family relationships in the context of migration. In this chapter, I show that transnational family ties are linked through demonstrable feelings of love that take the shape of courtesy money flows. However, in examining the meanings and uses of courtesy money, my aim is not simply to illustrate how courtesy money can emerge as the materialisation of migrant women's care from afar but also to explore the implications of dichotomised understandings in people's conceptualisation of money and care for the economic exchanges that go on between migrant women and their non-migrant relatives, and finally how these affect the relationships between transnational family members.

Furthermore, in my contributions to this body of work, I aim to broaden the definition of family. The need to analyse family-like relationships (Morgan, 1996, 2002) that include but are not limited to nuclear families became apparent during my fieldwork as I was trying to make sense of the extremely diverse family and household configurations of my respondents who maintain ties with extended family members including aunts, uncles, cousines, affinal relatives, among others (see Chapter 4). In the transnational families of my respondents, I learned that, 'family is what family does' signifying that families are fundamentally constituted through their actions (Morgan, 1996). Constant communication and regular visits home are essentially for constituting everyday practices of 'doing family' (Morgan, 2019, 2011). As I discuss in this chapter, apart from these, the circulation of courtesy money reveals the types of relationships in which emotions play a crucial role.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I discuss the symbolic meaning of courtesy money in the transnational families of my respondents (Section 7.1). Second, I underscore the shifting market conditions that have rendered gifts of money favourable among the transnational families of my respondents and which worked to create delicate relational challenges (Section 7.2). Lastly, I discuss the effects of anxieties about the mixing of money and sentiments, and how they shape economic interactions in transnational families (Section 7.3).

7.1. Courtesy money transfers is 'how you *show* you care'

Courtesy money is a special currency that is allocated not only for one's children and grandchildren but also for extended family members. This important feature of courtesy money distributed widely and travelling beyond the limits of the nuclear family is of great importance for migrant women who wish to return or/and who seek to maintain a symbolic and practical belonging to their family.

In my fieldwork, contributions of money within extended family members were not assumed or indeed expected but they were considered a 'good' way to behave. Migrant women viewed such contributions as an inherent part of family relationships and referred to them as 'courtesy' (*o atenție*, in Romanian) suggesting little gifts to express appreciation for their loved ones and care from afar. These sums of money varied greatly, from €20 to €100, and they were gifted by migrant women as part of an ongoing relationship.

Victoria is a representative example for how occasional little gifts of money are connected with ideas of relationship continuity across national borders. Victoria spends her days wondering about her family's daily lives, expressing worries about them, thinking about their needs. During the 16 years Victoria had lived in Italy where she had been working as a live-in care worker, she tried to create 'family time' (Parreñas, 2005a) by incorporating into her daily routine phone conversations with the occasional transfer of remittances. Referring to her relationship with her niece, Victoria explained how the depth of their relationship endured in spite of long-distance and long-term separation. Victoria maintains a close relationship with her niece. They communicate frequently throughout the day when they dream of and make plans for their long-awaited reunion. Victoria takes comfort in their daily conversations and enjoys the small ways through which she is kept apprised with any changes in her niece's life, such as when her niece plants tulips and then sends pictures of her garden to share the beauty of blooming flowers. Receiving updates on her loved one's everyday activities is one way through which Victoria feels she can sooth her loneliness. Victoria occasionally sends 'a little something' to her niece 'just so she knows I think about her.' Elaborating on this, she states:

> 'Sometimes I send her a little something, some [courtesy money], not much but when I know she'd need money for something like… Last time I sent her we were

> speaking on the phone and she had just returned from the city and kept thinking about this dress she saw. She said it looked good on her and that she'd buy it for the wedding she has coming up but it was too expensive, you see. So after we finished the conversation I sent her some money. Not much. Just so she knows I think about her' (Victoria, 62 years old, live-in care worker, 16 years in Italy)

When migrant women give courtesy money they play down these sums of money as economically insignificant, often commenting they are 'for small treats' and 'for indulgences' that would otherwise be unaffordable to non-migrant relatives. They emphasise courtesy's symbolic meaning as a token of love, a means through which they remind loved ones they 'think about' and 'are next to' them.

Migrant women do not send courtesy money 'home' to respond to a pressing financial need but rather to express sentiments that define their family relationships, evinced by the small sums that circulate from Italy to Romania in the transnational families of care workers. Contrary to Simmel (2011[1900]) for whom only when money is in 'extraordinarily great quantities' (page 294) it acquires special meaning beyond its quantitative values because it is capable to stir up imagination with 'fantastic possibilities that transcend the definiteness of numbers' (page 440), Zelizer (1999) argues that 'ordinary or even small sums of money can attain similar distinction' (page 87). Money becomes symbolically meaningful when they suggest the social relationship that underpins the transfer (Zelizer, 2010b). According to sociologist Supriya Singh (2016), in the context of family migration, gifted money acts as a powerful medium of communication which alters the value of remittances beyond that of their economic and quantitative qualities. Suggesting that 'not all dollars are equal,' Singh shows that, when money is intended to signal desire to maintain family ties in spite of separation, the perceived value of money sent and received is inflated. Converted into a 'currency of care' money acts as a means through which families express love and belonging. In a similar way, and despite money's admittedly limited capacity to communicate feelings when compared to language, courtesy money is, as recurrently emphasised by my respondents, a tangible gesture of appreciation that gives concrete meaning to words, as one respondent commented: 'is how you *show* you care.'

Since courtesy money is a materialisation of the feelings between gift givers and receivers, and since migrant women insist on it being used for anything that pleases the recipient, courtesy money can virtually be exchanged for any good available on the market. In practice, however, a range of additional considerations come into play when migrant

women transfer courtesy money including their own desires and aspirations for non-migrant relatives which are integral to their continuous concern and care despite their long-distance and long-term separation.

Hortensia, for example, hopes that courtesy money transfers helps her achieve an influence on her mother's behaviour as she aspires to change her mother's life in significant ways. In particular, Hortensia wishes her mother would spend money on things that are not intended to fulfil a practical or utilitarian purpose but rather meant to bring her joy and happiness. In our interview Hortensia explained her desire for her mother's investing money in 'nice things' by referring to the economic hardships and material scarcity which marked her mother's life in Romania, and which forced her to put her children's needs over her own, over and over again. Her now pensioner mother, who Hortensia says, 'Had worked all her life, hard work, at the factory' had reached a point in her life where she has accomplished her caregiving responsibilities as 'She no longer has small children to look after' evidenced by the lack of financial burden of caring for dependents, as Hortensia comments, she and her siblings 'Need and ask for nothing.' Nevertheless, instead of commiting courtesy money Hortensia occasionally send her towards overindulging moments of self-gratification, which Hortensia sees as desirable, her mother prioritises common household expenses:

> 'Sometimes I send money to my mother so that she can buy herself a present, buy whatever she wants… a blouse, a perfume… something nice. Sometimes she does sometimes she doesn't. With the money she prefers to buy this or that for the house. Instead of spending it on herself she *bagă banii în casă* [literally, puts the money into the house]. Last time I sent her [courtesy money] she told me she wanted to change the window curtains, but I told her it's better to go on a short trip somewhere.' (Hortensia, 37 years old, live-out care worker, 8 years in Italy)

Hortensia sees her role in guiding her mother on how courtesy money should be spent, namely in buying those stuff that are meant to be uplifting. In spite of the apparent impersonal nature of money gifts, Hortensia's comment suggests that these personalised transfers reflect migrants aspirations and concerns for their loved ones. Although it is impossible to control the use of courtesy, as money can be exchanged for whatever one pleases, migrants maintain their preference for courtesy money to be exchanged for small personal treats that lie outside the demands of common household purchases and constraints of necessity.

In spite of migrant women tendency to play down courtesy money's contribution to household budget as insignificant, and to highlight their inconsistent contribution towards non-migrants' budget, courtesy money nonetheless play an important role in allowing non-migrant relatives to finance those things that they could not have afforded otherwise, and give them the possibility to participate in an 'economy of dignity' (Pugh, 2009) through which they gain recognition and esteem among their peers. An occasional influx of money earmarked for an individual need is not only an important economic resource which can ease the pressure on a tight household budget, especially when the expense is desired but not planned for, but it also allows non-migrants to live a more dignified life. Whether it is exchanged for a stylish dress to wear at an upcoming special event or for taking a short holiday after a lifetime of hard work (as we have heard earlier from Victoria and Hortensia respectively), courtesy money is meant to uplift their receivers, to enable them to participate in social life.

I add here another example, that of Roxana, to illustrate this point further. Roxana remitted €50 to her 12-years old godson to support his aspirations to take part in sports. The godson used the money to splurge on an expensive pair of football shoes to complete his sporting equipment. Her godson's mother and Roxana's aunt could not afford the new shoes as their household budget went towards mortgage, utilities, and food expenses which means that any 'extra' purchases required advanced planning. Her aunt's initial reluctance to accept the money commenting that 'The expense is unnecessary' and citing worry that Roxana 'Should hold on to the money because life abroad is also hard,' suggests that she felt it was her own responsibility to provide for the child, and not to be a burden. But Roxana appealed to her social role in the family to convince her aunt to accept the money: 'I am after all the child's godmother, this is what you do.'

Despite the fact that Roxana highlighted the normative aspect of her decision to remit money as 'something that is done' to express family belongingness and continuity even after migration, respondents often insisted that courtesy money for loved ones were not assumed or indeed expected by non-migrant family members rather they were spontaneous and, importantly, voluntary gestures of showing appreciation. Giving courtesy money was optional. To support this claim, women often recollected memories when it happened on occasion they did not bring gifts of cash on their visits home and still, they insist, were not treated any differently by non-migrant relatives. One migrant women commented that in situations of momentary lack of money when, for instance, migrant women abroad become unemployed, coming home 'with empty hands' is justified, and non-migrants should be able

to exhibit sympathy and understanding for situations that are out of migrant women's control: 'It helps if they understand that when I have I give when I don't I don't.'

Courtesy money can be spontaneous gestures of appreciation bestowed upon non-migrant relatives, as the examples above suggests, but they can also be regular transfers integrated in the relationship as part of birthday, holiday, and special ceremonies celebrations. Similarly to several of my respondents, Vio offers gifts of money of €100 on non-migrant relatives' birthdays and holiday celebrations. Vio has been working as a live-in care worker in Italy for 18 years during which she has tended to the material and social needs of her now grown daughters. She proudly enumerated the many ways in which her children have achieved a decent level of living:

> 'They have their salaries, husbands work too, they have their own homes, grow some vegetables on a small plot of land, keep some chicken, really they have it good.' (Vio, 61 years old, live-in care worker, 18 years in Italy)

Although her now grown children no longer depend on Vio's remittances to support themselves, Vio continues to send her daughters 'small amounts of money' to express her love and care. Birthdays, Christmas and Easter holidays are important moments when family members mark the celebrations with gift exchange. The regular gifts of €100 in cash to her daughters to mark special celebrations does not make for a critical contribution to her nonmigrant family budget, but monetary transfers hold important social meaning. The continuation of monetary transfers (but in an albeit less economically significant way) is a form of affirming the family bond.

Importantly, the symbolic meaning of monetary transfers permits not only the affirmation of already existing bonds but also the validation of new family relationships. Tilly (2006) argues that relational work through which people mix money and intimacy permits the 'creation of new relations, confirmation of existing relations, negotiating shared definitions of the relations at hand, and repairing damaged relations' (page 50). In the case of Vio, the expansion of her family with her daughters' marriage, and eventually the birth of their children, meant that Vio needed to acknowledge the addition of new family members. She included her sons-in-law and grandchildren in the remittance circuit, allocating courtesy money for their birthdays, Christmas, and Easter holiday. These transfers are announced when migrant women call home to congratulate non-migrant family members and send their best wishes. Describing this, Vio comments:

> ‘When I send some [courtesy money] I call and tell them. They usually know that with my ‘happy birthday’ comes something… I say ‘listen, I send you a little something just for you’ So they know they can spend it on whatever they like.’ (Vio, 61 years old, live-in care worker, 18 years in Italy)

The stability and regularity of courtesy money transfers is a symbol of the family relationship migrant women attempt to maintain from afar, and thus a symbol of their own identity as mothers, grandmothers, daughters, nieces, godmothers, and so on. Mădălina, for instance, sends gifts of money to her nieces and nephews. ‘I never forget a birthday,’ she commented in our interview. Money is incorporated into special rituals that celebrate the christening of a child, a birthday, a holiday, a graduation, among others, and gifted to symbolise relationships. Mădălina works as a live-out care worker and among the very few respondents in my sample with a husband in Italy working in construction and without any children. In their return visits she offers gifts of money:

> ‘I take cash with me. I think ahead, you know… this is for my mom, for my niece, for my aunt who basically raised me.’(Mădălina, 49 years old, live-out care worker, 20 years in Italy)

Mădălina and her husband both send money when there is a need back home. Remittances are used to repair broken fences, buy medicine, pay for wedding gifts, among other things, she says ‘They know if they need money, we are here.’ ‘But,’ she continues, ‘fortunately it is not needed as much.’

7.2. Preference for gifts of money over goods

Most often than not courtesy are gifts of money because my respondents perceive money as necessary for achieving and maintaining a decent and respectable standard of living. Migrant women often point to the availability of consumption goods on the Romanian market that has grown significantly in recent decades. In the opinion of my respondents, the diversity and availability of imported goods rendered courtesy in the form of goods to fall out of favour, as Victoria comments:

> ‘Now everything you find on Italian [supermarket] shelves you can easily find on Romanian shelves too, you need only have money.’ (Victoria, 62 years old, live-in care worker, 16 years in Italy)

My respondents observed that once chocolate, olive oil, pasta, coffee, rice, detergents, dry fruits, personal hygiene products, marinated seafood, and other food staples and household products were appropriate courtesy gifts because they were considered desirable but difficult to find in Romanian stores and on the market, especially in the rural and semi-urban areas where most of my respondents originate from. Nowadays, according to Victoria, these gifts previously desired by non-migrant family members fell out of favour because of the variety of goods now available on the Romanian consumer market. Now, more than before, showing appreciation and care depends on how much one can earn and how much money one can set aside to offer as a gift.

According to post-socialist studies on consumption, the experience of material scarcity during the communist regime, where essential goods were rationed by the state and basic staples like meat, sugar, and flour became elusive commodities, has shaped the desires of people. Decades marked by severe shortages and limitations gave rise to an informal economy that emerged as a means for (some) individuals to navigate the challenging landscape of limited and hard-to-find products. Within this informal economy, people relied on family and social connections built over time to find and secure goods that were in limited and short supply (see Chapter 4). Resourceful sales clerks, who possessed greater access to these coveted items, were often able to procure ‘under the hand’ products for customers willing to pay an additional fee (Ger et al, 1993:103). The capacity to leverage one’s social networks to acquire necessary goods implied one had strong social connections and came to symbolise one’s affiliation with a privileged group (Poenariu, 2023; Cristache, 2021). Against this background of general deprivation, the expansion of the consumer market that has taken place after the fall of communism fueled the wishes of many Romanians who hoped to acquire ‘all the latest desiderata of the West’ along with ‘more mundane items such as water, soap, and books’ (Ger & Belk, 1996:278). Today, the high availability of goods and services on the Romanian market means that access to desirable goods is no longer mediated by sales clerks but by money. One’s ability to earn or dispose of money is decisive when trying to meet not only basic needs but also desires. The socio-economic transformations following the fall of communism and decades of uneven economic development have brought into sharp

relief the shifting market conditions which rendered some courtesy gestures to fall out of favour, and pushed my respondents to renegotiate the media of exchange from goods to money.

To illustrate the changing practices surrounding courtesy gestures in the families of my respondents I now turn to analysing an example of gift giving aiming to shed light on the desirability of money that takes precedence over goods. I discuss the example of Ilinca and Dumitra's family which illustrates this point. Ilinca and Dumitra are two key respondents in my fieldwork in Italy as I had numerous opportunities to spend time with them and interviewed them repeatedly, both together and separately. Ilinca and Dumitra are affinal relatives who share two grandsons, and both women are currently employed as live-in care workers in Italy. Ilinca first arrived in Italy in 2009 to 'replace' Dumitra when she returned home for three months to help her daughter adjust in her new role as a mother when she gave birth to Dumitra and Ilinca's first grandson. In the following interview excerpt, Ilinca reflects on how her gifts towards her two pre-adolescent grandsons changed from sweets to money over the past few years:

> 'Before, I used to bring my grandsons *Baci* chocolate with hazelnuts which they loved but now the little ones don't want chocolate anymore. They are all grown up. Now they need money. They don't even look at chocolate anymore. They told me that instead of bringing them sweets they prefer to receive cash so they can buy the games they want or whatever…' (Ilinca, 59-year old, live-in care worker, 13 years in Italy)

Ilinca, similarly to other respondents, replaced sweets with regular gifts of cash which her grandsons now regularly receive on their birthday, Christmas, and Easter celebrations. The agreement, however, did not sit well with Ilinca. Despite returning over and again to the meaningful connection she developed with her grandsons in spite of difficulties of separation through migration, I gained a sense that Ilinca's ties with them are not as strong as she would have liked only when I interviewed her together with her *cuscra*[14] and friend, Dumitra, a 56 years-old live-in care worker in Italy for 14 years. Dumitra was more upfront about their relationship with their children and grandchildren. Despite providing substantial support towards the building of their grown children's house, each woman remitting monthly €500

[14] Affinal relative and the mother of one's child's spouse.

towards this common goal, Dumitra is disappointed with how grandchildren relate to their grandmothers 'I call and they barely look at me (through the phone)' commenting that, immersed in video games, grandchildren hardly have time to connect with their grandmothers: 'They play on the computer all day long.' Lamenting over the lack of meaningful interaction, according to Dumitra, grandchildren pay attention to grandmothers in an affectionate way 'Only when they need something.' Dumitra rubbed the fingers of one hand together, a common gesture to suggest a money interest, and gave me a long look to see if I understood. Sitting next to us was Ilinca who had been silently and patiently listening to our conversation. Upon hearing Dumitra's derisive remark she rushed to add 'They are young boys, why would they sit and talk with two old broads like us?'

Seeing that her gifts are received with joy, is a source of great satisfaction for Ilinca. She fondly shared stories of her return home and described in great detail her grandson's anticipation, commenting that unpacking used to be an activity that lasted a whole day with children scavenging through luggages to discover gifts she had carefully placed there for them. However, lately Ilinca had begun to doubt her capacity to produce gifts that truly bring joy. Among other reasons is the changing needs and desires of children, from chocolate to video games. In a market society flooded by goods, selecting the 'right' gift for her grandchildren is an impossible task:

> 'I wouldn't know what to buy for them anyway. They play these games on the computer, what do I know about that?' (Ilinca, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 13 years in Italy)

Consequently, Ilinca sometimes feels that bringing gifts home is an 'unappreciated effort' commenting that 'nowadays it's all about money' and concluding that children are becoming increasingly materialistic.

Paradoxically, as Ilinca expressed concerns about her struggle to convey affection amidst the abundance of available goods in today's Romania society, I was surprised to learn that Ilinca had upped, during the course of my fieldwork, courtesy money transfers, commenting that 'Everything in Romania is expensive.' The €100 for birthday and holiday celebration for her grandsons transformed into €500, making her the only person in my fieldwork to ever transfer such a large amount of courtesy money.

> ‘Since the eldest [grandson] turned 12 years old they told me they are now big boys they needs more money. I started giving them each €500. My sons and daughters-in-law receive €100 each on their birthdays, and nothing on holidays… I mean beside the packages that I sent. For Easter I don’t give them money, I usually send packages. Sometimes my children come caroling at Christmas time because they know they receive some money then.’ (Ilinca, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 13 years in Italy)

With the changing needs and desires of non-migrant relatives, migrant women’s comments reveal the deep sense of obligation that underwrites courtesy, that is despite their initial comments that these exchanges are in all circumstances voluntary and optional. Many respondents, such as Ilinca and Dumitra, were deeply concerned about the increasing monetary demands of children and grandchildren, even if they did not deny such requests from non-migrants, and, in effect, participated in the negotiations of these transfers. These anxieties related to shifting demands, from chocolate to video games to money, point at deeper emotions related to the meaning of money and goods that reflect practices of care and family belonging in face of physical separation. The intention of women abroad to express their care from afar in the context of an increasingly monetised society where the possibilities and desires for consumption of available goods is mediated by money, which according to my respondents ‘is never enough,’ gave migrant women reason to pause. They often worried that their monetary contributions did not properly reflect their commitment to their relationships. In this context, suspicions about the commodification of relationships reflected in women’s hints and comments about non-migrants’ monetary interests, abound. Especially in relationships where non-migrants make ever larger claims of migrant women than they can possibly afford to transfer. Indeed, for those who may find themselves unable (or unwilling) to up their courtesy money, the risk is then to become marginalised for their inability to signal love and care via a steady stream of courtesy monetary transfers.

Migrant mothers and grandmothers adjust to changes in their family configuration, and adapt their monetary strategies to reflect these. Indeed, migration scholar, Rhacel Parreñas (2001), has analysed the strategies of migrant Filipino mothers to handle the normative expectations placed upon mothers to continue to provide care from afar, and what she calls ‘commoditization of love.’ Building on Sharon Hays’ (1996) ideas of intensive mothering model which describes a labour-intensive brand of parenting which demands substantial emotional involvement and material support on the part of mothers, Parreñas

(2005b) argues that Filipino domestic and care workers abroad respond to the social pressures to maintain the role of primary caregiver for their families. To ensure their childrens are well taken care of, migrant mothers overcompensate for their physical distance through intensive communication. They use technological communication tools to exert control over children and household consumption decisions, and to fulfil their responsibilities of meeting the emotional and social needs of those at home (see also Dreby, 2006; Abrego, 2009). In this way, Parreñas (2005b) argues mothers away give more attention to children than is expected, or indeed, than it is 'received by some children growing up in the proximity of their mothers' (page 123).

As Parreñas (2005b) points out, however, these adaptations carry an impact on the family relationship, especially when mothers' capacity to materialise feelings of care from afar hinges upon their ability to remit money. Children suffer from the physical absence of mothers, who in the interest of materially providing for their family sacrifice their time and emotional closeness with their children to migrate abroad where they provide care for children and adults in wealthier families and countries. In the relationship with their 'left behind' children, migrant women have little choice but to rely on money and goods 'to express devotion' and on services provided by others 'to display closeness' (Boris & Parreñas 2010:1), and this risks, Parreñas and colleagues argue, reducing a close personal relationship to a solely economic relationships, and replacing love and affection with money and material goods (Parreñas & Boris, 2010; Parreñas, Thai & Boris, 2016).

Courtesy money is thus a form of care, and these transfers are a means through which migrant women form and maintain long-term and long-distance connections with children and grandchildren—although mediated by the market.

7.3. Anxieties about mixing money with love and care

For my respondents, developing alongside the idea that money serves as a symbol of love and affection, facilitating the expression of tangible commitments by migrant women toward their 'left-behind' loved ones, is the recognition that monetary aspects hold immense significance within familial bonds, which run the risk of taking priority over affective sentiments.

On occasion, migrant women voiced their exasperation regarding the escalating volume of requests made by their loved ones. Interestingly, in the next breath, they lamented

the impoverishment that compelled family members to continuously seek additional resources from migrants abroad. As discussed above and elsewhere in this thesis, despite availability of goods on the market, the hopes and aspirations of people to acquire not only what they need but also what they desire are dashed as the continued economic crisis in Romania dwindles people's resources and marres their expectations for a brighter future. Increased income disparities have maintained particularly high between Italy and Romania, which continues to drive migration to Italy, although less so than it used to before (see Chapter 4). In 2022 in the Veneto region where I conducted my fieldwork, a care worker could earn as much as €1300, depending on her work responsibilities, compared to the minimum wage in Romania, the equivalent of €360 after tax. Today, Romania continues to be one the countries in the EU where poverty and unemployment is at high levels. According to EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (2023), the shares of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion within the EU are highest in Romania reaching, in 2022, a staggering 34.4% of the overall population. With the lowest share of disposable household income among the EU member states most Romanian families commit their resources towards daily survival. Even so, more people are forced to be vegetarian as they cannot afford a varied diet; to live in inadequate and overcrowded spaces as rent prices soar and house ownership declines; and to accept income poverty due to inability to find waged work. As discussed in previous chapters, migrant women often find themselves in need to assume responsibility for the social reproduction of their families if they are to secure a future for their children and grandchildren in the face of economic and structural challenges prevalent in lower sectors of the economy where they find themselves.

When migrant women's ability to express care and love from afar hinges upon their economic contributions towards non-migrant relatives, the increased anxieties about the intermingling of affection and money as the basis for family belongingness and commitment in the context of transnational migration, have exacerbated concerns about commoditization of love. Migrant women often complain about the ever increasing demands of non-migrant family members, noting that they 'always ask for money' and 'are only interested in money,' at the same time as they worry about chronic job scarcity and heightened unemployment among those 'left behind.' I interpreted their anxieties about the commodification of love in the context of family migration to be a reflection of wider anxieties related to broader socioeconomic changes in Romania. Remember the example of Elena, introduced in the previous chapter, who successfully negotiated the 'mixing' of money and affection by securing her brother's employment on her daughter's house building construction site. Elena

came to work in Italy for a few months to earn money which she committed to her daughter's ambitions to build a house. Prior to migrating she had forged an agreement with her daughter. Elena undertook the responsibility of contributing to the financing of windows and doors for the house and in exchange for this economic support she requested that her own brother be granted employment at the construction site during the summer months, with her pledging to cover his salary (see Chapter 6). 'Giving a job' to her brother Elena intermingled business and family relations in a harmonious way, exemplifying how migrant women sometimes use their status within the family as earners of remittances to negotiate, from a better position, their own demands and requests for economic exchange.

Migrant women are, however, selective of those with whom they share resources with. While Elena successfully navigated the intersection of economic matters and familial bonds with her brother, the same cannot be said for Roxana's cousin, whose appeal for favours encountered a different response, as I discuss next. Quite a different situation from that of Elena was presented by Roxana who recounted how she dealt with one instance in which she experienced increased expectations for economic exchanges in her visits home. Reflecting on a conversation going on between herself and her cousin with whom she had lost touch after migration, Roxana's comment sheds light on deep seated anxieties about the commoditization of love which translate into renewed concern about the widespread unemployment and material scarcity non-migrants face at home.

> 'They think that if you come from abroad, you necessarily... If you come from abroad, they look at you differently and ask for all kinds of things... My cousin saw me in town once and shouted at me from across the street "You are back from Italy, come on treat me to a beer!" They say things like this. I don't even speak to my cousin, I never once spoke to him after I left. Not on purpose but it just so happenes that we don't keep in touch. And if you say you won't give them a beer they start mocking you in a very rude way. I think the problem is that these people (back home) waste their time. With no jobs, no opportunities, and no prospects, they waste their time.' (Roxana, 36 years old, live-out care worker, 10 years in Italy)

By describing non-migrant relative's status as 'unemployed' 'with no opportunities' 'no prospects' and essentially 'wasting their time,' Roxana points to the power dynamics between herself and her cousin that result from unequal access to hard currency. Her status as a

migrant with access to foreign currency afforded her authority over non-migrant relatives. With little access on their own to money, non-migrant may appeal to their belonginessess to a transnational family to extract economic favours from migrant relatives. These negotiations, as discussed, can yield varying outcomes. They may be successful as in the case of Elena's agreement with her brother. Conversely they may also be met with considerable failure, as exemplified by Roxana's interaction with her cousin. When negotiations fail to reach its expected results, non-migrant relatives may turn to manipulating and shaming migrants into redistributing their resources.

As I have shown, rather than giving in to the perceived incessant demands for money from non-migrant relatives, respondents engaged in relational work through which they distinguished between different interpersonal ties and matched them with appropriate media of exchange (Zelizer, 2010b). While migrant women participate in negotiations with grandchildren, whose claims for money may be more difficult to deny (as in the case of Ilinca presented earlier), Roxana, on the other hand, exhibited no sense of regret when disregarding her cousin's appeals for assistance. Her refusal to entertain her cousin's solicitations for favours that involve economic transaction, served to reaffirm the boundaries that delineated their relationship. This once again underscores the perspective held by my respondents who view families as defined by their actions rather than by biological kinship. Merely sharing a blood tie does not automatically make one family without 'the actual performance of kinship' (Zelizer & Tilly, 2006:21). In the context of Romanian transnational families, the sharing of resources, with money being a pivotal resource, serves as one of the means by which individuals express their love and care for one another. At the same time, importantly, money is but one aspect of an ongoing relationship that already involves the exchange of other forms of sentiments and commitments. This common conception of money's role within the family explains why Roxana could legitimately reject demands for economic favours of non-migrant relatives.

Noteworthy, albeit less common in my fieldwork, are also the stories of few migrant women who reveal that deeper anxieties about the extension of cash into family relations were not solely confined to the worries of migrant women themselves but were also shared by some of their non-migrant families. The perception of persistent and unrelenting requests for monetary assistance that non-migrants directed towards migrant women represent a source of apprehension for the family members they 'left behind.' The story of Mirabela provides an interesting parallel to reflect on these instances when non-migrants blatantly refuse to receive monetary transfers. Mirabela, a 46-year old, live-out care worker and single

mother of two-children, has been living with her children in Italy for 23 years. During this time she has maintained regular communication with her ageing parents through various available means, including letters, phone calls, and regular visits. Mirabela has lived through the changes in ICT communication and often returned, in our interview, to the benefit brought about by new technological means of communication which helped her strengthen her relationship with her parents. Her family is able to engage in practices of conviviality that were not possible before. She and her parents video call each other every morning during which time they drink coffee together and keep each other updated with news and information. Commenting about the regularity of communication, she says: 'This has become a habit of ours, we see each other every morning.' Apart from maintaining constant communication which enables a feeling of emotional closeness, Mirabela's ageing parents regularly send her parcels filled with home-made goods and produce. These packages are viewed as tangible expressions of love in transnational families, well integrated into the practices of providing care across national borders (Mata-Codesal & Abranches, 2018), and observed among various migrant groups (for Filipino see: Patzer, 2018; for Macedonian see: Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2018; for West Africans see: Gemmeke, 2018; for Mexicans see: Medina & Vázquez-Medina 2018; among others), as well as Romanian migrants in Italy, as noted earlier by Ban (2012).

Mirabela's desire to reciprocate the gesture of care and affection materialised in the circulation of parcels from her ageing parents in Romania to her family in Italy, however, is met with her elderly parents' consistent refusal of courtesy money. She says:

> 'My parents saw that people there (in Romania) would ask, ask, ask, [for money]... they asked for the skin of our (migrants') back.' (Mirabela, 46 years old, live-out care worker, 23 years in Italy)

Interestingly, instead of using the common idiom 'to ask for the shirt of one's back' to imply demanding requests causing great inconvenience or difficulty to the giver, Mirabela, whether counsciously or not, referred instead to 'the *skin* of migrants' back' emphasising perhaps the significant sacrifices that migrants are required to make to meet the demands of their non-migrant relatives. Going beyond the demand for a valuable possession such as one's shirt, the expression 'the skin of one's back' is intended to convey that migrants are obligated to provide the ultimate gift, necessitating to self-sacrifice and renouncing a part of

themselves. In the quote above, Mirabela emphasises that this perception of increasing requests and demands placed on migrants has informed her relationship with her parents.

Her parents' refusal of remittances signals deeper anxieties about the extension of cash into an otherwise loving and caring relationship. The fear of being subjected to suspicions of love commoditization emerged from conceptions regarding non-migrants relatives who exploit their connections with migrants. Non-migrants incessant demands for money, in the eyes of Mirabela's parents, reveal motivations guided by material interests and greed as opposed to love and care in their commitments to continue family relations in the context of migration. Considering these evaluations of money as hiding non-migrants' immoral intentions and motivations which Mirabela believes her parents are making of monetary transfers in the context of migration, they do not accept remittances as a form of care exchange.

Despite numerous attempts, Mirabela failed to convince her non-migrant elderly parents to accept gifts of money as signs of her commitment to family and love as they remained resistant, throughout the years, to the idea of accepting money from her. When asked about monetary arrangements in her family, Mirabela comments:

> '[Sending money home] is a huge issue for us. We fight a lot on this. My parents never wanted anything from us and they do not accept anything. Anything at all. For them it's enough to know that we are healthy and doing well in Italy.' (Mirabela, 46 years old, live-out care worker, 23 years in Italy)

Her parents' refusal to accept money, however, does not sit well with Mirabela, as she continues:

> 'But it's not an easy thing to accept that I can't send them money especially because they sent us [frozen raw] pork, pickles, *sarmale*[15], and you know… But they don't want to receive anything in return.' (Mirabela, 46 years old, live-out care worker, 23 years in Italy)

Due to the centrality of courtesy money to migrant women's view on expressing care, non-migrants' refusal to accept gifts of money acquire emotional salience in the context of

[15] Romanian dish traditionally cooked to mark festive occasions and holiday celebrations.

family migration. Mirabela's emotional connection is expressed and felt through the exchange of gifts, including money gifts, as she reiterated over and again in our conversations she 'loves offering gifts.' Not being able to express and share this love with her family saddened her. Through her gifts, including money gifts, Mirabela aims to strengthen the personal and emotional bonds with her parents that may be fraying due to the long distance and extended periods of separation. Read in this way, when her gifts are refused, it signifies a deeper refusal to acknowledge the personal significance that Mirabela attaches to money, including its role in strengthening personal bonds. Influenced by these emotional memories, Mirabela became more attuned to her own children's needs to express their affection through gifts which, in her view, is a valid way to communicate feelings in intimate relationships: 'I made sure my children know they can offer me gifts, not only now, but also later in life.' And proceeded to proudly list the recent gifts she had received, some of which were relatively expensive, such as the latest smartphone, from her children who had purchased them with their own earnings and allowances over the years.

Simoni (2016), who explored the moral aspects of remittances among Cuban migrants in Spain, reveals that during periods of economic turmoil when sustaining a decent level of living on a low income becomes increasingly untenable, individuals reassess their intimate relationships. This reassessment involves placing greater importance on personal characteristics and qualities while reducing the significance of personal economic competencies and capabilities, and serving as a means to downplay the importance of their own economic shortcomings and limitations. He argues that 'rather than the economy, what was invested morally was the divide between the 'economic' and the 'social', between sentiment and interest and calculation, a divide between two radically different spheres of value and modes of being, cast here as incompatible' (Simoni, 2016:468).

In light of these considerations and reflecting on my own fieldwork, the anxieties associated with courtesy money suggest something suspicious regarding what monetary transfers are 'really about.' The available cultural framing of courtesy money as a means to express care and love from afar can lead to doubts regarding the hidden agendas of non-migrant family members. This scepticism may prompt some family members to insist on maintaining a separation between 'the economy' and 'family' life, that is—in spite of evidence to the contrary. They do so in order to distance themselves from suspicions of abusing the goodwill of migrants and of treating them as instruments in securing their own socio-economic positions, which are entailed in comments about non-migrants' incessant demands for money or, as Mirabela put it, 'asking for the skin of migrants' back.' These

efforts to eliminate money from other forms of care exchanges in transnational families, however, does not mean that the two domains of life, the economic and the family, remain separate realms. As Palomera and Vetta remark, de-emphasising the moral or cultural aspects of economic transfers may just be 'a way of moralizing the economy differently, without presupposing the actual existence of the latter as a separate realm.' (Palomera & Vetta, 2016:10).

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter discussed courtesy money transfers that play a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of family relationships in the context of migration. I showed that despite their small sums, distributed widely during return visits and ritually integrated into yearly celebrations, courtesy money symbolises an act of care and love, and these money transfers are a means through which migrant women form and maintain long-term and long-distance connections with their extended families. At the same time, I showed, courtesy money transfers extend beyond intimate transactions (Zelizer, 2005a). For my respondents, alongside the idea that money serves as a symbol of love and affection, facilitating the expression of tangible commitments toward their 'left-behind' loved ones, also develops the recognition that monetary aspects hold immense significance within familial bonds, which run the risk of taking priority over affective sentiments.

Chapter 8. Pocket money

Previous chapters of this dissertation have focused on the transnational dynamic that pushes women to migrate to Italy where they take live-in employment for (often) longer periods than initially intended in order to provide materially for their families (Chapter 5), and analysed the positioning of women in the moral negotiations in their transnational families (Chapter 6), as well as the cultural meanings of small money gifts (Chapter 7). This chapter of the dissertation focuses on the largely uncharted economic lives of Romanian live-in care workers in Italy.

As discussed in the Chapter 2 of this dissertation, women-led migration has been conceived through the lens of the global care chain (Hochschild, 2000). My respondents are part of this transnational dynamic in that they are women who migrated from poorer to wealthier regions and families in order to supply the growing demand for care and domestic services, leaving behind their own family members in need of care, and relying on other (usually female) family members and friends to step in and assume care responsibilities at home and fill the care gap left behind by migrating women (see Chapter 5). Much of the literature on care work migration has focused on women's exploitation in the contemporary global economy, portraying them as victims of an economic system fundamentally rooted in racist and sexist discrimination (Raghuram, 2012; Yates, 2012). At the same time, the literature on transnational families depicted women as mothers, and focused on the emotional strains of physical separation for those who 'stayed behind.' Masked by persistent focus on migrant women's status as vulnerable workers in the global economy and their role as mothers leaving behind children and other dependents in need for care (see Chapter 2), the economic and intimate practices of migrant women abroad have remained largely closeted due to care workers embeddedness in care chains that camouflages aspects of their monetary practices through which they aim to reconcile their own needs for care, safety, and wellbeing in abroad with their status as workers and carers for their families from afar. Breaking from these well explored paths in the literature on women-led migration, this chapter focuses on migrating women's agency who earmark pocket money from their wages as care workers abroad with the purpose to meet their own personal needs and desires in Italy.

To this end, this chapter is structured as follows. I first present some general observations of pocket money of Romanian live-in care workers (Section 8.1). Second, I discuss the earmarking of pocket money through which migrant women not only set aside funds for their personal consumption in Italy but they also imbue this type of money with special purposes (Section 8.2). By focusing on the meaning and uses of pocket money, I show that while migrant women still maintain an undisputed claim by non-migrant relatives to their salaries, through the act of allocating money 'for themselves' migrant women regain a sense of self that is lost in the routine transfers of money for common family goals, especially when the meaning of these transfers remain unacknowledged by non-migrant relatives, as discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. I show that having pocket money affords live-in care workers financial autonomy, and this, I suggest, can be a source of empowerment. Thirdly, I discuss the strategies that migrant women make use of in order to safeguard their own discretionary sums of money from additional economic demands made by non-migrant family members (Section 8.3). Lastly, I argue that the new-found financial self-reliance in Italy can influence new meanings for their migration and plans to postpone returning 'home' with migrant women's extended stay abroad (Section 8.4). I discuss three themes that dominated the accounts of migrant women who find financial self-reliance in Italy and for whom return migration assumed different meanings.

8.1. The discretion of pocket money

Data collected revealed that, out of their monthly wages, migrant care workers designate a small amount of money for their own personal consumption in Italy. Earmarked as pocket money for special purposes, my respondents describe the small sums, which typically range between €50 to €200, but sometimes more, as an 'allowance' they are entitled to and which they allocate to themselves to be spent in Italy as they please. As one woman commented:

> 'When I get my salary I send everything home. But I make sure to keep some pocket money, too. You know, in case I crave for something. Usually I buy Romanian food from the store. But I also need a phone top up, a coffee from time to time, things like that.'

In addition to their own wages, women draw on two other sources of pocket money, albeit less common. The change migrant women keep for themselves when they run errands and do grocery shopping with the money of their employers is another source of pocket money. Whether they are able to keep the small sums largely depends on the attitudes of their employers. Only very few women I spoke with benefited from lenient employers willing to complement their wages with 'unearned' money. These occasional 'tips' were irregular and economically insignificant. Furthermore, few migrant women mention they received cash gifts of about €50 and €100 on their birthday from their employers as a sign of appreciation for their work. Migrant women carefully differentiate between different sources of pocket money. They favour 'tips' and cash gifts rather than their own wage because, as I was told, 'It is not taken from my children's mouth.'

Interestingly, migrant women more readily discussed and quantified the amounts they 'send home' rather than their own private sums of money they retained for personal consumption in Italy. Live-in care workers insisted that 'all of us sent all our wages back home' (see Chapter 5). I learned, however, not to take this recurrent phrase at face value as it was in no way meant to suggest that migrant women do not keep money 'for themselves' in Italy, but rather their explanations were about what *pieces* of money takes precedence in their economic practices in Italy. In that sense, pocket money, I learned, must not compete with communal money. In various places in this dissertation I discussed migrant women's endurance of great sacrifices and hardship to make and 'send money home.' In Italy live-in care workers experience food shortage and hunger, ignore medical care and needs, and live with the constant threat of homelessness when employment contracts end as a result of the death of the person in their care. Yet in conversations migrant mothers and grandmother did not prioritise these hardships in immediately obvious ways. Despite the fact that no women wanted to go without food, paying for phone bills to keep the service active was more important than food expenses, even in situations in which food provided by the employer was insufficient. Mothers and grandmothers would rather go without food than phone service, as having phone service was crucial to maintaining contact with family members back home and their social connections in Italy. In that sense, in order to advance the social meaning of communal money, the piece of money that expresses the act of care intertwined with familial obligations and commitment to mutual cooperation for the benefit of all family members, migrant women continuously underscore the sacrifices and hardships endured abroad in order to give priority to money 'sent home.' When discussing pocket money migrant women downplay their own need for money, suggesting thus whose needs take priority in balancing

the economic demands of their transnational families. The recurrent phrase ‘After I pay for everything that needs to be paid for back home, whatever money is left is my pocket money’ is echoed by many respondents who reflected in interviews on the needs of those at home.

In fact, I had to probe quite heavily in order to get respondents to engage in conversations about their own private money. For instance, women claimed to retain pocket money ‘for themselves,’ which they kept out of the circuit of transnational household finances, yet when probed further about how they spend this money, some women told stories of family emergencies that prompted them to dip into their private stash of pocket money, and send more remittances they initially planned to that month. Migrant women’s contributions of additional money towards advancing the common familial goals further reinforced the importance of communal money in the economic lives of migrant women’s transnational families. Their increase in remittances served as a symbolic reminder that ‘sending money home’ is not an ordinary economic transaction (Zelizer, 2023). Take, for instance, the case of Ilinca. Despite conducting multiple interviews with her, I was never able to ascertain the exact portion of her monthly earnings that she sets aside as pocket money for herself. This led me to believe that the amount she designates for herself varies from month to month. Throughout my fieldwork Ilinca experienced spells of unemployment which were particularly daunting. Once she half-jokingly remarked that these were divine signs that she should retire from this work, and in the next breath added that she cannot leave Italy, not until she has helped her son finish the construction of his family house, and sighed deeply. In spite of dealing with her own economic insecurities that prompted her to keep tight budgets in Italy, when her grandson needed a laptop for school she dipped into her private money to transfer ‘extra’ money to her son who purchased the item she believed will supplement her grandson’s education. When it reached Ilinca’s son’s hands, pocket money was transformed into communal money. As it changed hands the money reaffirmed her relationship with both her son and grandson, and indicated her own values with regards to child’s education. By prioritising her grandson’s extra educational purchases ahead of her own needs, Ilinca revealed how communal money ranks higher than pocket money for those women who see their incomes as part of their transnational household finances. Thus the symbolism of communal money, i.e. an act of care expressing familial obligations and commitment to mutual cooperation for the benefit of all family members, takes precedence over pocket money, i.e. the amounts women kept for themselves which allows them to treat themselves from time to time.

Such findings of women prioritising the needs of their loved ones over their own support evidence collected among the physically proximate family members in other countries who show highly gendered patterns of money management and control in families which can be summarised as: women spend (their) money on children and men on themselves (e.g. Nyman, 1999; Roman & Vogler, 1999; Pahl, 1989; Zelizer, 1989; Gupta & Ash, 2008, among others). Women's spending of personal money on childcare indicates common conceptions that such responsibilities in the families should be carried out by women.

Nevertheless, despite these aspects of pocket money, the evidence collected during the course of my fieldwork suggests that the distinction between spending money on the family and on oneself is significant. I show that migrant women who do relational work to legitimise their own private money and spending are likely to fare better in Italy, for pocket money provides some degree of financial autonomy abroad, which, I argue, can be empowering.

8.2. Spending power of pocket money

Although virtually all live-in care workers in my sample worried about the material necessities of their non-migrant relatives, and went through great lengths to moderate their own needs and desires so as not allow them to take precedence over and outweigh familial common goals (see Chapter 5), live-in care workers imbued pocket money with meaning beyond their economic value, as one migrant woman commented:

> 'I never buy anything for myself, I buy for my grandchildren. When I go to the flea market I always think "would they like this, should I get that for the little one" never do I think "would this dress look good on me" because where would I wear anything that is nice? I am locked up in the house with my *baba* all day long with no one to see me. Actually, no! From time to time I go to this cafe nearby and get a nice coffee for myself. When my *baba* drives me mad and I feel like running away and leaving everything behind, I go and have a coffee to calm myself, and give myself strength. These little luxuries, you know, they matter a lot. It's a way to encourage myself to move forward. I say to myself one more week, one more month, a little more and this is how time goes on.'

This woman's statement captures a common sentiment among live-in care workers, namely that, although not physical necessities, items perceived by my respondents as 'little luxuries' meet crucial psychological needs. Some women expressed the need to treat themselves from time to time, so as not to feel that their needs and desires are unimportant or that their life in Italy is 'all about work and nothing else.' One woman spends her pocket money on a pricey bar of chocolate which she buys monthly from the same store. Other women buy public transportation tickets which they use to take short trips to meet a friend or a relative living nearby on Sundays, the only day off of live-in care workers. And others buy cigarettes. But most often my respondents mention they exchange pocket money for the occasional coffee with friends. Post-socialist studies that engage with the consumption of small luxury goods connect it with experiences of material deprivation in periods of scarcity (e.g. Cristache, 2021; Belk, 2020), such as those experienced by my respondents both during and immediately after the communist regime in Romania (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 7). Research focusing on consumption in the domestic sphere, particularly in relation to gender, argues that women's purchasing of small consumption goods such as make-up and beauty products takes on the role of 'little luxuries of everyday life' because, while these items may not be deemed essential for survival, they are 'nevertheless about feeling dignity, enhancing a sense of self and overcoming feelings of deprivation' (Belk, 2020: 241). In the same way, the little luxuries of everyday life migrant care workers are able to afford with their pocket money in Italy are held in high regard by my respondents. The pleasure they derive from these small occasional treats listed above restores a feeling of self-respect and helps women survive psychologically and continue to provide for their non-migrant family.

Despite their small sums, migrant women do not trivialise the importance of having money in their pocket. Rather they feel appreciative of the financial autonomy they gain through these discretionary sums that can be used as they please, as it was often explained to me, spending pocket money entails 'You don't need to report to no one.' Unlike communal money whose earmarking entails a process of negotiations in which family needs are weighted against individual needs of live-in care workers who earn that money, and which may come with the emotional toll of enduring and sacrificing abroad, pocket money is money women perceive to be their own.

The opportunity to have and spend their own private stash of money as they see fit brings a form of independence that women seldom enjoyed prior to their migration, particularly because their earned money 'melted into the household' as women strived to provide for the basic needs for their families. Referring how they managed family expenses

prior to their migration, respondents often underscored the limited resources that afforded them little opportunities to invest in personal consumption and leisure activities 'back home.' Most of the household income went towards paying for the bare necessities. When money is tight, the responsibility to make ends meet in the low-wage families of my respondents is often a chore that falls on the shoulders of women. While some scholars who study the social meaning of money in post-socialist families argue that the task of managing and controlling family money affords women more discretionary power over household decisions and resource allocation which holds the potential to challenge gender domination in family relations (e.g. Iversen, 2003), I contend, however, that rather than a privilege the time consuming and emotionally exhausting tasks of shopping for the cheapest products, stretching money to go as far as possible, begging for help from friends and relatives, repaying that help, dealing with threatening disconnection notices from utilities companies, managing children's desires and prioritising needs, among others—is essentially a burden to most women. The routine responsibility of managing tight family budgets has led women to acquire and develop skills through which they exercise frugality and self-abnegation. Perhaps this is the reason why some of them continue to use money in Italy in ways that exposes their self-abnegation (see Section 5.2 in Chapter 5).

In light of the above, the idea of having money of one's own, money that is not family or household money, to be spent as one pleases, is liberating for many women. In fact, their migration not only afforded women the possibility to earn significantly more money but—those who maintain separate purses in Italy—enjoyed more discretionary income. Commenting about the 15-years period during which she had worked as in live-in employment, Narcisa, now a live-out care worker, underscores the benefits of maintaining separate purses in Italy:

> 'I sent money home to help out but I didn't refuse myself small pleasures, you know. What use is working if you never have money in your pocket?' (Narcisa, 65 years old, live-out care worker, 22 years in Italy)

Spending her pocket money on coffee outings and the occasional Sunday excursions to nearby tourist spots with friends were occasions which provided Narcisa with ample opportunities for socialising. These experiences, mediated by access to pocket money, helped her realise that 'Life abroad is not only about work and sending money home.' Echoing Narcisa's sentiment about the importance of earmarking money for oneself when abroad, was

Eugenia who although described the monthly sums of pocket money as 'small' and 'little' when compared to communal money she regularly earmarks towards the downpayment of her son's home (see Chapter 6), she commented that 'My pocket money is mine and is important to me.'

Respondents such as Narcisa and Eugenia, among others, claim ownership over their wages in Italy and insist they have earned their right to not justify their own needs and desires and ask for permission on how to spend pocket money. Notably, although they did not refuse non-migrant family members requests for payments, they carefully differentiate between what they saw as 'helping out' their non-migrant family and their own discretionary sum of money in Italy. Despite insisting that pocket money is an important source of personal pleasure, migrant women are not neglectful of their children and grandchildren who they financially support throughout school, sponsor their migration overseas, buy them cars, pay for marriage and baptism ceremonies, help with large purchases, 'lift' homes, among others (see Chapter 6).

One of the social significance of women's financial independence afforded by their earmarking of pocket money is the opportunity to relay a positive image in their entourage in Italy. For instance, Dumitra 'finances' her friendships with pocket money. The monthly €150 she retains from her own wage in Italy, earmarked for daily coffee and occasional Sunday lunch, provides ample opportunity to sustain her friendships.

> 'It's enormously important to have some money in your pocket when you walk out the door. If you meet a friend you can say 'let's have a coffee' you don't have to invent an excuse for why you can't go.' (Dumitra, 56 years old, live-in care worker, 14 years in Italy)

As suggested in the comment of Dumitra above, rather than 'invent an excuse' in order to safeguard their dignity in face of peers, live-in care workers who have 'money in their pocket' can enhance their perceived legitimacy as individuals that can engage on par in economic and personal exchanges.

More generally, pocket money, which facilitates leisure activities, is a self-confidence booster enhancing social integration abroad and preventing live-in care workers from being socially isolated in Italy (see Chapter 5). By using pocket money to connect, create, maintain, and manage social connections in Italy, care workers alleviate or escape their precarious circumstances in the host country. One crucial moment in which having someone in Italy to

rely on for favours and support comes in handy is during times of unemployment. Periods of unemployment are experienced as particularly difficult by migrant domestic workers. For those in formal employment, it may take up to several months to get the benefits going, leaving my respondents (and their family) with no source of income in the interim. Many of my respondents encountered periods of unemployment and often voiced their frustration waiting for unemployment benefits to arrive and formulated strong criticism against Italian authorities upon whom they depended for favourable outcomes regarding their benefits application. This sentiment is exemplified in the following interview excerpt:

> 'When my *baba* died I applied for unemployment. It was two months before I saw any money entering my bank account. (raising her voice) What do THEY (Italian authorities) imagine we live off during this time? Air? We have to have somewhere to sleep, something to eat, we have our own needs!'

The work of a live-in care worker in elderly care is dependent upon the health of the person in care, as their death essentially means the end of the employment contract. Because their housing is tied to their work contract, losing one's employment essentially means losing one's accommodation and, consequently, being exposed to the risk of homelessness. One might expect that unemployment benefits provide some sort of safety net for live-in migrant care workers whose living and accommodation depends completely on their workplace. However, as many of my respondents reiterated, the support offered by the Italian authorities is insufficient. According to the Italian labour legislation, upon the death of the employer, care workers receive a severance check and may only reside in the house for another two weeks but no longer than one month (depending on the period length that the worker has been in the service of the departed care receiver). Those who do not possess a formal employment contract are at an even greater risk of homelessness because the possibility to continue to remain in the home/workplace after the death of the care receiver largely depends on women's ability to informally negotiate their contractual terms and conditions, and on the care receiver's family willingness to comply with these. As Nicolescu (2021) observes in her ethnography on Romanian live-in care workers in the south of Italy, migrant women tend to the needs of their employers in ways that prolong their health to keep their employment secure for as long as possible.

Nonetheless despite their efforts providing care services to the elderly implies that the health of the elderly care receiver deteriorates constantly. While the majority of my live-in

care workers respondents always try their best to find another work post immediately after losing their job, some could not avoid becoming unemployed. In such cases they relied on a trusted few that made up their social networks to help with accommodation and sometimes food provision. Support from friends, family, and acquaintances in Italy plays an important role in enhancing migrant women's ability to survive the material hardship associated with the ups and downs of income flows as they transition from one work post to another.

Livia returned over and again in our interview to the benefits of retaining pocket money from her monthly salary. Hinting at the importance of pocket money for maintaining social relationships in the limited time off she enjoys as a live-in care worker in Italy, Livia says:

> 'When I am off from work I go to my friends in Venice. I take the train and stop at a bakery to buy some cake, you know, to not go empty handed. And it's nice because I have somewhere to go and relax for a bit…'(Livia, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 17 years in Italy)

Her comment suggests the importance of pocket money for staving off social isolation, a consequence of working as a live-in care worker in Italy (see Section 5.2 in Chapter 5), in her decision to earmark money for personal consumption abroad.

Livia spoke proudly of her friendships with more well-to-do Italians and Romanians in Italy, who have helped her time and again in her hour of need. In Venice she frequently visits a friend who has 'turned her life around' by moving out of live-in employment to hourly work when she met her Italian boyfriend-turned-husband. Livia comments that 'They own the house they live in,' and proceeds to list the amenities of a three-bedroom apartment, concluding 'They have everything they need and enough space to host not one but three or four people.' Emphasising their autonomous living conditions, Livia hints at the acts of assistance she can gain access to by means of her connections. And, indeed, her friend's support has been crucial on at least one occasion when Livia became unemployed and in need of a place to stay until she found another work post.

To maintain relationships with people in Italy they can turn to for help and assistance in times of need, migrant care workers need to invest money. Pocket money is often exchanged for treating a friend with a coffee, buying a cake when visiting a friend's home, among others, and serves to signal sociability. Those who deliver on these customs can naturally ask for assistance from their personal relations. Discussing more generally about the

significance of pocket money, Narcisa emphasises its crucial role in facilitating social integration in Italy:

> ‘I never did it so I cannot understand how anyone can send all her money home to her family. Yes, you work, you give [the family] a lot [of money], but you also keep some pocket money for yourself, after all your life is here not there.’ (Narcisa, 65 years old, live-out care worker, 22 years in Italy)

Contrasting the story of Livia who successfully used the sociability enabled by pocket money to her advantage as she secured much needed help during times of unemployment in Italy, is the story of Narcisa’s friend. Narcisa was very familiar with the specific challenges posed by live-in employment. In her small studio apartment she sometimes hosts female friends in need of a place to stay until they secure another workpost. The mutual agreement is that friends are expected to contribute to household expenses in some way or another. Sharing different costs such as utilities bills and food expenses make it easier for care workers without a job to obtain their friends’ consent to help with accommodation. This agreement however works best when it is not spelled out explicitly. By recalling a disagreement she had had with a friend over appropriate compensation for such favours, Narcisa emphasises that such favours should never be taken for granted as she, like many of my respondents, highlighted the significance of monetary contributions to their conceptualization of intimate interpersonal relationships:

> ‘I took in this woman from church. The first time for a few days, and the second time for one week. But she never had any money. She couldn’t pay for food and contributed nothing (to household expenses). And I said to myself that’s it! I sat her down and talked to her like she was my sister. At that time she was in Italy for four years and didn’t have anything to show for. I told her that by now she should be able to take care of herself and not rely on friends all the time. I am here to help but she should be able to thank me in some way. I told her so and she never came asking me for favours again. I was told [by a mutual acquaintance] that after a few years she eventually went home to her family and died of cancer soon after. What’s the point of it all? You sacrifice so much and you can’t even enjoy your pension years.’ (Narcisa, 65 years old, live-out care worker, 22 years in Italy)

Narcisa suspected her friend 'sent all her wages back home,' for she saw no reason why one working and earning a monthly salary was left without 'money in her pocket' and thus unable to provide for one's needs. This economic behaviour of fellow care workers whose own inability to be financially self-reliant in Italy rendered them completely dependent on others who are only marginally better off was not espoused by Narcisa who held in high regards the value of (some degree of) economic independence in Italy. Echoing Viviana Zelizer's (2010b:x) argument that 'monies we spend or refuse to spend, for instance, often signal which relations matter to us,' Narcisa suggested that her friend's unwillingness to safeguard her pocket money for personal needs in Italy renders visible the web of meaningful social relationships within which she moves. When all wage is sent home, her friend signals which relationships matter most to her. When Narcisa understood that her friend's allegiance and loyalties lay elsewhere, namely in the ties she fostered with those at home whose needs prevail, and that reciprocity in their relationship cannot be expected, she withdrew her support.

Although migrant women who are out of a job hardly ever pay hard cash to their friends and family in Italy in exchange for a place to live, all these exchanges involve a strong expectation for some form of reciprocity. Similarly to other migrant women interviewed, Narcisa mentioned the ability to cover everyday needs and a willingness to show appreciation through material contributions towards common household expenses as key markers of reciprocity. Through the language of kinship, Narcisa established a form of relatedness that provided both emotional and economic support for her 'sister.' But to participate in the relationship and benefit from short term temporary housing during periods of unemployment, one is expected to engage in mutual exchange. Favours are secured by those who established a legitimate place in the relationship by proving themselves committed to the mutual benefit of all parties involved. Such favours cannot be taken for granted and, as Narcisa's story suggests, being short of pocket money curtails one's possibility to succeed or even survive in times of unemployment in Italy.

Those care workers who do not seize on the opportunity to regularly and consistently set aside pocket money from their monthly wages still grapple with the need to navigate and adjust to their lives in Italy, for their stay abroad is often prolonged, and return home on their own terms becomes increasingly unachievable as they are called to assume new responsibilities within their transnational families (see Chapter 5). For those migrant women who prioritise their non-migrant family's economic needs and desires often to the detriment of their own (see Chapter 5, especially Section 5.3), their own financial self-reliance in Italy

is diminished, and during unemployment spells they have to rely on others to provide various forms of support to ameliorate material hardship. To build a rapport with friends who can provide relief by offering a place to stay, a bed to sleep in, a plate of hot food, or small sums of money in case of emergency, one is expected to engage in mutual exchanges. The existence of these norms of reciprocity among friends made it difficult for live-in care workers to rely on these friends when they repeatedly reintroduced pocket money back into the circuit of their transnational household economies.

Migrant women's re-insertion of pocket money back into the circuit of the transnational household economy, therefore, hinders their ability to engage in relational work in Italy. Although they can ride off social networks for a while, they eventually find that among their low-waged migrant friends where resources are always scarce, the expectations that friendship and affect comes with material contribution may bring their relationship to a standstill and, as in the case of Narcisa presented earlier, effectively terminate them.

8.3. In defence of pocket money

The relational work entailed in earmarking pocket money is needed not only for supporting and strengthening social relationships in Italy but also for avoiding conflict with non-migrant family members, as I discuss next.

The modest amounts of money migrant care workers earmark for personal consumption in Italy and keep out of the household economy can generate frustration in the transnational families of my respondents. In Chapter 7 I referred to Dumitra and Ilinca, two live-in care workers I interviewed both together and separately. They are affinal relatives sharing two grandsons as well as close personal friends that materially and emotionally support each other in Italy. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork in Italy, Ilinca experienced a streak of bad luck. She would work for a few months at a time and then, with the sudden death of the person in her care, become unemployed. She had little time to grieve, however, as the practical details of unemployment require her full attention and dedication. She had to apply for unemployment benefits and find shelter before finding another live-in workpost. During unemployment she lodged with Dumitra whose lenient employer agreed to host Ilinca asking for €10 a night for a bed to sleep in. In addition, Ilinca helped Dumitra with housework and occasionally paid for grocery shopping. But this was hardly a comfortable

arrangement. Ilinca felt she was not allowed to come and go as she pleased for fear of arousing suspicion among neighbours who might think that care workers take advantage of the Italian elderly. She would have much rather preferred to spend her unemployment time in Romania where she could lodged with her son and his family, and travel back to Italy when she 'heard of any jobs.' But this arrangement was risky for she could lose her unemployment benefits in case Italian authorities discovered she had left the country. In any case, Ilinca was never more than a month or two without a job for she had always managed to find another employer/family, despite the fact that in order to stay in work she had to make many compromises such as putting up with demanding employers. Ilinca and Dumitra's remittances support their grown children who are building a family home. They agreed to each send monthly €500 to the couple to advance this goal. This arrangement has been lasting for several years now as the construction of the house advances slowly but steadily. When asked about this arrangement, Dumitra feels €500 is too much to send, and they should have holded out for a smaller amount. Ilinca disagrees, commenting on the importance of a home for the young family who needs to have 'something of their own.' Dumitra is worried about Ilinca's occasional transfers of 'extra' money, which I discussed in Section 8.1 of this chapter. She believes that exceeding the agreed-upon monthly sum may lead to increased expectations on the part of their children and grandchildren. In our one-on-one interview, Dumitra says:

> 'I didn't want to agree to €500 but my *cuscra* didn't give me a chance to say anything. Some months she sends more and I always tell her it is not okay. It is not okay because they see her, they see that she can (send more), and then they ask from me as well.'(Dumitra, 56 years old, live-in care worker, 14 years in Italy)

Dumitra is concerned that the unemployment spells experienced by Ilinca through the duration of my fieldwork has put pressure on her to up her remittances. To manage the expectations of her non-migrant family members, Dumitra says 'I never give them more than what is agreed.' One reason migrant women cite for refusing non-migrants additional requests for money is that of managing unrealistic expectations about monetary circulation. As Dumitra explained 'If they see you give whenever they ask they'll think you are an ATM machine,' where 'being an ATM machine' refers to perceptions that migrants have an infinite supply of money, and, as suggested in the previous chapter, calls to mind migrants' anxieties about having their identities as mothers and grandmothers reduced to those of providers of

remittances. This finding is in line with what sociologist of money, Supriya Singh, called 'money tree syndrome,' whereby non-migrants overestimate the availability of money abroad and underestimate migrants' hardships and sacrifices to earn money. In the context of transnational family migration, Singh argues 'the value of money is interpreted rather than calculated' (2013:178). According to Thai (2014), non-migrants' interpretations on the value of money are truncated for the hard work and toil entailed in migrants' accumulation of money through their low-wage jobs in the lower segments of the host society remain invisible when remittances are transferred to be spent 'back home.'

Dumitra's refusal to up her remittances, however, does not sit well with her family:

> 'They sometimes call me with this and that problem, but I keep a firm tone and I say this is all I can afford. I can tell they don't like it. But it is what it is.' (Dumitra, 56-years old, live-in care worker, 14 years in Italy)

This is not to say that Dumitra is not worried about how she is perceived by her non-migrant family. Indeed she bitterly remarks in our interview that their shared grandsons prefer Ilinca for she more readily responds to their demands for gifts and cash. Yet in spite of this realisation, for Dumitra, it is more important to have a private stash of cash earmarked for her own individual needs, commenting that 'I have to have my own pocket money here (in Italy).'

Over the years, those who persevere in their safeguarding of pocket money, despite frustrations and tensions in their relationships with family members, are those who enjoy a higher sense of financial independence in Italy which they perceive as desirable. They understand that their own safety and wellbeing in Italy is measure in terms of pocket money, as Vanessa comments:

> 'One should keep pocket money for oneself every month. Yes, we come here to make money. Yes, we help those at home with a lot of money. But we have to think about ourselves as well because we can never know what may happen next.' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

In addition to shutting down 'extra' demands for money to protect their pocket money, as discussed earlier, migrant women may sometimes resort to being secretive or even outright lying about their salaries to their family members in order to defend their discretionary sums

of money. Only one woman in my fieldwork openly discussed this aspect of pocket money. But this in itself is unsurprising given the secrecy that cloaks pocket money spending, a topic I covered in Section 8.1 of this Chapter. And so, there is reason to suspect that more women in fact misrepresent the amount of their income earned in Italy to their family in order to protect their pocket money from demands of 'extra' money coming from their non-migrant families.

Vanessa is the only woman in my fieldwork who confessed to 'hiding' her pocket money from her family members. In our interview, she was forthright about her earnings, savings, spending, and transfers. She did not require an expense record book to keep track of how much money she transferred, who she designated to handle the money, and for what purpose was money destined because she could easily recall and openly calculate the flow of money in her transnational family household. Vanessa 'lifted' the family home, financed part of her daughter's wedding, and bought a car for the young family. Vanessa regularly earmarks €100 courtesy money to mark important celebrations, but most of her salary is 'put into the house' as she strived to help family live as autonomously as possible by providing for their own needs growing vegetables, preserving fruits from the orchard for the winter, keeping a cow for milk and chicken for eggs and occasionally their meat. Vanessa confessed that her family never knows the real amount of her income:

> 'When I change jobs and they ask me how much I earn I always subtract €100 when I tell them the sum. This way I can keep some more money for myself (laughs).' (Vanessa, 59 years old, live-in care worker, 21 years in Italy)

As the comment of Vanessa suggests and as discussed above, when migrant women express a feeling of entitlement over the money they have earned through their hard work and perceive that revealing the actual amount could result in family members making additional financial demands, which they may hesitate to refuse, fearing disapproval, concealing the true sums of their earnings becomes the means through which one can safeguard *her* pocket money from prying and demanding family members.

It is clear in many of the cases presented above that women's discretionary sums in Italy, represented by their pocket money, is subject to various forms of control (that extends to oversight of monetary use) exercised by the family over migrant women. Pocket money can be made legitimate in the eyes of their family through the promise of communal money (see Chapter 6) and occasional money gifts (see Chapter 7). And indeed, most migrant

women exercise prudence in their use of pocket money, closely controlling their own expenses. While it may be less common to see live-in care workers investing their pocket money in personal appearance through clothing, grooming, or beautification, these expenses can surely offer 'visible' or 'flashy' signs of their financial independence in Italy. Nonetheless, as I discussed above, even the seemingly inconspicuous expenses such as meals out, occasional coffee with friends, bus fares, and the like can present opportunities for empowerment among those who view themselves as the rightful owners of their wages. For them, these everyday expenses offer a means to assert their control over their lives in Italy.

Pocket money does provide some form of empowerment (albeit limited) to migrant care workers who firmly set boundaries on what they are willing to provide (as seen in the case of Dumitra) or those who hide the actual amount of their earnings abroad (as seen in the case of Vanessa). As discussed throughout this chapter, pocket money serves as a gateway to social life in Italy, for it provides live-in care workers with access to public spaces during their time off, including coffee shops, restaurants, short trips, among other activities. Venturing beyond their employer's home/workplace enhances their self-esteem and significantly expands their social connections in Italy. These factors prove to be influential in obtaining essential assistance from friends during uncertain times abroad and future work prospects. Women who allocate a portion of their earnings as pocket money gain more control on the issues related to how their wages are utilised, in contrast to those who do not. They articulate in vivid detail how they use their money and why, indicating the pivotal role of pocket money in shaping their identity as individuals striving to assert control over their lives in Italy. Despite the small sums, therefore, pocket money holds great significance. For care workers, earmarking pocket money is an important practice enabling migrant women to maintain some level of financial autonomy in Italy, given the prevalent fear of job loss and the prospect of homelessness.

That being said, I am wary of over-emphasising the empowering capacity of pocket money. While pocket money is an important resource that women use to achieve their own personal ambitions, priorities, and motivations, safeguarding pocket money from 'extra' financial demands by family members is not necessarily a collective strategy for enhancing the empowerment of migrant care workers. As discussed in Section 5.2 in Chapter 5, one characteristic of Romanian care workers' migration to Italy is their involvement in migration chains as care workers organise travel, accommodation, and work for their female family members. The stories presented in this dissertation show that migrant women bring their sisters, sisters-in-law, daughters, nieces, aunts to Italy where they match them with live-in

jobs. Care workers who belong to the same extended family but who do not safeguard their pocket money may introduce tensions in their transnational families. If care workers fail to collaborate together to temper the expectations for monetary support held by non-migrant family members, they may find themselves under pressure from those 'back home' to up their remittances. This scenario unfolds when non-migrants draw comparisons between the money use of different family members engaged in live-in care work abroad. As we have seen in the cases of Ilinca and Dumitra, two live-in care workers belonging to the same extended transnational family, certain concessions made by migrant women such as Ilinca to accommodate the evolving needs and desires of their families by occasionally increasing their remittances, may frustrate interactions of other care workers such as Dumitra with their family members who, having a truncated understanding of the earning and remitting capacity of care workers, increase their requests for remittance. Becoming, what can be called, a 'super remitter'—that is, a care worker who prioritises their family's needs and desires over their own, often entailing the introduction of pocket money in the transnational household economy—is far from ameliorating the vulnerable socio-economic position women encounter in Italy. The absence of 'money in the pocket' certainly exacerbates the social isolation that migrant care workers experience for prolonged periods of time, often more than they initially planned to (see Chapter 5).

8.4. Making sense of staying abroad through pocket money

The opportunities presented by potentially becoming financially self-sufficient in Italy disrupt the narratives of self-sacrifice that migrant women mobilise in describing their life experiences abroad. As discussed in several places throughout this dissertation, faced with the trade-off between economics and care, many women mobilise a narrative of motherly self-sacrifice as they explain their migration to Italy as a necessary 'choice' to lift their families, especially children, out of poverty. Virtually all respondents planned to stay abroad for a few years until they met specific economic goals, yet they find that their time abroad extends for years, even decades (see Chapter 5). The experiences of poverty and instability that marked the lives of my respondents and their families in Romania, as discussed in various places in this dissertation, are important anchors if we are to understand the decisions to 'sacrifice one's life for money' earned abroad. In studying the sociological dimension of

memory, Migliorati (2010, 2015) argues that individuals draw from a collective memory that provide an interpretation of enduring values, norms, beliefs in a socially constituted context and throughout history. According to the author, collective memory is not confined to the past; it is part of social practices which are constructed and reconstructed in the present by individuals who embody the past as behaviour, activities, and capabilities, which, furthermore, influence our future because it is tied to intentions, expectations, and anticipation.

Several respondents perceive and describe themselves as part of a 'generation of sacrifice' whose lives in Romania were defined by an ongoing battle against poverty that they could neither overcome nor escape 'at home.' For instance, Victoria comments: 'My generation, the truth is that it is sacrificed. I mean, this generation of 50-60 years old. It was difficult then, and it is difficult now.' Respondents referred back to their memories of the daily struggles to make ends meet and provide for their families while on a low-wage salary in Romania. They recollect memories of material deprivation suffered through in the years of 'transition' to the so-called 'free market' when neoliberal policies and austerity measures left many without a living wage. These revolve around a particularly hurtful memory in which they felt they had fallen short in fulfilling their motherly responsibilities to provide for their children. One mother spoke of her inability to afford a varied diet for her children, another spoke of dressing her children in the same outfit every day, including during important school ceremonies; and another describes the heartbreak she experienced when she had to teach her daughter how to use rags during her menstruation for store-bought female intimate hygiene products were often considered luxuries in the households of my respondents, and therefore, rarely purchased. It is in this context of poverty and material deprivation my respondents faced in Romania where the emotional distress of not being able to provide for one's children prompted mothers to invest their narratives of migration with motherly sacrifice that is worthy of respect and to expect their children to honour their decision to migrate abroad to provide them with a decent life (see Chapter 6). Claiming recognition for the hardships and sacrifices endured abroad to earn money for the benefit of their children justifies the morality of mothers' decision to leave their family behind.

Without diminishing the hardships and suffering migrant women endured in Italy, I wish to suggest that there is at least some potential for empowerment to be held for women's prolonged stay abroad. I came to understand the potential for leading a (more) fulfilled life in Italy when I conducted fieldwork at a busy international parcels delivery point in Padua. Women walked around and about with heavy packages they handled with care. Scotch tape

became a communal resource, passing from hand to hand as women exchanged tips on securing the parcels, ensuring their precious contents made the journey 'home' unscathed. These women, working as live-in care workers, seized their brief daily two-hour respite from their care work duties, to deliver their 'transnational care packages' (Fouratt, 2017) to loved ones 'back home.' As they meticulously attended to their packages filled with food staples, sweets, hygiene products, clothing and footwear, beauty products, and other goods, laughter and friendly banter filled the air, creating a vibrant atmosphere. The parcel delivery point not only served as a practical hub but also offered a welcomed escape, allowing them to connect with others outside the confines of their home/workplace. With the packages safely dispatched, the women typically seized the remainder of their break, indulging in a shared moment over coffee. Amidst the hustle of one such bustling afternoon, I chatted with a group of live-in care workers who, upon learning about my research, told me in agreement that 'Italy saved us (care workers) all.' This is an expression I would sometimes come across during my fieldwork in Italy. The narrative of their migration of these migrant care workers shifted dramatically from the sacrifices they make for their now adult children and young grandchildren to stories of empowerment. Surely, considering the precarious working conditions, risk of sexual harassment, low pay, social isolation, limited prospects for professional advancement which mark live-in employment in Italy as elsewhere (Redini et al., 2020; Vianello, 2019), such expression of abstract appreciation women direct towards 'Italy' and occasionally their employers, may give researchers reasons to pause. These contradictions are not uncommon in migrant care workers' narratives and experiences with migration to Italy as we can see from the analyses of Boccagni (2015) who argues that 'whether such gratitude is warranted or not, or if it is just another instance of "false consciousness," is a normative issue that does not really affect its empirical prevalence' (page 8). Tending to these contradictions, Vianello (2009b) contends that 'motherhood characterizes many migrants' discourses, because it is one of the strongest justifications a woman can rise in order to defend her decision' (page 12) Behind the 'trauma of separation' (Fedyuk, 2021) of the 'self-sacrificial mother' (Vianello, 2016) there lies 'a process of emancipation developed during the migratory experience' (Vianello, 2009b:12) which is, I would argue, mediated by pocket money. As discussed in the previous section, pocket money holds some potential (albeit limited) for migrant women's emancipation from their class and gendered background.

The social significance of money extends beyond its financial value for the financial independence women gain after extended periods of stay abroad restores a sense of security

that enables migrant women to regain a sense of self worth and develop social connections in Italy. Under these circumstances, prolonging stay abroad may assume different meanings. Three themes dominated the accounts of migrant women who find financial self-reliance in Italy: unwillingness to return to their traditional roles in their families, escaping abusive husbands, and the desire to accumulate years of entitlement to Italian pension which can allow comfortable living during retirement.

First, the multiple domestic and care duties of migrant women in their late 50s and early 60s I interviewed for this dissertation can give us a sense of why migrant women may be ambivalent towards the prospect of returning, and choose to stay in Italy for longer than initially planned. Despite the fact that most respondents agree migration is not an easy choice, they perceive the work of a live-in care worker to be comparatively an 'easy job' when contrasted against the multiple burdens that fell on their shoulders in Romania: being mothers, grandmothers, wives, workers, and peasants with responsibilities for the plots of land they owned and tended. By comparison the strongly gendered work of live-in care work in the homes of Italian employers, which typically involves tending to the needs of one, occasionally two individuals, and managing one household, is at least financially compensated. As one migrant woman remarked, 'If I care for my family or for an Italian family it is the same work. At least here (in Italy) I get paid.' In Romania, the unpaid daily tasks undertaken by my respondents who provide care for their families and manage domestic chores and gardening work in their own households, added to the perception that life 'over there' is especially hard. This perception is amplified by the fact that women hold in high regard earning their own wages. Some of them previously held paid positions as factory workers, traders, welders, sales clerks, and so on, and cannot imagine themselves renouncing paid work. The combined load of paid and unpaid work, both within and outside the household, led respondents to view live-in care work as less demanding, as Mariana who previously worked in the garment industry described the burden of her responsibilities in Romania commented:

> 'In Romania I went to work and back. At home I did the cleaning, the washing, the cooking, then outside there were animals to feed, vegetables to water…. I was lucky if I finished work at 10 pm. Here (in Italy) I stop working at 8. If I want I can watch a movie and be in bed by 9.' (Mariana, 56 years old, live-in care worker, 6 years in Italy)

In my fieldwork I often heard migrant women jokingly comment that holidays in Romania are improperly called holidays since the amount of work required from them leaves them feeling more tired than at the start of their holiday. Ilinca described her daily tasks at home during the yearly three week holidays in the month of August, listing the tasks and activities around the household she routinely undertakes together with her family. Discussing the laborious and physically demanding procedures of curing meat and preserving various vegetables and fruits in jars for the winter, she commented 'When I go home I never relax. When I am at work in Italy I relax.' Similarly, Mădălina's yearly visits to her ailing parents are opportunities to do some house repairs and deep cleaning:

> 'I take all the carpets out, wash everything, clean the walls, I look around the house to see what needs repairing, things like that…I try to squeeze what I cannot do over the year into those two weeks.' (Mădălina, 49 years old, live-out care worker, 20 years in Italy)

To make these household chores easier to carry out many of my respondents invested in building 'modern kitchens' and 'indoor bathrooms' equipped with conveniences such as running water, a sewerage system, the substitution of stoves with water heaters fueled by firewood, and the replacement of dirt floors with cement, among other home improvements (see Chapter 6). Yet, despite home improvements and acquisition of some much-needed household tools and machines, they often described daily life in the Romanian countryside, the place where the several of my respondents hail from, as especially harsh.

Second, apart from their commentaries about the hard work facing them upon their return 'home', the life stories of migrant women revealed a life in Romania marked by domestic and financial abuse that women suffered at the hands of their husbands/partners. It is impossible to know for sure how many of the women I spoke with have escaped domestic violence by migrating to Italy. But I became aware of the extent of violence suffered by my respondents at the hand of their husbands/partners when describing their situation at home, some hurried to add that they 'are not one of those battered women who ran away from home.' The intention to separate oneself from 'that' reality revealed an awareness of domestic violence existed among my respondents. All the women who have confessed to episodes of domestic and financial violence had experienced regular and serious acts of violence which range from verbal abuses to overt threats at the life and bodily integrity of my respondents, with some experiencing the realisation of threats. When everyday acts of

violence are repeated over the course of marital life, they become an integral part of family life (Hydén, 2005). Although scholars have paid attention to women's agency in escaping abuse in intimate relationships (Hydén, 2005), the role that domestic violence plays in women's decisions to migrate remains an under-recognized phenomenon (Bowstead, 2015).

Consider the example of Cassandra. Cassandra, a mother of two (now) adult children, reflected on how she lifted her family out of abject poverty by migrating to Italy in 2011 to work as a live-in care worker. In Romania, Cassandra's husband was a day labourer who found it difficult to secure steady employment throughout the year, causing financial strain and frequent arguments in their household over how to make ends meet. When money was short, the family survived only on the vegetables Cassandra grew on the small plot of land she tended in their back garden. Occasionally, friends and family would come by with eggs and cheese, and small sums of money which Cassandra used to pay bills. But money was scarce and debts piled up. To describe the unpredictable flow of money Cassandra linked her financial situation with the popular idiomatic expression 'Whatever money I took with one hand I gave away with the other.' Matters worsened when her husband turned to drinking heavily and began to lie about his earnings which he spent on alcohol and cigarettes, causing tension in the family life to escalate into episodes of physical violence. Cassandra felt increasingly anxious and sinked into depression which she described as 'feeling hopeless that anything will ever change for the better.' She found support in her sister, a live-in care worker in Italy, who offered to pay her bus fare to Italy when she secured work for her in the home of an elderly Italian couple.

> 'No matter if I worked day in and day out, money still came up short. It felt like I only had one single thought in my mind: how am I going to pay for this and that and that. Kids were growing up and we lived from one day to the next… I felt like I was hanging on by a thread. Then, one day, my sister called to tell me she found work for me. An immense weight was lifted from my shoulders. I told my sister she gave alms to me.' (Cassandra, 58 years old, live-in care worker, 11 years in Italy)

Focused on economic survival, in the first years of her migration Cassandra worked '24 hours' to provide for her two then adolescent children who, as she reiterated over and again throughout our interview, 'understood perfectly well why I had to leave.' Cassandra said she had 'sent all my waged home' as she strived to 'educate' children, build 'modern kitchen'

and ‘indoor toilet’ to improve their living standards, saying that ‘I thought only of my children.’ She was forced to resign with the fact that her money was often mishandled and used for different expenses than ones earmarked by her, as her chronically unemployed husband ran tabs at the local bar which their children were forced to close with ‘money from Italy.’ Describing this situation, Cassandra reiterated what several migrant women have said that, when children still live in the parental home, mothers are expected to put up with the husband’s abuse so that they can continue ‘to be there for children.’

Cassandra’s efforts paid off. Her now grown children, one daughter living and working in Italy as a waitress, soon to be married to an Italian national, and her son, holding a professional career as an engineer for a large company in Romania, no longer depend financially on her. But she does occasionally ‘help out’ with expenses she deems important, such as mortgage payments. This change leaves Cassandra with more discretionary funds which she uses to socialise in the limited time off she enjoys weekly. This way of using money is legitimate for, she states, ‘I no longer have small children to raise.’ Despite my inquiries, I was unable to ascertain the current status of her economic and affective relationship with her husband. However it became clear to me that they have not had any face-to-face contact in years. Probably willing to avoid in-person interactions with her husband, she commented that she prefers to finance her son’s holiday trips to Italy where they travel and spend time together instead of returning home for her annual holiday leave.

Third, as women age abroad, postponing return may also turn into a strategy to address their own new evolving needs such as accumulating years of entitlement for Italian pension. Victoria’s case is illustrative. Victoria worked in the petrochemical industry before migrating to Italy in 2006 to work as a live-in care worker to provide for her two then-adolescent daughters. As Victoria’s daughters are secured in their livelihood, no longer depending on her monthly remittances, they establish families of their own. Becoming a grandmother abroad Victoria is faced with a moral dilemma. She explains her reaction to the entreaties of her two daughters to return to Romania:

> ‘The girls encourage me to retire. They always tell me, “Mom, forget about Italy and come home now. You don't need to give us anything anymore. Take care of yourself, and if you have, you have, and if not, we'll provide for you. Just come home and stay with us for a while.” Both of them say the same thing to me. But I think that I'm still young at 63, and I'm still in good health. If the situation were such that I would have any aches or pains... I'm striving to save some more money

> to have for when I'll need to retire, to build up a retirement fund because pensions are low. Four more years…. But I also long to be with my grandchildren. They grow up so fast…' (Victoria, 62 years old, live-in care worker, 16 years in Italy)

Victoria refuses to return. She made the calculation to extend her stay abroad, and continue to work, to build up pension benefits which, she hopes, will allow her to live comfortably in Romania when she finally retires. Even as her daughters express their willingness to provide financially for their mother in case she faces limited resources, Victoria postpones her return home and continues to work in Italy probably because she derives a sense of self-satisfaction from being financially independent in Italy. At the same time, in our interview, she continuously underscores her stay in Italy as a safety net in case her children face unexpected and sudden economic challenges, commenting that 'They know that I am here, if they need anything, I am here to provide' suggesting that her sense of self-worth is also intimately linked to her ability to express her care by providing materially for her children and grandchildren.

However, although not explicitly addressed as such by Victoria, her daughters' insistence for their mother's return home sooner can be understood against the backdrop of the role of grandmothers who are expected to be morally and physically involved in the rearing of grandchildren, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Benefiting from unpaid caregiving provided by their mother can enable daughters to pursue other personal goals and desires. This is the case of Elena who, during her stays 'home,' babysits her three young grandchildren while their parents run their business; or the case of Dumitra who temporarily returned home upon the birth of her grandson to help her daughter adjust in her new role as mother. Furthermore, migrant women are expected to be mobile to accommodate the in-person care needs of other dependents, such as ailing relatives. This is the case of Eugenia who returned home to care for her husband when he received a terminal diagnostic; or the case of Ilinca who stayed home for several months when her elderly mother's health took a turn to the worse. In this context, opting to take care of non-migrant family relatives by transfering money, either routinely or when there is a specific need for it, means that migrant women are obligated to transfers in order to justify their stay abroad and consequently 'escape' from demands for in-person hands-on care (Coe, 2023).

Not all care workers have, however, accumulated enough years to receive pensions from Italy. Building up full pension rights requires that migrants have lived and worked with a regular contract in Italy for at least 20 years. As discussed in other places in this

dissertation, in the initial years of migration, women made many compromises in their working conditions in order to hold onto their jobs and continue to provide for their families. One important compromise that elderly migrant care workers often discussed was that of working with no contract. Women who accepted informal work—whether willingly or not—referred to those years spent in Italy, as they put it, 'dead years.' Working informally for long periods of time as live-in care workers for Italian families brings 'dead years' that do not add up to women's social security contributions, consequently there is no pension to be incurred from either the Italian or Romanian authorities[16]. Migrant women's aspirations to formal work contract in which care workers are 'put in order,' as they would often say, often entails prolonging stay abroad and postponing return home in order to build up their social security and accumulate pension benefits.

The intersection of gender and age among my respondents is not only linked to them assuming intergenerational financial responsibility in their families (as discussed elsewhere, see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), but also driven by their desire to establish a safety net against their own economic uncertainty in Romania, which inadvertently prompts them to prolong their stay abroad beyond their initial plans or desire. Older migrant women I interviewed, many of whom are currently approaching retirement, expressed concerns about the limited job prospects they would encounter upon their potential return to Romania. Adding to their decision to stay in Italy until and, at times even after retirement age[17], is thus also the lack of employment opportunities available to older women on the Romanian labour market which forces women into their homes and exacerbates their social isolation (see Vlase & Preoteasa, 2017). For instance, Ionela Vlase (2013) found that working age women formerly employed as care workers in Italy are typically (and unfairly) seen as lacking marketable skills that can be leveraged on the local labour market. To cope with the lack of opportunities in the local labour market and the social isolation they experience at home, women maintain connections with their former employers in Italy through regular phone calls, keeping the possibility of returning to work in Italy, where employment is guaranteed, open. Under these intersecting

[16] At the time of writing, the EU does not have a unified 'transnational pension system' that covers all Member States. However, there are several EU regulations and directives designed to improve coordination and simplify the portability of pension rights in order to ensure that individuals who have worked in multiple EU countries can aggregate their pension rights and receive pension benefits without facing significant administrative hurdles. The coordination of national social security systems, including pensions, is primarily governed by Regulation (EC) No 883/2004, which establishes common rules for coordination between national social security systems, including between Italy and Romania.

[17] The retirement age for women is 62, in Romania, and 67, in Italy.

circumstances, migrant women postpone their return to their countries of origin where opportunities to be financially independent during old age are limited.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the third type of special money in the lives of Romanian care workers in Italy. Pocket money, distinct from communal and courtesy money, is reserved for personal use in Italy and kept out of the transnational household economy. Earmarked for personal consumption in Italy, pocket money is dedicated towards what my respondents refer to as 'little luxuries,' small indulgences that afford migrant women the opportunity to regain a sense of self abroad. Serving as a gateway to social life in Italy, pocket money provides live-in care workers with access to public spaces during their time off, including coffee shops, restaurants, and short trips, among other activities. Venturing beyond their employer's home/workplace enhances their self-esteem and significantly broadens their social connections in Italy. These factors prove influential in obtaining essential assistance from friends during uncertain times abroad and future work prospects. The chapter showed that despite their small sums, pocket money can be a form of empowerment for those migrant women whose social positioning in Italy is characterised by multiple forms of intersecting vulnerabilities. In such circumstances when migrant care workers' stay abroad entail constant earmarking of pocket money, the chapter discussed the new meanings that return migration can assume. The narratives of migrant women achieving financial self-reliance in Italy revolve around three main themes discussed: a reluctance to revert to traditional roles in their families, escaping from abusive husbands, and the aspiration to accumulate entitlement to an Italian pension for a comfortable retirement.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

The socio-economic transformations in post-communist Romania resulted in a dynamic migration process that responded to the global demands for feminised, flexible, and easily dispensable workforce (Marchetti, 2022). My respondents, part of this global dynamic, suffer the fate of many neoliberal workers who, pushed by economic and political turmoil in their origin countries which translated into low wages, lack of employment opportunities, and inadequate social protection, become labour migrants abroad in order to provide for their families, especially children. Romanian migrant women care workers in Italy have stepped into the global care chain (Hochschild, 2000) moving alone to Italy to provide care for the elderly in the homes of Italian families while leaving behind their own families. The large majority of women I interviewed and spent time with for the writing of this dissertation are in their late 50s and early 60s. They migrated in the early 2000s and 2010s when their children were adolescents or in their early 20s. Virtually all my respondents planned to stay abroad for a brief period of time to accomplish immediate economic goals. They took live-in employment because it was an easy way to enter the Italian labour market and allowed for saving and transferring large percentages of their salaries 'back home' to their families. Despite maintaining a desire to return 'home,' women prolong their stay abroad. At the time of our interview, their children were grown often with families and children of their own. As the case of my respondents suggests, the increasing incorporation of older migrant care workers in the global care chain suggests that transfer of care is not limited to migrating mothers but also grandmothers. For Romanian migrants in my sample it is not solely their gender that leads women to bear the care burden for their families but also the intersection of gender and age. Migrant women often assume the role of providers not only for their adult children but also frequently for their grandchildren. While existing literature on women's mobility primarily focuses on the migration of mothers, my respondents were often grandmothers. In that sense, migration of Romanian older women to Italy is not only driven by the demand for care services in Italian households but also by the changing needs for care in the households of migrant sending countries especially when women realise that what their adult children and grandchildren need is not hand-on in-person caregiving; what they need is money.

Rarely the central focus of scholarly investigation, the money earned by migrant women abroad underpins much of the research on migration for care work, even if implicitly. Focused either on the source of women's money as earnings from engaging in highly feminised and racialized professions abroad underpinned by different forms of exploitation (e.g. Hochschild, 2003); or on the social significance of remittances as they are diffused in the transnational household economy arousing suspicion of money's potential to corrupt 'pure' feelings of love and commoditised otherwise loving relationships (e.g. Parreñas, 2001), these studies typically offer a truncated understanding of women's money. The economic and interpersonal ties of migrant women abroad have remained largely closeted due to care workers' embeddedness in global care chains that camouflages aspects of their money meaning and uses through which they aim to reconcile their own needs for care, safety, and wellbeing abroad with their status as workers and carers for their families from afar. To avoid these well-explored paths in the literature, this dissertation proposed an ethnographic investigation of the largely uncharted economic lives of Romanian care workers in Italy. One of the most significant contributions of this dissertation is to show that money is a fundamental means of organising family life across space, time, and generations. It showed that migrants regard the economy and the social spheres are intricately connected. Far from existing as distinct realms, migrants, in their interpersonal transactions, seem to unite 'separate spheres' and navigate what might be perceived as 'hostile worlds' within the framework of Western morality (Zelizer, 2010b). In other words, money plays a mediating role in migrant care workers' interactions with family, friendships, work, the market, as well as other social spheres. By reconsidering inherited assumptions about family, money, and care, this dissertation sought to highlight the ways in which money is embedded in domains beyond those of 'the' market thus challenging the conventional focus of remittance scholarship, which often centres on money's potential to either alleviate or hinder economic development in the households and countries of origin of migrants (see De Haas, 2020). As this dissertation suggested, relying heavily on money to show care, solidarity, and maintain interpersonal relationships is hardly an individual strategy of migrants themselves, but a global experience that structures how family is experienced and enacted in the context of migration.

In this dissertation, I conceptualised money as being multi-dimensional thus aiming to include both the economic and social functions of money in my analysis. To reconcile these views, demanded that a bottom-up perspective of everyday economic interactions be paired with careful consideration to the context which enables or restricts exchanges. The driving

forces behind women's decision to migrate predominantly stem from the socio-economic transformations in their origin countries, transitioning from a communist to a neoliberal state, from a controlled to a 'free market' economy. The consequences of which resulted in a paucity of money in the lives of my respondents. Because of their perception that money is crucial for leading a harmonious family life, respondents addressed the negative embeddedness of money in their social life through migration. International labour migration becomes the means through which one is expected to fulfil their responsibilities towards family members and to improve family welfare. Virtually all my respondents left Romania and their families behind in pursuit of a wage and the opportunity to send money home. The prospect of solving various problems with money from Italy remained the primary motivation for their migration. At the same time, the ethnographic analysis suggests, at the everyday level of money use, money not only holds economic value circulating on 'the' market but it is also endowed with significant cultural meaning that shapes its use, allocation, management, and control (Zelizer, 2010b) in accordance with what people perceive to be 'good' and 'bad' ways of handling money in the interpersonal relationships they aspire to establish (Simoni, 2016).

Viewing money as a social construct helped me unpack the gender and generational dimensions of Romanian care workers' economic exchanges, especially with regards to their transnational household economies, and bring to the forefront negotiations and contestations of money's meanings and use within their transnational families. The key concepts that has helped me analyse the dynamics of these negotiations draw from a Zelizerian model of money, especially her concepts of 'special money' (Zelizer, 1989) and 'relational work' (Zelizer, 2010b), which provided an analytical lens for studying the empirical dimension of a transnational household moral economy framework. If money 'incorporates social and symbolic significance' (Zelizer, 2010b:94) and if people always intermingle economic and intimate transactions in ways that reflect 'power relationships, age, and gender' (Zelizer, 2010b:94) then paying attention to the ways in which people deal with money in their interpersonal relationships reveal those meaningful relationships that money helps construct among people of different gender and generations. Issues of gender and intergenerational relations run through monetary exchanges in the everyday economic lives of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy. Emerging from the social positioning and opportunities available to my respondents as both labour migrants and owners of remittances, money is tied to distinct social and gendered subjectivities of my respondents as migrant mothers and grandmothers, as I dicuss below.

Bringing together complementary insights from the sociology of money, especially on topics considering multiple meanings of money (Zelizer, 2010b; Bandelj et al., 2017) and multiple pieces of money (Wilkis, 2017), this dissertation not only contributed to ongoing discussions on the social meaning of remittances in family relationships but also offered a reconstruction—through the lens of money—of different aspects of migrant women's collective and individual lives, including work, family, and consumption. The three pieces of money earmarked by my respondents, described and analysed in empirical chapters in this dissertation, revealed a continuity in the economic lives of Romanian migrant care workers in Italy who earmark money not only for transmission 'home' but also for personal consumption in Italy. I showed that money earned from their wages as live-in care workers abroad are earmarked by migrant women as communal money and framed as a family 'obligation' (see Chapter 6), as courtesy money and framed as 'gifts' (see Chapter 7) when transferred home. Moreover, migrant women also retain from their salaries pocket money for themselves, framing it as their own 'entitlement' for their stay abroad and for the sacrifices made for the benefit of their loved ones (see Chapter 8). Each piece of money, endowed with special meaning, plays an integral role in transforming economic exchange in more than just an economic activity on the market. Communal, courtesy, and pocket money, reflect notions of moral obligations, status, and self-worth within transnational family relations.

As mothers and grandmothers, migrant women wish to respond to the needs of their adult children and grandchildren, who are the main recipients of communal money. Firstly, communal money, consisting of a large percentage of women's wage abroad, circulates from women to their children and later grandchildren, depending on needs of those at home which fluctuates along with the working and earning capacity of non-migrant adult children, throughout the duration of women's stay abroad. Secondly, born out of necessity for women to work collaboratively with their children and grandchildren to tackle together the structural constraints faced by them and their families back home, communal money represents the fulfilment of mothers and grandmothers' commitment to be economically and emotionally involved in the wellbeing of their children and grandchildren, and of mutual expectations that migrant women maintain their family relationships by transferring money over the lifetime of their children and then grandchildren. Communal money transfers make it possible for transnational family members to collaborate collectively to accomplish common family goals. 'Lifting' homes (see Section 6.3 in Chapter 6), 'educating' grandchildren (see Section 6.4 in Chapter 6), and showing solidarity in family reunification (see Section 6.2 in Chapter 6) are important economic accomplishments for the transnational families of my respondents

that represent a more profound form of security than mere money can buy. To accomplish these common family goals not only require concerted efforts and careful planning between family members, but migrant women invest money with moral functions which shape their economic behaviour in Italy. As this dissertation showed, migrant women reorganised expenditure in Italy in all facets of their lives, practising self-denial and self-abnegation, in order to further the social meaning of communal money. In that sense, sending money home is more than a survival strategy against the unpredictability of work and economic stability which requires individuals to turn inwards and rely on a network of security within their own family structure. Migrant women pool their income intergenerationally in order to achieve family common goals that would be challenging for individuals to achieve on their own. Thirdly, migrant women's devotion towards their children and grandchildren is not limitless, evinced by the fact that communal money is not shared indiscriminately. The turn inwards towards family support meant that non-migrant family members needed to treat communal money with the care and attention it deserved. Rather than gifts of money willingly bestowed upon family members to be used by receivers as they see fit (as in the case of courtesy money, see Chapter 7) communal money comes with strings attached for it is not transferred 'home' to be used without restrictions. Mishandling communal money by treating it as a regular market currency could easily lead to moral anxieties in family relationships where it circulated. Treating communal money as regular market currency prompted migrant women to safeguard the boundaries of this special currency from those who spend it unchecked and without regard for the collective benefit of all family members.

This dissertation outlined the importance of thinking about family beyond its ideal form—defined as a nuclear family and captured in a cohabiting heterosexual married couple with at least one child (Morgan, 1996, 2011) where resources are equitably distributed among all family members—to revealed the multiple meaningful family relationships that migrants maintain across space, time, and generations. It also suggests that monetary transfers are part and parcel of a disembodied provision of care within transnational families. Especially in Chapter 7 but throughout the whole dissertation I sought to show that the meanings of money and its use are articulated within broader visions of affective and emotional care. Small(er) sums, my respondents referred to as courtesy money, are ritually integrated in ongoing relationships with extended family members to mark celebrations, birthdays, ceremonies, visits home, and so on. Courtesy money is the materialisation of migrant women's care and love, and the means through which they form and maintain long-term and long-distance connections with their extended families. Migrant women accounts of their experiences and

enactment of transnational family life underscored the importance of regular monetary transfers along with frequent communication for the maintenance of emotional intimacy. Thus rather than nuclear families drawing the boundaries within which money circulates, the experiential reality of my respondents revealed a wider family network underpinning monetary distribution which suggests that sharing money is not the predicament of nuclear families.

Within such arrangements of transnational care circulation, family relationships are intensified and sometimes transformed. As I have shown in this dissertation, at the same time as transnationally pooled income (see Chapter 6) and gifts of money (see Chapter 7) has strengthened familial bonds through new and intricate interdependencies, alterations in monetary transfers, disagreements over money use, and misunderstandings concerning issues of economic needs and desires, have resulted in the fracturing of relationships. Throughout the empirical chapters of this dissertation I have aimed to expose these private moral conflicts surrounding money meaning and use, and bring them out into the open, suggesting that these are not only private; nor are they only personal.

Often influenced by moral obligations tied to cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions regarding women's status and role within transnational family relations, I positioned money within a moral economy framework. This approach best allowed me to analyse the meanings with which my respondents invest money which delineate what is considered acceptable, fair, and good from what is deemed unacceptable, unjust, and bad forms of economic exchange. In this light, the entanglement of morals and money is not necessarily corrupting as mentioned above but rather exposes those moral assessments that individuals already possess as they use money to create distinctions in their social ties (Zelizer, 2010b), and on occasions, to morally evaluate and judge others (Wilkis, 2017). Through the moral economy framework, I have shown that the family orientation does not prevent my respondents from integrating a logic of calculation and interest in their family relations. But rather than economic *or* emotional ties taking precedence, migrants' interactions with money correspond to a moral economy in which both considerations hold sway in the transnational family economy arrangements. By examining the connection between interpersonal relationships and money that are informed and negotiated within a moral economy framework I have sought to expose how migrant women creatively use money and economic exchange to reinforce and/or alter customary expectations tied to their gender and generational roles.

Preoccupied by what is fair monetary exchange in their interpersonal relationships, migrant women do relational work (Zelizer, 2010b) not only to establish and maintain their

family relationships across space, time, and generations, but also to avoid conflict with non-migrant family members and to build social connections in Italy. They walk a thin line between negotiating their solidarity for accomplishing common family goals (Chapter 6), expressing their care towards non-migrant family members (Chapter 7) and their own need for autonomy in Italy (Chapter 8). Following Christou & Kofman (2022) who argue that scholarship on care work migration, focused extensively on women's embeddedness in global care chain, 'has obscured a wider awareness of the *autonomy* and *subjectivities* of women migrants' (page 3, emphasis in the original), I paid attention to pockets of autonomy that migrant women created for themselves abroad which allowed them to exercise their agency (while simultaneously maintaining their transnational family ties and commitments).

Regularly earmarking pocket money out of their monthly wages abroad, Romanian care workers exhibit their agency in using money to pursue personal ambitions, aspirations, and motivations, particularly concerning their own migration trajectories. Earmarked for personal consumption in Italy, pocket money serves as a gateway to social life in Italy for it provides care workers with access to public spaces during their time off, including coffee shops, restaurants, and short trips, among other activities. Pocket money can assist women in developing pathways for empowerment. The social significance of pocket money extends beyond its financial value for the financial independence women gain from venturing beyond their employer's home/workplace enhances migrant care workers' self-esteem and significantly expands their social connections in Italy, both of which can be influential in obtaining essential assistance during uncertain times abroad and future work prospects.

That being said, while pocket money does enable migrant women to be financially self-reliant in Italy to some extent, even financially self-reliant women need considerable help from friends and acquaintances in Italy in dealing with unemployment spells, for example. Inadequate Italian state support during unemployment means that migrant women need to rely on their social networks for essential assistance and practical support. As migrant women depend on others who are just marginally better off than they are, support with providing accommodation when women are out of jobs is not free. Although money is virtually never exchanged for favours and help, reciprocation is the currency of interpersonal relationships migrant care workers establish in Italy. Whether or not a woman would receive much needed help in her time of need largely depends on her ability to engage in relational work in Italy that is facilitated or hindered by her pocket money. For those migrant women who do not endorse a strong differentiation between communal and pocket money, and instead prioritise their non-migrant family's economic needs and desires, their own financial

self-reliance in Italy is diminished. Migrant women's re-insertion of pocket money into the circuit of the transnational household economy hinders their ability to engage in relational work in Italy. Although they can ride off social networks for a while, they eventually find that among their low-waged migrant care workers' friends and acquaintances, where resources are always scarce, the expectations that friendship and affect comes with material contribution may bring their relationship to a standstill, and, as in the cases presented in Chapter 8, effectively terminate them. Therefore, despite their privileged position as legal migrants with access to wage work and formal employment, my findings suggest that care workers who do not endorse a stronger differentiation between their pocket money and communal money do not escape poverty after migration. Rather financial insecurity follows them over the course of their migration. The two categories of live-in care workers—those who keep separate purses in Italy and those who do not, or those I called 'super remitters'—differ significantly in the burden of care they assume for non-migrant families.

Thus it is important not to overstate the empowering potential of pocket money, as it alone cannot solve the economic challenges faced by marginalised migrant women care workers in Italy. As suggested throughout this dissertation, current policies in both destination and origin countries undermine migrant care workers and their families. The organisation of care work in the Italian society, the social isolation that care workers experience abroad, their low wages further demonstrate the limitations of pocket money for the full actualisation of its potentials to lead to empowerment in the lives of Romanian care workers in Italy in the absence of institutional support that can help address some of the larger macro-structural factors that shape the destinies of migrants abroad and their members 'back home.' In Romania, decades of neoliberal transformations, which translated into soaring cost of living, meagre salaries, and rampant unemployment, effectively transferred the responsibility—from the government to families, particularly mothers in the family—for covering the costs of housing, education, healthcare, among others. Migrant women embark on their migration project with the purpose to pool their income transnationally and help shoulder the costs to provide for their loved ones. But the absence of institutional support for women and their families thwarts their aspiration to realise cultural ideals to support children and grandchildren by providing their loved ones with a decent life—a value they hold in high regard—on their low-wage and under-valued work. The over-reliance of non-migrant family members on migrant older women for intergenerational support may erode relations of solidarity between family members, especially when women find themselves burdened by the fluctuating demands of children and grandchildren in Romania who express their desires and

needs to participate in a global economy in which standards of decent living—the burden for whose provisioning often falls on those whose lives in Italy are ridden with sacrifices—shift constantly, posing challenges to familial bonds and creating expectations and pressures. Improving or preserving standards of decent living for their families in a world in which migrant women feel are denied the certainties of a decent life (which implies access to basic goods such as housing, healthcare, education, and so on), is a way to help adult children and prepare young grandchildren to resist or, ideally, thrive against the vicissitudes of whatever the uncertain future might bring. At the same time, the implications of continuous support over time and generations has endangered migrant women's ability to save money for what they perceive to be an unavoidable moment in the future when they will need to stop working either because of sudden debilitating illnesses or because of retirement. As discussed in this dissertation, some compromise their own financial security in old age in an effort to grapple with this moral dilemma. Current policies, thus, trap transnational families of Romanian care workers abroad in moral conflicts as women in their role as mothers and grandmothers seek to honour what they see as their highest motherly and grandmotherly duty: pushing newer generations ahead and seeking to shelter them from a lifetime of hardship and deprivation.

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