



Men's Migration, Adulthood, and the Performance of Masculinities

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This chapter examines the ways migration shapes men migrants' adulthood transitions, their performance of masculinities during migration and upon their return, and their narratives of adult male identity. The chapter documents the socially constructed nature of adulthood and provides evidence on the ambivalences and ambiguities that men migrants experience regarding adulthood and manhood as a result of their long-term migration. Tensions involving the duration of stays abroad after migration—12 years, on average—on the one hand, and the difficulties in settling down and establishing unequivocal benchmarks of manly adulthood while living in different cultural and structural contexts, on the other hand, result in unsettling migrants' prior beliefs and goals concerning age and gender identities.

This study uses qualitative research encompassing life-story interviews with 12 Romanian men in their early and middle adult years who have lived, on average, more than a decade in different European countries,

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especially in Italy and Spain. Regardless of the age they were when they migrated; their education, marital, and family status; their destination country; and their length of stay abroad, men migrants have experienced life events that have impacted their sense of adult identity and the development of their masculine identities. The empirical evidence shows that men migrants' subjectivities are deeply shaped and transformed by the very experience of migration and its attendant residential, relationship, and occupational changes. Some men migrants find themselves in situations trying to outperform in the areas of adulthood and masculinity, while others struggle to cope with threatened masculinity after negative life events (e.g., divorce, unemployment) or a lack of milestones in life (e.g., parenthood, homeownership), prompting them to discursively resecure their sense of adult-male status by framing their experiences transnationally, in a broader sociocultural context of both home and host countries.

INTERPLAY OF ADULTHOOD AND MANHOOD IN ECONOMIC MALE MIGRATION

This section aims to examine the intricate patterns of manhood and adulthood developing within men migrants' time spent abroad during their early and middle adult life stages. Manhood acts as a crucial aspect in understanding the gendered selves and individuals' hierarchical positionalities (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009), while also capturing the contradictory locations of individuals alongside crosscutting axes of gender and age identity (Anthias 2012). To understand the challenges that migration imposes on progress toward becoming an adult male, anthropological and sociological scholarship has started to address the unsettled relationship between migration and the passage to manly adulthood (McKay 2007; Liu 2010; F. Osella and C. Osella 2000; C. Osella and F. Osella 2006). Historical records and worldwide empirical evidence illustrate that migration is *par excellence* a male process (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920; Monsutti 2007; French and Rothery 2008; Qureshi 2012), as it requires material resources that men can more easily mobilize at the household and community levels, as well as personal attributes most often associated with masculinity (e.g., courage, physical strength, risk-taking). There is, however, less straightforward evidence on how migration impacts young men's masculinity and their ability to achieve adult status in accordance with culturally desired trajectories toward reaching male adulthood. On the

one hand, such culturally praised trajectories in both sending and receiving societies may overlap, differ, or oppose each other, which may result in different adaptation strategies on the part of men migrants who seek to reduce the tensions and ambiguities of their adult-male perspective, while being exposed to the host country's normative expectations for a considerable length of time. On the other hand, young economic migrants might enter new gendered worksites, often taking up unskilled jobs in construction and agriculture, and living in various residential arrangements, sometimes exclusively homosocial, which can subject their masculinity and adulthood to permanent negotiation and contestation (Cohen 2006).

Apart from the different gender regimes of sending and receiving societies that migrants need to reconcile, migration may interrupt, precipitate, or cancel life transitions expected to take place at certain ages. Significant stays abroad may result in men migrants facing multiple challenges regarding the achievement of full-fledged adult status. As C. Osella and F. Osella (2006: 118) noted, "migration may accelerate an individual's progress along a culturally idealized trajectory towards mature manhood," especially through an enhanced relationship with money earned abroad that becomes the most valued resource, conferring high prestige on men migrants within sending communities. Nonetheless, migration does not always accelerate, or even facilitate, the achievement of adult-male status and may even thwart the process of becoming an adult (Liu 2010). It can even precipitate the aging process upon exposure to health-damaging work conditions and lack of proper safety protection for immigrants working in heavy industrial conditions (Qureshi 2012).

The existing literature documents various cases in which men migrants' masculinity is threatened during migration through different work regulations, restrictions on interactions with host-country natives, and complex positions within other networks of relations. For instance, Gallo (2006) illuminates the processes of contestation and redefinition of masculine identity among Malayali men married to women working in the domestic sector in Italy. Her ethnographic study accounts for the ambivalence of masculinity that these men are facing. On the one hand, they are experiencing downward mobility given their limited work opportunities outside feminized domestic work, in which their spouses are usually employed. On the other hand, these husbands are experiencing opportunities to construct a respectable adult-male status owing to the marital bonds with domestic employees who are in relationships of trust and dependency with their middle-class Italian employers. The sympathy and trust that Italian

employers have for their female domestic servants partly carry over to the male spouses who enter this domain. This could further be used as a means whereby these men gain legal status in Italy, while enabling the reassertion of their sense of masculinity and respectability, despite being placed within the highly feminized domestic work realm—a perception in both sending and receiving societies. Other research addresses men migrants' anxieties over state policies' representations and enforcement of their masculine subordination. For instance, McKay (2007) examines the narratives on masculinity among Filipino seamen. Such narratives are created as a way for them to cope with their threatened masculinity in a highly hierarchical labor niche in which the state, in its desire to secure remittances' flows, promotes its citizens' employability by depicting them as disciplined, obedient, and adaptable to changing work environments. These sailors' narratives become a source of agentic power through which they deconstruct the state's view of them, while portraying themselves as exemplars of masculinity by emphasizing their heroism and sacrifice for the sake of their family needs. Similarly, the narratives of Mexican male peasants migrating to the US under Bracero Program regulations epitomize the traditional male role as provider as a way to counter program regulations' assault on their masculine subjectivity. By living and working in extremely homosocial spaces, braceros—as these men migrants are labeled—find their claims to their identity as (heterosexual) men and their positions as patriarchs undermined and resolutely struggle to recoup their identity as proper adult men (Cohen 2006).

RECENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MASCULINITY AND ADULTHOOD

Over the past few decades, the concept of masculinity has been redefined by many scholars as part of their efforts to understand the tensions and anxieties that men face in relation to work, family, health, aging, sports, and countless other life domains, yet its theoretical conceptualization remains unsatisfactory, partly because of this very pattern of generating knowledge about masculinity by addressing the links between men and life aspects (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). These scholars suggest that a more helpful strategy to address masculinity, while avoiding the risk of reifying it by highlighting sex-appropriate and static personality traits, is to focus on manhood acts, that is, to look at what men actually do to claim their

membership in the dominant gender group, to be approved as a member of this group, and to resist being controlled and exploited. In accordance with this view, for men to be socially recognized and culturally valued, individual males need to master “a set of conventional signifying practices through which the identity ‘man’ is established and upheld in interaction” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009: 279). Men’s acts and their narratives reflecting upon these acts are central to men’s practical and discursive consciousness that constitutes their identity as men.

The idea that masculinity refers to the cultural practices that socially and economically advantage men’s position in society at the expense of women’s position by institutionalizing gender inequalities within various settings (e.g., family, work, state, global politics) is old, but the existence of power relations responsible for a hierarchy of masculinities was recognized in the mid-1980s (Carrigan et al. 1985). From the 1980s onward, scholars acknowledged that masculinity is plural and that the cultural and historical variants of masculinities are not equally celebrated at the local, national, and regional levels. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) put it, hegemonic masculinities, although emulated by a minority, embody the most revered ways of being a man, while other men who depart from this hegemonic ideal—because of either their bodily attributes or lack of necessary skills and material resources—are placed in subordinate masculine positions:

Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832)

Although the initial formulation of the hegemonic-masculinity concept received a large amount of criticism, its current reformulation by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) enables us to adequately frame masculine identities by retaining the concept’s core dimension, namely the underlying reality of power differential, while adding new elements, such as the geography of masculinities. The latter refers to the interactions among local, regional, and global ideals of hegemonic masculinity, allowing for the understanding of masculinity as geographically contingent, complex, and fluid. This can be easily applied to the study of men migrants, as they navi-

gate multiple masculinities at home and abroad, and their masculine performances could be informed by different—even contradictory—models of masculinities.

Another aspect that emphasizes the contingency of masculinity is its inherency among various strands of identity, such as age and class, and its embedding in certain social, cultural, and economic contexts. Recent studies on youth transitions rightfully argue that the construction of masculinities is contingent on the mobilization of class signs and leisure lifestyles that profoundly differ between young men from working-class backgrounds and those from families facing intergenerational unemployment (Nayak 2006). Alongside class, age is critical in shaping the growth of masculinities. The passage from boyhood to manhood captures the progress of masculinity from childhood to adulthood and its attendant transformations in values, aspirations, practices, and experiences. These transformations are responses to different societal expectations regarding the enactment of masculine identities at young and adult ages. This affirmation is not, however, unproblematic since the validation of masculinity through the realization of certain age-graded and clear-sequenced life transitions—including school completion, labor-market entry, departure from parents' home, marriage, and parenthood—is nowadays questioned under the current economic restructuring and the advent of liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), characterized by a perennial uncertainty and a lack of stable yardsticks to assess social roles' fulfillment. The life-transitions framework applied to the study of adulthood indeed has been criticized in the light of current evidence substantiating the claim that adult identity is narrowly and simplistically defined through individuals' achievement of social qualifiers associated with adulthood (e.g., obtaining full-time jobs, settling down, and becoming parents).

Another definition of adulthood considers both the variable societal structures that condition the timing and sequencing of adult transitions, as well as individuals' planful competence, understood as "the self's ability to negotiate the life course as it represents a socially structured set of age-graded opportunities and limitations" (Shanahan 2000: 675). Since migrants' life trajectories are presumably more dramatically impacted by societal conditions, given their exposure to different cultural norms and structural contexts, and because migrants' transnational living may affect their planful competence (e.g., low prospects to pursue a professional career, choose a stable partner, and cultivate and maintain relationships), migration, as a life event, appears likely to further disturb the achievement of adulthood.

Mary (2013) argues that for a better understanding of the achievement of adult status, one needs to include a broader view of adult identity, one that supersedes the conventional approach of considering the structuring power of the normative age-graded adult transitions by giving credence to individuals' voice and subjective experiences, as well as the derived psychological maturity that constitutes their adult identities. Following her argument, the present study adopts Cohler's (1982) idiographic approach to life trajectory that privileges the understanding of human development through the discursive analysis of personal narratives that individuals dynamically construct in their struggle to position themselves in relation to a master narrative of adulthood that is culturally shaped by specific circumstances varying in time and space. Building on Cohler's (1982) work, Hammack and Toolis (2014) emphasize that adulthood is not a clearly demarcated stage within the life span, but entails a dominant cultural discourse that mirrors normative expectations about proper adult status. However, norms can be tighter or looser in different societies, and individuals' transgressions against such norms happen more or less often depending on nature and the harshness of conditions inflicted upon those whose life courses depart from the norm.

Migration as a strategy to cope with underemployment in one's own country or region involves not only a physical separation from one's family and friendship networks, but it also can dissolve some of these relationships, as well as pressure migrants into allegedly adult transitions that can jeopardize their achievement once the social control of the origin society loosens during the migrant's prolonged absence. Acknowledging the impacts that migration can have on adult transitions, it becomes necessary to address migrants' self-perceived definitions of their position in their life trajectories. Another argument supporting this method of examining adulthood comes from youth studies. Panagakis (2015) brings empirical evidence of a variation in self-perceived adulthood between and within groups of 30-year-old individuals living in the US. Even those individuals who share similar gender aspects and education levels were found to differ in their subjective evaluations regarding the achievement of full adulthood. The explanation lies in the fact that individuals evaluate the timing of transitions and the nature of their ensuing social roles by referring to the normative standards set by their peer group, not through direct reference to societal norms that could appear too distant and abstract. In this view, having the same chronological age and having realized the same marital, residential, and professional milestones do not necessarily trans-

late to similar perceptions of age identity because of the mediation of peers. In the same way that local hegemonic ideals of masculinity shape masculine identities during face-to-face interactions, relative age plays a more important role in shaping age identity through assessing one's own age by referring to the progress toward adulthood made by friends and other acquaintances of the same chronological age. One should not, however, ignore the reality that the process of growing up entails changes and transitions in several life domains (e.g., school, work, family) and that one may experience these transitions at varying paces.

Building on these conceptualizations of adulthood and manhood, we see the maturing of gender- and age-based identities not as separate projects that one aims to accomplish over the life span but as inextricably linked and in constant flux, while also subjected to permanent demonstration and validation elicited by changing social contexts and expectations. This view enables us to consider migrants as agents of their life projects, as they deal with uncertainties that pervade all their choices, aspirations, and personal achievements. For migrants who left their countries of origin at an age when the most important life transitions are expected to take place, migration can alter the pursuit of some gendered and age-related life goals that are central to their concept of meaningful lives. These lives correspond to specific cultural expectations about what the shape of their adult lives should look like to gain full recognition as proper adult men. Such expectations are institutionalized within families through upbringing at home, socialization at school, exposure to mass media, expectations among peer networks, and workplace values. We acknowledge that for various reasons, life outcomes do not always match prior expectations because of complex factors, such as social constraints, limited resources, life vagaries, and ongoing evaluation and redefinition of prior life plans. To assess the realization of life expectations, participants in this study were asked to narrate their childhood and adolescent aspirations, then to compare their current (post-migratory) positions with prior expectations and reflect on the perceived impact of migration. The presentation of our empirical data that follows will provide evidence that migration affects migrants' objective perspectives (constraints and opportunities), as well as their subjective evaluations of their satisfaction with their lives. It is through migrants' individual definitions of meaningful lives that we will seek to establish patterns of manly adulthood in the sample of 12 Romanian men who lived abroad for as many as 22 years.

ROMANIAN LABOR MIGRATION: GENDER AND AGE STRUCTURING

The Romanian migration, as it developed from the early 1990s onward, showed a clear gender and age pattern. Before outlining these features, some facts about the context of its onset and an estimate of migrants' presence may serve to create a better understanding of the processes under scrutiny here. The breakdown of communism in Romania was followed by a series of dramatic economic, political, and social restructuring processes that never have been fully achieved (Stoica 2004; Gherghina and Miscoiu 2013). An upsurge in inequalities, rising unemployment, political crises, and economic turmoil in the labor market led many Romanians to seek solutions to their economic hardships and insecurity through migrations abroad for work by drawing on their agentic power to take advantage of gaps in restrictive regulations at the national and international levels to contain such mobility (Culic 2008). As of 2013, the National Institute of Statistics reported that at least 2.3 million Romanians have lived abroad for more than a year, with the top destinations being Italy, with 1.1 million, followed by Spain, with 796,000 Romanian immigrants (OCED 2015: 240). By all accounts, these are underestimations of the actual numbers of Romanians currently living outside their country of birth since neither receiving nor sending countries can accurately capture the size of this phenomenon, characterized by irregular border crossings or regular entries with visa overstays; seasonal participation of migrants in poorly regulated work domains; and migrants' reluctance to notify local authorities of their arrival and departure. Faced with rising unemployment due to the bankruptcy of large state-run factories after 1990, men were likely to respond to household economic crises first by engaging in circular and seasonal migration to nearby destinations, and then, starting in the mid-1990s, turning to long-term migration to more remote European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Germany, and France (Sandu 2006). The early 1990s were marked by migration flows to neighboring countries (e.g., Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, and Hungary) to find work in agriculture, construction, or petty trade, but the legal status of Romanian immigrants remains affected by different degrees of irregularity, given the restrictive policies of these countries with respect to the rights of Romanian immigrants to stay and work. At least in the first decade, the Romanian migration was highly masculinized, with men representing 88 percent of Romanian international

migrants between 1990 and 1995. With the lifting of restrictions on free movement within the Schengen Area in 2002, the share of Romanian migrant women gradually grew to 45 percent between 2002 and 2006 (Sandu 2010). Thus, male migration represented a dominant component of the outward migration for most of the contemporary history of migration from Romania, even if Romanian women are currently known to outnumber men migrants in some Southern European countries, especially in Italy and Spain, where the substantial degree of familialism characterizing their welfare-state policies (Saraceno and Keck 2010) contributes to a constant high demand for domestic work, into which these women are usually channeled (Piperno 2012; Vlase 2013). A complex combination of cultural and socioeconomic factors has been responsible for the gender structuring of migration. First, economic migration epitomized, at least in the early 1990s, one of the riskiest and most adventurous (essentially male) experiences one could undertake because of both the high probability of winding up with informal jobs and the dim prospects of obtaining legal status once migrants exceeded relatively short travel-visa terms. Second, there was a common belief that acted as a deterrent to female migration, namely that women who migrate alone would be lured into the sex industry (Montanari and Staniscia 2009). Whether real or groundless, such local gossip putatively implies a loss of credit by men in their origin communities, as they are thought to be unable to act as real fathers and husbands who are entitled to control the sexuality of their daughters and wives. The failure to properly police women's labor and their sexual behavior from a distance generates a local moral panic and gives rise to contestation and marginalization of these men, with their masculinity under assault. Third, however scarce household resources are, men usually enjoy greater access to them compared with their women counterparts (Vlase 2016). Drawing on this male privilege, men can access resources for travel expenses, which were considerable before 2002, when entry visas were still required for Romanian citizens traveling within the Schengen area (Anghel 2008; Vlase 2016). The ongoing process of migration, however, gradually altered the perceptions of origin communities regarding opportunities in destination countries, contributing to more balanced attitudes toward men's and women's labor migration.

Besides the gendered structuration of migration from Romania, there is also a generational patterning dominated by youth migration and marked by a rejuvenation of migrant stocks over the past few years in popular desti-

nations. Based on data provided by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics for the year 2000, Horváth (2012) shows that Romanians who obtained legal residence in Spain were predominantly young. According to the latter source, one third of Romanian migrants legally residing in Spain were 16–24 years old. This stage in life is usually marked by a high density of transitions associated with adulthood milestones. The similar age structure of Romanian immigration has been reported in England (Culic 2008) and Italy (Otovescu 2012). These observations concerning gender and age structuring in Romanian immigration prompted us to address pathways to adulthood and the performance of masculinities, as they are allegedly affected by migration experiences, pressured or delayed life events and transitions, and the interpretations that migrants assign to these events to forge new age and gender identities. We will further substantiate these contentions through analysis of compelling ethnographic data. More specifically, we try to answer the following two research questions: (1) How do gender- and age-based identities (i.e., masculinity and adulthood) intersect and shape men migrants' adult-male status? (2) How can men migrants resecure their masculine and adult subjectivities upon being challenged by migration and other life events that threaten their manly adult status (e.g., divorces, job losses), resulting in a lack of age-appropriate life transitions that serve to validate one's respectable masculine status (e.g., heterosexual marriage, parenthood, and residential independence, i.e., homeownership)?

DATA AND METHOD

The empirical data for this study stem from a research project titled *Migrants' life courses: dealing with uncertain, highly destandardized biographies in Romania*. Within this framework, the research team collected 40 biographical interviews with Romanian migrants, both men and women, who have spent more than five years abroad for work purposes and who returned to Romania either on a permanent or temporary basis. For the purposes of this chapter, we have selected 12 interviews with men originating from the lower working class, in their 30s and 40s and with similar profiles, to observe and interpret patterns in the formation of their adult life stages and masculine performances in relation to their lived migration experiences. Although class is not explicitly referred to in the interviews, our selection of migrants from a similar class background is motivated by evidence that its "structuring absence" plays a major role in the formation of gendered selves (Skeggs 1997). Thus, we try to control

for it to be able to capture migration's influence on men migrants' progress toward adulthood. Men's narratives serve as strategic tools to provide meaningful accounts of their fragmented biographies (Riessman 2008). I also consider them resourceful means whereby one can illuminate the tensions and uncertainties underpinning the structural plots of participants' life stories. These tensions are relevant proof of individuals' narrative engagement with cultural scripts on normative adulthood:

Although hegemonic discourses on the nature and meaning of adulthood continue to exist, these examples of protest reveal the way in which master narratives are in constant states of tension and renegotiation, as individuals do not blindly internalize them but rather engage with them. (Hammack and Toolis 2014: 50, emphasis in original)

The interviews were conducted according to a protocol that specified that migrants were first informed about the scope of the study and invited afterward to narrate their life experiences as they remember them, starting with whatever they believed relevant. Subsequently, interviewers guided informants toward specific life events and transitions preceding and following migration, their sequencing, the feelings they attached to them, significant others involved, the meanings they derived from their experiences, and assessments as to whether, and to what extent, their narrated life stories match their aspirations before migration.

Our purposeful sample consists of participants recruited with the help of team members' contacts within large social networks—including professionals, relatives, and friends—ensuring an initial mutual trust between researchers and participants, mediated by these common social ties that brought them together. Interviews took place at participants' homes or other places that they chose. The interviewers ensured that interview situations were never uncomfortable or awkward by avoiding intrusiveness through careful arrangement of the details related to time and place to accommodate participants' needs and rhythms. Written informed consent forms were signed by all participants, assuring them of confidentiality.

Some migrants left the country for the first time while underage by evading border controls or bribing border officers at checkpoints. Illegal activities were often reported during interviews, not only concerning entry and exit controls but also in relation to day-to-day living abroad (e.g., theft from shops, driving on public roads without a license, exploiting

fellow migrants who overstayed their visas by extorting money from them to help them get through border controls without incurring penalties, engaging in informal work). Interviews were fully transcribed, and the transcriptions were coded with the help of Maxqda 11 software. On the basis of a system of codes referring to both a wide range of life events and transitions occurring in migrants' lives, as well as migrants' assessments of their manly adult status, informants were classified within four adult-male status types (explained later) according to the most numerous coded text segments identified in the quote matrix as closer to one of the ends of age and masculine identities.

In this study, men migrants' narratives revealed different patterns of adult-male status resulting from intimate links of various masculinities and age identities. As we will show in the next section, masculinities in the men's sample range from *exacerbated* to *threatened*, according to the meanings conveyed by informants about their manhood acts that emphasized either an enhanced domination or a loss of dominant status. Likewise, men's narratives also reveal their perceived ages on a continuum ranging from *delayed* to *premature adulthood*, revealing that some men migrants in our sample were pressured by migration. The four adult-male status types resulting from the combination of the two axes of age and gender identities (i.e., premature adulthood/exacerbated masculinity, delayed adulthood/threatened masculinity, premature adulthood/threatened masculinity, and delayed adulthood/exacerbated masculinity) serve as an analytical guide to illustrate how men migrants perceive, although not always unambiguously, their age- and gender-based performances. Migrants are knowledgeable actors, aware of the presence of hegemonic narratives of masculinity and adulthood against which they position their own narratives. Without perfectly matching any of the types mentioned earlier, these personal narratives can feature, to a higher degree, one pattern. Moreover, inner tensions are common in men migrants' narratives, as in some life domains in which certain men point to acute senses of prematurity derived from experiencing life events and transitions specific to adulthood at early ages. In other life areas, the same migrants doubted their maturity or even denied the possibility of ever achieving adulthood, given their failure to meet certain conventional markers of adult status (e.g., marriage, parenthood).

MEN MIGRANTS' PROGRESS ALONG MANLY ADULTHOOD TRAJECTORIES

If we agree that masculinity is plural and hierarchical, and that adulthood is not fixed but rather fluid and contingent on both achievement of conventional social qualifiers (e.g., marriage, parenthood, full employment, independent living) and psychological maturity, then we can better understand the contradictory locations of men migrants who position themselves differently on these two inextricably linked identity axes. Figure 9.1 shows the main traits of informants whose narratives suggest different locations on the masculinity and adulthood axes.

Furthermore, I will provide illustrative examples that flesh out the four patterns describing uneven progress along manly adulthood trajectories in which men find themselves amid a long migration career throughout which they have faced different life events and transitions that have shaped

| | | Self-assessed adult status | |
|-------------|-------------|--|---|
| | | Premature | Delayed |
| Masculinity | Threatened | Swift transitions to marriage and parenthood, certifying achievement of adult status, as well as substantial earnings during migration but bad management of savings, while at the same time, acknowledgement of masculine crises, especially when confronting local hegemonic masculinity narratives upon return, in both public and private encounters (financial insecurity upon return, inability to influence others and obtain deference). | Migration intersects with work, education, and family trajectories, leading to many fragmentations, e.g., school interruptions, romantic break-ups and pains, regrets, ongoing self-doubt over individual achievements, and a low propensity to plan family and work/career outcomes. Such fragmentations threaten both masculinity and the pursuit of adulthood. |
| | Exacerbated | Early adult transitions and traditional ordering of life events pursued during migration (e.g., marriage, homeownership in home country, parenthood), seekers of opportunities to increase income involving crime, highly agentive actors, orientation toward family protection, breadwinners regardless of current marital status. | Postponed adult achievements during migration, with an emphasis on playful manhood acts that reveal a mischievous boyhood identity, high concern for masculine leisure activities (e.g., riding motorcycles, playing computer games), interrupted work histories, problem with authority figures, reliance on partners' incomes. |

Fig. 9.1 Men's performances according to their position on the masculinity and adulthood axes

their senses of manhood and adulthood. With few exceptions, migrants in our sample have experienced nonlinear processes of moving from adolescent to adult life stages, with life transitions marked by discontinuities and repeated life events (e.g., remarriage with the same or different partners, reenrollment in school after migration). The ways in which life events and transitions to adulthood are reflected in participants' narratives convey understandings of their masculine identities, while migrants' manhood acts also indicate age patterning since all these acts are virtually boyish or mature expressions of selves.

Premature Adulthood/Exacerbated Masculinity

This type is epitomized by a few sample cases (04_M_43, 18_M_45). Informants' code is made up of two-digit numbers indicating their order in the sample of the total of 40 interviewees, followed by gender symbol (M for male), while the last information regards informants' age. Both informants belonging to this pattern come from similar family backgrounds (fathers were truck drivers, mothers worked in agriculture) and migrated soon after completing vocational schools, although they made the transition from school to work before migration. The narratives of these informants stand out clearly as they are full of accounts of bold manhood acts through which the storytellers aim to provide an image of themselves as goal oriented and heroic in their ability to sacrifice for the achievement of adult male markers, such as building their own homes in their home country, marrying, becoming fathers, and providing for their families. They consider migration both as an important accelerator of their progress toward adulthood and as masculinity leverage, thanks to their abilities to creatively combine various jobs and enhance money-earning activities, both formally and informally, while benefiting from rich social ties and enjoying a good reputation within their social networks:

Operator: If you were to remember the moment when you felt that you had become an adult, when did this transition to adulthood happen? What marked this transition for you?

Interviewee: Do you know when? I think it was '89 ... yes, in '89, I was 17 years old... something like that, because you could see everyone... In '90, just after the revolution, you saw that they have all become wealthier, they were leaving, and that's when I started making my own money. (04_M_43)

While working in Italy, I was the kind of person who wasn't satisfied with the 1000 euros or whatever the monthly salary that one [employer] was giving me. I was the person who sought to earn as much as possible. I was either imposing myself on the employer, or, if I failed to impose my way, I was changing jobs. Wherever I went, I was offering [skills], but I had expected the same in return. Even if I was Romanian or a foreigner, if I am giving you something, you must give something in return too. I did training as well. I have a firefighter qualification in Italy under the Ministry of the Interior. I can get a job as a firefighter in Romania too... a qualified firefighter. I have forklift training, and medical first-aid training... I've done several trainings for qualifications. They are split by categories. And I changed my jobs from unskilled work, to cooker in kitchens, restaurants, I worked in aluminum industry, in a furniture factory, in construction. I've nearly tried jobs in all the branches of the industry in a row. I didn't stick to a single domain. I got involved in all of them... I went where the payment was better. That was my goal. As years went by... they go by anyway, I have to do something. And so I did. And when I left Italy, I left it not because I didn't earn well enough. I was getting good money there. I was employed on a high-level skill category, I was responsible for an entire department, but I left due to family reasons. My children were here [in Romania]. My boy was about to start primary school, then my daughter also came and she had to commute. When I was returning from my godparents', I was coming home every three months [of absence], and I said that with the 500–1000 euros, I was sending them monthly, maybe I can earn just as much in Romania as well. Maybe not 1000, but 500 I can manage to earn back home. (18_M_45)

Money becomes an important asset that provides them with a sense of power and control necessary to demonstrate their masculinity and gain approval as a real man. The narratives also show that in the deregulated market that sprang up upon the collapse of communism in Romania, some young men engineered international thefts and petty crimes, as they had few opportunities to accumulate money and gain financial independence:

Operator: How were you choosing your countries of destination?

Interviewee: From friends. So, someone went to Austria to steal perfumes. So, these were the times back then. I'm not ashamed of anything I've done so far: "Let's go there to steal perfumes!" You took whatever you found there in the stores and sold them to Bulgarians. I came back home. I stayed for a week, and I left with N. I spent a weekend home. On Monday morning, I went illegally to Italy, and I got there through Croatia, Yugoslavia, and... after a day and a half, I was in... Italy. And then I stayed in Italy without visiting home, as I got there... let's say the first week I got there was rougher. I went to my sister, where

I had a bed to sleep in. [...] After a week, I found work, and I kept that job for eight years. In an orchard. [...] After five years, I... came home for the first time. That's when I got the papers. Otherwise, you could not go back to Italy if you were coming home. However, I got my papers, and I came home. But I did not stay. The first time I [returned, I] stayed for a week. And then I started to come [regularly]. I used to come, I started a business in transport, but still kept my job there in agriculture. Being [involved] in agriculture, it was different. You could leave when you wanted. It wasn't like in a factory. And I started back then, during that time with visa over-stayers, in 2003, I was doing two rides per month. But I wasn't staying home. I was coming home on Sundays, getting to Romania on Monday, and by Thursday, I was heading back to Italy. And so on. I was doing this commute twice a month. And I made good money out of these visa over-stayers back then. (04_M_43)

Criminal activities for financial accumulation are themselves a marker of exacerbated masculinity that is underpinned by young men's shared understandings of expectations that society places on them. Such understandings—culturally negotiated and internalized during their early socialization—usually include ways to prove success (financial gains and material possessions are often a measure of it), show physical strength, and take risks. When men are deprived of resources and lack legitimate means to demonstrate their masculinity, their claim to manhood is incomplete, and they might, therefore, resort to unconventional or criminal behavior to restore their sense of manhood. There is, however, an important caveat they should be aware of: To avoid thwarting their journey toward adulthood—entwined in their manhood acts—young men need to desist from criminal behavior in the short run and use their financial resources wisely to ensure future access to conventional ways of proving their proper male adulthood. After becoming financially independent, whether from legal or illegal money-earning activities, settling down and starting a family usually is an important step in gaining full adulthood and respectable man status. Parenthood causes these young men to face the necessity of turning away from crime if they want their children to benefit from their parental support and not be excluded or stigmatized because of their fathers' conduct.

Operator: So, this is the major event of your life: becoming a father?

Interviewee: Yes. That's when I thought about him, that I didn't want him to be alone. Because of what I used to do, I didn't sleep at home at night. And if I were to stay two to three years in prison and he would end up alone—I said "Stop!" and that was it. (04_M_43)

The men in this subsample of premature adulthood/exacerbated masculinity adopt the pattern of marriage, followed by parenthood transitions, a few years after migration, once their financial situations improve. Their ability to earn money and independence from their parents' financial support is central to their concept of adulthood. They emphasized that migration enhanced their opportunities to earn more, while these earnings enabled the realization of their sense of having a meaningful life that includes orderly life events (e.g., marriage and parenthood) and that demonstrates their adult-male status. Throughout their long years in destination countries, these men remained oriented toward definitively returning to their home country, a project they nurtured through savings and investments in their origin communities (e.g., building their own houses, buying properties). Although these men are not immune to life events that can potentially affect their masculinity, adulthood, or both, they resolutely, at least in the discourse, recoup their threatened identity. For instance, a divorce is not seen as disturbing their life trajectory or affecting their sense of manhood, as in the case of 04_M_43, who gained custody of his four-year-old son. Not being able to look after his son while working full-time, the single father decided to send the son to his mother in Romania and continue working and saving for his planned business back home, where he plans to return upon his son's enrollment in primary school. A deep sense of moral duty toward family/children support is present in both of these sampled cases, and although uncertainty is present and acknowledged in both narratives, it is also dealt with in agentic ways:

Operator: How do you see yourself, for example, in 10 years' time, at 53?

Interviewee: I never thought about it. What I am doing now [for a living] is something I can live off quite well. That's why I made a plan for the future, and I also planted a hectare of nuts because you never know. Let it [grow] there because in 10 years' time, it will pay out [bear fruit]. I bought a few hectares of land for the same thing, for the future. But you don't know what will happen to the land, but we're still trying to work it. I also planted half a hectare of plum trees. We are producing what is popular nowadays. If anything changes, we will try to change ourselves as well. (04_M_43)

Men in this group tend to have multiple skills, formal and informal, technical and social, as well as investments in concurrent entrepreneurial activities (e.g., one man manages several enterprises simultaneously—running a bakery, a pig farm, and a car-rental service, as well as leading a

construction team), providing these men with resources to handle unforeseen life circumstances through effective planning. Their wide work experience gained as migrants in various (male) domains (e.g., construction, industry, transportation) and a highly entrepreneurial profile upon their return single them out from the other cases. Also, unlike men in the fourth category, these men's references to leisure or recreational activities are present in their discourses only in respect to their past life stage (i.e., before adulthood), and they are often full of self-criticism toward their immature spending habits or behavior.

Delayed Adulthood/Threatened Masculinity

This subgroup contains three sample cases: 19_M_49, 26_M_39, and 27_M_30. Although they are different ages, they are similar in respect to their present life outcomes, which are partly the result of fragmented trajectories in either family, education, and/or work domains. These fragmentations intersect with and are shaped by their long migration careers. As an illustration, I soon will introduce the youngest informant of this subgroup, 27_M_30, and his tortuous pathway to adulthood during migration and his return. He left high school to migrate. He viewed migration as a way to escape his parents' authority and gain autonomy and financial independence. His subsequent work trajectory and romantic career in Italy led to a reassessment of this first decision. Frequent job changes in Italy with no upward mobility and an unstable romantic relationship that ended after five years, in which he felt betrayed, added further volatility to his adulthood achievements and illustrated the serious limits of his planful abilities. The turning point in his unaccomplished pathway toward adulthood seems to be the dissolution of his romantic relationship, when he saw his life plans torn down and decided to return home and pick up where he left off a few years back. He reenrolled in high school with a plan to pursue a university degree while working in a factory:

Operator: What kind of high school did you attend?

Interviewee: Mechanical.

Operator: Four years?

Interviewee: No, no, I didn't finish it because I left.

Operator: Since high school?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. In fact, I am still studying for it nowadays, I'm working hard... for the mistakes I did back then.

Operator: The mistakes from high school?

Interviewee: Yes, because I abandoned it, and I chose to go abroad. I was telling myself: "I'm not going to do anything with it anyways"—that's how I was thinking back then—"I should better go and work."

[...] I wouldn't go again. I would definitely finish my studies because it is somewhat frustrating [to study] at this age. I mean people don't understand that you aren't necessarily stupid if you have 10 grades or 8 or 7, or 11 [grades], or you didn't graduate high school or you didn't pass your High School Graduation Exam. Because, you know, somebody asks you, "Hey, did you pass your High School Graduation Exam?" "No, I didn't." But they won't let you explain why, how, when... which are the mistakes. It is not always fair, but diplomas are more important these days. (27_M_30)

His new romantic partner seems to play a major role in his new attitude and plans for the future, as he tells it:

Interviewee: Pff... I think my current girlfriend changed my life a lot, in a good way. Since we've been together, I have changed a lot as a person, but I also changed my way of thinking, I would say. The people around me and I started to accomplish a few things. I told you, I got my driving license late, but not because...because of her persistence, so to say.

Operator: She motivated you to do things?

Interviewee: Yes. Nobody ever told me. Nobody ever insisted to tell me why I needed a driving license. And she told me, "Go try. You are 30 years old. What if you're going to have a family someday? What will you do? Will your wife drive your child if you need to go somewhere?" And I said "OK. Let's try!" Of course, I tried. I took it without any problem. Good. Afterward, "Go to school. Finish this!" (27_M_30)

He acknowledges that he is late in accomplishing conventional life outcomes in education and work. At the same time, his partner's encouragement regarding his lack of a driver's license questioned his manhood while threatening his chances of becoming a real husband and father by social standards, according to which, men should have a higher socioeconomic status and manage practical and technical aspects of private life. This excerpt also demonstrates that late-adulthood achievements also can interfere with masculinity, preventing men from acquiring the ability to be a good father and husband, and even suggesting the uncertainty of such ontological possibilities. Being a man returnee is often associated with

some success during migration, which is proven in the home community through some standard assets (e.g., homeownership, owning a car, and entrepreneurial skills). In turn, the lack of such masculine trappings of success threatens men's adult status by lowering their marriage prospects, residential independence, and economic mobility. Our informant's perceived gap between social expectations and his current achievements led him to adjust his self-assessment about his age and gender identity:

Operator: Do you see yourself becoming an adult in the future, and what would adult life mean?

Interviewee: Adult life for me? ... I don't know what to say. To be prepared to work all your life.... To have a job, a full-time [job]. I don't know. To be supportive of the ones around you. Also like that, unconditionally. I don't know... to have a family. I still don't think I would be ready to get married.

Premature Adulthood/Threatened Masculinity

Unlike the preceding type, the informants clustering in the premature adulthood/threatened masculinity type (11_M_42; 05_M_43, 14_M_46, 17_M_33) do attain social qualifiers of adulthood (e.g., marriage, fatherhood) relatively early in their lives, and migration seems to speed up this growing-up process, but a sense of disempowerment and displacement of their masculine selves is conveyed when life outcomes are evaluated against the expectations and realities in their home countries. One informant captures this feeling when recalling the moment of migration that he believes marked his transition to adulthood:

Interviewee: I was in a hurry, and I took life head on, and that's why I regret that I didn't wait for the other stages.

Operator: Are you referring to your going abroad to Serbia?

Interviewee: Yes.

Operator: That was the first job you ever had?

Interviewee: Yes. (17_M_33)

Another informant acknowledges that his first day in another country marked the beginning of his maturity, but such maturity and honest work did not translate to an enhanced male status as signified by valuable markers such as money:

Interviewee: Starting day one. Starting day one. That's when growing up begun. I kept thinking, "If I wouldn't have left, I wouldn't have grown up. I couldn't have done it. And not only in Spain. When I left abroad for Belgium for the first time."

Operator: Already since then?

Interviewee: The moment I went away from home, it was already a different world.

Operator: What was different?

Interviewee: Well, when you leave your mother's and your father's home, you are left alone. You need to handle things by yourself. And you handle things the way you learned back in your home country. In life, in your childhood, at your mother's home. You either step over everything in order to have a good life, or you work and you earn your life... And I chose to work. I could've done deals, to make money, but I wasn't interested in that. [...]

You could see the world differently, with different eyes, you could see... everything with different eyes. Absolutely everything. And after a year, after I went, I think the first time I returned home was after two years. Everybody home was already thinking, "You became arrogant and slier," and I don't know what else. "You don't know where you came from anymore." But I was seeing everything with different eyes. Everything.

Operator: Can you give me an example?

Interviewee: I can't say. But it's different. It can be seen in all Romanians that come back. The Romanians back here don't understand them anymore. They all say: "You don't remember where you left from; you think you are superior" and whatnot. But, in fact, Romanians [migrants] are different. Their eyes [and perspectives] open differently. And then you come back to your country, and nothing is good anymore. You have the feeling that nothing is going right. It's like you can't accept it. (05_M_36)

The dissatisfaction upon returning to the home country has to do with a feeling of displacement that includes both a different perception of old realities by the migrant whose experiences abroad changed his perspectives on his home country, and an attitude of rejection that non-migrants display toward their migrant countrymen when the latter impose their point of view. Their personal feelings of inadequacy and uneasiness in their home country threaten men migrants' masculinity since they cannot convincingly exert influence on local daily routines, as their opinions are met with suspicion and resistance, instead of praise and consent.

Threatening situations concerning masculinity are found emanating not only from public (male) resistance against migrant men's ideas and behaviors but also from relatives (especially brothers), who can oppose

men returnees' masculine ways of handling their own affairs. One man returnee from this group was married while earning his university degree, then decided to migrate before completing his master's degree because he couldn't provide for his newly established family. Being unable to buy or rent a satisfactory home, he was living in student housing on campus, relying on his parents' financial support while working part-time for low wages. This living arrangement prior to migration was not sufficient proof of proper masculinity since he could show neither financial independence nor acceptable residential status. His subsequent migration career did not result in major improvements to his adult-male status either. His family trajectory was dramatically impacted during migration, causing him lots of pain because of two divorces and his stated failure to become a father. Concerning work, although he mentions unprecedented income derived from entrepreneurial activities in Italy, he also regretfully says he was unable to realize male achievements, such as owning a house, under local standards of masculinity because of his inability to properly manage his finances and spending, blaming this on his leisure lifestyle abroad. Thus, he questions his adult manhood by echoing both his (non-migrant) brothers and his current partner's dissatisfaction and criticism regarding his inability to manage money.

Operator: Do you think you were a role model for them [younger brothers]?

Interviewee: For a time, yes. Lately, no, because their role model transformed, I mean their desire to see a role model has transformed. As long as this financial aspect didn't depend on me or them and it depended on parents, they saw me as a role model of getting good grades, of dressing nicely, clean ... Now, since I began attempting to start my own activity, there are moments when... like that. There are moments when I end up asking them: "Hey, lend me some money." They don't see me as a role model because they have the feeling they are doing better. With the little money they have, they manage to ensure continuity. For me, this job is more fluctuating because I either got used to Italy and to spending more, or it is just how I am, and I like to feel good. [...] 14 years [in Italy] probably took their toll. It is exactly that period when you become an adult, when you learn to save money or to spend it. Well, I probably developed that since during that period I had a lot, I spent a lot. I oftentimes argue with the girl I am currently in a relationship with, as we are not married, whatever. It's a colleague from... so, she keeps scolding me. This morning, there was a great... scolding, of about an hour, regarding money. Sometimes I do realize that I might also have a problem. (11_M_42)

For men in this subsample, migration appears as a trigger or as an accelerator of adulthood since it provides migrants with a sense of maturity and enables their full transition to conventional adult-status achievements (e.g., marriage, financial and residential independence), but their return causes them to face different threats against their masculinity. They become contested and marginalized in their home country since their material and symbolic assets are not sufficient to elicit other men's or family members' deference.

Delayed Adulthood/Exacerbated Masculinity

The final subgroup refers to men migrants whose adult achievements are postponed and rendered uncertain during migration, while their age identity interacts with masculinity and shapes their manhood acts, resulting in a mischievous, playful boyhood, rather than the attainment of a mature manhood. Informants 08_M_34, 21_M_32, and 25_M_39 are closer to this type. They are currently in their 30s. Regardless of their marital status, their progress toward adulthood lacks what social narratives of adulthood contain, as reflected in their personal narratives. Informant 08_M_34 acknowledges that his (male) initiation into migration as a masculine act was done through learning bad things first:

Operator: Out there, how did you feel about the adaptation process, at the beginning, in respect to the new culture, different people, foreign language?

Interviewee: Fine. I have first learned the foolish stuff. (08_M_34)

This informant married when he was 24 years old and migrated soon after marriage because he couldn't raise a family while living with his grandmother, which was his residence before getting married. He recalls that his arrival in Spain was followed by hard times, as he didn't find any work for seven months, during which he was torn between the desire to return home out of despair and the reluctance to take this step out of fear of being judged as a failure. During his migration career, he became a father twice, but despite such social adulthood markers, he does not self-identify as an adult.

Operator: If you think about it, when exactly do you think you became an adult?

Interviewee: Never.

Operator: [laughs]

Interviewee: ... Never...

Operator: So, you think you haven't grown up?

Interviewee: Not yet.

Throughout the migration years, this man's slow progress toward adulthood shaped his manhood acts, which emphasized an accentuated masculinity mold in a boyhood concept marked by his interest in leisure activities and spending to display masculinity:

Operator: How was it trying to adapt to a new country, with other people, with another language?

Interviewee: Fine. Initially I learned the foul language...

Operator: Really? And when you didn't have work [to do], what did you do?

Interviewee: Oh... what didn't I do? I played on the PlayStation, I smoked weed, I grew plants—what else did I do? I don't know... I looked for iron. I made up to 200 euro from [recycling] iron.

Operator: Did you use money for other things, except a house?

Interviewee: Yes. Cars. About 15 cars. I changed them every year. For each one, I paid at least 1000 euros.

Operator: Did you buy land or anything of the sort?

Interviewee: No.

Operator: You didn't invest in this?

Interviewee: Only in mobile phones.

Operator: In mobile phones?

Interviewee: In PlayStations [laughs]. In computers. (08_M_34)

The other two men in this group are not married but in stable relationships after other broken relationships during migration. Out of the two, participant 21_M_32, ended his relationship because he didn't want to be bossed around by his ex-girlfriend's father at work and wanted to keep his money separate and decide how to spend it, as proof of his masculinity. Informant 25_M_39 still struggles with adulthood achievements, while clearly stating that he does not perceive himself as an adult. His statement also can be interpreted as a negotiation and resistance against local hegemonic narratives of adult masculinity since his prior internalization of social expectations has been discarded in light of migration experiences that enabled him to balance norms and expectations of origin and destination societies:

Interviewee: I wanted to be married at 20 years old. I wanted to have a child at 24 years old, probably about three by 30. Now, I am soon 40, and I don't have any of that. On the other hand, I don't know... I am very content with my life.

Operator: Do you think migrating contributed to that?

Interviewee: You should know the migration opened my thinking horizon a bit. I don't know... I felt very good in another country, I came with... they are more evolved than we are. We are, at an overall level, quite far behind, not like in the West or other countries I've been to. We are still... I don't know. I came with an extra baggage of knowledge, of experience. But it helped me. It probably helped me to be more optimistic, more relaxed. (25_M_39)

This excerpt indicates how personal narratives depart from hegemonic narratives of adulthood. Yet the storytellers preserve a sense of adult-male status by framing their experiences transnationally, in a broader sociocultural context encompassing narratives of both home and host countries. 25_M_39 started a new relationship upon his return and dreams about becoming a homeowner and a father someday. When asked about his worries and concerns for his future, he simply stated that he is most afraid of a motorcycle crash and the expenses that it would incur. Detailing his passion for riding motorcycles is allegedly a way of asserting his masculine self, while his disproportionate concerns about crashing add more ambiguities regarding his progress toward adulthood, as he acknowledges:

Operator: Are there things that frighten you in life, regarding the future? Do you see a certain aspect in a somewhat fearful way?

Interviewee: I am afraid not to crash my motorbike and—not to have enough money to fix it [sneer]. That scares me the most. It can be laughable, but my passion is to... I love motorbikes. I am currently very frightened by the idea of repairing my bike, I mean a major repair after a crash of 2000 euros, for example. (25_M_32)

Although this informant is unemployed and most of the time lives off his new partner's wage income while occasionally contributing his own income from informal work, his masculinity does not appear threatened by his uncertain economic status and unstable income, since he retains a sense of superiority over most other men migrants whom he has met and/or worked with. His masculine leverage is discursively produced by downplaying physical strength's relevance to hegemonic masculinity. While emphasizing knowledge and recreational activities as central to his man identity, he also resists deference and the reproduction of submissive work relationships on construction sites:

I knew my rights, I know my right to work ... it is written very clear, in a conduct rulebook: First of all, you do not lift the bags all by yourself. I took the example of my Italian colleagues, who didn't show off and didn't want to prove anyone anything; most Romanians wanted to prove what slaves they were. "What a slave I am. How many things I will do for little money." Then they played with two bags to carry on their backs. They did these stupid contests on who can carry more bags, and now they are on injected medicine. I feel sorry for them, but this is the way of things. You don't have to prove anything to anybody in my opinion. You need to prove it to yourself. So then, yes, they have medical issues. Generally, back issues. They're in construction—knees, back [are affected]. So far, I don't have any [of these issues]. The only issues I have [are] my knees, I have them . . . from the ski track. (25_M_39: 251)

CONCLUSION

This chapter illuminates the interplay of masculinity and adulthood as affected by the long migration careers of young men about to make life transitions marking their path toward adulthood and mature manhood. As highlighted by other scholars (F. Osella and C. Osella 2000; Liu 2010), migration affects the progress toward adulthood and masculine performances of young men migrants, but the directions of such influences may be contradictory and do not necessarily converge to create mature manhood. The present research contributes to efforts in understanding these migrants' achievement of adult-male status by documenting the different, sometimes opposing, trends in masculinity and adulthood and their interplay in shaping uneven progress along the two identity axes under scrutiny.

The narratives of adulthood and masculine performances that make up the core of our empirical analysis substantiate the four distinct patterns of manly adulthood identified within our sample of Romanian men migrants who migrated in their youth. Their migration careers intersect and shape their work and family trajectories, while their ensuing life outcomes—measured through economic, residential, and family-status criteria—serve as social benchmarks against which men migrants position their masculinity and adulthood. In addition, their planful competence is seriously undermined. Despite prior plans to stay abroad for very limited periods, usually one or two years, these men migrants ended up staying more than a decade in host countries. Moreover, the context of transnational living complicated their choices, affecting their pursuit of stable relationships, upwardly mobile professional careers, and homeownership as ultimate indicators of independent/adult status.

Independent migration is subject to rules concerning minimum ages for being granted the right to travel and work abroad. Some men migrants bend the rules in their search for better work prospects. Migration can become, in this case, an extreme avenue for asserting one's masculinity through the embodiment of courage and strength, and by taking risks, including illegal activities. Upon establishing lives abroad, some men migrants overcompensate in trying to act in masculine ways beyond the limits set by their peer groups (e.g., using concurrent skills to earn more, participating temporarily in criminal activities, managing several enterprises simultaneously), while for other men migrants, late achievements toward adulthood or negative life events during migration (e.g., repeated separations, frequent job losses) undermine their masculinity and threaten their manhood. The ways in which adulthood and masculinity intersect suggest great variation in the interplay of men migrants' adulthood accomplishments and masculine performances. The four adult-male status types illustrated earlier were based on the analysis of men's narratives, reporting not only their biographical data but also the significance assigned to their experienced life events and transitions. The analysis revealed tensions and ambiguities in gender and age identities that men migrants sought to solve by referring to transnational cultural frameworks when they felt that their personal narratives did not match the prevailing master narrative of mature masculinity. Informants' narratives illuminate the complexities of interactions among migration, adulthood formation, and masculinity in the construction of manly adulthood in men migrants whose migration takes place in their youth or early adulthood. By acknowledging that age categories and gender identities are not fixed but subject to permanent social and cultural constructions by agents involved in social interactions embedded in larger socioeconomic and cultural contexts, this research outlines the intragroup variations in manly adulthood among men migrants in their middle adulthood (30s and 40s) by addressing subjective definitions and culturally embedded representations of their journeys toward adulthood and masculine performances shaped by long migration careers.

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