

INTRODUCTION

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This book continues the reporting of a tranche of research on migration and Lithuanian families which has been contributing to the international understanding of these areas since 2004. Incorporating contemporary conceptualizations of the family and emerging theory from the fields of family, migration and childhood research, it shows how families are developing new ways of family life as transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). It also provides new findings on the way in which official and academic documents have developed and altered in light of the experiences of migrant families and the influences these have had on how cross-border families (Boccagni, 2010) are studied and understood. This has fed into significant changes in Lithuanian policy and legislation; a process which continues.

Drawing on the family practices approach which recognizes both the activities of, and discourses about, family life (Morgan, 1996), each area is given significant attention. The book then has three main foci which form its three distinct parts: the conceptual (Part 1), a consideration of legislative and academic discourses on migrant families (Part 2), and empirical studies of the strategies and activities of Lithuanian Transnational Families (Part 3). Importantly, the last section utilizes new methodologies to illustrate and further test the conceptual material drawn on in the volume. As such it provides both cutting-edge research (in both findings and methodology) and holistic feedback as it further develops the underlying concepts on which this research draws.

Families across Borders: The Lithuanian Context

As a background to the research reported in this book, some statistics relating to international migration in Lithuania will be provided. Lithuania joined the European Union through the Treaty of Accession (2003) which came into force on 1st May 2004. As part of what were named the 'A8' countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia), Lithuanian citizens were provided in 2004 with access to the job market in some European countries such as the UK, Sweden and Ireland. Twelve other nations already in the EU did not provide immediate employment access with Germany and Austria imposing the full

seven year waiting period until 2011 before opening up their job market to A8 workers. The movement of peoples to and from Lithuania since 2004 has shown considerable imbalance. Immigration to Lithuania between 2005 and 2018 has shown a mostly steady annual increase from 6 789 in 2005 to a recent high in 2018 of 28 914 (Statistics Lithuania, 2018). This has however been dwarfed by the numbers of Lithuanian citizens emigrating. Figures for 2005 showed 57 885 residents leaving Lithuania and while this was the second highest annual figure, beaten only by 2010 when 83 157 people emigrated, numbers have ranged consistently between 30–50 000 per year (Ibid). In total, some 710 thousand people have emigrated from Lithuania since 1990 (EMN, 2019). This is especially noticeable in a country with a small population such as Lithuania and the overall population has reduced between 1990 and 2019 from 3.7 million to 2.8 million or around 24% of the initial population (Ibid). Crucially, this emigration has not been across all ages. While 13% of emigrants were aged 0–14 which can be assumed to be the children of migrants who took their families with them, young working age Lithuanians have made up the majority of those leaving the country. 29% of migrants were between 15–24, the highest number from one age group 30% came from 25–34 year old Lithuanians while another 14% of emigrants were aged 35–44. After 45, the percentage of emigrants falls sharply. As a result, 86% of emigrants were aged 45 or less, making a significant impact on the demographic and economic profile of the country (Sipavičienė, 2019). In addition, many of those who left Lithuania would be in the child-bearing and family-rearing years of their lives and this led to the disquiet evidenced in the official documents examined in Part 2. By 2018, few people in Lithuania were unaffected by emigration. A representative survey of the population carried out in 2018 while implementing the project ‘Global migration and Lithuanian family: family practices, circulation of care and return strategies’ (LMTLT, Contract No. S-MIP-17-117) showed that 7% of them lived abroad previously for at least 6 months, 24% had family members abroad at the time of the survey, 30% had kin abroad, 30% had friends abroad, and 32% had acquaintances abroad. About one third of the sample (32%) did not have anyone abroad. It is with this background of significant population loss (albeit with growing numbers of returnees more recently), and the movement of large numbers of economically active citizens that the research in this book should be considered.

Outline of the Book

As described above, the book is divided into three main parts outlining conceptual, discourse analysis and survey material.

Part 1. Revisiting established frames and testing new approaches

Part 1 provides the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the other two empirical parts to be understood. Julie Seymour opens this Part of the book with an explanation of the recent family research concepts which have been used as a lens through which to view the impact of global migration and the Lithuanian family. Chapter 1.1 explains the genesis and use of the ‘family practices’ approach (Morgan, 1996) and how this allows a consideration of more diverse and spatially separate family forms. This approach distinguishes between the everyday ‘doing’ of family and periods of family ‘display’ when the need to be seen as a family becomes more intense. She shows how this can be the case for a number of local, transnational and State audiences of migrant families. The chapter also introduces the concept of Personal Life (Smart, 2007) which allows consideration of wider forms of intimate relationships alongside families. Finally, recognizing the importance of intergenerational links it considers the family configuration approach which focuses on inter and intra generational linkages.

In the second chapter in this Part (1.2) Irena Juozeliūnienė further expands on the conceptual approaches of family practices and Personal Life. To this she adds the very recent sociological discussions of ‘Troubled Families’. Bringing this new perspective to look at the issue of migrant families, she explains how this approach problematizes the labelling of families as ‘Troubled’, wishing to focus instead on how families manage the everyday troubles of family life. Within this chapter she shows how she operationalized the conceptual material from these approaches to enable empirical research to take place and how the specific projects which formed the project ‘Global migration and Lithuanian family: family practices, circulation of care and return strategies’ (2017–2019) were developed.

Part 2. Situating migrant families’ troubles in Lithuanian legislation and academic publications

The second part of the book provides the findings and discussion of the projects related to understanding the changing discourses around migrant families. These investigations provide a significant arc of material

some going back as far as 1995 to show how conceptualizations and conversational frameworks have varied and developed.

In chapter 2.1, Irena Juozeliūnienė and Indrė Bielevičiūtė provide empirical data to interrogate the way in which family and migration were represented in official Lithuanian policy documents. This includes National Policy documents from 1995–2018. Here the conflation of migrant families with other ‘troubled’ families can initially be seen. The authors then trace changes in these documents to a less negative viewpoint of migrant families although they consider they are still not recognized in their own right.

This examination of discourse is developed by Irena Juozeliūnienė, Indrė Bielevičiūtė and Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė in chapter 2.2 where they outline an examination of academic social constructions of migrant families using material from 2005–2017. They note the prevailing low mobility discourse which pervades the material, and which does not reflect the experience of significant numbers of Lithuanian families.

Finally, in this Part, the same authors provide a consideration of the role of parenting in Lithuanian academic publications between 2005 and 2017. The role of mothers is shown to be constructed as particularly problematic. Also, dominant, for those migrants who took their children abroad, is the concern about the continuation of a Lithuanian identity. This often related to use of the Lithuanian language and presents the issue of integration abroad as a problem.

Part 3. Doing, Displaying and memorizing: the evidence from the quantitative research study of Lithuanian Transnational Families

In the third Part of the book, new research methodologies, namely quantitative are applied to the family practices approach to migration. Vida Česnuiytė (chapter 3.1) provides new empirical data to exemplify the activities carried out by transnational families as part of ‘doing family’. Using two surveys of 1005 Lithuanians and 406 migrants she examines how family is done through routine activities, feasts and traditions. These data show that while migrants abroad make families of choice from friends, there are considerable cross-border activities and visits which maintain existing family ties.

Chapter 3.2 focuses on the importance and continuation of displays of parenting and caring for elderly parents. Irena Juozeliūnienė, Gintė Martinkėnė and Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė provide empirical evidence of the transnational circulation of care and the enablers and hinderers of such activities. They show how such activities are still gendered particularly in the type of care that is carried out. They also make the important point that

this is a two-way interaction in which care givers in the country of origin have to work with migrant parents and adult children. In addition, parents of adult children may not accept the type or form of care that migrant carers seek to arrange.

In the final chapter of Part 3, Laima Žilinskienė shows the importance of memory making in migrant families lives and how emigrants 'do' family memory. Drawing on the representative sample of Lithuanian residents, she shows that those with emigration experience since 1990 participate in family memory construction more actively. The development of such communicative family memory is family work which demonstrates family solidarity and occurs between and within generations. However, this research shows that gender, age and location influence who is involved in this process with men and younger family members less likely to participate.

The book concludes with a consideration of this recent research on migrant families and the avenues it opens up for further examination especially in the light of increasing numbers of return migrants.

References

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