



# Transnational Grandparenthood: A Qualitative Study on the Relationship of Grandparents and Grandchildren in the Migration Context

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## Abstract

Transnational relationships are defined as those between actors located in different national spaces, that is, relationships that are built beyond borders. It is the case of grandparents and grandchildren, who through migration see themselves in a distance relationship between two countries, thus one can speak of a transnational relationship that seeks an affective connection between two countries, two cultures, played out between grandparents and grandchildren. These transnational relationships will link grandchildren to family traditions, stories and values in and from the culture of origin. Despite the migration by parents and children, apparently distancing generations, this distance does not seem to totally prevent the inter-family cultural transmission of social values, mainly due to grandparents, who function as a kind of cultural root in the family and in contemporary society. In this context, the general objective of this study was to understand the transnational relationship between grandparents who remained in the country of origin and their migrant grandchildren. A qualitative research was carried out with twelve participants, that is, four grandparents, who remained in Brazil; four mothers, who migrated to Switzerland with their children; and four grandchildren, from different Brazilian States who migrated to Switzerland. The instruments used were a biosociodemographic questionnaire, a life history interview and semi-structured interviews. Results point out that their transnational relationship presents itself in singular and special ways, through created opportunities by those involved.

## Keywords

migration, family, transnational relationships, intergenerational relationships, qualitative research



Migration is gaining more and more space in the media, academic and also personal scenario, since the number of people who migrate or are affected by migration is increasing due to the communication facilities that technologies offer approximating people from different countries. According to [Patarra \(2005\)](#), it is observed that international migration is a phenomenon that has a diversity of meanings and implications. The author highlights that part of these implications occur at the macro level, by generating economic, social, political, demographic and cultural transformations. In addition to these changes, it is also necessary to highlight the implications at a micro level, which involves personal processes. Migration does not involve only those who migrate, those who are already born in this new country and find themselves coexisting with two cultures, called “second generation migrants”. But there is also a family that remains – parents, grandparents, and other relatives. According to [Nesteruk and Marks \(2009\)](#), many contemporary migrants currently belong to transnational families, that is, families that maintain significant contact with two or more countries. These families identify with multiple environments and deal with lifecycle changes across a wide geographic space.

For [Andolfi \(2017\)](#), the migrant is always traveling, in a perpetual “from” and “to”, between origin and destination, past and present, between children and grandparents, trying to integrate two realities. [Scabine and Regalia \(1993\)](#) point out that the migrants carry a family mandate of integration to the new culture, without forgetting their roots. Thus, this migrating generation, called the “first generation of migrants”, seeks to mediate the impact of the new country and the connection with the family of origin, who are the grandparents. In this context, the generation of grandchildren who migrated with their parents or were already born in the destination country, denominated as the “second generation of migrants” will often seek the generation of grandparents as a means of connecting with the culture of origin.

In this sense it is possible to envision the development of transnational relations. [Mato \(2008\)](#) defines these relationships as those between actors located in different national spaces, that is, relationships that are built beyond borders. In the case of the generation of grandparents and the second generation of migrants, the grandchildren see themselves in a distance relationship between two countries. Thus, we can speak of transnational relationships that seek affective connection between two countries, two cultures, played out between grandparents and grandchildren. These transnational relationships will link grandchildren to family traditions, stories, and values in as well as from the culture of origin. Despite that migration by parents and children, may enhance the distance between generations, it does not seem to totally prevent the inter-family cultural transmission of social values, mainly thanks to grandparents, who function as a kind of cultural roots in the family and in contemporary society ([Ramos, 2012](#)). Care, culture and values seem to continue being transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren, even at a distance.

Siqueira (2009) explains that migration may generate feelings of anguish both for those who migrate and for those who are left behind. As it is an event that will affect the whole family system, as well as from macro to micro, Scheifele (2008) adds that it is an adventure that can be traumatizing. In general, there is a greater concentration of research on those who migrate than on those who stay in the country of origin, however we believe that both are interconnected since the phenomenon of migration affects both.

Given this context, the general objective of this study was to understand the transnational relationship between grandparents who remained in the country of origin and their migrant grandchildren. More specifically: we sought to understand the feelings arising from the migration; characterize the role of grandparents in the relationship with grandchildren in the context of migration; and to analyze the transnational relations between grandparents and grandchildren, as well as their experienced needs.

## Transnational Grandparents and Grandchildren

In order to understand how “being grandparents” occurs in the context of migration, it is necessary to first analyze what grandparenthood means and functions by itself. According to Dias et al. (2017), grandparenthood in Brazil is complex, heterogeneous, and diverse, taking into account social, cultural and gender issues, among others. In addition, we can observe an extensive age range between 35 (or even less) and 70 years in which Brazilians become grandparents (Cardoso, 2011).

In the Brazilian family, grandparents undertake several activities, both instrumental, such as taking their grandchildren to school, and affective, involving conversations, advice, and storytelling (Dias et al., 2017). They are also seen from a perspective of wisdom and experience, according to Dias and Silva (2003). Oliveira (2015) pointed out that it is through quality interactions that grandparents have an impact on the professional, religious, moral, and psychosocial lives of their grandchildren. Through the various attributions that grandparents assume in the family, Cardoso and Brito (2014) emphasize the difficulty of finding a definition about what it means to be grandparents. By merging being a grandmother with the context of migration, that is, being grandparents at a distance, the challenges of definitions escalate. Several questions arise about how the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren occurs, through the challenges of geographical distance, means of communication and possibly language challenges.

According to Nedelcu (2007), grandparents are put to the test in migration, assuming their roles in several ways: taking care of grandchildren left in the country of origin (Schuler & Dias, 2015); engaging in mobility back and forth, that is, in the capacity of certain grandparents to get used to international migration, being called: generation 0 of migration (Nedelcu 2009), transnational flying grandparents (Treas & Mazumdar 2004); and still creating new ways to exercise their function as grandparents, even at a distance. Studies argue that virtual co-presence, i.e. via ICT (Baldassar, 2008), offers a set of qualitatively distinct possibilities of being co-present, and facilitating intergenera-

tional solidarity at a distance, allowing grandparents to endorse an active role within transnational families.

Attias-Donfut and Segalen (2001) explain that there is no exact model to follow, however, the tasks and ways of being transnational grandparents and grandchildren are built among those involved. It is the specific context, the mediation and availability of those involved that is going to permeate the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren beyond national borders. Ferrigno (2006) points out that new situations will determine new forms of intergenerational relations, as in a permanent dialectical movement.

In the context of migration, grandparents emerge as cultural and affective agents of connection to the country of origin, in addition to becoming a source of support for bicultural identity. Nedelcu (2017) points out that transnational grandparents play a significant role in the integration of their children in the host country. The author says that they do as well contribute to the transnational socialization of their grandchildren, perpetuating cultural traditions, language skills and even culinary habits of their country of origin. As Baptista (2012) highlights, grandparents are as tutelary figures in this panorama of transmitting cultural heritage. Through contact with grandparents, life stories express not only the development of changes, but also attest to the permanence of certain social and cultural patterns that contribute to the construction of a social identity. Thus, the idea is that life trajectories and family memory are factors to be taken into account in the construction of social identity. It is also important to highlight the role of grandparents as “agents of the preservation of our cultural matrix” (Meneses, 2012, p. 28). Grandparents are custodians of an invaluable knowledge that needs to be passed on to the younger generations. In the current context, it is the grandparents who appear as a bridge of dialogue between the generations to promote the knowledge of their origins, as well as the recovery of their cultural roots. Grandparents therefore become a possible way of connection with the country of origin (Schuler et al., 2019).

According to the afore mentioned authors, grandparents contribute to the transmission of a cultural legacy, by providing a possibility of continuity regarding their cultural identity with the country of origin, which translates into speaking the Portuguese language as a “heritage language”, with their grandparents. In corroboration, Marujo (2010) states that grandparents of the second generation of migrants are the bridge between the destination country and the country of origin, guaranteeing, in some cases, the preservation of the mother tongue, the family bond, the feeling of belonging, among others. Marujo (2014) adds that grandparents transmit important aspects of cultural heritage of origin, including “the language of heritage” which she calls “the language of affection”.

Therefore, the role of grandparents in the bilingualism of migrant grandchildren should be highlighted. For Marujo (2017), knowledge of the language of affection approximates and enables interaction between grandchildren and grandparents, who in

their original language transmit family stories, authentic cultural heritage, establishing a bridge between the past and the present, contributing so for the emotional balance of grandchildren. [Boschilia \(2010\)](#) argues that the concept of heritage language is the result of the close relationship between language, identity and culture, since the heritage that is being passed from one generation to another does not only correspond to linguistic skills, but also to the culture and customs of the country of origin. The term “heritage language” is used because it is profoundly different from teaching Portuguese as a foreign language. When we talk about cultural heritage, we are referring to the baggage that we carry in our lives, coming from the place where we were born and grew up, or from the place of origin of our families.

In addition, the transnational relationship between grandparents and grandchildren will enable new experiences for both generations involved. The younger ones may enjoy the stories of their grandparents, in addition to learning and training the language of the origin country, that is, the language of heritage or affection; the older generation gains the possibility of acquiring new knowledge, such as: getting a glimpse of a foreign culture through the eyes of their grandchildren, using a cell phone, taking computer courses to use the device in order to communicate with their grandchildren who may live in another country, among others.

[Nedelcu \(2009\)](#) states that information technologies are crucial tools regarding transnational grandparenting is processed and represent an important part of the emerging and increasingly complex picture of transnational aging ([Baldassar et al., 2017](#)). Studies argue that virtual co-presence, that is, via ICTs, ([Baldassar, 2008](#)) offers a set of qualitatively distinct possibilities of being co-present, and facilitating intergenerational solidarity at a distance, allowing grandparents to endorse an active role within transnational families.

[Torres and Dias \(2017\)](#) emphasize that technological tools reduce geographical distances, despite the lack of physical touch. It is a solution to ease the longing and maintain contact, even if it does not take away the value of physical contact. The authors explain that new technologies are a possibility to remove the elders from their “comfort zone” focusing on new learning skills that may improve their quality of life. It can be said then, that even in this context of migration, the coexistence mediated by technologies between grandparents and grandchildren, provides more and new experiences for both, older and younger generations.

In addition, it is emphasized that parents' mediation is often necessary for the construction of the transnational relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. [Pinazo and Montoro \(2004\)](#) point out that if the relationship between grandparents and their children is harmonious, consequently doors are opened for the benefits that grandparents can offer to grandchildren, as well as for grandparents to feel comfortable in their role.

Baldassar (2016) states that being grandparent involves regular and intense contacts and exchange between grandparents, parents and grandchildren. For these authors, care in close and/or distant contexts is not very different. They claim that forms of mediated co-presence by information technologies can successfully create a sense of shared experience in family practices. Thus, the cultural exchange, regardless of the means by which it occurs, also constitutes an affective exchange between grandparents and grandchildren that, in addition to stimulating the intellectual and relational potential of both, favors the maintenance of historical memory, allowing the rediscovery of a person's presence, despite the distance or co-presence as Baldassar et al. (2017) explains. For Nedelcu (2017), this co-presence translates into the fact that the person is physically absent, becomes present in everyday situations, mediated by ICTs. These transnational practices lead to the emergence of a transnational everyday reality. The literature reviewed focusses mainly on the migratory moves from southern country to northern countries, as the present study is situated in the bridge between Brazil and Switzerland. In this sense, we believe that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in the migratory context from Brazil to Switzerland becomes special, since transnational relations are built, which go beyond geographical distances, which justifies the present study. Our aim was to understand the transnational relationship between grandparents who remained in the country of origin (Brazil) and their migrant grandchildren (Switzerland).

## Method

This study is part of a larger research on the migration of Brazilian children to Switzerland carried out by the second author of this article. Considering the frequency that the interviewees mentioned their grandparents, as well as the migration of their mothers. Therefore, we thought to try to get a glimpse of the intergenerational perspectives on the subject of grandparenthood in the immigrational context.

Due to the proposed objectives, we opted for a qualitative research, as it allows knowledge that goes beyond statistical data, prioritizing the object of investigation, based on what is placed by the participants and the meaning it has for them. Qualitative methodologies, in general, favor the analysis of micro social processes, individual and group, performing an intensive examination of the data in its amplitude, depth and multiplicity at the time of analysis (Minayo, 2019).

## Participants

Considering the frequency of mentions of the mothers and grandparents by the first interviewees of the research, the importance of these roles were considered in the migration context and thus the second author thought to search as participants also mothers and grandparents in order to enrich the data and the understanding of the

migration and adaption process from an intergenerational point of view. As for the criteria for choosing the participants, purpose sampling was used, which is also called intentional or deliberate. The sample includes four grandparents, of both sexes, aged between 65 and 71 years old, who remained in Brazil; four mothers, aged between 49 and 59 years, who migrated to Switzerland with their children; and four grandchildren, all older than 18 years, of both sexes, from different Brazilian states and who migrated to Switzerland, totaling 12 participants in the research. As a requirement to participate in the research, grandparents had to have children who have lived abroad for more than five years and grandchildren who migrated to Switzerland. For the participating mothers, the requirements were to be a first-generation migrant married to Swiss men, to have children brought from Brazil and/or born in Switzerland and to have their parents in Brazil. Considering that the interviewees mentioned their mothers as the migrant in the family dynamic and that all fathers were from the host country, only mothers were recruited as participants. The marriage to a Swiss man is one of the few possibilities to stay legally in Switzerland and thus reunite with their children. An intergenerational sample of participants was chosen in order to deepen into the relationship between the generations, going beyond dyadic relations as proposed by Vicente and Sousa (2012). It should be noted that the participants, that is, children, mothers and grandparents, are not from the same family. The sociodemographic data of the participants are shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The names of the participants are fictional for the preservation of their identity.

**Table 1***Sociodemographic Data of Grandchildren*

Participant	Civil Status	Migrated at the age of...	Age	Birthplace	Profession
Granddaughter Cíntia	Single	3 years	22 years	São Paulo	Artist
Granddaughter Elena	Single	7 years	25 years	Recife	Administrative Assistant
Grandson Nilson	Single	10 years	25 years	São Paulo	Cook
Granddaughter Renata	Single	5 years	23 years	Fortaleza	Nurse Assistant

**Table 2***Sociodemographic Data of Mothers*

Participant	Civil Status	Birthplace	Age	Time since Migration	Children
Mother Juliana	Married	Salvador	49 years	More than 10 years	One son that migrated with her
Mother Fernanda	Married	Recife	59 years	More than 10 years	Two sons, one migrated with her and the other was born in Switzerland
Mother Luisa	Married	Manaus	53 years	More than 10 years	One son that migrated to Switzerland some years after her
Mother Patricia	Married	Recife	58 years	More than 10 years	One daughter that migrated to Switzerland

**Table 3***Sociodemographic Data of Grandparents*

Participant	Age	Number of grandchildren abroad	Age of their grandchildren who live abroad	Number of children abroad	Country children and grandchildren migrated to
Grandfather Arnaldo	60 years	One granddaughter	8 years	One daughter	Switzerland
Grandmother Cecilia	71 years	One granddaughter	15 years	One daughter	Switzerland
Grandmother Paula	65 years	Two grandsons	4 and 6 years	One daughter	Switzerland
Grandmother Marta	72 years	Three granddaughters	18, 5 and 2 years	Two daughters	Switzerland

As we can see in Table 1, all the grandchildren migrated at a young age (3–10 years old), being considered second generation migrants from different parts of Brazil. It also stands out that their current profession is of a technical level.

As we can see in Table 2, the mothers or first generation migrants who participated in this research are all married to Swiss man and have migrated since at least 10 years, being also from different parts of Brazil.

In Table 3 it is possible to see that all grandparents, aged from 60 to 72 years, that were interviewed have children and grandchildren who currently live in Switzerland.



## Instruments

As research instruments, a biosociodemographic questionnaire was used containing information such as sex, age, education, marital status, religion, among others, with all participants. A Life History interview was conducted with the grandchildren, whose main characteristic is to allow the participant to resume their experiences retrospectively. These reports provide extremely rich material for analysis (Boni & Quaresma, 2005). In them is found the reflection of a collective dimension from the individual perspective.

Semi-structured interviews were used as research instruments for mothers and grandparents, with a specific script for each generation, developed by the researchers containing questions about the migration of children/grandchildren, relationships with grandchildren and the feelings experienced. Minayo (2019) points out that the interview guides a conversation with the purpose of deepening communication and, thus, obtaining information and opinions relevant to the study. The script allows an informal conversation that allows the participant to spontaneously report on their experience, and guides the topics to be addressed, without the need to follow a strict order, which may be added by relevant content in the interviewees' discursive elaboration.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with grandchildren and mothers were carried out in Switzerland, in the cities of Basel and Zurich. The contact was made through people known by the first and second researcher in that country. The interviews were conducted with the mothers in Portuguese and with the grandchildren in German and/or Portuguese. With grandparents the interviews were carried out in Recife (Brazil). A first contact was made by telephone to set up a meeting, in which the participants were attended at their home or another location of their choice (the home of one of the family members), being interviewed individually in a particular location.

Before we started, the objective of the research was explained to each participant and the Informed Consent Form (ICF) was presented, which guarantees anonymity. After reading and signing the term, we started the interview. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee (CAEE: 66930917.0.0000.5206) and the interviews were done individually, recorded and then transcribed. We followed Minayo's (2019) guidance on anonymity, so all participants had their names changed.

The interviews were analysed according to the dictates of Thematic Content Analysis (Minayo, 2019), which consists of three phases: pre-analysis, corpus organization, interpretation and analysis of the material obtained. The pre-analysis focuses on a fluctuating reading of the collected material, resuming the initial research objectives for the elaboration of indicators that guide the interpretation of the data. The second stage is the exploration of the material, which seeks the nuclei of understanding the text for its interpretation. In the third stage, the researcher then performs the interpretations and

analyses, taking into account his theoretical framework. In this way, the predominant themes in the participants' speech are approached and analyzed based on the consulted literature. All the results obtained, resulting from the interviews with the three generations, were related for a better understanding of the studied phenomenon.

## Discussion and Analysis of Results

In this section, we will discuss the results found in the interviews with grandparents, mothers and grandchildren. From the reading of the material obtained, three categories are presented here.

### Migration for Those who Go and Those who Stay

Grandparents express ambiguous feelings regarding the migration of their children and grandchildren, while demonstrating awareness of the reasons that led to the migration and the possibilities that the destination country brings. In this sense Grandmother Cecilia, expresses the lack of physical presence and the desire to have them back:

“I felt it so much when they (grandchildren) left ... I got physically sick because I missed them. But I understand why they went. I understand the opportunities that Switzerland has, and it is a very beautiful country ... but deep down I wanted them to come back. Despite having a lot of contact with them, I miss them here”.

It is interesting to note that even stating her awareness of opportunity in Switzerland, Cecilia falls sick and sees the cause of her health issues in the migration of her grandchildren. As far as her illness may be a somatization of psychic process by feeling the loss of her dear ones to another country, we can only hypothesize. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy how much this movement towards another country affected her and her health, up to the point that she still wants them back, as to say, “under her wings”.

Taking up the point of view of those who migrated, having an ill mother back home might surely have had impacts on the adaption process. Especially considering the innumerable challenges they encounter, as well homesickness they report feeling of the country of origin and especially from the family. Patricia, one of the participating mothers, reported this difficulty of migration: “The longing for the Brazilian family always tightens in my chest ... and the absence of the family here with me ... it is very difficult”. We may question to what extend this family is actually absent, as it the memory may also be a form of presence. Nowadays with social media and internet possibilities, the absence becomes something rather relative, nevertheless it is important to note that ICT's were not at its highest point ten years ago.

In addition, the challenges of integration into the new culture are added, as Fernanda said: “It was and is a challenge to manage the country's cultural and behavioral issues ...

always with respect, but without forgetting to add Brazilian cultural values so that we are still Brazilians". While Fernanda's account certainly Scabine and Regalia's (1993) studies on the mandate to maintain cultural roots, it is also interesting to point out her need to "still be Brazilian", as is if there was a risk of losing one's Brazilian cultural identity in the foreign country. There seems to be a need to feel Brazilian, as well as be acknowledged somehow culturally even if only in small details as a Brazilian. While the mandate seems to be given by the generation of grandparents, the mother herself reinforces in the need to still feel Brazilian.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that the vast majority of grandchildren who were born in Brazil, when their mothers migrated from different parts of Brazil as stated in Table 2, remained with their grandparents until they could migrate, and everything was legalized for family reunification. As we can see in Table 1 of sociodemographic data of the grandchildren, migration took place in their childhood ranging from 3 to 10 years old when they took off, considered therefore as second-generation migrants. In this sense, grandchildren also report difficulty in leaving Brazil, especially in leaving their grandparents, as noted in the following reports:

"When my mother came to Switzerland, my two sisters and I stayed with my grandfather ... we missed her (mother) but my grandfather took care of us, he did everything for us. When it was time to migrate ... we had become attached and then we cried a lot ... it was very difficult to leave him" (Grandson Nilson).

"I came here ... I was five years old. But I had been with my grandmother since I was very young. For me, my grandmother was my mother. So it was very difficult, because I didn't want to come" (Granddaughter Renata).

"I came to Switzerland when I was three, and I only spoke Portuguese with my grandmother when she came to visit us here. I missed her so much, even though I was so young (...). Now she has passed away, but I feel that she left marks of Brazil on me. It is as if I miss Brazil... to live what I have never lived" (Granddaughter Cintia).

It is interesting to see how the grandchildren who stayed with their grandparents during this period became attached to them. We may also see that grandparents go through a form of parentification, as they suddenly see themselves in place of parents with the responsibility for their grandchildren. Interestingly, it seems that the grandchildren adapted quite well to this situation in spite of missing their mothers, Nilson and Renata, for example, reached the point of not wishing to migrate. While Cintia explains the depth of her homesickness, as she migrated at 3 years of age and her good relationship

with her maternal grandmother. Her statement of missing something she has not lived brings forth feeling of home in Brazil and with her grandmother, that go beyond having a physical home. The marks her grandmother left seem to be profound and nurture a sense of home in the origin culture.

## Distance Grandparenting?

The collected data suggests that geographical distance calls out to other ways to be a grandparent and to feel close to grandchildren. Grandmother Cecilia's account shows that even far away, she feels close to her granddaughter who lives abroad: "I often feel closer to my granddaughter who lives in Switzerland than to those who live here in the same city as me. She doesn't forget me". The feeling of closeness of grandmother Cecilia to her granddaughter can be linked to the phenomenon that [Baldassar \(2016\)](#) called virtual co-presence. Possibly, communication between this grandmother and her granddaughter is frequent, which demonstrates a close relationship. This corroborated with the study of [Nedelcu \(2017\)](#), which explains that technology-mediated communications can generate a feeling of closeness and unity that develops regardless of face-to-face interaction or local proximity. [Kędra \(2021\)](#) adds that the communication provided by digital technologies transforms the ways of being together and, therefore, family relationships, to the point of no longer requiring physical presence to guarantee their emotional meaning. The fact of being far away can also lead to the desire of "wanting to be present" and the ICTs offer this possibility, as highlighted by Elena:

"I always spoke to my grandmother once a week by video or voice call... and she gave me a report of everything that was happening to people in the family, and so I felt that I had some connection with my extended family through her".

It is noted that the grandmother, in addition to being a bridge to the country of origin and the Portuguese language, also forms the bridge between Elena and the extended family. It is noteworthy to highlight Elena's need to belong to her Brazilian family, that is, uncles and cousins, even being far away.

Communication between grandparents, mothers and grandchildren takes place mainly through information technologies, that is, video calls or WhatsApp messages. The mother Luisa highlighted:

"With the ease of technology, they talk a lot ... there are those family groups. And my son also likes to talk to his grandmother ... he likes to make video calls or send pictures for her to see. They have a good relationship".

Corroborating [Kędra \(2021\)](#) argues that family practices on WhatsApp groups, as well as sharing photos, play an important role in daily routines, allowing, among others, the

learning and training of the language of affection. Grandmothers seem to be willing to be present via the internet and even help, as far as possible, in caring for their grandchildren, showing that they can get out of their comfort zone, as explained by Torres and Dias (2017). Grandmother Paula takes care of her grandchildren via Skype:

“Even from a distance, I take care of my grandchildren. When my daughter is going to do something, I talk to them, tell them a story, sing with them ... and so time passes. The internet and the video call remains on all day and so when they want or need, they call me”.

It is possible to see that grandmother Paula performs her role of caring for her grandchildren, through virtual co-presence, as stated by Baldassar (2008). Nedelcu (2017) adds that this form of co-presence reinforces the sense of belonging of transnational family members, shaping and creating new family practices. Allowing, among others, opportunities for grandparents to express solidarity between generations and participate in child care and grandchildren's socialization across borders.

Nedelcu (2017) explains that transnational grandparents are rooted also in technology developments. This has been leading many seniors to use ICTs in an innovative way to maintain meaningful family relationships. Grandmother Cecilia, in her testimony, also pointed out that she learned to use a Tablet in order to better communicate with her granddaughter:

“Ah, I always talk to my granddaughter! She gave me a Tablet as a gift and taught me how to make a video call. And the screen is bigger then I see it better ... we talk every week. She films the things I like and sends me. She films the flowers ... the snow ... she remembers me! And I also send her voice messages”.

The distances between grandparents and grandchildren seem to decrease through the use of the internet. In this sense it is also worth pointing out that grandparents are still quite young, as seen in Table 3 and open to learn the new technologies. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the need to find connection points with each other, themes or activities that are of mutual interest. As we can see in Cecilia's statement are granddaughter seems to know what she likes to send her videos and photographs that will appeal to her, constructing bridges over the distance. To know or to find out these points of connection, interaction is needed, which may occur when they can finally meet in person.

Thus, another way to reduce the distance is the vacation trip to the country of origin by mothers and grandchildren to visit grandparents and family members. Grandfather Arnaldo said that when his granddaughter comes to his house during her vacation, he dedicates himself to spending time with her and pampering her:

“When my granddaughter comes, I do everything for her. She likes to lie on the hammock on the terrace and then I sit beside her and tell stories... I also buy sweet bread and chocolate milk and so we spend many afternoons. The house is empty when they leave, but it is a joy when they arrive”.

As seen, it is done the most out of the short time they have together, what also points out to a certain routine interruption, when Arnaldo says that he does everything he can during this time she is there. We may question if it is a sacrifice during this time to actually put away all duties and be available for the person who normally is not there. Granddaughter Elena also reported on trips to Brazil, with happiness and points out the closeness during the short time they have:

“I was very happy when I went on vacation to Brazil to meet my grandmother again ... I always stayed at her house, so even though we were not close physically for most of the year, when we were together it was really close. In the same house ... doing everything together, and mostly talking a lot. It was a short time, but it was something very nice, intense and I don't know ... I felt her love for me a lot”.

Both grandfather Arnaldo and granddaughter Elena try to make the best use of the opportunities for coexistence established during the holidays. But, in both testimonies we see the need to make full use of the time they have, that will fuel their relationship for another long period of time apart. During this time connection points are traced and intensified to make sure the relation keeps alive. We may also question if this relationship closeness that is out of the routine for all involved may be to a certain extent idealized, as everything is done the best way possible but only for a short period of time.

The travelling goes both ways, as the participating grandmothers also said that they travel to Switzerland annually, or at most every two years, in order to see their daughters and grandchildren. Considering that travel requires good health, we can see that their age is not very advanced (Table 3). For them the travel means to be able to exercise on sight their mother function with their children, as well as their grandmother role with grandchildren, what seems to complement their virtual relationship. Their travel has the aim of helping with the care of the grandchildren during this period of visit. Grandmothers Cecilia and Marta share their experience:

“I've been to Switzerland seven times, it's a beautiful country. So, I get close to my granddaughter and have the opportunity to help my daughter” (Grandmother Cecilia).

“I’ve been to Switzerland many times, because I have two daughters there. When my granddaughter migrated, I went too and stayed about six months for her to get used to it. She was so attached to me... And later when my other daughter had children, and I went both times to help. When it’s possible I go every year” (Grandmother Martha).

As seen in the speeches above, grandmothers enjoy their trips and also feel needed, what apparently is something that boosts their relationships with the migrant generations. And indeed they are needed as a support of help during adaptation and throughout life in different ways.

This movement of grandparents coming and going, more or less regularly between the country of origin and the country where their grandchildren live, in this research between Brazil and Switzerland and vice versa, was conceptualized by [Nedelcu \(2017\)](#) as the “Generation 0” of migration or also “flying grandparents” by [Plaza \(2000\)](#). Possibly these trips even become “spontaneous rituals”, as [Falicov \(2001\)](#) denominates them, with the aim of strengthening ties between family members and getting to know each other. Although the term “spontaneous” may not fit for an international trip, the repetition denotes a spontaneous ritual in the sense that it becomes a ritual by its willing repetition by the grandparents in order to minimize their absence.

## Transnational Relationships

Grandparents seem to play a special role in the relationship grandchildren have with the country of origin, even if they are geographically distant. The transnational relationship between grandparents and grandchildren seems to favour bridges between the two cultures in which family members find themselves. However, it is noted that due to the approach to Brazil more in the form of tourism, one of the interviewed mothers highlighted that the country is seen from a more idealized angle: “They know the beautiful side of Brazil” (Mother Juliana). Which leads to questions about the extent to which relations both with Brazil and with family members are idealized due to distance.

In general, it can be noted that grandparents are proud to talk about the qualities of their grandchildren who live in Switzerland, as can be seen in Grandfather Arnaldo's speech: “My granddaughter speaks four languages: German, French, English and Portuguese very well. You know, I never thought she was going to get so close to us, even growing up and living so far away”. In this report, it is possible to see the grandfather's pride about his granddaughter, but also the affection he feels for her, due to her proximity to the family. It is also noteworthy that for this proximity to happen, the grandfather emphasized the fact that the granddaughter knows the Portuguese language. Here we question, how much for Arnaldo's understanding does knowing the language also mean closeness, since the language appears to be a criterion for the relationship to develop.

The mothers' reports varied as to their children's fluency in the Portuguese language, and the grandchildren pointed out that they mainly speak the language with their grandparents. Grandparents become agents of preservation of language and culture. When there is no fluency in the language, contact becomes more difficult, as Grandmother Marta explains: "My grandchildren speak very little Portuguese, because they were too small when they went there. The place reference they have is more from there. When we speak, they mix the two languages and then my daughter helps me understand".

Both learning the Portuguese language, as well as contact with the family that remained in Brazil, will initially need the mediation of the Brazilian mother, which points to the importance of parents in the relationship, as explained by Pinazo and Montoro (2004). Roberto and Stroes (1992) had also emphasized that the quality of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren varies according to the parental connection. Thus, the participation of the intermediate generation (the parents) is essential for a good relationship between grandparents and grandchildren.

Nevertheless, it is through this transnational relationship between grandparents and grandchildren that cultural inheritances are passed on, such as regional recipes or cultural traditions. The granddaughter Cintia said, for example: "I learned to cook with my grandmother ... I like to make Brazilian foods. I love making 'feijoada'. Even my boyfriend already likes it. When it's a party day, I always make and invite my mother". Grandmother Paula also said: "Sometimes they ask for recipes for the food I make, I'm happy to see that they like my food and maybe miss it... and that they want to learn how to do it the same way".

Transnational relations probably favour the construction of the grandchildren's bicultural identity, who end up feeling Swiss and Brazilian, may it be more like in a divided way or in an integrated way. As Nilson explains: "I am divided, I like it here and I like it there". Renata says: "I'm both, I'm Swiss, but my heart is Brazilian". One of the interviewed mothers highlighted how impressed she is to see her son move easily in both worlds:

"It is wonderful to see how he moves in both worlds without any problems. It seems that it is possible to bring together the best of both worlds ... to be Brazilian in generosity, spontaneity and respect for multiculturalism ... to be Swiss in disciplined behavior, practical ways and focused on personal investment".

It is interesting to note that mothers also observe this bicultural identity in their children, the mixture of cultures, whether in physical traits or personal characteristics. Patricia says: "He is open and spontaneous, he likes physical contact, but he also likes to plan everything and is extremely punctual". The mothers highlighted the challenge that it is to live between the two cultures: "It is a challenge to be a Brazilian mother in Switzerland ... to teach our language, culture, stories, relationships ... not to lose the root of being



also Brazilian, even living here in Switzerland” (Mother Fernanda). Being a transnational grandparent is also seen as a challenge, but grandmother Cecilia highlights: “Being a grandmother to a granddaughter who lives in Switzerland is fancy... (laughs)... it is also a challenge, but with willpower we can get close, even when we are far away”.

## Final Considerations

This study sought to understand the transnational relationship between grandparents who remained in the country of origin and their migrant grandchildren. Transnational grandparents seek the most different ways to relate to their grandchildren. Whether through mobility (travel) or immobility (ICTs). Given the results of this research, it can be said that communication via information technologies and travel complement each other in terms of proximity in the relationship and between grandparents and their migrant grandchildren. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in the context of migration seems to be established in a systematic way, primarily through the mediation of the Brazilian mother so that this relationship is solidified. Subsequently, the relationship can be centered between grandparents and grandchildren, regardless of the middle generation (of the mothers).

The migration of mothers to Switzerland influenced all generations involved, that is, for themselves, as first-generation migrants, for their parents and other relatives, who stay in the country and became transnational grandparents, and for their children, the second-generation migrants. It is important to highlight that migration has consequences when intertwining the three generations that seek connection wires to keep together, despite the distance. The feelings of longing are added to the challenges of acculturation to the new country, without neglecting Brazilian cultural roots. For grandparents, feelings of ambivalence arise, since there is awareness of the opportunities presented to children who seek other experiences and, at the same time, there is a lack of physical contact with both, children and grandchildren.

In order to shorten the distances to be “grandparents at a distance”, family members use technologies to maintain communication. Grandparents are overcoming the challenge of exercising their transnational grandparenthood by creating possibilities to take care of their grandchildren from a distance. They use the activities of storytelling, singing, talking, and so they pass on not only the Brazilian culture but also the Portuguese language, the language of inheritance, which is important for construction of identity of migrant grandchildren. Another way to shorten the distance are the vacation trips of grandparents to Switzerland, becoming generation 0 of migrants, in a movement from here to there to take care of their grandchildren. In addition to that, they also receive their grandchildren with great pleasure on their vacation in Brazil, which allows a closer and more intense coexistence, for a short time, but which ends up leaving cultural and emotional marks on all involved.

The transnational relationship presents itself in singular ways, since they are opportunities created by those involved to nurture the relationship. Through the relationship, knowledge is passed on, from grandparents to grandchildren, for example, inheritances and family histories, cultural traditions and the inheritance language itself. Nevertheless, grandchildren also pass on knowledge to their grandparents by sharing their multiculturalism, providing information from the daily life in the other country and also the technological knowledge that seems to make the relationship possible.

The language shared between grandparents and grandchildren is essential for the transnational relationship to occur. Although the Portuguese spoken by grandchildren varies considerably in their level of performance, it is noteworthy that grandparents and grandchildren have managed to strengthen emotional bonds and feel loved. It is observed that there is an admiration between grandparents and grandchildren that suggests the question of the extent to which distance can foster mutual idealization. However, it cannot be denied that the transnational relationship between them is involved by a lot of affection, perhaps even as a way of keeping that family member close on an emotional level.

The methodology using interviews with the three generations involved in the migration was fundamental to obtain an intergenerational view of transnational grandparenthood. It is also thoughtworthy to mention the majority female sample in the study, possibly pointing out to the female migration phenomenon. As far as it did influence their perception of the migration context, the authors argue that maybe grandmothers and mothers may have a more affective view on the relations that were developed. We recognize the limits of this research, since it was about middle-class grandparents, who have the possibility to have access to technologies and travel. There are other issues to be further investigated, such as: the relationship with migrant grandparents and grandchildren in low-income families; whether there are changes in the relationship according to the age of the grandchildren; how grandparents perceive the relationship with migrant grandchildren and those living in the same country; how is the quality of the relationship between grandparents and parents; what the parent's participation was, which were not mentioned or deepened in the present investigation. These are some possibilities and curiosities, resulting from this study, that remain open.

The contribution of this research to the understanding of transnational grandparenthood is that intergenerational bonds may develop and constitute an affectionate tie between grandchildren and grandparents going beyond geographical distance. The transmission of intergenerational legacies through contact by ICTs and occasional travel seems to be successful and valuable for all family members involved. We believe that this study pointed to the establishment of an affective bond between grandparents and grandchildren that goes beyond geographical distances and possible cultural barriers. Grandparents assume an important place as agents of the cultural matrix for grandchildren who migrated as children, facilitating the possibility of building relationships

between the “there and here” of the two countries. We hope that this article can motivate further research on the topic, since migration and the consequent transnational grandparenthood constitutes a challenge of seeking new ways of being family, extending over two countries, as Marcel Proust said: “The true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes”.

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