Ethnicity, Assimilation and Transnationalism: a Comparative Study of Eastern European Migration to the United States (1940-2012)

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ETHNICITY, ASSIMILATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN MIGRATION
TO THE UNITED STATES (1940-2012)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY
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CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words hardly can express my gratitude to Dr. Judith Wittner, my dissertation chair and mentor from my first day on at Loyola, for her continuing encouragement and tremendous support over the years I spent as a graduate student, and for her commitment to share her passion and expertise for qualitative research that helped me transform my data collection of immigrant stories into a dissertation.

I would further like to express my deepest appreciation to all of my professors in the Department of Sociology at Loyola University of Chicago, with special thanks to the late Dr. Peter Whaley for being a superb teacher and for offering me the first opportunity for an assistantship in the department; a position that made all the difference to me at that time. To the members of my committee: Dr. Marilyn Krogh, whose mentoring over the years strengthened my discipline and work ethic and to Dr. Rhys Williams for the new perspectives and insights offered to me at the time of the proposal defense. Thank you all for your patience, time, and guidance and above all for your confidence in me.

Special appreciation to the faculties in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Purdue University Calumet for fostering my development as a student, and as a teacher over the past ten years. Two of my department heads, Michael Flannery and Anne Edwards, provided guidance and support that were crucial to helping me through this journey. Dr. Ralph Cherry, my first sociology professor, responsible for my love for sociology, Dr. David Raden, for his encouragement and mentoring over the years, and
last but not least, Dr. Alan Spector for his invaluable mentoring, infinite patience and trustworthy friendship. None of my accomplishments as a scholar would have been possible without your support. Thank you.

I am thankful to the Graduate School at Loyola University of Chicago for supporting me during my graduate studies, with assistantships for four years and for honoring me with a Dissertation Fellowship in my fourth year, which allowed me to focus on the completion of my work.

To Roy Hamilton, director of the Ronald McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program, many thanks for the opportunity to be part of this program, both as a scholar, and later on as a mentor; this role allowed me to pass along the legacy of this program with all its benefits for prospective graduate students.

Much gratitude to all of my respondents of this study, Eastern European immigrants who had the trust and thoughtfulness to share with me a major chapter of their lives, their immigration story, and for all the courage they had throughout this endeavor. Many of the respondents of the pre-communist group are not with U.S. anymore, but their stories and memory will be with me forever. Thank you all and each of you.

Special thanks to abbess Mother Gabriella and the monastic community in Rives Junction, Michigan, for their kindness and inspirational way of life, no less for their hospitality during these years; in the solitude of the monastery I wrote my best pages of the dissertation. There, I also had the chance to meet many Orthodox immigrants and to learn about the role of religion in their lives.
To my dear parents, who despite all obstacles, made the effort to be with me when I needed them the most, and to help me out during my years in school: Multumesc--

Thank you. I only learned to truly appreciate your help, Mom, when you could not travel anymore. Now it is I who will be visiting more often.

For bringing happiness to every second of my life, for motivating me to be the best I could be as a mother, student and teacher, thank you, my little Carina.
To Carina:

This is a part of a story of Eastern European immigrants, people who leave their home land to come to America, in the hope of a better life for themselves and their children. Because your parents are two of them, I thought, one day, you would like to learn about these.
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ABSTRACT

Transnationalism is a relatively new pattern of migration; the process by which transnationalism has supplanted assimilation has been the subject of this study, and it has been done by comparing the immigration experience of Eastern Europeans, before and after the demise of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

The study employed a qualitative methodology with a total of sixty one respondents divided in two groups from Eastern Europe – a “pre-communist wave” and a “post-communist wave” – who shared their migration stories through in-depth tape recorded interviews. The study emphasizes the different experiences between the two waves, first, by taking into account the socio-economic and political contexts of the sending and receiving countries, and second by tracing these experiences throughout from the lenses of ethnicity and assimilation theories to the transnationalist perspective.

Transnationalism is a concept that has distinctive features when compared to circular migration. There are people from Eastern Europe who are engaged in circular migration, mostly to Western European countries. This implies temporary work and living in Western Europe, traveling back and forth, mainly for the purpose of better economic advancement.

In contrast, the transnational migrants are mostly permanent residents of the host country, in this case, the United States. Therefore, while they reside physically in one
place, they are involved economically, socially and politically in both the host and the home country. This distinctive feature of transnationalism is often possible both because of the socio-political context of the home and host country of residence, and because of the higher level of human capital these recent immigrants possess.

The significance of this project, beyond the immediate focus on the comparative study over time of Eastern European migration to United States, is to develop the understanding of the notion of immigration and its effects on American society beyond the traditional view of American society as a “country of immigrants”, contrasting immigration before and after the recently accelerated globalization, and using the transnational framework to advance theoretical understand of immigration patterns now and in the future.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In the context of new and developing democracies in Eastern and Central Europe, research accounts of the experience of the new wave of migrants from the post-communist states are very scarce. Recent Eastern European scholarship on migration focuses on the dynamics surrounding the ethnicity of migrant populations, rather than gender, race or class, and puts emphasis on the link between internal and external migration. Compared to the extensive research on the earliest waves of Eastern European migrations to the United States (U.S.) and the current focus on recent waves of immigrants from Latin America and Asia, little attention has been given to the Eastern European coming to U.S. after the fall of the Soviet bloc.

My dissertation will explore the life experiences of two groups of immigrants coming to the United States from Eastern Europe: those migrating during and shortly after WWII and those migrating in the post-Soviet era. While the previous waves of Eastern European migration are well researched within an assimilation framework, the sociological scholarship on immigration has very sparse accounts of the contemporary migration from Eastern Europe, and no comparative study has been undertaken of Eastern European immigration before and after the inauguration of the communist regime in this area of the world. Such a comparison offers a way to better conceptualize the emerging idea of transnationalism in the sociology literature and public understanding.
According to Morawska (2003), transnationalism refers to the “civic-political membership, economic involvements, social networks, and cultural identities of (im)migrants and their offspring extending across state-national boundaries and linking people and institutions in two or more locations.” Transnationalism, and its U.S. as an analytical tool to explain processes of immigration, is not simply a patching together of the older theories of assimilation or ethnic solidarity, taking bits and pieces from each. Rather, it contains aspects of both but synthesizes them in a completely new way that reflects the new socio-political-economic processes of the past few decades. The idea of transnationalism is being used more frequently in recent studies (Morawska, 2005, 2008; Ong, 1999; Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1994; Sianatti, 2008), but those studies are generally limited to migration between countries in close proximity to each other, such as Mexico and the United States or neighboring European countries. Moreover, those studies use rather broad and incomplete measures of transnationalism, and sometimes transnationalism is simply a synonym for improved transportation and communication technologies.

In my dissertation, I will contest the idea that transnationalism is a completely new phenomenon, (Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1995), and show how many features of transnationalism manifested in both the previous and present Eastern European patterns of immigration to America. Moreover, I will show how transnationalism does (or does not) help to interpret the immigration experience of Eastern European women and families coming to United States. To date, scarce research delves into the experience of women migrants from the post-communist states. The scant existing research focuses on
the role of ethnicity, rather than gender, and emphasizes the links between internal and external migration in Eastern Europe, rather than the growing circular migration between Eastern Europe and America.

In summary, my study will aim to answer the following questions: (1) What is the context and the experience of Eastern European migration today, and how does it compare with the post WW II migration? (2) What are the gendered aspects of contemporary Eastern European migration and what is the impact of migration on families and children? (3) How can the study of contemporary Eastern European migration help to critique and develop theories of transnationalism?

This study will contribute to the immigration scholarship by filling the void on literature of Eastern European migration to the U.S., employing a comparative historical method, and the new theoretical perspective of transnationalism. It will discuss the changed role of religion and ethnic community between the two waves of immigrants and analyze the gendered experience of migration and its consequences for the Eastern European families, along with the racial identity as perceived by Eastern Europeans.

**Significance of the Study**

Globalization has led to a huge surge in immigration all over the world. Capital flows, communication, and especially the need for inexpensive labor have dissolved borders and intensified the natural processes of the “shrinking planet.” Our understanding of immigration patterns – the why, the how, the “push and pull” factors and the consequences of immigration are based on more traditional patterns especially during the period when industrialization in Western Europe and North America lured permanent
immigrants from especially Eastern Europe and also Asia, Latin America and Africa to the rapidly industrializing centers. Cold War politics also played a role, although it has primarily been attempts to control the labor flow, sometimes encouraging, sometimes discouraging, that has been the main factor.

In the past two decades, the end of the Cold War and the changing nature of the economy in the U.S.A. and Western Europe have changed these patterns. This can be seen especially in the deindustrialization of those economies and the rise of businesses that rely on more fluid labor forces. Large scale industries have somewhat been replaced as profit-machines and magnets for immigrants by smaller factories, and by financial, medical, and various other white collar and pink collar “service industries.” These jobs may not be as dirty or dangerous as the jobs of the last century, but they are often more insecure, vulnerable to rapid changes in the economy. Furthermore, the term “service industries” could, very loosely, be applied to many jobs in the informal sector – hotel and restaurant employment, janitorial work, and certain kinds of semi-legal and illegal employment, including construction, domestic labor and sexual exploitation of various types. The rise of smaller business and some of these “informal” jobs as quick profit-makers has lured impoverished people from other countries and made them vulnerable to human trafficking and extreme forms of exploitation.

My comparative study of earlier and later immigration can lead to better understanding the economic and political developments in the home country and in the host country and will provide a more accurate framework for understanding these newer migration patterns, from the professional to those trapped in super-exploited coerced
situations. The changing role of women in these processes is a particularly important change to explore. I hope to provide a better understanding of the current processes of cultural assimilation, family stability, and religious practices and those forces which have created an increase in “circular migration” – something that was not common among European immigrants in the past. Eastern Europe is a particularly interesting case because it was neither “First World” (the rich countries), nor “Third World,” but rather had a relatively educated population, somewhat industrialized economies, but where the collapse of state socialism caused a sudden disruption of the lives of many people. I hope and expect that my study will be a stepping stone to a better understanding of the situations in the home countries, the “mind set” of the new immigrants and the problems of adjusting to life in the United States, both in the less desperate, but still problematic lives of the professionals and the more desperate lives of those trapped in the informal economy. A dissertation is a launch pad to a career of future work. I see this dissertation as my launch pad to a career working academically and with community groups to help immigrants and others secure their human rights by developing an understanding of those social forces and social processes which undermine and also those which can strengthen the kinds of communities that will make for a more humane society.

**Theoretical Framework**

From a theoretical standpoint, the experience of immigrants in general, and of Eastern European immigrants in particular, has been largely understood at the macro level with the conventional “push and pull” theory and at the micro-level constrained by the assimilationist model. The classical assimilationist theory (Gordon, 1964) as
appropriate for some second generation immigrants in the early 1960’s, but it is not adequate as a universal model of assimilation. He was writing at a time when economic prosperity, growth and employment was high in the “middle working class” (industrial sector), however the today patterns of assimilation have been changed first by the changes in the economical context of the host country (the decline of the industrial sector of the economy) and second by the socio-economic and political changes that occur in the native country of the first generation of immigrants.

Furthermore, the increases in highly educated immigrants which quickly integrate themselves in the labor market, “skipping” the first step of cultural assimilation, contradict Gordon’s argument that structural assimilation of the first generation of immigrants arriving as adults is “both impossible and undesirable” (Gordon, 1964, p. 242). Similarly, not all new immigrants are so enthusiastic to accept the cultural values of mainstream white American society.

Alba and Nee (2003) provide a critical review of the assimilation theory, demonstrating the continuity of importance of assimilation today, but also the ways in which immigrants have profoundly changed the mainstream culture in their process of becoming Americans, to the point where the concept of mainstream culture has become blurred. In the U.S.A., the post-1965 immigration has been the subject of many of these theoretical discussions; it was based on immigration more from Asia and Latin America, rather than Europe. This dramatically changed the face of immigration and the experiences of those waves now coming from Asia and Latin America, challenged the assimilation paradigm (Alba, 1997; Alba & Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964; Handlin, 1951;
Park & Burgess, 1926; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927) and stimulated the development of new ones. These theories, segmented assimilation (Portes & Rubbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993), racialized ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Morawska, 2008) and transnationalism (Morawska, 2005; Ong, 1999; Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1994; Sianatti, 2008) reject the assimilationist perspective and frame the current experience of immigration into a new light.

However, most of these theories have been applied to those waves of immigrants from Asia and Latin America that actually inspired the research for them but not to the Eastern European immigrants to the U.S. The latest research on Eastern European migration to the U.S. (Robila, 2010) employed an integrated theoretical framework that applies migration theories, assimilation and human capital theories to investigate the experience of these current immigrants and their family experiences. Human capital theory, discussed more throughout this study, explains the degree of adaptation of new immigrants as contingent upon their level of education and labor market skills (Borjas, 1990). But one of the limitations of human capital theory becomes noticeable when the aspect of acculturation (Massey et al., 1998) is taken into account (learning the language and culture) and when labor market skills may not be transferable unless English is proficient. Furthermore the degrees and certifications immigrants hold from the home country might not be transferable to the U.S.

This dissertation, then, attempts to apply the new transnational model to more comprehensively and accurately understand the immigration experience of Eastern European families who migrated to the United States after the collapse of the Communist
regimes. Second, it integrates the macro-structural context by presenting the mediating role of women who either returned home or who engaged in circular migration in shaping the socio-cultural environment of their home countries. I will also look at the effects of immigration on Eastern European migrant women, and the ways in which their immigration experiences advance feminist ideas and practices in their home countries including – the form it takes in the context of the new developing democracies in Eastern Europe.

The Socio-Historical Context of Eastern European Migration

Broadly described, there have been four major historical waves of immigration from Eastern Europe: the first wave from 1880-1921, the second wave from 1921 to 1945, the third wave from 1945-1989, and the fourth and most recent one, after 1990 (Robila, 2010, p. 17). Besides the socio-economic and political contexts that have shaped these immigrant waves and their settlement patterns abroad, there are a few major variables that have to be taken into account when describing the diversity of these immigrant ethnic groups; a diversity that influences their migration and adaptation patterns.

One major variable is the geographical division of the Eastern European region into five major areas: the Baltic States, Transcaucasia, former Soviet States, Central Eastern Europe, and South Eastern Europe. The second variable presents the cultural

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1This study-mainly focuses on the following countries: the former U.S.R (including Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine), Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia.

2Different agencies and organizations developed strategies of theoretically dividing the Eastern European map in order to serve their own research interests.
elements of language and religion. In terms of geographical location, for example, conditions created in Europe during the First and Second World Wars and then the proximity to the Soviet Union later on, have directly affected the patterns of emigration from different regions of Eastern Europe. But these patterns need to be analyzed in conjunction with the cultural identities of people living in these territories.

The largest ethnic and linguistic group in Eastern Europe is made up of Slavs, but they fall into two main categories in terms of their religion: the Christian Eastern Orthodox (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Macedonians) and those associated with the Roman Catholic Church (Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Slovenes, and Croats). Bosnians-a smaller group generally practice Islam (Robila, 2010, p. 18). The data collected for this study includes respondents migrating to the United States before and after the instauration of the communist regime, from the former Soviet States of Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine as well as from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia.

**Overview of the Chapters**

For my study I developed a typology based on the differences found between two groups of Eastern European immigrants, before and after the establishment of the Communist regimes in the area of Eastern Europe, in relation to their religious life and the roles these play in their migration experience. The immigrants who came during WWII or shortly after will be referred as the “pre-communist” (although historically, of course, there were Eastern Europeans who are not subjects of this study who came many decades earlier). Most of them emigrated before the instauration of the Communist
regimes in the area of Eastern Europe, although some did emigrate very shortly after those regimes were established. The "post-communist" wave refers to those coming to U.S. after 1989, after the collapse of the Communist regimes in the area of Eastern Europe. My data show some specific patterns of how members of each of these two waves have shaped their religious lives within the context of their immigration and of how their religious background has shaped their immigration experience.

Chapter Three compares the religious life of the two waves of Eastern European immigrants and the changed role of the institution of Orthodox Church in America. The immigrants coming to the United States during WWII or shortly after identified themselves with their ethnic community that gathered around the Orthodox Christian churches (which they often established), and the church facilitated their assimilation into American society. By contrast, the most recent wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe, coming after the fall of the Communist regimes, did not gather around a church-based ethnic community, and the church did not facilitate their assimilation process, a process that has become less essential than in the past. This change was in part due to transformations in the Orthodox practice of religion in America. Those transformations including adopting a congregational polity, separating religion from culture, the growth of ecumenism among all Orthodox churches, and a greater social inclusiveness (many born and raised Americans have been converted to various Orthodox churches in the past ten years).

Many parents interviewed for this study look for help from their church to raise their children in their ethnic heritage and Orthodox tradition, but they also want to
prepare their children for a more transnational life. However, many of those churches established by the earlier immigrants have been transformed over time, and have become less concerned with their ethnic identity and more engaged in promoting Orthodox faith. Consequently, there is a mismatch between the parents’ expectations and the orientation of contemporary Orthodox churches in America.

Chapter Four explores the experiences related to employment and social networks established by Eastern European immigrants. The earlier waves of Eastern-European immigrants relied on the ethnic community and its church as their starting point in seeking employment and a place of residence. The employment of post-communist immigrants from Eastern Europe has been more contingent upon their educational background and their previous work experience. The church and the ethnic community continues to be a starting place for immigrants in working class jobs, but not for professionals with higher levels of education. Those immigrants have been coming to the United States with either a student, resident visa or an employment contract signed before emigration.

Unlike the earlier immigrant generation, among working class families of the post-communist wave (post-1990), the husband has a difficult time finding stable employment, while the wife starts in an entry-level position in a service or clerical job where she might receive opportunities for advancement in her career. This reflects the structural changes in the U.S. economy and to the cultural to a more gender egalitarian society. Therefore, the majority of male respondents of this study, regardless of their
education and job status, expressed more dissatisfaction with family life, than the men of
the previous wave.

Both earlier and later immigrants experienced racial tension within their neighborhood and work place. As members of an ethnic minority group, they experienced some prejudice and discrimination, but as members the majority white race, they also learned prejudice and discrimination against non-whites. Elements of color blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and vestiges of explicit racism are blended in the approach to race as experienced by the post-communist wave.

Chapter Five visits the families of Eastern European immigrants, discussing the patterns of family formation in the two waves, the gender roles in Eastern Europe and the elements of transnationalism as experienced by the post-communist wave. The pre-communist wave often started having children right before or immediately after immigration. Typically, while both spouses were employed, the father was the “breadwinner,” and they were preoccupied with raising American citizens who would face less discrimination in the future than they experienced.

Unlike their predecessors preoccupied with raising assimilated “American” citizens, immigrants in today’s more multicultural context are interested to expose their children to both cultures simultaneously and to raise children who would be able to adapt and accommodate their future life to any other part of the world. They believe that this cultural heritage should be preserved and carried with the individual not only as a cultivation of the nationalistic spirit, or as a resistance to assimilation but as a skill necessary to develop and maintain a transnational experience.
Chapter Six focuses on role of education, especially for the post-communist wave of Eastern Europeans. During the communist era many citizens saw in education an opportunity for empowerment to make change in their life, through a career or to emigrate or even to oppose the regime. After 1989, the fall of the communist regime, and with the transition to a market economy, many people found themselves unemployed and in a society where advanced education was beneficial only if accompanied by a strong social network that would help further economic advancement. Eastern Europeans who chose emigration, continue to value education and try to pass their cultural and intellectual heritage to their children. Some reasons include: ethnic-cultural preservation, the ability to prepare them for the increasingly globalized labor market and to equip them for an eventual transnational life. The interviews show very interesting ways in which these parents are involved in their children’s education. Many of the respondents have the hope of their children attending an elite university in the U.S. or Western European country, where they can apply based in their dual citizenship.

The discriminatory labor markets also push women from well-paid professions toward lower paid service sector jobs or into domestic work, where there has been a steady demand in the “Western” capitalist countries.

Personal accounts of respondents in this study confirm that, regardless of the level of education, women develop more independence and autonomy after migration, and this results in their exercise of more power in the family.

The last chapter is the conclusion of the dissertation and presents a review of the main distinctions between the experiences of Eastern European immigration to the
United States. It emphasizes the difference made by employing the transnationalist view of these experiences. This chapter ends with suggestions for further comparative research of Eastern European and other immigrant groups to which the transnational perspective has been applied so far in immigration scholarship.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Data Collection Procedures

Over the course of five years, 25 men and women who emigrated from Eastern Europe during WWII or short after and 36 men and women who emigrated after 1990 shared their migration stories through in-depth tape recorded interviews (see Appendix C). Of the total of 61 respondents, 16 women were part of the pre-communist wave and 20 women part of the post-communist wave. Nine men were pre-communist immigrants and 16 men, part of the post-communist wave. The countries of emigration of these respondents were: Romania, Russia and the former U.S.S.R. states of Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and the states of former Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Macedonia. At the time of emigration, respondents’ ages ranged from 16 to 25 for the first group with a median age of 23 and from 22 to 40 for the second group with a median age of 26.

Following IRB approval obtained in December 2008, I used the snowball technique to select a non-random sample of respondents in the United States. Participant observation method and data gathered through informal conversations with new immigrants during the past five years at various Orthodox churches and monasteries in the areas of Chicago, Northwest Indiana and Michigan allowed me to understand aspects
of the dynamic processes related to immigration and settlement of individuals and families coming from Eastern Europe.

The interviews took place in a public space (such as a church, monastery, public library building, coffee shop, Eastern European shop, or book store) at the convenience of the respondents. While I simply took notes on some interviews, I made audio recordings and transcribed the in-depth interviews. Prior to the interview each participant signed an informed consent form that explained the purpose and procedure of the study, as well as their rights and confidentiality. After the forms were signed, a semi-structured interview with 25 open-ended questions was conducted. On average, the interviews lasted between 60-120 minutes. All except one interview (that had been translated, transcribed and coded in English) occurred in English; however, the informal conversations were conducted in both English and Romanian languages in the Romanian communities.

The interview questions (see Appendix B) for the study were originally generated during a class project for the course on “interviewing” taken during the last year of classes as a graduate student. They were further developed based on the review of the literature on Eastern European immigration, various studies of transnational migration, and suggestions from the members of the dissertation committee during the proposal meeting held in January 2011.

The data collection and analysis for this study were performed simultaneously. I transcribed the interviews within a few days of their completion. Soon after transcription, I performed the open coding, with the purpose of identifying and developing concepts in the interview data. Based on preliminary findings and emerging themes, the literature
review was updated to address these themes of religion, ethnic identity, community, adaptation, language, education, gender, family and work that remained in the final analysis of the data.

The findings are limited both geographically and by the fact that the sample is not stratified by any other variables other than time of emigration and country of origin. Considering these limitations and the narrow literature on recent Eastern European migration, this exploratory study, rather than making generalizations about the overall experience of immigrants from Eastern Europe, aims to point to the issues that emerge from this data collection and to draw trajectories for future research of this immigrant group, perhaps with some aspects that can be generalized to other immigrant groups as well.
CHAPTER THREE
ETHNICITY, ASSIMILATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM:
THE CHANGING ROLE OF CHURCHES IN THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Introduction: The Two Waves of Eastern European Immigration to the U.S.

This chapter examines the identities, ethnic and religious community formation and cultural expression of Eastern European immigrants. As I described in the last chapter, the two waves of Eastern European immigrants, as individuals and as groups, experienced contradictory processes of assimilation and ethnic retention in the same context, contingent upon the time of their emigration. The immigrants coming to the United States during WWII or shortly after identified themselves with their ethnic community that typically gathered around the church (which they often established) and used it as a tool in their process of assimilation within the larger society.

For the most of the history of migration to the U.S., the process of assimilation has been seen as a necessary and desirable path to be taken by most immigrant groups, including the Eastern Europeans. Economic assimilation generally is an adjustment more common to the first generation (which may include parents and their children and perhaps even their grandchildren); it is the economic progress that helps the immigrants raise their standard of living and offers the opportunity for a better education to their children which in turn opens the way to structural assimilation, or integration for the future generations.
The next step, *cultural assimilation*, implies a deeper absorption of the cultural traits of the new environment and the modification of old customs which are not in harmony with the environment. It also implies the complete adoption and use of English language, the familiarization and adoption of American ideals and utilization of American institutions. To such an extent, this complete cultural assimilation was nearly impossible for the first generation.

The furthest step, *ethnic assimilation*, is “reserved” through the practice of intermarriage, and it had been found to be a more common practice among the second-generation immigrants (Galitzi, 1929).

Coming after the fall of the communist regimes, the most recent wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe experienced, in more marginal and different ways than their predecessors, the connection with their ethno-religious community. One difference was that their connection to a religious community did not help their assimilation process.

Furthermore, for the most recent Eastern European groups, the process of cultural and ethnic assimilation has become less imperative now than it was in the past. One explanation is provided by the level of human capital (language proficiency, level of education and professional skills they possess), much superior than their predecessors, which has allowed them to skip the traditional stages of assimilation. Instead, religion helped them to connect to their cultural roots and to maintain their ethnic identity. Today it is more difficult for this function to be performed by the ethnic churches, especially the Orthodox churches, which often also have experienced a decades-long process of assimilation and adaptation themselves in favor of sustaining the religious core mission.
Consequently, the new immigrants experience religious life and ethnic community in complex and different ways from previous generations.

In the past few decades most ethnically-based Orthodox churches have experienced a process of assimilation and adaptation themselves with a more cosmopolitan, ethnically diverse membership within particular parishes. I will discuss the process of assimilation of ethnic churches and the structural changes produced over time later in the chapter, yet this finding is echoed by Steinberg (1989), in his discussion on the challenges of ethnicity and assimilation. He explains two simultaneous processes: the adaptation of the ethnic culture to American life by the earlier generation on one hand, and the transformation of the ethnic culture in the native country during the process of modernization, on the other hand. Therefore the later generation of newcomers meet an “Americanized version of their own culture” while the latest generation of young people born in the ethnic community know this as the only “valid” ethnic culture. Steinberg refers to this experience as the “incongruity between the culture of the home country and that of the hyphenated Americans.”

Nonetheless, Steinberg (1989) mentioned family, religion and community as the main three instruments of preserving the cultural values, yet little attention has been given to recognition of the depth of religion on preserving the cultural values of the ethnic group.

A second challenging aspect of Steinberg’s (1989) study is the claim that, “Indeed, throughout American history ethnicity has been preserved most authentically by these groups who, for one reason or another, have remained economically marginal” (p.
This statement disagrees with his concept of “crises of identity” which arise in immigrants and therefore drives them to identify with their ethnic community, regardless of their level of economic success. Moreover, I would challenge the statement based on other studies that argue that even immigrants with a high level of economic and social success in their American experience, often continue to identify themselves with their ethnic group, as a tool to adjust to the prevalent diverse society.

Nevertheless, the book makes important points, showing the flexibility of ethnic categories as being affected by other social forces, but not going to the extreme of denying that those ethnic categories do exert an influence on social organization.

The larger majority of Eastern Europeans are Orthodox and the entire sample of my respondents identifies themselves with the Orthodox religion. For my study I developed a typology based on the differences found between two groups of Eastern European immigrants, before and after the establishment of the communist regime in the area of Eastern Europe, in relation to their religious life and the roles these play in their migration experience. The immigrants who came during WWII or shortly after will be referred as the “pre-communist” (although historically, of course, there were Eastern Europeans who came many decades earlier, but they are not subjects of this study), but the ones emigrating before the instauration of the communist regimes in the area of Eastern Europe, and the “post-communist” or those coming to U.S. after 1989, after the dismissal of the communist regime in the area of Eastern Europe. My data show some specific patterns of how members of each of these two waves have shaped their religious
lives within the context of their immigration and of how their religious background has shaped their immigration experience.

**The First Generation of Pre-Communist Wave of Immigrants from Eastern Europe: The Importance of the Church**

For the pre-communist wave of immigrants, the ethnic and religious community was an integral part of their emigration story. The church community functioned as a buffer between the new immigrants and the host society, and a main tool in the assimilation process of the immigrants. It created the opportunity for the immigrants to express their beliefs, unlike in the home country. Indeed, freedom of religion is part of the immigration story of many other newcomers to America. Hence, their religious practices and spiritual life have also been shaped by the overall immigration experience, the adaption to the host society as individuals and as groups, and to the reshaping of the church institution, that performed more complex functions in the U.S., beyond the spiritual enrichment, than it did in the home country. Here are some of the accounts of immigration from Eastern Europe as experienced by those coming during the WWII or short after:

The departure and arrival “harbor” that anchors the migration episode of the first waves of European immigrants was the church. As in the home country, their ethnic community was usually gathered around the church. In fact the church was both the departure and arrival point of their journey. The church’s doors (in the home country) opened and equipped the migrants’ departure through the community’s support and
fundraising. In the host country, they again opened wide, welcoming them in the host
country by awaiting the immigrants and helping them to adjust to the new land.

Mrs. Muntean reflected on the ways priests sent them off on their immigrants’
journey and welcomed them to their new home.

[...] (Before emigration) … we had some money, but we were sponsored by the
Church, we came to New York [...] and I think it was a priest and he sent us to
the train so we came to Gary, and in Gary, again, we were picked up by a priest
...and he took us to his house, very nice [...] (Arriving in U.S. in 1952).

Mrs. Muntean was born in 1927 in Germany and at age of 21 married a Romanian
citizen, who was in military service in Germany at time. She and her husband moved to
the U.S. in 1952. Her husband was worried about the expansion of the Russian regime
over the area where they were living at the time and wanted to leave. Her husband was
Orthodox and the family attended Orthodox churches, although Mrs. Muntean was a
Lutheran who never converted to the Orthodox faith herself. She enjoyed her spiritual life
in her native country and found it difficult to adapt to the ethnic and religious community
in the U.S. She explained that one of her difficulties was adapting to a “different
mentality,” a new way to express the spiritual life and the connection to the church
community. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Muntean has been in a more unique situation where she
had to adapt to both a new religion and to an ethnic community with which she had not
been familiar in the past. Nevertheless, during her lifetime as an immigrant, living in a
mixed marriage, she learned to adapt to the new ethnic community and its responsibilities
(perhaps in many ways better than members who belong by birth to the ethnic
community) and to use the resources offered by the church community. For example,
soon after arrival she had been helped by the people from the church to find her husband’s first job in the area where they settled:

[…] and my husband was looking for a job, and he got hired at Steel (Steel Mills of N-W Indiana), with the help of some people from back home, they were all busy working there…

I had a lot of help (from one Romanian neighbor), Ms. Muresan-- she was very, very generous, she gave us a bed to sleep […]

Mrs. Muntean’s paid occupation for most of her life was working night shifts for a bakery company:

Well, that is a long story… because I was called to the Immigration in Hammond to translate for some, after that was a teacher that want me to go and be a librarian.. but for me I was looking for something I can work nights because my son was small so that I can took care of him during the day, so I worked in a bakery …for a long time. {…} I have no idea (how many hours I worked per week), but it was like slavery.{} because there was no unions, you have to work 19-22 hours and if you don’t come back next day, they would fire you …[…] it was very hard.

Similar accounts of work saturated with competition, prejudice, and stereotypes among the Eastern European immigrants and other ethnic and racial minorities, as well as rigid and competitive relations with the dominant group will be further discussed on the subsequent chapter.

Mrs. Muntean learned how to navigate the path of being an immigrant into a religious and ethnic community different from her own. Often in our conversations, she remembered to point out that although she has never converted to from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy, she fulfilled all of the responsibilities as a wife and a church member that were expected from a women married to an Orthodox husband. She explained her move
into a new religion by saying that her spirituality is based on the belief that there are many religions, but only one God to whom people are accountable.

There are other similar examples in my sample of mixed marriages between Romanian men and German women, since many of the men drafted in the military had been sent to Germany during WWII. Mr. Moldovan born in Romania in 1925, was drafted at an early age into the military, sent to Germany for special military training (1943-1951), married a German citizen and moved to the U.S. in the spring of 1951. He recalled the year of 1948 when the Eastern European ethnic communities began providing the UN with affidavits of support to bring people to the U.S. through “The Church Society.” (The Church Society, which has undergone several name changes, was founded on April 15 1906, by 60 members and later grew rapidly in membership.) At the beginning of the century, there were few funerals within these ethnic communities, since most immigrants were young men. However many of these immigrants suffered tragic industrial accidents, therefore the original propose of the “Society” was to provide life insurance and related services to the community.

Mr. Moldovan recalled with great enthusiasm the ethnic community that gathered around the church. As most ethnic communities, this Romanian one was primarily defined by its cultural characteristics (language, religion, speech patterns, dress style, cuisine, a common background) and its immigrant status, and consequently as a minority group within the larger American society. It was a community that provided many organizations to its members, such as “The Society,” “American-Romanian Orthodox Youth” (AROY), “Married Couples Club,” “Abraham Lincoln Society,” “Lion Cubs,”
“Boy Scouts,” and in which most men including himself had multiple positions. At that time, around 1950-1960's, a stream of new members joined and the organizations grew larger and stronger, having multiple functions, including a financial shareholding that would help people increase their income. These church organizations also had multiple roles, such as helping people from the native countries to qualify for emigration to America, to restructure the church organization and negotiating the religious and administrative leadership, during a time when most ethnic churches faced the concern of having priests sent from home who would not truly serve the interests of the community, but would be a tool of the communist regimes newly in power in Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, this new context created new conditions by means of a great deal of participation, involvement and responsibilities on the side of the religious community members. It has been a learning process, as Mr. Moldovan recalled, where the members had to take the leadership of the church, as opposed to just following the priest, as they had done within their religious communities in their native country. Moreover the first clergy sent from the home countries to serve these communities found it difficult to adapt to these changes and to submit their authority to the lay leadership represented by the parish council. One reason for this was the high authority and status they were expecting in these positions, as traditionally granted in Orthodox countries. Additional structural changes in the practice of Orthodoxy, and the way those change the interaction between the priest and the community are presented later in the chapter.
Among the above mentioned organizations within the church community was the “Ladies Auxiliary,” established officially in 1916 with the purpose of allowing women to work and support the church as a group, rather than by individual donations. The functions and roles of this organization developed rapidly, from fundraising activities, homemade art decorations for the church, visitation and support to families in need, war bonds purchasing during WWII out of loyalty to the adopted country, and constant fellowship with other ethnic Orthodox churches. At most Orthodox churches that I visited during my data collection, this women’s organization still exists, but the membership has decreased over time, with the median age near that of the senior citizens.

Mrs. Cornea was an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary organization within the Romanian church from East Chicago. She was born in Bucovina, in 1925 and in 1940 when the Russian army occupied her country, her family moved to Germany and from there to the United States. She had never regarded herself and her family as immigrants, but rather as war refugees, since they had never planned to leave their home, but were forced by the events of WWII.

Well, it was rough after the war started. When Russians occupied my country… and they retreat in ’41 and they occupied again in ’42 and we had to emigrate. […] They told us to move in two hours, we picked up whatever we could and walk through the mountains, sleep under the tree... we could have no fire, because the planes were running back and forth…that was kind of rough. (Respondent emigrating from Bassarabia in 1942)³

³This note is to acknowledge that no corrections of English words or editing of the syntax has been made to the collected data. The English proficiency is another measure of level of acculturation of immigrants in the United States.
This was the way in which the respondent described to me the beginning of her and her family’s migration from Bessarabia when she was a young girl. Like other respondents from European countries, she mentioned having a good life in the old country before the Second World War started, when there was no thought of emigration. To this group of people, generally speaking, emigration was not an aspiration and needless to say, not a planned move for their lives.

Mrs. Cornea was raised Orthodox and gladly embraced the church community she found in the U.S., where she recalled making many friends especially after marrying her Romanian husband. The dinners, banquets, picnics, and weddings increased in number after WWII, and were all held in the church. She spoke of these social events with great enthusiasm as a wonderful time of their life in the new country. Despite the dramatic context of her emigration, she learned to adapt to the life in the new country fairly fast, and she confessed that she felt as “American” as she would have been born in the U.S.. The connection with the church community facilitated her adaptation to the new surrounding and helped her to learn the values of the new society, and to assimilate. At the end of our interview, I asked if there was anything she would like to add, and her last statement expressed with great enthusiasm was: “I am, I am very happy (to be here) and God Bless America!”

The lives of members of the first immigrant wave centered on the church, starting with the connections with the home country, baptism, weddings, funerals, religious holidays, classes for children in the community on ethnic language, history, and geography about their family's country of origin. The church community had many
valuable resources, social gatherings, organizations divided by age group, gender, and marital status, so that each member of the church at that time could find his or her own place and contribution within the larger church community. This first group embraced their community with sentiments of appreciation for their support as a buffer in adjusting to the life in the new land and responded to the community with loyalty to the church and active participation in an effort to become a valuable part of the church community. One major contribution of this wave of immigrants to the church community, besides economic support, was a sustained membership and participation not only in the Sunday services, but by constructing their everyday life activities in strong connection to the church community and identifying themselves through it. Being not just an Eastern European immigrant, or refugee, but rather an (ethnic) Orthodox member of the specific church, with a specific location, was a formal way of introducing themselves. Overall, for this group of immigrants, the identification with the church continued their spiritual life, introduced them to the ethnic community, helped them to adjust to the host society, as individuals and as a group, and allowed them to work together toward Americanizing the church institution. In the later section of this chapter I will present examples of how this Americanization works.

**Short Historical Background of Orthodoxy in North America**

Early in the 20th century the massive immigration from Eastern Europe led to many new Orthodox jurisdictions in America. These were divided ethnically, culturally, canonically and administratively, in order to preserve national and cultural heritages of the various churches. Some of these jurisdictions were still under the autocephaly of their
“Mother Church” in the home country. However, during the instauration of the Communist regime in Russia and its suppression of the Russian Church (1920), the American diocese declared a “temporary autonomy” interrupting its relationship with the Church of Russia and forming what was called the American “Metropolia.” It was not until 1970 that the Patriarchate of Moscow recognized the self-declared autonomy of the Metropolia (which was in schism from the Church of Russia), and granted the status of autocephaly to this “daughter church.”

After the Soviet Revolution, there had been political persecutions of the Church of Russia and the national churches of Albanians, Romanians, Bulgarians and Macedonians. Because the Communist governments in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and other countries of the Eastern European bloc strictly limited and supervised the church activities, the new Orthodox jurisdictions of immigrants in North America often broke into hostile factions – some of them supporting the relationship with the home “mother church,” some of them denying any of their representatives and suspecting them as representing “tools of the Communist regime.” Therefore the last dissident parishes started to form new jurisdictions on their own and eventually affiliated with Metropolia.

The Metropolia soon changed its name to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), a name that is still in use today. Now one of its major missions is to remove the ethnic divisions of the Orthodox Church and unite it into an organic Orthodox Church in America. On the OCA website is written, “Unity, conciliarity, spiritual renewal, evangelization, and social witness and not ethnicity, have become central concerns.
Although most clearly visible in the OCA, the American Mission is an orientation increasingly evident in all ethnic churches as well (OCA website p. 2).

Traditionally, the ethnic churches that joined the OCA, rather than remaining under the jurisdiction of their home patriarchate have added to the name of their church the specification that it is an English speaking parish (i.e., Romanian Orthodox Church-An English Speaking Parish). Over time, as I show below, they have become more open to the acceptance of converted priesthood (priests who were not born Orthodox but converted and then entered the priesthood), and tried to grow their congregations with members outside of their ethnic group.

The controversy over the “unification” of the Orthodox churches of the same ethnic background in America is still a subject of much debate. For example the Romanian Orthodox churches in America are still divided between the “Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America and Canada” (under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Romania) and “The Romanian Episcopate of America” (under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church in America).

Although there are no theological, doctrinal, canonical, rituals, linguistic or cultural differences between the two ethnic Orthodox groups in America, there are major political and reasons which stand in the way of their unification.

For example, even today OCA is seen as a challenge to the very existence of the ethnic churches in North America, and for the parishes abroad. It is seen as a threat to weaken the cultural ties and eventually, the financial and institutional support. Many of the Eastern European churches in the United States, still under the jurisdiction of their
home country patriarchate, advocate toward the unification of their ethnic church on U.S. soil. However, the churches that belong to OCA are less willing to share their better off economic and political status with them. One parishioner of the Orthodox Church in Merrillville, IN, an OCA parish, proudly explained to me how the church, as many others today, used to provide funding for education to the most competent youths of the church.

“Now,” he mentioned, “if we would have been unified under the Romanian patriarchate, how do you think these funds would be distributed? I am telling you, not by merit but by nepotism and corruption. We do not want them involved in our business, there is nothing to gain for us from doing that (the unification).”

Along with such arguments, comes the attitude that churches under the OCA have over time embraced more of the American values and therefore became more of a truly respectable and accepted American institution.

On the other hand, the main argument of the Orthodox Eastern European churches in the U.S. that are under the jurisdiction of the home country patriarchate, is that unification between the two would build a more powerful institution, better equipped to promote Orthodoxy in North America and also to help the church in their home countries.

Except for the fact that religious services take place in English in U.S., there is absolutely no religious difference between the two Orthodox ethnic groups in the Church of North America and the Church in the home country. Nevertheless, not all Romanian Orthodox immigrants embrace the authority of the traditional Romanian Patriarchate.
Aspects of the Institutional Changes and Lay Leadership of
Orthodox Church in the United States

One major distinction between the Orthodox Church in Romania, for example, (and this is very similar to other Eastern Europeans) and the Orthodox Church in America is the independence of the Orthodox Church in America. While in the home country the Church is an institution separate but still supported by the government, in America the Orthodox Church is funded and supported by the community; this major distinction influences its own structure and organization.

It is true that the voluntary membership, in the form of financial support, committed membership, and volunteer activities in the immigrant church has many similarities with the membership in the home country. However, while in the majoritarian Orthodox home country membership is more or less “taken for granted,” in America, church membership requires a more serious commitment. As a consequence of this, the church developed various programs and activities to attract adherents, and lay leaders actively tried to recruit people and gain their commitment. While some of the techniques of increasing the membership of the church are positive, such as educating people and especially young children about Orthodoxy, they contradict its theological foundation, which defines Orthodoxy as a non-proselytizing religion.

Existing in such a religiously diverse society, the church cannot count permanently on the loyal adherence of its members. The newer immigrant are not “replacing” the old members in numbers, as more recent generations have other sources of social support and as their identity is more “American.” Moreover, replacing an old
member with a new immigrant requires a great deal of devotion on both sides for the following few years. As the new member understands, accepts and adapts to the new church life and eventually contributes to the church, seldom does he or she equal the financial power of the older members.

In addition, the expansion of services throughout the religious organization is another characteristic of adopting a congregational structure. The Church has become more than a place where the religious worship takes place. Social services, catering and other secular social activities, with the purpose of both revenue and publicity, take place on the religious site. All these steps, beneficial in many ways to the ethnic community, diverted in other ways the role of the church as a place of prayer and spiritual enrichment, and transformed its character into a more congregational form and a more of a social-club profile that has been maintained to these days.

Mrs. Eta, a recent Romanian immigrant, comments on her religious experience in the U.S.:

[… ] Plus the entire service is exactly one and a half hours, I counted, I always do! (on a very convincing tone), but then, the coffee hour thing.. people stood there until 2:00 sometimes, two hours or more… longer than the service... Is like they are coming to church more for that, than for the service (in a critical tone of voice). Plus in Romania there is no such thing as meeting in the church, after the service, there is no such thing as the social hall. You go to church to pray to God... not to socialize…

From a structural point of view, while churches in both countries have a priest, a Parochial Council and other small administrative organizations, such as “Ladies Auxiliary” or the choir, the role and status of these organizations within the church differ from one country to the other.
From a theological and canonical perspective, the *structure* of the Orthodox Church is a hierarchical one, with the priest as the supreme leader and the head of all other administrative organizations within the local church. While this is still the case in the home country, the priest in Orthodox churches in America is only nominally the leader. As a result of influences from the Protestant host-society (the U.S.A.), which emphasize more formal procedures and responsibility to the congregation, a more democratic and organizational system replaces the traditional one in Orthodox churches. The supreme administrative authority now belongs to the president of the parochial council and the council members have distinct functions and responsibilities such as: secretary, treasurer, bulletin editor, etc. While this organizational division of responsibility has many positive aspects, it still regards the priest as just another “employee” of the church, lowering in a way his spiritual authority.

Mrs. Topescu recalls:

So I went one Saturday evening at church, since I spoke to the priest, and let him know that I’ll come for confession... but I felt so surprise that he was busy cleaning the social hall for the next day, ... there was this guy, what’s his name? (an older parish council member), who did seem to help the priest, but rather just telling him, what to do.. I felt weird and kind of embarrassed for him (the priest), so ... I just went home.

For example, a deep belief of the Orthodox faith is about the sinfulfulness of the human being and its ritual dimension expresses the acceptance of it by confession to the priest and the sacramental purification through the Holy Communion which takes place during the Liturgy. The ritual itself serves both an expressive and an instrumental function.
But the concept of sin somehow lost its “popularity” (now, being seen by people as an archaic notion which belongs to an illiterate society), in a socio-cultural context that can explain this notion in other ways, “saving” the individual from taking responsibility for it. When this personal acceptance is lost, “the relationship with God” becomes an impersonal one. As a consequence of this, the whole practice of confession and Holy Communion becomes a formal one (Braga, 1996). Therefore, the priest’s spiritual role becomes formal also.

However, in a context in which a church has to support itself “from the bottom to the top,” this organizational system of “lay leadership” of the church becomes a functional one, but in its functionality, it contradicts the very canonical establishment of the Orthodox Church.

In contrast, in the home country, the church-land has a sacramental value and the entire complex of the church has to be treated with the same piety as the inside of the church. Conversation should be low keyed and laughter is considered out of place. The churches as well as the monasteries are places of prayer, meditation, spiritual retreat, worship and quietness. In the Orthodox understanding, the Church should teach people how to get rid of worldly pleasures and devote themselves to God.

The ritual of the worship in the Orthodox Church has been also influenced by the congregational model. The time of worship is restricted to the Sunday service – in most Orthodox churches in America the only day during the week when the church doors are open – due mainly to the members’ work schedules. People have no time left for meditation, prayer or their spiritual needs. Also, because of the development of spread
out suburbs and commuting in contrast to higher density European cities and towns, a visit to the church outside Sunday requires a special car trip. The increased rhythm of life is what changed the immigrant in the first place, (a churchgoer spends an average of forty hours per week at the workplace and only one hour at the church) and the adjustment to this rhythm is an essential part of the overall adjustment in society on one hand. This change in daily life works to reshape the way they feel, see and relate to their values.

Steve Warner (1993), in “Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm of Religion,” discusses the ways immigrants use the American congregational models in their churches, and the structural changes as experienced by immigrant religion, with special attention to the traditional hierarchical ones, and how they have been transformed in within the new context:

From the perspective of Europe, where the universal “church” was the social and theoretical norm against which the radical “sect” perennial-ally protested, the American “denomination”-making little claim to inclusiveness yet also working within the world- was a structural innovation (Niebuhr, 1929; Smith, 1968; Swatos, 1979). The voluntarism of the U.S. religious system has also facilitated the development, since early in the 19th century of parachurch “special purpose groups” (Wuthnow, 1988, Chapter 6), both bureaucracies (e.g., the American Bible Society) and collegial (e.g., the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International). Another pervasive American pattern is the congregational model of local church organization, whether or not sanctioned by the hierarchy (Silver, 1990; Warner, 1993).
Discussing the ways of worship, most who are newly immigrant have observed that the level of comfort in the church has also increased. The classic architecture of the naos (the lay area) in the Orthodox Church in Europe has only a few chairs along the church’s wall (for elderly, mothers with children and people with disabilities, who cannot stand or kneel for the whole length of the service). The theological significance of this is to encourage individual focus on prayer and arouse in individuals their sense of humility and respect before God.

In U.S. the Orthodox Church has increased the level of comfort of their members, who now can sit down, stand or kneel on their knees in their cushioned benches. Not only do nearly all members have their very own bench-seat in the church, but the entire experience of the worship service has been transformed to mimic the experience of a dramatic play or movie theatre. The special, small private rooms designated for individual prayer and worship are non-existent. In the home country, those rooms are used mostly by the people who stop by at the church, anytime during the day and week, outside the scheduled religious service for prayer, but also during the Sunday service by some of the members who wish more privacy during their prayers. This setting creates the conditions for more privacy that enhances the spiritual life of the members. People have the opportunity to experience the prayer in a more deep vertical dimension, in addition to be just a part of the community who prays and sings together in the church.

The language of worship has created much controversy during the history of the ethnic Orthodox churches in America. While language preserves ethnicity and the cultural tradition of the church, the second and following generation often speaks English
as their first language. Most immigrants understand the passing of the cultural heritage to the next generation as beginning with language; however not all born and raised American children are interested in learning their parents’ language as much as they are willing to be like all their other peers outside the community. This finding is consistent with other research on immigration, besides the Eastern Europeans. In order to maintain the membership of the following generation and the continuity of the church, however most of the original ethnic churches have moved forward and today their language of worship is English.

As many first generation immigrant respondents of the study mentioned, the goal of maintaining the continuity of the church should prevail. Some of them refer to an “emotional experience” of learning not only a new language, but learning to express your deepest feeling and to worship in the new language. However, for some individuals, even after a considerable period of time spent in the U.S., this experience of praying to God in other than the maternal language is almost impossible to achieve, despite their English proficiency. This particular finding as expressed by the majority of respondents interviewed can be understand in relation to the way first generation immigrants construct their identity. While many of them consider themselves both structurally and culturally assimilated in the host society, a few more salient aspects such as the choice of the language in intimate conversation, the language of prayer in solitude, or what "home" means to them reflect balancing life before and after emigration and challenging the idea of a complete assimilation.
From the same interview with Mrs. Eta, a Romanian immigrant in Northwest Indiana, expressing her view on the issue of language selection in the Church:

"It is still weird for me to hear the Liturgy in English, I am just not used to it ... they say one or two prayers in Romanian, but that’s all.. I think it should be more Romanian, so people can connect themselves with the experience.

All of the institutional changes discussed above contribute to the changes in the religious life of the Orthodox immigrants. The degree to which the immigrants are affected depends on the importance of their religious life to themselves. In any case, the question arises whether all these institutional changes discussed above will find a doctrinal justification. Most of them are influences of the congregational system specific to the host socio-cultural context, and yet Orthodoxy along with only few other religions, is one of the oldest continuous religions in the world. Theologically, many adherents of traditional Orthodoxy claim that there is a Law of God that never changes, and therefore, from this perspective, they reject the assumption that morality varies from generation to generation, or from place to place (as in the above example about the sin) and they reject the notion that the changes in the Orthodoxy in America could be justified by the adaptation of the religion to this context because spirituality is being diluted by the institution’s adaptation to the social and organizational aspects of the host country.

Within this context of structural changes of the church institution, the second immigrant wave describe their early encounter with the ethnic and religious community very differently and in more marginal ways compared with their predecessors."
The Case of New Generation of Immigrants (The Post-Communist Wave) of Immigrants from Eastern Europe: The Transformation of their Religious Life in America

The newer generations of immigrants came from places where the process of industrialization and more generally modernization in their home countries had been very rapidly pushed by the socio-economic and political changes that happened there. For example, Romania is a country with a majority Orthodox population (80%), but an analysis of the religiosity of its population has to take into account the specificity of the historical social context.

The traditional Romanian society granted a vital role to religion, and religious beliefs offered coherence and reality (Gheorghiu, 2003, p. 104). In other words, religiosity was the experience that gave cohesion and solidarity to people, justifying their collective lives.

Despite the assumption that modern and post-modern societies embrace secularization of religion and weaken the individual’s religiosity, many studies have shown that actually marginalization of religion is not the same thing as the absence of it. In many post-Communist countries the degree of the population’s religiosity has increased in the last 20 to 30 years. Based on the controversial assumption that the religious manifestations increase as a reaction to the individual’s incapacity to “deal” with modernity (Inglehart, 1997), one might conclude that the increased level of religiosity in these countries is the result of the individual’s inability to deal with competition, professionalism and a higher level of education, demanded by the
development of modernity. Again, this is not necessarily about modernity itself, but rather people’s inability to deal with the changes of modernity and again of post-modernity.

Surprisingly, several studies done by Romanian sociologists have shown that the majority of the Romanian population with a high degree of religiosity are embracing not a “traditional” but rather a post-modern religiosity; and moreover they are not necessarily all people with difficulties in dealing with modernity. On the contrary they are people satisfied with all aspects of their own lives, including their careers and the competition associated with it (Gheorghiu, 2003, p. 107). The same study illustrates (based on the European Values Survey-EVS-from 1993, 1997 and 1999) that the European countries with higher level of religiosity are Malta, Romania, Poland and Ireland. Among these, Romania is the only country with an Orthodox majority, and one explanation for its place among the most religious countries is the fact, that throughout history, the Christian religion was the basis of its national identity and connection with the rest of the world.

As mentioned before, the contemporary Romanian secularization was largely the result of the Communist government’s intervention into the area of religious beliefs and practices- a different process from what happened in the Western countries. In this context, even though the level of religiosity was depressed because of this, the people’s beliefs resisted this suppression over time. Much of the Romanian population did not assimilate the atheistic values of the Communist philosophy, but kept strong traditional religious values.
Moreover, there are places, such as the Eastern European countries, where the secularization of religion had happened under the pressure of the Communist regimes, a different process from how secularization happened in the West. Furthermore, Orthodox immigrants in the last 45 years came to America from places where their own religion suffered major transformation. Because it is a religion with very deep historical roots, even though the religion as an institution has undergone transformation, the population resisted secularization over time. In a society in a state of anomie, due to the transition from socialism to capitalism, such as the case of the countries from Eastern European bloc, during the last part of the 20th century, religion was one major instrument of national identity and survival, meeting certain emotional/spiritual needs.

After immigrating to the United States, identification through the ethnic church continues, but major transformations also occur on both the Orthodox practice of religion and on religious life. Several major transformations have affected the religion of the new immigrants: adopting a congregational form, separating religion from culture, the desire for ecumenism among all Orthodox churches, and a greater social inclusiveness (many born and raised Americans have been converted to various Orthodox churches in the past ten years).

The adaptation of the most recent wave of immigrants to this transformation of their ethnic church is mostly contingent upon their educational level, social class and level of acculturation. Despite the fact that all of these respondents are more educated than their predecessors, those remaining in the blue collar occupations are more likely to construct their ethnic identity narratives as very distinct from the mainstream culture,
have more nationalistic views, are more likely to attend the churches under the jurisdictions of the home country patriarchate, and less likely to accept all of the major transformations in the churches that belong to OCA. According to my male interviewees, the churches that move to the jurisdiction of the OCA become more "Americanized" and this marks a loss in status for many of them, who still reap the benefits of the patriarchal family structure and practices that are better preserved in the ethnic churches that still belong to the home country.

Mr. Popovici was born in the southern part of Romania in 1955, lived most of his life under the Communist regime, and immigrated to America at age of 44 hoping to escape the poverty in his native country. He was raised in a Christian Orthodox family, but the cultural and religious values of that time, he recalled were very contradictory:

Yes, I was a religious person, and I still am, I was born in a Christian family that believe in God, but this does not stop me to steal, if there was something to be stolen from the company (the state run company) where I worked. I had not stolen from people, from the people with whom I was in contact, such as neighbors and friends... But from the company. Nobody was stopping me from stealing, because all did the same; all of us used to “adjust” our salaries by stealing from the company, we used to take a little bit from the company, because there was enough.

As Mr. Popovici recalled, the experience of ordinary people under the communist regime in Romania created conditions where many people engaged in various so called, “normative agreements,” a resistance to the oppressive regime, without considering that they were violating laws, but instead believed that the State owed them such a bonus. Within the context of the Church’s persecution by the State, their religious beliefs and practices were suppressed during those years and stealing (from the State run enterprise)
was seen as a survival strategy. Most citizens felt betrayed and abused by the State and the practice of resistance against all this injustice took place in the form of solidarity between workers that would resist the oppression, and lack of basic human rights, by supplementing their wages by stealing from the work place. Here is an account of Mr. Popovici explaining this situation,

Although, “the State” used to refer to all of us, but all of us thought at that time that we are lacking some rights, enough salaries (which were not so good at that time) so we try to adjust them on this way, by stealing. It was not just me doing this, but all of them did this, it was the “helping traffic,” because one was working at the shampoo factory, the other at the meat factory and there was a “natural exchange” (bartering): “You would give me some shampoo and I would give you a piece of meat.”

This respondent, like others, regarded the ethnic and religious community in the U.S. as a fragmented social group, divided by immigration generations, age, class and interests, a place where you can make friends who are similar in these ways to you. The church community has changed, in their view, from being the heart of the ethnic community (which is now difficult to define) to a social club.

In this sense, older and new immigrants have little in common. For earlier immigrants contact with the church was essential in the process of accommodating into the new society. For those coming later, participation in church life become less vital in their immigration process and therefore more marginal. As [name] commented:

Yes, in the area where I live now there are Romanian people, right here across the street from me, I had the luck, or maybe the bad luck to have some Romanian neighbors. Most of the Romanian people living here are old generation immigrants, people who came here during the WWII, or right after the war, people whose mentality did not change over time, and they remained the same people as they used to be in Romania. To have a relationship with them is very difficult task, to preserve the ethnic and cultural background together with them is
very difficult...[...]So you can say I have friends, Romanian friends,[...] that are younger[...], but not in this area, a very few living in this area.[...] We have a Romanian church in Merrillville, where we Used to go a while ago, now we are not going anymore...not because I consider a waste of time, but because I do not consider it to be what I want from that place...

Fourteen of 30 second wave respondents reported that they socialized with some people outside the church community. Instead they become acquainted with people of their ethnic heritage, whom they have met through other acquaintances in ethnic stores, social gatherings, mutual friends, and for those in professional fields, by connecting with other professionals in their area of their specialization, people they have met at conferences and other professional workshops. All of them have continuing connections with their families and friends in the home country, being very informed and often involved with the events at home, by the means of new technology and media communications.

Controversies about language use in church and at the social gatherings within the church community is a subject of debate in both churches, those that belong to the OCA as well as those to belong to the home patriarchates, and is an issue further discussed in the section of the structural changes in Orthodoxy in North America. However, the determining factor in language use is related not only to the church's affiliation, but rather to the generation of immigrants. Superficially, one might mistakenly assume that the older wave would be more “old fashioned” and traditional but in fact, they are more assimilated. (The resolution of this seeming contradiction is reflected in the way that the more “modern” recent wave is more in rhythm with the trend towards the transnationalist practices of travel back and forth.) The later wave prefers using their ethnic language and
that is one main divide between members within the same church community. This aspect is often noticeable at the after service social gatherings, where the members voluntary segregate themselves in groups that speak English only at their table (those from the earlier wave), and others that prefer to sit alongside people who speak their native language (the more recent immigrants).

Mrs. Veta born in Ukraine in 1972 and immigrated to America at 29 years old, thought that older immigrants were “too far away generations,” but that instead she had made friends with a [Russian]woman from my generation who married an American man,

No, in this area I do not have ethnic community. At the church were some people they emigrated after the WWII and some at the beginning of the century, I have nothing in common with them, they know my language but, but they are too, too far away generations. […] because they are American Orthodox church, they do not favor any ethnic group, the service is just in English, so that way they get more diversity and people. This was actually a Russian church and decided to become an American Orthodox church and that way …you can see there any ethnic group… The people there lost their Russian language…But I met a woman from my generation who married an American man, she was from Russia and we become friends, and other people I met at the English classes.

Eastern Europeans often meet at the ethnic stores in the areas where they live, at the public libraries which offer ESL classes and other workshops of interest for immigrants, such as citizenship classes, computer literacy seminars, or just morning programs for children that many parents, especially mothers, like to attend. In Chicago area, many Eastern Europeans like to dine out at ethnic restaurants, to attend summer festivals celebrating their own heritage and cultural events, where they often meet new acquaintances from their home country.

Mr. Neamtu, a Romanian engineer, came to America in 1999 with a visitor’s visa, and shortly after arrival married an American. He established his family here, continued his education and opened a business in the construction industry. During my interview with them, his wife recalled that part of the marriage “proposal” was that the marriage
will take place in the Orthodox Church. Their future children will receive Orthodox names and will be baptized in the Orthodox Church. There were no demands on her (as a Catholic) to convert, but in order for the priest to perform the matrimonial service, she had to consent to be re-baptized in the Orthodox Church. Today, as a family they belong to a Romanian Orthodox church, and over all these years it has been her duty to attend the church along with the children most Sundays. They recalled with amusement that the baptism of their sons in the Orthodox Church was a formal and superficial ceremony compared to the Romanian Orthodox standards, and at the request of the his family at home, they made a trip back to Romania where,

In a cold winter morning, they took my son in the church, and dived him all the way in the water, three times, and I was so worry he will get sick after that ... along with a long religious service and a party at the end of the day.

Mr. Neamtu recalled his religious upbringing as a child back home. He remembered long Sunday mornings in the church, where everybody had to gather inside at 8:00 am and could not leave until 1:00 pm, and the stricter rules and greater respect of the congregants toward the authority of the priest. He said he never gave a thought, before moving to America, to how much “business the church actually is”...

Within this context, Mr. Neamtu claims that his involvement with the church here has diminished his spirituality, but he has found himself more active in helping the church with his work and administrative issues.

I wish the service to be in Romanian, I found it weird, boring, to hear the same thing twice, (the Sunday service and sermon) and wish would be more depth,. I did not realize until I came here, how much business the church actually is.
Other respondents also told of how the church changed from a house of prayer to a community organization, or a social club. The changes in the practice of Orthodox religion in the U.S. arise in response to the need to transform the church institution to meet the American society in its social, economic, and cultural milieu. There are a number of examples of these structural changes adopted by the Orthodox Church in the United States.

In contrast with the first wave, immigrants from Eastern Europe with more human capital, a higher level of education acquired in the U.S., and the means to access a middle-upper class lifestyle, are seeing fewer cultural differences between themselves and the host society (as they have a view of a more globalized world), report fewer difficulties in their integration experience, and are less reticent to become members of the Orthodox churches that belong to the OCA.

Indeed the churches that belong now to the OCA tend to have a more democratic structure, have more leadership and administrative positions for women, beyond the roles immigrant women traditionally hold within the ethnic community, such as dinner and banquets preparations, along with fundraising and educational and vocational responsibilities.

The issue of having a priest who has been converted to Orthodoxy, or a non-native speaker, is not seen by those immigrants as a problem, as long as the church allows and maintains programs geared toward the preservation of ethnic heritage. As I will show in the next chapter, half of my respondents see the responsibility of raising children in the current global context as making them aware of their heritage so that they might return to
their home country, but also live as global citizens able to adapt to any other place in the world they would chose to live. They believe that adaptability and flexibility are more essential skills than ethnic heritage or assimilation to American culture.

These recent immigrants, unlike those who came before them, were less in need of ethnic enclaves to shelter and familiarize themselves with life in the new country even though they are more in tune with their ethnic heritage than many of the earlier immigrants. They possess a higher level of human capital and their religious life is more marginal than it was at home or compared to the previous immigrants. Since America is no longer the destination point of immigrants from Eastern European country with limited human capital, and the racial stratification system in U.S. categorized Eastern Europeans as “white,” many of the respondents coming after 1989, equipped with better education, English proficiency and skills entered the United States with employment contracts, or through visa lottery and settled their life in the suburbs where they passed as members of the “suburban white middle class.”

Within today's more diverse context and opportunity for multiculturalism, these immigrants would like to see a resurgence of the ethnic church toward their original roots, so their families and children would continue to be exposed to their native heritage and learn the cultural and religious traditions of the home country. Unlike their predecessors preoccupied to raise “American” citizens (that would encounter less discrimination than themselves), these new families want to expose their children to both cultures simultaneously and to raise children who would be able to adapt and accommodate their future life to any other part of the world. They believe that this
cultural heritage should be preserved and carried with the individual not only as a cultivation of the nationalistic spirit, or as a resistance to assimilation but as a skill necessary to develop and maintain a transnational experience.

One of these respondents, a physician and a mother of two elementary school children, describes her frustration with her children’s desire to maintain solely an American identity,

When I went to pick up Matei from school, I was in the parking lot, and when he came toward me I asked him (speaking Romanian), how was school today. I noticed him being uncomfortable and answering our loud “Fine,” and then rushing me into the car. When I asked him, what was the problem, he said “Mom, please never talk to me in Romanian when we are at school.” “I was so surprised, and upset at the same time,” I asked him “but what is the problem with the Romanian language?” and he said “-I do not want other kids to know that you know… because I was born here, so I do not want them to know you are not American.”

I could not help but turn to him, and said “That is not right! Not only to mentioned that half of the parents of your classmates are immigrants, and that is nothing to be ashamed of, but look, go and asked your American classmates, whose parents are not immigrants, how many of them have seen Paris, the greatest work of art in Italy, and the rest of Europe, by third grade???. I offer to you more than these people born and raise here can offer to their children, and you are ashamed with me specking the Romanian language? I offer to you to see the world, and to learn that we have a history to be proud of, so you know there is not just AMERICA in the world.. We might not live here forever… so what's wrong with you?! I was so mad at him… look! third grade! My parents did not have anything like this to offer to me, but I had so much respect for them […]... I do not know what is wrong with these kids here...

A similar experience of children trying to hide their family ethnic background in order to pass as “Americans” in front of their peers is the story of Mrs. Doina, who immigrated to America short after 1989, together with her husband and her first grade daughter.
Mia was in her senior year in High-School and I was supposed to pick her up from some of her friend’s house. She asked me before leaving if I mind parking the car down the street (rather than in front of her friend’s house) when I'll pick her up, because she does not want her friends to see my car. I said: Ok, but what's wrong with my little red Chevy..? I felt bad that she was so embarrassed with my car … I could afford a better one, but we moved to this expensive area, so she could go to a good school… but then talking to her I also find out that she doesn't like my accent either, especially when is to talk to her friends or their parents. She only speak Romanian at home, but avoid doing this in public.

These parents, unlike their predecessors, were preoccupied with transmitting the language and their cultural heritage to their children, and tend to be unsatisfied with the little means of support they have. Since they do not have extended families here, they often try to use the circle of friends from their ethnic background to socialize their families to compensate the lack of support from the their own children to embrace the ethnic identity, and especially from the church institution that have been changed over time, became more Americanized and preoccupied with promoting Orthodoxy. They also believe that as their children will grow up and mature, they will realize the benefits of learning more than one culture, language and way of life, and be prepared to for a more transnational experience.
CHAPTER FOUR
WORK AND NETWORK

Introduction

As in the case of religious life, there are differences between the two waves of immigrants in the ways they launch their employment experiences in the U.S. and the ways they relate to the community. Similar to the religious life, where the first acquaintances are made at church, the earlier wave began their search for employment within the ethnic community that gathered around the church. Many of the post-communist group, contingent upon their occupation, skipped this step, and found opportunities to enter the workforce through various other avenues.

Earlier Eastern-European immigrants' starting point in searching for a job and a place of residence was the ethnic community. This is consistent with most of the research on immigrant communities in the U.S.A. Beginning with Gordon’s model of assimilation, the ethnic enclaves as “decompression chambers” (Gordon, 1964) were used by immigrants in order to adjust to the new environment. Nevertheless, Gordon was writing during a time of post-World War II economic growth and prosperity and employment was high in the “middle working class” (industrial sector). In addition to their church communities, these immigrants also found social support from people in the neighborhood. Neighborhoods at that time consisted of a large and diverse number of immigrants coming from both Western European and Eastern European societies who
seemingly enjoyed good lives together, despite their ethnic heterogeneity, as we will see later in their stories.

A sense of solidarity and of being a part of the immigrant group developed between among these immigrants at that time, despite their ethnic diversity in those neighborhoods, and they describe their sense of community with enthusiasm in the interviews. As they made connections with other co-nationals within their ethnic churches, established families in the new country, and competed for jobs with other immigrant groups, this sense of ethnic identity and the friendliness of these relationships weakened. They soon learned and embraced the racial and ethnic stratification of American society, replacing the feeling of identification with the larger immigrant group from Eastern Europe with a sense of being a part of the minority group that competed for work and a place in their new world with their sense of racial/ethnic superiority I present accounts of these transitions in this chapter.

Unlike these early immigrants, the post-communist immigrants from Eastern Europe had different experiences in their search for employment. Their experiences are often contingent upon their educational background and their previous work experience. The church ethnic community continued to be a starting place for immigrants in working class jobs such as construction, plumbing and home remodeling, but this was not the case for the growing numbers of professionals with higher levels of education. They came to the United States with a student/resident visa or landed their first job through work contracts with companies that had been offered to them before emigration. These professionals, largely physicians and engineers, first established their practice in the
United States and then began to make connections with the ethnic community they met at church. Their goal was to find clients for their services. They were different from their predecessors in that the ethnic community was no longer the traditional starting point in their search for jobs. The role of immigrant churches was very different from its role for the earlier immigrants. Technological and professional work requiring that job seekers have education and degrees replaced the “employment opportunities,” traditionally announced by the priest at the end of the service or transmitted orally between the church members. Today that function has been replaced by internet websites linking immigrant diasporas in the host country and their countries of origin. These websites replace the old functions performed by the church by offering specific information, covering many areas which are constantly updated, such as: guides for the newcomers, answers to immigrants’ questions about visas and family visits, services offered by professionals as well as laborers in the community, marriage, renting and real estate information.

**From Solidarity to Competition: The Work Experience of the Earlier Wave of Eastern-European Immigrants**

One interesting finding from my interviews with members of the pre-communist wave is the absence of the word “diversity” or “diverse ethnic groups” in the description of their early neighborhood, and rather a sense of identification with it through their status as war refugees or immigrants coming from different European countries.

I had one (neighbor) from Finland, one came from Denmark, and one she was Croatian and one that was an American, that (Gary, Indiana) was a very nice neighborhood at that time (Immigrant coming from Germany in 1952).
People used to search for jobs by networking within their ethnic groups gathered at that time around the church and within their neighborhoods. Between 1951 and 1980, the U.S. labor force grew by 7.6 million [...] immigrants could have accounted for at most 33% of this increase during the 1950s (Borja & Tienda, 1987). Nonetheless, the pre-communist migrants understood their immediate contact and networking in the neighborhood as facilitating their settlements' adjustments as they told me in our interview. For example, Mrs. Muntean remarked on the way she found a place to live:

And I found a German lady and she said to me “Oh, not far from me there is a house,” “Okay, I will go and look, maybe we can rent or we can own” I said.

Mrs. Muntean, newly come from Germany, commented on the help her family received from a Romanian neighbor.

I had a lot of help from one neighbor, a Romanian … […] she was very, very generous, she gave us a bed to sleep.…

Twenty-six out of 28 respondents of the pre-communist wave were welcomed when they arrived in the U.S. by a church member of their ethnic community, who helped them to adjust during their first days. These new immigrants found places to live, close to the people who waited for them and members of their ethnic community, mostly the neighborhoods with a large number of immigrants at that time.

Mr. Moldovan, born in Romania in 1925, arrived in the United States in the spring of 1951 together with his wife. After arriving in New York, he was assisted by an ethnic co-national who found him his first job as a driver and his wife as a cook. As did many men of this Eastern European immigrant generation, he moved to Northwest Indiana and he began working in the steel mills of Gary, Indiana, where jobs were
plentiful. Upon his arrival in Indiana he was as usual welcomed by the priest of the local
curch and introduced to the ethnic community, where most men were employed in the
steel mills.

There were many single guys that left the country by themselves […] life was
much easier single…easy to find jobs.

Once his employment became more stable, and after the birth of their two
children his wife ceased working outside the home. He said,

In the steel, there were many working class (immigrants) men and women,
women also Us to works as tailors, cooks, but if they married they were not
working (employed outside the home).

He recalls being very fortunate with his life in America:

I had an extraordinary luck; I worked hard, I was truthful, precise, never had to
ask for a raise (of the salary). I always got it. I wanted to enroll in the university,
but my wife was more sick, but I got an Associate Degree, that gave me the
possibility to advance in my work. At ’67 I was a senior engineer.

A different case in terms of accommodation within a diverse immigrant
neighborhood was Mrs. Cornea. She was born in Bucovina on April 25, 1925 and came
to America in 1941, at the age of 16, fleeing the Russian occupation of her country at the
beginning of the WWII. She was also the first member of her family departing Bucovina,
and for eleven days traveled in a boat surrounded by other Eastern and Western
Europeans trying to escape the misery of the war.

There were a lot of foreigners; we could speak German, and Russian. You
know… there were foreign languages that were fun. But when I came here it was
rough, because I could not speak English.

As other emigrants of her time, she and her family were sponsored by an
immigrant of the earliest wave, established already in the U.S..
It was this lady, she sponsored us, help, you know, from Germany, she had a convalescence home, you know …she came and picked me up. From New York I had to travel to a.... Michigan, Spring Lake, Michigan; I worked in her home for 11 months, you know and then later on, my parents come, my sister come later on to East Chicago, Indiana, and then she brought my parents to East Chicago. And then I move from Michigan to East Chicago, so I worked at the Defense Factory as a welder for two years. […] But then the war was over and they close the place and then worked at the Continental Bakery for 18 years.

Mrs. Cornea recalls with great sorrow and compassion for herself, a young girl at that time, the very early employment experience she had at the convalescent home. From her description, this place functioned as a nursing home for the sick and elderly

All the sick people, 15-20 people, you know she (the owner) had the big home, you know […]: The family, they put them in there and they had to pay.

Mrs. Cornea’s main responsibility was doing menial jobs and most of the dirty work for those patients, under the close supervision of a bitter owner, who sponsored and hired her. One major obstacle was her lack of English proficiency that held back her ability to understand the demands of her job, and also the ability to engage in conversation with co-workers that would have helped her to more quickly learn about the culture of that place.

It was rough. I couldn’t speak English, after three months my ears… (Laughing and making a gesture of unplugging her ears), unplugged. So, I did very well after that, but it took me a while.

After her marriage to a Romanian immigrant whose first employment in the U.S. was also as a laborer, she continued to work in the bakery while her husband continued his education and specialized as a master mechanic. A similar experience happened to Mr. Moldovan and six other respondents who started in low-end jobs, but bettered
themselves through education, usually sponsored by the employer, most often from the steel industry.

No such opportunities were presented to immigrant women of this wave unlike the immigrant women of the post-communist wave. The working class families of the post-communist wave usually consisted of a husband working in the trucking industry or as a construction worker who often experienced episodes of unemployment, and a woman starting an entry-level position in the health-care system or as clerical staff for attorneys, real estate companies, automobile manufacturers, beauty salons and other small businesses and local industries.

Often they tried to advance themselves in their fields by taking advantage of educational opportunities offered to them by the employers, including both university courses and various semi-professional occupations such as paralegal, bookkeeper, librarian, realtors, and various positions associated with the health care field. Their experiences of work are evidence of structural changes in the U.S. economy, with the loss of manufacturing jobs and other stable, “middle working class” jobs and the necessity for women to work outside the home to help with the family income. Cultural changes since the late 1960’s in attitudes about more gender equality no doubt also played a role. No wonder, then, that the majority of male respondents of this study, regardless of their employment qualification and status, expressed distress and dissatisfaction with their immigration experience and the changes brought to their families. Mr. Alex from Romania is one example of the blue-collar working class experience of the post-communist wave:
I was ... I got hired at a shop as a mechanic where I was paid with the famous amount of $5.00/hr (sarcastically), this was happening in 2001, January 22. So, if a person can live with $5.00/hr in 2001 ... that’s very good! (sarcastically)

He worked as a mechanic for about two years in Florida and one year in Hobart, Indiana, near Gary, the heavily industrialized city near Chicago.

I: …and between then and now?

R: ...Between then and now I purchased a house, which was old, I fixed it, and I am trying to do open up my own business.

I: Which will be in the field of mechanics?

R: No, …in the construction field.

I: So, how did you support yourself during these years?

R: My wife has a pretty good paid job (registered nurse), and because when we got married we promised to take care of each other (?), I took advantage of this, so she supported me. (this answer started as a joke but he ended the sentence with a very low/down tone of voice).

I: […] and now this is how the unpaid work went: I raised my child since she was two and a half months, now she is seven years old.

So in this case, the male partner was experiencing what is common for so many women, and interestingly, he uses the term “unpaid work,” indicating perhaps some slight realization that domestic work is, in fact, “real work.”

Nonetheless, during the pre-communist wave of immigration, class distinctions were important. For example, the “Hungarian intelligentsia” distanced themselves from the “lower classes” of the same ethnic group and so more quickly assimilated into upper middle class American society. At least this is how my respondents perceived these families. Still the respondent recalled one physician, one attorney as being part of the
community and that they had been regarded with high respect. They were not first generation immigrants per se, but rather the sons of a previous wave from Eastern Europe, who had the opportunity to gain their education in America. However they were active within the church and helped provide the services they were specialized in. They socialized less in the after church activities, but often were present for the Sunday service.

**Prejudice, Racism and Intolerance**

There seems to have been little inter-ethnic tension within the respondents’ experience, perhaps because the first group (late 1940’s-early 1950’s) had closer relationships with members of other European ethnic groups in their more “urban village” type of neighborhood, and the second group (post 1989) had, or at least perceived that they had, the power to choose which neighborhoods they would live in.

However, both groups eventually had the experience of racial tension within their neighborhoods and work places. They both experienced (as minority groups) and learned (as “white” groups) the patterns of prejudice and discrimination latent in U.S. society.

In terms of work experience, as many of the members of the pre-communist wave had entered blue collar jobs that required minimal English skills and work experience, they would often compete with the non-immigrant American working class and had to confront a strong spirit of nativism expressed historically in the U.S. society.

In the United States, around the decade of 1830-1840, the first nativist group emerged as a reaction against increased (Catholic/Irish) immigration and the crisis over slavery. Many in the 19th century America believed that Protestantism was responsible
for the prosperity and freedom of their nation. The anti-Catholic sentiments were mostly born from the fear that the hierarchic Catholic structure, exercised too much control over their followers and Catholic people are not able to embrace the American spirit of independence and the participation in a republican government. The Know-Nothings party achieved the most success as a nativist group with its tactics directed primarily against Catholic immigration but many Northerners had been initially attracted by the Know-Nothings anti-slavery stance (Anbinder, 1992).

Subsequently, the beginning of immigration restriction in the United States emerged. It began with the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and then continued until 1965 with various legislative measures that would target particular immigrants and regulate the admission of these groups. The criteria for exclusion of certain groups of immigrants had been originally based on religion, race and ethnicity and later on, post-WWI, as a reaction to the Bolshevik Revolution, by an increased domestic radicalism, xenophobia and fear of the threat posed by the leftist social movements that potentially could be formed by the immigrant working class. Overall, a dualistic attitude, “on the one hand reveling in the nation’s immigrant past and on the other rejecting much of its immigrant present” (Daniels, 2004) pervades much American history, characteristic to the 1882-1917 period and up to today’s debates over Latino immigration. The sociological research of each period often reflects the cycles of various interest groups’ standpoints (both anti as well as pro immigrant) dominant at those respective times.

Within the larger literature of Eastern European migration to the United States, a few studies consider the reception of Eastern European immigrants in the receiving
countries. Under the umbrella of ethnic exclusionism are the studies that focus on issues of public opposition to civil rights for (legal) immigrants. The topic of these studies corresponds to some degree, to the American scholarship on nativism and/or ethnic, and racial discrimination of minority and immigrant groups, but unlike them, use mostly quantitative methodology in measuring the degree of hostility toward immigrants. One study (Scheepers, Gijberts & Coenders, 2002), for example uses cross-national data from 15 European countries and performed multi-level analysis, and concluded that people living in individual competitive conditions perceived ethnic out-groups as a threat and those indigenous people who hold similar social class positions to ethnic minorities, support ethnic exclusionism more strongly.

In addition to demanding work conditions, Mrs. Muntean recalled unpleasant and unfair situations she had to deal with because of her status as an immigrant at that time in America.

I was even called Nazi one time, from one girl with whom I worked at the bakery, she couldn’t just keep up (with the work) and she blamed me for (everything) ….[…] No, she was not an immigrant, she was a “Hilly-Billy” […] or sometimes someone call you a DP (displaced person).[…].I just ignored them.

During the recorded interview, Mrs. Muntean refused to explain to me the meaning of what she called a “hilly-billy,” but remembered to return to it, at the end, after the interview had been concluded and the recorder was turned off. In her immigration story, the spirit of nativism and white superiority as she experienced it, is one that has taught her to always be aware of raising this as an issue and always be grateful for the opportunity to be here. Her understanding and acceptance of the situation
had been simple: that there are those (native) people who are against immigration and once they found out that you are from a different place (country) that is their only reason for being against you. Furthermore she mentioned that this experience actually helped her to understand that there are other groups (racial minorities) that are carrying an even lower status than herself and that they have a “names,” too and they are “more dangerous” as compared to other groups.

One instance is presented below where the respondent, a white European immigrant from the earlier period, describes her experience.

After a number of years working in the Northwest Indiana, Mr. and Mrs. Muntean managed to purchase a small apartment building in Gary, Indiana, with the purpose of renting. After learning that the person (a black male) to whom she rented her apartment refused to pay the rent and tries to avoid her by “hiding ‘ in his church community, one Sunday morning, Mrs. Muntean called the secretary of the ministry.” Mrs. Muntean explained:

[…] I was very angry […] and I said: Ok, then you tell him (the renter) that I owe you people nothing, I came here, I worked very hard and if he thinks that he can do that that to me, he is wrong!” … he will pay the rent or I will put him in the news media and everybody will know what is going on.

Mrs. Muntean’s experiences were not uncommon for many immigrants from Europe at that time. For example, soon after arriving in America, Eastern European immigrants learned that whiteness is more than just skin color, but a privileging of opportunity, and a condition for citizenship. The Supreme Court of that time, would never define what “white” was (as requisite for citizenship), but only what was “not
white,” (as many of the today Caucasian people would not be classified as “white”), and consequently allowing the accumulation of property and class identification of immigrants based on the social-political construction of race. As a consequence of this fact, the standard narrative of European mobility (“we came here with nothing, work hard and made a future for our children”), as a proof of American economic order and success, leaves out that access to opportunity was closed to “non-whites.”

Even to these days, some of the respondents interviewed have very racist views and beliefs which they do not express explicitly, but instead through the choice of language they use when making reference to the racial minority group, such as ”you know, the blacks” (while making a negative facial expression). Although they experienced ethnic and religious discrimination and might have shown some solidarity with other subordinate groups at first, their assimilation into “white” American culture taught them to buy into racist stereotypes. Most of them did not understand the historical-structural basis of anti-black discrimination and their rising location in the social stratification system combined to move many of them towards more prejudiced outlooks.

Mrs. Smaranda, is a Moldavian wife and mother of two, who proudly recall devoting all of her life, “making a career from being a stay-at-home wife and mother” in her own words, to her family, while her husband was employed in the steel industry, with a similar experience of advancing himself through education and specialization. By their hard work and the economic conditions of the time, they managed to make an investment in real estate and bought a small apartment building in Hobart, Indiana, with
the purpose of renting. She recalls at this time the great distress she experienced when being sued for constantly refusing to rent the place to black families.

I always knew when a black women called, I know how they talk, and I used to say that the apartment is not available anymore. Until one day when they caught me (laughing), and I had to go through all that trouble; then we noticed that more blacks start to move in the area anyways, so we sold the building... I did not want to rent to them, they destroy everything, plus you rent to one family and ten other people would move there, and then you have trouble with the rest of the people living there.

The post-communist group of Eastern European immigrants actually had a more difficult experience in finding good employment, and yet they too accepted the standard discourse about how “white” (European) immigrants (and a select group of non-Europeans) came with “nothing” and somehow managed to rise above poverty because they worked hard, and therefore, the poverty experienced by many black people must be “their own fault.” There is little understanding about the processes of racial discrimination in the U.S.A. and the impact of racial segregation. Both of the earlier group in their “urban villages” and the more recent experiences today of suburbanization reinforce these ideas because both the “urban villages” and the suburbs were often defined by racial/ethnic exclusion. None of the respondents of this group, reported to have friends or to socialize with members of racial minorities, especially African-Americans and Latinos, but they acknowledge the ethnic and racial diversity of the workplace and sometimes participate in social activities when related to the workplace. Both of the earlier groups live in their “urban villages” and the more recent experiences today of suburbanization, reinforce these ideas because both the “urban villages” and the suburbs were often defined by racial/ethnic exclusion.
Despite this cordial form of socializing, there still remains some competition among various professional ethnic groups as members of different groups tend to favor others from their group. This can work against Eastern Europeans with less social capital if they believe that they are competing, especially with Asians, who might have more social capital in the form of networks and friendships. These more educated immigrants are aware of the racial discourses in American society and they avoid discussing this topic. They acknowledge the presence and the rights of the minority, but avoid any explicit expression of feelings and attitudes toward the minority group. Often these racist ideas develop in the context of job competition and form a pattern based on the occupational field. For example, respondents from Eastern Europe employed in information technology often express racial prejudice toward Indians or other Asian groups with whom they compete on the job market. Two of the physicians I interviewed “complained” that the medical field of Northwest Indiana is dominated by Indian and Middle-Eastern doctors, and that black female doctors are supposedly hired with less qualification and practice, making the work in the office and hospital more difficult.

Elements of color blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), such as “I don’t really care about their ethnic or racial background, I just want to work with someone who know what they are doing,” and vestiges of explicit racism are blended in the approach to race as experience by the post-communist wave.

“Passive” racism is more perceptible and openly discussed in the conversation with post-communist immigrants in blue collar occupations. Feeling competitive with other minority groups on the job market and the experience of discrimination, not
mentioned by the professionals in this wave, are the most common factors triggering this attitude.

“The people used to tell me that if we (the immigrants) would had not been here, they (the Americans) would have been paid better, but we (the immigrants) are working for salaries that are fake (not real money), and this is true; when the employer find out that we are immigrants coming from Europe or Mexico, we are treated differently.”

I: When you said “fake salaries,” what specifically you mean?

R: I mean the money.....hmm.....an American workers got for the same job, and sometime of a lower quality of the work compare with the quality of the work done by an European. This improved quality came from the fact that in Europe we are having real education, starting with the technical schools and moving to all that had to do with the general education; while the American worker got a higher salary just because he is an American.

A barrier that fuels the sentiment of powerlessness and exclusion that stands in the way of advocating for their rights, for this group, is their lack of English proficiency.

[...] because once arrived here I bumped myself very bad and very strong...a hit that still hurts since then...because the language it was and will always remain a problem for immigrants, the integration in the society and culture here is very difficult for immigrants like me and we feel it very tough on our own “skin,” at least from my perspective and a few others, people who would agree with me on what I am saying now We are perceived as immigrants, we are pushed away, the full integration in the American society is not completed and will never be completed, regardless of who you are, professor, mechanic or other jobs you might do …

The Work Experience of Post-Communist Wave of Eastern European

Immigrants: Access into the Primary and Secondary Labor Market

Immigrants coming after 1989, perceived their ethnic communities differently, and they are less likely to rely on their church or neighborhood to guide them in their
search for residence or work. Other important factors to be accounted for include the gradual transformation of the functions of the church, the development of multimedia and technology and also the changes that occurred in these “ethnic or multietnic” neighborhoods over time, along with the “expectations of American life” of this more recent group.

One illustration of this new perception of ethnic community is Mr. Alex who commented on his dislike of older Romanian neighbors:

Yes, in the area where I live now, there are Romanian people, right here across the street from me I had the luck or maybe the bad luck to have some Romanian neighbors…most old generation immigrants […] To have a relationship with them is very difficult, the integration with them is a very difficult task, to preserve the ethnic cultural background together with them is very difficult, so I can say that we have friends, Romanian friends, Romanian friends only, only Romanian people, but not in this area …a very few living in this area. (Respondent emigrated from Romania in 2000).

While the first group of emigrants tend to embrace their ethnic communities(s) and beyond that other ethnic groups, the group coming to America after 1989 seems to be more distant from their fellow East Europeans and removed from the network of immigrants. One explanation for this is the fact that the first group constructs their identity beyond the ethnic boundaries in terms of their experience as war refugees (seeing refugees continue to make me cry) and seems to manifest and better preserve the cohesive aspects of their home societies, than the second group that have perceived themselves with more power of selection on who would fit their group identity and part of their network. This difference in embracing the ethnic community is also contingent to the social class and background of the immigrant.
Moreover, respondents from the post-communist wave often express dissatisfaction with their emigration experience, and have contradictory feelings about their decision to emigrate. The expectation of an American life had been constructed by the stories of earlier immigrants having the opportunity to finally visit their homeland after the fall of the Soviet bloc, many of whom left before the instauration of the Communist regime or fled illegally during the regime. Mr. Sandu describes here:

At the time of emigration, was misinformation; misinformation that was done by other Romanian people... they used to say: Oho, you should see how the America life is, wow! it is so great, everything there is so wonderful, wow…

[…]So, they used to describe America such as dream of anyone, such as the place where you have the possibility to succeed overnight. More specific: in America there is a dollar tree and all you have to do is to go there and start to pick them up (the money).

Mr. Sandu’s experience is not uncommon among Eastern Europeans who came to the U.S. with limited educations and marketable skills. Among the more recent immigrants, there was little, if any, knowledge and contact with the current reality of the American society, and most of their expectations were based on the stories of other immigrants visiting the homeland, and bringing with them stories of (economic) success.

There is class difference within the same wave of immigrants in the ways they experience this connection or disconnection with other co-nationals and their launching into the workforce. The above example belongs to the blue-collar working class respondents, with relatively limited social and capital resources before and after immigration.
Conversations with immigrants on student-visa, professionals and in general people with higher level of human capital, reveal more realistic stories about what they were looking for and what they have found in the host country. Most of these group, were more informed (due to media and internet sources), more connected with people of their own educational level, sharing their experiences over these conversations, and therefore more able to plan accordingly their path to the “American dream.”

**Gender and Work**

In Eastern European countries, gendered socio-economic forces impacted emigration. There, women have been employed outside the home for much of the twentieth century. But when the economic shock waves of the “post-Communist” reforms hit those countries, it was more often the women who were first and most severely affected by the loss of jobs (Hughes, 2000). In those countries, women were more likely to see emigration as a means of survival, again on the one hand because of the economic conditions created in their own country, and, further, because of the possibility that women work in Western countries.

Gendered labor is connected to gendered wages, of course, and wage discrimination against women is commonplace all over the world. As the economic well being for most working class people in the developing world and in the post-communist world has deteriorated, this discrimination has intensified. As Moghadam (2000) explains:

The fact that in Russia and Poland women’s unemployment is higher than men’s despite women’s higher educational attainment and their long work experience is suggestive of the existence of gender bias in labor markets, often influenced by
the gender ideology that men are primary breadwinners and more deserving of the better jobs

A common survival strategy, for young, single Eastern European women is to move abroad to Western Europe, Canada, or the United States, where there is a demand for domestic work as housekeepers or babysitters (Sandu, 2005). As a result, many young well-educated girls responding to respectable job advertisements end up working in lesser jobs, sometimes even under conditions of coercion, at the extreme risk of ending up as victims of human trafficking, while others chose the alternative of an arranged marriage with a U.S. citizen.

Unfortunately these “alternatives” are currently commonly accepted practices by the sending societies. Although the practices of “arranged marriage” and “sending the young women away” had not previously been traditional cultural practices of these societies, it has become an increasingly accepted economic strategy, and an example of the effects of transition to a new, less stable, economic system on the previously existing societal norms.

The pioneering work on gender in the emergent sociological scholarship, Kovach and Melegh (2008), that specifically looks at the reasons, type and processes of migration in different migratory spaces in Eastern Europe and the integration of female migrants, contains important insights, but ultimately falls short in exploring the root of the problem of migrant women, because they do not fully explore the ways that globalization and new economic processes impact on gender relations, issues that lie in the cultural construction of gender as well as the life conditions of migrant women. Statements such as:
“Traditionalist” women want to integrate to migrant men and to recreate something of the original familial society left behind; or They simply believe that to live with Westernized men brings Western type of “freedom” are limited interpretations of the construction of the ideas of “West” and “East,” “men” and “women” and what these respondents define by ‘freedom.’ More research is necessary to explore the roots of the problem of migrant women in the new cultural construction of gender as well as the life conditions of migrant women in Eastern societies and socio-economic context that pull women out of work in their home countries after 1989.

Some researchers however, have come to understand better the dramatic social consequences for younger women under the globalization’s politics of neoliberalization:

The paths of women’s liberation from traditional patriarchal control in developing countries lie either through degrading factory labor or through trading on sexuality which vary from respectable work as hostess and waitress, to the sex trade (one of the most lucrative of all contemporary industries in which a good deal of slavery is involved) (Harvey, 2005).

**Conclusion**

The earlier waves of Eastern-European immigrants relied on the ethnic community and its church as their starting point in seeking employment and a place of residence. There was often a sense of solidarity based on being new immigrants to America, even among immigrants from different countries, who often lived in diverse ethnic neighborhoods. However, as these immigrants established connections with co-nationals within their ethnic churches, established families in the new country, and started to compete for jobs with other immigrant groups, their identities changed from being immigrants to being members of minorities who were competing for jobs. This
competition for jobs was accompanied by a sense of racial/ethnic superiority towards other ethnicities and towards black Americans, in order to become successful. It was the combination of structural factors, especially competition for jobs, and the absorption of latent Anglo-Saxon American attitudes about other ethnicities and especially black people.

There were two traditional patterns taken by immigrants from these earlier waves. Many of the major industrial companies, including especially the steel mills, actually advertised in Europe that they had jobs available. Furthermore, family and church networks and word-of-mouth generated momentum for people from particular areas to settle in particular parts of the U.S.A. Once the ethnic groups established churches and other community institutions, this tended to further encourage clustering in certain regions, again, primarily dependent upon where there were jobs.

Those coming unmarried found employment and then tended to marry people from their own ethnic community. Those who came already married were often seeking employment soon after arrival. In both scenarios, for blue collar immigrants from Eastern Europe, (the majority of my sample), the husband was most often employed in the steel industry or industries ancillary to the steel industry. They often received opportunities to advance within their position, through training for skilled positions, while the wives often found jobs in small local industries, such as working in bakeries, or as seamstresses, or in laundries. They generally had children shortly after marriage and set the goal of advancing them into Middle Class America.
The work experience of post-communist immigrants from Eastern Europe has been more contingent upon their educational background and their previous work experience. The church and the ethnic community continues to be a starting place for immigrants in working class jobs while professionals with higher levels of education have been coming to the United States either with a student/resident visa or they have been landing their first job through work contracts with companies that had been offered to them before emigration. Therefore, the ethnic community is no longer the traditional, first resort and starting point in searching for jobs for this group as it had been for their predecessors. This change is due in part to the fact that the role and functions of the immigrant church has been changed over time, and also because of the increase in technology, specifically internet websites created by immigrant diasporas that are often used by potential immigrants in the native country before they emigrate.

Unlike the earlier immigrant generation, the pattern of the blue-collar working class families of the post-communist wave (post-1990) more often have a situation where the husband actually has a more difficult time finding stable employment while the wife starts starting in an entry-level position in a service or clerical job where she might receive opportunities for advancement in her career. This finding relates to the structural changes in the U.S. economy and to the cultural changes that had once seen the man as the primary breadwinner of the household, to a more gender egalitarian society. Therefore, the majority of male respondents of this study, regardless of their employment qualification and status, expressed distress and dissatisfaction with their immigration
experience and the changes brought to their families, compared to the men and women of the previous wave.

Both groups had the experience of racial tension within their neighborhood and work place. They both experienced (as minority groups) and learned (as “white” groups) the patterns of prejudice and discrimination latent in U.S. society. In terms of work experience, as many of the members of the pre-communist wave had entered blue collar jobs that required minimal English skills and work experience, they would often compete with the non-immigrant American working class and had to confront a strong spirit of nativism expressed historically in the U.S. society. Both of the earlier group in their “urban villages” and the more recent experiences today of suburbanization, reinforce these ideas because both the “urban villages” and the suburbs were often defined by racial/ethnic exclusion. While the (negative) views of the pre-communist wave are more explicit in what regard race and ethnic relations experience in American society, elements of color blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and vestiges of explicit racism are blended in the approach to race as experience by the post-communist wave.
CHAPTER FIVE
EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Introduction

The two waves of Eastern European immigrants experienced family formation and family life in different ways, contingent upon the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the sending and receiving country. Families of the first wave entered into a society having at that point in history the same family structure and similar (family) values, in both sending and receiving countries. Migration of the post-Communist wave happened at a time when families in the United States had become substantially more complex and more open compared to much of the rest of the world, largely due to the changing structure of the economy as well as a result of social political attitudes and social movements of the time, such as the feminist movement.

A comparative study by sociologist Cosima Rughinis, University of Bucharest, explores the contemporary values that guide behavior in intimate relationships, focusing on eight countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, France, Germany and Italy). Along with other topics, that study addresses the questions of changes in women’s role brought about by modernization. She identifies three types of family [traditional, modern and post-modern (with two employees)], linking each to different values.
People interviewed in all the countries believed the employment of women was important for family survival and had confidence in the ability of women to be both mother and employee simultaneously. But only a very small number of Romanians agreed that fathers could take care of their children as well as the mothers. Rughinis (2002) notes that:

The symmetry from the roles exterior to the households seems to be vulnerable to the crisis situations: the Romanians, the Bulgarians and the Polish believe to the greatest extent that unemployment justifies the act of granting a greater priority to men in obtaining a job. The Czechs and the French are the most open-minded in this respect, two thirds of them rejecting the idea of the discrimination of women even as regards the unemployment situation. (p. 67)

One of the study’s questions is “for how long will the family continue to be a fundamental institution of the Romanian society, rooted in the healthy nature of this people?” (Mitrofan 1993, p. 477). Rughinis (2002) notes, because

in a rapid moving society, where many things change rapidly, where the husband goes up and down on a diversity of economic and social scales, where family is again separated from the home and from the community, where the individuals detach themselves from their parents, from the religion of origin, from traditional values; it is almost a miracle if two individuals develop in somehow similar rhythms. (p. 51)

In many Eastern European countries divorce is no longer considered a failure in an individual’s life, as it once was. Still the importance of the family is “unquestionable” in all eight countries, the extent to it is necessary for the personal happiness differ from country to country.

The majority of Romanians and Ukrainians believe that men and women need children in order to be happy; they are also convinced, along with Bulgarians, that a stable relationship is important in order to be happy. The opinions are more homogeneous as regard the necessity of a family with two parents for the
happiness of children: only 10% of the citizens of all analyzed countries consider that the family with two parents is not necessary (Rughinis, 2002, p. 56).

The strong cultural belief that a child needs to be born inside a family with two working parents and therefore a stable emotional and financially situation, dissuades many women from choosing to have children.

In more religious countries, religion is important in dealing with family problems, and the emphasis on family life is stronger. Many Romanians, Polish, Ukrainians, and Italians believed that the church offers the right answer for people’s spiritual needs and family problems, almost all Eastern Europeans (Romanians, Poles, Ukranians) and Italians surveyed by Rughinis (2002) agreed that the religious ceremony is important in the following situations: birth, marriage, death (p. 58).

How have people’s perceptions changed as a result of the post-1989 social, economic, and political transformation? In the specific case of Romania, the legalization of the couple’s relationship remained a priority, and the divorce rate is a low 21.5 per 1000 population (Rughinis, 2002). On the other hand, couples postpone marriage – women marry around the age of 23 while men around the age 25, about one year later than before. The proportion of marriages before the age of 20 has decreased while those of marriages between 25 and 29 have increased. Overall, there is a decline in the fertility rate from before 1989 and the present.

A major change is the importance of religion in the individual’s life. While religiosity was restricted or even prohibited in Soviet times, now it has become there has been a return to tradition and culture. The expansion of acceptance of religion as an old
value is associated with a strong intolerance toward “unconventional sexual behavior” (homosexuality, prostitution, casual relationships, and extra-conjugal affairs), in particular among Romanians, 70% of whom say they are “never justified” (Rughinis, 2002, p. 58). Overall women are more tolerant of homosexuality and men more tolerant of prostitution, adultery, abortion and divorce.

Even though many young couples approve of traditional marital roles, the vast majority have much less trust in the value of marriage than any previous generation. This is in the context of the post-socialist changes. The socialist policies promoted full employment for men and women. The post-socialist society has high unemployment, including the lack of available jobs for women, and a lack of state supported child care programs. These changes in national policies motivate many families to consider emigration.

**Patterns of Family Migration of the pre-Communist Immigrant Wave**

The immigrants coming to the United States during WWII or shortly after often started their families at the same time as they immigrated or soon after arrival. They married spouses from the ethnic community. This is in contrast to the later wave of immigrants who immigrated as couples and families who made the decision to immigrate together.

Mrs. Cornea was born in Bucovina on April 25, 1925 and came to America at the age of 16, fleeing the Russian occupation of her country at the beginning of the WWII. She was raised Orthodox and gladly embraced the church community she found in the U.S., where she recalled making many friends and where she found her future Romanian
husband. She recalls the constant pressure from her family, especially her mother and older sister, already married in the home country, to soon find a Romanian man and to start her family in the new country. Her main criterion for a husband, other than having the same ethnic background, was “to be a tall, good looking man.”

She recalls during the interview, and many times in private conversations, about the first time she met her husband and their good life together.

One day I came to see my sister (who was married and had two kids, living with her family into a neighborhood of many immigrants), and on the same block, and her neighbor was a war refugee also living in the same block, you know, she called me over, and (I) was happy to meet somebody, you know. I met my husband, you know, and I married him. […]

... And when first time I saw George, he was a tall man with blue eyes, and kind of thin, but so handsome and so kind. I just like him, and I knew right away that I want to marry him.

Mrs. Cornea had been married for 32 years, which she liked to remember as a wonderful time of her life. She and her husband had no children, but mentioned enjoying being Godparents to many children of their Romanian friends, with whom they socialized at the church gatherings. She spoke of these social events with great enthusiasm as a wonderful time of their lives in the new country. She recalled participating in many banquets and dance parties, taking pride in herself and her husband as a good looking couple, with very good dancing abilities. “By the end of the party, I was so tired (from dancing) and used to take off my shoes, and dance just like this with the rest of the girls, we had so much fun.”

Mrs. Cornea worked multiple blue collar jobs, the longest position, for 18 years as a baker. However, she retired once her husband’s employment became more stable:
Well, he went first, to work as a laborer, of course, then he went to Purdue, the Iron Steel paid (for his education), and he learned to be a mechanic.[...] He was very happy (with his employment).

The dinners, banquets, picnics, and weddings increased in number after WWII, and were all held in the church. Despite the traumatic context of her emigration, Mrs. Cornea learned to adapt to the life in the new country fairly fast, and she confessed that she felt as “American” as she would have if she had been born here. However, the America in which Mrs. Cornea actually lived, was mostly a place sheltered by the ethnic community, where families, networks of friends, neighborhoods, shops and jobs were places formed by immigrants such herself, learning together how to live in a new country, and learning how to adapt to a society to whose values they aspired, such as freedom of expression, voluntarism, hard work, success throughout individual effort and liberty. Becoming an American and living the American dream was not just a goal, but a way of life. Immigrant families like that of the Corneas gradually transformed their families and their religious institutions into American institutions.

Mrs. Cornea was like most immigrants of this generation. Both women and men entered the work force after arrival, but as men's jobs became more stable and able to support the family, and certainly after the birth of their children, women often left the paid work force. Stephanie Coontz (2005) describes how this was the pattern in the U.S. white, middle class in the early 1950’s, as war veterans returned home to “reclaim” their jobs and their wives immersed themselves in the role of homemaker. Mr. Moldovan, born in Romania in 1925, was drafted into the military as a young man, sent to Germany for special military training (1943-1951), married a German citizen and moved to United
States in the spring of 1951. After arriving in New York, he and his wife found their first jobs, he as a delivery driver and his wife as a cook. With many men of his immigrant generation, he moved to Northwest Indiana and he began working in the steel mills of Gary, Indiana. Once his employment became more stable, and after the birth of their two children his wife ceased working outside their home.

There were many single guys, that left the country by themselves[…]life was much easier single…easy to find jobs in the Steel, there were many working class (immigrants) men and women, women also used to works as tailors, cooks, but if they married they were not working" (employed outside the home).

A different case is Mrs. Muntean, an ethnic German born in 1927 who, the age of 21, married a Romanian citizen who was in military service in Germany at time. She and her husband moved to the U.S. in 1952. Her husband was worried about the expansion of the Russian regime over the area where they were living at the time, and wanted to leave.

With great sorrow, Mrs. Muntean recall her first thoughts at the time of emigration:

So, me and my husband married in ’47, my husband came from the East, so after that he…. that we leave Germany and come to U.S.; I had no reason to come, because my life was very good, (smiling), therefore in 1951 we went up to… and when I saw the camp (the camp for immigrants)….and I talk to him (my husband) that I will took my child (born in 1948) and just came back home…[…]

Mrs. Muntean’s story of immigration is different in part because of her life experience as a German citizen. At that time, despite the turmoil during WWII, she did not consider emigration to be an escape from her native country, as did most of the other refugees of Eastern Europe. Emigration was the decision of her newly married husband, a Romanian citizen, member of the pro-Nazi Legionary movement, who feared the consequences of the political changes in Germany and Eastern Europe in place at the end
of the WWII. Unfortunately, nothing more is known on Mr. Muntean’s background and what political relationship it produced in the U.S, since he declined my invitation for the interview at that time, and he passed away a few months before I finished my study.

Let, me think back…it was in New York, and I think it was a priest and he sent us to the train so we came here to Gary, and in Gary again we were picked up again by a priest. And he took us to his house, very nice, and from there we were brought to another older couple house, we stayed there maybe three weeks and then we were looking for a place .. and I found another German lady and she said to me : “Oh, not far from me there is house “ and I said “Ok, I will go and look maybe we can rent or we can own”. So when I came there, they took me to a nice, new house, and they said “thirty-five dollars” (per month), “Oh, my God!” I said, “I will take it!”

The toilet was outside, which I wasn’t used for, in the nighttime you have to go, in the snow in January, out, ...I cried my eyes, to be in such situation, to what I left and what I found, therefore, after that we did not stay there too long, we got the apartment closer to Gary, (this was South of Gary what was happened) and then I started to look for work, I found a job, and then we bought a house. My husband work not too far, many days because there was…yeah and in 1955 we bought a house, and everything from there went ...

Mrs. Munstein recalled Gary, Indiana as:

At time was very nice, the city was good you could go out on the nighttime to the theater, to the stores, not how it is today.. […]yes, I had many immigrants in the block,…..that was close to the school so my son didn’t have to go too far for school.

However, during her life time, she always regretted having to accept her husband’s decision to emigrate and often expressed, during the interview and in further private conversation, a romanticized view of the past and how their life as a family would have been back home. She had been employed for most of her life, yet once again, her opportunities for employment as an immigrant and as a mother and wife and limitations she had seen because of her status, were often under her expectations.
Well, that is a long story… because I was called to the Immigration in Hammond to translate for some after.. and that was a teacher that want me to go and be a librarian, but for me I was looking for something I can work nights because my son was small so that I can look for him during the day, so I worked in a bakery, yeah…and the….several time that I cannot work that long, I said because I thought it would go better, but see, I got stuck until they closed the ..whole place

I: How many hours did you work?

R: Hours?...I have no idea, but was like slavery..

I: Why?

R: Why?, because there was no unions, you had to work 19-22 hrs and if you don’t came back next day in time, they would fire you .It was very hard…it is unbelievable what happened...

I: Was the bakery owned by some immigrant family?

R: No, no, no, this is the Wonder Bread, […] I was there started in’53, I believe, and then they close up in seventies But at that time it was easier, we had unions, and worked 7-8 hours

I: What other jobs have you had?

R: That was it, I had enough.

Mrs. Muntean as an immigrant in the post-war America, recalled that her first job was “like slavery.” Her work, together with her full responsibilities as a wife and a mother, exemplifies the vulnerability of the new immigrant families starting their lives in the new land.

Children were raised in the families that required the use of English language in the household, although most of the parents were still learning English. These parents wanted their children to become American citizens and assimilated into American culture without having to experience the discrimination that many immigrants experienced.
One of the respondents, a priest serving a newly established (at that time) Romanian Orthodox church recalls:

[...] and at that time, while visiting the houses of my parishioners, I remember how some of them (the parents) were so strict, and they would not put the food on the table, until the child asked for it in English.

Furthermore after WWII, anti-communist sentiments were very strong in the United States, and immigrants from Eastern Europe were concerned they might be marginalized as foreign communists if they did not blend into the mainstream.

One respondent, the son of an immigrant family from Russia, recalled the terror his parents felt that some people, recognizing their Russian origins, would call them communists, so they urged their children to speak English only. The parents also avoided any conversation in Russian between themselves when the children were present. As a grown up man, this respondent confessed that now he has regrets about not learning his parents’ language, and not knowing more than a few expressions in Russian language, since

[...], now really nobody would care, so would have been good to know other language than English" [...] I also have an American first name, these new parishioners (newer immigrant families), don't even know that my family was Russian, no trace of that...

Within the context of these transformed original ethnic parishes, there is a mix of English (only) speaking parishioners (sons and daughters of the WWII immigrants) and newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe along with their children, fluent in both English and their native language. One well known joke that goes along the Sunday’s dinner tables, is as one of the older generation to complement a new immigrant about his
English proficiency despite the short time since arrival, such as “How long have you been here? Your English is so good” and the answer would be: “Thank you, …yours, too.” As sarcasm to the fact that the older generation’s English proficiency is so good, because English is the only language the older immigrants actually speak. For this reason, most of these parishes are somewhat segregated between their members – those that belong to the wave of after WWII and the those who came during the post-communist wave. The voluntary physical segregation in church and the voluntary socialization with the members of their own group in the social halls of the churches, the language they choose for conversations and the friendships they form based on their background, bring to the surface the conflict of values between themselves (that are going beyond the age-related differences), and the different expectations of what the face of the church should look like and what purpose it should fulfill in their life.

**Gender Roles in Eastern Europe**

Women in Eastern Europe entered the job market in great numbers after 1940, and later on during the Communist regimes. They had opportunities for employment and encouragement from the Communist Party to pursue professional careers as men’s equals, careers that were not commonly available to women in Western capitalist countries. The communist ideology proclaimed equal rights for men and women, both in education and work. Despite this ideology, however, the culture of most Eastern European societies supported very restrictive roles for women, who were expected to take primary responsibilities within the household, including the raising of children, regardless of their employment status.
During the Communist era, the proletarianization of women who worked in factories was seen as a positive aspect that would create independence and class-consciousness among them. But, on the other hand, male/female differences were very obvious; there was a “fear” that if women will be raised too independently they might believe that heterosexual marriage and the traditional nuclear family are irrelevant in their lives. In her study of Romanian women under Communism, Karl Heinz Mehlan (1965) found that educated women were less interested in having children. It is possible that this rejection of childbearing was a result of women’s awareness of gender discrimination in Romania.

Many of the countries of the former Soviet bloc had social policies supporting women including two years of post-natal leave while maintaining the security of the position, free medical services, and free state-run day care. These policies were supposed to encourage maternity and the whole social culture of child welfare, but, in practice, discriminated against mothers. The idea of a long term career was often considered unrealistic because of the difficulties of balancing family responsibilities with the responsibilities of a career. According to Olga Toth (2004), “the idea of a career is alien to the Hungarian women, and that they give priority to the interests of the family over the advancement at work” (p. 121). In Romania, where very strong pronatalist policies had been implemented, many families ended up with more children than they could afford.

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4On October 1, 1966, a Romanian government decree severely restricted the right to abortion and left women with no other means for controlling their fertility. All forms of “artificial” birth control were banned, and it was not until the late 1980s that an underground, illegal-(black) market for birth control pills and devices began to flourish with such products imported from Hungary and the Yugoslavian Federation countries. However, illegal abortions were commonplace during that whole twenty three year period and
and women’s role and responsibilities became locked to the household. Ironically, these
extreme pronatalist policies were generally associated with conservative governments,
rather than those claiming to be “Marxist.” As a result, thousands of children were born
into families that did not have the economic resources to properly care for them, and
many were abandoned to state-run orphanages. The unusual tradition of child
abandonment and its rationalization as “the government wanted them (the children), so
the government should raise them,” emerged as a reaction to a depressive and
exploitative life endured by women in a socialist society.

For the most part, families in Eastern European countries have assumed very
traditional gendered roles for men and women. These countries developed family patterns
of fertility according to their own situation, but the common trend was that a man was the
head of the household and, families considered one or two children ideal. Again, this
might seem counter-intuitive because socialist ideology emphasized equality between the
sexes and promoted more opportunities for women in some traditionally “male”
occupations, such as medicine, factory work, and law enforcement. But in reality, most
women still found their position at home which was more alike than different from
women in non-socialist societies (Robila, 2004, p. 147). In Slovenia, Macedonia,
Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and the rest of the former Soviet countries, the same
variation of gender roles was maintained more or less rigidly, with the men assuming the
role of breadwinner and head of the family, while women, regardless of their

abandonment of children to state-run institutions was also a way for families to deal with the inability of
women to control their fertility.
employment outside the house, were responsible for the household tasks (Bodrug-Lungu, 2004; Filadelfiova, 2004; Robila, 2004; Staykova, 2004; Ule, 2004; Zhurzhenko, 2004).

The development of a more “westernized” culture with more egalitarian gender roles and social relations emerged in the 1990s, a shift that, significantly, affected more recent immigrants to the U.S..

Alex, who was married under the Communist regime in Romania, and divorced shortly after 1989, emigrated to U.S. in 2000. He compared his marital experiences and family life in the two different contexts. One major difference was that he became a stay-at home dad for his daughter in the U.S.. He explained:

[...]there was two main stages of transformation of Romanian people: one was before the Revolution where the woman was the one in charge to prepare pretty much everything in the household; after the Revolution the people’s mentality had changed in the sense that both men and women are working, so they are both in charge with the food preparation and raising the children. Personally, I consider this as a good thing, because from the oldest time until now, there was a struggle to eliminate the exploitation of human being by other human beings. I do not know of how much progress had been done so far, but…..

Nevertheless Alex explained that he was not involved that much, because my job was ten to twelve hours daily. I was a manager of a shop, and that position meant spending a lot of time at my work place. Maybe my involvement with the child was about 50%, while here my time allow me to take care complete of raising and educating my young daughter, and I am proud of that.

Similar accounts attest the experience of everyday Eastern European families before 1989, when despite the full-time employment outside the house, women’s main commitment was supposed to be the devotion to their families, while the most important paid work outside the household was supposed to be held by the man.
Mrs. Lavinia born in Russia in 1972 and emigrating at 29-years old to the U.S. with a fiancée visa and marring an American citizen, recalls:

In my opinion, in the 60’s, 70’s (in Russia), the man was the main [provider], and women had to follow the man, and the wealth of the family all depended on man. Women made less money with the same education. She was still responsible for all the chores, men expected that for the women...Even men who (are) raise(d) now, they still expect for the women (to be responsible with the household chores). Women now want equality, they are not as feminist as in America, but they still want to be treated equal. They don’t want to be better than men, but they want to be friends and equal with men.

In regard to the changes she noticed after the 1989, Mrs. Lavinia acknowledges that:

(The) Status of women, become more independent than before, and they could live on their own. During the Soviet Union, women were suffering more, with one income or two, still were bad, men were making more money, but that is true on America, too, men make more money than women.

Mrs. Red from Moldova recalled that gender and age discrimination became even more prevalent after the fall of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe:

You know, in our country after 30 years old, as a women is kind of difficult to find a job...if you do not have already started a career… I kind of started mine at 27 years old, before 30, because if I would have wait after being 30 years old, and call a company for job, and they asked you how old are you, without even seeing you they would said "oh, we will think about it, and call you back". I am looking here at people working and being hired in their 50’s and 60’s and to US if you are in your 30’s and still looking good, they might think about…(hiring you).

As these two accounts acknowledge the disadvantaged status of women in Eastern Europe both before and after 1989, and recognize a women’s empowerment through immigration, they also miss the support of a community that used to compensate for the discrimination they experience at home as women. The existence of a community, which was taking for granted in the past, now is an experience that has to be created. In many
ways the existence of this community (outside the church) in these small towns of Northwest Indiana, and perhaps in other suburbs through the United States developed throughout the need and effort of the women and mothers.

This need arrived partly because of family isolation as a result of a more age segregated society and individual’s isolation in their own family as result of the economic demands. That comes in addition to their immigrant status. The spatial nature of many communities, where one must rely automobiles rather than walking and public transportation, also weakens the community bonds which have existed in the past, both in the U.S. and their home countries. The lack of government sponsored childcare programs in U.S. further becomes a factor that causes suburban moms to seek community through developing informal or formal private social organizations.

Marx, among others, utilized the concept of alienation as a way to understand how the macro (societal) processes affect individuals. According to Marx, class society causes alienation as people are separated from the fruits of their labor, from themselves, and from the rest of humanity. In capitalist society, this alienation becomes more extreme as the drive for more and more profits intensifies the division of labor and breaks down feelings of community. Marx believed that new solidarities would develop based on common class interests, but in any case, there is a period where the old feelings of community can be replaced by feelings of isolation and alienation and people seek ways to overcome that alienation. In many of the Eastern European communities, the breakdown of mechanical solidarity was not accompanied by organic solidarity but rather by more atomized, individualistic lives giving rise to a sense of
anomie as many people were not sure how to successfully navigate the new “rules” of post-communist society. One can find relevancy in much of Durkheim’s writings on the breakdown of mechanical solidarity and the rise of anomie to help understand these developments

Transnational Families of the Post-Communist Migration

Women from the former socialist countries make up a higher percentage of immigrants in contrast to the previous wave of immigrants from those areas. They also had more of a role in the decision to migrate in the first place. Migration was a response to the worsening economic conditions associated with the transition from a socialist economy to a capitalist market economy. Discriminatory labor markets also pushed women out of well-paid professions in the home countries and toward lower paid, service sector jobs and domestic labor, in the host country. This demand for domestic labor has been due in part to more women in advanced capitalist countries, entering the work force. The trajectories of their migration are contingent not only upon their human and social capital but also their age and marital status.

I use the term human capital to refer to the level of education which determines how quickly and easily an immigrant will integrate into the work force (Robila, 2009, p. 56). Language proficiency is another important factor in the adaptation process (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), as is motivation for success that would spur people to participate in programs for job training that increase the likelihood of landing jobs in the host society (Robila, 2009, p. 10). Social capital, more specifically network capital (family and community) provides support for travel and accommodation at destination countries;
however, as migration shifts from temporary to permanent, human capital such as language skills, education and professional knowledge become more essential (Sandu, 2005). This finding is consistent with previous research (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990) which observes that unlike at the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. is no longer the favored destination among Eastern Europeans who have less human capital and economic resources, and supports the more recent findings (Robila, 2005) documenting that Eastern European immigrants who have more resources (human, social, economic capital) attempt to migrate to U.S., while those with fewer resources tend to migrate to closer geographical locations such as Western Europe (e.g., agricultural workers leaving for Germany, Italy and Spain).

Not only does migration shape the sending places; characteristics of the sending places (such as ethnic and racial composition) but religion, age of migrants, geo-political location, and economic order, also regulate this type of migration. Important factors include age (the youngest migrants are oriented toward Italy), religion (a large concentration of Romanian Adventist men work in the construction areas near Madrid, Spain), and ethnicity (Romanians of Hungarian ethnicity working in Hungary, Roma in Germany and Yugoslavia). Additionally, the geographical location of villages strongly influence migration, and places located near major cities and modern roads are more integrated into transnational spaces (Sandu, 2005). All these factors play a role in determining specific trajectories of migration.

Moreover, these factors are tied to economic processes in a dialectical way, where migrants “change” the place to which they migrate, and migration, in turn, changes the
characteristics of the place from which they migrated. For example, younger migrants go to Italy because of attractive jobs more suitable to their ages, such as working in hotels, tourism, and entertainment. The entertainment industry requires a constant change of performers; this “age variable” in the industry therefore, becomes a factor in promoting circular migration rather than permanent settlement among young people. When they return to their own countries, other young people from their villages and towns may seek similar jobs abroad, contributing to the development of a pattern where particular “places of origin” have specific characteristics of work. For example, certain towns might send their young people to Italy, while other towns do not.

Still, there is a relatively limited number of scholars publishing in the area of Eastern European migration, notably Mihaela Robila, Dumitru Sandu, Cosmin Radu, Monica Constantinescu, Oana Ciobanu, Eva Kovacs and Attila Melegh. Most of their studies use quantitative analysis focusing on emigration from Eastern to Western Europe with the purpose of informing and promoting social policies in this area. These studies (Sandu, 2000, 2001, 2005; Sandu, Radu, Constantinescu, & Ciobanu, 2004) look at the ways in which the context of new and developing democracies in Eastern and Central Europe after 1989 have created an unprecedented migratory movement between East and West. Some of their inquiries look to what extent these new immigration flows from Eastern Europe bear the marks of transnationalism. What is the role played by the individual, community and regional variables in the selectivity of international circular migration and particularly of transnational migration? And to what extent are migrants from the post-communist states in Eastern Europe developing a new type of ‘regional
transnationalism’ (Sandu, 2005). However, these studies focus largely on individual, rather than the family, as the primary actor of migration.

My findings are consistent with current research (Robila, 2009) that says the human capital of contemporary immigrant families is higher than that of the previous Eastern European groups, and that Eastern Europeans have higher level of education than other immigrant groups. In this recent wave, both women and men enter the work force after arrival, often coming with a student visa or job contract. The findings indicate that the more patriarchal the family is, the more dramatic is the change within their families in terms of gender roles.

Eastern European immigrant women tend to adopt a more progressive gender role and attitudes while living in Western societies. However, Eastern European men still favor the traditional gender roles for women. Similar to the findings on the Mexican family experience of migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994), major changes in gender relations develop within Eastern European families when they move permanently to the U.S. Eastern European women settle in a more protective, empowering and egalitarian system like the U.S. with less gender discrimination compared to their own countries. A woman from Moldova explains: “If in America a man beat up women, you call the police; at home we call this tradition.” While this statement might seem an extreme representation, it does point out that there are socio-cultural practices and legal protections for women in the United States that are not necessarily as common in Eastern Europe. Aside from the cultural, social, and political factors affecting the lives of Eastern European women, the issue of economics is also important. While most of the Eastern
European migration to U.S. after 1990 consists of legal immigrants with the right to gain employment, and often with an advanced educational background, many Eastern European women tend to work in entry-level positions or low paying jobs well below their skills level and qualifications, although they eventually advance over time (Robila, 2008). Personal accounts of respondents in this study confirm that women develop more independence and autonomy after migration, and, thus, result in the exercise of more power in the family.

Migration and settlement result in the renegotiation of gender relations in the traditional patriarchal Eastern European family. However, new forms of relations are contingent upon the intersections of social class, age and educational background of immigrants. For example, husbands in the home country who are better educated tend to adjust to shifting gender relations in the U.S. more readily than those who are less educated. Even as their wives acquired more education and skills in the U.S. with more status or power accrued to them, educated husbands are still more secure in their social class position relative to wives. Less educated husbands tend to have diminished power as their wives acquired more education or skills. For example, many immigrants from former Yugoslavia came to the U.S. as refugees from the major wars in the 1990’s which included less educated male workers (Robila, 2008). Male immigrants from Moldova also tend to have less education than those from most of the other Eastern European countries. These men generally find stable blue-collar jobs, while their spouses often acquire more education and skills resulting in higher occupational status.
Based on the data collected for this study, migrant families from former Yugoslavia and Moldova tend to report major transformations in family relations and experience most difficulties in maintaining traditional patriarchal practices. It seems that family power tends to become balanced between the husband and wife. The adjustment is seldom easy, sometimes resulting in a positive realignment of roles and sometimes resulting in family break ups. Thus, social, economic, and cultural factors contribute to the changing gender relations among Eastern European immigrants.

Changes in gender relations shape the differing opinions between men and women over whether the family should settle permanently in the U.S. One concern is that securing a stable employment is increasingly becoming difficult for men. Also, Eastern European women’s independence in the U.S. compared to their traditional gender roles practiced in the home country makes adjustment to American culture challenging for men. Since the U.S. economic recession in 2008, job market opportunities are unstable and unpredictable. Small businesses provide some opportunities but these do not ensure security as those provided in the immediate post World War II period.

Because of less discriminatory practices in receiving countries such as the United States, Eastern European women have better opportunities to advance themselves in these countries and become economically successful, and they tend to adopt a more progressive gender role and attitude while living in Western societies. However, many Eastern European men still favor the traditional gender roles for women. Migration to and settlement in the U.S. results in the renegotiation of gender relations in once traditional patriarchal Eastern European families. Still, new of relations are contingent upon the
intersections of social class, age and the educational background of immigrants. In contrast to the pre-Communist wave, there is a context in the host country of increased acceptance of ethnic and racial diversity. Children of these families have been more encouraged to speak the native language and to maintain a multi-ethnic identity, without as much fear of discrimination.

One example: Mr. Alex, who emigrated from Romania in 2000, admits that he still struggles with learning English; however, he insists that his daughter Dana (7) speak Romanian when she is at home:

My English skills were… I could say that I prepared myself a little bit before emigration …hmmm.. but I do not know what happened along the way, but after arriving to America I forgot even how to say “thank you” in English .. It had been very difficult, and a huge obstacle for me …because the language gives to a person the possibility to provide for food and shelter, have a good job, and… this affected me very much…

I: How is your English now? How did it change over time?

R: I would say that I can move around now, I can get a pretty god job, I can manage to keep a discussion in any conditions, so I would say that my English level now, let’s say …hmmm… almost at a half…

Still, Mr. Alex tries to preserve his ethnic heritage and culture in his family, in the United States and to pass down to his children:

I tried to keep the Romanian tradition in all that is understand by culture, language and cuisine.[…] Yes, I raised my daughter, in a Romanian style, not an American one.

I: What do you mean by “Romanian” style?

R: Not too much fast food, or junk food (what’s the name for that?). I tried to raise her closer to the truth, in the sense that Romanians have different eating habits that are different from those here …the food there is made more natural.
Mrs. Lavinia from Russia, who married an American citizen, and has not even one member of her Russian family in the U.S., socializes mostly with her husband’s extended family and some Russian friends. However, that is a friendship group which her husband does not favor much, since he does not understand Russian and is not interested in learning it. Therefore, Mrs. Laivinia has a more difficult time passing her language and tradition on to her children. When asked what language she speaks to her children, she answered:

50/50 English and Ukrainian, but they pick up English better (oh..) they understand some words, but they do not speak Ukrainian or Russian… I tried to teach them some words, but they…because nobody else around speaks that language, is hard, very hard…so in time they learn from TV just English..

A similar example of a mixed family, from Ukraine, is Mrs. and Mr. Lucas. They have two children, both baptized with Russian Orthodox names and having both children conversing Russian only (the mother’s language) at home. When asked Mrs. Lucas, how her husband (an American born and raised citizen, with no Eastern European background), understands and is able to converse in Russian, she said;

At the beginning, when we married I tried to teach him from books and everything organized,… but it didn’t help much. Then when my parents came here to help US with the first baby, they talk to my husband Russian only, since they don’t know any English, especially my dad, he talks a lot and really want to hang around with his new son in law,,, so my husband was “emerged” so to speak …(laughing out loud). Now, as you can see, he is doing just fine..

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the form of relations are contingent upon the intersections of social class, age and the educational background of immigrants. The marriage of Mrs. Lavinia to a working class American citizen, resembles more the patterns of traditional Eastern European families, with the husband the head of the
household and the wife responsible for raising the children and the household domain. Despite the fact that Mrs. Lavinia has more education than her American husband, she agreed before emigration, to submit to the “conditions” of a marriage that resemble more the traditional/patriarchal type of the family.

On the other hand, Mrs. Lucas, who came to U.S. with a student visa, and was able to complete her doctoral degree at one of the Chicago’s top universities, married one of her fellow classmates, eagerly learn to adapt to a family life with more egalitarian values, as her husband was more committed to it and able to see the benefits for her children to learn a new language, besides English. He expressed great enthusiasm in regard to the public school which their daughter (Ana, 7 years old) attends, as being a place near the university's campus with a high diversity of families (mostly international students), and where nearly every child speaks at home other language than English. Ana, their young daughter converses fluently in Russian, English, French and Spanish; the last two being taught with a private tutor.

As a legacy of the old customs, there is a cultural tradition of involvement in raising the grandchildren after the grandparents retire. Current immigrant families are more likely to invite their parents to live with them for up to a year, involving them in the care of their grandchildren. Some of these grandparents gradually change their legal status from visitor to permanent resident, seek employment and start to balance their own jobs, mostly in their ethnic communities with those of helping their own children. Grandmothers tend to engage the most in transnational migration, because they almost never plan to permanently settle in America. But, on the other hand, they spend very
limited time in the home country. Living in ethnic enclaves and attending ethnic churches, they almost never learn English beyond the basic skills they need for traveling and dealing with the American bureaucracy for certain services. Culturally, these elder Eastern European women are major agents in maintaining old traditions, teaching (grand) children the customs of the home countries such as cooking ethnic food and staying strongly connected with events at home through the internet and satellite television. These migrants are also more involved in kin work with relatives back home being in regular contact, sending presents and remittances, and functioning as carriers of American culture.
CHAPTER SIX

EDUCATION

Introduction

Most of my respondents, men and women alike, reported that despite a good, solid education acquired during their student years in Eastern Europe, the rewards did not transfer to the U.S.. In Eastern Europe, education was traditionally valued and seen as the way toward a better life, and a resource helping to fight against government oppression. In the post-Communist world, they were frustrated that despite their good secondary school, or even college education, the transition to capitalism depressed their ability to maintain their jobs or advance in their careers in the home country. Women were particularly hard hit. During the communist regime, they reported, there was no discrimination in education, and female students were encouraged to advance themselves in careers that now were seen as more suitable for men. As industries privatized in former socialist countries, women were excluded from professions and occupations, and pushed into lower paid, service sector jobs. For example, a routine feature of job ads and hiring states a preference for single women in many of these countries. Being young, unmarried and attractive are the first “requirements” for a position and then the necessary skills are listed. Since most private companies have men in their leadership, it is expected...
that the young female employee be willing to engage in sex, or at least not be tied to family responsibilities in case she is required to do extra hours.\footnote{Both in media and in everyday life, women’s bodies are constantly scrutinized, and one of the most desirable qualities for women and their first passport for success is a “good looking” body image. Starting with the employment opportunities section of any newspaper that features adds such as: “Searching for young, good looking women with good organizational skills.” The skills and education required for the position mostly are mentioned secondarily. Media portrayal of women, even women in politics, emphasize very sexualized postures (Tango, 2008).}

If workers choose emigration to avoid this exploitation or, in the hope to better their lives economically in the new country, they face wage discrimination, even when they accept positions below their qualifications. This discrimination, as perceived by the respondents of this study, takes two forms. First, refers to the wage discrimination, which is being paid less than a non-immigrant, and second, having denied the opportunity to get the higher paid job, because of the lack of experience in the U.S. or because their educational credentials were not transferable. Yet, within a few years after immigration, many of the respondents reported to find the ability and resources to continue and equivalent their educational degree, and eventually making themselves more suitable on the job market. I have discussed this process in the chapter on Work and Network. All of the respondents regardless of their work field or specialty, acknowledged that the benefits of their educational background acquired in the home country, equipped them with a good foundation to further build upon. In sum, these immigrants were coming with a solid educational background, but forced to take at first lower paid jobs, below their qualification, however, that strong background then helps them to get more specialized education in the U.S., which in turn enable them to eventually advance in their career.
Empowerment throughout Education during Communist Regime in Eastern Europe

The Soviet Union had its beginning in the Russian Revolution of 1917, when the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin overthrew Tsar Nicholas II and his government. The Red Army entered several territories of the former Russian Empire and helped local communists seize power. Following Lenin, Joseph Stalin, who came to power in the mid-1920s, was committed to the state ideology of Marxism-Leninism and through his authoritarian rule he initiated a centrally planned economy. As a result the country went throughout a rapid process of industrialization and collectivization, a process which dispossessed many of the wealthy farmers of their lands and goods, forcing them into “sharing” their possession with others. Similar strategies were implemented later on, during the instauration of Communist regimes in other countries of Eastern Europe outside the Soviet Union.

There are some stories about the experiences of people who lived during those times of forced collectivization where sometimes one of its members (usually the head of the household) who were opposing the new regime were severely persecuted and in many instances deported to Siberia or other regions where they became completely lost to their families. Under these circumstances the only means to reclaim some control over their lives and the only source of empowerment had been seen through education.

One illustration of these experiences and the value placed on education is narrated by Mr. Vladimir, or Crown-Point, Indiana, who born in Moldova in 1970s (part of the Soviet Union at that time).
My whole family, my mother side and my father side came from wealthy people. I would not say rich. I would say wealthy people, and I was a born to be in the former Romanian side of the country. That part was annexed, in 1940, that was the secret pact between Germans and Russians. […] Because I remember from my father stories, that my grandpa, in the morning the Russian were there. They changed the name of the people to Russian letters. Even if they speak Romanian, the official language was called Moldavian, Romanian language with Cyrillic letters. So, the Russians took the land where my grandparents lived, and that was true for many family, so if people fight back, they took the father of the house, and exile them in Siberia to work the hard labor, so people want to stay with their families, they did not want to fight back with the government. So they took my grandfather property, when Russian took over, as of today we have thousand of Romanians living in Ukraine, because in the '40 when Russians occupied Romanian,[…] he was a wealthy farmer, but they took over and nationalized their properties, so my grandfather fight back, and they took him to the labor camp, but he came back, he survived, so that is another story, of how they were feeding them, how was there… a terror. He told to all his children and grandchildren: this is a country of criminals and gangsters, you need to try to run away from here, because this never going to get better. My father was very upset, he didn't want to go to school, to speak Russian, because there you must speak Russian, so my grandfather said: they are your enemy, you need you know you enemies, study Russian, and go to school. So that was the rule for my entire family, no matter what you have, they will come and take away from you but the education you have, they cannot take it away from you. So that was the rule, you have no choice we have to study. This is how I get straight 5 (the highest grade), so we can understand and try to go away from the system.

Mr. Vladimir's story of the value of education in families, as the only possession “they (the government) cannot take away from you” and as a tool for empowerment under the newly established Communist regime, was common to 12 other respondents. Despite the fact that ethnic and cultural identity, along with the material possessions of many Moldavians and Ukrainians has been leveled off by the new Soviet regime, many people were able to acknowledge not just the benefit of a free education as a tool to better themselves, but also as a tool that helped to empower them to fight for change.
Describing the educational system of early 1970's in the former Soviet Union, Mr. Sivol recalls:

The school system, we had, if you are doing very good in school, you can try the college after grade 8. Soviet Union offered ten grades, they, then, after ten grades, you got a high school diploma. After grade 8 you can take college classes, start as freshman and take your specialty class for college and take grade 9 and 10 to finish.

For example in grade six we were studying chemistry, on grade seven we were done with all course of chemistry, physic we start grade 6, at grade 7 we started astronomy, we got algebra, we were done with all algebra by grade 8, with all calculus, is a different way of school.[...] I had no choice, I [...] so the grade system in Soviet Union was not in grade letters or points, but in numbers, 5 was the heights grade. So I finish my school with 5, went to college and finish with 5 all four years, earn an honor diploma, it was called a Red diploma, being the best from the Soviet flag, red flag.

This account of educational experience as an illustration of a different system, has been narrated with great pride and a sense of gratitude toward a socio-economic and political system that provided its citizens with a good education. The way the immigrants perceived their positive learning experiences is perhaps the only aspect of that regime that is favorably remembered.

**Significance of Education for the Post-Communist Wave of Eastern Europeans**

The ways in which educational background reflects the significance of learning for these immigrants and the body of knowledge acquired by students in general before entering college is important in several ways. First it laid the foundation for their future careers, and in the case of immigrants, the essential and solid background to build upon in the new country for taking up a different career or to continuing their existing one. This approach to education is fundamentally different from the approach of members of
the pre-Communist wave of immigrants to the United States. That is because America is no longer the refuge of the poor and oppressed of Europe, but rather a society that requires higher skills and higher levels of human capital in order to be accepted and eventually to succeed. (With deindustrialization and the loss of well-paid “working class” jobs, only immigrants who experienced intense poverty in their homeland are willing to take these extremely low paid jobs. Most of these immigrants come from Latin America, where transit to the United States is easier to arrange than from Europe.) For immigrants from Europe, the recent hope is for employment in technical, semi-professional, or professional occupations.

Robila’s (2008) previous work on Eastern Europeans and Eastern European families, a quantitative research study, compares the characteristics of Eastern Europeans with other immigrants in the U.S. in term of demographic differences. The article examined the contemporary immigrants’ human capital and adaptation processes and found a higher level of education for most Eastern Europeans compared with other immigrant groups, such as Hispanics.

Portes and Rumbaut (1990) observed that the U.S. is no longer the destination of for Eastern Europeans who have fewer educational capital and economic resources, Robila (2005) found that those immigrants who have more resources (human, social, economic capital) try to come to U.S. and those with fewer resources move to closer locations such as Western Europe. For example, many agricultural workers go to Germany, Italy and Spain. Sandu (2005) finds no hierarchy of importance, but rather a functional difference between the human and social capital associated with migration.
Human capital does not have a strong influence on circular migration (such as the case between Eastern to Western Europe, where migrant tend to move back and forth between the home and host country), but social networking enable migrants by providing support for travel and accommodation at destination; however, as the migration progress from temporary to permanent, language skills, education and professional knowledge become more essential (Sandu, 2005). Second, the expectations immigrant parents have for their children’s educational achievement in the United States tend to be higher and often more competitive compared to typical U.S. citizens. The Eastern European respondents’ histories seem to confirm many studies on the children of first generation immigrants from Europe and India, who do tend to perform better in school than the children of equivalent social class in the United States. As Aldarondo and Ameen (2010) argue, “In spite of the differences in the U.S. of language at home, children of immigrant parents, receive grades in school that are equal to or even higher than non-immigrants peers” (Helaey, 2012).

Eighteen out of 26 families with children, interviewed for this study, reported dissatisfaction with the U.S. public school system compared to their experiences in their home countries and many parents made their children do additional work to supplement the U.S. school curricula. This commitment ranges from assigning extra homework for the children and working individually with them at home, to providing a private tutor or registering the children for additional educational programs offered in the community – and even sending the children during the school year back to the home country in the care of grandparents, especially if children hold dual citizenship.
One major concern raised by these parents with respect to their involvement in their children’s education, is that the emphasis on fundraising and social events in American schools seem more important than education. Mrs. Bolec, from Serbia, a mother of a first grader recalled the day she was planning to attend a school meeting, and being concerned on the way to school that she might have left something she might need for the meeting, at home, but could not remember what it was. Her friend, another Serbian woman, asked with irony:

Did you bring your wallet with you? If you have it, that's all you need for these meetings.

Her friend’s remark points to the fact that many of the parent-school interactions limit parents’ involvement in their children’s education to fundraising activities, as other parents also suggest.

Mr. and Mrs. Covaciu emigrating from Romania in 1999 had an elementary school student at the time of the interview. They mentioned, with distress:

We tried to get involved with the school, since Horea is our only son, and want like most parents, to see him successful in school, get a good education and succeed in life, so we tried to attend from the start the PTO meetings, but there is nothing about learning! It’s all about raising money! No one parent ever asked a question about the curriculum, about what is taught to the kids, when a certain concept in introduced to the children and in what steps” [...] I tried to contact the teacher to discuss more in depth about the material, especially on mathematics, since I have real concerns about the way my son understand the material in class, (Mr. Covaciu is an assistant professor in Mathematics Department of one of the Chicago’s universities and his wife a physicist), but it didn’t really help to much. So we just work at home as much as we can, not me (smiling), my wife, since she has far more patience with him than me. I do work with him, over the summer, though”. [...]We were really happy with him in the Lab at U of Chicago, but could not continue there any longer after the second grade. (Their graduate residency ended that year at the University of Chicago).
A similar case is the family of Mr. and Mrs. Lupescu, who emigrated from Romania short after the 1989 Revolution, but brought their son to the United States only after he finished the third grade in Romania. During the interview, they recalled one day at the teacher-parent conference about how pleased the teacher was with their son’s progress. Specifically, she mentioned the math scores on one of the standardized tests for fourth grade, where Mr. and Mrs. Lupescu’s son scored higher (the maximum percentage) than she (the teacher) did. (The teacher decided to take the test along with the children, in order to motivate and encourage them more).

She was very enthusiastic about this, (about the fact that their son scored higher than herself) I think her intention was to give us a good news,” Mr. Lupescu said. I was just… scared.

In most of these cases the parents are very concerned about the opportunities their children have to enter good universities, and therefore, for now, they wanted their children developing structure and discipline within their school-work. In fact, at common complaint is that teachers do not assign much homework in the first place. This approach to schoolwork on the part of teachers is a disappointment to many parents, who want their children's schools to encourage them to become competitive and interested in learning.

In this regard, Mrs. Ciobanu a three year resident in the United State and a mother of two elementary children, stated with concern:

So, what these children should do at home from, let’s say 2:00 pm., after they get home, until 8:00 pm. the bedtime? Are they supposed just to play in their rooms, with their same toys? They got bored. Should I buy new toys? Should they be let to watch TV all day long? To read? Yes, they read some, but then? What am I supposed to do with them? Aren’t these teachers thinking of it? When I asked my
third grade daughter’s teacher, she said she does not believe in homework. And then, when the ISTEP test was scheduled for next week, instead of sending home some resources to practice for the test, or at least the math book, which I never see it! Ever! She asked us (the parents) to write a poem of encouragement to the children, so they would be confident and do well on the test. Believe this? A poem! Instead of practice! This is crazy! [...] Yes, I stood up late that night, and I wrote a poem to Andrea. I could never imagine something like this, before.

Nonetheless, there are aspects of the American public education system that immigrant parents appreciate. Mrs. Eta, a mother of two middle school students reported:

Although, overall here (in school), everything comes down to money, the school facilities, and the environment is much superior than in Romanian schools. The attention that is granted to students, the respect … In Romania this is much superficial. I especially like the issue of confidentiality, when it comes to your child school performance. Do you remember, in Romania, how stressed out our parents were when they were to attend the teacher-parent conference? All the parents in the same room, for one hour, the teacher goes over each child progress, and how they embarrassed the parent in front of everybody else if her child was doing bad in school or misbehaving. […] I recently wrote an email to the secretary of the school where I taught in Romania (Mrs. Eta, worked as a high-school math teacher for six years before emigration) and told her about this, it is something that should be implemented there as well, I think.. more.. decency.

On the same topic, of school ethics and discipline one interviewee from Serbia, argued the “benefits” of this practice that lacked confidentiality not only granted the teacher more authority, but also resulted in more concern on the parents’ side with having well behaved children and students who are always prepared for class. She recalled her own father always coming back upset from these conferences and punishing her brother for the humiliation he felt as a parent when the teacher went over his son’s progress. She believed that this was actually the most efficient method to keep her high-school brother out of trouble and helping him to get into the college.
Mrs. Topescu, a high-school physics teacher in Romania, who emigrated on a cultural-exchange visa to teach physics in a more economically depressed school district in the U.S. expressed concerned over the fact, that here as a teacher not only has her authority been diminished, but to the fact that her "right" to accurately and realistically inform the parents about their child’s progress is severely restricted.

So, the Principal said that I always should start stating something positive about the child, even if he or she is the dumbest in the class, and there is really nothing good to say about their work. I should start by saying something about his other qualities, such as, I don't know, what an intelligent gaze he has…is just that now is time for a little effort on their side in order for him to perform well.. and pass the course, of course! So, if I am not allowed to tell these people the reality, and have to be so vigilant not to offend them in any way, how possibly, these people can be realistic about what is really going on, and help their son or daughter? […] I am very serious about my work, and always like to teach, but these restrictions make no sense to me.

Not all parents were dissatisfied with their children’s schooling. Five of the 26 families with children did not criticize American schools and teachers. Yet even this group reported setting the time aside every day for extra work with their children. Mrs. and Mr. Ionescu, with one child in elementary school and another in middle school, living in upper-middle income Naperville, IL, were very excited about their children’s progress and the school functions in the area where they live.

“No, we like the school system here.” Mr. Ionescu said. They are pretty good, they provide you with what they should, and if you want your child to do more or better, you should just work at home with them. I do that every night. They protested at the beginning, and then we cut off their the things they like to do, so they have no choice. I am sitting down, here in the kitchen, get a shot of brandy before sitting down at the table with them, so I won't lose my patience, (laughing) and we work for about an hour on math. That's all I do, math. My kids were always in the honor classes and their entire teachers had only good words for them. We are not obsessed to have them pursuing highly demanding careers, we just want them to have a good life and look for jobs that will always be on the
market. Joana wants to be a vet, she loves animals, and that's a very practical career, but not overly stressful, so she can enjoy having a family life, and Matei wants to be a computer engineer, like us. I think that's safe for the future, too. He also wants to marry your daughter when he grows up, we would like that too… oh, well, but I guess this is not part of the interview (laughing).

As the last quote suggests, while not many recent first generation European immigrants are satisfied with the public educational system and a very few can afford private schooling, many are choosing the alternative of taking time to work with their children at home, assigning homework for their own children. While their class income may not be that of upper-middle income families, their competitive attitude towards wanting their children to get into the better universities is similar. Furthermore, because their children hold dual citizenship, they will be eligible for a European Union program that allows a select number of highly qualified students with Eastern European citizenship to receive an EU university education at little cost. This is another aspect of transnational processes that is a new feature of international immigration.

In this regard, parents interviewed for this study, unlike the immigrant parents of the pre-communist wave, were preoccupied with their children’s bilingual proficiency. All of the respondents report speaking the native language at home, and some of them push the children to learn more than that.

One example is the family of Mrs. and Mr. Gruenfeld, emigrated from Romania in 2000, having at the time of the interview an eight year old daughter, born in U.S.. Mrs. Gruenfeld has been part of the Hungarian minority living in Romania, and her family were speaking Hungarian only at home. She had completed her education, including her graduate studies at the Hungarian institutions in Romania. Her husband, from the German
minority born in Romania, speaks only German at home, and was educated in German institutions in Romania, as well. Now as a family living in the U.S. they have the desire to pass on to their child some of their ethnic heritage, and that usually starts with language. Each of the parents, when alone with their daughter, converse with her in their own language, and when together, in Romanian, only. They decided to set this as a rule, and tried to stay consistent with it. In addition, Magda, takes Spanish classes with a private tutor and I was amazed to learn that at her short eight years of life, she is fluent in five languages, having an accurate accent in all of them. The parents explained to me that much of this accuracy came from the fact that this was the way they interact with her from the very beginning, as young as three years old, she ‘naturally’ learned what language to choose in every conversational setting. When asked about the holidays that are celebrated in their family in the U.S., Mrs. Grunfeld replied:

We celebrate everything in here !(laughing), all the holidays, the only adjustment we make is the group of friends we invite for each of them[...] yet, we are more serious about the religious ones, so Magda won't get confused with that.

While this might be an exceptional case, the overall data shows that parents of the minority group in the Eastern European country, often try to pass the language and heritage of their home country to their children, along with the “official” language of the native place. Children, are raised and socialized in the American institutions, and their English is fast learned and mastered, in most cases surpassing their parents’ level of accuracy and fluency. Therefore, in these types of families, children are fluent in several foreign languages, besides English.

A final view on the importance of passing on the language was Mrs. Eta’s remark:
There are about only twenty million Romanian-speaking people on Earth, if we don't teach them (the kids), the language will disappeared. They remain illiterate, look at the Romanian translation today, how terrible they are. When I watch TV (on the Romanian channels), the movie translations are so bad. All the smart people left that country, there are only the illiterate and uneducated left. Plus I think it help the kids (to learn the language), because it help them to see the world from two perspectives, and I also like to be able to tell the "secrets" in public, so only them can get it (smiling). Yes, often when I talk to them in Romanian, they answer back in English, but I pretend not to understand, and I like when I see them struggling to find the Romanian words to explain what they want.

Besides the parents' desire to pass on their cultural heritage, there is also the desire to equip the children with the tools of adaptability and versatility of living, helping them to become educated, preparing them to work in the increasingly globalized community, and getting them ready for a more flexible migrant life experience, an essential aspect of the current transnational context.

**Changes in the Value of Education in the Home Country as Perceived by European Immigrants**

Yes, in Romania, now...hmm.. there are many millionaires there, the so-called “cardboard made (fake) millionaires”...the millionaires that became rich over night, but they have no culture and they belong to different gangs, and they are in power now.

The statement of Mr. Sandu seems to be representative of many Romanian, Macedonian Russian, Ukrainian and Moldavian respondents, in the way they perceived the changes brought to the society in the process of transition from a state centralized economy to a capitalist one.

In other words, these days the passport for economic success is no longer guaranteed by a good education, but rather by connections to a network of people engaged in newly developed business and the ability to acquire in short time the skills
and ability for navigating the new socio-economic system. Often, they were people with “contacts” outside the country, or returned refugees that would now bring money and the initiative they need to invest into a new business. A feeling of anomie and confusion was created shortly after the transition to capitalist economy, and it has been a slow, difficult process of adjustment for many of the everyday people to learn that the state is no longer responsible for finding and guaranteeing jobs for its citizens. These felling of anomie has been also fuel by a depersonalization of the relationship between people a noticeable changes that happen in Eastern European region, after 1990, that directly affects family (including its formation). This depersonalization of human relationships leads to the “individualization” of the society. People begin to see themselves as separate individuals and not as members of a community or social category. Similar to Durkheim’s mechanical breakdown of the society, this kind of individualization came along with an increased feeling of separation and alienation, both form other people and one’s work.

Furthermore, the new, often foreign, investors were now creating a new culture of job search and this meant that potential employees need to learn the skills for obtaining employment as well as the skills for some of the newly designed job classifications necessary to both obtain and maintain a job. Furthermore, these changes created a discriminatory labor market based on sex and age. An account of these experience has been narrated by Mr. Sandu, from Romania immigrating to U.S. in 2000:

I graduate from the School of Master Mechanics with a degree equivalent of a three years college here. […] So my occupation was, in the mechanics field, everything I did was in the field of mechanics. I graduate the gymnasium (elementary school), then the high school and specialized in the mechanics then a post high-school, three years of specialization within the Bucharest Polytechnics
Institute, where I became Master Mechanic, giving me the chance to teach the subject of mechanics to the students from a high school in Bucharest. […] But that was gone after the Revolution.

This statement of Mr. Sandu echoes the experiences of all of my immigrant respondents, who were in blue collar occupations. Advancement throughout education becomes possible only when the respondents were part of a strong social network that would open the door to employment.

Once choosing emigration as an alternative, with the purpose of bettering their lives economically in the new country, many of these immigrants then were faced with wage discrimination, even when they accepted positions below their qualifications.

[…] I mean the money…..hmm…..an American workers got for the same job, and sometime of a lower quality of the work compare with the quality of the work done by an European. This improved quality came from the fact that in Europe we are having real education, starting with the technical schools and moving to all that had to do with the general education; while the American worker got a higher salary just because he is an American.

In this context of a competitive labor market, many immigrants learned for the first time the experience of being a part of the minority group, which is at a disadvantage, despite their educations or skills. As mentioned earlier, many of them are eventually able to the continue their education here or to land jobs in the areas they were specialized.

**Education and Gender**

Gender relations were discussed earlier with respect to employment in the chapter of Work and Network. However, the question of how gender relations more specifically were impacted by immigrants’ educational experiences warrants some discussion.
Ironically, five out of twenty Eastern European women coming to U.S. after 1990 and interviewed for this study were aware of this gendered discrimination much more after their experience of immigration, and only after they were able to compare the status of women in the two societies. However, a sense of pride for their ethnic background and an urge to defend it in our conversations about gender, came often during the interviews.

I often suspected their more frank comments to be partly a reaction to my own ethnic background, gender and age (which are very similar to those of my respondents but with a very different status – graduate student – in the U.S. at the time of the interview); had I been a non-Romanian, and especially a white, male American conducting the interview, I doubt that their comments would have been as direct. For example in a conversation regarding the professional careers available to women in Eastern Europe during the Communist regime, such as physicians, lawyers, professors, and architects, and the new scarcity of these jobs now, Mrs. Veta from Ukraine stated:

[It] is still the men world, in the supervision position men takes it, and that is in America now. Look at any magazine, who is the CEO of any hospital? When we have a president in America to be a woman? Same, is the same world, I do not see the difference between America and Ukraine. I did not have ANY problem to adapt here …and in Ukraine, they do not discriminate women like in Egypt, we don’t have to put hijab on face, or cover the body, you can say things to men, they do not have the right to hit you or anything …if they hit you, you can call police, you can divorce them and to live alone….nobody would punish you for that. 

[...]Now we have many women they are older and they do not want to get marry, because that is what they like, nobody pushes them, “oh you are old, you have to get marry…” especially in the city, more than in the rural, in the rural area at a certain age they have to get marry, this would be in Romania too, but in the city, “is not your business,” that is my life, nobody tell me what to do. the young people are getting educated so fast, and Hollywood is educating them.

Q: What you mean by that?
R: Because they are watching TV, and if they see a murder on TV they try to follow it, if they see if that is a broken family they try to follow that, they are copying.

Mrs. Veta’s comment on the way the use and abuse of the mass media and internet outlets are replacing, rather than complementing, the education and the changes it brought in values at the society level in her native country, is a rising concern among immigrants when they consider the families left behind and the future that awaits from them.

Furthermore, these changes created the context of discriminatory labor market based on sex and age. As industries have privatized in former socialist countries, discriminatory labor markets have pushed women out from the previously inclusive professions and occupations which men are now dominating and towards lower paid, service sector jobs. As I wrote above, gender specifications are a customary feature of job advertising and hiring, as are preference based on marital status in many of these countries. Both in media and in everyday life, women’s bodies are constantly scrutinized, and one of the most desirable qualities for women and their first passport for success is a “good looking” (body) image. Starting with the employment opportunities section of any newspaper that features adds such as: “Searching for young, good looking women with good organizational skills.” The skills and education required for the position mostly are mentioned secondarily.

Women in Eastern Europe entered the job market in great numbers after 1940, and later on during the Communist regimes. They had equal opportunities for employment and encouragement from the Communist Party to pursue professional
careers that were not commonly available to women in Western capitalist countries. The communist ideology proclaimed equal rights for men and women, both in education and work without assuming traditional gendered jobs for male and females. Despite this proclaimed ideology, however, the culture of most Eastern European societies assumed very restrictive gender roles, where women were expected to take primary responsibilities within the household including the raising of children, regardless of their employment status.

Feminist literature is rich in examining the experiences of different groups of migrant women around the world, emphasizing the discrimination faced by these workers. Rachel Salazar Parrenas (2001), in *Transgressing the Nation-State: the Partial Citizenship of Migrant Philippine Domestic Workers*, provides more details of how the burden of these migrant workers is doubled by the limitation of their citizenship rights in the receiving country, which constitutes a way of keeping down their already low income and minimizing their possibilities for family reunification. While countries such as Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria are members of the European Union (E.U.) and, therefore, migrants coming from these countries are E.U. citizens, their access to jobs remains limited to domestic work and other lower-level service jobs. Because immigration policies are generally shaped to regulate the labor force (often to fill a labor gap, sometimes to stop an uncontrolled influx), family migration is not always an option among migrant workers. Overall, the *feminization of labor* (using women as a source of cheap labor to maximize profits) is maintained by a gendered labor regime, which in turn supports the global economy. Valentine M. Moghadam (2000), in *Gender and the*
Global Economy, perceives feminization of labor as the main consequence of economic restructuring and explains:

The world trade in services also favors women’s labor migration, in contrast to the demand for men manufacturing workers during the earlier periods of industrialization in Europe and the United States. Mexican, Central American and Caribbean women have migrated to the United States to work as nurses, nannies, and domestics, Filipinas and Sri Lankans have gone to neighboring countries as well as to the Middle East to work as waitresses, nurses, nannies, and domestics; Argentine women have traveled to Italy to work as nurses; and an increasing number of Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian women have migrated alone to work in various occupations in France, Italy, and Spain. (p. 137)

Gendered labor is connected to gendered wages, of course, and wage discrimination against women is commonplace all over the world (Moghadam, 2000). As the economic well-being for most working class people in the developing world has deteriorated as well as in the “post-Communist” countries of Eastern Europe, this discrimination has intensified. Moghadam, for instance, notes:

The fact that in Russia and Poland women’s unemployment is higher than men’s despite women’s higher educational attainment and their long work experience is suggestive of the existence of gender bias in labor markets, often influenced by the gender ideology that men are primary breadwinners and more deserving of the better jobs. (p. 133).

A common survival strategy for young, single Eastern European women is to move abroad to Western Europe, Canada, or the United States where there is a demand for domestic work as housekeepers or babysitters (Sandu, 2005). However, many young well-educated girls responding to respectable job advertisements end up working in lesser jobs, sometimes even under conditions of coercion, at the extreme risk of ending up as victims of human trafficking (Feingold, 2005, p. 26; Kligman & Limoncelli, 2005, p. 118; Raymond & Hughes, 2001). Recent research on Eastern European families have
shown that for countries such as Slovenia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and the rest of the former Soviet countries, the same variation of gender roles are maintained more or less rigidly, with the men assuming the role of breadwinner and head of the family, while women, regardless of their employment outside the house, are responsible for the household tasks as in any patriarchal culture (Bodrug-Lungu, 2004; Filadelfiova, 2004; Robila, 2004; Staykova, 2004; Ule, 2004; Zhurzhenko, 2004). However, the development of a more “Westernized” culture with more egalitarian gender roles and social relations emerged after the 1990’s.

**Conclusion**

During the Communist regime, people in the Eastern European countries benefitted from strong and free public education, including post graduate studies. The purpose for access was to make education available and at the reach of peasant and working class citizens, in order to somewhat level the class inequality of society and to more rapidly help modernize the society. Many citizens saw in education an opportunity for empowerment to make change in their life, through a career or to emigrate or even to oppose the regime.

After 1989, the fall of the communist regime, and with the transition to a market economy, many people found themselves unemployed and in a society where advanced education was beneficial only if accompanied by a strong social network that would help further economic advancement.

Eastern Europeans who chose emigration, continue to value education and try to pass their cultural and intellectual heritage to their children. Some reasons include ethnic-
cultural preservation, the ability to prepare them for the increasingly globalized labor market and to equip them for an eventual transnational life. These parents tend to be dissatisfied with the American public educational system, (often comparing it to their own schooling experience in the home country), and tend to see its main functionality only in terms of assimilating the children into American culture. Therefore, they have developed additional strategies to improve their children’s learning experience, strategies that vary from doing extra homework with them all the way to sending the children for the elementary school back in the home country. Many of the respondents have the hope of their children attending an elite university in the U.S. or Western European country, where they can apply based in their dual citizenship.

The discriminatory labor markets also push women out from well-paid professions toward lower paid service sector jobs or into domestic work, where there has been a steady demand in the “Western” capitalist countries. The trajectories of their migration is contingent not only upon their human and social capital but also their age and marital status.

While most of the Eastern European migration to U.S. after 1990 consists of legal immigrants with the right to gain employment, and often with a high educational background, many Eastern European women tend to work in entry-level positions or low paying jobs well below their skills level and qualifications, although many eventually advance over time (Robila, 2008). Personal accounts of respondents in this study confirm that regardless of the level of education, women develop more independence and autonomy after migration, and, thus, result in the exercise of more power in the family.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Transnationalism is a relatively new pattern of migration, which has become more common place during the last 10 to 20 years. Earlier generations of immigrants might have fit the pattern of assimilation, but the more recent group of immigrants, at least from Eastern Europe, have now gone beyond simple cultural assimilation. This process by which transnationalism has supplanted assimilation has been the subject of this study, and it has been done by comparing the immigration experience of Eastern Europeans, before and after the demise of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

Transnationalism is a concept that has its distinctive features when compared to circular migration. People from Eastern Europe are engaged in circular migration, mostly to Western European countries. This implies temporary work and living in Western Europe, traveling back and forth mainly for the purpose of better economic advancement. The circular migrants as opposed to the transnational migrants, are often domestic workers, agricultural workers, and workers in more exploited sections of the entertainment economy; yet they too are also agents of cultural transference of values and practices, mostly from the host to the home country. They are often more the exploited victims of economic and cultural globalization, yet they too are part of the process responsible for dissolving the cultural boundaries between countries.
In contrast, the transnational migrants, are mostly permanent residents of the host
country, in this case, the United States (although a study of Eastern Europeans in Canada
might reach similar findings). Therefore, while they reside physically in one place, they
are involved economically, socially and politically in both the host and the home country.
This distinctive feature of transnationalism is often possible both because of the socio-
political context of the home and host country of residence, and by the higher level of
human capital these recent immigrants possess. For example, despite the fact that the
U.S. does not recognizes dual citizenship, the host country often does. Participation in
political elections of the home country can be done at the consulates of those countries on
the U.S. territory. Furthermore, economic involvement is possible, beyond the more
traditional remittances sent back home, through investments and share holdings
transactions that are easily performed now over the internet. In terms of cultural
practices, as discussed earlier, there is continuous resurgence of the celebration and
preservation of their cultural heritage in the host country, along with an embracement of
learning diversity and adaptability to any new cultural practices. Much of this cultural
relativism is often exhibited by individuals with higher levels of education, immigrants
that do not see themselves uprooted from one place and transplanted into a new land, but
rather as individuals that count themselves responsible at the same time for their present
life in the host country as well as to the (economic and political) transformations of the
home country. Since they often possess a status that allows them economic involvement
in their home country, that often is accompanied by the political one.
All of these features distinguish the transnational life style of the current wave of Eastern Europeans to the U.S. from the circular migrants to Western Europe (to whom the push and pull framework would be more suitable). The circular migrants often have lower levels of human capital, in terms of language proficiency and transferable educational background, and often rely on labor skills and social capital (relatives and acquaintances that have introduced them into the chain of migration). However, even in the case of a solid educational background, the context of Western European countries, traditionally xenophobic, allows very few opportunities for advancement for immigrants in general and Eastern Europeans in particular.

This concluding chapter of the dissertation presents a review of the main themes discussed when comparing the experiences of Eastern European immigration to the United States before and after the establishment of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. It discusses the contribution of the research to the overall scholarship on immigration and to the larger public understanding of the new American context with an increased number of immigrants, many very different from those of the past. The chapter ends with suggestions for further comparative research of Eastern Europeans to other immigrant groups to which the transnational perspective has been applied so far in the immigration scholarship.

Religion

In the third chapter, “Ethnicity, Assimilation and Transnationalism: The Changing Role of Churches in the Immigrant Community,” the identities, ethnic and religious community formation, and cultural expression of two waves of Eastern European
immigrants, as individuals and as a groups, emphasizing the contradictory processes of assimilation and ethnic retention between the groups, contingent with their time of emigration are examined. The immigrants coming to the United States during WWII or shortly after identified themselves with their ethnic community that typically gathered around the church and used it as a tool in their process of assimilation within the larger society. Coming after the fall of the Communist regimes and up to the most recent wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the connection to a religious community did not help their assimilation process, a process that has become less essential than in the past. Economic assimilation was easier, in part because of the changing U.S. economy and in part because the more recent wave often have more social capital, including education, which made dependency on the church less essential. Suburbanization since the early 1950’s also played a role as the church was no longer a nearby “community center” for particular ethnic groups which had been clustered into “urban villages.” Many structural transformations have occurred on both the Orthodox practice of religion and on religious life for this latest group, that now looks at the support of the church and the role of religion as mediating their families more transnational experience of migration. Somewhat freed up from needing the church to help with assimilating to U.S. life, many of those who come to the church now utilize it either for more spiritual reasons or to affirm, rather than dilute, their ethnic heritage. With more travelling back and forth, there is also a felt need to encourage their children to maintain a connection with their ethnic ancestry.
Similar to the changed experience at the level of religious life, the employment and networking experience seems to take a different path in the life of post-communist wave. The earlier waves of Eastern-European immigrants relied on the ethnic community and its church as their starting point in seeking employment and a place of residence, with the goal of working and living for the rest of their lives in the U.S.. The work experience of post-communist immigrants from Eastern Europe has been more contingent upon their educational background and their previous work experience, that more recently can now be “transported” and utilized in many other parts of the world. The church and the ethnic community continues to be a starting place for immigrants in working class jobs while professionals with higher levels of education have been coming to the United States either with a student/resident visa or they have been landing their first job through work contracts with companies that had been offered to them before emigration. This difference accounts both for the changes in the socio-economic context and also to the demographics of the immigrants, the last wave having higher level of human capital than their predecessors.

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Education

Yet, perhaps the most prevalent area of life where aspects of transnationalism is perceived in the life of the latest wave of immigrant is education. Parents of this group are preoccupied with their children’s ethnic-cultural preservation, the ability to prepare them for the increasingly globalized labor market and to equip them for an eventual transnational life. The interviews show very interesting ways in which these parents are involved in their children’s education. Many of the respondents have the hope of their children attending an elite university in the U.S. or Western European country, where they can apply based in their dual citizenship.

Contribution of the Study

Within the larger framework of recent globalization, there is a large body of literature studying the push and pull factors and forces of immigration and the way these factors affect both the sending and receiving countries. Throughout history, there are many similar patterns in the cycles of immigration to the United States. These are often tied to issues of labor market needs as well as, in some ways, national security concerns, and racially biased culture. Immigration today reflects many of the same debates of the past, but there are major differences. The world is smaller, globalization has opened borders, and there is massive migration of labor all over the world, as people from less affluent countries seek a better life and corporations seek less expensive labor. While this pattern has existed in the past, it has greatly accelerated in the last twenty years.

The purpose of this study was to understand the dynamics that have shaped immigration processes, both on the macro level of politics and economics and on the
micro level of individual aspirations. This includes a comparative analysis between
Eastern European immigrants to United States at the end of WWII and a more recent
wave of Eastern European immigrants coming to United States after the fall of the Soviet
bloc. The study emphasizes the different experiences between the two waves, first, by
taking into account the socio-economic and political contexts of the sending and
receiving countries, and second by tracing these experiences throughout from the lenses
of ethnicity and assimilation theories to the transnationalist perspective.

Very different and alike at the same time, the course of the immigration of current
immigrants was discussed in relationship to the broader social and historical context that
has created and shaped these waves of immigration. The questions addressed in my study
focus on how the new patterns of immigration are shaped by new political-economic
dynamics, different in many ways from those of the last century, and how these processes
have transformed earlier adaptation and assimilation patterns, including the creation of
local identities, ethnic and nationalist attitudes, religion and spirituality, family and the
meaning of place, race, education and gender.

Moreover, the study examines to what extent various measurements of selective
assimilation, segmented assimilation or transnationalism offer a better explanation than
traditional assimilation paradigm does for how Eastern European immigrants attempt to
maintain dual identity. It also explores to what extent the framework of transnational
migration can help explain the new patterns of migration.

The significance of this project, beyond the immediate focus on the comparative
study over time of Eastern European migration to United States, is the understanding of
the notion of immigration and its effects on American society beyond the traditional view of the American society as a “country of immigrants.” The older, simpler pattern of immigrants coming to the U.S.A. to settle permanently no longer reflects the reality of immigration in the past few decades. As in many parts of the world, there has been the massive movement of people coming as temporary rather than permanent residents to America, on one hand, and, to some extent, people born in the United States leaving their home country for years at a time; all in a context of the increased pattern of migration of what has been called the “global village.”

Second, this is also a study contrasting immigration before and after the recently accelerated globalization. These powerful forces of globalization have radically transformed the world over the past few decades, especially as they have shaped the ideas of local identity, ethnicity, family, religion, race, place and gender. Third is the flexible applicability of this model; this methodology can be applied to studying other migrations around the world – Africans to Europe, and Asians to Europe and the Middle East, for example.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The research on current Eastern European migration to the United States, especially after the fall of the Soviet bloc, is very limited when compared to other immigrant groups. This research need to be continued, by both including the experiences of immigrants from other Eastern European countries, that are not part of this study, and by employing a quantitative methodology that would synthesize larger amounts of data in
order to improve the findings. However, at this point there is a lack of database that could
be used for cross-country comparison from this area.

Furthermore, there is a need for further comparative research of Eastern European
to other immigrant groups to which the transnational perspective has been applied so far
in the immigration scholarship, in order to find not just the similarities and differences
between those groups, but rather the key elements and forces that create and maintain this
new form of migration in the increasingly changed global context. These findings are
important both in understanding the experiences of immigrants, and how this new type of
migration shapes their lives, but also the ways their migration affects and changes the
contexts of the sending and receiving country within the new globalized world, where
the values of national identity, ethnic identity and citizenship along with the cultural
border of the countries became more diluted than in the past. Such findings would help to
develop the theoretical scholarship in the field of immigration by tracing the trajectories
of the future international migration and the ways it will transform the global context.
APPENDIX A

WRITTEN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY ON IMMIGRATION
Hello,

My name is Cezara Crisan, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago, Department of Sociology. I am doing a research project that will compare the immigration experience of Eastern Europeans over time. You have been contacted by my acquaintance because you are part of a group of people emigrating either during or shortly after WWII or after 1989. If you would like to share your immigration experience with me through an interview, it would be an important learning opportunity for me and it would be very helpful for my future research on the studies of immigration. The interview will be audio taped and strict confidentiality will be ensured. No names or other identifying information will be kept on the tapes or the written reports of the tapes. More information about the purpose of the study and ensured confidentiality will be provided in the consent form at the time of the interview. Furthermore, all participants will be able to receive a summary of the final results.

If you would like to participate or for more detailed information, please contact me and we can schedule a meeting at your convenience.

Thank you,

Cezara Crisan

Ccrisa1@luc.edu
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
1. Where and when were you born?
2. Can you describe the house you lived in before emigration?
3. Can you describe the relationship among the family members before emigration?
4. What occupation did you have in the old country?
5. How well off would you classify your family compared to everyone else in the community/neighborhood?
6. How did you express your spirituality?
7. Did you belong to a particular (ethnic/religious or any other) community?
8. Tell me about moving to the United States – what was involved in that process?
9. How old were you at the time of emigration?
10. Was there a specific reason why you emigrated?
11. How and where did you get money to travel?
12. When you first immigrated, did you do so alone or did you arrive with others?
13. Who was the first person or people you met?
14. Was there a community of people from your ethnic background that you met when you first arrived at your destination?
15. Tell me about the contact with the old country after you arrived in the U.S..
16. Were you the first person in the family to migrate? Tell me about the order of your family migration.
17. Has the relationship between the family members changed after immigration? In what ways?
18. What were the things that you have found more different from how they were at home how you dealt with them?
19. How were your English skills at the time of arrival? How that affects your experience as an immigrant?
20. What occupation did you do have when first arrived as an immigrant? How did that changed over time?

21. Have you belonged to any hometown organization, churches, or other group that were connected to the place you migrated from?

22. How have you been treated in the United States? Do you feel like you are treated like a foreigner?

23. Do you consider yourself American? Why or why not?

24. Tell me about your friends at home and in the United States. Did you relate to an ethnic community of emigrants abroad? If so, describe these experiences.

25. Did anyone from your home country live near you? Did you know them? What kind of friends did you have in the first year of arrival?

26. Do you have any children? If yes, what language have you spoken to them?

27. What is their relationship with your country of origin?

28. How often are you in contact with the home country? How that happens?

29. How important it is for you to have your children learn about your ancestors?

30. When thinking of “home,” what comes to your mind?

31. Do you consider yourself American? Why or why not?

32. How do you think that the immigration experience has affected you?

33. Would you ever consider permanently returning to the home country?
APPENDIX C

MEN AND WOMEN WHO SHARED MIGRATION STORIES
Respondents by Wave of Immigration and Gender

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Communist Wave</th>
<th>Post–Communist Wave</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>
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VITA

Cezara Crisan was educated in Romania and the United States and is fluent in three languages. She defended her dissertation on patterns of European migration to the United States and transnationalism and was awarded her Ph.D. in sociology from Loyola University Chicago in August 2013, when she will start her appointment as Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Behavioral Sciences Department at Purdue University Calumet. Her past teaching experience includes courses in Statistical Methods, Introductory Sociology, Gender Roles, Social Problems, and Socio-Psychology of Marriage and Families. In addition to teaching at Purdue University Calumet, she has taught at Loyola University Chicago, Indiana University Northwest and Northeastern Illinois University; courses there also included Race and Ethnic Relations as well as Marital Relations and Sexuality.

At Purdue University Calumet, she also mentored a number of students in the Ronald E. McNair Achievement Program including several research projects on immigrants in the United States.

Her research interests currently center on the immigrant experience in the United States, exploring the transitions from ethnic enclaves to assimilation and more recent forms of transnationalism and how the changes in global economics and culture have impacted families, gender relations, religion, and social stratification in general. She is a member of various sociological associations, has presented at regional, national, and