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The Young-Old Transnational Travellers On the Transformation of Care Arrangements among Bulgarian Muslim Migrants in Spain*

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Abstract:

The focus of this article is the “transnational ageing travellers”, a group of elderly migrants who are in constant movement between social contexts, families, and states. Drawing on a case of Bulgarian Muslim migrants in Spain, I look into the ruptures in the structure of care arrangements, kin expectations and family relations, which have been triggered by migration. I argue that these transformations, albeit subtle, lead to reformulation of the fabric and meaning of the family as such.

In spring 2008 Fatme, a woman in her 50s, arrived in Tafalla, a Spanish village which is at present home to many Bulgarian Muslim migrants¹. She was visiting her daughter, who had found a new job working in shifts at a large restaurant, and was intending to take care of her 9-year-old grandson. Fatme had taken two-month's unpaid leave from the sewing factory in the village of Brushlyan², Bulgaria. But already on the first day of her arrival everybody was

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¹ Bulgarian Muslims is a term used to refer to this group of people. “Pomaks”, “Bulgarian speaking Muslims” and “Bulgarian-Mohamedans” are among others which are commonly used. I have chosen to use the designation Bulgarian Muslim for three reasons: First, because it represents a critical discussion of both aspects of identification – being Muslim, but not Turkish, and being Bulgarian, but not Christian. In addition, it does not contain the possible pejorative or insulting overtones which the other concepts (especially “Pomaks”) might have for certain people (and more particularly for the group of people I have researched). Finally, it points to the officially recognized categories which are used by state institutions, which allows a commentary on such categorizations.

² Brushlyan is the fake name for the village I am describing here. I have changed it in order to maintain the anonymity of the people. This applies to all the names.

animatedly discussing the surprising idea of Fatme's continuing on to Portugal to visit her son. She looked worried, while her daughter and son-in-law were rather silent, repeating: "*It's your choice, it's up to you, we can't decide anything for you.*" Three days later Fatme disappeared from Tafalla. Once her son in Portugal realised she was in Spain, he insisted that she visit him and help to care for his two children, both above 15 and not really in need of supervision. He also found her a temporary job in an orange orchard. Less than a week later Fatme was back, having called her daughter every day, complaining of the horrible conditions in the orchards. She travelled back the 1000 kilometres from Portugal only to realise that in the meantime her daughter had lost her job and did not need help with her son anymore. A week later Fatme was back in Bulgaria, discontinuing her unpaid leave and going back to work in the sewing factory. Throughout the whole affair she was referred to as the "problematic grandmother" by her relatives.

While this is a somewhat extreme example, there are a plenitude of cases of ageing people who are engaged in complicated care schemes, which often confuse and upset some or all family members. It is the rupture of prescribed and expected kin relations under the conditions of transnational migration that I aim to explore here. More specifically, I look into the category of ageing people who migrate between contexts, families, and states and their adjustment to care obligations in new migration circumstances. I approach the subject through a specific group of ageing people from Brushlyan who are in constant movement between two or more places. These people include grandparents who move between their place of origin, which they often call their home, and the places where their children reside (which might be in different houses, different towns, or different countries) and where they help with raising their grandchildren. Inversely, they also include people based in the destination country having left their ageing parents at home, hence they travel back and forth to fulfil their duty of care. They might also fit into both categories trying to juggle all their obligations towards parents and grandchildren at once, which often turns out to be an upsetting experience. These ageing people are the epitome of transnational living, sometimes moving up to five times per year, spending every two months in a different site. Analyzing the movements of this group of '*transnational ageing travellers*' and the relations they develop with their kin members an entry point into broader questions of the transformation of family relations and kin expectations under conditions of migration.

Despite the fact that many of the aspects of ageing in the context of migration have already been discussed³, the case of '*transnational ageing travellers*' remains an unexamined issue. I seek

³ Migration in later life has occupied less scholarly attention in comparison to youth and middle age migration. Nevertheless, there are several streams of literature on ageing and migration, which have developed recently. One stream of studies is devoted to migration at later age, looking at various types of elderly people migrating for the first time at an advanced age (among others, Blakemore (1999); Evergetti and Zontini(2006). These groups vary from UK retired migration to Southern European countries (Ackers and Dwyer 2002; King, et al. 2000) to elderly Pakistani women joining their husbands and grown up children in the UK (Gardner 2002). Another line of research

here to demonstrate their specificity by exploring the flexibilization of both their everyday practices and their life projects, which they develop at a later age due to migration. At the same time, I will argue that an important prerequisite for explaining the specifics of the '*transnational ageing travellers*' lies in the refinement of the broad category of the ageing into smaller and subtler groupings. Thus, I will be using the notion of a *social age group* as a tool for distinguishing the nuances in the expectations, obligations and care patterns among different groups of ageing people.

In making these arguments, I shall be drawing on my fieldwork from 2007 and 2008 in the village of Brushlyan, in Bulgaria, and Tafalla, in Spain, where most of the migrants from Brushlyan are concentrated. I have explored the network of care arrangements and their transformations in both countries. In what follows I will briefly dwell on the issue of social age groups and describe the migrants in their social, economic and political context. I will then present the accepted and expected (i.e. the ideal) care arrangements in the Bulgarian Muslim village community prior to migration. Then I will describe the particular ruptures and transformations in the “normal” care arrangements. I conclude with reflections on the transformation of the very concept of family and of who is part of which family.

Conceptual considerations: the *young-old* and the *old-old*

While most migration studies deal with a very limited category of ageing people in terms of social class or social age (be it British retirees in Spain or elderly grandparents left behind in Bangladesh), there is an analytical tendency to place all ageing people together in one large indistinctive group of “the elderly”, “the aged”, or “the ageing”. At the same time, social psychology and social gerontology analyses have underlined the need to distinguish between different stages of later life and have developed a more refined set of categories⁴.

The difference between a person who is middle aged and a person who is ageing or old, and what is implied by this transition, has to be approached in a contextually sensitive way. For example, in the case of Bulgarian Muslims living in rural areas normally a woman with grandchildren and/or elderly parents-in-law in need of care is regarded as an “old” person, even though her

explores the ageing migrants who have spent substantial periods of time in their host country and have to struggle with social policy problems related to retirement and care arrangements and the possibility of return migration. (Ackers 2004; Ackers and Dwyer 2002) A third aspect is studying the effect migration has upon elderly people left behind in need of care and the transformations of reciprocity contracts and other types of intergenerational care arrangements triggered by migration. (Mazzucato 2008; Pyle 2006; Schroeder-Butterfill 2003; van der Geest et al. 2004). A further addition are studies which demonstrate the importance of the emotional aspect of movement or separation (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Parrenas 2005).

⁴ For an example of more detailed discussion of this see the pioneer in the studies of ageing Bernice Neugarten (1974), (1996), also Ackers and Dwyers (Ackers and Dwyer 2002), Baldassar (2007), Karp et. al.(1982), Warnes (1992).

counterpart from the same cohort in the capital city might still be regarded as a middle aged active woman. There is yet another stage after this one: a person in need of care. Following Neugarten (1974), I will refer to these two stages as the *young-old* and the *old-old*. I will further argue, however, that these stages are not simply biologically defined, but are socially constructed.⁵ Thus, while age appears to be an objective criterion, the meanings, stages and conceptualizations it encapsulates are shaped by social forces and performed in interaction with others⁶. Furthermore, these stages, being an analytical tool, often overlap in real life. An elderly woman can be both ill and in need of assistance from her son and daughter-in-law, dependent on them for money or transport to the hospital, and yet still be able to help with raising the grandchildren.

Therefore, while keeping the distinction between the *young-old* and the *old-old* for the sake of clarity, I shall continue to refine the categorization of ageing migrants, placing them in different *social age groups*. To do this I will employ the particular criterion of care, on the basis of which I will distinguish between groups of people who have various positions in terms of kin obligations. In the case of Bulgarian Muslims, who are a predominantly rural population living in rather small conservative communities, age is defined by passage through different statuses and related obligations. In addition, the age status always depends on gender and differs between men and women. Thus a woman changes her status from a girl, into a married woman, into a mother (especially when she has a son), into a mother-in-law, into a grandmother, into a woman whose parents-in-law are not alive, into a widow. A man changes from a boy, into a young working man, into a married man who becomes the breadwinner, into the head of his own nuclear family, into the head of the extended family with daughters-in-law and grandchildren. All these statuses (largely growing in importance with increasing age) are connected to different care arrangements and obligations. Thus, each status corresponds to a particular social age group, based on care division.

My main focus here will be the *young-old* who are part of the social age group which has to combine two types of care obligations; having both young grandchildren and elderly parents. They are what I call the '*transnational ageing travellers*' and I will explore the alterations which migration causes in their relations with both the older and younger generations. At the same

⁵ While Neugarten (1974, 1996) insists on breaking the category of the ageing into two groups and demonstrates how the ageing period has become longer with the change of the life span and the social conditions, she employs a rather rigid distinction, by arguing that there is a substantial difference between the characteristics of the Americans aged 55 – 74 years old, and those aged 75 and older. When applying this division to other groups of people though, the age span might have to be reconsidered, as in the case of the Bulgarian Muslim migrants, where a much lower age limit would make someone an old-old. Thus, the division should not be based on biological age, but rather consider the specificity of the social environment and the practices of the particular population segment to which it is employed.

⁶ On the social construction of age see Gardner (2002), Gubrium (1977), Gubrium et al. (1994), Hazan (1992), Karp et al. (1982), Laz (1998), Neugarten (1996).

time, I will continue to use the notion of *generation* in the narrow sense of transitions, in terms of children, parents, grandparents. This means that people from the same generation (i.e. having children and grandchildren) might have a different social age.

Bulgarian Muslims in Spain: Flat dense networks and the family safety net

Bulgarian Muslims in Tafalla in the Navarra region started migrating to Spain about 8 years ago, the majority after 2001 when Schengen restrictions were lifted for Bulgarian citizens. They all come from the same village in Bulgaria, located in the Western part of the Rhodopi Mountains. They arrived in several waves on the principle of network chain migration, using flat dense networks. I use the term dense networks to signify strong ties (i.e. family/kin) rather than the weaker ties based on religion or ethnicity (see Granovetter 1974). The flatness of the networks refers to the horizontalization and stratification of informal networks (i.e. among people with similar social status, income, education and age), typical of post-socialist societies (see Creed 2002, Iliev 2001, Ledeneva 1998, Pine 2002). This has led to a tendency towards individualization and withdrawal in the immediate kin group. Most migrants stated that they relied on close kin members (father, brother, or cousin) to help with settling-in, which includes the provision of a place to live, small initial loans, finding employment, and advice for orientation. This reliance reproduces the mechanisms of social life typical of the village life in Bulgaria. This is also expressed in social life after initial settling, which is mostly limited to communication within the immediate kin circle.

Migrants from Brushlyan mostly do not communicate with Spanish people or with migrants from other countries. By now the village community concentrated in Tafalla is so large that people say they feel socially as if they were not in Spain. Sometimes whole kin groups (three generations) live in Tafalla, which allows for a partial reproduction of the social relations which were maintained in Bulgaria. Old conflicts and intrigues are transferred to Spain, patterns of going out, paying visits, and holiday celebrations are repeated⁷. Over the last 3 years a Bulgarian satellite television has been established, which creates an even stronger link to life in Bulgaria through news, talk shows and popular soap operas watched and discussed at both ends of the transnational field. Another aspect of the reconstruction of the community is the use of the Bulgarian language: the size of the migrant group in Tafalla means that most people who have arrived in later migration waves do not need to learn Spanish. The established migrants manage all the necessary formalities for “new migrants”. Of course this is gender specific with women

⁷ I had the opportunity to witness one of the two biggest Muslim holidays, Ramazan Bayram being celebrated. Without going into details, it seems that for many people the experience was not too far from what they used to do in Bulgaria. On the second day of the celebration a big group of people went to the outskirts of the town for a whole day, and had a big picnic with roasted lamb, dances and songs. The most frequent comment was: “*It’s as if we are not in Spain, isn’t it? It’s absolutely the same. The only difference is that our cars have Spanish registration numbers.*”

who work in domestic services speaking much less Spanish than construction or factory workers, who have Spanish colleagues and employers. With this context in mind, many of my respondents would repeat the same sentence: “*Whoever comes now, comes to a second Brushlyan, not to Tafalla. Everything is arranged, you don’t need to learn the language even... there will be always someone who will help you with finding a job, and an apartment to live.*”

Whilst social relations may seem the same in Tafalla, as in Brushlyan, the generational dynamic is not reproduced in Spain: Bulgarian Muslim migrants are mostly young people; sometimes single men; more often families with young children who might or might not be brought to Spain. The rupture in the generational balance causes all kinds of informal difficulties, especially with regard to care.

Social age groups

I will now describe the main social age groups among migrants in Spain. The majority, or ‘*kernel*’, group are migrants aged between 26 and 33. Migrants from this group are at the height of their active working life. Most of them have arrived in the last 4 years, following the first wave of close relatives or trying out their luck. Men arrive first, and are later joined by their wives. Some women arrive with children, others leave children at home until they are settled and then send for them. Within this group there are also women who gave birth after they have arrived in Spain. Some returned to Bulgaria, while others with husbands with legal status and access to health insurance gave birth in Spain. This age group has children who are largely still in need of care. Therefore, many young parents ask their mothers to come to Spain to take care of the children. The mother is often followed by the father. Thus, this group tends to act as a pulling factor, influencing the migration choices of the ‘*parents*’ group.

The ‘*parents*’ are between 45 and 60 years old. There are two possible migration scenarios for this group: men arrive first, find a job through their children, and then women join them in order to take care of the grandchildren. Alternatively, women arrive first to take care of the grandchildren, and men join them later and find a job. These people are still at a working age. In Bulgaria they would usually both be working, whilst in Spain usually only the father works. Within this age group there are the ‘*pioneers*’, who have a different status: they are men in their 50s who arrived in Spain 7-9 years ago. They are a minority but they are influential; accepted as opinion leaders, they are proficient in Spanish, already have work permits and have brought their extended families to Spain. They plan to retire in Spain so that they can get a Spanish pension, which they can then spend in Bulgaria. Their wives are with them in Spain; these who might become transnational carers if there is a need to fulfil a care arrangement with an ageing parent in Bulgaria.

The difference in status and position between the ‘*parents*’ group and the ‘*pioneer*’ group

demonstrates the need for a *social age group* concept. While both groups have the same age and are from the same generation in terms of employment stage, age of children and grandchildren, they are treated in a different way by the community. The '*parents*' group is regarded as a subsidiary group; they are in Spain as temporary or permanent assistants to their children. They are thought of and think of themselves as having reached the end of their active lives and arrange their plans and movements through their children. Thus their social status is lessening already. Quite on the contrary, the '*pioneers*' are still the central organizing core for the extended family. Much depends on them, financially and socially. They are in the peak stage of their age and in this sense are in a different social age group than the '*parents*'. Thus, even in the same small community there might be meaningful differences between people of the same biological age.

A third group are the '*very young people*', in their 20s, who are part of the extended family of the kernel (brothers, sisters, cousins). They have just graduated from school and come straight to Spain to work. Most of members of this group have arrived relatively recently, after it became easier to stay in Spain legally for an unlimited period of time. Most of them are not married yet and do not have any dependents. They usually stay in the same house as the person from the kernel who influenced their decision to migrate and very often work with some of the family members. Some of them in fact try to help with taking care of the children of their extended family members, but this is an exception rather than a rule.

Finally, the *children* group comprises the fifth social age group. They have different ages, and so need different types of care. The children of the '*pioneers*' are older, either with their own families, or just graduated from high-school and working in Spain. The children of the '*kernel*' group are young and even though they all go either to nursery or to school, they still need extra assistance from an adult⁸. However, many women working in restaurants or hotels have shifts which do not coincide with childcare hours and thus they need additional help, for example with picking up the children from school. Hence the need for another family member.

Here, the '*parents*' and the '*pioneers*' are the *young old*, while the *old old* would be the ageing parents of these groups who have stayed behind in Bulgaria. They are very often in need of additional assistance. The prescribed or ideal care arrangement is usually for the daughter-in-law or one of the sons to go back home to take care of an ageing parent. Nonetheless, with mass migration there are more and more critical cases which need alternative decisions.

⁸ Nursery has two stages. Guarderia, for children 1 to 3 years old, which is paid and usually provides care only for half a day. And a nursery attached to the school for children 3 to 5, which is subsidised by the state. Younger children often do not lunch there, and go home for a couple of hours. Both this kindergarten and the subsequent school offer services all day, from 9 to 5.

Ideal care arrangements

By identifying the different social age groups, I have briefly outlined some of the care arrangements. I will now detail the prescribed care arrangements which would have been regarded as normal prior to migration. My observations are based on the practices of both migrants and non-migrants. Very often care obligations have been discussed ad hoc in conversations because of a crisis or a complicated case in relation to care arrangements among relatives. Such crises very often led to transformations: some subtle, some extreme.

In Brushlyan the patrilocal tradition is strictly kept. This means that daughters-in-law are usually responsible for taking care of the elderly, i.e. parents-in-law. There are two possible scenarios: either people who have migrated and have elderly relatives at home are not the ones responsible for taking care of them or, if the responsibility for care rests with the son who has migrated, then his wife, the daughter-in-law, may stay behind. If she has already joined her husband, and there is an emergency, e.g. the elderly person becomes suddenly ill, then she is obliged to return and remain in Bulgaria for as long as she is needed there. The decision about who will have care responsibilities is usually determined by who will inherit the house and/or who lived with the parents before migration. The rule is that the elder sons have to “go out of the house” and the youngest stays, inheriting the house and also the responsibility to take care of the parents. Although this has become more flexible and different arrangements can be made, most people still follow this rule.

The other care strategy is for elderly people to take care of their grandchildren. If living in Brushlyan, the rule prescribes that the mother of the husband assists with taking care of her grandchildren. However, the village is small enough for the two grandmothers to share the responsibility if required. With regard to migration, there are two polar tendencies for this aspect of care: In some cases the children are taken to Spain by their parents, with the parents' mothers or mothers-in-law often coming along to help with grandchildren. The opposite strategy is to leave the children behind, which is common in the initial stage of migration. A variation of this strategy is children being sent back. This most often happens with children approaching school age, when parents decide that it would be better if their child received a proper education, as they see it, in Bulgaria, and most importantly that the children learn to read and write in Bulgarian. In the case of children being taken care of in Bulgaria the designated grandmother will have to quit her job in order to devote all her time to the grandchild.

In the above cases it seems that migration does not change the traditional mechanism of care: no new arrangements emerge. Even if there are daughters-in-law living in a neighbouring house in Bulgaria, if the son responsible for caring for his parents migrates, then his wife will return to fulfil the care responsibilities. Thus the extended family safety net functions in the case of migration in a similar way to how it worked before people started migrating. Nevertheless, by

scrutinizing individual cases it becomes apparent that the neat structure is in fact starting to go through certain transformations. This will be illustrated in the next section by a few personal stories.

Transformations in care arrangements – four cases of the *young-old* in a state of flux

Case 1: On the meaning of living with the wife's parents

Alil lives with his wife's parents in Spain. They share a flat, a kitchen, expenses, and they dine together. The grandmother helps with their 3 year old son when both parents are at work during the week: she picks him up from the school bus and stays with him until her daughter, the mother, returns from working in a hotel near Tafalla. Alil used to work as a construction worker outside Tafalla, and came back on Saturday afternoons only to leave again on Monday morning. Now he has changed jobs and is working in Tafalla. Alil's wife has only one free day per week, Wednesdays. She's busy all day long during the weekends but her mother only takes care of her grandson during the week. When Alil is free on the weekends, he is the one to take full responsibility for his son. He does things which other men would not do: he takes his son to the park and hangs out with mothers and grandmothers there, he goes to visit his sister and nephews in the early afternoon, just as the rest of the *women* with children do. Instead of playing cards on Sunday afternoon in the pensioner's club, where most of the other men go, he is busy with his son. The result of these "unfortunate events" is that his fellows and male relatives pity him and make compassionate comments about his situation. When I asked why the mother-in-law did not take care of her grandson over the weekends, he explained: "*Well, she's busy, you know, she visits her son in Pamplona, or she just has other things to do. She is not obliged to help us after all.*"

This only lasts while Alil and his wife are in Spain. Once they return to Bulgaria for vacation they all live in his parents' house. Alil's masculine authority is only challenged whilst they are in Spain, even though he has been in Spain for 5 years now and does not plan to go back to Bulgaria in the near future. The temporariness of his position leads to a series of complicated semi-transformations of his relations with the rest of the relatives. Thus, on one hand his mother-in-law does help with his son and with the household. On the other hand, however, she is not held responsible for all the daily activities related to his son. She in fact helps her daughter rather than the daughter's whole family. Alil's parents-in-law take their vacation in July, while Alil and his wife return to Bulgaria in August. The parents are not willing to change their vacation plans, even though it would be more convenient for them to travel together to Bulgaria, and then there would be fewer complications over who will take care of the grandson in July when he's not in kindergarten. The solution until now was that the mother of Alil has been coming to Spain for a month to help with the grandson, while the other grandmother is in Bulgaria. This is considered to be absolutely normal by all affected, while Alil's mother-in-law's support during the year is

thought of as a favour. Zaira, Alil's mother, changed her lifestyle. She stopped growing tobacco over the summer, sold her cow, and eventually stopped working at the sewing factory because she needed to come to Spain. It is regarded as her duty and obligation to help her son: she is a typical 'transnational elderly traveller'.

The more I stayed in Tafalla, the more I realised that Alil's case was not unique. For various reasons, many men end up living with their parents-in-law in Spain. This leads to a mixing of power relations in which male authority and leadership roles get confused. Moreover, it creates a complicated web of mutual help and reciprocity issues which did not exist before migration. Elderly mothers feel obliged to help their son's families, whilst at the same time living with their daughters' families. Thus grandmothers arrive in Spain to help their sons and ignore their daughters.

To continue examining Alil's family setup: the first time Zaira went to Spain she stayed at his place, while his parents-in-law were in Bulgaria. When the parents-in-law returned Zaira's mother decided to stay a bit longer as her own daughter was due to give birth in less than two weeks. She moved to her daughter's place, but felt obliged to continue caring for Alil's son, whilst simultaneously trying to help her daughter take care of her son, too. This meant running from one part of the village to the other four times a day, which led among other things to serious weight loss. When I asked why the other grandmother, the mother of the wife, did not take the child to the kindergarten as usual, Zaira explained: "*Oh, no, how could she, if I am here. It doesn't matter that I live in another house, I am obliged to help my son. What would other people say, if I only helped my daughter?*"

Case 2: Care for free, care for money

A similar example is Ayse who lives in Spain with her husband, daughter and son-in-law. Her other son is also in Spain, but lives in Pamplona. She accompanied her daughter's children to Spain in September in order to take care of them. The arrangement was that the daughter would pay for her accommodation and food and give her pocket money. However, Ayse's son in Pamplona decided to bring his two daughters to Spain as well, since his mother was in Spain. So, from January on, there were four girls in Ayse's household. The son and his wife could not take care of their daughters in Pamplona, because their schedules did not correspond with nursery opening hours. Thus Ayse lived with her daughter, who paid her to take care of her daughters, while at the same time taking care of the son's two granddaughters for free in the same household. Like Zaira, Ayse explained that it is her duty to look after her son's children, while taking care of her daughter's children is in fact regarded as a favour.

In both cases the main motivation is the consideration: "what would other people say?". Not keeping an obligation would lead to disgrace. Thus reciprocity and public shame are the two

leading social forces behind kin relationships. This also entails a well-established concept of what it means to be a “proper mother/grandmother/daughter-in-law” or “proper man”. Variation from the model leads to disharmony. However, when migration enters the scene the relationships become flexible: grandmothers start taking care of their daughters’ children, men start living with their wives’ parents. While things are not completely transformed and the “old” habits and manners are still influential, new agreements come into force to address new situations. This is a complicated process; grandmothers take care of the son’s children for free because it is part of long lasting intergenerational reciprocity relations, but taking care of the daughter’s children requires a different type of reciprocity, which includes direct payment and gifts (like an expensive sewing machine for example). Thus, even though the care arrangements are transformed, these transformations are inevitably cast away as temporary or shameful, or are partially circumvented through complicated adjustments.

Case 3: Choosing between parents and children

The other end of the care chain is the care of the *old old*. The case of Dordana provides an example of a subtle change in the prescribed care act. Her husband is the youngest brother of three boys, and the penultimate child of five children altogether. According to the village tradition he will be the one to inherit the parents’ house. His two elder brothers are also in Spain with their wives and children, while his two sisters live in Brushlyan. Dordana was living in Spain with her husband and her two young sons (19 and 24) for over a year, taking care of the household and working part time in a restaurant. In the summer of 2007, while on vacation in Bulgaria, her elder son got married and took his wife with him to Spain. In the meantime, Dordana’s father-in-law became very ill and could no longer live on his own. His other two sons were in Spain and he was living all by himself. The decision was that Dordana would stay and she immediately started working in one of the sewing factories, while her sons and husband continued living in Spain. The two sisters of her husband, though living not far away, did not offer any assistance. They belonged to other extended families now with other care arrangements. Thus, an elderly woman has to choose her father-in-law (or mother-in-law as another case demonstrated) over her husband and sons when it comes to care.

However, about a year later the situation changed. Dordana’s new daughter-in-law became pregnant. This led to a small crisis; if all family members were in the same physical place, it would have been easy for Dordana to combine helping her daughter-in-law with taking care of her ageing father-in-law. However, the distance triggered the need for change, which engendered complications in the extended family relations. Since the young wife was about to give birth in Spain, Dordana decided to go back at the last moment and to leave her father-in-law to the care of his own daughters. This was settled with a lot of arguments. I was told by various family members that to offer money in exchange for care was out of the question and would ruin the idea of a family. But at the same time it was not very clear to the members of the dispute how

they could solve the imbalance in the care arrangements. When I asked why the mother of the young bride did not go to Spain for a while to assist with the baby, everybody told me that she had her son's son to take care of and that, anyway, it would be highly inappropriate. In this sense, not all transformations in the care arrangements are possible. For example, the relation between Dordana and the young daughter-in-law had yet to be established, and could not be violated, while the negotiations between the ageing brothers and sisters in terms of who would take care of their father turned out to be a less rigid obligation.

The case of Dordana demonstrates a typical transnational grandmother who has to divide her care between the elderly left behind and the new born grandchildren, thus she becomes a person without a permanent abode, without permanent employment or a permanent everyday routine. It also indicates the type of family transformations which might take place in light of migration.

Case 4: Intergenerational relations and the transformation of male authority

It is not only young men who are bothered by the unusual situation of them living with their parents-in-law. The violation of the patrilocal tradition may also cause tensions for the father of the young woman. This change in the male authority in the household, i.e. the status change, is always experienced as traumatic. While there is a clear understanding between father and son, when the father lives with the daughter's husband there can be tensions over the issue of who is the real head of the family. Moreover, younger men adapt easily to life abroad and gain new life skills which are not transmitted to the older generations, which leaves the elderly dependent on the younger ones. Gardner (2002) describes a similar thing among Bengali elders in London, who suffer from the undermining of their authority. Ageing men experience this as disturbing, especially if they depend not on their own sons but on their sons-in-law. Several men told me explicitly that this is a rather unpleasant situation for them, but unfortunately this is a necessary consequence of migration. Mehmed, who at the age of 63 lives with his daughter in Spain said: *"It confuses me, I do not feel knowledgeable enough, experienced enough to advise them. They [the younger ones] have to advise me. This is not normal. And if only it was my own sons telling me what to do. But that is not the case. Not that I dislike my son-in-law, but it simply seems wrong."* This is an exemplary case reflecting the general attitude among the men who live with their daughters' families.

The other group among the 'young old' are those who live in Spain with their sons. They suffer from devaluation of their knowledge and life experience as well, but in a milder form. Their authority is put under question only in terms of age, not in terms of mixing of kin position. In both cases however, the meaning of belonging to a certain social age group has been transformed through migration.

A third type of *young old* men in Spain are the travelling grandfathers, i.e. ageing men visiting

their daughters for up to several months. They visit their daughters with the idea of helping with the grandchildren, but end up finding temporary employment, usually in agriculture or construction. The result is that the daughter gives up her employment, while her father takes the new job. The difference is quite obviously gender defined. While for women the concept of shame comes from failing to keep their care obligations, for men shame is triggered by stepping out of the traditional male role. By taking care of grandchildren, they not only take up a female obligation, but also give up their role as bread-winners. A temporary job reinstates them in the “proper” position and normalizes the kin relations. The fact that they have actually come to Spain to assist their daughter’s families is of less importance.

For women things look slightly different. Most of the ‘*young old*’ women have difficulties with the fact that they do not settle for long: often they spend up to three months in Spain, then they go back to Bulgaria for two months, and come to Spain again. Since they are rarely the major breadwinner of the family, changes of plans and of place are more usual for them than for their husbands. What is most upsetting for these women is that the decision is never their own, and not even their husbands’, but their children’s. One such example is of a woman who is in Spain helping her daughter with her 2-year-old son. Her husband is also there, working. One of her sons is in Pamplona, and lives with his parents-in-law. The woman feels guilty for helping her daughter instead of her son. That’s why she moves to Pamplona to take care of his child when his parents-in-law return to Bulgaria for the summer. She also has another son in Bulgaria, whose wife gave birth shortly before Christmas. The woman returned to Bulgaria for two months to help the young mother. Now she is back with her daughter in Tafalla. After explaining all these movements in great detail, she said: *“I don’t know where I’ll be in a month. I try to help all of them, but it is sometimes impossible. If we all were in Bulgaria, it would have been so much more normal. All the grandchildren could have come to me, I would have helped all of my children with ease. But here... I have to move all the time. I don’t have a home anymore.”*

Concluding remarks: transformations of the family

Care arrangements among Bulgarian Muslims, as described above, are kept within the boundaries of the family: paying for a nanny or for someone to take care of a sick ageing parent is not an acceptable option, neither is sending elderly people to a nursing home. This is not surprising in the context of Bulgaria and more specifically of the village region where Bulgarian Muslims live: nursing homes are state owned, uncommon and have very miserable living conditions. Meanwhile paying for someone to help is something very few people can afford to do. Even asking a member of the same family, like a daughter to take care of her father, as the example of Dordana revealed, might be problematic and creates turbulence. In the case of the Bulgarian Muslims I have described, the kin-obligations, which are based on a complicated structure of reciprocity, are strictly defined. They are based on a clear concept of who belongs to the family, and who remains outside the family. In this sense, migration conditions disrupt not

only the care arrangements, but also the fabric of the family.

Through the case of the '*transnational ageing traveller*' I have tried to demonstrate the subtle transformations and ruptures which migration triggers. While the basic structure of care arrangements appears to remain the same, and obligations are kept within the family, the different emergency cases which the *young-old* people in the community respond to, demonstrate how the practices and principles of caring are changing. This, in its turn, leads to critical moments in which the statuses and obligations within the family are reformulated. A son-in-law temporarily becomes part of the family of his wife, a grandmother gradually acknowledges the reformulated family relation she has with her daughter's children etc. In this sense, the very existence of the '*transnational ageing travellers*' is defined by and also influences the transformation, albeit subtle and slow, of the family fabric and meaning.

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