

Central Themes in the Study of Transnational Parenthood

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This article reviews the emerging literature on transnational parenthood, concentrating on six themes: gender, care arrangements, legislation, class, communication and moralities. Gender concerns not only the distinction between transnational motherhood and transnational fatherhood, but also the role of children's gender and the broader networks of gender relations within which transnational parenthood is practised. Care arrangements are often the most tangible challenge for transnational parents, and an area where material and emotional concerns intersect. The third theme, legislation, primarily concerns how immigration law can be decisive for separation and the prospects for reunification, as well as for the practice of parenthood from afar. Analysis of class can help us to understand differences in how transnational parenthood is practised and experienced. Communication across long distances is a defining element in the everyday practice of transnational parenthood, shaped by the intersection of technological, economic and psychological factors. The final theme, moralities, concerns the ways in which context-specific behavioural norms guide transnational parenthood. We subsequently discuss how the age of children is an important differentiating factor in the experience of transnational parenthood. In addition to these thematic discussions, we address methodological issues in the study of the phenomenon. Throughout, we emphasise both the limitations and the dynamism of transnational parenthood as it is experienced and practised in different contexts and throughout the life course.

Keywords: Transnational Parenthood; Gender; Class; Care; Moralities; Legislation

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Introduction

This special issue of *JEMS* addresses practices and experiences of transnational parenthood. Ties between parents and children play a particular role in transnational families: they are based on a lasting biological relationship and often embedded with strong, asymmetrical expectations and obligations. Securing their children's future is a key motivation for many migrants, even though physical separation is a challenge for parenting in the short term. The possibility of migration thus presents individuals with difficult trade-offs between different aspects of parenting.

The essence of migrant transnationalism is that physical absence is compatible with social presence and participation. This is also the case with migrant parents. Understanding transnational parenthood thus means analysing how the parent–child relationship is practised and experienced within the constraints of physical separation. At the same time, we draw attention to the dynamism and complexity that characterise transnational ties, and emphasise the many challenges and limitations that exist in relation to maintaining family across time and distance.

Parenting roles are strongly gendered, meaning that transnational motherhood and transnational fatherhood are distinct phenomena. The gendering of migration opportunities sometimes creates tensions with traditional gender relations, as when mothers migrate and assume a breadwinner role. When fathers migrate, the parenting role of the mother can also change as a consequence of her being the *de facto* head of household.

Changes in the international migration regime have affected the prevalence and nature of transnational parenthood. The generally restrictive stance towards immigration in developed countries now coexists with a strong demand for certain categories of migrant worker, for instance in domestic service and agriculture. In some cases, regular migration opportunities exist for individual workers, while it is legally or practically impossible to bring a family. This is the case for many contract workers in Asia, be they women working as housekeepers or men employed at sea or in construction. This is also the situation for contracted agriculture workers in the United States, who are separated from their families for seven months of the year. In other cases, migrant parents are unable to bring their children because the parents are undocumented. Millions of Latin Americans in the US and in Southern Europe are in this situation. Even legally resident migrants often face bureaucratic and financial obstacles to family reunification, which can result in years of unwanted separation. We wish to call attention to how new and more restrictive migratory regimes affect, in critical ways, the ability of migrants to parent from a distance.

Transnational parenthood is a specific aspect of the much broader, and widely researched, phenomenon of transnational families. Migration and transnational practices affect families in multiple ways, whether or not close family members are separated (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; König and de Regt 2010). Even within the theme of parent–child separation, we have deliberately concentrated on parents' experiences and practices. The other side of the story—the fate of children left

behind—is subject to ongoing debate in the media, policy circles and academia. In the light of the increasing focus on the benefits of migration, some have raised questions about the possibility that children are paying the price of economic development through separation from their parents. Others are pointing out that individual children often gain when their parents' migration ensures adequate health care and education. The articles in this special issue do not engage directly in the controversies about the consequences of migration for children left behind. However, these debates represent an important backdrop for transnational parenthood. Migrant mothers and fathers must relate to societal norms and attitudes in justifying their actions and performing their parenting roles.

The main body of this article discusses six themes that have been central to research on transnational parenthood: gender, care arrangements, legislation, class, communication and moralities. We then discuss how the age of a child is an important differentiating factor in the experience of transnational parenthood. The penultimate section of the article addresses methodological challenges in the study of transnational parenthood, and the final section introduces the seven articles included in this special issue.

Gender

Transnational parenthood is affected in gender-specific ways. Though their actual parenting activities may be similar, women and men who migrate to help sustain their children back home face different experiences both in the host country and with respect to their children left behind (Dreby 2006). Both mothers and fathers send gifts and money and maintain communication, but mothers are expected to also continue providing emotional care to their children (Parreñas 2001, 2005). Thus, even when they live thousands of miles away from their children, women continue to be constrained by care-giving expectations and obligations (Bernhard *et al.* 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2005). In the process of transnational parenting, women subvert traditional definitions of motherhood (Rajman *et al.* 2003), recasting practices of motherhood by exchanging their physical presence and nurturing for their children's material well-being (Horton 2009; Menjivar and Abrego 2009).

In a study of Polish migrants in London, Ryan *et al.* (2009) found that women were expected to remain involved in transnational care, whereas men who had also left children in Poland were not actively involved in care or care-giving, and were not expected to be. Indeed, when examining experiences of 'fathering at a distance', Parreñas (2008) noted that, although fathering practices are not static or transhistorical, the Filipino transnational fathers in her study made far fewer adjustments to suit the needs of their children than Filipino mothers in similar situations. In fact, Filipino fathers tended to perform a 'heightened version of conventional fathering', conforming to norms of breadwinning and male authoritarianism (Parreñas 2008). As Dreby (2006) observes in her research among Mexicans in

New Jersey, the different experiences of mothers and fathers stem from gender ideologies that sacralise mothers but sustain fathers' roles as breadwinners and financial providers. However, social position is an important angle to consider for, as Silvey (2006) observes, religion and class introduce important angles to ideals about proper mothering practices.

In response to the greater expectations placed on mothers during the time of separation, some mothers engage in 'intensive mothering' from afar (Parreñas 2005; see also Hays 1996), attempting to follow normative gender roles regarding motherhood through sending money and gifts and regularly telephoning their children, practices that also have been called 'transnational motherhood' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Nonetheless, these efforts are seldom sufficient. Children miss their mothers and reproach them more than they do their fathers for having left them (Asis 2002; Dreby 2010; Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Consequently, mothers often express feelings of hopelessness, distress and guilt about 'abandoning' their children (Asis 2002; Bernhard *et al.* 2005; Horton 2009; Parreñas 2005), even if their migration was prompted by a sense of obligation to provide their children with education, food, clothing and a lifestyle they could not otherwise have afforded. A Salvadoran woman in the US related to Horton (2009) that she found her weekend phone conversations physically painful: where her son's infant body used to fit now hurt; his absence throbbed like a heart. Honduran women in Schmalzbauer's (2005) research described having children in the US as a means of partially filling the painful void that is created when a woman leaves her children in their home country. Yet, whereas a new child may help to ease a mother's pain, the presence of such children often spurs resentment among the children who stay behind. And so, emotional trauma can limit the strength and health of transnational connections between parents and children. Sometimes, as in the case of Latina migrant workers in Israel (Rajman *et al.* 2003), women make reference to the sacrifices they have made on behalf of their children not only to assuage their pain and diminish their fear and anxiety related to transnational motherhood, but also to avoid critical suggestions from back home that they have abandoned their children. Gamburd (2000) notes that long-term effects of mothers' migration on grown children do not support media claims that the children are neglected, even though the migration of mothers contributed to reductions in children's education and increased paternal alcohol consumption among the Sri Lankans in her study.

Fathers are less likely than mothers to live up to gender expectations, and abandonment is not uncommon (Landolt and Da 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004, Schmalzbauer 2005), although specific causes for it vary. Landolt and Da (2005) found that in most cases in which men stopped communicating with and sending remittances to their spouses and children, the cause was 'malfeasance and infidelity', not economic difficulties. To the contrary, Dreby (2006, 2010) found that, when men grew distant from their children, it was because they could not fulfil their role as provider. They often disengaged and then re-engaged over time. Whichever case holds true, men are less likely than women to be socially sanctioned when they lapse

in their responsibilities. For example, in her research in a transnational Cape Verdean community, Åkesson (2009) found that many people expected that fathers would forget their children after a while.

Yet, greater flexibility in social expectations does not mean that fathers are unaffected by the process of separation. Research on migrant women has tended to examine the social and personal costs of migration to a greater extent than has been the case with research on male migrants (Asis 2002), exploring the emotional consequences for mothers who live apart from their children (Dreby 2006). But, while the emotions of fathers are not commonly broached, we know that migrant fathers suffer too, and that they are often more self-destructive in their coping strategies than transnational mothers. In their review of the existing literature, Worby and Organista (2007) identify Mexican and Central American migrant men's inability to travel to visit their loved ones as a result of stiffer border policies as one factor behind problem drinking for these men. In addition, a majority of the Honduran transnational fathers that Schmalzbauer (2005) interviewed in Boston cited struggles with severe loneliness and depression, some admitting that abusing alcohol and 'finding women on the streets' were typical ways of dealing with distance from loved ones and the inability to live up to prescribed standards of masculinity. Transnational Honduran mothers, on the other hand, while also struggling with depression related to being away from their children, were more optimistic about their futures and the futures of their children.

For parents who migrate together or who are reunited in their host country, distance from children, coupled with the stress of migrant life, can intensify marital tension, and divorce is not uncommon. Dreby (2010) found that, in cases of divorce, transnational fathers were likely to use their change in status as an opportunity to strengthen their bonds with their children, whereas mothers were more likely to respond by temporarily distancing themselves. Despite this significant gender shift, Dreby found that other gender norms persisted throughout and following the process of divorce. Men were still the most stressed about their role as economic provider, while women bore the brunt of resentment from their children. Ultimately, gender expectations restricted any radical reconfiguration of transnational family relations.

Gender also differentially impacts the experience of children who stay behind. Sometimes carers lose control of adolescent children, which has behavioural implications. Parreñas (2005) found that migrant mothers put much more responsibility on their female children than on their boys, commonly entrusting them with remittances and household finances. Similarly, girls are more likely than boys to be held responsible for young siblings and household chores after their mothers leave (Parreñas 2001, 2005). Girls who stay also seem to be more affected than boys when they are left in the care of others (Menjívar and Abrego 2009; Moran-Taylor 2008). Accordingly, when girls are not watched carefully, they may become involved in relationships that can lead to early and single motherhood (Grimes 1998). Moran-Taylor (2008) similarly found that, in the Oriente region of Guatemala, the daughters of migrant parents tend to be pulled towards promiscuity. Still, boys are

not wholly unaffected by a migrant parent's absence and the substitute care arrangements. Gang or other deviant criminal activity, for example, has been noted among unsupervised transnational youth, especially in Mexico and Central America (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación 2004; Smith 2006). However, data that relate gang activity to transnational family formation should not lead us to blame migration (and migrants) for a host of social ills, disregarding the structural conditions that give rise to those problems and to migration in the first place (Gamburd 2000).

The intersection of gender norms and family separation may lead to the creation of new family forms and to different arrangements within existing families. An examination of transnational families through a gender lens sheds light on the very definition and composition of these families—who belongs, when and why—and on the meanings that these relations take when parenting is carried out from a distance. Whereas many individuals maintain connections over time and distance, the way and intensity with which relationships are maintained are inconsistent (Smith *et al.* 2004) and typically fraught with pain and heartbreak (e.g. Menjivar and Abrego 2009; Schmalzbauer 2004, 2008). Yet, the emotional implications of living in a transnational family remain under-researched, and thus in large part absent from the transnational literature (Ryan 2011).

Care Arrangements

Given gender ideologies that place mothers at the centre of reproductive care work, care arrangements for children left behind by migration tend to be focused on women. Mothers are traditionally in charge of the 'ritualized practices of everyday life' (Falicov 2007: 159), such as personal hygiene, food preferences and bedtime rituals, which provide the basis for the development of intimate emotional ties. Thus, typically, when mothers are absent, grandmothers, aunts, older sisters or other female kin step in to take charge of the practices of everyday life for the children who are left behind.

Although children (and adults) identify mothers as their primary care-givers (Asis 2006), most consider their fathers' care-giving roles as peripheral. This is the case even when fathers are present and mothers are absent (Parreñas 2005). Therefore, when fathers migrate to work abroad, children feel the emotional displacement, but care-giving activities are not altered. However, when mothers migrate, care arrangements are markedly reorganised (Asis 2006; Parreñas 2005). When fathers migrate, the mothers who stay usually assume the role of fathers and mothers. Yet, when mothers migrate, the fathers step aside and other female relatives step in to fill in child-rearing duties (Parreñas 2005). In some cases, the children who have been cared for by 'other mothers' may come to consider these women as their 'real' mothers and even forget who their own biological mothers are (Menjivar 2000; Schmalzbauer 2004).

Distinctions in migration patterns and care structures independent of migration are important to note when examining migration-induced care arrangements, as there is no uniform pattern of care that exists or works for all migrants. For instance, Faulstich Orellana *et al.* (2001) note that, although Central American, Mexican and Yemeni migrant families migrate in stages, there were almost no cases of children left behind among Yemeni migrants, but many among the other groups. In the case of West African migrants, among whom polygamy is common, multiple care arrangements can be found that reflect this practice (Whitehouse 2009). For Nepali migrants in Japan, the migration of both parents is a new phenomenon, and thus new patterns of care are emerging (Yamanaka 2005). Similarly, Moran-Taylor (2008) notes that, in Guatemala, shared child-caring responsibilities in cases of international migration north are also becoming more commonplace. The *encargados*—that is, the guardians left in charge of the children—are acknowledged formally by Guatemalan government institutions as the carers of the children concerned; however, they do not necessarily gain in social status. In the Caribbean there is a long history of migration, and therefore intricate and wide-ranging networks have developed to allow migrant mothers to leave children with family, friends and neighbours (Thomas-Hope 2002). In addition, in the Caribbean case, those in charge of children left behind seem to enjoy a measure of social status (Moran-Taylor 2008).

Challenges arising from migration-based family separation, such as the development of family tensions if and when reunification ultimately occurs (Adams 2000; Menjívar 2006) and disruptions to parent–child bonds (Smith *et al.* 2004) occur among migrants with new traditions of leaving children behind, as well as among groups with long histories of this practice, particularly when it is the mother who migrates (Adams 2000). As Heymann (2006) notes on the basis of her research on families in five continents, even in contexts with strong traditions of collective care, extended care networks do not always work smoothly, because they do not remain immune to the broader effects of economic globalisation. Indeed, economic crises may affect the functioning of transnational kin networks, limiting their ability to facilitate migration and migrant incorporation into the host society (Menjívar 2000). This, in turn, can impact the well-being of those who stay behind. It is not uncommon during times of economic uncertainty for children to move within their kin networks from household to household. Recession or other crises in destination countries can, by way of unemployment, deportations and voluntary return, completely disrupt family care-giving strategies which depend on remittances.

Sometimes travelling back and forth provides a way of obtaining care for children (Aranda 2003; Levitt 2001). Caribbean migrants have a long history of sending children ‘home’ to be raised by relatives, for disciplinary purposes or to remove them from negative cultural contexts in the US and Europe (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Levitt 2001). Among Mexicans in New York, Smith (2006) found it common for grandmothers to return to Mexico for long periods of time with their Mexican-American grandchildren. This allowed Mexican migrant parents in the US to save on childcare expenses while giving their children an immersion in Mexican culture.

Whitehouse (2009) learned that, in the Republic of the Congo, migrants from Mali gain or maintain status when they send their children home to be raised by family or kin, as this is seen as a way of preserving cultural identity. Therefore, Malian families with the resources to do so typically choose to have their children raised back home by relatives until they reach adulthood. In contrast, Moran-Taylor (2008) found that Guatemalan migrants to the US only send their children 'home' in rare cases. Migrant parents in her sample said that the economic and educational opportunities available in the US outweighed any negative cultural influences and thus they preferred keeping their children with them. Similarly, in her research among Guatemalan parents, Menjívar (2002) observed that parents struggle with the decision to send their children 'home' and only consider doing so when they perceive that the children are befriending the wrong youngsters and might get into trouble with the law. Class and migration status probably also influence this practice, as poverty and undocumented status may eliminate the option altogether for certain individuals (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Schmalzbauer 2004). Situations of violence and civil unrest, compounded with economic crises, may also limit parents' options for sending their children home to be cared for.

Social relations between the migrant parents and the carers of the children back home have been found to be important for the well-being of the children. Sometimes these relations are strained when migrant parents reduce or stop remitting (see Moran-Taylor 2008) or when carers are suspected of not looking after the children properly and spending remittances on other projects. These social relations are critical for analysis not only of care itself, but also of how social relations develop and are maintained across geographical distances and across time (Ryan 2011). Indeed, drawing from his research in Mali and the Republic of the Congo, Whitehouse (2009) argues that care-giving itself is instrumental in the maintenance of transnational ties.

As care arrangements typically fall on women—both on the migrant mothers who continue to feel responsible for their children's care from a distance and on the women who actually do the care-giving—there are important gender angles to consider. For instance, when there are reports that children are not being cared for, are not treated well or are inadequately supervised (Crawford-Brown and Rattray 2002), migrant mothers suffer (Menjívar 2000) and feel guilty about having 'abandoned' their children (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Children, for their part, resent their absent mothers more than their absent fathers when they are not cared for properly, remittances are misused or they do not receive the gifts they expect from their migrating parents (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). And, although feelings of abandonment can be directed to the fathers as well (Pribilsky 2004; 2007), children reproach mothers more, because it is mothers who, in their eyes, should be in charge of their care (Menjívar and Abrego 2009).

Legislation

The effect of immigration laws on transnational parenthood is sometimes mentioned but rarely examined in depth. However, at a general level, there have been important

discussions about the effect of immigration laws on the rights and activities of migrants. Some scholars working on European cases in the 1980s and early 1990s (Jacobson 1996; Soysal 1994) argued that a reconfiguration of citizenship was taking place under the growing influence of international human rights regimes: rights that formerly belonged only to nationals were being extended to immigrants. However, some researchers have noted that national immigration law regimes in recent years have become more rather than less restrictive towards immigrants' rights (Bosniak 2000). Accordingly, scholars working on contemporary US cases (Abrego 2008; Massey *et al.* 2002; Menjivar 2000, 2006; Rodriguez and Hagan 2004), and on recent European ones (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; van Walsum 2006) have highlighted the importance that national immigration laws, in contrast to supranational laws, have for the activities of migrants, specifically on their mobility and efforts for family reunification. An important point to note here is that immigration regimes that affect the transnational lives of individuals do not remain static or frozen at certain points in time. And, as van Walsum (2006) notes, immigration law is not monolithic; rather, it is fragmented and fraught with contradictions. Thus, when immigration law becomes more restrictive, as has happened at various points in history in different contexts, it shapes in multiple and significant ways the lives of individuals who move across borders. Attending to legal regimes in analyses of transnational migration brings into sharp focus the significantly narrow choices migrant parents have and the immobility, rather than mobility, that increasingly characterises their experiences.

Recent studies of transnational migration that have taken legislation into account have noted that the separation of parents and children and the very formation of transnational families owe a great deal to the immigration policies of the receiving countries. Immigration policies in major receiving countries have had the consequence of keeping migrant families separated for longer and more uncertain periods of time, as they have made family reunification more difficult and back-and-forth travel more dangerous than ever before (Calavita 2005; Falicov 2007; Menjivar 2006). Often, a lack of proper documentation or full legal status is a key factor for migrants in decisions on whether to bring their children with them or to leave them behind, as immigration policies sometimes make it impossible for parents to do the former (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; van Walsum 2006). Furthermore, children living with undocumented parents may be deprived of access to a range of social services, including education and health care (Bernhard *et al.* 2005). Examined from this angle, families do not become transnational or multi-local simply because they decide that this is an optimal arrangement, though in some cases this may be the case. Often, immigration policies in the receiving (but also emigration policies in the sending) countries, together with extrapersonal factors such as economic dislocation in the countries of origin and destination, contribute significantly to shaping these family formations (Bernhard *et al.* 2005; Menjivar 2006). Thus, Filipina domestic workers in France (Fresnoza-Flot 2009), Central Americans in the US (Menjivar 2006), Nepali migrants in Japan (Yamanaka 2005), Ecuadorian and Ukrainian women in Spain (Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue), and Latina women in Israel (Raijman *et al.* 2003)

often separate from their children either because they have no visa and are undocumented migrants or because it is practically impossible to bring their children to live with them through family reunification policies (see also van Walsum 2006).

Initially, separations between parents and children are meant to be temporary, but they become long-term and indefinite because, in efforts to decrease or stop further immigration, immigrant-receiving countries have implemented more-restrictive immigration policies. The parents sometimes migrate with temporary visa authorisations but, when these expire, the migrants become irregular/undocumented. At other times, parents migrate without authorisation and join the ranks of the irregular/undocumented. Some parents are able to regularise their legal status, but the avenues for so doing have become fewer and narrower, and thus these migrant parents spend a longer time with an irregular status or in legal uncertainty. Thus, sometimes the migrant parents are able to send for their children left behind, but often family members remain separated for extended periods, even decades, as in the case of Central Americans in the US (Menjívar 2006). Meanwhile, families at both ends are reorganised and redefined, children grow up and mature, and the lives of the migrating parent(s) are transformed by a new environment, new relations, and different outlooks on parenthood and life. In addition, the longer the parents remain unable to reunite with their children, the higher the likelihood that family members will grow apart. A consequence of long-term separation is the formation of new families, with combinations of step-parents and step-siblings who barely resemble the families whom other family members imagine (Bernhard *et al.* 2005; Menjívar 2006).

During these largely unwanted, unplanned, long-term and indefinite separations, the migrant parents, as well as the children left behind, can develop a somewhat idealised notion of the united family, constructing family solidarity based on memories and images of a time when parents and children were together (and supposedly happier). The indefinite and uncertain separations can be a source of frustration for the children, because they are unsure whether the parent actually cannot return (or send for them) or whether they do not want to do so (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Long periods of separation can also have detrimental effects on the intimacy of mother–child relations (Fresnoza-Flot 2009). Consequently, during uncertain separations without face-to-face contact and visits, the children can feel abandoned and reproach the parents, and those left in charge of caring for the children can grow tired and terminate the caring arrangements. In efforts to attenuate the negative consequences of indefinite separations, the parents, particularly mothers, sometimes resort to increasing their monetary remittances and gifts sent. In a comparative study of undocumented and documented Filipina mothers in France, Fresnoza-Flot (2009) noted that undocumented mothers resorted to monetary gifts mostly because they were no longer familiar with their children's tastes and thus could not send gifts that the children would like. Thus, an irregular migration status, increasingly common among different migrant groups around the world, restricts the range of parenting options available to individuals who parent at a distance.

Class

Transnational families are commonly characterised by structural inequalities in power (Dreby 2006; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Within transnational families, geographic distance between members can create or compound inequalities in access to resources, mobility and decision-making (Parreñas 2005). Yet, transnational family configurations are not static: migration can shift the intersection of inequalities within households. Whereas family members pre-migration typically share the same class location, class divisions may emerge during the migration process, most notably between migrant parents and the children they leave behind (Schmalzbauer 2008).

The pre-migration class position of families shapes the migration experience. Whereas poor parents may choose migration and consequent separation from their children as a survival and mobility strategy (Schmalzbauer 2004), class-privileged families are more likely to choose to transnationalise for professional or lifestyle reasons (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Class position thus determines in large part whether or not parents can achieve well-being while keeping their families geographically intact. When separation occurs, parents' stocks of human and social capital influence their ability to reunite with their children (Landolt and Da 2005). Although class plays a major role in determining the ease with which one can maintain transnational ties, the class hierarchy of migrants has been overlooked in most of the transnational literature. Indeed, it is much easier to maintain ties and facilitate reunification on one's own terms when one has access to resources and legal protection (Menjívar 2006). When we bring class to the forefront of transnational family studies, we see how poverty and marginalisation very much limit transnational mobility.

In her study of Indian migrant mothers who went to the US to work as nurses, George (2005) found that, although the process sometimes took years, these women were able to reunite with their children. On the other hand, scholars who have studied poor migrants from the global South conclude that family separation is often indefinite (Menjívar 2006; Schmalzbauer 2004). In her research on Central American migrants in the US, Menjívar (2006) found that indefinite separation of parents and children is common when migrant parents are undocumented or when they live in a state of 'liminal legality', such as having an increasingly common temporary legal status. Both are markers of the poor. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) notes the irony of undocumented Central American and Mexican female migrants to the US who, lacking the resources to care for their own children, must work caring for the children of wealthy North Americans. In most cases, these *domésticas* do not know when or if they will be able to see their children again. Parreñas (2001) learned that even poor Filipinas with visas were restricted by the cost of travel from visiting their children.

Class position also influences transnational communication between family members (Sassen 2008), and thus the possibility for parents and children to stay connected. Parreñas (2005) found that middle-class Filipina migrants maintained close contact and intimacy with their children. Filipina domestic workers, on the

other hand, were much more constrained in their ability to communicate with their children. Mahler (1995, 1998) similarly documented the constraints on communication due to limited economic resources amongst Salvadoran migrants in the US. Simply accessing a phone and the space to have a private conversation was a challenge. And, even though Internet technology has transformed transnational communication, the many who are computer illiterate and/or lack access to this technology are excluded from engaging in e-mail communication with their loved ones abroad (Schmalzbauer 2004, 2008).

Economic remittances are critical to the well-being of non-migrating family members (Levitt 2001; Menjivar 2000) and are often at the centre of socio-economic mobility strategies (Olwig 2007). Poor migrants with low earning capacity are restricted in terms of the amounts they can remit and the frequency with which they can do so. Still, research shows that even poor migrants typically manage to protect surplus earnings to send 'home' to their children (Garza and Lowell 2002), even if this means skimping on meals, living in crowded conditions and restricting leisure (Abrego 2008; Schmalzbauer 2008). When poor men can no longer remit, they may break off ties with their family because they can no longer fulfil their provider role (Dreby 2010).

Whereas remittances support social and economic mobility, they also have spurred a class divide between those who receive them and those who do not (Levitt 2001). In his research with Mexican transnational migrants, Smith (2006) contrasts the *remittance bourgeoisie*, who live comfortably and gain status because of their access to dollars, with the *transnational underclass*, the very poor who have no access to dollars. Increasingly, scholars are noting a similar class divide within families (Schmalzbauer 2008), spawned by unequal access to resources and compounded by consumer culture and transnational imaginations (Carling 2008a; Silvey 2006).

Class divisions between migrating parents and the children they leave behind are intensified by *social remittances* (see Levitt 2001)—the ideas, images and messages that flow between migrants' home and host societies. In his research with Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands, Carling (2008a) found that distance between migrants and non-migrants created gaps in information: even migrants who remained in close contact with non-migrating family members had limited information about their lives. That *per capita* purchasing power is much greater in the Netherlands than in Cape Verde increased non-migrants' expectations for remittances—expectations not always met. Åkesson (2009) learned that, when Cape Verdean migrants start new families abroad, they remit less money, subsequently reducing levels of inequality between children who do and do not receive remittances.

Misunderstandings coupled with resource inequality can raise tensions within transnational families. Schmalzbauer (2008) found that Honduran children who have one or both parents working in the US have little knowledge of their parents' lives. Most assume their parents are doing well, whereas in reality their parents are struggling. Although poor before their parents' migration, the majority of children in Schmalzbauer's sample identified as middle class; this played out in terms of their

consumption practices and life expectations. Yet, their class mobility is tenuous, dependent on them staying in Honduras and continuing to receive remittances from their parents, many of whom are undocumented and poor. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) found similar trends among Haitian youth. Those who received remittances from one or both parents on a regular basis were optimistic about their life chances and assumed they would experience class mobility upon finishing high school. Most were surprised and disheartened when they finished school, were unable to find jobs and found their dreams out of reach.

Gender intersects with class to shape the experiences of transnational parents and children left behind. In Indonesia, Silvey (2006) noted the clash between gender expectations and class necessity. Whereas the hegemonic gender narrative in Indonesia celebrates a mother's place within her family, and specifically with her children, the government facilitates the out-migration of poor women to the Middle East as a national development strategy. The women Silvey interviewed cited the class mobility of their children as central to their decision to migrate. They affirmed that it was better to be away and give their children what they needed materially, even if this meant breaking gender norms, than to be together in dire economic circumstances. Similarly, Landolt and Da (2005) found that, in El Salvador, non-migrating residents associated the migration-induced separation of mothers from their children with a breakdown in family values. For their part, however, migrating mothers cited their dedication to their children and families as their primary motivation, a finding that Abrego's (2008) work echoes.

Communication

Transnational parenting depends fundamentally on long-distance communication. The literature on migrant transnationalism more generally has shown how migrants strive to be socially and emotionally present while physically absent. Achieving such virtual presence can be particularly important and challenging in parent-child relationships.

Communication in transnational family relationships serves two overlapping purposes. The first is to exchange information, in a broad sense, and by extension to engage emotionally with each other. Parents enquire about their children's schoolwork and well-being, provide advice, reprimand or comfort, and give instructions to foster carers (Alicea 1997; Asis *et al.* 2004). In these and other ways, communication is a vehicle for parents' involvement in their children's everyday lives.

The second, overlapping, purpose of communication is to confirm the relationship itself. Others have described how family relationships are actively re-created through 'kinwork' (di Leonardo 1992) or 'relativising' (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). More-distant kin relationships require active maintenance simply in order to avoid losing their social meaning. Transnational parent-child relationships, by contrast, may need continuous confirmation because of their importance to the identity and selfhood of

both parents and children. The frequency and regularity of communication are important regardless of the specific information that is exchanged, and can change over time. Indeed, communication may ebb and flow depending on the emotional and/or material status of parents and children.

The nature of communication between migrant parents and their children is intimately linked with communication technologies. Until the 1990s, migrants in many parts of the world relied on letters as the principal form of communication. Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat (2007: 21–22) provides a remarkably illustrative account of the letters her father sent from the USA to his children in Haiti in the 1970s:

Every other month, my father would mail a halfpage, three-paragraph missive addressed to my uncle. Scribbled in his minuscule scrawl [. . .] my father's letters were composed in stilted French, with the first paragraph offering news of his and my mother's health, the second detailing how to spend the money they had wired for food, lodging, and school expenses for [my brother] and myself, the third section concluding abruptly after reassuring us that we'd be hearing from him again before long.

Danticat describes the ceremonial reading of the letters by her uncle, and the sense of intimacy she found in examining the tilts and slants of her father's writing. The letter itself thus represented what Baldassar (2008) describes as *co-presence by proxy*. Like the photographs described by Fedyuk (this issue), handwritten letters are physical objects that provide a form of connection very different to the time-limited shared experience of a phone call. Danticat's account of her father's correspondence also points to the painful pragmatism of parenting from a distance: 'The dispassionate letters were his way of avoiding a minefield, one he could have set off from a distance without being able to comfort the victims' (2007: 23).

Phone lines spread rapidly in many developing countries in the 1970s and 1980s and gave more migrant parents the opportunity to hear their children's voices. The cost of international phone calls was astronomical, however; spending a day's salary on a hurried phone call seemed paradoxical when that salary was the motivation for separation in the first place. The price of international phone calls started falling significantly in the mid-1990s, which made the telephone a much more affordable means of communication for many migrant families (Vertovec 2004). For instance, the price of a call from Germany to Turkey fell by almost three-quarters in the two years before the turn of the century (TeleGeography Research 2001).

Despite the increased access and decreased cost of communication, fundamental asymmetries between migrants and non-migrants often remain (Carling 2008a; Mahler 2001; Pribilsky 2004). It is typically the migrants who have the financial and technological means to *initiate* communication. This structural constraint is reinforced by the inherently asymmetrical relationship between parents and children. The reciprocal aspects of parent–child relationships may therefore be curtailed by migration.

The affective care that is typically ascribed to mothers seems to be particularly hard to sustain from afar. However, Pribilsky (2004) and Parreñas (2005) both show how the respectful distance maintained towards an authoritarian father can become aggravated through transnational communication. One of Parreñas' informants in the Philippines describes the awkward brevity of phone calls with her migrant father: 'He'll just ask me how I am doing. I say OK. Then that's it' (2005: 75).

In developing countries, families of migrants are typically at the forefront of adopting new communication technology. Not only do they have particular communication needs, but they are also more likely than non-migrant families to be able to afford the costs. A 2003 survey in the Philippines found that both landlines and mobile phones were much more common in migrant than in non-migrant households (Asis 2006). The greatest difference, however, was in children's mobile-phone ownership: more than a third of migrants' children had a mobile phone of their own, compared to just over one in ten among children without migrant parents.

The proliferation of mobile phones has changed transnational communication between parents and children in several ways. First, for the many migrant mothers who are live-in domestic workers, having a mobile phone of their own dramatically expands communication possibilities. Second, text messaging and 'flashing' provide low-cost or even free communication that can also be initiated by migrants' children and other family members in low-income countries of origin. The Internet is also having a profound impact, although access remains limited in developing countries. A number of studies have addressed the role of the Internet in political transnationalism, but research on how family relationships develop in cyberspace is still limited. The most ambitious attempt at overcoming distance through technology is probably the teleconference services offered to migrant families: in studios in selected cities in the USA and Latin America, divided families can get together with high-quality image and sound connection and celebrate birthdays or holidays 'together'. Yet, these opportunities are often bounded by class on either or both sides of the border.

Moralities

Since the 1990s, anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists have increasingly used the concept of 'moralities' to describe context-specific, morality-laden social norms for behaviour (Howell 1997a; Lee and Smith 2004; Redclift 2005).¹ Issues relating to moral judgement and practical behaviour abound in the literature on transnational parenthood; we find the notion of moralities to be a useful tool in analysing these aspects of parenting from afar.

Transnational parenthood can be located within three sets of moralities, concerning transnationalism, conjugal relations and parenthood, respectively. Carling (2008a) has suggested that the experiences of leaving and being left underpin moralities of transnationalism. These endow migrants and non-migrants in general

with different moral entitlements and obligations. In short, migrants, by virtue of being migrants, are often obliged to give, while their non-migrant counterparts are entitled to receive (see also Gowricharn 2004). This active/passive moral asymmetry is significant for understanding the broader pressures on migrant parents and their relationships with other adults in the community of origin.

The second set of moralities concerns conjugal relations. Much of the literature on transnational parenthood describes situations in which one parent is abroad while the other remains at home with the children. Parenting from afar thus becomes intertwined with the transnational conjugal relationship in a project of transnational co-parenting. Conjugal separation in itself is often imbued with strict moral norms, depending on the cultural context and on which of the parents has migrated. In many cases, women left behind by migrant husbands are under close moral surveillance by in-laws, other relatives and even friends (Menjívar 2011). Ethnographic work in migrant communities in Mexico and Ecuador has found that only if the couple has children is it socially acceptable for the woman left behind to head her own household (Hirsch 2003; Pribilsky 2004).

Finally, parenting itself is connected with morality-laden norms for behaviour. People in different parts of the world have strong—and contrasting—views on how children should be brought up (DeLoache and Gottlieb 2000). A key issue for migrant parents is the trade-off between providing material well-being for children by means of migration, on the one hand, and providing emotional and physical care of the kind that necessitates proximity, on the other. Such choices about parenting are often subject to moral evaluation by one's surroundings (Dreby 2010; Gamburd 2000).

The moralities of transnationalism, conjugal relationships and parenting intersect in the arrangements transnational families make to provide care for those who are left behind. Migrants who 'outsource' their care obligations provide compensation in the form of remittances, but these transfers of money are enmeshed with trafficking in symbols of care, belonging and kinship (Leinaweaver 2010).

Age of Children

Children left behind do not constitute a homogenous, static group, and therefore they do not experience separation from their parents uniformly. During the migrant parents' absence, children's lives change rapidly as they go through different developmental stages. Their psychological development and exposure to different experiences in their social environments at different points in time inform the relationships they maintain with their absent parents, and also the bonds they develop with their carers. And the age at which children are separated from their migrant parents influences the connections they are able to develop, maintain and negotiate across borders (Artico 2003). Although these questions are not often directly researched in the context of transnational migration, we can glean the effects of children's age at separation in the existing literature (see Ramirez *et al.* 2007).

For instance, just as age at migration impacts on migrant children's adaptation and incorporation in the receiving context (Carling 2008b; Rumbaut 2006), age at separation from the parents shapes the relationships children and parents maintain while separated, as well as the bonds they form when they are together again (Artico 2003; Dreby 2010). Some parents leave behind very small children, sometimes babies or toddlers. In these cases, the children depend on adults for developing or maintaining regular communication with the absent parents, for the exchange of photographs, for updates on the children's growth and progress, or for information about illnesses or other circumstances in the children's lives that their parents should know about. When parents are absent for prolonged and uncertain periods of time, sometimes decades, often these children have no real memories of the parents, except for the reconstructed stories and photos that other adults share with them (Schmalzbauer 2004). This can limit the maintenance of parent-child relations and weaken communication between parents and children over time. As years pass, transnational bonds may fade and kin may replace biological parents in the hearts and minds of children.

Migrant parents also leave children who are older, sometimes adolescents; in these cases, other dynamics ensue. These children often have a keen sense of the separation, which can sometimes be traumatic, and have memories of a time when they lived with their parent(s). This serves as a backdrop within which they fashion an ideal future for themselves (Parreñas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2008). These children often have access to direct communication with their parents, express their views and opinions, desire emotional connections and support that the younger children do not demand, evaluate their care arrangements *vis-à-vis* an image they maintain about their parents' care, and sometimes so acutely experience the separation that they even initiate their own migration to reunite with their migrant parents. This has been the case with Central American children who migrate alone to the US seeking to reunite with their parents, often their mothers (Menjívar 2006). Thus, the children left behind of different ages and developmental stages establish different forms of what Baldassar *et al.* (2007) term 'staying in touch', develop varied relations of care and attachment, communicate differently, and demand different levels of emotional support and intimacy from their absent parents.

Changes experienced by children as they go through different developmental stages can pose challenges for the migrant parents. Sometimes parents find it difficult to get a sense of how time elapses during their absence, and imagine their children left behind as still small and dependent. Gaps between the parents' images of their children and the children's actual age, level of maturity and development can lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of the parents (Parreñas 2001). Even though such differences in expectations and experiences by gender and age occur in families in general (Thorne 1992), these challenges can be felt more acutely across distance when daily interaction is not possible.

Methodological Challenges

The study of transnational parenting and children left behind presents unique methodological challenges. Existing research is dominated by in-depth case studies in which researchers have built trust over time through extended interaction with a limited number of informants. For many researchers, their own experiences of parenthood, migration and/or entanglement in transnational families have been important for creating mutually trustful relationships in the field (Baldassar *et al.* 2007; Dreby 2010; Ryan 2008).

Data collection for research on transnational parenthood and children left behind falls into four broad groups: (1) using migrant parents as informants; (2) using children as informants; (3) using young adults as informants, asking retrospective questions about their experiences as children; and (4) using significant ‘third persons’ as informants—for example, non-migrant parents or others who are providing care for children in their parents’ absence.

Many of the articles included in this special issue have relied on two or more of these strategies through multi-sited fieldwork. This reflects Levitt and Glick Schiller’s (2004: 1012) call for a transnational methodological framework that is attuned to the ‘intersection of those who have migrated and those who have stayed in place’. Because transnational families are sites of conflict and solidarity, gathering family perspectives that cut across gender and generation, as well as geographic location, can inform scholarly understandings of how power operates within families (see Carling 2008a). One-sided accounts will provide limited understandings of interpersonal *processes*, but may nevertheless yield valuable information about *experiences* at particular locations in transnational family networks.

Multi-sited research on transnational families can be conceived of as ‘following the people’, many of whom move across borders, and all of whom, whether they move or not, are connected to multiple actors in multiple locations (Dreby 2010). Transnational family configurations are dynamic, and scholars may therefore have to be responsive to family movement and change over time. The complexity of movement and change within transnational families is matched by the intricacy of care networks that are at the base of transnational family life. The fact that transnational families and care networks are not clearly delimited, either by geographical location or by straightforward biological kinship, makes them elusive objects of study. A few studies have followed transnational networks emerging from a single place of origin to multiple destinations (Hage 2005; Olwig 2007). Many others have focused on a single binary of origin and destination, including Boccagni (Ecuador–Italy), Fedyuk (Ukraine–Italy) and Pribilsky (Ecuador–USA) in this issue. The articles in this issue also include studies that focus on either end of the migration flow. Menjivar covers transnational families from several Central American countries converging on Phoenix, Arizona, based on fieldwork in that city. Åkesson *et al.* address commonalities in Cape Verdean transnational family networks that extend to multiple locations on both sides of the Atlantic. In both cases, however, the

analysis is informed by the authors' previous experiences from fieldwork at the other end of the migration flow.

Original studies of transnational family life have focused on transnational motherhood and mother–child bonds (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001). These in-depth explorations of mothering from a distance capture the emotional and moral challenges confronting those living in divided or reorganised families, calling for theorising these critical aspects of the migration experience. Wolf (2002: 258), for example, called for an exploration of transnationalism 'at the level of emotions, ideologies, and cultural codes'. Feelings of shame, guilt, longing and loneliness are common among mothers who are living apart from their children. These feelings are shaped in large part by the social construction of motherhood and gender expectations (Dreby 2006; Isaksen *et al.* 2008; Parreñas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2009). The very intimate spaces in which these emotions are experienced and shared demand research methods that can navigate complicated emotional territory. Capturing the emotional and moral part of the migration experience requires relationships of trust and solidarity between the researcher and participants, relationships that are best nurtured through qualitative methods (Ryan 2011).

Although transnational family scholarship began with a focus on motherhood, transnational fatherhood has more recently been highlighted as a critical part of the family puzzle and an essential component of complex gender analyses of transnational parenting (Dreby 2010; Parreñas 2008; Pribilsky 2007). Cultural constructions of masculinity that silence expressions of emotion and vulnerability (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 2000; Kimmel 2006) may make it difficult to access the experiences of transnational fathers. Thus, transnational fatherhood research similarly calls for methods that are rooted in an atmosphere of trust and openness.

Studies of transnational families that rely on children as informants face particular ethical and methodological concerns. General challenges of research with children have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Farrell 2005; Greig *et al.* 2007; Levey 2009; Moncrieffe 2009). A particular issue with children left behind by migrant parents, however, is that the absence of a parent may add to the child's vulnerability and/or complicate the question of parental consent. Furthermore, relations with migrant parents can be a difficult and sensitive interview topic. Children may, for instance, feel torn between the rational justification of a parent's departure and a suppressed feeling of abandonment. Parents' anxieties about being judged for their choices can take more complex forms in their children.

The growing literature on transnational families remains overwhelmingly dominated by qualitative research, much of it conducted by anthropologists and sociologists. Mazzucato and Schans (2008: 5) see it as a gap in transnational family studies that 'they are small-scale and do not collect data systematically on the topic'. Therefore, they say, it is difficult to 'assess and verify the information found in these studies'. This criticism partly fails to recognise the nature of qualitative research. First, many of the influential studies in the field are far from small-scale: in-depth

interviews with 100 informants or more, contextualised by participant observation and follow-up over several years (and destinations), yields enormous empirical material (see, for example, Dreby 2010; Parreñas 2005). In other studies, the relatively small number of informants, and the absence of random selection, compared to what would be required in a quantitative survey, enable researchers to observe individuals in their quotidian lives and in their ‘natural environments’, and to build relationships of trust and thereby acquire insight that would otherwise remain out of reach. Second, as evidenced by these and other studies, qualitative approaches can be highly systematic, meticulously comparing and contrasting information from interviews, ethnographic fieldwork and an array of complementary sources. An absence of measurement and quantification does not mean that there is no methodological rigour in a study. Third, we are sceptical of the criticism that it is particularly difficult to ‘assess and verify’ the information emanating from these studies. While it is true that qualitative or ethnographic research is not amenable to straightforward replication, the long-term commitment and personal investment of researchers is precisely what makes the leading studies of transnational families trustworthy.

As in all social science research, different methodological approaches to the study of transnational families may complement each other in fruitful ways. We welcome new multi-method research in the field, such as the project ‘Child Health and Migrant Parents in South-East Asia’, funded by the Wellcome Trust. What is important is to recognise the value and limitations of different methods, and to ensure a sound relationship between research questions and methods. The studies of transnational parenthood presented here primarily address themes that would have been ill-suited to quantitative approaches.

Seven Studies of Transnational Parenthood

The seven articles included in this special issue of *JEMS* explore transnational parenthood from different thematic and geographical angles. Figure 1 maps the migration flows under study. We follow parents from Central America, Ecuador, Cape Verde and Ukraine to destinations in the United States, Spain and Italy. The geographical overlaps and thematic parallels between the articles bring out similarities and differences, discussed below. In several of the cases presented here, parent–child separation occurs as part of a drawn-out settlement process in which parents—for practical, economic or legal reasons—migrate on their own but hope to send for their children at a later stage. In other cases, families lead transnational lives with irregular sequences of separation and co-residence. What is absent in these studies is tightly regulated contract-worker migration of the type that often underlies parent–child separation in Asia as well as among contracted (H2A) agricultural workers in the US. Furthermore, the studies do not address parent–child separation within areas of free movement, such as the European Union.

Focusing on the experiences of Ecuadorian and Ukrainian migrants in Spain, **Leifsen and Tymczuk** examine the constitution and maintenance of transnational

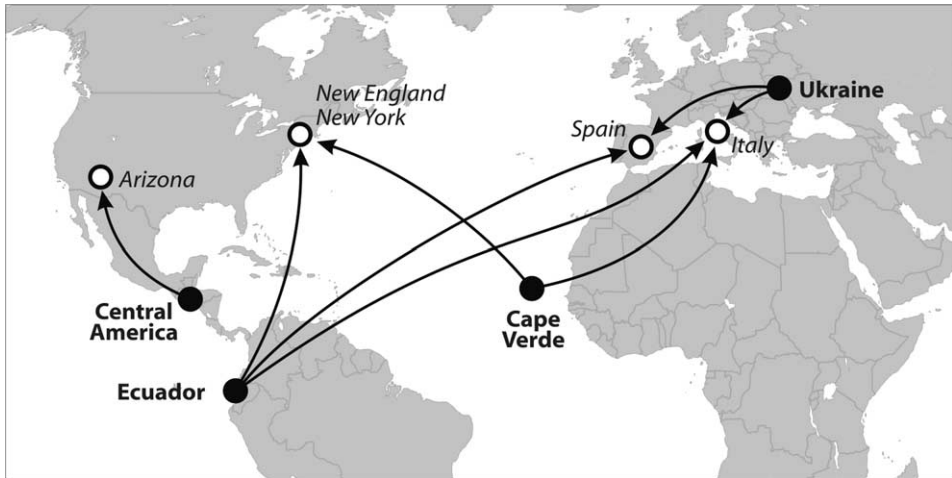


Figure 1. Migration flows discussed in this special issue of *JEMS*

ties between parents and children, and how relational closeness is created and re-created through virtual communication, as well as by the money, consumer goods and gifts remitted. They note that periodic and regular face-to-face encounters through repeated visits are essential for sustaining the material and social-emotional dimensions of care, and these in turn are shaped by geographical distance, transportation opportunities and expenses, as well as the relative ease of movement across national borders and checkpoints determined by the receiving country's immigration policies.

In their article on the migration of Cape Verdean mothers to Europe and North America, *Åkesson et al.* focus on the views of the biological mother who leaves children behind and of the foster mother who cares for the child during the other mother's absence. Deploying the concepts of 'transnational fostering triangle' and 'contingencies', the authors argue that, within existing conjugal relations and flexible arrangements in Cape Verdean households, lengthy separations between mothers and young children are seen as normal, even in the absence of migration. In this context, taking the pragmatic solution to migrate to address life's challenges does not position the women as deviant but as agile problem-solvers who look after the best interests of their children, and are thus good mothers.

Like *Åkesson et al.*, *Boccagni* focuses on the constructions of mothers who leave children behind. His analysis is based on the women's own views and the understandings others have of the women's migration. The migration of the Ecuadorian mothers to Italy that *Boccagni* studies is understood as self-sacrifice, as a matter of necessity. The mothers in turn emphasise concern for their children's well-being as their essential mission, and thus the children's significant material gains resulting from their mothers' migration serve to offset any perceived loss of affection or emotional involvement on the part of the mothers. And even though the migration of mothers is now widespread in Ecuador, it has not become any easier for

the women themselves, who struggle to balance their physical absence with the conviction that what they are doing will ultimately be the best for their children.

As Leifsen and Tymczuk observe, migrants keep in touch through advanced technology to uphold socio-emotional ties, and through money and consumer goods to sustain the material dimensions of care at a distance. But another important way of maintaining ties is through the photographs that circulate between migrants and their families back home, as **Fedyuk** observes in her study of Ukrainian migrants in Italy. However, in Fedyuk's examination, the photographs are not mere images or objects exchanged: they are infused with meaning in the context of exchanges and become part of the transnational relationships themselves. Though photographs sent from Italy to Ukraine are seldom displayed openly, those sent from Ukraine to Italy remind the migrants of their obligations and responsibilities, but also of an idealised family life that has been temporarily suspended by migration.

The key role of immigration policies and border controls is observed by many of the authors in the special issue. **Menjívar** specifically examines the effects of state policies in shaping practices of transnational parenthood among Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants in the United States. She argues that US immigration laws lead to the lengthy and indefinite separations that last years—and can even be semi-permanent—within which parenthood practices are enacted across borders. As Åkesson *et al.* also note, the increasingly stiffer immigration laws in the US often prevent family reunification or regular travel, leading to new ways of being a parent across borders. These laws also affect the lives of transnational parents and children in the US, curtailing (or facilitating) access to goods and services and paths for integration. The redefined and reorganised forms that parenthood at a distance takes are intimately linked to state practices that delimit human action.

Whereas motherhood at a distance has often been couched in moral narratives about good mothers who migrate for the sake of their children or bad mothers who abandon their offspring (see the papers by Åkesson *et al.* and by Boccagni in this issue), **Pribilsky** focuses on constructions of fatherhood at a distance. He examines the experiences of Ecuadorian men who migrate to New York and how they define themselves as men and modern, while at the same time negotiating between obligations to children and wives back home and their modern identities in the US. The consumption possibilities they encounter in New York, coupled with the demands of budgeting, saving and remitting as experienced from their position as undocumented workers living on the margins of US society, help to define their roles as husbands and fathers in the families they left in the Ecuadorian Andes.

Zentgraf and Chinchilla propose a framework for examining relations between parents and children separated by migration that takes into account family structures and care-giving traditions and reflects themes dealt with by other papers in this collection. Similarly, Åkesson *et al.* present the 'transnational fostering triangle' as a tool for understanding the relationships that develop in connection with the migration of mothers. Zentgraf and Chinchilla also include in their framework material remittances of money and gifts, along with different forms of contact—examined in

detail in the article by Leifsen and Tymczuk—as well as policies that shape transnational family separation and reunification, on which Menjívar also focuses.

Note

- [1] Precise usage of the word ‘moralities’ differs, and some authors might disagree with the definition proposed here. In the introduction to her edited volume on the ethnography of moralities, Howell (1997b) explicitly refrains from putting forward any general definition of the term.

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Care at a Distance: Ukrainian and Ecuadorian Transnational Parenthood from Spain

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Maintaining intimate relationships in transnational families depends on various care practices that involve the circulation of objects, values and persons. Comparing our observations among Ukrainian and Ecuadorian labour migrants in Madrid, we argue that such care practices are structured by geographical distance, and that the distinction between overseas and overland is significant. We claim that differences in distance produce diverse constraints, possibilities and preferences for migrants' practices of remitting, communicating, revisiting and reuniting with their children left behind. Care at a distance moves through formal and less-formal market channels—like international communication technologies, remittance enterprises and transport facilitators. From our material we are able to identify clear distinctions in how migrants of the two nationalities make use of these market channels to nourish their relationships with their children. We also argue that there is a correspondence between geographical and cultural distance (where language communion vs language rupture is crucial) on the one hand, and the preference of Ecuadorians for family reunification and of Ukrainians for revisits to children left behind, on the other.

Keywords: Transnational Parenthood; Care at a Distance; Labour Migration; Spain; Ecuador; Ukraine

Introduction

On the basis of the empirical realities described in this article, we use the concept 'care at a distance' to refer to a wide range of practices, among which is remitting

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value—the sending of money, consumer goods and other valuables between family members in countries of origin and those of destination. The concept also refers to the frequent and extensive contact established between members of the family through international communication technologies (ICTs). In addition, it refers to periodic direct contact between parents and the children they left behind, through parents' visits to their country of origin or through travel for shorter periods, that is, holiday trips by children to their parents' country of destination. Care at a distance constitutes practices that often last for longer periods, sometimes for years and even semi-permanently, and that tend to transform as a result of their protracted duration.

In this article, we compare practices of care at a distance among two migrant populations in Spain: Ukrainians and Ecuadorians. Our central concern is the constitution and maintenance of transnational social bonds (or relatedness) between parents and offspring; we discuss the conditions and consequences of long-distance separation, and how relational closeness is generated and regenerated through the virtual connectivity of ICT practices and the material connectivity of remittances. Our main argument is that relational closeness is also achievable in transnational, long-distance social interaction: virtual communication and the connections that money and other circulated valuables and consumer goods produce are 'real' enough. In both groups we observe that family concerns, emotional support and care are mediated through the market and by commodified exchanges. Migrants' remittance and sending practices clearly demonstrate the meaning of money and consumer goods as communicative devices expressing social bonds and belonging (McKay 2007), and these practices also demonstrate how the circulation of such objects fluctuates between the family and market contexts of valuation (Kopytoff 1986; Parry and Bloch 1989). Furthermore, the extensive use of ICTs indicates that 'virtual intimacies' (Wilding 2006) are generated through confluences of family concerns and commercialised transmittance possibilities. We also discuss how, in spite of these possibilities, these forms of communication and exchange delimit the possibilities and quality of relatedness, especially over time, as relational closeness tends to wither if care at a distance is not complemented with return visits and 'moments of physical co-presence' (Baldassar 2007; Urry 2003: 156).

Both Ukrainian and Ecuadorian migrants in Spain carry out transnational parenthood and constitute elements of transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Nonetheless, the ways in which these two migrant populations partake in caring activities directed at the children and other close family members whom they left behind are conditioned by distance, as Ukraine and Ecuador are countries at very different geographical distance—intra- vs intercontinental—from Spain. We therefore centre our comparison on the differences that geographical distance produces. This does not mean that we think geographical distance in itself is the conditioning factor; rather, we hold that geographical distance structures other aspects of migrating and caring. In this article we focus on aspects such as: (1) the control and regulation that immigration policies define and the immigration administration employs; (2) the transport technologies and markets that enable the circulation of

migrants; and (3) the international communication technologies and informal and formal remittance economies that migrants make use of in order to take part in the life of the family they left behind. In other words, we concentrate on the conditioning effects of transport, transference and communication dimensions of long-distance care and transnational family life. These include reasonable bus fares enabling relatively frequent revisits, informal arrangements for sending money and consumer goods, and the possibility of illegally crossing EU borders which all condition Ukrainians' care at a distance. Ecuadorians enter Europe and Spain by expensive air flights and through highly controlled passage points. Their mode of migration fixes them to a higher degree in the migration context, and implies that Ecuadorians, to a greater extent, engage in caring at a distance through means that are both virtual and formalised (by the market and national/international regulations).

On the basis of these observations we suggest that a focus on the 'doing' of transnational relatedness—that is, on the ways in which relations are created and recreated over distance and time for Ukrainians and Ecuadorians in Spain—might nuance the notion of 'social fields of transnational migration' (Basch *et al.* 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). We argue that the transnational social fields of Ukrainian migrants are different from those of Ecuadorians. This difference is difficult to grasp as long as the analytical focus is directed at the connections configuring border-crossing networks and hence enabling the flow of ideas, practices and resources. A focus on network configurations tends to concentrate on connections' structural resemblance, independent of the distance between the various nodes. The constitution of long-distance relations, however, implies very different types of activity and involvement when it comes to transportation, transference and communication. This change in focus brings distance as a conditioning dimension into the notion of social space: the relative distance between the different nodes or points in the network constituting a transnational field is of significance; we have to understand and take into account the characteristics of these relative distances if we are to describe more realistically the conditions enabling different migrant groups to 'care at a distance'. By shifting the focus from networks to relatedness, then, an ethnographic comparison becomes relevant and necessary.

The ethnographic comparison of Ukrainians' and Ecuadorians' practices of care at a distance is based on two separate periods of fieldwork among Ukrainians and Ecuadorians in Madrid. From September 2007 until October 2008, Tymczuk conducted multi-temporal fieldwork—amounting to a total of two months—among Ukrainian labour migrants in Madrid. The methodological approach was mainly participant observation and unstructured interviews with migrants living in both reunited (with spouse and/or children) and transnational households. Tymczuk also carried out eight semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian migrants, all of whom lived with their spouses in Madrid, but of whom four had children living with them and four had children living in Ukraine. In addition, a Ukrainian research assistant living in Madrid carried out eight structured interviews with four couples, of which

one couple had brought their daughter to Madrid and the other three had children living in Ukraine with their grandparents.¹ Contact with Ukrainian migrants in Madrid was achieved through various channels and by attending different places and events where Ukrainians tend to congregate, such as the Ukrainian Saturday school, the Spanish-Ukrainian Centre and the weekly mass of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Tymczuk also spent several Sundays observing the hundreds of Ukrainians congregating at Alluche Square to pick up or send packages to family members in Ukraine.²

Leifsen's ethnographic material was produced through several visits to Madrid in the period October 2006–April 2007, a total of five weeks of intensive fieldwork. Informal and formal interviews were carried out at a specific site—the sales office of an Ecuadorian firm, Artefacta—and within a network of Ecuadorians to whom he obtained access through a Colombian migrant. Twenty adults were interviewed in depth (several of them repeatedly), the majority of whom had experience of family separation or who had been reunited with children left behind with relatives in Ecuador. The fieldwork also consisted of visits by the researcher to migrants' homes and participation in leisure activities with migrant families. Substantial observation was carried out in the different public spaces in Madrid which Ecuadorians frequent—the Ecuadorian consulate and its immediate surrounding area, weekend gatherings at a sports field in a recreational area in Madrid called Lagos, and a range of *locutorios* or communication-centres-cum-restaurants run by Ecuadorians. An additional source of information providing substantial and crucial context data was obtained through contacts at and visits to EMIGRA, a centre for migration and childhood research at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Care at a Distance: A Process-Oriented Approach

In order to understand the workings of practices of care at a distance, and their capacity to shape and reshape close family ties, we find it useful to look at migration—in this case, to Spain—as a process divided into three stages: (1) the pre-migration period, including the first entry; (2) the period of irregular legal status; and (3) the period of regular legal status in Spain.³ It should be noted here that this is an ideal model of a much more complex reality, since migrants from Ukraine and Ecuador also enter Spain as legal labour migrants and as irregular or clandestine migrants, and not only in the way that we register as the general trend—as tourists. Furthermore, the situation for many migrants fluctuates between the irregular and the regular, although the general trend is that, over time, they go from irregular to regular legal status. What we hope to do with this model is to identify general tendencies that can help us to see how and under what circumstances geographical distance conditions the transnational circulation of persons, values and objects, as well as exchanges of communication. This approach also allows us to get a more general idea of how care at a distance over time contributes to strong or weak ties of relatedness.

The First Stage: The Pre-Migration Period and First Entry

The first stage concerns the period prior and leading up to the first entry into Spain, and involves the whole spectrum of economic, legal, bureaucratic and intra-familial preparations necessary for carrying out the journey. Entry to Spain is regulated by a constantly changing policy field in which laws and regulations are renovated and reformulated. Obviously, these changes are a result of shifting political regimes as well as increased pressure from the EU regarding the implementation of general principles and recommendations into national policies. Such changes are also a result of the recognition and implementation by Spanish authorities of basic human rights principles in social welfare policies and schemes. If we consider only the period from 1999 to 2007, the period that demarcates the 'new emigration' from Ecuador (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002) and the main thrust of the post-Soviet emigration from Ukraine (Karpachova 2003), Spanish immigration legislation has undergone considerable change (Arango and Jachimowicz 2005; Calavita 2007).

A majority of Ukrainians and Ecuadorians residing in Spain since the late 1990s came as tourists and were transformed into irregular immigrants and labourers as they stayed on. However, the pattern of their entry into Spain differs on two important points. First, there were no visa restrictions for Ecuadorians to Spain until 2003, whereas travel from Ukraine to Spain has been subjected to visa restrictions in both Soviet and post-Soviet times. In recent years, however, citizens of both countries have equally experienced a more-restrictive visa policy. Second, because of their country's geographical closeness to the borders of the Schengen Area,⁴ a large number of Ukrainians have been able to enter Spain clandestinely.

Migration Patterns from Ukraine to Spain

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the abandoning of the Soviet 'no exit' policy, Ukraine has experienced a massive wave of emigration to Europe, and especially to Southern Europe. Because of lax immigration policies in most of Mediterranean Europe, these countries saw a large influx of Ukrainian migrants from the end of the 1990s.⁵ Spain has thus been one of several possible destination countries for Ukrainian labour migrants. However, the migration pattern from Ukraine to Spain seems to have distinctive characteristics compared with patterns to other Southern European countries, mainly as a consequence of the high demand for labour in the Spanish construction industry over the last two decades. In contrast to Italy, where the larger proportion of Ukrainian immigrants are women working in the domestic sector, the number of Ukrainian immigrants in Spain is equally divided according to gender (see Fedyuk, this issue, on the feminisation of migration from Ukraine to Italy).

This sudden explosion in emigration from Ukraine gave incentives for commercial firms—some of which are established tourist firms and others that come close to being criminal networks of human smugglers—to offer 'package tours' to defined

destination countries in Europe for a relatively large sum of money. Such packages include a European tourist visa or smuggling across European borders, transfer by bus or car, and a contact person in the country of destination. Because of the open borders within it, any Schengen visa or clandestine crossing of the borders in Europe will enable migrants to go to any country within the Schengen Area.

Migration Patterns from Ecuador to Spain

Since the severe economic crisis in Ecuador in 1999, labour migration to Spain has been massive. Today there are around 420,000 Ecuadorians registered in Spain. A general trend in recent labour migration is that women are often the first to leave their homes and families in Ecuador in order to search for job opportunities overseas; they are then often followed by their husbands or joined by new male partners. Studies now talk about a feminisation of the labour migration (see Pedone 2006). All labour migration from Ecuador to Spain goes by air. The sudden and dramatic increase in the numbers of Ecuadorians who tried to get to Europe, and especially to Spain, generated a series of new niches in the travel agency business and in related enterprises such as money-lending and the procurement of different kinds of permit and job contract. The price of plane tickets rose considerably. When Spain insisted on tourist visas for Ecuadorians—especially after 2003—this legal-bureaucratic activity had been operating on both sides of the formal/informal divide. Costs for potential migrants were considerable.

Comparison of Routes and Patterns

Formal and informal means of getting access to documents, including the manipulation of formal systems, make up part of Ukrainians' and Ecuadorians' preparations for their first entry into Spain. These preparations reflect the different geographical distances that Ukrainians and Ecuadorians have to travel in order to reach their destination. The former travel mainly overland, while the latter travel by air—a distinction that should not be understated. Transportation by bus, truck or car, together with Europe's road network, offer far more flexible entries into Spain than air transport and airport infrastructure. Crucial here are the points of passage—that is, border-control posts that migrants have to pass through and where immigration regulations are enacted to a higher or lesser degree. Transportation by road multiplies the possibilities for access, with considerable variation in levels of control, and hence generates a kind of porosity. Ukrainians who travelled clandestinely recounted that the persons who carried them over the borders to Europe had their own 'windows' at the control posts, meaning their own immigration officers facilitating irregular passage. Such resources are not available at passage points at airports. Transportation by air singularises access and concentrates control resources ultimately at two points—the airport of the country of origin and that of the country of destination (see Aas 2005). Implications of geographic distance, then, make entry into Spain

different for Ukrainians and Ecuadorians: while both may access documents irregularly in order to travel legally, only Ukrainians can enter Spain irregularly. This also means that they are able to enter and leave Spain with children irregularly. This option is not available for Ecuadorians.

The Second Stage: The Period of Irregular Legal Status

The second stage demarcates the period during which Ukrainian and Ecuadorian migrants are irregular in Spain. A majority of migrants from both countries entered during the late 1990s and the early 2000s as tourists, and stayed on after the term of legal stay expired. Owing to various amnesty agreements, many irregular migrants have managed to regularise their status and obtain legal residence and work permits. The length of time between first entry and regularisation varies, but tends to be around two to four years. The observation we have made concerning both Ukrainian and Ecuadorian irregular migrants is that illegality produces immobility, and immobility implies that migrant parents are separated from their children for a considerable time period. As a rule, both Ukrainian and Ecuadorian migrants tend to stay in Spain without revisiting their home country and families during the period in which they have an irregular legal status. The reasons they give for staying are similar: the economic costs and potential loss are considerable; job opportunities gained in Spain could be wasted; and travelling irregularly could be risky.

In the case of Ukrainians, being stopped by the immigration authorities and sent back could have considerable bureaucratic and economic consequences, as the price of a 'package tour' has inflated in tandem with the introduction of more-restrictive visa policies in European countries towards Ukrainians. Irregular return is an option, but is considered unpleasantly risky. The investment each person needs to make in order to get into the EU is thus so high in terms of money and risk that most Ukrainians stay in the destination country until they are able to regularise their status, since legal status makes it possible to commute regularly to and from Spain.

Something similar could be said about irregular Ecuadorians, especially after 2003 when Spain introduced tourist-visa requirements. Undocumented Ecuadorian migrants revisiting Ecuador would have to go through a time-consuming and costly process in order to obtain a new visa. Considering the debt many migrants have accumulated, and also the loss of potential income in Spain in the period spent waiting in Ecuador for a new visa, revisiting is an option few undocumented migrants choose to take. No informants had considered this possibility. Immobility, then, implies that, in the period of irregular legal status, revisits do not form part of migrants' practices of care at a distance. During this period, other sources and resources are actively used by migrants to stay in contact with those left behind, namely, remittances and a wide range of package-sending practices, as well as the use of different types of ICT.

But before we look closer at these activities, let us consider the rationale and personal motivations behind them. Both Ukrainians and Ecuadorians see labour

migration as one of few ways, if not the only way, in which they can provide for the immediate care of their children—that is, care related to their survival and well-being—by providing for the child's basic needs (food, clothes, etc.). Migration also permits long-term projects of care, such as investment in future housing and education. Migrants from both countries work in Spain in order to secure improved living conditions for their children, and to provide them with improved future possibilities. Though the migrant parents have suffered hardship, they have done so willingly in order to spare their offspring from such things as hunger, homelessness, cold, loneliness and lack of money. Even if there are many aspects to their decision to leave their children, extended families and home countries in search of work in Spain, migrants state clearly that such migration is carried out for the sake of their children (see, in this issue, Boccagni on Ecuadorian migrants' perceptions of the obligation to remit, and Åkesson *et al.* concerning the social meaning and moral obligation of 'remembering' children and relatives left behind).

The period of irregular legal status is probably the most intense concerning ICT and remittance activity. Together with the use of mobile phones, and money- and package-sending services provided by established *remesedoras* or arranged through informal intermediaries, the frequent use of services provided by *locutorios*, such as long-distance telephone calls and the Internet (e-mail, Skype and IT-telephone calls, including webcam communication), is especially important in the first period after arrival in Spain. Migrants' need to maintain contact with their children in the immediate period after separation partly explains this frequent use. Another determinant is that irregular migrants are excluded from important services and systems for virtual value transfers. The use of electronic services for money transfer, handled by credit and bank institutions, requires that migrants become customers in systems that presuppose legal residence, and even work permits and contracts. Some foreign commercial enterprises in Spain have even started to specialise in the virtual transference of specific goods, such as electric household equipment, 'white' goods, audio-visual equipment, computers and even cars. The rationale of this business is that migrant customers purchase products in Spain which are then delivered to relatives in the home country. Even real estate, including apartments and construction projects, is now offered for sale in Spain in this manner for potential migrant customers. All services within this sector require that migrant customers be registered and documented in Spain. Undocumented migrants have no access to this market.⁶

The virtual transference of goods is more relevant and necessary for Ecuadorians than for Ukrainians—a consequence of geographical distance. Ukrainians do make use of international money-sending companies, but connection over land and transportation by car, bus or truck also offer possibilities for sending packages and money that are not dependent on formal actors, institutions and systems. They thus tend to opt for personalised sending practices in an informal market economy, operated by private actors who have found a niche in the transfer services of objects, money and persons between Spain and Ukraine. The larger firms in this transfer

business are connected to several of the Ukrainian shops in Madrid, where packages to be sent or received are handled, but most popular are the 10–15 Ukrainian minibuses that congregate in Aluche Square in Madrid every Sunday morning (see Fedyuk, in this issue, for parallel practices among Ukrainians in Italy). Aluche Square is an ordinary car park that, once a week, is occupied by several hundred Ukrainians, and is thus the largest social gathering of Ukrainians in Madrid, apart from the weekly services in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The square functions simultaneously as a place for sending and receiving packages, meeting friends and acquaintances, posting and searching adverts offering rooms in apartments, and buying Ukrainian newspapers, bread, sausages, smoked fish and other Ukrainian foodstuffs that are sold from the minibuses. The minibuses are owned and operated by private individuals, and all have specified lists, printed on large posters, of the Ukrainian cities to which they can deliver packages. Packages contain everything from clothes and food products to home appliances, tools and car tyres. The drivers of each bus weigh the packages wrapped in paper or plastic bags, calculate the price, and register the name, address and phone number of the recipient. These transfers are thus based on trust, rather than on formal contracts.

Ecuadorians, on the other hand, are more dependent on the market of virtual value transfers, and on the spaces of the *locutorios*, or call centres, and the *remesedoras*, the money- and package-sending businesses. ICT and remittance centres have mushroomed in Madrid in recent years, and a considerable number of them are owned and run by Latin Americans, including Ecuadorians. *Locutorios* tend to be something more than a locale for money and package-sending, telephoning and Internet use. They are also places for the exchange of information of all sorts, for making contacts and getting advice, places where a migrant can get Ecuadorian and other Latin American newspapers and keep her- or himself updated on relevant news. Parallel to Aluche as one of the central urban spaces for Ukrainians' sending activity, the specialised remittance bureaus and call centres scattered around the city constitute the central spaces for Ecuadorians' sending activity.

Ecuadorian migrants do, indeed, send packages via normal post or through specialised offices, but size and weight limit the utility of this option. The package-sending observed directly in Madrid indicates that Ecuadorians tend to send sweets, other basic (and often dry) foodstuffs and clothes to children and relatives left behind. Other types of goods are either too big, heavy, fragile or valuable to be sent by post. One should bear in mind here that the Ecuadorian post system in practice provides no guarantees in the event of the loss or disappearance of packages and valuables sent from abroad. The limits to current package-sending, then, imply that other options in a diverse and fast-expanding market for virtual value transfers become attractive. Leifsen has done fieldwork in one of the enterprises in Madrid that is heavily involved in virtual value transfers—Artefacta—an influential and well-reputed Ecuadorian firm dealing in household electrical goods. Its sales office in Madrid sells a range of electrical equipment to customers in Spain, and these products are then delivered to the customers' close relatives in Ecuador. The products

on display do not function in the Spanish market, since they require a different voltage (110V rather than 220V). The format and design of the products are also targeted towards a market that is not that of Spain. As well as household goods, Artefacta also offers televisions, stereos, DVD players and other electronic devices for sale, and lately has also started to promote pickups and cars (mainly for use as taxis). It should be mentioned here that Artefacta Madrid also offers money- and package-sending and long-distance phone calls—services which give the sales office something of an aspect of the *locutorio/remesedora*. Since many of the products offered are quite expensive, different kinds of payment arrangement are available for customers, such as payments in quotas and access to credit loans. As long as the customer is not paying in cash, which is extremely infrequent, all these arrangements require that the migrant has obtained legal status in Spain. Unlike Ukrainian migrants, then, undocumented Ecuadorians have access to a restricted set of technologies, services and systems that enable them to transfer values and valuables, and hence to maintain contact with the children left behind (see Pribilsky, in this issue, concerning the Ecuadorian sales office of Créditos Económicos in New York as a parallel to Artefacta in Madrid).

But why is this restricted access a problem? Why is it important for migrants to send objects and not only money? An observation we both have concerning this is that money-sending is conceived of as problematic. Both Ukrainians and Ecuadorians state that it is difficult for them to control how the money they send is used (or misused) at the receiving end. The sending of objects is therefore an attractive alternative, as it increases the likelihood that migrants' caring and providing intentions will be successfully transmitted and implemented. This alternative is crucial for migrants in terms of their ability to exercise care at a distance (see also Åkesson *et al.*, this issue, concerning ambivalence related to the sending of money).

In general, Ecuadorians' practices of care at a distance are integrated into a market that requires formalisation to a relatively higher degree than is the case for Ukrainian migrants. In this respect, undocumented Ecuadorians obviously have disadvantages because of the geographical distance that influences their ability to engage in long-distance care, as well as their decisions concerning care of their offspring over time.

The Third Stage: A Period of Regular Legal Status

The third stage is a direct consequence of Spanish immigration policies and regularisation of undocumented immigrants living in Spain. Regularisation programmes gave irregular migrants the right to apply for a one-year residence and work permit in Spain, with a further right to renewal of these permits, and obtaining legal status is certainly a moment of great importance for both Ukrainians and Ecuadorians. Legality not only entails better work contracts and higher salaries—which could secure more stable opportunities for long-term investments in child care, like housing and education—but also implies that a broader range of virtual value transfer opportunities becomes available, and that the daily care work of

sending remittances and communicating through ICTs could be supplemented with return visits to the home country without fear of being denied re-entry to Spain. Further, legality gives the right to apply for reunification with close family members. In short, whereas care practices through remittances and ICT communication are less dependent on legal status, legality opens up opportunities for the circulation of persons, whether through return visits or family reunification. The circulation of either the migrant parents or their offspring confirms and strengthens the parent–child bond but, while the former prolongs the care-at-a-distance relationship, the latter ends it. The difference is significant for the two migrant groups under consideration, because the tendency is that Ukrainians opt for revisits while Ecuadorians opt for family reunification. The difference in preferences is clearly conditioned by geographical distance.

Differences in the cost of travel influence the frequency of return visits. In real terms, a Ukrainian can travel from Madrid to Ukraine for one-fifth of the price that an Ecuadorian must pay to get from Madrid to Ecuador.⁷ It is affordable for most Ukrainian labour migrants in Spain to return home once or twice a year, and many stay in Ukraine for several weeks. For Ecuadorians, the cost of revisiting is so high in relation to average incomes (equivalent to at least one month's wages for most migrants), that a trip becomes a major project involving planning, money-saving and the accumulation of holiday entitlement, and also spurs great expectations. Revisiting is something Ecuadorians might be able to do every two or three years, and these limitations of distance and high cost make migrants relatively immobile.

And immobility has its costs: many Ecuadorian informants pointed out that, over time, the telephone calls they make, and the money, consumer goods and gifts they send, tend to be weak resources in the provision of care to children at a distance. Patricia, a 32-year-old Ecuadorian migrant, recounted that the initial expressions of *cariño*—love and affection—expressed in telephone conversations, over time turned into routine exchanges which threatened to become indifferent modes of communication. Miranda, a young Ecuadorian mother in Madrid, said—while explaining why they had decided to reunite with their son after six years of separation—that telephone calls allow for no more than talk. Over time, the strength of the word (*la fuerza de la palabra*) weakens if it cannot be supplemented with direct and personalised interaction. Worries, affection and correction are facets of care that can be communicated by telephone conversations; however, if communications are not followed up by acts, their effects are limited. Concerns over similar problems are also shared by the Ukrainian informants, who emphasise the importance of regular revisits. Migrants' narratives of revisits to Ukraine are, as a rule, filled with descriptions of personalised interaction with their children. Anastasia, a Ukrainian migrant in her late 30s who had been living in Madrid with her husband for six years, and whose 15-year-old son lives with Anastasia's parents in Ukraine, spent several weeks in the home country each summer and each Christmas. Anastasia and her husband had also recently applied for family reunion with their son; not in order to bring him to Spain on a permanent basis, but rather to give him the possibility of

spending time with them in Madrid during the Ukrainian school holidays. Recounting their recent trip to Ukraine, she described in detail all their activities and the places they had been together with their son, as well as a mutual wish for intense togetherness: 'Ihor wanted to sleep in our bedroom every night. It surprised me, as he is already a grown-up, but he said that we can sleep alone when we come back to Madrid'. Migrants from both Ecuador and Ukraine express, then, the importance and value of periodical co-presence for the maintenance and strength of long-distance care relationships.

Further, the values and valuables which migrant parents transfer to their children and relatives back home could be received and consumed without recognition of the caring concern they embody. As we already have mentioned, the way in which money is used by the receivers in Ukraine and Ecuador may be very different to that intended by the sender in Spain. Moreover, since the majority of the objects remitted are mass-produced consumer goods or equipment facilitating household chores and satisfying entertainment wants, their use may be disconnected from the persons sending them. Consumer goods are fine for transnational circulation but, at the same time, the intentions and care of the persons putting them into circulation may be ignored. Ecuadorians' limited possibilities for visiting might turn their caring at a distance into weak practices. Ecuadorian experiences of losing contact with and control over the children they left behind seem to generate another care practice—family reunification.

Although we should be careful about drawing too-strong conclusions from statistical data, it seems that Ecuadorian parents bring children to Spain on family reunification much more often than Ukrainian parents. According to numbers from the Spanish municipal register of January 2008, 13.6 per cent of the total number of registered Ukrainians living in Spain were between the ages of five and 19, while 23.3 per cent of the total number of registered Ecuadorians were in the same age group. In relative numbers, there were thus almost twice as many Ecuadorian children living in Spain as Ukrainian children. These numbers could give a good indication of the level of family reunification among the two migrant groups, because they refer to children born in the respective home countries and subsequently brought to Spain. Children and youth living in Spain but born in their country of origin may come to Spain together with one or both of their parents, or they may have been reunited with them at a later stage. Since a main characteristic of recent labour migration from both Ukraine and Ecuador is that one or both parents leave without children, it is probable that these numbers predominantly measure the frequency of family reunification.

One implication of transnational family reunification is that the children of migrants change educational systems when they shift schools. So far, we have emphasised the role of geographic distance as a driving force in Ecuadorian family reunification. Weakening ties and migrants' experiences of losing contact with their offspring over time cause them to prefer this solution. As a result, Ecuadorian-born children enter Spanish schools and the Spanish school system. In contrast, Ukrainian

migrants tend to keep their children in the home country, and hence in Ukrainian schools. However, besides geographical distance, there are other factors that also influence this difference in practice, one of which is related to differences of *cultural* distance. Language and education are thus important factors in migrants' decisions to apply for family reunification. For Ukrainians, transferring their children from the Ukrainian educational system to the Spanish is regarded as having certain non-reversible effects: Spanish certificates for lower-secondary schools are not valid in Ukraine. Moreover, Ukrainians regard the level of the Spanish educational system as lower than that in Ukraine. Oksana, a 41-year-old woman living in Madrid with her husband and their 16-year-old son, had worked as a schoolteacher in Ukraine: 'What children in Spanish schools learn about mathematics in tenth grade, children in Ukrainian schools learn in seventh grade. You see, nature studies and mathematics were important subjects in Soviet schools, and they still are'. These ideas discourage many Ukrainian migrants from bringing their children to Spain. One solution adopted by many who do bring their children is to enrol them in one of the four Ukrainian Saturday schools in the Madrid area. These schools offer teaching in Ukrainian language, history and culture, and the children get the opportunity to graduate from the International Ukrainian School. Pushing their children to get a Ukrainian certificate is one way of holding the door open for a permanent return to Ukraine.

Family reunification has further relevance and value for Ecuadorian migrants. A child from Ecuador will probably have an easier transition to Spanish society than a Ukrainian child. The fact that Ecuador and Spain belong to the same language universe eases the transition to the Spanish school system, although that system differs from the one the child comes from. Furthermore, state schooling in Ecuador is in general of lower quality than its Spanish counterpart, although the difference in quality between state and private schools is greater in Ecuador than in Spain. Schooling in Spain opens up a much wider world of possibilities for higher education. For Ecuadorians in Spain, the issue of education might support decisions to reunite with children rather than function as an obstacle to such an approach. Ecuadorians with scarce resources who had to send their children to state schools in Ecuador would find improved educational options in Spanish schools. Migrants from the educated middle classes, used to sending their children to private school in Ecuador, could find an acceptable (although not optimal) alternative in Spanish state schools.

For both Ukrainians and Ecuadorians, in sum, their desire to care for the children they left behind is a driving force behind the continuous sending of values and valuables, and in the often time-consuming work of staying in contact. In the long-term project of care, such as providing for and securing education for their children, however, the two migrant groups express contrasting views and statistically tend to chose differently. While Ukrainians tend to keep their children in the country of origin so that they can attend Ukrainian schools, Ecuadorians tend to opt for family reunification and the transference of children to Spain and the Spanish education

system. We have indicated that differences in both geographic and cultural distance influence Ukrainian and Ecuadorian patterns of decision-making.

Transnational Social Spaces and Care at a Distance

Comparison of the empirical realities described above indicates that *geographic and cultural distance*, as well as the *shifting legal status* of the migrant over time (the three-stage model), influence how care at a distance is practised. The ‘transnational social spaces’ in which Ukrainian and Ecuadorian transnational families exchange resources and information, and circulate and build relatedness, are thus ‘complex, multi-dimensional and multiply inhabited’ (Jackson *et al.* 2004: 3). In contrast to this observation, previous work on ‘transnational social spaces’ has tended to build too strongly on a network metaphor, with its connotations of ‘flow’ and ‘mobility’ in abstract spaces of movement. The focus has been too narrowly put on connectivity, whereas distance has been subdued.

One apparent reason for this emphasis on connectivity is an enthusiasm for advancements in virtual technologies that arguably eliminate the ‘constraints of real geographical difference’ (Robins 2000: 227, in a critical comment on Mitchell 1995). A new ideal vision within techno-culture assumes that it is possible to achieve ‘close encounters in virtual space’ (see Wilding 2006). To some extent, we share this idea in our emphasis on the potential of ICTs and the long-distance transfer of money, consumer goods and other values for achieving (virtual) relational closeness and meaning where the absence of co-presence and cohabitation conditions social interaction. ICTs and related technologies might, indeed, increase connectivity, shrink barriers and bridge the gap in long-distance social interaction, as ICTs create audible and visual possibilities of staying in touch and of ‘being together’ in spite of distance. However, virtual and material connectivity could be overloaded with significance in such a perspective, so that certain effects of geographic distance tend to be ignored.

In this article we have, by means of comparison, exemplified the importance of distance for migrants’ long-distance care. We have been concerned not only with how care at a distance produces connections, but also with how this kind of activity produces relatedness, social belonging and family intimacy. Acknowledging similar approaches (see Baldassar 2007; Carsten 2000, 2004; DeVault 1991; di Leonardo 1987; Hochschild 1983; Parreñas 2005), we come to the conclusion that a basic component of care as an area of activity is to contribute to the making of relationships. Continuous exchanges of care constitute processes of relatedness, as the immediate provision of necessities and different modes of emotional and social support occasion an extended experience of mutuality and identification with social collectives. Likewise, DeVault (1991) argues, in parallel with new kinship studies in anthropology (see Carsten 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2001), that parent–child nurturing practices and feeding the family do something more than simply satisfying basic human and biological needs. These activities also shape and maintain essential social

relationships. Hence, we argue that, when such activities are performed across geographical distance, it is relevant to consider how this distance affects the production of relations. Differences of distance (Ukraine/Spain vs Ecuador/Spain) create distinct needs and uses of transportation, transfer and communications technologies. This also implies that the modes of care that are transported, transferred and communicated differ as a consequence of distance. The ways in which persons and objects circulate overland within the European continent differ from the ways in which such circulation takes place overseas between the Latin American and European continents. The introduction of ICTs and their massive and widespread use, then, qualitatively change the 'social fields of transnational migration' (Basch *et al.* 1994) or the 'transnational social spaces', understood by Herrera Lima (2001: 77) as the 'densified and institutionalised framework of social practices, symbol systems and artefacts that span pluri-locally over different national societies'. However, the ways in which these social fields change are conditioned by the means available and employed by migrants and migrant collectives in holding worlds apart together.

The other important aspect concerning distance that we have discussed in this article has to do with what Baldassar (2007) terms 'the importance of co-presence'. In line with Baldassar's argument, we hold that cohabitation is *not* a precondition for 'holding the family together'—i.e. for achieving the social cohesion that makes a family into a sharing and inter-related collective. The importance of cohabitation and co-presence has diminished, argues Baldassar—especially as a result of ICT usage—and staying in touch, caring for each other, and creating and maintaining familial intimacy can be achieved in spite of geographical separation. Having said this, we would also agree with Baldassar in pointing out that this observation does not imply that face-to-face sociality could be wholly replaced by virtual sociality. On the basis of our observations and conversations with Ukrainians and Ecuadorians in Spain, we conclude that periodic and regular face-to-face encounters through revisits are important and necessary for broadening the material and social-emotional dimensions of care and belonging. In our view, this dimension of co-presence is especially important in adult migrants' long-distance care of children, since care in this phase of family life combines provision of needs and social-emotional support with socialisation and upbringing. As we have argued in this article, the conditions for achieving periodic and regular co-presence in transnational parent-child relationships differ as a consequence of geographical distance. The proximity of Ukraine for Ukrainians is better than that of Ecuador for Ecuadorians—because of transportation opportunities and expenses, and also because of the relative ease of movement over national borders and checkpoints. We have argued that, together with concerns related to education and cultural distance, this differing proximity influences the crucial decisions which migrants take concerning their offspring—either to keep the children at a distance back home or to engage in complex and tiresome bureaucratic processes in order to be reunited with the children.

Lastly, we would also point to an additional dimension of care at a distance and the market that applies to both Ukrainians and Ecuadorians, and where distance also has an effect worth mentioning. Caring work at a distance consists of migrants' efforts to prepare objects and messages of the market and in the market so that they can travel as personified objects, i.e. as objects that evoke migrants' experience of and identification with social belonging and obligation (see Parry and Bloch 1989; Zelizer 1997). Furthermore, it also consists of the operations aimed at ensuring that these objects and messages continue to be personified where they are received and consumed. As studies within both economic anthropology and economic sociology hold (see Kopytoff 1986; Parry and Bloch 1989; Zelizer 1997), money and other commodities can and will, through their circulation, take on different kinds of meaning beyond that as objects of economic exchange, standards of value and consumer goods. Money and commodities might, in circulation, be connected to social values, as well as to such emotional dimensions as those implied in care. Objects of the market may serve as symbols of relations, and circulate in that capacity. In our observation, transnational care depends to a high degree on the possibility for objects to fluctuate between the intimate family sphere and the commercialised market sphere. As we have tried to show by reference to the Ukrainian and Ecuadorian cases, and to argue for theoretically, we do not think that such market integration empties migrants' care initiatives of content or annuls their impact. We believe, however, that the different transportation and transference technologies available for the two migrant groups discussed here—which differ because of geographical distance—affect the potential for money and commodities to take on symbolic value and communicate relations, belonging and social-emotional closeness. The circulation of objects through personified channels or chains (as in the case of the packages sent by bus and through face-to-face exchanges in the Ukrainian case) contributes to the investiture of those objects with a relational meaning that virtual value transfers do not have. For Ecuadorians, then, the work maintaining the personified value of commodities and money seems to be more intense and time-consuming. The differences involved are increased by the fact that Ukrainians, to a greater degree, are able to complement remittance- and package-sending with periodical co-presence, deepening in this way the social basis for sharing. Ecuadorian migrants, on the other hand, reach a point where they experience a weakening of social ties, motivating them to seek family reunification with the children they left behind.

Notes

- [1] The children of one of the couples lived with their parents in Spain for three years, but decided to go back to Ukraine for their higher education.
- [2] In addition, Tymczuk carried out eight semi-structured interviews in Ukraine with returned migrants and with children left behind by migrating parents, during a two-month period of fieldwork in Lviv. He also initiated a literary contest for the children of Ukrainian migrants,

and many of the 150 texts received contained family biographies with valuable information on the migration process from Ukraine to different European countries.

- [3] In this article, we interchangeably use the terms 'il/legal', 'un/documented' and 'ir/regular', but tend to prefer the latter, since the analytical use of the label 'illegal' confirms a political categorisation of migrant populations (see Khosravi 2006: 284), and since the label 'undocumented', in our view, is an imprecise concept for persons with a range of different legal statuses or identities in relation to formal authorities. Irregular migrants are basically not without documents, but hold incomplete, unrecognised or non-verified documentation of their actual formal identity in relation to legal norms and authorities in the migrant context.
- [4] The Schengen Area is a zone with no internal border controls, consisting of the majority of the countries in the European Union, along with Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. The Schengen Treaty specifies police and judicial cooperation within the borders of the Schengen Area, in addition to shared border-control arrangements.
- [5] The total number of Ukrainian labour migrants is estimated at between 2 and 7 million persons (Karpachova 2003). There were 103,000 registered Ukrainians in Spain in 2007. However, the Ukrainian embassy there estimates that there are approximately 200,000 Ukrainians living in Spain; see <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/spain/ua/2028.htm> (accessed 28 April 2009).
- [6] An additional aspect worth mentioning here is that migrants' usage of ICT and virtual sending arrangements depends on their relatives' access to these technologies in the country of origin, which to a certain extent is linked to social class (see Parreñas 2005).
- [7] The bus fare from Madrid to Lviv and back costs around 170 euros, while the air ticket Madrid–Quito–Madrid would cost around 800–920 euros.

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Mobility, Moralities and Motherhood: Navigating the Contingencies of Cape Verdean Lives

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In this article we discuss how transnational motherhood is managed and experienced in contexts of uncertainty and conflicting pressures. We propose a conceptual approach and apply it to a specific case: female migration from Cape Verde to Europe and North America. The analysis is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the authors in Cape Verde and the diaspora over the past decade. We first address the ideal of and expectations towards transnational mothering in Cape Verde, relating these to local forms of kinship, fostering and household organisation. We demonstrate that lengthy separations between mothers and young children are socially constructed as a normal aspect of transnational lives: they are a painful necessity, but are not automatically assumed to be traumatic. In an ideal situation, the biological mother and the foster mother play complementary roles in what we describe as the transnational fostering triangle. Subsequently, we ask how transnational mothering is confronted by unforeseen incidents and obstacles, which we refer to as contingencies. We relate these contingencies to the negotiation of individual and collective ideas and aspirations. The Cape Verdean case is interesting in a comparative perspective because of the social acceptance of mother–child separation. Our analysis explores how this acceptance co-exists with the real-life challenges of transnational mothering.

Keywords: Mobility; Migration; Moralities; Motherhood; Fostering; Cape Verde

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Introduction

This article addresses the management and experience of motherhood in transnational social fields. We apply a set of conceptual tools to a specific case: female migration from Cape Verde to Europe and North America. Cape Verde is an island nation in the Atlantic, with half a million inhabitants spread across nine islands. The country defies conventional geographical and cultural classifications. Its closest neighbours are West African countries, but its history of colonial settlement, slavery and plantation agriculture, and emigration generated a society with similarities to other Creole societies—such as those in the Caribbean—and strong social and cultural linkages with North American and European societies.

The three terms in the title point to a nexus that is central to the lives of many Cape Verdean women: *mobility* far beyond the islands is often necessary or desirable, while *motherhood* is an anchor in an otherwise shifting social universe; the practical and emotional challenges of mothering from a distance are tackled in the context of socially defined *moralities*. We pursue a two-step strategy in our analysis. First, we address the ideals and expectations held in relation to transnational mothering in Cape Verde. We do so with a focus on the duties of the ‘two mothers’ involved: the biological mother, who leaves her child (or children) behind, and the foster mother who cares for the child during the other mother’s absence. We demonstrate that, in Cape Verde, lengthy separations between mothers and young children are socially constructed as normal and not inherently traumatic. This attitude to separation, we show, is related to the flexible nature of households and the instability of conjugal relations in Cape Verde, even in the absence of migration. As a second step, we situate the conditions of transnational mothering in relation to the fact that real-life situations, in Cape Verde as anywhere in the world, are complex and uncertain, usually shaped by many unforeseen incidents and obstacles. We relate these contingencies to the obligation of managing migration on a family level—that is, the negotiation of individual and collective ideas and aspirations in relation to structural options or limitations.

Our focus on moralities is related to the ambiguous societal position of mothers. Phoenix and Woollett (1991: 13) described this paradox in the following terms:

Motherhood is romanticized and idealized as the supreme physical and emotional achievement in women’s lives [. . .], but when women become mothers (as most do) they find that the everyday tasks of mothering are socially devalued and relegated to individual households.

As several studies on transnational families have demonstrated, this tension can be amplified in the context of migration, when mobile mothers try to legitimate their choices in relation to a public narrative of ‘good mothering’ (Chamberlain 1999; Erel 2009; Parreñas 2005).

In societies where there is a strong ethos of mothers as providers in a broad sense, the paradox described by Phoenix and Woollett (1991) takes a somewhat different

form: mothers are expected to prioritise their children's emotional and educational needs, while simultaneously being responsible for providing a satisfactory material standard. This is what we have observed in Cape Verde, where transnational motherhood is linked with the pre-existing material responsibilities shouldered by many mothers. Cape Verdean mothers have to precariously balance their double roles as care-givers and breadwinners. In local everyday life, women are pressed to leave their children in the care of people they maybe do not trust in order to work long hours in a factory or as a domestic. When mothers have a chance to migrate, the contradiction of the demands placed on them is intensified. As we will show, poorer mothers in particular find that the pressure to provide economically for themselves and their children makes it more or less inevitable for them to leave. At the same time, most of them experience the separation as a heavy burden.

The literature on transnational motherhood primarily relates to situations in which adult women work abroad while their minor children remain in the country of origin. This understanding of motherhood is the counterpart to an age-related notion of childhood, describing the period between birth and adulthood. Childhood, however, is also a relational term: individuals remain the children of their parents regardless of age. This point allows for an expanded understanding of transnational parenthood as a relationship that can also exist between adults. A migrant who has left a child with the grandmother is thus simultaneously part of two transnational parenthood relationships. This is significant in Cape Verde, where the mother-child bond is central throughout the life-span. In our analysis, we nevertheless concentrate on transnational motherhood in the sense of female migrants leaving minor-age children behind in the country of origin.

This article explores the ways in which Cape Verdean women make motherhood compatible with individual mobility. However, the barriers to mobility are an important part of the picture. First, migrant mothers without residence permits are prevented from returning home temporarily to see their children or resolve fostering crises. Second, restrictive immigration legislation can delay or thwart the migration of children for family reunification overseas. The transnational lives of our informants are, in other words, rarely characterised by effortless mobility between countries or continents.

Our paper is structured as follows. After a brief overview of transnational motherhood and fostering, we describe the fieldwork and methodology on which the article is based. The subsequent analysis is divided into three sections. In the first, we elaborate on the nature of Cape Verdean kinship, households and transnational families. We go into detail on local family patterns and processes that affect the way in which transnational motherhood is practised and experienced. The second section, on the 'normality of separation', explores the Cape Verdean view of separation as a natural part of life. By extension, we address the perceptions and practice of transnational fostering. In the ideal case, the arrangement is beneficial to all three parties of the fostering triangle: the biological mother, the foster mother and the child. In the third section, on the 'contingencies of transnational motherhood', we examine how

unexpected events or uncontrollable circumstances can challenge mothering from a distance.

Approaches to the Study of Fostering and Transnational Motherhood

Studies on practices of moving children between different households, families or localities have a long history in the social sciences. Within anthropology, the structural relation between parents and their children was seen as central from an early date. This was not least because the meaning of kinship was crucial in the development of anthropology as an academic discipline. Most scholars of the British structural-functionalist school of the mid-1900s focused mainly on the rules and norms reflecting descent. Later, Esther Goody pushed the practices of raising children into the centre of the British debate. In her book *Parenthood and Social Reproduction* (Goody 1982), she observed that, in West Africa, many children do not grow up with their biological parents. According to Goody, different aspects of parenthood, such as bearing and begetting, status entitlement, nurturance, training and sponsorship, are often shared among different people. In France, too, a structural approach has been dominant, and scholars have identified functional reasons for placing a child within another family. French anthropologists concentrated on alliance theory, and Lallemand (1993) was among those who made use of this approach for understanding child fostering. Lallemand considered the child to be one of the most important gifts a family can give away for the purpose of creating a bond between givers and receivers and entering into a longstanding relationship.

Since the renewal of the anthropology of kinship, which began in the 1990s, child fostering and adoption have served as key practices for underlining the active composition and the processual emergence of social relations, and kinship in particular. For instance, in one of her early articles, Carsten (1991) called attention to the role of children as key mediators of the exchange of goods, such as food or information, between households. In an endeavour to question the opposition between nature and culture, Weissmantel (1995) elaborated on the everyday micro-politics of creating relatedness and parenthood by feeding and nurturing a child. Others have identified links between fostering and broad fields of societal organisation, such as gender, economics, politics and law. Hence, recent approaches link fostering to, for example, the globalised adoption system or elaborate on the notion of childhood and its transformation owing to international agreements on the rights of children (Fonseca 2002; Leinaweaver 2007). Generally, a changing understanding of childhood, particularly in Western societies, influences current research on fostering. Against this background, we can observe a shift towards the perception of children as active agents within their social environment (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Leifsen 2009).

These broader perspectives have also shaped many studies on transnational child care. The growing demand for mobile female labour has changed global gendered orderings of work, mobilities and reproduction, as well as cultural understandings of

mothering. During recent decades, many women from the global South have travelled to care jobs in Western countries, leaving their families behind and joining new families in the destination country. In their seminal article on 'transnational motherhood', Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) argue that perceptions, experiences and meanings of transnational motherhood should be understood as transformations of culture-specific mothering ideologies. Understandings of motherhood are not universal and pre-cultural, and hence the cultural norms on how the mother-child bond across national borders should be lived vary largely across the globe (see the articles by Boccagni, and Leifsen and Tymczuk, in this issue). Many women who cross national borders to rear other women's children are forced to radically break with their own expectations of gender, intimacy and child care. Besides Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, several other scholars have drawn attention to the diversity of mothering ideologies and experiences and how these become reconceptualised in the context of migration (Colen 1995; Erel 2002). The fact that transnational mothering may become burdened by negative societal conceptualisations reflects the pitfalls of a Eurocentric approach, containing the image of a nuclear heteronormative family as a hegemonic feature of society (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004; Gamburd 2008; Parreñas 2005; Verhoef and Morelli 2007).

Fieldwork and Methods

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted by the three authors in Cape Verde and various diaspora communities in the period 1998–2008. Between us, we have undertaken seven distinct research projects on Cape Verdean migration; the topic of transnational motherhood has featured in all, either by design or by chance. Our intention in this article is to apply our cumulative insights to the question of how motherhood is managed and experienced in the context of transnational separation. By also drawing upon research in which transnational motherhood is a tangential theme, we are able to interpret it through a variety of lenses. These include the moralities of migration, the tightening of migration policies, and the social meaning of remittances.

Doing research on transnational motherhood poses particular methodological and ethical challenges. In all social behaviour, there can be a tension between what individuals actually do and what they feel they ought to do according to social norms. This tension is particularly strong in relation to motherhood, for at least two reasons. First, motherhood is a social construction strongly laden with moral claims. Second, it is typically a central aspect of individual identity. Informants, conscious about the ideal of Cape Verdean motherhood, can understandably be anxious about being perceived as 'bad mothers'. Comparable pressures and anxieties weigh on foster mothers, who have to satisfy societal norms regarding how they might fulfil their duties in an adequate manner.

Extended fieldwork, regular encounters with families and their social environment, and informal face-to-face conversations with all actors involved underpin the

requisite level of trust that allows for openness about the challenges of mothering. At the same time, however, the very nature of transnational motherhood restricts what can be ‘observed’ by the researcher. In our fieldwork, we have therefore relied on a combination of extended interaction and interviews. These interviews were primarily conducted with biological mothers, foster mothers and fostered children, but also with persons in their social environments, including social workers and teachers.

We have conducted fieldwork on the islands of Brava, Fogo, Santo Antão, São Nicolau and São Vicente, and among Cape Verdeans in Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the United States. In this article, we concentrate on the broadly ‘Cape Verdean’ experiences of transnational motherhood, recognising that differences between islands and destination countries are significant, but beyond the scope of this text.

Kinship, Households and Transnational Families

Transnational families are shaped by the intersection of specific forms of migration, on the one hand, and specific forms of kinship on the other. This section provides a discussion about the nature of Cape Verdean kinship, family relations and households, followed by a brief account of Cape Verdean migration. We then proceed with an analysis of how transnational families form in this context.

Conjugal Relations and Ties Between Parents and Children

Current Cape Verdean family structures are formed through the process of creolisation that resulted from the social encounters between European traders and African slaves who were shipped from the West African coast. The Cape Verdean family model reflects asymmetries evolving from this historical process (Drotbohm 2009; Rodrigues 2007). On the one hand, a patriarchal family system was introduced which was based on Catholic values and the authority of the father. On the other hand, conjugal relations tend to be unstable. These relations depart from the norm of lifelong monogamy in two ways: they can be transitory and clearly come to an end, or they can last over many years but be somewhat undefined and non-exclusive. The commonly used kinship terms *pai-de-fidj* and *mae-de-fidj* (literally ‘father of child’ and ‘mother of child’) are open to such ambiguity.

The low frequency of formal marriage in Cape Verde reflects a form of pragmatism, as well as a creolised relationship with Catholicism. Marriage is often seen as an unnecessary and expensive ritual. While many young people often have an indifferent attitude towards religion, others are involved in the rapidly growing Protestant congregations or the spiritualist Christian Rationalism movement. As Lobo (2006) writes, however, choosing not to marry is not the same as a rejection of the Christian model of marriage. On the contrary, she finds, people hesitate out of respect for the norm they believe they might not be able to follow.

The fact that men often have relationships with several women at the same time is a matter of constant gossip and public criticism, and causes frustration and complaint, especially among Cape Verdean women (Drotbohm 2010). Lifelong monogamy is not expected of women either, but simultaneous relationships are condemned (Åkesson 2004; Lobo 2006). Permanent commitment to a single partner, especially among men, is seen to run counter to the Cape Verdean spirit. One return migrant expressed it as follows: 'In Europe you are satisfied when you have a family. Then you lean back and nothing more happens. Here you find a love of adventure. I can't stop moving on; I need new challenges all the time' (cited in Åkesson 2004: 102).

Both men and women typically have children with more than one partner. Partly for this reason, the majority of children do not live together with their father (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2008). Masculinity is closely associated with sexuality and fatherhood, and men usually take great pride in the birth of their child. Nevertheless, their relationship with their children is often marked by distance, even when they live in the same household. During fieldwork on Boa Vista, Lobo (2006) found that direct questions to men about their children were often met with evasive and superficial responses, or requests that she talk to the children's mothers instead, since this was a 'women's issue'.

There is a well-established ideal of the responsible father, a reliable provider who ensures that his children are well fed, nicely clothed and live in a decent house. Conforming to this norm clearly contributes to a man's reputation, even among his male friends. However, this ideal leads a frail co-existence with that of the potent womaniser. A man who is seen to be controlled by a woman—afraid to follow his own desires—is typically ridiculed and condemned.

The fragility of conjugal ties is intertwined with the centrality of the mother-child bond in Cape Verdean kinship. This bond is important in material as well as emotional terms. The mother carries the primary responsibility for both the nurturing and the education of children, even when there is a father shouldering paternal responsibilities. Women devise strategies to provide for themselves and their children. This may involve efforts to hold on to a man who gives material support (for instance, by having a child with him) or creating a livelihood independent of a male partner. Women often pursue several such strategies simultaneously.

There are, in other words, important differences in the nurturing aspects of motherhood and fatherhood. As the daily managers of households, mothers are the immediate providers of food, clothing and the like, even if money is brought into the household by the father. Whether he is present or absent, the father is a potential source of income for the mother's running of the household. A mother who does not provide adequately for her children could be seen to have failed and may, depending on the circumstances, be subject to reproach. When a father does not make substantial contributions, this is more easily accepted as a fact of life.

In this article, we specifically address transnational *motherhood*. In a Cape Verdean environment, a mother's emigration without her children is fundamentally different from the separation of fathers and children through migration. The typical fragility of

father–child ties in Cape Verde means that emigration is just one aspect of the more general phenomenon of absent fathers.

Household Dynamics

The household has gained popularity as a unit of analysis in studies of migration and transnationalism. It is often presented as a bridge between individuals and their social world, thereby addressing the central social science concerns with structure and agency. Based on our studies of Cape Verdean migration, we wish to make a case for caution in the use of ‘households’ in migration studies. Notions of ‘household strategies’ are based on an assumed common interest, and the concept of ‘transnational households’ presumes a domestic unit that is resilient to separation. Others have also pointed to the shortcomings of such assumptions. For instance, Sana and Massey (2005) show that household-based theory on remittance behaviour holds true in rural Mexico, where patriarchal families dominate, but not in the Dominican Republic, where family structure resembles the Cape Verdean model described above.

Our scepticism does not mean a rejection of the household level as irrelevant. Household dynamics in the country of origin are essential to how transnational motherhood is organised and perceived. In Cape Verde, household organisation is, in several ways, suited to accommodating mothering from afar. Furthermore, the diversity and flexibility of local households make transnational fostering less of a deviation from social norms. This, in turn, affects the moralities of transnational mothering (Drotbohm 2009). Three aspects of the household institution merit attention.

First, responsibility for the running of domestic life always rests with a woman. In everyday conversation, households are usually identified with reference to that woman, whether or not she has a male partner. In many cases, she does not; only 55 per cent of Cape Verdean households are headed by men (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2008). A female *dona de casa* is essential to the very notion of a household, while a man is optional. Where there is a senior male in the household, however, he is typically a respected figure of authority. Establishing an independent household is a common motivation for migration among women, as well as among men.

Second, household membership is often ambiguous and transitory. For instance, young adults can remain partial members of their maternal household for a decade or more before setting up an independent household. It is common for young men to sleep in a small house or rented room of their own, but eat in their mother’s house. The general fluidity of households makes relocation of a child from one household to another less dramatic (Drotbohm 2012).

Third, when households are analysed statistically, as in population censuses, a striking diversity emerges (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2002). Households with one, two, three, four, five or six members are more or less equally common;

headship is, as noted earlier, divided quite equally between men and women. Only slightly more than a quarter of all households are of the nuclear type, consisting of a couple and their children. Even among this group, the children are not necessarily the couple's common offspring. This general variation in household types means that unusual constellations in the context of migration are not perceived as deviant.

The diversity of household types is reflected in the living arrangements of children. The majority of Cape Verdean children do not live together with both parents (see Table 1). As children grow older, it is increasingly common that the father, the mother, or both are not living in the same household as the child. In the 0–15 age group as a whole, almost a quarter of Cape Verdean children are not living together with their biological mothers. Some of these are cases of transnational motherhood, but the statistics do not tell us how many. There are three other reasons for children not living with their mothers. First, as will be shown in a later section, child-fostering practices are relatively common in Cape Verde, even in the absence of migration. Second, there is extensive internal migration that divides families. Moves between islands, in particular, can result in lengthy separations of mothers and children. Third, some children have experienced the death of their mother. This is relatively rare, however; in 95 per cent of the cases where children and mothers are living separately, the mother is alive.

Child Fostering

In Cape Verde, a childhood divided between different caretakers is considered part of a normal socialisation process, and not a source of stigmatisation. This view, coupled with the widespread practice of fostering between local households, is an important context for understanding transnational motherhood (Drotbohm 2012). Households in the lower and middle socio-economic strata tend to be connected in networks of exchange and solidarity in which children play a key role. Infants are often looked after by girls and women in other households, be they relatives, friends or neighbours. Children from around the age of five are the principal messengers and

Table 1. Living arrangements of children aged 0–15 in 2005 (%)

Age	Living with both parents	Living with mother only	Living with father only	Living with neither parent	Total
0–1 year	47	45	1	7	100
2–4 years	43	36	3	18	100
5–9 years	38	38	3	22	100
10–14 years	36	38	3	24	100
Total	39	38	3	20	100

Source: Calculated on the basis of data from the second national survey on demography and reproductive health 2005 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2008). Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

intermediaries between households, delivering messages, borrowing or returning items, and doing a range of household chores. As Lobo (2006: 81) writes, children are thus simultaneously *vehicles for* and *objects of* sharing and exchange between households in Cape Verde.

Beyond being temporarily looked after in other households, it is common for children to move households on a more permanent basis—for months, years or their entire childhood. Such fostering can have a variety of motivations. In a society like the Cape Verdean, which historically is shaped by strong socio-economic differentiation and the constant threat of supply crisis, fostering can be an element in collaboration between poorer and richer households. Today, too, fostering is often based on unsatisfactory conditions in the maternal household, due to illness, particular times of hardship, chronic poverty or domestic violence. In other cases, children are moved in order to attend school in an urban centre. Cape Verdeans often stress that child fostering is part of getting by through mutual assistance (Åkesson 2004; Lobo 2006). The placement of a child in another household is generally seen as a positive solution in the given circumstances. People who receive foster children are considered kind and generous, complying with moralities of solidarity.

Foster children also bestow benefits on the receiving household. The foster parent assumes control over the child's labour, which can be important in the day-to-day running of the household. Elderly women, in particular, whose own children have left the household, may welcome a foster child for help and companionship. There is obviously potential for abuse, but foster children are not necessarily treated any differently to biological children with reference to household chores. Fostering a child can also create advantages in terms of future reciprocity. Parents, especially mothers, expect their adult children to support them economically and emotionally. For women without children, fostering is thus a way of preparing for old age. Fostering also creates ties between the foster mother and the biological mother that can be of benefit for both in the long term (Drotbohm 2012).

Åkesson (2004) points to three factors that explain how widespread fostering can co-exist with the centrality of the mother–child bond. First, the biological mother retains common-law and legal rights as the 'real' mother of the child. Second, the strength of the relationships between mothers and children is not limited to biological mothers, but can also apply to ties with foster mothers. Third, leaving a child to be fostered by somebody else is often seen as an act of responsible motherhood, and not of abandonment.

Close female relatives, especially the maternal grandmother, play important roles in raising children, even when the mother is present. When a young woman gives birth, it is common for her to remain in the maternal household with the child, rather than living with the child's father elsewhere. As Lobo (2006) points out, this exemplifies the common primacy of filial over conjugal bonds in Cape Verde. Almost a third of Cape Verdean children spend the first year of life in the household of their grandparents (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2002).

Migration and Transnational Families

Cape Verde has a long and multi-faceted history of migration, and the current diaspora possibly outnumbered the residents on the islands (Carling and Åkesson 2009; Carling and Batalha 2008). Emigration was partly driven by devastating droughts and famines during Portuguese colonialism. While Cape Verde is currently prosperous by African standards, the wish to emigrate is still widespread (Carling 2002). Emigration is typically perceived and presented as a strategy for 'making one's life' (*fazé se vida*). The notion of life-making is associated with livelihood, but also signifies the transformation of an unfulfilling life into a potentially fulfilled one (Åkesson 2004). Although many Cape Verdean migrants settle permanently abroad, most leave with the intention of returning to a better future on the islands. Earning money abroad in order to build a house in Cape Verde is a common plan.

The largest diaspora population is found in the United States, where Cape Verdean settlement began in the nineteenth century (Halter 1993). The United States has also been among the foremost destinations in recent migration; consequently, the Cape Verdean community there is a heterogeneous one, comprising up to five generations of migrants. While the majority are well integrated and represented in all societal strata, many first-generation immigrants struggle with undocumented residence status and work restrictions. Experiences of social exclusion are common in all generations. Migratory ties with the United States are particularly strong on the islands of Fogo and Brava. Large Cape Verdean diaspora communities also exist in Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy, Senegal and Angola.

Italy plays a special role in the context of Cape Verdean transnational motherhood. Its Cape Verdean diaspora population is overwhelmingly female and has traditionally been dominated by domestic workers (Andall 1998; Monteiro 1997). Female migration to Italy continues, albeit at a reduced pace.

Networks based on kinship constitute the strongest linkages between Cape Verde and the diaspora. More than half of adults on the islands have a parent, child, brother or sister overseas.¹ Transnational families are not only extraordinarily prevalent in Cape Verde, but also remarkably dispersed across different destinations. For instance, it is common among the children of migrant mothers that the father also lives abroad, but in a different country. One reason for this has been the gendered opportunities for migration. At the height of female migration to Italy, there was a predominately male migration flow to the Netherlands, where Cape Verdeans found work as seafarers in Rotterdam (Andall 1999; Carling 2008a). More generally, the destination country is not always a matter of choice or careful planning. Many Cape Verdeans harbour a wish to emigrate that might be realised quite suddenly when an opportunity arises, for instance if a visiting relative offers to sponsor a tourist visa.

In most cases where minors are separated from their mother, the mother migrated and left her children behind in Cape Verde. In other cases, children born abroad are sent back to Cape Verde on their own, for instance to be fostered by grandparents. Such separations are often motivated by the mother's inability to care for an infant

while working abroad. Older children are sometimes sent to Cape Verde to keep them out of trouble. Many Cape Verdeans, both in Europe and in the USA, live in environments where drugs and violence are widespread. Sending children to Cape Verde is one of the options which parents may consider in raising their children under such circumstances.

The normative aspects of family relations are decisive for transactions between people at home and abroad (Åkesson 2004). A wish to improve one's own life is often said to be the driving force behind migration aspirations. Support to relatives is seldom given as a principal motive for leaving, although the inability to provide for oneself or—especially among women—one's children, may have been central to frustration with life in Cape Verde. After leaving the islands, migrants are expected to 'remember' their relatives by sending news, remittances and gifts. Those who fail to do this are easily labelled 'ungrateful' (*ingrót*) (Åkesson 2004; Carling 2008b).

The Normality of Separation

The dominant view in Cape Verde is that separation is a normal part of life. 'Normality', in this context, points not only to the prevalence of separation, but to a sense of societal acceptance. Separation can be painful but does not warrant much explanation or justification. Even lengthy separations between mothers and children are seen as normal, although the mother-child tie is, as we have shown, the basic emotional and social relation in family networks. One way of understanding this apparent paradox is to explore the meaning of 'good motherhood' in the Cape Verdean context.

A mother's fundamental duty is to provide her children with a roof over their heads, food, clothes and basic schooling. In some cases, the father enables her to do this; in other cases, he does not. The material aspects of motherhood mean that a female migrant tends to be seen as a good mother as long as she continues to regularly send money and gifts to her children. The everyday socialisation of children, as well as affection and security, can be provided by other trusted individuals. A migrant mother's obligation is rather to try to articulate emotional proximity from a distance.

The role of mothers as providers of material necessities is compatible with transnational motherhood. In this respect, Cape Verde differs from several other countries in which transnational motherhood is common but seen as a deviation from the normative nuclear family, with the mother as caretaker and the father as breadwinner. The Philippines and Moldova are cases in point, where women's migration is perceived as leading to the disintegration of the family (Parreñas 2005; Salah 2008). In Cape Verde, by contrast, the role of migrant mothers makes their absence inevitable and ordinary. This, in turn, is reflected in people's efforts to normalise a mother's departure, as the following example demonstrates.

When Dilma was quite unexpectedly offered a contract as a domestic worker in Italy, she was living together with her mother and her six-year-old daughter, Gina.

Dilma was reluctant to leave her daughter while, at the same time, she told everybody that she had to leave. To migrate was necessary, Dilma argued, because that was her only chance to achieve a better life for her daughter and herself. The week before Dilma emigrated, she went around visiting relatives and friends and gave two *despedida*, which is the local term for farewell parties for migrants. At all these occasions, a matter-of-fact attitude characterised the behaviour of everyone present. Nobody gave way to feelings of sadness or worry, and conversation consisted of the usual mixture of jokes and gossip. Little Gina was not present at these occasions. Dilma's female friends reported that Gina was doing fine and that there was no need to worry. Gina was going to stay in the house where she had lived all her life, and her grandmother was 'of course' going to care for her.

Only the night before Dilma's departure did the gay atmosphere change slightly. Dilma's closest friends and family were gathered in Dilma's mother's house. Conversation was focused on everyday topics and Dilma tried to keep up her normal joyful attitude but, every now and then, she cast long sorrowful glances in her daughter's direction. One of Dilma's friends tried to cheer her up and said, 'You'll surely be able to come back for a holiday already after two years'. The thought of returning after 'only' two years made Dilma look less unhappy. Gina herself showed no signs of distress. She played with her cousins and ran in and out of the house. Somebody jokingly shouted at her, 'Are you going to cry tomorrow at the airport?', but Gina just laughed and pinched another piece of cake from the table.

Over the phone to Italy, Dilma's mother reported proudly that Gina had not cried at the airport. She had been given an ice-cream on the way back to the house, and immediately after coming home she had started to play with the children in the street. Before going to sleep at night, Gina used to talk longingly about her mother, but her grandmother believed that Gina would soon get completely used to her mother's absence. Dilma had phoned every day from Italy and assured her mother and her daughter that she was doing fine. She was soon going to start working; at night, she went out dancing with her cousins.

The playing down of emotions that characterised Dilma's departure may be understood as a coping strategy. It was obviously heartbreaking for Dilma to leave her little daughter, but everybody seemed to believe that keeping up a hopeful and positive attitude was the best help for both Dilma and Gina, as well as for Dilma's mother, who also had to face the separation from a beloved child. All the people who said goodbye to Dilma during her last week in Cape Verde tried their best to encourage her and hid their own feelings of sadness. In this, they were helped by their familiarity with the situation. Everyone had participated in many similar events and knew the codes of expected behaviour. This meant that, apart from serving as a coping strategy, the (un)emotional *ambience* at Dilma's departure also reflected the normality of separations in Cape Verde. Nobody questioned Dilma's reasons for migrating or criticised her for leaving her daughter. Evidently Dilma, like most mothers, will experience the separation from her child as a burden and emotional

distress. Seen from this angle, the normality of separation in Cape Verde implies the careful balancing of caring obligations and a mother's own needs.

Arranging for Transnational Motherhood

Migrating Cape Verdean mothers see separation from their children as a temporary solution, although everyone is aware that it may last for many years. The commonly expected scenarios were succinctly relayed by Eloisa (17) in São Vicente, who had grown up seeing women in her neighbourhood go abroad for work: 'They leave their children here and they go. When they have stabilised their lives over there, they send for their children. Or, if not, they come back to live here.'

'Leaving the children' generally means taking great care to place them with a suitable foster mother. As in many other societies of emigration, the preferred person is usually the children's maternal grandmother. Alternatively, children could be placed with the migrating mother's sister, or a good female friend. Another common choice is the child's *madrinha*, or godmother (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Godparenthood originally derives from the Catholic baptism in which a godfather and a godmother ritually sponsor a child. The institution has lost much of its religious meaning in Cape Verde, but remains socially significant. The relationship between the child's mother and the godmother is typically one of affection and respect (Åkesson 2004).

The child's father is usually not considered an appropriate caretaker, even if the parents were living together at the time of the mother's departure. If there is no suitable fostering arrangement in the mother's family, a female relative on the father's side, such as the paternal grandmother, could be called upon. Lobo (2006) notes that, in the families of female emigrants on Boa Vista, the father does not generally increase his presence in the household to compensate for the mother's absence. On the contrary, he may feel relieved of obligations towards the household now that the mother has assumed a breadwinning role.

Cape Verdeans of the poorest socio-economic strata often have the greatest difficulty in realising their migration aspirations (Carling 2002). The challenge of arranging fostering can reinforce this pattern, since women with less education tend to have more children (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2008). Placing one, two or three children with foster mothers is feasible for many prospective migrants, but a greater number could be difficult. A third of Cape Verdean women have four or more children by their early 30s, and thus perhaps see the window of opportunity for migration closing.

The Transnational Fostering Triangle

The practice of transnational motherhood easily leads our attention to how the biological mother keeps in touch and performs her mothering at a distance or, alternatively, to how bonds develop between the foster mother and the child.

Understanding transnational child care in Cape Verde, however, requires looking beyond dyadic relationships. Instead, we argue, transnational motherhood must be seen as a triangular arrangement between the two mothers and the child (Figure 1).

The relationship between the biological mother and the foster mother can often be described as one of ‘co-mothering’, in which, ideally, two equal partners collaborate to the benefit of all the people involved. The individuals who make up the triangle typically lived in the same household or neighbourhood before the mother’s departure. Migration, as a transitory and arbitrary process, cannot be planned. Nonetheless, the logics of a transnational fostering triangle are based on the assumption that the three persons involved may all gain from this arrangement (Drotbohm 2012).

The migrating mother is given the opportunity to ‘make her life’ and establish an independent livelihood that she may not have had before. While leaving children behind is an emotional burden, migration may also be a source of pride with regard to ‘good motherhood’. Mothering capacities may be expressed in the sending of remittances and gifts and the making of regular phone calls.

For the foster mother, receiving a child may be an important means for securing her life conditions in Cape Verde. Those women, in particular, who do not intend or are unable to migrate, see the connection to relatives and friends overseas as a powerful form of social capital. Through children, women articulate their emotional and economic ties with one another.

The biological mother is expected to send remittances to the foster mother, primarily to cover the expenses of raising the child. While remittances in other constellations may have a rather sporadic and symbolic character, transnational

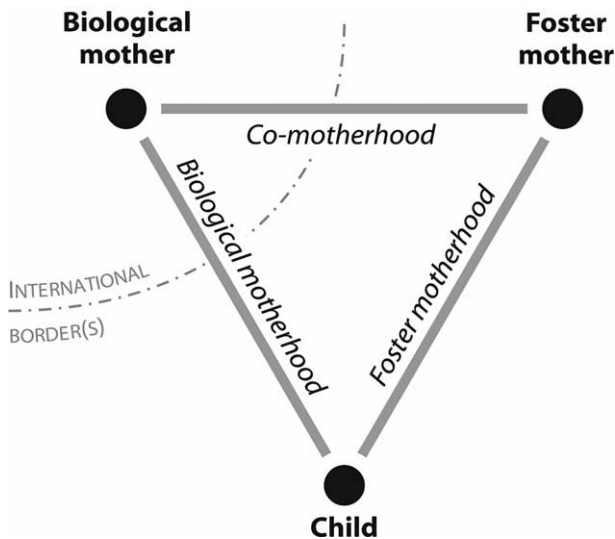


Figure 1. The transnational fostering triangle

fostering entails a strong moral pressure to send the appropriate amount of money on a regular basis. The regular income from abroad usually benefits all the people in the household. The remittances contribute to paying for food, clothes, school equipment, bills for water and electricity, and the physical maintenance of the house. In addition to the money, the biological mother generally sends clothes or other consumer items to her child.

It is difficult to paint a common picture of the situation of children left behind. Their reactions to their mother's absence vary strongly and may, by and large, depend on age, the length of the mother's absence, her economic and emotional support, and the conditions in the foster home. Fostered children do not always complain about their mother's absence, but instead express their appreciation of their mother's effort to sustain their lives in Cape Verde. In order to facilitate the relationship and the contact between the absent mother and her child, some foster mothers talk about the situation. They see it as an important duty to strengthen the bond between the biological mother and the child, since this relationship is sometimes the most fragile one within the foster triangle. Comparing local fostering arrangements with transnational mothering, Drotbohm (2012) identified a difference in how they were perceived. The local mobility of children and the sharing of mothering roles were seen as an ordinary and welcome element of Cape Verdean social life. By contrast, the absence of biological mothers due to international migration was viewed with ambivalence. According to Drotbohm, this ambivalence is closely tied to the contingencies that pose a danger to the maintenance of the mother-child bond.

Contingencies of Transnational Motherhood

The analytic framework of 'contingencies', which we develop ethnographically in this article, emphasises a particular aspect of border-crossing life-worlds. Both the migration process and the gradual establishment of a transnational family life are complex undertakings. Migration is an uncertain and at times risky investment in economic terms, and immigration policies often add considerable insecurity and powerlessness. Social networks are needed for beginning a new life in an unfamiliar environment, where housing, work and social life need to be organised. Furthermore, setting up cross-border family life requires efficient communication, as well as economic and organisational resources. In the case of transnational mothering, these prerequisites are important for guaranteeing the well-being of the children left behind, as well as of all the other persons involved.

Despite people's efforts to plan and manage transnational mothering, real-life situations are complex and uncertain and often lead to unforeseen incidents and obstacles. Hence, our notion of 'contingencies' refers to events that may occur but that are unintended and unexpected. In the following, we will elaborate on particular contingencies. We show that, while separation is seen as normal and not dramatic *per se*, it may involve considerable challenges.

Troubled Triangles

Fostering triangles are vulnerable to unforeseen events that make the foster mother unable to care for the child. Two such contingencies are common. First, the preference for placing children with grandmothers increases the likelihood of the foster mother falling ill or dying. Second, if the foster mother is a younger woman she is also a likely candidate for emigration. The widespread wish to emigrate and the difficulty of making it come true mean that, when an opportunity arises, departures can be sudden and unexpected.

Re-arranging fostering from abroad is a serious challenge for migrant mothers, especially for those who are undocumented and unable to return to Cape Verde. Furthermore, when this need arises, it is typically because the preferred foster mother is no longer available. New arrangements can therefore involve greater concerns about the child's well-being, as illustrated in the following case.

When Lydia, a young woman studying in Lisbon, heard that her elder sister Laura had applied for a visa to visit her boyfriend in Italy, she became worried about the care of her two-year-old daughter whom she had left with Laura. In their frequent dialogues on the phone, Laura tried to downplay the problem and emphasised the personal qualities of Vitalina, an older woman in the neighbourhood who had agreed to take care of the little girl. The fact that Vitalina did not belong to the family particularly disturbed Lydia. Unlike her sister, she did not know Vitalina well and had never seen her caring for a child. Would Vitalina be able to comply with the girl's particular needs and habits? Was it only because of the money that Vitalina was willing to receive the child? And how would it be possible to check that remittances were used for the child?

The ideal fostering situation described earlier is founded on the complementary roles of the biological mother and the foster mother. The biological mother's emigration is made possible by the foster mother's provision of daily care for the child in Cape Verde. This link between the migration of one woman and the non-migration of the other can be a source of tension between the two. The case of *Silvia* exemplifies such a situation. *Silvia* was in her late 20s, and the youngest of four sisters. The other three were all working in Italy, and two of them had left children in *Silvia*'s care. Their remittances ensured that *Silvia* could cover her daily expenses, but she felt that her life was going nowhere. 'They are making their lives in Italy', she said, 'while I am stuck here raising nieces and nephews'. Thus, chain migration worked only to a certain point in *Silvia*'s family. The three elder sisters helped each other to move to Italy, but shared an interest in *Silvia* staying behind.

The Distribution and Dilution of Resources

The mother's remittances will, as mentioned earlier, typically benefit the entire foster household. If the foster mother is the maternal grandmother, she has a moral right to remittances regardless of her role as caretaker of the child. The same can apply if

the child is left in the care of another close relative. In other cases, however, the mother's obligations towards the foster mother are exclusively linked to the fostering arrangement. The use of remittances is then a more sensitive issue. Is the money that was intended for the child being diverted for other purposes? Samira, a young domestic worker in Italy, was troubled by such suspicions. She had left her four-year-old son with a distant relative and had negotiated a monthly remittance of 150 euros. In addition, she regularly sent clothes, shoes and toys. It would have been cheaper to send more money and have the foster mother buy clothes locally, but Samira suspected that 'when the money arrives, they wouldn't be spending it on clothes for him'. She also took care not to send clothes that were too big:

If I send him a T-shirt and it's large for him, he's not the one who gets to wear it, you see. [...] That's the kind of thing that hurts us mothers who are abroad. If he'd been with me, if I bought him a T-shirt and it was large, I would store it in a suitcase until he grew bigger and it would fit. But when he's there with the other kids, it's logical that those bigger kids are going to wear it. [...] When he is old enough to wear it, it will be worn out.

Samira's son was living in a poor household with a single mother and three other children. Samira was well aware of the pressure on the household economy. Her monthly transfer of 150 euros did not change that. Any cash would be channelled to pressing expenses such as rent and electricity; clothes and toys would be shared by all the children. This made it hard to give her son the extra attention that she wanted.

Setting up a good fostering arrangement does not only mean finding a suitable foster mother; the composition of the household also matters. Too many children, in particular, can limit the foster mother's ability to care for the child who is placed in her care. Furthermore, as illustrated by Samira's account, the presence of many other children can dilute the mother's transfers of money, clothes and toys.

When Samira left for Italy, the foster mother was living with a single child of her own. This had been one of the reasons why Samira thought it would be a good household for her son. When she came back on holiday, however, [she] 'found a lot of kids there'. One was the foster mother's own child, who had previously been living on another island; the other two were a niece and a nephew. Samira explained that she wondered whether the other children's mothers were also contributing anything to the household, but felt that she couldn't ask about it. She had considered placing her son with her uncle instead—an unusual choice, since he was living on his own. Her reason for deciding against it was the fear that her remittances would attract additional children to that household as well, as she explains:

His other children will come to live there with him, and maybe he himself will hook up with a woman who has children of her own. [...] She'll move in, and she'll bring her kids along. If it's three or four of them, they'll all have to eat, and if my uncle doesn't work, and she doesn't work [...], the one who is going to feed all of them is me.

Samira's experiences and fears show that the instability of Cape Verdean households is a mixed blessing for migrant mothers. On the one hand, the flexibility of households and the widespread existence of fostering arrangements make it easier and less stigmatising to leave a child behind. On the other hand, the same practices can provide a challenge to mothering from a distance: the household in which the child is left could soon look very different. The inflow of remittances, in particular, could stimulate the transfer of additional children to the household.

Delayed Reunification

The separation of mothers and children is, as mentioned earlier, expected to be temporary. The idea that the separation will 'only' last for a couple of years is often repeated by mothers who grieve over their departure from their children. Mothers who leave should either send for their children when they themselves are established abroad or return to Cape Verde. Women who migrate with the hope of being joined by their children often find that the reunification is delayed long beyond what they expected. There are primarily three reasons for this.

First, the mother might find that she is unable to sustain a family abroad. Many Cape Verdeans who leave their country for the first time have unrealistic images of their life prospects overseas. Already within a couple of weeks they usually realise the high costs of living, especially if they intend to be followed by other family members. Mothers realise that they will have to work full-time or even double shifts to cover basic needs, and that this entails unaffordable costs for day-care. In addition, some migrants struggle with their low social status and feel ashamed of being unable to provide their children with a wealthy lifestyle. This double disillusionment may result in repeated postponements of the family's reunification.

Second, immigration regulations can also prevent mothers from sending for their children. In the USA, especially, many migrants of the first generation never manage to legalise their stay, which renders family reunification impossible (see Menjívar, in this issue). Those who obtain legal residence still have to prove a substantial income or savings in order to be entitled to receive their children. For those who reside legally, however, it is much easier to visit their children in Cape Verde, or return for a longer period of time if they have to rearrange fostering, or simply want to be close to their children.

Third, the children's father might not give the necessary parental authorisation. Cape Verdean legislation is intended to prevent the abduction of children by one parent against the will of the other parent, and requires the consent of both parents for taking minors out of the country. In addition, such authorisation is often required by the destination country in connection with visa procedures. As our analysis of the Cape Verdean kinship system shows, fathers are often absent, not only physically but also socially and emotionally. While modern Cape Verdean family law forces fathers to register their children right after their birth, many never support their children. If the father has also emigrated, and is no longer in touch with the

mother, obtaining his signature can be a tremendous obstacle. It is a cruel irony that the less involved the father has been in his children's lives, and the more bitter the relationship between the parents, the more difficult it will often be to have the father sign the necessary papers.

Stepwise Separation

The various reasons for delayed reunification sometimes mean that the child reaches adulthood in Cape Verde. This can make migration under family-reunification provisions impossible, but simultaneously open up opportunities for the independent migration of the child. In female labour migration to Italy, it has been relatively common for mothers to assist their own daughters to migrate once they have grown up. By then, however, the daughter could have children of her own, who will have to be left behind in Cape Verde. This results in a pattern of stepwise separation. When the daughter migrates and is reunited with her mother, this marks the end of one transnational mother-child separation. Through the same move, however, a new mother-child separation occurs in the next generation.

Parallel Families

The last type of contingency is also closely related to the experiences of delayed reunification: as time passes, the migrant mother might start a new relationship in the destination country, resulting in parallel responsibilities, and maybe in the eventual marginalisation of relations with family members left behind in Cape Verde. When Dulce left her son, Ivan, with Beatrice, her mother, she was still young and expected to return very soon. However, the migration process turned out to be more complicated than Dulce had foreseen; she did not manage to legalise her stay and develop the appropriate conditions for family reunification. In such a situation, many migrants—who need and wish to maintain close contact with children left behind—feel immobilised despite the success of their own cross-border mobility. At this stage, Dulce fell in love with an American-Cape Verdean and moved into his house, expecting that this would eventually alleviate her financial difficulties. Soon after, she became pregnant. In our interview, she commented: 'When I looked into my newborn daughter's little face, she reminded me of her brother. I felt something like a competition between her and little Ivan, still waiting in Cape Verde. Would she ever meet her brother?'. At the time of our interview, Dulce had two additional children. None of the three, US citizens by birth, had put a foot on the Cape Verdean islands, spoke Cape Verdean Kriolu or asked about their brother.

For migrating women, the bond with a partner left behind seldom lasts, and it is very common to start a new relationship abroad (Åkesson 2009). However, most migrating mothers will try to continue to support their child or children in Cape Verde, and do everything to send for them and integrate them into their new household. Despite this, two parallel families often exist, which compete for attention

and moral and financial support, a situation that compels migrating mothers to negotiate their commitment between two spheres of social and emotional belonging. In most cases, such competitive constellations exist only for a short amount of time before the phase of parallel family lives gives way to a phase of creeping alienation and, later, decoupling.

We can see that parallel families are a phenomenon often generated by male behaviour, but not exclusively. Migrating mothers can also experience the unexpected emergence of new emotional attachments, which compel them to negotiate their commitment between two spheres of social and emotional belonging. Nevertheless, the constellations vary considerably in the long run. While migrating fathers, in the course of time, tend to give priority to spouses and children in the diaspora, most migrating mothers will, indeed, try to send for their children and integrate them into their new households. Once more, the Cape Verdean notion of the family prioritises the mother–child bond and highlights the fragility of the relationship between fathers and their children.

Conclusions

Our analysis of Cape Verdean transnational motherhood has shown how women strive to combine mothering responsibilities and international migration. When mothers leave the islands without their children, they depend on other women staying behind. Usually, both the biological mothers and the foster mothers try to comply with expectations regarding appropriate ways of mothering and the roles they are supposed to perform. Four points merit attention by way of conclusion.

First, contingencies are, in a sense, part of the normality of separation. This illustrates the somewhat paradoxical nature of contingencies in Cape Verdean transnational motherhood: it is to be expected that life will take unforeseen turns. Accordingly, although separation is constructed in discourse as normal and as an inevitable part of Cape Verdean life, unintended and unexpected events often lead to great distress for migrating mothers and their children. Contingencies may bring about transnational family conflicts and prolonged or never-ending physical separation between mothers and children. The most troublesome situations may lead to a total decoupling. In the less-problematic cases, contingencies still require a flexible readjustment of a mother's attachment and a rearrangement of collaborating partners. Second, it is important to remember that, although the migration of mothers is not seen as detrimental to the well-being and development of their children, this does not imply that separation is easy, or that all mothers who have a chance to migrate are willing to do so. Some are not able to bear the thought of living separated from their children; others do not want to leave the care of their children in the hands of relatives or friends. It is, however, difficult for a mother to reject a chance to go abroad if she lives in dire economic circumstances and can find a suitable foster mother for her children. Owing to her breadwinning duties, she would run the risk of being considered an irresponsible mother if she

did not take the opportunity to become a reliable provider for her children through migrating.

Third, the contingencies we have discussed show that experiences and strategies of transnational motherhood interplay with a range of contextual elements, including migration regimes, mothering ideologies, patterns of conjugal relationships, household organisation and the gendering of the global labour market. This demonstrates that transnational mothering cannot be understood with reference to one or two specific 'factors', but must be analysed in all its complexities. Although our article does not explore all these contextual elements in depth, it demonstrates that transnational motherhood may well be studied as a 'total social fact' (Mauss 1967) that dynamically informs, and is informed by, seemingly quite distinct ideas, practices and institutions. In this way, our text represents a novel approach that distinguishes it from other studies of fostering and transnational mothering.

Fourth, the Cape Verdean case is interesting in a comparative perspective, as it probably represents an extreme with regard to the social construction of separation as normal and acceptable. The historical grounding of transnational family life in Cape Verde led to a wide repertoire of care arrangements connecting kin between several localities. In addition, the instability of conjugal relationships, the breadwinning role of mothers and the widespread practice of fostering between local households, are important elements for understanding transnational Cape Verdean mothering. While transnational motherhood is an increasingly globalised phenomenon, it is perceived and practised in different ways. Variations in mothering ideologies are consequential for the fostering triangle, for the nature of contingencies, and for how contingencies are handled.

We believe that the concepts 'transnational fostering triangle' and 'contingencies' are useful analytical tools for developing future comparative research on transnational motherhood. With growing numbers of mothers being separated from their children through international migration, new debates about the variety and the changing notions of motherhood in society are needed. We have shown that the challenges and experiences of transnational mothers are fundamentally shaped not only by the social context but also by the process of migration which, for most migrants, remains difficult to predict. Variation between the different migration flows from the global South must therefore be recognised and should be explored empirically.

Note

- [1] Calculated on the basis of unpublished data from *Observatório de Migrações e Emprego* (2002–03). Praia: Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional.

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Practising Motherhood at a Distance: Retention and Loss in Ecuadorian Transnational Families

Paolo Boccagni

This article builds on an ethnographic study of a migration flow linking Ecuador and Italy. Through personal relationships built up during fieldwork, I was able to delve into the changing interactions between migrant mothers and the children they leave behind, looking also at constructions of ‘mothering at a distance’ in both their host and their home societies. For migrant women, practising transnational motherhood entails communicating frequently, sending remittances and showing a deep affective involvement. The attitudes and practices of migrant mothers suggest an ambivalent commitment: an attempt to exert control from afar over their children’s daily lives, alongside a perception that any such attempt may prove inadequate; a struggle to work and save hard, alongside fears that the money sent home may be spent improperly; and a framing of migration as a necessary self-sacrifice, together with concerns about losing their grip on their children’s upbringing. The article also looks at the role of some key variables—for example, the role of other family members in care arrangements; the influence of temporal and spatial distances on the evolution of intimate relationships; and the prospects for family reunion—in accounting for the impact of transnational caregiving practices. A final question arises. To what extent and in what realms—that is, in relation to the affective domain, the realm of communication or the area of material reproduction—can a transnational caregiving relationship be mutually interchangeable with a proximity-based one?

Keywords: International Migration; Ecuador; Transnational Motherhood; Transnational Caregiving; Ethnography

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Introduction

My children's love matters much more than money, to me . . . I love them, but I'm forced to stay here. Because you need money to help them. But if you are alone . . . who are you fighting for? (M., aged 25, in Italy for 5 years).

In the past I was making good money, and my child was far away. Now I'm back here with my child, with no money. That's my contradiction (C., 24, return migrant interviewed in El Guabo, Ecuador).

Let's pray for all our brothers overseas . . . so that they don't put money before their children any more, but rather they should stay with them all the time! (Mass sermon of the Bishop of Loja, people's pilgrimage to El Cisne Sanctuary, Ecuador).

Drawing on an empirical case study—from which these three quotes are taken—this article examines migrant parenting from a distance as a gendered transnational process. From a bottom-up, actor-centred perspective (see, for example, Levitt 2001; Smith 2006), it explores the development and negotiation of transnational motherhood in a recent and long-distance immigrant flow, that of Ecuadorian migration to Italy. This has proved to be a significant case for testing the resilience of intimacy at a distance in relation to intergenerational relationships.

The way in which I proceed through the article, from theory to fieldwork and back to sociological reflection, is marked by three key stages:

- a review of the key ideas on migrant transnational family life, paving the way for an exploration of the practices of 'distance filling' between 'here' and 'there' (in relation to the material, cognitive and emotional domains);
- a qualitative exploration of emigrant mothers' motivations and expectations, and their ways of communicating at a distance with children left at home;
- a parallel analysis of typical representations of female emigration, and of how it allegedly undermines family structures in the context of origin.

My ethnographic study, which lasted for one and a half years from January 2006 to July 2007, was conducted in an area of immigrant settlement in Northern Italy (Trento Province) and within a source community in Ecuador (Pasaje, El Oro Province). By taking part in the informal social events and networks of some 200 Ecuadorian immigrants—the majority of them women, half of them with at least one child left behind—I was able to explore the social relationships that they maintained from a distance with their homes and families. While my theoretical concern was with all forms of cross-border tie, transnational connections in the private sphere proved far more significant than those in the public sphere (Boccagni 2010). Family life at a distance, along with the transnational caregiving practices that fuel it, emerged as the only life domain where the contentions of the transnational perspective (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007) do hold true—where, for some time at least, patterns of systematic interaction between migrants and their homelands can be

empirically detected. For this reason, my research has focused on cross-border intergenerational relationships.

These remarks apply, at least, within the boundaries of my case study. Despite its potential ethnographic relevance to other migration flows (Fitzgerald 2006), the notion of transnational mothering discussed here refers only to the Ecuadorian women I personally met and observed, on many occasions, in their everyday interactions *in situ* and at a distance.

My fieldwork involved systematically listening to the accounts of migrants and their family members (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004), interviewing some 50 of them, and observing their relationships of ‘proximity at a distance’, as a possible development of the ‘multi-sited’ agenda of Marcus (1995). This enabled me to ground my analysis on terrain somewhat sounder than any abstract debate on the nexus between migration and family disruption. Within Ecuadorian society, the weakness and frailty of household structures by and large pre-date emigration, whatever the rhetorical relevance of ‘the family’ as a single unit in the public discourse. At the same time, the recent wave of emigration has further undermined pre-existing family arrangements—with respect both to conjugal and to intergenerational relationships.

‘Migration destroyed my family’, R. told me with a sigh on one of the first times that I met her in Trento. Her decision to leave for Italy was seemingly made in agreement with her husband. He had followed soon after but, supposedly disliking Italy, then moved to Spain, where he started a new family of his own. After five years in Italy alone, R. has finally succeeded in being reunited with her adolescent child (maintained by the remittances she sent back, and looked after by his elder sister in the meantime). As far as I know, her experience might still be regarded as a successful one, compared to those of so many others. It is highly possible that many people I met would echo R.’s words if they were to look back at their own migration stories.

On Transnational Family Life in a Long-Distance Migration Flow

Families are not necessarily defined by the sharing of the same proximate space. In other words, families do not equate to households (Finch 2007). While this remark, seemingly obvious, may be relevant for any family history, it is even more so when it comes to the impact of migration on family structures. In the wake of its academic success story in the 1990s, the construct of transnationalism has been increasingly applied to the realm of intimate relationships at a distance—as these potentially persist between members of the same household physically divided by migration (see, for example, Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Goulbourne *et al.* 2010). Here, I will focus in particular on interactions between migrant parents and the children they leave behind,¹ examining the subjective expectations that inform such interactions, the practices of ‘distance bridging’ (both in emotional and in material terms) on which they build, and the dilemmas faced by the various parties.

Rather than the structural features of the families involved,² I explore families' attempts to build a transnational family space, one based on sharing at a distance the family members' past lives spent together, as well as communal hopes and expectations for the future (Yeoh *et al.* 2005). Emphasis will be put on the everyday practices that fuel and reflect—both 'here' and 'there'—reciprocal commitments and obligations (Carling 2008). In this perspective, transnational family life refers to the cross-border evolution of informal social interactions between migrants and non-migrant significant others—insofar as such interactions allow for family social and emotional reproduction (Olwig 2003; Smith 2006; Sørensen 2005).

While separation from loved ones is often constructed as a short-term, provisional adaptation at the beginning of a migration history, this is not necessarily how things turn out (nor, arguably, has it ever been). Rarely, however, is a transnational family perceived—judging from my case study—as a new family identity in its own right. The state it represents is instead understood as a transitional condition, a necessary step on the way to a return to 'ordinary' relationships of co-presence. Transnational family life, in other words, stands as a condition that one (and one's family) is forced to go through, despite the sufferings and blame it often induces. It is a marker of migrants' commitment, flexibility and spirit of adaptation, but surely not—in their own perceptions—a desirable condition, nor a goal in itself.

Rather than applying to a uniform social phenomenon, the transnational family approach sheds light on a diverse range of migration-related changes in household structures that have no predetermined outcome (Landolt and Wei Da 2005). Apart from family reunions and definitive break-ups, many intermediate arrangements do emerge in practice—contingent on variables such as the distance from the motherland, the success of 'integration' overseas, the perceived effects of separation and the viability of reunification. Different kinds of kinship tie also need to be taken into account. While any family bond may retain long-term significance, it is in intergenerational ties, as I will show, that migrant transnationalism is stronger, whether in terms of affective involvement or in relation to material outputs (remittances and other transnational social practices).

It is in these very ties that the paradox of transnationalism is at its most extreme: relationships at a distance may turn out to be far more significant than any relationships based on co-presence in migrants' everyday lives overseas. Whether, and to what extent, these relationships at a distance are able to reproduce the 'ordinary' proximity relationships of their earlier lives as parents is the key issue that runs throughout this article.

'Your Body is Here, Your Heart is There'

This section examines the viewpoints and life experiences of emigrant mothers, drawing on their personal accounts³ and my own ethnographic observations. I explore their motivations and their expectations with respect to the children still in Ecuador; the changes that have occurred in their roles and status, as well as in their

self-representations, as a result of migration; and their channels of (and scope for) communication and involvement in the daily lives of those left behind.

The typical case for transnational parenthood, as far as Ecuadorian migration is concerned (CEPLAES 2005), is that of women who leave on their own, though generally in the framework of a family-oriented process that is expected to result 'soon' in family reunification, whether 'here' or 'there'. While the children left behind are mostly left in the charge of extended family networks (primarily being looked after by their grandmothers), the role of male partners—if any—seems more varied and less predictable (Camacho and Hernández 2008; Herrera and Carrillo 2009).⁴

In Ecuadorian society, as a result of the massive 'new emigration' that began in the late 1990s (Gratton 2007; Ramírez and Ramírez 2005), the practice of leaving infant children behind is quite widespread.⁵ Though often criticised or even stigmatised (Pedone 2006; Soruco *et al.* 2008; see also Parreñas 2005), this practice seems to have gained some unwritten, bottom-up legitimation.

In transnational mothers' accounts, leaving children behind is mostly understood in terms of self-sacrifice and responsibility towards the children, as a matter of necessity and/or as a unique opportunity to be seized *para salir adelante*—that is, to provide the children with better future life chances, whatever that might mean in practice. For sure, emigration is also spurred by a myriad of concurrent factors—failed marriages or histories of conjugal violence being not the least of them (Herrera *et al.* 2005).

In emigrant mothers' words, which emphasise children's livelihood as the essential mission, the significant material gains that should accrue from emigration may soften the perceived relevance of their affective loss. This is true, for instance, in the case of M., who has two children in Ecuador, one of whom was born in Italy but was sent ('provisionally') back home, to be cared for by M.'s parents:

You feel stronger as you say 'Well, I'm working for them' [the children left behind] ... that's all! 'Stronger', I mean that ... you think 'Who am I here for?' I think 'If I am alone, what's the point of staying here? Why do I stay here, making sacrifices, staying alone ... why?' It doesn't make sense. [...] I love my children, but I'm forced to stay here. Because you need money to help them. But if you are alone ... who are you fighting for? (M., aged 25, in Italy for five years).

Unless hopes for an impending reunification can be sustained, however, the condition of mothering from afar struggles—in women's own accounts—to justify itself. Regardless of their grounds for leaving, their efforts to keep in touch and even the self-sacrifices they may be making, transnational mothers would rarely deny that they have missed a great deal: in the realm of affection, in their ability to bring up their children, in their very role as mothers. The latter role may turn into that of a 'female breadwinner' which, while emphasising the mothers' responsibilities in terms of livelihood, leaves the children's caregivers at the centre stage of affections (see Dreby 2007). However, neither their self-abnegation nor their very real ways of

doing motherhood from afar eliminate—in the eyes both of those left behind and of most mothers—the perception that they *are* not-so-good mothers. Some interview quotations, from the accounts of both migrants and former migrants, provide relevant illustrations:

I've lost so many major things of my life ... for instance my family, which now ... exists no more. My husband, for instance. My children, who are growing up without me, which is still worse ... I'm even losing my hope to see them growing up ... [...] The only thing I will really bemoan, till my last days, is ... for my children. For not being with them, right now (R., aged 45, in Italy for five years).

Most [migrant mothers]—well, they don't really 'forget': they trust those who stay here with their children ... I know only this, they get used to staying without them. They forget that *they* are the mothers ... [...] They think all is settled with the money they send back. And this is not ... (Y., aged 41, former migrant, interviewed in Machala, Ecuador).

Maybe you can reproach yourself ... I mean: I went away, I didn't see my children growing up ... I've completely lost their childhood years. But at the same time you're satisfied, as your children ... never behave badly ... I tell them 'If you behave well, if you keep on studying, if you don't give it up—I will be always proud of you'. And I think they, while studying, have a good example of a mother who, from afar, can give them what maybe she couldn't have given them at close range. [...] My children have been growing up in the country, with my parents—for them, my parents are their own parents ... (N., aged 27, in Italy for four years).

Transnational mothers' accounts often mirror a struggle to turn their feelings of *double belonging*—'my heart is always there', 'we live with the body on the one side and the soul on the other'—into some form of actual *double living*. However, relevant events in children's lives at home illustrate how difficult this is, regardless of the commitment of emigrant mothers—for instance, in the case of birthdays, first communions and other religious festivals. Celebrating such events far away from the children concerned makes especially poor sense, and is perceived as one of the most painful aspects of transnational motherhood.

When it hurts you more it's on Mother's Day, on Father's Day ... it hurts more, so you call them up ... sometimes you even cry your eyes out, as you can't be there with them at Christmas, at New Year's Eve ... it's the days more ... the worse, the harder ones (Y., aged 27, in Italy for four years).

In a far-reaching migration system such as that linking Ecuador and Europe, 'being present'—as one transnationalism-oriented article puts it—'is tied not to face-to-face interactions between loved ones, but rather to remittances and other kinds of resource contribution' (Landolt and Wei Da 2005: 647). However, whether this form of presence may offset the loss of face-to-face interaction in every respect but the strictly economic is contentious, to say the least.

Despite these inherent limitations, nearly all of the transnational mothers I met made systematic attempts to retain strong ties with their children left behind: by sending remittances, communicating at a distance, and—to a lesser extent, given the costs involved—sending presents, letters or pictures (mostly through co-nationals' holiday trips), and visiting them back home (see Tymczuk and Leifsen, in this issue).⁶ While calling home once a week or so is common for most Ecuadorian immigrants I met, for transnational mothers the standard is usually more frequent—charged, or perhaps overloaded, with greater expectations. For a parent communicating with children from afar, phoning can be a unique opportunity to recover some feeling of deeper connectedness with them through voice contact. It hence provides a peculiar, if ephemeral, personal space in which migrants can enter into the everyday lives of those who stayed behind.

It's easier now, it's so easy that you keep in touch all the time ... phoning is the more convenient way—by Internet, those who came here could even afford that, but down there [in Ecuador] it's more difficult, Internet is not that advanced in our country. I mean, it's a bit expensive [...] so one calls up even twice a day, or three–four days a week. That is, it depends on your needs ... I call them every time I feel the need to get in touch with my family, or when something is pending ... to remind them what they must do, for them not to forget ... so, in fact you keep in touch all the time ... [...] maybe it's just a weakness of mine ... but I need just to call them up a minute or two, and then I'm at peace! (R., aged 44, in Italy for four years).

At the same time, while communicating at a distance, a transnational mother may realise that she is no longer able to exert the same level of control on those left behind as she could previously. This becomes clear, for example, in relation to the use of remittances. No matter how hard a migrant mother may try, only those who take care of the children *in situ* can really impose their will on them (despite often lacking the authority or legitimation to do so). Once again, it seems difficult to replace actual physical co-presence. On closer examination, even frequent communication by phone reveals its shortcomings.

The constant postponement of co-presence is hard to heal, even more so in the realm of primary care relationships. Although 'communicating always by phone'—as M. remarks, drawing from her own experience—may recreate some feelings of proximity for adults, this is not true to the same extent for the children left behind:

No. They don't accept you. They want you to be there. Phoning is not enough for them. My elder [daughter] can already understand you a bit, she knows why one stays here ... the younger [son] instead, no—he wants to share all with you, the simple things of every day ... no way (M., aged 25, in Italy for five years).

In addition, relying only on transnational communication inevitably leaves space for significant ambivalences (Baldassar 2007; Svašek 2008). Most mothers, in

communicating with their children and families back home, purposefully tend to skip any in-depth references to their own life conditions.

L (aged 26, in Italy for four years): [When calling up family in Ecuador], I generally ask about school, how do my children do at school? What about their health? How are they—do they feel fine? That's—that's what we speak of.

P: Do they also ask about how you feel here?

L: Yeah, they ask me how I'm doing. I always tell them 'Fine'. This way I avoid . . . this way they don't worry. I tell them, 'Yeah, I'm working, I'm OK'.

P: And—is that really the case?

L: In my spirits, I don't think so but, in my health, yeah.

As far as I have seen, this type of attitude reflects an attempt to preserve the delicate emotional balances underlying communication at a distance—rather than to convey an idealised picture of one's life conditions overseas. Whatever the case, communication between migrants and non-migrants—though instantaneous and easily accessible—results in a highly fragmented information flow. The same applies to the incessant flow of gossip and rumours, spanning Italy and Ecuador, which pervades compatriots' informal sociability in the immigration setting (Boccagni 2009).

Ironically, family members left behind in Ecuador seem quite aware of the 'emotional filters' developed by their relatives overseas, and indeed tend to replicate them.⁷ Only visits back home, as expensive and difficult as they may be, permit improved communication between both sides, without the ambivalent interface of physical distance (see, however, the critical account provided by Mason 2004).

However 'close' one may feel, and despite remittances, physical distance is still an objective constraint—much more so as it cannot be bridged by frequent, circular migration. Feelings of inability to overcome distance are felt the most strongly in relation to critical events such as serious illnesses, or even the death of a family member at home.

It is as though transnational relationships between migrants and non-migrants—particularly where children are concerned—were systematically exposed to the risk of some negative event taking place, here or there, without the others being able to physically participate in it. It is right here that a transnational social relationship unfolds both its utmost import, in affective terms, and its utmost inadequacy, or even its impotence, compared with a co-presence relationship (Urry 2002). In fact, the maintenance and growth of cross-border social relationships, however intimate they may be, is still critically contingent on the real distance between 'here' and 'there'—both spatial and temporal—as well as on the possibilities for bridging that distance. The typically transnational emphasis on (the potential for) 'simultaneity' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), and on the unprecedented relevance of social action at a distance (following Giddens 1990), does not do justice to this basic point.

Whatever may happen there, we do suffer here . . . we feel powerless, as we can't help . . . my son, for instance, when he was there [as an irregular migrant, before being repatriated], he once had a bike accident, and I was desperate here. I didn't

know what I could do . . . you feel impotent because you can't stay there with your family, with your child . . . no way. You suffer, that's all. All of us with some relatives there, we suffer the same (H., aged 44, mother of a former immigrant, interviewed in Pasaje, Ecuador).

For most Ecuadorian families divided by emigration, transnational ties are basically a tool for coping with an extended physical separation. Such separation is likely to affect their personal relationships both in terms of 'emotional depth' and in relation to the potential for cultivation of trust and reciprocal control, which are inherent in any proximate relationship. Family life at a distance is a matter of endurance, or of durable affections, along with the social practices that emanate from these factors. It is more likely to 'work', and to make sense for those involved, the sooner a family reunion occurs.

Transnational family life, in other words, is expected to be a transient condition, hopefully foreshadowing a return to 'natural' co-residential family arrangements (Skrbiš 2008). It is a constraint one is bound to live with, while attempting to fill the distance gap with constant emotional involvement. In the medium term, however, such involvement may prove difficult to sustain, especially in the elective realm of couple relationships. 'If you leave', as a couple of former emigrants (and former transnational parents) put it,

. . . you must keep with the idea that you will return soon—otherwise, to me, it just doesn't make sense—you leave, work so hard, and then stay there?! (G. and M., interviewed in Machala).

'Money is No Recompense for Not Seeing their Mothers'

In conversations about migration with anyone in Pasaje, and possibly in most Ecuadorian towns, the children who have been left behind are an inescapable topic—whether discussed in a painful or in a reproving tone, as in the quote in the heading above.⁸ In Ecuadorian public discourse, the severe reduction in primary care resources that affects children, following separation from their parents (increasingly, from their mothers), is framed as the negative consequence of migration *par excellence* (Hall 2008; Herrera 2010). Indeed, the condition of those left behind sums up both the positive and the negative consequences of migration, though the former can hardly be said to compensate for the latter.

Limited understanding, or even stigmatisation, are the more common reactions to the issue—despite the attempts of the current Ecuadorian government to 'destigmatise' the national discourse on migration (Boccagni 2011). Still, my ethnographic analysis, interlocking the levels of social representation and practice, shows that approaching emigration in terms of a supposed 'children abandonment' is a gross oversimplification. While mothers' emigration is especially criticised—even as a silent undermining of a longstanding gender-role heritage (Herrera and Carrillo 2009)—migrant mothers' efforts to provide transnational care at a distance are disparaged as

merely involving 'sending money'. Barely grasped at all, though very significant for those involved, are the micro-level interactions that do develop between emigrant mothers and the children they leave behind in Ecuador, complementing the circulation of remittances.

Nevertheless, regardless of what mothers may wish for and expect, reunification with their children can by no means be taken for granted in the short term. In the meantime, it is mostly grandparents who are expected to stand in for the parents, supported by remittances and—to a variable but crucial degree—by the attentions and recommendations of those abroad. Judging from the accounts I obtained in Ecuador, grandparents themselves frame their role as an insufficient and hopefully provisional one. In their narratives, a woman's decision to leave is generally understood as a necessary sacrifice, carried out to provide the children with 'a better future'. Whatever the framing, however, it seems very difficult to justify the option to the children involved. Attempts by grandparents—and even more so, by emigrant parents themselves—to justify migration on the grounds of the need to work hard to get a new or a better house, or just to make more money, seem useless, or even downright pathetic. This is seen, for instance, in the account provided by Y., aged 27, an emigrant mother in Italy with a ten-year-old child who has been left behind for four years:

The only one who told me I should not have left was my child . . . before leaving, sure, I was telling him I was going to do this. And he put it: 'Well, mum, but—why?' And I replied: 'To work hard!' And he said: 'Yeah mum, but you're already working here!' . . . 'My child, that way I'll earn more . . .' 'But you're already earning well here!' . . . 'Well', I replied, 'I want to build a new house: a very, very, very big one!' 'OK', he told me, 'a two-storey house, isn't that?' OK. That was some . . . a week before I left. Right the day before, however, my child tells me: 'Mum . . . I don't want you to leave!' 'Well . . . why not?' And he said: 'I just don't want . . .' 'Yeah, but I'm going there to work!' 'No, I don't want that big big house now! I don't want that; I want you to stay'. [Almost breaking down] I mean, it's painful. He told me that I shouldn't have come. Even later, we've tried to explain it to him, but it keeps always that way: 'Mum, when are you coming back? Mum, I just want to stay with you' [crying]. Yeah, even now: 'Come on, mum, come back! It's been already four years . . .'

At the same time, as grandparents reflect on similar cases in their own neighbourhoods, criticism abounds for those mothers who 'grab the chance' to escape their responsibilities towards their children—supposedly contenting themselves with sending remittances, or even living the 'high life' abroad, with a lifestyle unattainable in Ecuador.

In other words, the decision of a mother to leave her children behind raises significant ambivalence: it may be understood as necessary in the case of a migrant's own daughter, while others are often blamed for acting in a similar fashion. This goes hand-in-hand with an even more painful contradiction: that between the affection grandparents strive to convey to their grandchildren and their awareness that they are playing a surrogate role, one that is unlikely to equate to the maternal one, or to be

perceived by the children as such. This is what emerges, for instance, in the account of Mrs T., whose daughter has been in Italy for seven years, while she is caring for two grandchildren:

In my case—well, I adopted them with love, as they were my daughter's children, and I know she didn't really want to leave, but there was no way to get a job here. I have treated them so tenderly, they have got good habits with me, but—the kid, my daughter will take him to Italy at last. It's that—as I tell you, a grandma is not like a mum and, compared to a motherly love—it may be a similar one, but a child knows it is not. And as he is missing his mother, he gets melancholic, so I'm glad—and sad also, but even more glad—that he goes back to his mother. Her little daughter, instead, she has been living with me since she was four months old—so she always says 'my mother', but she calls me that way too! Yeah, I think the kids are missing their mother's love, yeah . . . The elder one, sometimes I see him so melancholic—he must be thinking, for sure: 'Why did mum stay there?' (T., interviewed in Pasaje).

The same vision seems to be more or less shared by former transnational parents, judging by stories told by returnees such as G. and M., who lived for three years in Italy as undocumented migrants while their three children stayed with their grandparents. The substitute role of the grandparents is retrospectively understood as radically insufficient, both in terms of affection and in terms of upbringing. The same applies to their own efforts to communicate with their children while overseas. While framing their migration as 'worthy' and 'earnest'—as a matter of hard work, of savings, and even of conjugal stability—G. and M. recall physical detachment from their children as a painful and regrettable experience. In M.'s story, homecoming and the recovery of a traditional way of 'doing motherhood'—one she constructs as *the proper way of being a mother*—marks a biographical watershed permeated with an emotionally, even morally, positive tone:

M [wife]: It's difficult, the kids change—when we left, they were much more attached, although [M.'s mother-in-law] is a very fair person, she is Catholic indeed. However my daughters did anything they liked with her, they got rude. When we came back, they just told us 'No' all the time—I mean, they had got used to doing everything as they liked, and we always had to forbid them—and they told us: 'What on earth did you come back for?'—'No, I am your mother! I am your father!' So we—kind of started again.

G [husband]: The difference between those with their parents out there and the rest, it's a very clear one . . .

M: Yeah, a huge difference—in their upbringing, at school, in the ways they talk, get dressed and all of that—when we left, my elder daughter had excellent marks; when we came back she had rather lower ones, as by then . . .

G: Staying with their grandmother was not the same, it wasn't. Not for granny being bad—it's that . . .

M: It is I who am their mother! We never used to send money right to them, but to their granny, she knows what she does. There are those who just keep sending right to children, for them to spend everything. We didn't . . .

G: That's another of the reasons why we came back, you know what I mean?

Because here you do control them . . . It's not that they are crazy, but it's safer, for keeping them out of trouble.

M: There are those who stay in Italy, or anywhere else, while their children are alone and don't even go to school, or go dancing all the time . . .

G: Life makes no sense to them—that's it, unfortunately.

M: Parents keep living there and children are being filled with rancour—they say: 'Dad has gone, he left me here' (G. and M., 37 and 35, former migrants, interviewed in Machala).

Within Ecuadorian society, the issue of school attendance is the main arena where the expectations of emigrant parents meet (and sometimes clash with) children's trajectories of personal development (Gaitán 2010). On the one hand, parental emigration often allows children to gain access to private (i.e. better) schools. On the other, emigrant children's attainment (and even active involvement) at school is mostly regarded as a difficult process—by and large more critical, let alone stigmatised, than for 'ordinary' kids (Pedone 2006). The condition of being left behind arguably calls for a 'surplus' of educational support that no relevant stakeholder can actually provide: not local authorities, nor schools in Ecuador (Herrera 2010), nor even emigrant parents themselves—despite any efforts they might make in that regard. The following extracts from my field notes in Pasaje illustrate this well.

H. has fixed an appointment for me with his uncle, *Presidente de los rectores* of secondary schools in Pasaje. By the way, he has three daughters in Spain. He starts the conversation as anybody else, here, would do: more and more people are leaving 'in search of better days', for themselves and especially for their children's future (but—here or there?—I wonder. So do they, after all). The money they send back, provided they do, does not by any means satisfy all their needs . . . a monologue starts then, concerning 'the deterioration of our family structures' (though—I cannot but think—were they so healthy beforehand?). Most 'parentless children'—that's what he calls them—being reportedly in the charge of neighbours, relatives or 'at best' grandparents, 'make poor progress at school' (is this—I keep asking myself—fact, or stigma, or self-fulfilling prophecy?).

As he contends, 'They look for fun and distraction anywhere . . . they may even get lost, negligent as they are in studying . . .' Were they punished', he insists, 'it would be even worse. The worst of all', however, is 'when parents send money right to the little kids . . .'—having then, as he puts it, 'no more control on anything they do'.

In the face of this huge problem, schools just seem to be lagging behind. What about the role of emigrant parents? 'You know, some of them even call us up, to get information on their children!'. Most, however, apparently don't: They think: 'Well, I'm already sending money . . . that's all'. As for the kids, 'It is as if they were living off dreams, with no feet on the ground—insofar as they get money, no need for working!'.

His conclusion is, possibly, even worse: 'The only way to motivate them is by promising reunification . . . the only [solution] is if the whole family migrates'. The latter option is thus perceived—arguably with no cognisance of its potential

troubles in turn—as the only way to ‘save a family’. Apart from that, effective caregiving for children at a distance (as many articles would call it) seems to be more the case in Utopia than in Pasaje (or anywhere else in Ecuador).

It seems that, no matter how reasonable and legitimate the grounds for a mother’s emigration may be—a point that is not at issue here—the condition of transnational childhood struggles to make sense in its own right, at least within a long-distance migration flow. While mothers’ physical absence is a fact, the only prospect that may obviate it is arguably that of reunification. Such reunification, initially expected to be ‘impending’ (or so most migrants say), may in fact be achieved, if at all, only in the medium or long term.

Nowadays, practising motherhood from afar can build on manifold channels of communication. This does enable a pervasive cross-border circulation of monetary, cognitive, affective and emotional—and to a lesser extent, material—resources. Still, there is a need for deeper reflection regarding the viability and the medium-term implications of transnational caregiving.

Conclusion: From Care Monetisation to Transnational Caregiving?

Among the many challenges inherent in transnational parenting, one risk is especially worth underlining—one that is emphasised in the ‘left behind’ stereotype and that even creeps into the self-accounts of emigrant mothers. This is the risk that a transnational relationship may turn into a relationship of merely ‘money transfer’, as physical distancing paves the way for growing emotional detachment, or for thinner and thinner communication, between generations. Though this is not necessarily the case, as cross-border care practices potentially involve much more than monetisation, another point is at issue here. What is, under the circumstances of a long-distance migration flow, the ultimate reach and impact of transnational caregiving?

In principle, the scope for circulating remittances and information between ‘here’ and ‘there’ is now huge. Were it a matter of mere ‘information exchange’, a cross-border relationship between individuals who know each other could easily endure for a long time despite being de-linked from any basis of proximity. The situation is much more dubious, however, when it comes to the emotional and affective side of a transnational relationship—to say nothing of one based on primary care.

Judging from the personal accounts I have collected, an intimate relationship at a distance between mothers and children is still perceived as inherently significant, imbued as it may be with moral and affective dedication. Still, such relationships seem to be pervaded by a sense of insufficiency—that is, a constant need for communal references, meanings and confirmations, which can barely be satisfied through oral communication alone. Not even prolonged contact at a distance can make up for the lack of intimacy provided by sharing gazes or actual bodily contact within a space of physical proximity (Svašek 2008; Urry 2002). Hence, for instance,

the crucial relevance of visits back home which are obviously, in a long-distance migration case, rare and expensive.

How can an Ecuadorian migrant mother actually take part in the daily life of the children she has left behind, other than by sending remittances and getting in touch with them often? I am afraid that most of the transnational mothers I met would simply reply 'In no way'. The stronger one's feeling of proximity for those left behind, the more blatant—in critical moments at least—the unpleasant perception that their commitment in working hard abroad is possibly a necessary condition, but by no means a sufficient one for ensuring a better future for their kids—let alone for getting deeply involved in their everyday choices. So many intervening variables lie outside the reach of emigrant parents, not the least of them being the dedication of those taking care of their children. That caregivers are of their own kin is a prerequisite for trust, more than a guarantee for success, as to the endurance of intergenerational affections across distance.

What, however, do mothers' future expectations amount to? Judging from my fieldwork, their search for 'better days' for their children is generally oriented towards family reunification in the receiving society. In the meantime, mothers' remittances and transnational caregiving, while fuelling expectations for further emigration, do allow for better education and health care at home (Hall 2008). Still, if any opportunities for intergenerational social mobility do exist, these are arguably contingent on the thorough development of a family migration chain. Such mobility is highly unlikely to materialise in a country of origin such as Ecuador, even were parents to return and invest their savings there (Boccagni 2011).

Returning to the literature, a final remark might now be made. As far as long-distance migration is concerned, the idea that a migrant mother *is* 'here, but also there' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 1997)—the possibility that she might be able to exert a significant influence on her children's everyday life beyond cultivating a *feeling* of closeness—should not be taken for granted. In empirical terms, the 'double presence' hypothesis—living *as though* one stayed *there*, while in fact staying *here* (Boccagni 2009; Carling *et al.*, this issue)—holds true in the realm of the circulation of material and even information resources. In the emotional realm, however, lengthy physical distance often makes for fraught intergenerational relationships, which face challenges that are difficult to address through long-distance communication only. The formula 'I'm here, but I'm there' aptly describes a typical transnational mother's spirit, more than her real scope for action, as far as children left behind are concerned. Transnational caregiving may be durable, and most of the time it does endure. Nonetheless, the consequences of a long-term distancing can by no means be neglected—be these in relation to directing the upbringing of one's children, exerting control on their growth, or sharing a common life vision and future expectations with them. In all of these regards, the difference from a relationship of co-presence is remarkable, at least in terms of potentialities.

Transnational family life studies have rightly emphasised the endeavours which migrant parents make, despite their unfavourable life conditions, to lessen the

downsides of distancing for their loved ones—particularly when the latter are their own children. Hence a relationship that by far exceeds money remittances, in the light of the intimate ties it may be fuelling. Still, this perspective risks shifting into an ideological stance if the spatial and temporal structural limitations of proximity at a distance—well-known to migrants themselves—are not also taken into account.

Notes

- [1] No less significant (and even more troublesome), however, are transnational relationships between partners (see, on the Ecuadorian case, Banfi and Boccagni 2011; Pribilsky 2004).
- [2] An inherent ambivalence of the transnational family discourse lies, of course, in the shifting meanings and boundaries of the notion of family (Therborn 2004). Within my fieldwork on Ecuadorians, however, I have systematically found well-marked differences, in terms of affections or at least moral obligations, between family members proper—parents and children, partners (if any) and, to a lesser degree, brothers or sisters—and relatives. Only the former are generally regarded as legitimate recipients of remittances. The former—with an unwritten internal hierarchy (children first, then partners, then the rest)—are also far more eligible as potential members of future chain migration.
- [3] The quote in the heading is from my interview with R. (44 years old, in Italy for four years), a mother with two children left behind in Ecuador.
- [4] However, for a case study on transnational fatherhood in the Ecuador–US migration system, see the contribution by Pribilsky in this issue.
- [5] According to a 2005 national survey in Ecuador (FLACSO 2008), more than one-third of all adult emigrants—with little difference between the genders—still has one or more minor-age child in the country of origin. In other words, transnational parenthood is not necessarily a temporary or a short-term phenomenon.
- [6] The informal (though generally paid for) circulation of these affection-laden objects to family members back home, when a *compaisano* returns to Pasaje, is a valuable resource for exchanging information, as well as in terms of the emotions it arouses. I, myself, when travelling, took advantage of this opportunity (at no charge) in order to strengthen my ties with emigrants' family members in Ecuador.
- [7] During my fieldwork in Ecuador, I found evidence of greater awareness about the life conditions of immigrants in Italy than I had expected. A quotation from my fieldwork notes (Pasaje, 22 November 2006) may be helpful here. It is taken from my visit to D., a former immigrant, whose children, still in Italy, I had often talked with. 'Here we are at Mrs D.'s . . . In the dining room, along with the usual paintings of their ancestors hanging on the walls, I cast my eye on a small photo—right above the TV set. It shows a girl, in Italy, outside a supermarket. Mrs D. went to Italy as an undocumented migrant and then came back. In her wake, a number of children, brothers and nephews left too. She says she would return now, but 'only together with all my children'. Only later, while asking her for some more photos, do I realise that one of her children still in Italy, in his 20s, is S. (still irregular): one of those guys who seem to drink, play football and listen to (loud) music all the time. He has not called home 'for five months', but she looks resigned, rather than worried. 'He always drinks a lot, doesn't he?'. I attempt a vague answer, but I feel impressed by her perceptive account of S.'s situation—even though she has been living far from him for years, and in spite of—I guess—their poor communication. No room for migration myths, here. 'They're messing around, that's all', she sighs at last.

- [8] Quoted as the supposed statement of a teacher during my interview with the mother of M., who has been caring for her grandchildren since M. left, seven years previously (Pasaje, 15 November 2006).

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Images of Transnational Motherhood: The Role of Photographs in Measuring Time and Maintaining Connections between Ukraine and Italy

Olena Fedyuk

Photographs occupy a special place among the tokens of love and care that glue together transnational families: they fill in the absences, compensate for the lack of intimacy and serve as a reminder of the ‘other life’ that was disrupted by migration. Through examining the photos that circulate between Ukrainian migrant mothers in Italy and their families at home, I try to grasp desired representations of migration and home, motherhood and family. Collected during fieldwork in Italy and Ukraine, and interpreted in the light of interviews and participant observation, the photographs studied often unravel the conflicting interests within transnational families. The article shows how the pictures that flow between Ukraine and Italy measure time differently abroad and at home, reflect the imagination of success and failure in migration, and illustrate how responsibilities and obligations are unequally distributed within transnational families.

Keywords: Transnational Parenthood/Motherhood; Photographs; Italy; Ukraine; Female Labour Migration

Introduction

This article uses photos as a way of increasing our understanding of the quality of transnational ties between Ukrainian female migrants in Italy and their families in Ukraine. ‘The family is the site of conflicting interests’, wrote Parreñas (2001a: 83). Every member within a family has certain expectations and duties at every given stage of their life-cycle. Migration often challenges the habitual division of roles within a

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family: children become primary breadwinners; mothers are separated from infants; and fathers and grandparents become sole care-givers for children. Maintaining transnational connections is not to be taken for granted; it involves commitment and opportunities (time, money) that have to be present on both sides of the family (see also the articles by Boccagni and by Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue). The exchange of care, according to Baldassar (2007: 392–3), depends on ‘a dialectic of capacity (ability), obligations (cultural expectation), and negotiated commitments (family relations and migration histories), which change over the family and individual life course’. Therefore, relations within transnational families are not just dependent on individual love and care, but on a number of social, economic and culturally shared expectations, which determine ‘who provides care for whom, how much, when and why’ (Baldassar 2007: 393).

While the transnational migration literature pays much attention to maintaining connections within migrants’ families, most research is done on the care provided for the children and families left behind (Andall 2000; Gamburd 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Margold 2004) or on the redirection of migrants’ care and love from their distant families to the children in care in migrants’ workplaces (Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001a, 2001b, 2005). In this article, I look at the directionality of care flows within transnational families and question what care migrants receive from their families. What is the distribution of emotional labour within transnational families? Who provides emotional support across distance, and for whom? Using pictures as primary media, I attempt to break the analytical ‘unit’ of the transnational family, without denying the strength of transnational ties and existing care chains. Another pair of questions central to this article is why a migration flow, like that of Ukrainian women to Italy, requires a scrupulous representation and what kinds of performativity of migration are linked to ‘proper’ gender/familial roles, in particular motherhood, within transnational families?

Addressing the material and symbolic value attached to photographs within a wider object circulation occurring among migrant families tackles one of the fundamental issues in transnational migration research: ‘It is worth asking to what extent the researcher’s focus on transnational processes and practices reflects the concerns and emphasis of the participants in the research, as opposed to reproducing the particular conditions under which the ethnographer lives and conducts his or her research’ (Wilding 2007: 332–3). Indeed, on my visits to migrants’ families in Ukraine, I encountered one of the main problems in my research: oftentimes, the family members had a limited image or little opinion of the experiences of their migrant relatives in Italy. However, bringing pictures into the conversation—browsing through albums or showing a few photos—almost always created a bridge of common experiences commented on by both migrants (who have sent the pictures) and their families (who have received them), thus establishing a space for discussing common issues.

Owing to the variety and individuality of the images circulating between migrants and their homes, I do not aim to create any rigid form of classification of images or

the ways in which they function. However, during my research many of the images and the ways in which they were presented to me did fall into several broad groups. I begin by discussing the significance of the exchange of photographs as a part of the larger object exchange described in the literature on transnational migration. Subsequently, I discuss two types of picture: those sent from home to migrants in Italy and photos sent by migrants back to Ukraine.

The materials for this article were collected during fieldwork among two generations of Ukrainians migrating to Italy. Interviews and participant observation were carried out among migrants in the Italian cities of Bologna, Brescia, Ferrara, Milan, Naples and Rome, and among migrants' family members in the western region of Ukraine, between August 2007 and September 2008. The research was done separately with the migrants and their families. Whereas, as a researcher, I had the privilege of being able to move freely across the borders, many of my informants in Italy could not leave the country and their families could not visit them either. While the research is based on multiple encounters with, and discussions about, photographs, the specific pictures used in this article come from five families who gave their consent and generously found time to discuss their photographs with me.¹

Ukrainian Migration to Italy

Italy is the third-most-popular destination for Ukrainian migrants, after Russia and Poland. There are an estimated several hundred thousand Ukrainians in Italy, of whom 133,000 are officially registered (Caritas 2008). Among the latter, 80 per cent are women. Ukrainians are the fifth-largest migrant group in Italy, and are mostly employed in care and domestic work. According to Caritas (2003), 64 per cent of all Ukrainian migrants are married, 90 per cent have children, but only 6 per cent have their children with them in Italy. Unlike their counterparts from the new EU accession countries,² Ukrainian migrants face strict visa regimes that prolong women's separation from their families. Thus, while Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian migrants can make regular and quite frequent visits home, and even establish working shifts involving two or more women from the same kin network rotating every few months while working for one Italian employer, most Ukrainian women spend two to three years on average in Italy before they are able to obtain some sort of residence permit and thus visit home. For Ukrainian migrants, obtaining the first residence permit usually means being able to go home at least once a year. However, women often spend another five years reapplying for yearly permits, which involves a great amount of paperwork and limits their opportunities to travel. In this context, transnationalism, as an opportunity to move freely across borders, is a luxury that was made possible for some migrants (e.g. Romanian, Bulgarian or Polish) by specific national and EU regulations. For Ukrainian migrants who spend years in tiring legal procedures to obtain long-term residence permits, transnationalism is a privilege that remains one of the main achievements in migration and comes only with years of separation and migration experience.

The feminised nature of migration to Italy has brought to Ukraine a crisis of care within migrants' families, along with clashes of gender roles similar to those seen in the case of female migration from the Philippines and South America (Hochschild 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001a,b, 2005, 2008; see also Carling *et al.*, Leifsen and Tymczuk, and Boccagni, this issue). Specifically for Ukraine, feminised migration led to an outburst of gendered nationalist discussions on all levels, from the populist and media levels to political and religious debates, where this migration was labelled 'migration of mothers'. The departure of women from their families is often discussed in the media as a crisis of family values, a disruption of traditional gender roles, a challenge to masculinity, women's transgression, and the eventual loss of a whole generation of children who grow up without motherly guidance (Keryk 2004; Vianello 2009). Thus, in the June 2009 issue of the *Gazeta Ukrainska*, a monthly newspaper published by Ukrainians in Italy (through an initiative by and with the support of Western Union), the front page covering the 2009 celebration of Mother's Day in Rome contained the following description:

This holiday has come back to us from non-existence, to re-establish an ancient tradition of celebrating woman-as-Mother, the Mother of God and Ukraine—a three-in-one symbol of the all-encompassing love, faith and hope. For Italy—a country with the largest female, maternal migration, Mother's Day carries in itself a symbol of Christian unity.

The description generously compares women to both the Virgin Mary and Ukraine, drawing the boundaries of the nation on the female bodies of its migrants (Yuval-Davis 1997). Such comparisons are quite binding: they glorify women on the one hand, while reminding them that it is their migration that disrupted the unity of the family and the nation on the other.

Thus, Ukrainian migration to Italy is not an exception but rather yet another case in the long list of examples of stigmatisation of female migration that can be found all around the world. Parreñas (2005: 92) draws a remarkably similar picture of the discourses surrounding female migration from the Philippines: '[T]ransnational families of migrant women hold tremendous promise for the transgression of gender boundaries. Women's migration not only increases the economic power of women *vis-à-vis* men, it also places biological mothers outside of the domestic sphere'. While discussing the trap that fixation on normative gender roles can bring into transnational families, Parreñas (2005: 39) warns: 'The idealization of the nuclear family and the public conformity to such an ideal hurt women, since they hide the dysfunctions of the economy at the same time that they deny the nation's dependence on women's labor migration'. She continues that public pressure from states, schools and churches to uphold the nuclear family 'enshrine[s] this type of family at the cost of ignoring the different needs of other types of families' (Parreñas 2005: 30). Such a rigid division of family roles not only condemns transnational migrants' family arrangements as deviant, dangerous and unwanted, but ignores all those practices

that can allow us to understand migrants' choices, strategies and decisions, denying any flexibility within the whole family unit.

Photographs: Performing Migration and Family Ties

'Perhaps one of the most widespread social uses of photographs is as objects of exchange', write Edwards and Hart (2004: 13). They go on to emphasise the multiple layers in such an exchange: 'While the image itself is of course central to the act of giving, receiving and utilizing, the materiality of the photograph is equally part of the social meaning of exchanges'. Photographs which, just like migrants, travel across the borders, can help us to get a better understanding of hierarchies, care-flows existing within and emotional labour invested into migrants' families to maintain transnational connections. In their work on family photographs in the UK, Drazin and Frohlich (2007: 55) note that '[P]hotographs participate in relationships and exchanges', thus emphasising that not only are they the objects of exchange that help *to form* relationships but, through exchange, they *become a form* of the relationship in itself. Therefore, my focus will be not only on the content of the image but also on the consumption and framing of the photographs (Berger and Mohr 1975; Drazin and Frohlich 2007; Margold 2004; Wolbert 2001).

Putting photographs as the focus of this article can help to 'evoke experience of emotion, embodied experience [...] in a way that is untranslatable into written word' (Pink *et al.* 2004: 171). Thus, bringing the pictures to the reader allows us to make the notion of the emotional price of maintaining the transnational family more real, sharp and vivid. While the focus on photographs is rare in the transnational migration literature, there have been several groundbreaking works that make use of photographs' powerful expressive potential. Already in 1975, in their book *A Seventh Man*, Berger and Mohr make images equally important to words for representation of the migration experience. In Berger's words, it is 'the photo that defines an absence', that dominates the migration experience for both migrants and their families back home (1975: 16). Wolbert's (2001) text on the pictures exchanged by Turkish labour migrants in Germany and their families explores the role which pictures play in transforming migrants' families into transnational families, while Margold's (2004) text, which looks at expressive production (these are mainly the pictures of migrants taken by themselves) of Filipina migrants in Hong Kong, focuses more on the migrants' transforming subjectivities.

Images have recently been picked up by several hypermedia/online projects as a powerful tool for mapping out migrants lives—that is, their connections with homeland, within families, migrants' making sense of their past and present, and ideas of home (Miller 2009; Pythagoras Project nd). Following these works, this article looks at the exchange of photographs within transnational families, not as an accidental collection of snapshots, but as deliberate (if not conscious) representations of home and migration experiences and of life in separation. Such representations,

I argue, are heavily informed by the differing expectations and obligations assumed within the course of migration by migrants and their non-migrating families (see more on this in Zentgraf and Stoltz Chinchilla, this issue).

Since the 1990s, when the migration literature shifted its focus to the transnational nature of contemporary migration, special significance has been given to the flows of remittances, material objects and, partially, photographs within migrants' transnational communities. In one of the earliest texts on transnational migration, Basch *et al.* (1993) attribute great importance not only to remittances but also to the flow of goods (including tapes, videos and records) between Vincentian and Grenadian immigrants to New York and their homes. Such a flow of material objects serves, in the authors' argument, as both a means of creating meaningful, multidimensional connections across borders and as proof of the existence of transnational social fields.

In her account of a village in the Dominican Republic, of which a third of the inhabitants are working in Boston, Levitt (2001) starts her description of the visibility of migration by referring to the villagers dressed in T-shirts embossed with Boston company names and logos, and to the presence of multiple objects, like the packaging from food and drink products produced in the USA. To the author, this visible presence is the first trace of migration that grabs the attention of a visitor; the presence of objects marks the absence of people and points to the transnational links of the local village.

A special focus on the flow of objects and photographs comes in the transnational literature with the development of transnational parenthood—specifically, the transnational motherhood literature. Parreñas pays significant attention to what she calls 'bridges of constant communication' (2001a: 142)—that is, the exchange of letters, phone calls, tapes and videos. All these exchanges serve as a way of making separation more bearable, maintaining connection, making up for the lack of intimacy, proving love, and re-enacting a family at a distance. Gamburd (2000) uses pictures of migrants' families in Sri Lanka to visually document the absence of the migrating mother. The photos in her text present strikingly contrasting groups of very young children and ageing care-givers.

Documenting absence and maintaining transnational connections are not the only roles that photographs perform. Talking about female migrants from African countries to Italy, Andall (2000) discusses how, in the pictures sent home, migrants pose in front of an object of luxury in the house of their employers, thus demonstrating their own success and access to Western goods. As described in the transnational literature, pictures therefore function not only as a way of connection but also as a way of representing and performing migration, especially for the audience that stays behind. Performing such functions, these photographs cannot be seen as accidental, but are selected and used in ways that make it possible to approach the imagined ideal of 'proper' motherhood, dutiful migrant and caring family in separation.

The Role and Place of the Photograph in the Family

Like many Ukrainian migrants who live at their place of work in Italy, Inna (49) and Ihor (50) created their own ‘Ukrainian corner’—a little space of remembrance and active association with their homeland (Figure 1). The dwellings of Ukrainian migrants in Italy rarely bear many signs of the personalities of the people who live there. Unless it is a flat where a whole family who migrated lives, these dwellings are highly temporary, even if inhabited by the same people for years. Sparsely equipped with borrowed furniture and things given away by Italian employers—all good-quality furniture and valuable presents are sent back to Ukraine—these dwellings are mostly rented shared-room accommodation or simply a room or half a room in the household of a migrant’s employer. However impersonal, each one of these dwellings has some little shrine composed of icons, family pictures from home, political and religious souvenirs and, often, a Ukrainian flag. These shrines come in numerous forms and shapes and contain various components, but they are always present, and it is always pictures from home that occupy the prominent position in them.

On my visits to Ukrainian migrants in Italy, every home I went to had a number of pictures from Ukraine on display. In contrast, on my visits to the homes of the migrants’ families in Ukraine, I rarely saw pictures displayed of their relatives



Figure 1. Bologna, 2007. The mantelpiece of a room in an Italian home, where a Ukrainian couple works and lives, is decorated with pictures of grandchildren, icons and religious souvenirs from holy places. There are also two Ukrainian flags, a picture of Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and her party’s flag, and a symbol of Ukrainian statehood, the *bulava*.

(often mothers) sent from Italy. Most such pictures were stored in albums and envelopes or on the computer, while those on display were from the days when the family was together. In their article on the significance of different framings of photographs in English homes, Drazin and Frohlich (2007: 51) suggest that the location of photos, their public display, or their absence from visible spaces, should not be seen as accidental: '[T]he range of ways of materially contextualizing photos (which we call "framing") in the home map out a family's collective intention to share memories in future with assorted relatives'. Viewing a display of photos as a materialised intention to preserve certain selected memories for future recollection leads us to ask what—in transnational families, where daily experiences and routines of familial interactions are disrupted—is meant to be remembered and by whom. I argue that choices on such matters are dictated not only by the differentiated roles and responsibilities allocated within the transnational families in times of migration, but by the very goals and imagination of the migration enterprise.

In the context of transnational families, the photographs and their framing in themselves become a form of sharing, which helps to make up for distance and absence (Margold 2004; Miller 2009; Wolbert 2001). For domestic live-in workers, whose work and privacy spaces often collide, a display of pictures from home often demarcates an asylum of what is really 'theirs', occupying a limited space on a shelf or bedside table, sharing a territory with objects that, at home, would not be kept together—pictures of family and of political leaders, religious calendars, small flags and icons. However, when the living space coincides with a workplace, these pictures together with *all* other objects are placed in such spaces on the basis of one criterion: they all mean *home*.

Another factor that I found looming large in migrants' choices about displaying certain images but not others was formulated by Drazin and Frohlich (2007: 68): '[T]he motivation behind photographic framing practices does not only lie in the recapturing of the past, but the preservation and realization of possibilities for the future'. In this sense, to display a picture of the family in a migrant's dwelling makes it possible to imagine the possibility of return and future reunification. In contrast, displaying a picture of a migrant mother who is away is to remind a family of separation. It therefore makes sense that the only pictures of migrants exhibited in migrants' homes are pictures of migrants' visits or pre-migration pictures in which the whole family is together. The pictures thus establish 'the right' order of things, giving hope for the possibility of re-establishing this disrupted order in future.

Asymmetries of Keeping in Touch

However, such 'good intentions' often lead to neglect and the ignoring of migrants' lived experiences. Very often, maintaining connections under conditions of separation becomes the migrant's responsibility. It is usually the duty of the migrating relative not only to be in touch by phone (since s/he commands more resources than the family at home) but also to constantly indicate their interest in life in Ukraine,

and to present their period in Italy as an empty limbo in which time does not move, life is not lived, and only work and the sense of separation from the family are present. Strikingly, the unequal distribution of duties was normalised and internalised not only by migrants' families but also by migrants themselves who, on top of the effort of working abroad, had to pick up the larger emotional and practical share of the family's communication. To illustrate such asymmetry, I recount here the story of one migrant interviewee, Ljubov, whose pattern of communication with her family proved typical rather than exceptional.

Ljubov (47) had come to Italy six years earlier, and had since brought over her two younger children. Her third and oldest son, 28-year-old Dmytro, was married and living in Ukraine. While visiting her in Naples, I saw Ljubov making phone calls to Ukraine several times a week; she maintained contact with the widest circle of relatives—that is, her son, her daughter-in-law, her daughter-in-law's mother, and even the Ukrainian girlfriend of Ljubov's middle son and the girlfriend's father. She was also directing the renovations of her new flat in Ukraine and keeping in touch with the care-giver who looked after her disabled sister. On multiple occasions, Ljubov discussed details of her son's life in Ukraine, for example, relating how unhappy she was that Dmytro had no time to fix his and his wife's room or to buy the furniture that they lacked.

On my visit to Ljubov's eldest son, Dmytro, in Ukraine (when Ljubov was still in Naples), I was only able to talk to Dmytro's wife Olena who, despite the constant contact with Ljubov, had very little idea of her life in Italy. She knew that Ljubov had a job, but could not give any details of what it was. She knew Ljubov lived in a flat and that the youngest of Ljubov's children went to school. Olena had no pictures of Ljubov in Italy and, when I handed them some that I had taken of Ljubov on the promenade in Naples, the family looked at them for a brief moment and stuck them into the album in one bunch. Despite all their communication, Ljubov's family in Ukraine did not know that she had married an Italian and subsequently been widowed, a fact that Ljubov does not like to advertise but that would not be so difficult to deduce, if only Ljubov's relatives cared to know it.

I witnessed a similar disproportion of knowledge about each other's lives among most transnational families I interviewed. A part of this unevenness can be attributed to the fact that, for the family members who have stayed behind, it is indeed very difficult to imagine life in the country of migration (Carling 2008). However, while some of the women I interviewed in Italy even knew what their children were wearing on that day in Ukraine, most families in Ukraine could not even answer questions such as 'Where does your mother live now?' or 'Where does she work and what does she do at work?'. Carling (2008: 1457) suggests that the inequality of the emotional labour put into keeping in touch stems from a differentiated positioning of migrants and non-migrants within the 'moralities of transnationalism', in which it is the migrant's obligation to revitalise and nourish transnational connection, as a form of paying the 'gift of commonality'. In the case of Ukrainian female migration to Italy, these obligations are magnified by the fact that it is the mothers of the families who

are migrating, and even if they are doing it with the family's consent and for the common good, they are expected to make up for their absence; they often feel guilty for leaving their parents, husbands and children behind (also see Zentgraf and Stoltz Chinchilla, and Boccagni, this issue).

Pictures from Home: Connecting to the 'Real' Life

Maintaining connections within transnational families between Ukraine and Italy is getting easier owing to the increasing availability of free Internet communication like Skype and chat programmes, relatively low phone tariffs (especially those from Italy to Ukraine) and the availability of mobile phones, which permit being 'on line' virtually at any moment. However, such simplification of communication hardly translates into equal investment in communication: it still remains primarily the responsibility of the migrant to keep in touch.

Printed photographs occupy a special place in transnational communication. They travel between Italy and Ukraine just like people: 30 or more hours in overloaded and often overcrowded minibuses that run in their thousands every Thursday from Ukraine to Italy and every Sunday back to Ukraine. The images are sometimes recorded on discs, but more often as paper prints, so that they can be immediately seen. When picked up by migrants from the minibus parking lots in Italy at the weekend, they are then carried around for a while in women's purses to be shown with pride at work to Italian employers, and in parks and fast-food places to friends, before some of these images secure their place in the little 'shrine' at their Italian accommodation. Unlike telephone communication or Skype connection, which is gradually becoming more common among some families, printed photographs possess mediality and materiality, which is crucial for their further circulation and use. When talking of the significance of picture exchange among Turkish guest-workers in Germany and their families, Wolbert (2001: 27) emphasises: '[I]n a letter only ideas of the sender can be shared with the addressee. A picture, however, can be held, owned and displayed'. Thus, only printed images can be placed on the wall, shelf or bedside table, demarcating 'home', 'something that is truly theirs'. Thus, photographs do not only inform the viewer about the addressee; through their material form, they become a physical medium that bridges the distance and fills up the absences in transnational relationships.

Images of Children

Images from home, first and foremost, demonstrate the flow of time, the changes that have happened at home during a migrant's absence, and the progress the family has made. More importantly, such images usually capture the growth of children and grandchildren. Along with pictures of family and religious celebrations, marriages and the birth of new family members, they bring the sharp realisation of separation but also a sense of 'normality' and flow of life in Ukraine. Together with frequent,

often daily, telephone conversations, such images update the migrant on the changes, allowing them to somehow remain a part of these events, keeping the door open for the possibility of stepping back into the flow of life in Ukraine.

Figure 2 is a semi-humorous picture that Nadia received from her brother during her four-year stay in Italy. When Nadia learnt that she had a newborn nephew, she sent him a set of baby clothes. The photo she received back not only acquainted Nadia with the new family member, but also demonstrated gratitude for the present, acknowledging Nadia's presence in her nephew's life. It also pointed out to Nadia, a mother of two herself, how she was out of touch with reality and how she could not even approximate the size of the baby! Nadia commented that the photo made her laugh but also made her feel really far from her family in Ukraine.

Mothers and Children

In order not to limit the role of circulating pictures strictly to calculated messages of representation, it is important to emphasise their great emotional significance. This holds especially true for the exchange of pictures between children and parents. Children are probably the most vulnerable members of transnational families, and their frustration with the separation often comes through in pictures. However, such images and the messages encoded within them hardly make migrants' burden of separation easier. Such pictures often provoke a painful longing for home, a sharp realisation of absence and a sense of guilt for making the decision to leave.



Figure 2. Ivano-Frankivsk, 2004. A picture sent to Italy documenting a set of baby clothes that Nadia has sent from Italy for her newborn nephew. The picture jokingly but convincingly demonstrates how wrong Nadia was in her estimates of the size of the baby.

The prime significance of the visual aspect of communication between migrated parents and children soon became clear. Thus, in one of the pictures sent to Italy, 15-year-old Rostyslav (after two years of separation) writes on the back of the photograph: 'Mother! What are you like now? Come back!!! I am very lonely!!! Kiss you. Miss you. Rostyslav'. In his message, Rostyslav does not ask his mother how she is or about her life in Italy. He asks her 'What are you like now?', referring to both visual and internal changes that might have happened during their separation, revealing the lack of the intimacy that only comes with daily interactions and presence. In the children's world, where physical, visible transformations are a part of everyday life, visual images provide a closeness that even phone calls often cannot provide.

In Figure 3, Andrij, Nadia's son whom she left when he was 14, took a picture of himself in order to send it to her in Italy. The inscription reads: 'I took this photo with my mobile phone and printed it on our printer, so that you know what I look like now. I have already built up some muscles'. While formulated in a slightly jokey manner, the importance and intimacy of this image is striking: for a boy whose mother left when he was 14, the two years have been a lifetime in which he feels he has transformed into a man, and even his body went through some major transformations. The need for his mother to catch up with his new self, his new look, could be substituted neither by e-mail nor by daily telephone conversations. Here, the photograph's ability as '*enabler of the unity*' (Wolbert 2001: 24) comes through powerfully. Another clear message of this image is that of the new

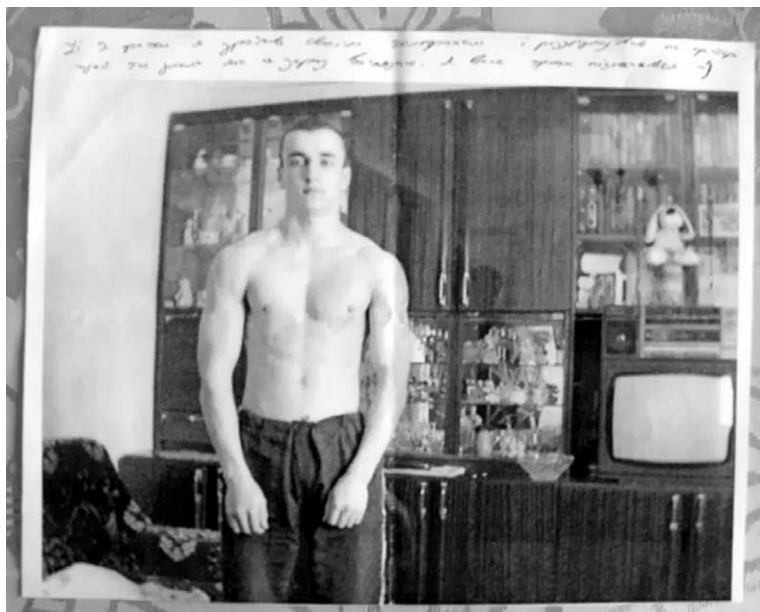


Figure 3. Ivano-Frankivsk, 2006. Updating his mother in Italy on his current looks, Andrij has sent this picture after a few years of separation.

acquisitions that Andrij had made, obviously with the help of his mother's money—a mobile phone and a new printer.

Presents Received from Italy

Photographs of presents received from Italy constitute another common category; these images often serve as tokens of a migrant's presence in the life of the family, as they document the material exchange that is already seen as a token of dedication, love and unity of the family. Thus, in the seemingly trivial Figure 4, Nadia's aunt is posing rather unconventionally in her nightdress. When I asked Nadia why her family chose to send such a slightly 'indecent' picture, Nadia explained that the nightdress was a present she sent home to her aunt from Italy, and that she was happy to see that the gown fitted and was used. The pictures of the presents received have thus closed the circle in the material exchange chain.



Figure 4. Ivano-Frankivsk, 2005. Migrant's aunt demonstrating a present from Italy: a brand new nightdress.

Iryna (50) stayed in Italy illegally for six years. In the meantime, her daughter graduated from university, got married and gave birth to Iryna's first grandson, Mykhailyk. Iryna talks to him on the phone and, when asked, Mykhailyk says his grandmother is in Italy and points at the phone. For his third birthday, Iryna sent him an electric car, which cost her over 100 euro. For Iryna, such an expensive gift for a three-year-old grandson was important as a way of demonstrating her unconditional love for and loyalty to him despite their separation, and that the family enjoyed top priority with her. Meeting their obligation, Iryna's family was very careful to explain to the young child that the present was from his grandmother, who he already knew lived in Italy. Mykhailyk, however, drew his own conclusions and, when talking on the phone to Iryna, he told her that it might be a present from her but it was the grandfather (Iryna's husband) who brought and gave it to him. This innocent example of the child's reasoning left Iryna quite sad and made her realise how time spent in migration is lost at home and cannot be made up even through frequent communication on the phone. Iryna added that it was the 'last straw' that confirmed her decision that it was time to go back to Ukraine.

The pictures of the presents received from migrants and distributed among family members are, however, of incomparably greater emotional value to migrants themselves than to their families. Nadia, who returned from Italy in 2006, keeps all the pictures she sent from and received in Italy in several huge paper bags stored in a wardrobe. She does not display this part of her life in her family house but keeps it privately to herself. At my request, Nadia and her sister Ira (who never went abroad) went through hundreds of pictures, remembering how it was when Nadia was in Italy. Among them were numerous pictures of Ira's wedding, which had been sent to Italy. Many focused specifically on the details of Ira's dress and jewellery. Nadia commented: 'My sister is the sixth child in the family and she was sure that we would never have the resources to give her a proper wedding with a white dress. When I went to Italy, I sent her money for the dress and bought her very expensive jewellery, because I wanted her to have the best. She sent me this and many other pictures from her wedding and I was on the phone with her throughout most of the celebration'. Nadia has tears in her eyes as she recalls this but, for Ira, these sentiments and memories are apparently less vivid. As we talk over the pictures, she just shrugs her shoulders and says that it was so long ago (three years) that she can hardly remember all these details.

Material Acquisitions: Money Put To Good Use

Another group of images that clearly stands out relates to the development of a common project into which a migrant invests money. The progress of the house construction or renovation, a new car, mobile phones—all these images reinforce a sense that, though they may be separated by borders, the families are working on a common economic and social project, live by the same values and strive for

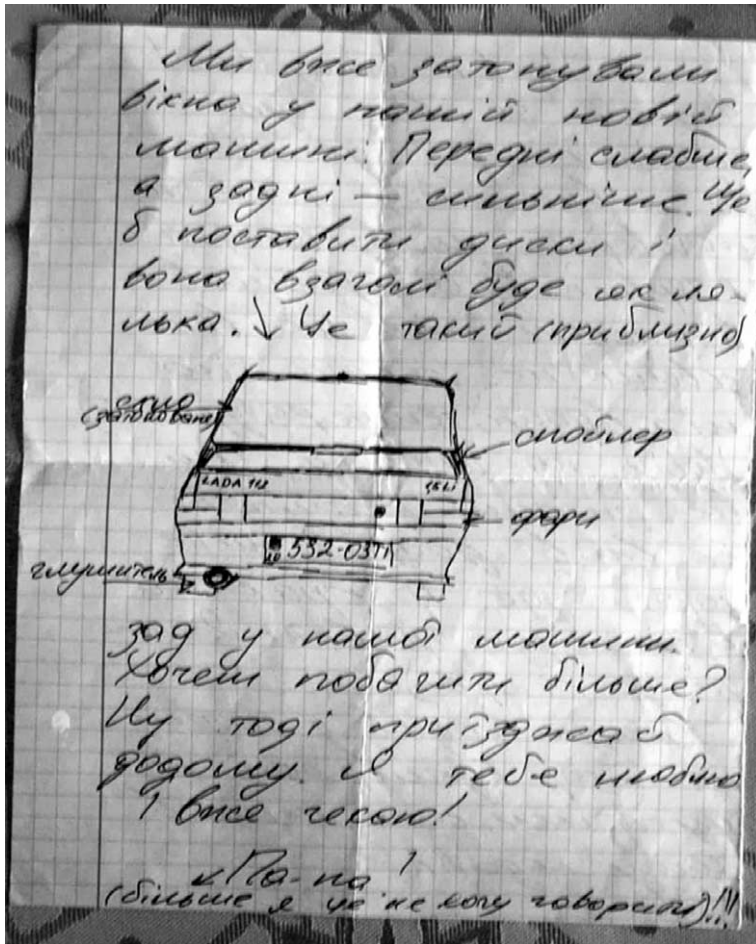


Figure 5. Ivano-Frankivsk, 2004. A letter sent to Nadia in Italy by her eldest son tells her about the car that was purchased with the help of the money Nadia has remitted home. The inscription runs: ‘This is how (approximately) the back of our new car looks like. Would you like to see more? Well, then you have to come back home. I love you a lot and already waiting for you! Bye-bye! (I don’t want to say this ever again)!!!’.

similar goals. Importantly, they tell migrants that, while they sacrifice their chance to be at home with the family, they should not doubt the importance of their migration for the family; while the migrant works abroad, the family takes care of the rest, so that when the family reunites, the sacrifice of separation will not have been wasted.

The value of images sent across the border is not necessarily equal for both migrants and the family. Migrants seem to be much more dependent on these images for maintaining emotional strength away from home. Similarly, it is the picture sent from home that reinforces the ‘normality’ and flow of life in the fullness of familial

interactions and daily activities, development, growing up and life-cycles, while migrants' lives are perceived to be captured in limbo. Olha Kozak (2003: 35), a migrant domestic worker and author published in a Ukrainian anthology of lyrics, poetically expresses this common sense of life passing by so often expressed in migrants' accounts:

In Ukraine one counts minutes:
 Someone has a funeral,
 Someone has a baptism.
 Yet here, time stands still and doesn't move:
 You live, but there is no life . . .

Pictures Sent Home: 'No-Story' Photographs

Images sent both to and from migrants are burdened heavily with representations. In her auto-ethnography on visiting her parents' country of origin as a second-generation migrant, Ramirez describes how, before family reunions, her mother would cautiously select the images that she would later show to the relatives. These would comprise some indisputably beautiful shots but also some very average pictures. When asked why she decided to include those images, she answered 'that she was quite aware of not wanting to portray their lives in Australia as perfect and wanted to balance out the good photos with some unflattering and simple ones, to avoid creating a gap between their extended family and themselves' (Ramirez *et al.* 2007: 425). Similarly, Ukrainian women who migrate alone have to be extremely cautious not to stir up the mistrust and jealousy of their spouses, gossip within extended families and neighbours, or feelings of neglect in their children.

None of the pictures sent can have the same value or be measured against the same scale (Ramirez *et al.* 2007). Thus, while pictures from Ukraine have more emotional value, those from Italy have to be much more carefully selected in terms of how they represent the migrants' lives. One contributory factor is that these pictures are sent from Italy—a more affluent country—back to the family, and they should not suggest or feed in any way into the dominant Ukrainian public opinion that a migrant's life is easy. In contrast to the situation described by Margold (2004) with Filipina workers in Hong Kong, who send home pictures from fancy shopping centres depicting them smiling and happy in fashionable new clothes, the pictures of Ukrainian women in Italy, to use Wolbert's (2001) analysis, are *not supposed* to tell any story. As a mother of a family, a migrating woman should be careful not to suggest that she has found a new self, a new life, or been able to experience something that was otherwise repressed by her situation at home.

During a nine-day walking pilgrimage dedicated to the well-being of the families of transnational migrants, organised by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church (UGCC), Father Pavlo, one of the leading figures in the establishment of the UGCC in Italy,

emphasised in each of his daily talks the growing insensitivity and indifference to the lives and feelings of women working abroad displayed by their families, including their children:

It often happens that we stay in Italy for years [...] sending money home, working days and nights, bearing the separation. Our families miss us, but after a few years, everyone gets used to it, children get used to managing by themselves. And then when we have enough and just want to go back home, it is our families who convince us to stay. How many women have told me that when they phoned home to say they were returning for good, they only heard their families reasoning: 'But what would you do here? There are no jobs here. Maybe you should stay some more'. This is how we get pushed out by our own families.

Father Pavlo, however, partially puts responsibility on women themselves for generating this attitude in their families. He explains that many women are reluctant to tell the truth about their work even to their children and family, because they find it either very undignified or because they do not want the family to get frustrated about the difficulties their mothers go through. Olha, who has been in Italy for over five years, seems to be trapped in the patterns that the majority of the women I talked to ended up in to a greater or lesser degree:

I have a great relationship with my sons (20 and 25) but I don't like to tell them that I work five jobs to earn this money. If they knew how hard it is for



Figure 6. Genoa, 2007. The picture is taken during a group trip (from Bologna to Genoa) organised by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church for Ukrainian migrants.

me, they might refuse to take the money. [...] But even when I start talking about this, my youngest son hugs me and says that he is very grateful for my sacrifice, but he can't stand listening to how hard it is for me in Italy [...] so I don't tell them.

While Olha sees her relationship with her sons as perfect, it is obvious that, after a speedy divorce from her husband and given her sons' reluctance to listen to her, she has nobody to talk to about her actual everyday experiences and emotions. During my visit to Olha, I saw her calling home often several times a day, discussing minor details of the happenings in Ukraine, but I never heard her discussing anything unrelated to the family back home. Her position within her family denies her any multiplicity of roles; even if she is divorced and has brought up children and two grandsons, her role within her transnational family is that of a mother. There is no space for acknowledgement that Olha lives a life in Italy, that she has five jobs where she interacts with colleagues, that she is acquiring new qualifications as a nurse, or that she lives with an Italian man—in fact, for anything that is unrelated to her Ukrainian family. The pictures that Olha sends home on rare occasions are of Tuscan landscapes and historical sites.

Lonely Vacation

Probably the most common type of photograph sent home from Italy are those taken during rare vacations or against the background of local historical sites. Migrants' pictures usually present them against a church, or an exotic blossoming tree, maybe against the sea as the background. The purpose of such settings resonates strongly with Wolbert's (2001) description of photographs sent over a decade from Berlin by the father, Ilyas, to his Turkish family back home as amazingly repetitive; in most of them, Ilyas is standing at full height, neutral in his posture, against an unidentified landscape, some scenery or in the middle of a room. All of these pictures carry surprisingly little information about Ilyas' life in Germany. However, as Wolbert analyses, it is not the point of these pictures to give any information about his life or to tell any story, other than that Ilyas is in good health and thinks about his family. Wolbert then refers to the point that is crucial for the intentions of the Ukrainian women migrating away from their families: 'Photographs that do not situate the photographed person as belonging to a new group or another place, serve as a proof that the sender has not become a part of an alterneity. For this reason, they are not supposed to tell a story' (2001: 27–8). The 'vacation' pictures seem to serve this aim perfectly. Moreover, they bring out the notion of 'absence': the migrant is usually alone, thus demonstrating the absurdity of loneliness—even though the migrants are surrounded by the most beautiful landscape, and living in such a romanticised country as Italy, they are not enjoying it without their families.



Figure 7. Benevento, 2003. Embroidering traditional Ukrainian Easter towels in a park in Italy.

Ukrainian Life in Italy

Another ‘favourite’ topic for migrants’ pictures—with a clear purpose—can be seen in the images of social activities that are somehow related to Ukraine: usually a celebration of religious or social festivals, maybe a political event. In these pictures, migrants assert their belonging to Ukraine, at the same time reminding families at home that, even in Italy, they live a Ukrainian life. In Figure 7, two Ukrainian migrants are depicted in their rare free time (usually one day and one afternoon a week for live-in domestic workers). Though the picture is taken in Italy, there is absolutely nothing to indicate that. It is their activity that is the focus—the embroidering of traditional Ukrainian towels—demonstrating their non-participation in Italian life and their use of their rare free moments to do something highly associated with the traditional woman’s role. One can be sure that their thoughts are also about home while they are embroidering the traditional floral design. It is a ‘safe’ picture to send; it makes it possible to dampen potential feelings of jealousy among some members of the family and to emphasise once again that the best place to be is at home in Ukraine, even if the migrants now live in this seemingly affluent place, Italy.

In many instances, the pictures sent home (be they of the ‘lonesome’ vacation type, of migrants on the phone with the family, or with presents sent from home) are static; unlike pictures from home, which demonstrate change, these images confirm ‘non-change’. Migration thus is depicted and perceived as a limbo in which a migrant

puts her life on hold, until she returns to her family and gets a life again. Presenting life in migration as static and not moving without one's family is also a 'safe choice' for a mother. Thus, on top of dealing with the stress of downward professional mobility, and the social traumas of moving away from home and starting from scratch in a new environment, many migrant women have the double burden of dealing with their own hardships and helping their families to deal with separation. For many, the calls of their husbands from home with demands for more money and accusations of prostitution in a foreign land are a part of the migration experience, as are accusations from children that 'You have abandoned us'. Under these circumstances, the lives of migrants in Italy are followed with a particularly jealous eye from Ukraine and from country-fellows in migration. Only through constant reinforcement of common goals, loyalty and recognition of the differentiated duties and obligations can a transnational family maintain ties that have become too fragile through separation, suspicion and distance.

Conclusions: The Transnational Family as a Site of Conflicting Interests

Photography can be seen as the 'glue' which bonds together transnational families, where the 'close relationships inform their sense of obligation to care for each other and result in the ongoing transnational exchange of emotional support' (Baldassar 2007: 393). However, while functioning together on certain life-projects, transnational families should not be seen as homogenous units. First and foremost, they are 'sites of conflicting interests' (Parreñas 2001a: 83), and seeing them as such allows a stepping-away from an idealisation of free transnational flows across the borders and a clearer understanding of the unevenness of transnational social fields and differentiated obligations and duties within them.

The differentiated framing and consumption of images by migrants and their families is heavily rooted in the very purpose and experience of migration. 'The motivation behind photographic framing practices does not only lie in the recapturing of the past, but the preservation and realization of possibilities for the future' (Drazin and Frohlich 2007: 68). Therefore, it is not separation but the possibility of reunification that a picture has to profess. While pictures exchanged in migration carry necessary information and somehow bridge the gap of distance, they are not intended to be remembered or shared together in the future. What is intended to be remembered are the times spent together, a hope that there will be reunification. Migration, therefore, has to be seen as temporary and should not be celebrated by the family. Only moments of unity are worth remembering in photographs.

Among the tokens of love and care that flow across the borders to bond together transnational families, photographs occupy a special place: they fill in the absences, compensate for the lack of intimacy, and serve as a reminder of the 'other life' that was temporarily left behind. Unlike migrants themselves, whose transnational movement is often limited by visa regimes, legality status, tight work schedules

and economic restrictions, the flow of photographs not only maintains but also constitutes transnational connections. The content and the directionality of the flow of these photographs thus reflect the larger composition of transnational ties, speaking volumes of the obligations, moralities and hierarchies within these networks.

Transnational parenthood, especially motherhood, cannot survive without careful representation by both migrants and their families left behind; the images of a family's life separated by distance cannot be sent without an attentive strategising and a consideration of the effect they may have on the receiver and the judgments they might evoke. Such photographs often mirror the desired representation of migration and home, the 'proper' roles of a mother and a child, idealised notions of home, familial roles and the common future. The pictures that flow from Ukraine to Italy measure time in migration and at home, reflect the imagination of success and failure, and speak of responsibilities and obligations distributed very unequally within transnational families.

Notes

- [1] The names of all individuals have been changed.
- [2] For Italy, the greatest flows are from Romania—625,000 officially registered migrants; Poland—90,000; and Bulgaria—33,000 (Caritas 2008).

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Transnational Parenting and Immigration Law: Central Americans in the United States

Cecilia Menjivar

In recent years, many immigrant-receiving countries have implemented increasingly restrictive policies that include tighter border controls, more temporary worker permits, an increased threat of deportation, and greater restrictions on the ability to acquire permanent residence and to petition for family members. Thus, family separation seems to be built into new immigration policies, and long-term and indefinite separations are not the exception. In this article, I examine the case of the largest Central American immigrant groups: Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans. Many of these immigrants are neither fully ‘undocumented’ nor ‘documented’, but often straddle both statuses as a result of having received a series of temporary permits over a period of more than a decade. This legal instability profoundly influences parenting across borders among these immigrants—both the relations between parents and children who are separated, and the links between these immigrant families and the different institutions in the host society. The experiences of Central Americans present a special opportunity to reflect on the effects of current immigration regimes on families separated across borders.

Keywords: Transnational Parenthood; Guatemala; El Salvador; Honduras; United States; Immigration Policy; Legislation

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature on the multiple ways in which families separated by migration, particularly parents and children, deal with the challenges of living apart. These range from sustaining emotional bonds through diverse forms of

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communication (Baldassar 2007; Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2005a; Wilding 2006), to ways of handling child-rearing and issues of identity (Whitehouse 2009), parenting and co-parenting (Pribilsky 2004; Whitehouse 2009) with key gender angles (Parreñas 2005a), and challenges that arise from the separation and eventual reunification (Falicov 2007; Ramirez *et al.* 2007). And, as Parreñas (2005b) notes, these family dynamics and their constitution across borders are shaped by the larger systems of inequality and power relations within which they take place.

A significant aspect of this larger system within which relations between parents and children across borders are enacted is immigration policy. As the literature has amply demonstrated, immigration policy, an important component of the context of reception, is crucial in shaping immigrants' lives (Menjívar 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993). It determines who stands inside or outside the law, and whether immigrants qualify as full participants of society or become some of its most destitute members, as it dictates whether they will have access to regular employment (Fortuny *et al.* 2007; Uriarte *et al.* 2003), and to health and educational resources (Abrego 2008a; Holmes 2007)—and, if they do, to what kind (Menjívar 2000). The political-economic context into which immigrants arrive can therefore translate into a favourable reception—relaxed or even friendly immigration laws and a viable economy with abundant jobs—or an adverse one—stiff immigration laws and fewer or lower-paying jobs, with critical effects for the immigrants and their families. A focus on immigration policy in the context of transnational family relations exposes the central power of the nation-state in delimiting individual action. Increased control of the number of immigrants arriving, of the social benefits that immigrants can access, and the policies that exclude and expel create a different scenario from one that places emphasis on what migrants do—their efforts to remain connected. This also requires a shift in focus, from an emphasis on migrants' mobility to their immobility, an immobility that creates conditions for migrants to develop creative strategies to remain connected over space and time. In an era when receiving states around the world are enacting ever-more-restrictive immigrant policies and immigration laws, a focus on what states do to limit immigration may have great intellectual purchase.

In this article, I focus on how the legal aspect shapes the dynamics of parenting across borders. I centre my examination on relations between parents and children, as well as families' links to social service institutions which, in my view, are two integral aspects of parenting that are brought into sharp relief by the challenges of indefinite physical separation and legal uncertainty. I also want to emphasise the links with other aspects of the context of reception—such as the economy—which affect labour market opportunities. I have singled out immigration law and immigrants' legality because they emerge as fundamental for the Central American immigrants in my studies in Phoenix, Arizona, regardless of specific nationality group. The effects of immigrants' legal uncertainty on parent-child relations in the context of transnational parenting is heavily pronounced, as it exposes vividly the challenges that these parents and children face in dealing with the logistics of temporal and

spatial separation. It also reveals the 'long arm' of immigration law, as legal status impinges on parent–child relations when they live across borders as well as when they reside together as immigrants in the same location; this examination shows that parenting is no longer contained in one physically demarcated space or bound by close intimate ties. This focus permits examination of a facet of transnational parenting that does not receive much attention, that is, the parenting of children who live in the United States as an integral part of parenting across borders. Immigration law redefines the status of family members and their relations, and differences in legal status mark family members in various ways, shaping their access to resources, mobility and lifestyles. Therefore, I also examine these families' links to institutions in the host society and how they respond to contextual constraints, so the analysis does not present solely a unidirectional effect of the macro structure on the lives of the individuals concerned. In so doing, I recognise that gender strongly influences how the effects of legality play out; thus, when appropriate, I will note important differences, particularly in perceptions of parenthood that are informed by gender ideologies and how individuals act on these views.

Empirically, I focus on the experiences of Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran immigrants who arrived in Phoenix, Arizona, in the period between 1998 and 2008, complemented by the views of women who stayed in Honduras. These immigrants' lingering legal instability brings into sharp relief the effects of immigration law on family dynamics across borders and how immigrants negotiate and redefine intergenerational relations within these legal constraints. The aspects of family dynamics I examine here—family separation and links to institutions in society—exemplify how broader structural forces, such as the political decisions that fashion immigration law, shape the immediate worlds of individuals and families. This examination helps us to reflect on the powerful position of the state—in an era when the nation-state is believed to have weakened in the context of globalisation—on the lives of immigrants who find themselves in similarly precarious legal situations in immigrant-receiving countries around the world. Indeed, the receiving states' border enforcement and the barriers they enact through immigrant policies impact vitally on the immigrants' relations with those close to them. The work of Parreñas (2005a, b) among Filipinos, of Schmalzbauer (2004) among Hondurans, and of Calavita (2005) among African immigrants in Spain and Italy also exposes the consequences of the tightening of legal and physical borders on immigrants' families.

Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans have a long history of migration to the United States. This migration has been shaped by structural factors ranging from the export and commercialisation of agriculture in the early twentieth century to political upheaval and civil war in the region in the past few decades. As a central player in such determining events, the United States has figured prominently in the lives of the Central Americans who have migrated, as well as in the affairs of those who have stayed. As Rumbaut (1997) reminds us, an ironic consequence of the expansion of the US to its post-World War II position of global hegemony has been the involvement of

the rest of the world in the US. And, even though Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans have been migrating to the US since the turn of the last century, large-scale migration from Central America only took off in the late 1970s, in the context of tumultuous civil conflicts and militarisation in the region, complicated by several natural disasters. The profound economic and social dislocations that accompanied these human-made and natural disasters have maintained the pace of these movements to this day. While Guatemalans and Salvadorans migrated internally or to refugee camps in adjacent countries, together with Hondurans many of them also crossed several international borders to reach the US, where friends and family members resided. According to the 2000 US Census, there was a 760 per cent growth in the Salvadoran, 740 per cent in the Honduran, and 642 per cent in the Guatemalan populations between 1980 and 2000; approximately 85 per cent of these immigrants arrived in the period 1980–2000 (US Census 2000). These upward trends have continued; according to recent estimates (American Community Survey 2008), there are approximately 915,700 Guatemalans, 543,300 Hondurans and 1,477,200 Salvadorans in the US today.

Salvadorans and Guatemalans who migrated during their countries' political strife would have fitted the classic profile of refugees; however, every Washington administration during the two-decade period during which most arrived—from Reagan to Clinton—refused to grant them blanket refugee status. Although Hondurans did not experience the same level of political strife as their neighbours, their country was a site of military bases and bellicose operations in the region. Accordingly, Portillo (2008) notes that Honduran migration also increased exponentially during the conflictive years in the neighbouring countries for reasons linked to the (largely silent) and unrecognised effects of the violent conflicts in the region. Hondurans were granted temporary protection to remain in the US, but only after Hurricane Mitch destroyed a substantial part of their country's infrastructure in 1998. All this means that many Central Americans entered as undocumented immigrants and have been protected only temporarily. As with other immigrant populations in the US, their legal reception was shaped by the intersection of immigration and refugee policy on the one hand, and foreign policy on the other. In a reception framed by foreign policy considerations, therefore, these Central Americans were denied the government assistance normally available to officially sanctioned refugees, and were left to cope on their own with the consequences of political flight. Classified as undocumented (and thus legally excluded), with sporadic and irregular access to legal protection (Menjívar 2006), the opportunity structures available to these immigrants in the US have been severely limited.

After a brief background to contextualise the family experiences of these immigrants, I present the methods and data. I then turn to an examination of the two areas that permit a close up look at parenting across borders among Central Americans: family separations and reconfiguration, and links to US institutions beyond the family. In my treatment of the first I focus primarily on parent–children relations as informed by long-term separation and legal uncertainty, whereas in my

analysis of the second I shift the angle of vision to these families' links to institutions that provide social services in the receiving context, and end with a broader discussion of the effects of immigration law on parenting across borders.

Contextualising Central Americans' Lives: Legal History

As Rodriguez (2001) has noted, though victims of Central America's geopolitics and the new global economy, Central Americans have been received by the US as depoliticised labour migrants who do not need political protection. Accordingly, with important differences between and within these groups to keep in mind, these immigrants share key aspects regarding their legal reception in the US that merit their treatment in this article as a single group. My discussion highlights the roots of the legal instability that permeates all aspects of these immigrants' lives, particularly the organisation and reconfiguration of their families, and the often confusing and intractable deadlines (for example, each Central American group faces different filing deadlines, dissimilar dispensations and legal options), applications and procedures that contribute to accentuating their precarious legal situation.

Guatemalans and Salvadorans applied for political asylum, but they did not fare well in asylum applications. Throughout the 1980s, less than 3 per cent of these applicants were granted such status. Immigrants' rights groups lobbied on their behalf, and eventually Congress granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) from deportation to all Salvadorans who arrived prior to 19 September 1990. The US government only began granting temporary dispensation to them toward the end of the Salvadoran civil conflict in January 1992, a move that exposes the links between foreign policy and immigration and admissions. TPS allowed Salvadorans to live and work in the US for a period of 18 months; it was extended a few times under Deferred Enforced Departure, and ended for good in September 1995. El Salvador suffered two devastating earthquakes in early 2001 that exacerbated many of the problems left by the years of civil war. Thus, Salvadorans who arrived after the earthquakes were granted TPS for a period of nine months, a dispensation that has already been extended several times, usually at the last minute, for 18 months at a time. At the time of writing, it is due to expire on 9 March 2012. Worth noting is that these extensions are not automatic. Each time this dispensation is extended, applicants are given a two-month period of re-registration that requires the completion of forms and the payment of fees to obtain a work permit, a benefit that this designation offers. This is a temporary, not a permanent, status, and thus for technical purposes official statistics do not include TPS cases in the documented population counts.

Even though Guatemala also endured the destruction of Hurricane Stan in late 2005 plus three decades of state terror and political violence, except for a few months' stay of deportation in 1998 after Hurricane Mitch, Guatemalans have still not been granted TPS, even after Guatemalan heads of state themselves have personally interceded and asked for this provision for their citizens. US officials have argued that Guatemalans have not deserved protection. In June 2010, Guatemalan officials once

again asked Washington to designate their country for TPS while Guatemalans recovered from the May 2010 twin disasters of Tropical Storm Agatha and the eruption of Pacaya Volcano, a request that, at the time of this writing, is still pending. On the other hand, Hondurans have been granted TPS for 18-month renewable periods since Hurricane Mitch devastated that country in 1998. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced another 18-month renewal of TPS for Hondurans (and Nicaraguans), which extended this designation until 5 July 2013. As in the case of Salvadorans, only those Hondurans who obtained TPS in the previous period are eligible to reapply. However, for the latest re-registrations, Hondurans have also had to renew their work permits which, in the past, were automatically renewed.

In 1990, as a result of the settlement of a class action suit (*American Baptist Churches vs Thornburgh* [ABC]) that alleged discrimination against Guatemalans and Salvadorans on the part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Salvadorans and Guatemalans were allowed to resubmit asylum applications. Initially, the success rate of Salvadoran applications increased to 28 per cent and those of Guatemalans to 18 per cent in fiscal year 1992 (National Asylum Study Project 1992). Salvadorans and Guatemalans who arrived in the US prior to 1 January 1982—the cut-off point to apply for amnesty under the Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA)—applied for this benefit (Menjívar 2000). However, a relatively small percentage of these Central Americans arrived prior to 1980; thus, the thousands who arrived at the height of the political conflict in their countries in the 1980s and 1990s and during the postwar violence were ineligible for amnesty under this provision.

Some Salvadorans and Guatemalans were included as beneficiaries of the 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA). As long as they had filed an asylum application before 1 April 1990, Salvadorans who entered the country before 19 September 1990 and Guatemalans who entered before 1 October 1990 could be granted a ‘cancellation of removal’ (Menjívar 2006). Immigrants’ rights groups lobbied on behalf of these immigrants so that the benefit NACARA conferred to other nationals included in that act—adjustment to permanent residence without a hearing on a case-by-case basis—would also be extended to Guatemalans and Salvadorans, but they were unsuccessful in their efforts, and the prospects of obtaining this benefit diminished drastically post-9/11 as a result of an increased tightening of immigration laws. The legality of Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran immigrants is further shaped by a generalised restrictive immigration regime embodied in the IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) of 1996, as Rodríguez and Hagan (2004) document. Additionally, state and local ordinances and propositions across the US have had the effect of intensifying the effects of the different federal immigration laws, which have given way to raids and deportations coordinated by local-level governments (Arizona is a prime example). For instance, there were more than 392,000 deportations in fiscal year 2010, the highest number on record (Esquivel 2010).

Thus, a large proportion of Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Honduran immigrants has remained in the US in an uncertain legal status. According to Passel (2007), of the

ten largest Hispanic groups, those from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have the lowest percentages of US citizens whereas, at the same time, they have proportionally some of the largest undocumented populations. Indeed, the Pew Hispanic Center (2006) estimates that, of the approximately 11 million unauthorised immigrants in the US, about 2.5 million are primarily Central Americans, and the three Central American countries, along with Mexico, top the list in terms of the numbers of deportations today (US Department of Homeland Security 2007). However, it is not an undocumented status *per se* which matters; it is the perennial instability of temporary permits, continuous threat of deportation, multiple and confusing deadlines, and lengthy waiting times for cases to be adjudicated. During years of legal insecurity, immigrants carry on with their lives, their marriages and their children's lives, and make a host of short- and long-term decisions that are then inevitably shaped by their long-term legal ambiguity, 'liminal legality' (Menjívar 2006) or 'permanent temporariness' (Bailey *et al.* 2002).

Methods and Data

The data for this article come from a multiple-year (ongoing) study of Latin American-origin immigration to the Phoenix metropolitan area conducted between 1998 and 2009.¹ We contacted study participants in churches, sports and social clubs, community organisations that aid immigrants, and neighbourhood shops and restaurants, places where we also conducted participant observation. These multiple points of entry helped us to avoid reaching a socially homogenous group. Study participants were selected according to two general criteria: they had to be at least 18 years old at the time they left their country, and must have arrived in Phoenix within the previous five years, so as to capture 'new' arrivals. Informants normally chose the location for the interviews, which were conducted in Spanish and lasted 90 minutes on average; except for four, all were tape-recorded. At least one-third of the participants were re-interviewed multiple times. These methods cannot produce statistically generalisable results, but they generate rich information about these immigrants' lives.

The 57 in-depth interviews include 23 Salvadoran, 3 Honduran and 31 Guatemalan immigrants (including 6 indigenous Maya), complemented with informal conversations with their relatives, friends, co-religionists and neighbours. Data also come from a small qualitative study that one of my assistants and I conducted with 18 women in a small rural town in Honduras, which allowed us a window into the complexities of family relations across borders from the perspective of mothers and wives in the sending country. More than half (or 57 per cent) of the participants in Phoenix were women; their educational level on average was about nine years; their average age was 29 years; and none were fluent English-speakers though, among the indigenous Guatemalans, several spoke more than one Maya language. Several of the participants arrived in Phoenix from other states, particularly California and Florida, but more and more are coming to Phoenix directly. Legal status is not easy to tabulate,

as participants changed from having temporary status to permanent (or to an undocumented one) during the course of the study; however, at the time of the initial interviews, some had obtained permanent legal status and one man had become a naturalised citizen. The majority, however, had a temporary permit, were in the 'process' of regularising their status, or were undocumented without any legal basis to enable regularisation of their status to that of a permanent resident, with no extreme differences by gender.

Furthermore, although these immigrants' occupations in their homelands were varied—electricians, plumbers, agricultural workers, clerks, housekeepers, owners of small businesses, market vendors, students, soldiers, and factory workers, their US occupations were strikingly homogeneous. With the exception of four Salvadorans and two Guatemalans who owned businesses in Phoenix, the rest worked in the low end of the service sector, employed as hotel chambermaids, cafeteria servers, janitors, cleaners, babysitters and caretakers of the elderly, or in construction. Thus, former professionals, teachers, accountants and nurses were labouring in jobs that require fewer qualifications, their unstable legal status preventing them from accessing job-retraining classes and English-language courses and thus from obtaining better job opportunities.

Family Reorganisation

Sociologically, the family is a primary social institution constituted by a series of relationships which are bound by an ideology of shared kinship that involves social production and reproduction, care-giving and feeding work (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2005a). Such activities are not evenly divided among the members, as the distribution of resources and labour is hierarchically organised around gender and age. Furthermore, these relationships are embedded in economic, social, cultural and political arrangements that shape family forms. Thus, when I discuss Central American families, I do not refer to a static institution synonymous with the nuclear family, as this institution has gone through many transformations in Central America, and other family forms have co-existed with the idealised class-based notion of a nuclear unit. Women and men have been engaged in different flows of internal labour migration, leading to the creation and maintenance of a variety of family formations. Already in the late 1950s, it was estimated that 'free unions' in El Salvador accounted for 50 per cent of all unions, and families regularly included children from previous unions as well as adult relatives (Menjívar 2000: 47). My discussion of the dynamics of Central American families should thus be placed within this broader historical context. This optic permits a more nuanced presentation, as well as an apt assessment that reflects both broader historical and politico-economic trends and the immigrants' own views and desires. From this viewpoint, we can examine how the US legal context that today receives these immigrants plays a key role in their families' internal dynamics across borders, and in their links to other institutions in society.

Parent–Child Relationships

Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the US have varied forms of family arrangement. Some immigrants came to the US single and established families there; others arrived alone and left their families back home. In some cases, the siblings and the parent or parents live in the US and other siblings live in the home country. Some have established other unions in the US and thus have two immediate families in two (or more) geographical locations. Some Guatemalans and Salvadorans took their children but, given the high crime rates and drugs in some of the neighbourhoods where they settled, sent the children back to their home country to be cared for by a relative (Menjívar 2000, 2002a).² Hondurans, who started to arrive in high numbers later, began to follow similar patterns. Thus, it is not unusual for these Central American immigrant families to include multiple arrangements and be separated by great distances—geographical and otherwise.

As a result, the effects of immigration policies on these immigrants' families are not unambiguous or easy to categorise. Whereas there has been dislocation, tension and pain among family members who are separated and unable to reunite or visit each other regularly, respondents did not mention not having a family or that their family 'had disintegrated' in the context of migration.³ Particularly with reference to parents and children left in the home country, they always mentioned their sacrifices, their actions, their ups and downs in life, their dreams and plans for those family members (PNUD 2005). Indeed, it is perhaps this *idea* they have of family relations and perceived obligations in spite of time and distance, together with weakened economies and increasing trends of inequality in the home country, that accounts for the large volume of remittances these immigrants send to their loved ones.⁴ In 2008, Salvadorans sent \$3.8 billion in remittances (US Department of State 2010a), Guatemalans sent \$4.3 billion (*Guatemala Times* 2009) and, in 2009, Hondurans sent \$2.9 billion (US Department of State 2010b). Many immigrants remit about \$150–\$200 monthly and have been doing so for several years. In the context where Central American families live, these remittances signify much more than money. As Zelizer (2010) notes, remittances not only provide essential resources for those in the home country but also serve to mitigate the trials and uncertainty of long-term separation between parents and children (and between partners in couples). Remittances reflect what Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 14) call 'relativising', that is, 'the variety of ways individuals establish, maintain, or curtail relational ties with specific family members'. In the case of families split as a result of immigration policies, 'relativising' may also refer to 'modes of materialising the family as an imagined community with shared feelings and obligations' (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 14). Remittances are thus monetary transactions with deep emotional meaning, through which immigrants keep a sense of family (McKenzie and Menjívar 2011).

Moreover, social position, such as gender, informs immigrants' perceptions and obligations toward their families within the context of declined face-to-face contact. For instance, mothers who leave their children behind rarely stop remitting, and send

money and gifts for longer periods of time than their male counterparts (Abrego 2008b), even though the women's US earnings tend to be lower than those of the men. In fact, Guatemalan and Salvadoran women have been shown to even *increase* remittances when they form new unions in the US (Menjívar and Abrego 2009). Dreby (2006) and Schmalzbauer (2004) observed similar gender differences in expectations of parenting across borders among Mexicans and Hondurans, respectively.

Immigrants resort to many other ways to remain connected. For instance, Worby (2006) found that a coping narrative among Guatemalan men was to maintain the idea that their families back home needed them and were counting on them. These observations notwithstanding, it does not mean that cohesiveness predominates over conflict, that family relations are devoid of tension, or that reunification between parents and children is easy, as all these dynamics can simultaneously co-exist in the same family. Rather, they underscore the complexity inherent in these families' reorganisation, redefinition, accommodation and change (as well as continuity) across borders. Accordingly, these separations can also have detrimental consequences. Given these immigrants' legal uncertainty, the possibility of an imminent deportation shapes many decisions that individuals make.⁵ According to the US Department of Homeland Security (2005), 7,235 Salvadorans, 12,529 Guatemalans and 14,556 Hondurans were deported in 2005 and, whereas in 1998 these three Central American groups accounted for approximately 9 per cent of total deportations, they made up 17 per cent in 2005, and 21 per cent in 2008 (US Department of Homeland Security 2009). Thus, many of these Central Americans must factor in the insecurity of residence they experience when making decisions about where their children should live; they often find it more secure to leave or send their children to live with relatives (usually female) back home. An important gender angle emerges here, as gender ideologies position women at the centre of the challenges that arise from the separation of parents and children. In a dramatic case that underscores this point, one Salvadoran mother tried to put her 12-year-old son up for adoption in the hope that this would improve his chances of staying in the US, as she had had TPS for over ten years and was not hopeful that her legal status would become permanent (Wright 2005). The boy had been living in El Salvador with his grandmother, and had travelled alone at the age of ten to be reunited with his mother. Although this was a dramatic case, Central American children have been observed to be the protagonists of their own migration (see Orellana *et al.* 2001); long-term, uncertain separation from their parents plays a key role in children's decisions to migrate alone.

The legal predicament of many Central Americans and their precarious financial situation make it difficult for them to see their families regularly or to reunite permanently; while they hold temporary permits they cannot travel back home because, although such travel is technically possible, it involves a cumbersome process that can easily jeopardise their chances for securing permanent status. To be sure, the migration experience among other groups is also characterised by one family member migrating to work while the rest of the family stays in the home country

(see also Parreñas 2005a, 2005b). However, owing to the legal instability experienced by Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Hondurans, temporary disruptions often turn into indefinite long-term separations, during which the immigrants wait and hope that their temporary permits will become permanent, or that there will be an amnesty that will guarantee them the right to live and work in the US on a permanent basis. At the other end, their relatives in the home countries hope and pray that their loved ones do not perish during the journey, that they will not be deported, and that one day they will return home to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour in the north.

However, these dreams and hopes become harder to realise as time goes by. Given the immigrants' legal predicament, trips back home become highly costly physically and economically, and thus family reunification is put off indefinitely.⁶ Owing in part to the pressure many immigrant women feel to compensate for supposedly 'abandoning' their children back home, one Salvadoran woman decided to work almost around the clock, holding down three jobs seven days a week, so that she would be able to send more money home to her children, who remained in the care of her mother. She confessed, however, that this strategy also helped her, because it left her with little time to think about how much she missed them: 'My strategy was to get exhausted so I didn't have to think how much I miss my kids. Being busy makes me forget my sadness'. What gets to her is that, when she calls her children, her 13-year-old son cries every single time he comes to the phone. Her sadness increases when she contemplates how long she might be separated from her children, because her political asylum application has been in process for several years and there are no signs that it will be approved anytime soon. Another Salvadoran woman said that she misses her family above all during the holidays: 'For New Year, at church the priest said that people should greet each other and hug their families. I started to cry. I had no one to hug. And it's the most horrible moment when you see couples hugging, children hugging their mothers (crying) and you're just standing there alone, with no one to hug. It feels terrible, terrible'. However, she was not sure how many more New Year celebrations she would spend separated from her children as, with her TPS, there are only very slim chances of her ever being able to apply for permanent residence.

For the most part, the women tended to break down and cry during the interviews when they narrated how much they missed their children; however, none of the men cried. Perhaps it is not that the women missed their children more, but that women are given more licence to express emotions more openly. The women worried about whether their children were being cared for properly, but the fathers whose children lived back home seemed satisfied to know that they were in the care of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, or aunts. This parallels Dreby's (2006) observation about the difference between the sacralisation of Mexican women's maternal role and Mexican men's role as providers. The Central American women also seemed to feel more guilty about having left their children back home. It did not help that, for their part, their children reproached them more than they did their fathers, and seemed to understand better their fathers' inability to travel to see them, particularly when the migration (and separation) enabled the fathers to fulfil their breadwinner

obligations. In the case of the mothers, even when they sent gifts and money to support the children, their offspring still accused them of abandoning them. These attitudes reflect gender ideologies that place different expectations upon fatherhood and motherhood, which are accentuated in parenting across borders.

Moreover, many immigrants establish new families in their new home. Women and men sometimes form new unions and end up with partners and children both in their countries of origin and in the US. At the other end, those who stay behind, particularly the women, are often concerned about the fate of their relationships and what it means for the children, above all when telephone communication (usually initiated by the immigrants in the US) is irregular or when packages and monetary remittances do not arrive on time. In Honduras, this was an important topic of conversation. There, Toña, an active and well-respected woman in her mid-50s, stressed the importance of communication: 'It happens in the community. There are families that have disintegrated ... if there isn't communication'. And, after long and uncertain separations during which many changes take place, it is not uncommon that, when parents and children reunite in the US (or back home), they often find little semblance of a family and sometimes cannot even recognise each other physically. Armando, a Salvadoran in Phoenix, mentioned maintaining a sense of family even though he could not physically recognise loved ones due to the long-term separation. He recounted how fortunate it was that he had been able to take his brother with him when he went to pick up his 20-year-old son at the Mexico–Arizona border. Armando had left his son a toddler in El Salvador and, if his brother, who had visited El Salvador recently, had not been there to recognise the young man, Armando would have returned to Phoenix empty-handed. He then asked for photos of his family in El Salvador, as he was preparing for his first trip there in 17 years, because, he said, '[I]f I didn't know they were my family, they would be like complete strangers to me'.

The uncertain and lengthy separations between parents and children that Central Americans experience create tension when they are finally together. Although the material and financial lot of the children left in the care of relatives tends to improve when the parents (or parent) send money and gifts from the US, this betterment often comes at a great cost (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Leslie (1993) notes that family reunification for Central Americans can be problematic owing to the unrealistic expectations that parents and children have of each other. The children often reproach the parents, particularly their mothers, for having left them 'abandoned', a situation also observed among other groups (see Parreñas 2005a). Eduardo, a young man in Phoenix who is half Salvadoran and half Guatemalan, felt 'robbed' of a sense of family because he had grown up in the care of his maternal grandmother in El Salvador, 'with comforts and everything I wanted materially, but without my parents'. In his words:

What do you think is worse, to share poverty here with my half-siblings and mother and father, or not having learned how to love them because I never saw them? What would I have given for a goodnight kiss from my mother, for instance,

or even for a fight with a sibling! You know? That's what makes a family a family. But instead, I don't know who these people are! I am sorry if you feel I'm ungrateful . . . and you and everyone else think my parents are great and you're going to tell me about their sacrifice and blah blah blah. I know the story. And I'm sure you'd side with my mother because she's such a hard worker [rolling his eyes] and loves me and all that. But I am not and will not be grateful to them for having sent me back.

Leticia, his mother, mentioned that he reproaches them for having 'abandoned' him, something that is particularly painful for her:

Do you know how much it hurts that he thinks I abandoned him, when all I did was killed myself working three jobs so that he could have a good education there, away from all the bad things here? I wanted the best for him; I'm his mother, not a stranger. I have asked him to stop reproaching me because it is too painful (voice quivering, teary eyes) . . . All those years he was there [in El Salvador] I used to miss him so much, I used to cry at night, but I kept thinking, 'No, this is good for him.' And then look what he says to me now? Is this fair?

An important aspect of these family reunifications is that often the parents who are in the US miss the years during which children grow up the fastest and change the most, which underscores the importance that stage in the life-cycle makes in separations and in reunification (see Carling *et al.* this issue). Although the parents are cognisant of their children's growth, they realise the impact of time when they are reunited. Sometimes the children develop tastes and lifestyles that the parents do not approve of, which can be a source of tension when they are finally together. To be sure, such tensions also arise among non-immigrant families, and among immigrant families who are together in the place of arrival. But this strain is more pronounced when parents and children are reunited after separation that may have lasted for decades. A Salvadoran mother in Phoenix said that she only realises that her children are growing up when she talks with her teenage son, whose voice is changing, but she still keeps an image of him as a small boy: 'I have an image of my children as babies, not as teenagers. To me they are my little kids. Can you imagine when we are together what it will be like?' And a Guatemalan woman who left three children under the age of three, when the youngest one was just newly born, cannot envision what it will be like to live with her children again: 'I don't really know them, especially the youngest. He doesn't know me either . . . He is now three and talks, and the last time I got a photo from the kids was one year ago. I would like to be there with them. But I have to put up with it and stay here.' Again, importantly, it is women who seem to bear the burden of these separations more intensely owing to gender ideologies and expectations of motherhood.

During times of indefinite separation, telephone communication becomes key in attenuating the effects of physical distance (McKenzie and Menjivar 2011). Participants reported calling their loved ones regularly, as it provided them with a way of keeping a 'sense of family'. Not everyone could do this, however; some

participants' relatives back home did not have a telephone, although this is changing with the increased availability of mobile phones. Illustrative of how much time had elapsed without him seeing his children, a Guatemalan man said that when he left them they only spoke his language, Mam, and now that they are going to school they all speak Spanish, a major change in them that is reflected in phone conversations.

One Guatemalan mother said that, when she phones her three children back home, she tries to be as nice as possible:

No, no, no, I never scold them, ever. I only tell them that I love them, that I miss them, that I need them, that I want to see them, and that soon we will be together to never be separated again. They tell me that they love me and that they are grateful for what I do for them. And they know that we'll be together again soon. They miss me and ask me to go back. But they know that I'll see them when God permits.

She explained that this has been going on for three years, and that frankly she was not sure when she would see them again. The last time she saw them was through an Internet connection two years prior to our interview. Conversely, women in Honduras reported talking with their husbands and sons in the US anything from daily to every few months, but the majority talked with their loved ones weekly. Most of these conversations revolved around external goings-on. My assistant often overheard, and interviewees typically related, conversations regarding day-to-day chores and responsibilities, such as household maintenance, land care and financial matters. He rarely heard, and women almost never reported, conversations about fear, loneliness and stress, feelings he observed were always present in the women's conversations with others in town (McKenzie and Menjívar 2011).

As the words of the immigrants in Phoenix and their loved ones in Honduras indicate, attempts to romanticise these family separations in the context of family cohesion across borders should be tempered by recognition of the numerous costs, dislocation and alienation that such separations produce. Even though sometimes the children may be left in the care of maternal grandmothers or other female relatives who dote on them and who indeed become 'second' mothers to them, in the eyes of the children the care provided by these relatives is no substitute for the presence of a parent, particularly a mother. Efforts to sanitise the pain and suffering resulting from these separations and the migrants' *immobility* with celebratory images of family unity should be reassessed. At the same time, for those involved, a *sense* of family is the engine that keeps them going, even if their wish to be close can only be realised through rapid communication technologies.⁷

Links Beyond the Family

US immigration policy reconstitutes immigrants as they cross national borders and channels immigrants and their children into different paths. It is also not unusual for immigrant parents and other adult immigrants who live in precarious

legal situations to avoid contact with schools, the health-care system and police authorities. With stiffer immigration laws, the militarisation of the southern US border and new initiatives for service providers to work in conjunction with immigration authorities to detect and then deport undocumented immigrants, it is not surprising that immigrants will be reluctant to approach such institutions.⁸ Many undocumented parents fear sending their children to school, even if the children are US-born, to avoid detection by the authorities when filling out school forms. Similar situations have been found in other US cities (see Uriarte *et al.* 2003) but, in Arizona, where several laws targeting undocumented immigrants have recently been passed, this is a major concern for all immigrants, documented and undocumented alike, and for their families back home. In addition, local enforcement agencies, in collaboration with federal authorities, have conducted raids as part of an agreement between the two agencies of enforcement to target undocumented immigrants. As a result, a climate of fear has been created, particularly in destinations such as Phoenix, where it is not surprising to find parents making life-altering decisions about where children should live based on their experiences with accessing benefits and social services, as well as the omnipresent threat of deportation.

As a result of the legal uncertainties experienced by many Central American immigrants, many of them live in what Chávez (1988) referred to as ‘binational families’ and Fix and Zimmerman (2001) later coined ‘mixed-status families’—i.e., undocumented parents or children living with documented (mostly US citizen) children or siblings, or several members of a family each having a different legal status, a situation also found among other immigrant families (Capps *et al.* 2005). In the same families, there are children who have the privilege of citizenship (and thus access to goods and benefits in society), those in the process of regularising their status, and undocumented ones who lack even the most basic rights—such as access to higher education and health care—and who can be deported at any moment. Membership in such mixed-status families can have unforeseen consequences for the children as, within the same family, legal status can channel siblings along significantly different paths. The immigrants’ and the children’s relations with the different institutions in society will be equally dissimilar.

For instance, immigrants often risk their own health and, potentially, that of their children, as they avoid public health workers so as not to risk detection. Their lack of access to social services due to their tenuous status is particularly damaging because the kinds of job they tend to obtain do not provide benefits like health insurance; thus, they are left with access to few, if any, social service resources. Sometimes parents go back home to seek medical treatment and take their children with them. And there is an important gender angle here, too. As gender ideologies place women in charge of caring for their families, when immigrants do not have access to social benefits such as health care (particularly for the children), it is women who take charge of locating medical treatment (Menjívar 2002b). Thus, Central American immigrant women often attend community organisations to obtain information about free clinics or similar programmes, places where they have the opportunity to

meet other immigrant women and exchange information. One Salvadoran woman was anxious about not having health insurance for her children, and tried to avoid contact with health professionals; she had heard that these workers might contact immigration officials and have her deported.⁹ She was unsure how long this situation would last, as her Guatemalan husband had already filed a petition to regularise her status but her application had taken almost a decade to process and she was still ‘in limbo’. When asked about her health situation, she said:

I feel fine now. Insurance? Our insurance company, we call it Our Heavenly Father Company [laughing]. You know why? Because we simply pray to God that we don’t get sick. We wouldn’t know what to do if we did. So He keeps us healthy. We try not to go to the doctor often; as you know, we cannot expose our [legal] situation to everyone. So if anyone gets sick we use medicines that people bring from Mexico or El Salvador, you know, a little penicillin here or there. Stuff like that. But mostly I just try to eat well and once in a while I’ll have an aspirin. Do you understand me? It’s one day at a time.

One indigenous Guatemalan woman made sure to exercise, riding her bike daily around her block, so that she kept healthy and avoided the need to see a doctor or go to a hospital. In other cases, immigrants were reluctant to call the police when they needed help, a particularly troublesome situation for women in situations of domestic violence, who mentioned that, while they were aware that they had ‘more rights in the US as women’ if their partners abused them, were not sure that calling the police would solve the situation. And in Phoenix, in recent years, there has been a series of assaults on Guatemalan immigrants, mostly on those of indigenous descent, apparently committed by other Latino residents who see them as especially vulnerable because many of these immigrants can be identified easily by their phenotype and appearance and it is not uncommon that they will not speak Spanish well. They also come from a context where reporting to the authorities was avoided. These Guatemalans are regularly assaulted, robbed, extorted, but do not call the police because, although they fear the criminals, they fear deportation even more (Gonzalez 2008). The general crackdown on undocumented immigration in Phoenix has created more fear among these immigrants than the threat of deportation alone. A Guatemalan man we interviewed said that he does not leave his house to venture out when there are raids in his neighbourhood: ‘As long as you don’t leave your house, there is no fear, right? As long as you don’t leave your house and you are locked in, you’re fine’.

Some scholars argue that the US-born children of undocumented parents are the most vulnerable, because they are a class of citizens who live subject to the disadvantages of their undocumented parents (Fix and Zimmerman 2001). In fact, there are many eligible-citizen children with non-citizen parents who do not participate in benefit programmes because the parents are unaware that their children are eligible or are afraid of the consequences of benefit receipt for their legal status and eventual legal citizenship (Hagan *et al.* 2003). Thus, the legal instability of

the adult immigrants affects their children's potential for success. New border enforcement and stringent legal strategies will undoubtedly affect immigrants' links to different institutions, particularly when the immigrant parents are unsure of when or if they will ever become permanent members of society as citizens. Legal developments in Arizona, like the passing of Senate Bill 1070 in April 2010 which can penalise the presence of undocumented immigrants, have created a situation where immigrants 'self-deport', or leave voluntarily, taking their children—often US-born—with them, either back to their origin countries or, more likely, to other states. And although many of these children and their parents are resilient and are contributing in meaningful ways to the communities in which they now live, as well as those back home, the effect their current predicament will have on their future here and there remains in question.

Discussion and Conclusion

The case of Honduran, Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants underscores the complexities of parenting across borders. Many of these Central Americans migrated within the context of militarisation, civil strife or its aftermath, or natural disasters, exacerbated by increasing trends of inequality worldwide. Their reception in the US has been shaped by political decisions that have left many in legal limbo for decades. This tenuous legal status influences these immigrants' parenting, both of children left behind (and family reunification) and of children who live with them in the US, decisively shaping parent–child relationships within the family and links between the family and social institutions. And, whereas these immigrants' sense of parental relationships and obligations—in their countries of origin as well as in the US—are strongly influenced by the legal constraints they face, factors such as social position (e.g. gender and stage in the life-cycle) play a significant role in shaping the relations they maintain, the nature and degree of contact, and the expectations that both the children and the parents have of each other.

Thus, given gender ideologies that inform perceptions of parenthood, children have dissimilar expectations of their mothers and fathers, both when they are separated and when they are reunited after long separations. Meanwhile, parents and children redefine, reorganise and rework their relationships in ways that may not always agree with the receiving state's legal definitions of the family, and that reflect the fluidity of their predicament. Individuals in families interact with institutions, such as the health-care system, authorities and schools, dealings that underscore the fragility of their legal position, particularly in the context of increasingly hostile immigration regimes. As a result, the parents' and children's experiences are not easily classifiable and are more akin to multi-coloured but blurry pictures than to black-and-white sharp images, because joy and sadness, rapprochement and love, and sacrifice and fulfilment are all intertwined and can be present in these relations—both here and there.

Although some scholars have noted the corrosive effects of migration on immigrant families, because it sometimes leads to their breakdown and dissolution, and have seen that families maintain transnational ties that attenuate the negative effects of separation, I would like once again to note that these debates misdirect our attention from key issues regarding parenting within regimes of high levels of international migration. As Gamburd (2000) correctly observes, when discussing the negative consequences that migration has for families, it becomes easy to blame family breakdown simply on migration, disregarding the structural conditions that give rise to migration in the first place. Thus, the role that extra-personal factors play in parenting across borders is often overlooked, or treated as secondary, in favour of attention to individual characteristics, actions and motivations. And even though, during the uncertain time of separation, immigrants maintain vibrant ties and regular communication (no doubt indicators of the immigrants' agency and individual motivation), one must note that these often-celebrated activities and expressions of agency are enacted within crucial structural constraints (e.g. laws that prevent frequent face-to-face contact through travel or family reunification) over which individuals have little, if any, control—and, thus, are not of their own choosing.

The case I have discussed here reminds us that, in the face of much movement across borders, the state continues to hold great power, as it delimits, constrains and affords rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities. Attention to what states do through their immigrant and immigration policies sheds light on the underside of presumed patterns of immigrant incorporation, as spending long periods of time in legal instability can thwart immigrants' socio-economic advancement. Importantly, the effects of state policies are not contained within the physical borders in which immigrants live, and they spill over to the countries from where the immigrants' originate, particularly when close family members, such as children, still live there. At the same time, the experiences of the children who live with their parents in the US are not limited to the physical spaces in which they now live, as the structure of immigration law situates their lives in temporary spaces that include removal (or exclusion from society's benefits) at any time. Among the families affected, inequalities among children (between those who live here and those who live there, as well as among those who live in the same US house but have differential access to resources by virtue of their place of birth or legal status) surface in striking ways. Thus, as people live out the contradictions embedded in immigration law and foreign policy, lengthy separations between parents and children transform and reorient conventional notions of the family, often in complex ways. Landolt and Da (2005) insightfully document the efforts of migrant families to negotiate the spatial challenges they face and note that distance and mobility are contentious sources of power and vulnerability within these families. It is worth noting that, from the point of view of those involved, these reconfigurations do not necessarily mean disintegration.

Notes

- [1] I conducted the research for this larger study with the assistance of several doctoral students; thus, I sometimes use the plural pronoun to refer to the fieldwork.
- [2] There are questions about the efficacy of this strategy, as Central American countries now exhibit high levels of violence. Observers blame this violence on the deportation of youth who were in trouble with the law in the US, but one must locate this phenomenon more carefully within the broader context of lack of opportunities, along with the legacy of years of overt political and structural violence in the countries of origin.
- [3] I am not denying that separation, divorce and abandonment happen. I argue for a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics, which questions the simplistic notion that migration *leads* to family disintegration (a popular trope that conflates physical separation with the act of migration itself).
- [4] It is this *idea* of a family, and the expectations embedded in it, that led many of the Salvadorans in my study in San Francisco (Menjívar 2000) to be disappointed when their relatives could not help them during settlement.
- [5] In an excellent examination of the effects of IIRIRA 1996 on Salvadoran families, Rodríguez and Hagan (2004) note the devastating effects of increased deportations resulting from implementation of this law.
- [6] Extensive ties have developed between immigrants in the US and their families in Central America, but frequent trips back home are highly concentrated among those who provide a link (through the delivery of goods) to people at both ends. Thus it is the immobility of many that has opened up opportunities for the relatively few entrepreneurs.
- [7] Negative effects of family separation through migration have also been found in other contexts and groups (see Landale and Ogena 1995).
- [8] This situation is not specific to Central Americans, as other undocumented immigrants also go to great lengths to avoid detection. However, it is an integral part of the Central Americans' experience that lingers for indefinite periods of time.
- [9] Arizona voters approved Proposition 200 in 2004 and another version of it in 2006. This law requires that state and local workers report immigration violations to federal authorities. Failure to do so or to not withhold benefits from individuals who fail to provide proof of eligibility can result in a misdemeanor charge. Immigrants of uncertain status are understandably fearful of contacting service providers and state officials. Other laws have followed, such as the 2008 law that heavily penalises employers who hire undocumented immigrants. The most controversial, Senate Bill 1070, contains the USA's most stringent provisions against undocumented immigration, including those requiring law enforcement officers to determine the immigration status of individuals who are suspected of being undocumented immigrants. At the time of writing, a temporary injunction has prevented the more controversial components of Senate Bill 1070 from taking effect.

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Consumption Dilemmas: Tracking Masculinity, Money and Transnational Fatherhood Between the Ecuadorian Andes and New York City

Jason Pribilsky

This article explores the consumption dilemmas encountered by migrant men from the Ecuadorian Andes living and working in New York City. Specifically, it looks at how the priorities of budgeting and saving money that are necessary for generating remittances conflict with migrants' practices of consumption. New consumption practices take shape as young men experience the city as an engagement of perceived modernity. I argue that the changes involved in this process require men to confront long-standing relationships between ideas of what constitutes proper masculinity and the uses of money in the Andes. They also require men to find new ways to balance consumption and their gender identities. In this space, new models for fatherhood emerge as migrants shape their role as breadwinners through the specific practices of providing for families back home.

Keywords: Transnational Fatherhood; Consumption; Drinking; Masculinity; Money; Ecuadorians

Locating Transnational Fatherhood

Motherhood is a biological fact, while fatherhood is a social invention (Mead [1949] 1969: 1).

A decade ago, in an insightful research article, sociologists Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) conjoined the public world of transnational migration with the presumably private domain of motherhood in an exploration of the experiences of

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Latina migrants in the United States living apart from their children back in Mexico and Central America. The article gathered particular analytical strength by holding in parallel a study of women's strategies of mothering 'from abroad' while in the US, on the one hand, and a focus on their duties as domestics caring for the children of others, on the other. Ultimately, this bifocal approach demonstrated myriad ways in which the political economy of domestic work saturates and shapes women's own sense of identity within globalising discourses of proper and 'modern' motherhood; motherhood was shown to be a crucible of the global and the local. Since then, research into the varied expressions of 'transnational motherhood' has become something of a migration sub-speciality (see, e.g. Avila 2008; Dreby 2006; Gamburd 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001, 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; and contributions to this issue). Yet, can the same be said of male migrants in their roles as fathers? In what ways is male migrant identity shaped by gendered experience, and what role is there for exploring fatherhood in this process? Moreover, in what ways do migrants organise their transnational livelihoods amid assessments of their role as fathers? To date, answers to these and similar questions have remained largely absent in the transnational literature (for notable exceptions, see Ahmad 2008; Parreñas 2008). Perhaps Mead's ([1949] 1969) sentiments regarding the mere 'social invention' and lack of necessity of fatherhood still carry some weight among social scientists. Or perhaps, more broadly, it signals the perniciousness of what anthropologist David Gilmore (1990) has dubbed 'the taken for granted syndrome' in social science writing about men's gendered experiences, despite numerous examples to the contrary. In any case, where male gender is concerned in studies of migration, questions of fatherhood have been largely absent or linked superficially to displays of machismo or *homo economicus*.¹ We still know little of this 'social invention' in the context of migration.

In this article, I sketch out an understanding of 'transnational fatherhood' among undocumented Ecuadorian male migrants living and working in the US. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1999 and 2004 in the rural community of Jatundeleg² and in other surrounding villages of the south-central Ecuadorian Andes and in the heavily migrant-populated New York City boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn.³ I traipse lightly around the application of the term 'transnational fatherhood', however, not wishing to suggest a direct corollary of the many detailed explorations of globalised motherhood populating the migration literature. Indeed, in Jatundeleg, fatherhood (*paternidad* in Spanish) cannot be said to occupy quite the same subject position as motherhood. While men who migrate out of the village frequently add moral force to their departure with claims of migrating 'for their families' or leaving 'to feed their children', a more amplified discussion of fatherhood is not often to be had in casual conversation. To put it in Bourdieu's (1979: 13) terms, fatherhood in Jatundeleg is *doxa* (unspoken practice) to motherhood's *heterodoxy*. While no villager regularly speaks of fatherhood, there is no shortage of discussion about what constitutes a 'good mother'. Even where it has historically been men who migrate and leave their families, it is women remaining in the community with

children who undergo the greatest scrutiny with respect to their parenting abilities. This double standard persists even as women have migrated abroad in large numbers (see, e.g. Boccagni, this issue; Pedone 2008). The argument I advance here is that locating or 'tracking' what might be termed 'transnational fatherhood' requires an exploration of a host of quotidian micro-practices and experiences of daily life that ultimately constitute meaningful situations in which migrants confront identities as 'men in their role as *men*', including roles as husbands and fathers (Gutmann 1997: 385; emphasis in original). While seemingly obvious, the history of migration studies demonstrates that, even while men have been overwhelmingly the focus of research, their gendered lives have been largely excluded (Willis and Yeoh 2000).

Nowhere, I argue, are these experiences more salient for undocumented Ecuadorian men in the US than in the realms of money management, spending and budgeting that occupy so much of a migrant's non-working hours. Young men in Jatundeleg who leave for the US, leaving behind wives and children in order to 'get ahead' (*salir adelante*), do so with the hope, if not an expectation, that they will be away for a short time (a couple of years), earning, saving and remitting money back home; a common refrain is that migration for them will be '*ida por vuelta*' (go and return, a short trip). Running parallel to their goals of earning money, however, is a search for adventure abroad. As many young men describe, leaving their home community for the first time opens up a chance to 'aspire to have things' (*aspirar a tener cosas*), and more generally to engage in what I have elsewhere described as *iony modernity* (Pribilsky 2007). *Iony*, pronounced 'I-Oh-Knee', or sometimes expressed as the common American name 'Johnny', as in 'yoni', is a manipulated pronunciation of New York City's Tourist Bureau's slogan 'I♥NY'. Migrants and their families back in Ecuador frequently use the label both to refer to the USA (as a place) and to describe a certain form of life abroad.⁴

The possibilities of migration as *iony modernity* present themselves in what Moore (1994: 66) describes as 'fantasies of identity' typically formed around the style and affect that return migrants bring to the community, as they flaunt limited English-language vocabularies, ways of dress and what appears to others to be endless disposable income. For young men leaving Jatundeleg, this fantasy often naively combines ideas of 'having things' in the US (clothing, cars, music, mobile phones) with continuing to remit money home, although, once abroad, men invariably find this juggling act difficult, if not at times impossible.⁵ Success—defined as being able to simultaneously afford one's existence in the US and send home remittances—comes with discipline, diligence and a reorganisation of priorities: a confrontation with a variety of 'consumption dilemmas'. Men, who are not typically money managers in highland communities, soon find themselves engaging in actions that were once the sole domain of wives and mothers; soon, for the first time, consuming alcohol with friends becomes scrutinised practice, as it affects one's abilities to send money home. It is within these balancing acts, between generating remittances and desires for *iony modernity*, that men's experiences reveal contradictions and tensions that are not just economic, but gendered as well. In some instances, these experiences,

as I recorded them, served to bring fatherhood and a commentary on how to be a father (*ser padre*) out of the realm of *doxa* and into active dialogue and debate.

If community commentary on fatherhood has been traditionally *doxa in* Jatundeleg, this of course does not signal a complete absence of father-talk in the rural Andes. Whereas *paternidad* may rarely enter into people's daily speech, elite and professional discursive fields extolling the 'proper' and normal forms of fatherhood have slowly crept into the local lexicon, lending imagination to new definitions of being a father. The sources are varied: in recent years, the federal Instituto del Niño y la Familia (Institute of the Child and the Family, INNFA) has made men, in their role as fathers, a focus in campaigns to ameliorate child labour. In community programmes, murals and pamphlets, fathers are encouraged to see their children as 'in development', like flowers and plants in need of tender cultivation (Pribilsky 2001). Similarly, Bedford (2005) has described how World Bank-funded ethno-development projects in highland Ecuador strive to inculcate 'better loving in men' through the promotion of normative intimacy between married couples and encouraging men to assume child-care duties as wives move into productive work outside the home. In both of these instances, state and non-governmental initiatives working to define progressive forms of fatherhood are reinforced by an onslaught of slick television and other media increasingly targeted to play on people's anxieties surrounding modern childhood and children's development. In Jatundeleg, media images from parenting magazines such as *Crecer Feliz* (Growing Up Happy), and talk shows regularly focused on children's well-being, are well known. Often the images of parenthood feature white, urban professionals in the role of mothers and fathers, blending together ideas of 'proper' parenthood with powerful messages about modernity. Fathers, in particular, are often portrayed as providing what Townsend (2002) calls the 'package deal': a respectable home, a good job and loving, well-adjusted children. Absent in these portrayals are the realities of rural life, where children continue to be integral to agricultural labour, where public schools are often closed for weeks on end owing to teacher strikes and lack of wages, and where sources of work outside of farming are scarce. Still, despite the disjuncture between images of urban modernity and rural life, these models of proper fatherhood find traction in Jatundeleg, especially when merged with urban critiques of migration. Indeed, psychological studies—filtered through news stories and television—have made professional terminology such as 'abandonment' and parental neglect (*negligencia familiar*) common parts of villagers' lexicons when discussing the potential problem of parenting from afar (Pribilsky 2001; see also Pinos and Ochoa Ordóñez 1999). For young men leaving Jatundeleg, as both new fathers and new migrants, these messages are hard to avoid.

Ecuadorian Transnational Migration: The View from Cañar

Unlike in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is no longer possible to speak of international migration from Ecuador in terms of specific sending and receiving

areas. Whereas the phenomenon of migration was once largely restricted to the country's south-central Andean highlands, Ecuador as a whole has become, if fitfully, a diasporic nation, with fully 10 per cent of its citizenry living abroad and with large populations in the urban US, Spain and other countries of Western Europe. Between 1993 and 2006 alone, approximately 900,000 people left Ecuador without returning, a figure that represents almost 8 per cent of the total population of the country and 20 per cent of its economically active population according to the country's 2001 census (Herrera 2008: 12; see also Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). There is also not a single demographic profile that characterises Ecuadorian transnational migration. While young men constituted the original rank-and-file of migrants, a wholesale 'feminisation' of migration has occurred over the past decade with the large-scale migration of women, largely to Spain (Herrera 2005; Pedone 2003; see also Boccagni, and Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue).

The view presented here, then, is partial, focused on the southern province of Cañar, an area regarded as the first major migrant-sending region in Ecuador (Jokisch and Kyle 2005; Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). Despite the influx of remittances and a landscape dotted with new homes paid for by migrants abroad, Cañar remains one of the poorest regions of Ecuador (Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo 1993). Rural households, many of them originally constituted on *hacienda* lands, are perhaps best characterised as 'semiproletarianised' (De Janvry 1981). Family units, nucleated around a parental unit and some extended family, derive their livelihood from a combination of subsistence farming (mainly of corn, potatoes, beans and barley) and piecemeal day-labourer work (*jornalero*). A fortunate small group of men in Jatundeleg have found work as local truck transport drivers, and a handful of women own small stores selling basic groceries, alcohol and medicines. Few villagers find secure work outside the community.

As in many rural villages throughout the Ecuadorian *sierra*, intensive international migration from Jatundeleg has further suspended rural households between the market and subsistence economy. Beginning in the mid-1980s, as the pace of migration accelerated substantially, a pattern of transnationalisation of familial arrangements has come to predominate. Typically, it was men who would initially leave their households, in a preferred pattern of first getting married and not infrequently having a child. If successful abroad, the first objective of many migrants is to establish an independent household for their family through the purchase of land or the construction of a home in the community. Such a base allows men to establish households apart from their natal kin and to consolidate remittances. However this process unfolds, at the root is a steady reliance on remittances for rural households and a movement away from the subsistence economy. Extensive agriculture (growing a series of different seasonal crops) is often jettisoned in favour of less risky and more easily managed mono-cultivation of corn (*maíz*) and the keeping of livestock, primarily dairy cows. Farm profits, along with remittances, are used to buy foodstuffs, usually processed starches in the form of pasta (*fideos*) and bread, along with potatoes, which households no longer grow. While villagers lament

the decline of agriculture and its attendant associations with a nostalgic rural past (*ñaupi tiempos*), many concede this is the only way a family gets ahead. Providing some consolation is the hope that, once a new household is established, a migrant can return with a comfortable level of savings and hopes of investing in a successful business. Dreams include buying a taxi, building a greenhouse to grow produce for markets and opening a small store. However, the reality in Jatundeleg and other villages has been much bleaker, with few migrants returning with prospects other than resuming subsistence agriculture. The situation provokes many to migrate again and has been a significant catalyst for wives to follow husbands abroad, often with the understanding that extra income will lead to greater success.

A major obstacle that hinders many Jatundeleg families from ‘getting ahead’ as quickly as they might wish is the crippling amounts of debt migrants bring with them to New York. Smugglers (*coyotes* or *pasadores*) charge between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to safely deliver clients into the US, a fee that is usually mortgaged. For funding, migrants rely on a quasi-legal system of loan-making (*chulco*), for which immediate and extended families provide land and other forms of collateral (livestock, cars and jewellery). Each loan carries an 8–10 per cent interest rate compounded monthly and, once abroad, migrants must make regular payments to their *chulqueros* (moneylenders). If payments are missed, *chulqueros* frequently resort to violent intimidation directed at family members and will threaten to seize land and other property. In all, the economics of undocumented migration and the transformation of rural households from subsistence to an almost complete reliance on migrant wage labour cast a profound shadow over men’s lives and sense of themselves abroad. As the following sections of this article elaborate, the burden of *chulco* debt and fears over a family’s security, the contradictions between *iony modernity* and generating remittances, and the fundamental realisation that they have become sole breadwinners for rural households in the Andes, all shape men’s experiences of ‘transnational fatherhood’.

Money Matters: Between Remittance Discipline and Consumption

Saddled by debt, an overwhelming urgency to find work marks all migrants’ first days in the US. After securing employment, migrants quickly rush to ‘*enviar una seña*’ (to send a sign) to family members back home, as well as to *chulqueros*. However, sending a ‘sign’ usually adds up to little more than servicing the compounding monthly interest on a crippling *chulco*. Of equal importance is sending a sign to anxious family members fretfully waiting in Ecuador to learn that everything is alright, as the journey between the Andes and New York can sometimes take many months. Along with token amounts of money, migrants hurriedly package up modest gifts, such as clothing or jewellery, giving the appearance of instant success. Photos—of a migrant’s apartment, a workplace or even recent purchases—round out the well-scripted story of initial good luck many migrants wish to tell.

For most migrants I interviewed, however, initial impression management is much easier than money management. Like many other migrants from Latin America, men from Jatundeleg face a difficult transition from an economic mind-set of maintaining subsistence to one oriented towards generating surplus. As Mahler (1995: 2) notes, distinct from the goals governing economic livelihoods in their home countries, migrants ‘face the task of stretching their meager salaries past self-sustenance . . . [and] achieving a surplus to cover debts and family obligations’. Of course, Jatundeleg migrants did not come from strict subsistence economies, but instead had extensive experience in wage labour and a cash economy. Still, the kinds of money-management skill necessary to generate income far and above that needed to live in the US comprised a task that was qualitatively different from the types of task to which most migrants were accustomed.

Jatundeleg migrants frequently characterised this situation to me as the distinction between two methods of earning money, between a mode of ‘making a living’ (*ganarse la vida*) and ‘working for money’ (*trabajando para plata*). Although at first glance both are products of wage labour, each form of work constituted a different approach to the management of cash. To ‘*ganarse la vida*’ includes not only the act of making money in order to meet one’s needs but also the other constituent parts of the peasant economy, including reciprocal labour pacts and barter. Since their childhood, migrants had lived in an affective world of reciprocities—from village work parties (*mingas*) to reciprocal work agreements between households cemented through forms of fictive kinship (*prestamos/cambiamanos*)—where not all economic relations were grounded in cash exchanges. While monetisation was not new, the degree to which it shaped migrants’ lives abroad was significant. In New York, migrants were able to tap into kin networks to meet some needs, such as help obtaining initial household furnishing (mattresses and bedding, for instance) and useful information about where to find thrift stores and community centres offering free services. By contrast, the notion of working ‘*para plata*’, which most male migrants associated with women’s control of money, delineates a wholly different approach to making a living.

Over time, urbanised migrants I spoke with employed various strategies to minimise their expenses and save money. As formal saving measures, such as bank accounts, were impossible to obtain without a social security number, migrants exchanged a host of information regarding informal cost-saving measures and saving techniques. To North American readers routinely familiar with comparison shopping and bargain hunting, the transparent acts of migrants combing the streets of Queens for discount phone-cards or low money-wiring fees can appear mundane and of little consequence. To be sure, in many ways these acts *are* of little consequence, as their cumulative effect is usually not enough to qualitatively boost migrants’ earnings or, more importantly, the amount of their remittances. In fact, the migrants I knew grew frustrated in their pursuits as they found that almost no amount of strict fiscal discipline ever substantially improved their finances. Rather, monetary success invariably only came with fitting extra work into their already overtaxed schedules

and, in some cases, profiting off the needs of other migrants. Nevertheless, small acts of budgeting were important, as migrants put faith in them to bring a semblance of control to their precarious experiences as undocumented labourers. In the context of high debts and obligations to their families, fears of missing work and failing to generate remittances were threaded through my interviews with migrants. With little control over the whims of an employer, the possibility of debilitating sickness and the potential for work-related accidents, any of which could cause migrants to miss work and lose earnings, mastery over budgets provided a psychological buffer against uncertainty. As one Jatundeleg migrant confided in me, 'I go to sleep with those numbers in my head and I can't sleep. But I have to know'.

Genders and Spenders: Drinking, Masculinity and Money Management

Successful migrants quickly learn that *trabajar para plata* includes not only learning to become good savers but also re-evaluating consumption behaviour. As I argue in this section, consumption 'dilemmas' emerge when the economic gymnastics required to make saving possible often force men to confront tensions between their pre- and post-migration identities. Issues of fatherhood are at the forefront of such tensions, as migrant men often construct their justification for migrating around notions of providing for their families. Becoming *iony* entails not only the acquisition of foreign goods but also the acquisition of such goods for one's family. When men's expectations of *iony* accumulation go unmet, they invariably see their inability to consume within the disparaging lens of Ecuadorian class and race antagonisms and the critiques of consumption that were often lobbed against their fellow villagers back home. Equally as powerful, however, were the gendered transformations that accompanied migrants' practices of spending and consumption. In particular, in their attempts to balance budgets and control spending, the men I knew were inadvertently drawn into worlds of money management that, in Ecuador, customarily, would only be attended to by women. As I argue, adopting new money-management practices had real implications for gendered practice and identity formation *between* men, including constructions of 'proper' fatherhood from abroad. As I discuss below, nowhere are these tensions more evident to migrants than in the realm of social drinking.

In Ecuadorian highland communities, women are almost invariably the household managers, in their role as housewives (*amas de la casa*). In Jatundeleg, both sexes frequently opine that women are intrinsically 'smarter' with money and '*más organizadas*' (more organised and capable) in terms of managing domestic finances; men, by contrast, are defined as 'untameable' (*rebeldes*) in this respect. In particular, men in Jatundeleg readily admit to their lack of knowledge of how to '*comprar la semana*' (literally, 'to buy the week', though used to refer to the totality of women's spending). As men were aware, shopping in the weekly markets requires acumen and skill. Within a chronically unstable economy, women relentlessly monitor price fluctuations on key staples and assess with which market vendors they can develop

lines of credit. In Jatundeleg, such attention not only ensured that family members were fed: shielding husbands from gyrations of the household budget was in itself strategic in maintaining good conjugal relations. To be sure, Jatundeleg wives periodically worried that their husbands would feel humiliated by their lack of wealth and erupt into violence.

Although women's control of money signals a certain degree of female-held power, it is not a benefit without burdens (Stølen 1987). As Weiss (1988: 7) summarises, '[W]ives control the money allocated for consumption not for investment, and this control is delegated'. In Jatundeleg, men's ignorance of household finances could easily spark marital discord when a wife grew frustrated with her husband's disregard for the domestic budget. However, a more worrisome (and more chronic) kind of spending concerned '*los vicios*'—vices—of alcohol, cigarettes, gambling and, in rare cases, the use of prostitutes. After men turned over their earnings to their wives, they customarily demanded back a portion for *vicios*, frequently framed as a well-deserved 'reward' for working. How much money a man would demand and how often—or, in other words, how much he wished to reward himself—typically divided households where money spent on *vicios* represented little more than a nuisance from those where the action had crippling effects on domestic life. For migrant men in Queens, the problem of *vicios* assumed another form in the context of saving and budgeting priorities. Nowhere perhaps was this transformation more evident than in the times men spent drinking with other men. Here, their pre-migration approaches to money management the most clearly clashed with the priorities of migrant economics.

To understand the prominence of drinking as a 'consumption dilemma' requires a brief explanation of the role of alcohol use in rural Andean life. In Jatundeleg, as in many Ecuadorian highland communities, social drinking is the preserve of men; women rarely imbibe, and almost never in front of children. Men drink largely to get drunk (*para emborracharse*), and few drinking sessions end before this is achieved. Drinking often begins when a husband signals to his wife to prepare a batch of *agüita* (sweetened herbal tea) and to fetch a bottle of *aguardiente* or a jug of *puro* (pure cane alcohol). Throughout a drinking session (which can last all day or all night), wives and children stay in earshot of the festivities so as to heed a man's request for more alcohol. When the alcohol expired, a child would be sent running to a *tienda* for more. It is a host's responsibility to shoulder the expense, although not without the exaggerated protest of guests waving money about, offering to pay. Beyond such gestures of generosity, the etiquette of male drinking in Jatundeleg is straightforward. Once one begins to drink, one should continue to drink as long as others stay the course or until drink-mates lose the physical ability to drink more. Refusing a drink or trying to excuse one's self mid-session contradicts the central purpose of drinking: to partake in an act of sharing through which community is created and social cohesion is expressed.

While it would be misleading to suggest that all Ecuadorian migrants conform to the pattern and purpose of drinking just described, it is reasonable to say that, among the men I knew in New York City, the importance of alcohol lay in its role in

providing an arena of meaningful practice, and especially meaningful practice *between* men. To be sure, migrants I spent time with often mixed drinking with their socialising—after work, in parks, and even sometimes at work. Such instances, however, ultimately obscured the conflictive relationships some men developed towards alcohol within an economy of working *para plata*. As the following interview data show, answers to my questions on the subject suggest that, while drinking continued to have the same meanings it had had back in Ecuador, men's ability to enact those meanings in their new lives had changed:

Héctor: *Puhh!* Everyone drinks here! There is not much else to do.

JP: But what about you? Do you drink regularly?

Héctor: When I first arrived, I drank so much. It was unbelievable! [. . .] A *paisano* stole bottles of wine—super expensive wine—from the Italian restaurant where he worked. We would have little parties all the time. That was when I was working on the streets.

As Héctor later elaborated, working as a day labourer allowed him a degree of freedom to spend multiple days drinking. When he finally sobered up and returned to work, he paid his dues by taking extra shifts so that he might still save enough money:

Héctor: The reason I drank was because I was lonely. I didn't like it here and I missed my family so. I had a long beard at the time, and I would think about how my wife would comb and stroke it. I would do it myself with my bottle in hand. I was so lonely and there was nothing else for me to But I can't do that now.

JP: And now? You're not so lonely. Do you still drink much?

Héctor: [laughing] Sometimes, yes. It's crazy, but you won't succeed. Sometimes, still, I will meet some friends and we will be listening to some Ecuadorian music and we'll have a few *tragitos* and that will be it. It has to be. I can't miss work. Yes, life disciplines us [*Sí, la vida nos castiga*].

Héctor's experiences with alcohol, including binges, drinking to combat depression and eventually his relative abstinence, were echoed in other migrants' drinking stories. As others concluded, all-night sessions of imbibing with the express goal of getting drunk were quite simply costly affairs, as each finished bottle would call for a fresh one. Even the cheapest bottles of alcohol could add up quickly in a night of drinking. In the US, prices for Ecuadorian liquors—particularly brands of the poor-quality sugar-cane *aguardiente* favoured by *campesinos*, such as Zhumir and Cristal—were particularly high. Consequently, few of the men I interviewed continued to play host the way they may have done back in their home village. One migrant even pointed out the difficulty of buying single cigarettes in the US. If he wished to drink and smoke, he told me, he had to buy an entire pack, only to watch it be depleted by his fellow drinkers. More costly than the money spent on alcohol, though, was the potential for missed work, as a long night of drinking could mean a long day of recovery. Even a day without work could seriously derail scheduled remittances.

Not everyone, of course, shared Héctor's spendthrift approach. Rather, different drinking styles and priorities often placed migrants at odds with one another. Gutmann (1996: 184) could be speaking of the Ecuadorian Andes when he writes of men's drinking in urban Mexico: 'Coercion to drink among men is a standard element of drinking habits'. As was the case in Jatundeleg, men who attempted to cut out in the middle of drinking sessions often found themselves embroiled in tense situations, where they risked offending fellow drinkers. In particular, refusing a drink despite the cajoling to do otherwise can imply a lack of trust and a denial of mutual respect. Among migrants in New York, whose social networks were typically small and tightly knit (often consisting of only room-mates and fellow workers) and who invariably brought the stresses of their undocumented lives into drinking sessions, the stakes were markedly high at times and the likelihood of conflict frequent. An incident involving another migrant, Miguel, captures a familiar predicament that resonated with others I interviewed in New York.

Miguel explained what happened when he began to restrict his drinking in an attempt to 'better manage' (*mandar bien*) his finances and save money (*guardar plata*). While he never stopped drinking altogether, the last straw came after what he described as a month-long drinking binge (*borrachera*) in which he paid little attention to his finances. When a gas utility bill arrived that he could not pay (presumably already overdue), his service was abruptly disconnected even though it was the middle of January. With minimal English-speaking abilities, Miguel did not understand the conditions of the shut-off and failed to get his service reinstated, eventually going two months without heat in the winter.

Miguel's decision to curb his drinking became problematic one Sunday afternoon when he joined friends for a few beers on the patio of a friend's apartment after work. Miguel told himself he would only share a couple of beers with friends. When the other men in attendance decided to pool their money together for a bottle of rum, he plotted his exit strategy:

When they were planning to buy the rum, I said I had to go. I needed to make some calls. No one, though, believed me. They started saying I never spent any time with them. They wondered if I was really so busy, or if I had just become stingy.

Other migrants shared with me details of the less-salutary remarks and hostility they had experienced when they attempted to bow out of drinking sessions. A 27-year-old migrant from a village outside Cuenca re-enacted the response he slung back at fellow migrants:

We were having a typical day, like another day, just drinking and having fun. Laughing and listening to music. Some guys were already drunk, as they always were [...]. They never worked it seemed and they would be asking you for money [...]. You had to be careful. But with friends, it is different. You buy drinks for them, and they buy for you. Nobody is taking advantage of others [*no aprovechándose*]. You just don't think about it. Usually, if I told myself I wasn't drinking, I would not drink—period. I know they wouldn't care, but I don't want

them to think I'm taking advantage of them. There were a few guys, though, that would not leave me alone. One said to me, 'Come on, stay and have a few drinks'. He was drunk and kept pushing me. He said, 'Come on *mandarina*' [sissy], and then I got angry. . . You can't imagine. I said to him, 'What about you? I have a family to feed and my kids back home. I'm no macho man, but I am not a *mandarina*'. He has no kids, no wife. *He* is the one that has to be careful that he's not a *mandarina* or a *maricón* [homosexual].

More than just pragmatic concerns about saving money caused disagreements over alcohol. Selective abstinence also ran counter to a set of particularly male values that lay behind drinking styles and motivations. While the conspicuous consumption of alcohol between men undoubtedly served as a 'means to reputability' (Veblen [1899] 1953: 43), there was more than just status at work. As other ethnographic explorations of male drinking hint, beyond defining relations between men, alcohol consumption equally allows men to become men and enact fundamental qualities of what it means to be a man. In a comparative framework, Ecuadorian patterns of alcohol use parallel Karp's (1980: 113) analysis of men's drinking among the Iteso in East Africa, insofar as drinking constitutes a 'managed accomplishment [that] recapitulate[s] the social order of which [men] are a part'. The social order to which Ecuadorian drinking has long recapitulated is one fraught with uncertainty and potential instability. As men in both Jatundeleg and New York could attest, men drank together largely in mutual recognition of the uncertainties of life. Acknowledging that they could 'make a living' and do their share to provide for their families, they often worried about their position as breadwinners.

My understanding of the tacit meanings behind male social drinking developed very clearly as I listened to men speak of the gendered division of labour between husbands and wives. As one man explained:

Yes, it is true men and women own the fields and men and women work the fields. But, if the fields don't produce and there is no harvest, families will blame the man. It is his responsibility. Although [other people] may not say it, they certainly think it. So do the men. But, what can you do? [Men's work] is uncertain. It's destiny [*destino*], a lottery [*una lotería*].

Similarly, men would employ a common expression to describe their seemingly erratic behaviour, a statement that aptly captures the ethos of masculine drinking: '*Pan para ahora y hambre para mañana*' (Bread today and hunger tomorrow). The saying suggests that it is better to indulge in what you have now (bread historically being a luxury food in the Andes), because you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

For male migrants who left wives and children in Ecuador, I ultimately noticed a perspective emerging around the priorities of saving money and generating remittances that I did not find as prominent among men who did not migrate. Specifically arising during conversations with migrants about their money-saving strategies, I grew accustomed to migrants' critiques of men whom they faulted for

'squandering money' (*derrechondo la plata*) and their inability to generate remittances. Borrowing the language of economics, migrants spoke triumphantly of their efforts to 'make savings' (*hacer economías*) or 'to hold on to money' (*guardar plata*). In some measure, the taking hold of household finances by migrant men represented a process of what Gutmann (1996: 151–2) calls *degendering*, a situation whereby migrants did not necessarily identify their meticulous attention to finances as either men's or women's duties.⁶ However, a refined analysis of this transformation might also suggest the presence of a kind of regendering, a reassigning of the role of money manager to themselves in a particularly masculine form. Indeed, the economic shift from rural agriculture-based households to migration-based households frequently entailed a reshuffling that positioned men as the primary breadwinners, especially as average monthly remittances could easily double a family's income and prompt households to discontinue previous money-generating work.

Migrant husbands and fathers abroad responded to their new breadwinner role with a mixture of ambivalence, fear and pride. As one migrant said to me:

Everyone can work, that's simple. But for men who are fathers and have families back home, it is different. You can't stop. You have to change your mentality. Men who do this are *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. They can't just drink and hope it will all work out. No, it's a different mentality.

Miguel's sense of himself as a 'more modern and up-to-date' man was echoed by other migrants I knew in New York. Often, men used a comparison with their own fathers as a foil to describe how they had become *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. While the comparison often hinged on criteria such as fathers who drank too much or who never helped wives with domestic tasks, money management equally took centre stage in these moments of identity construction. However, for many men in Miguel's position, the situation was hardly worth bragging about. Instead, being a *hombre más moderno y progresivo* entailed entering into a juggling act with high stakes.

Most of the men I interviewed could tell me at least one story about a migrant who had failed in his pursuit to generate remittances. Likewise, migrants stayed abreast of the gossip that filtered back from their home villages telling of *chulqueros* who had usurped people's land and of families left hungry when husbands failed to wire remittances. Men in these situations often felt anxious and debilitated, at times in embodied ways, as one migrant father's testimony of the difficulty of breadwinning demonstrates:

I had just counted my week's money and again and again. Very fast! I just shut my eyes and wished I could go back [to Ecuador]. I would farm and work my land. I didn't care But I knew I couldn't. I had to stay and work. I tried to calm my trembling heart down, but I couldn't. I knew it eventually would be alright, but for the moment I was struck with *nervios*. I couldn't move, and there was a pain throughout my body.⁷

In addition to the pressures of unwittingly assuming the role of primary breadwinner, the challenge of being an *hombre más moderno y progresivo* also divorced migrants from the frequent and often ritualistic acts that portrayed Ecuadorian manhood. To the extent to which drinking allowed men to identify their shared vulnerabilities with one another while simultaneously affording them an instant reward for hard work, curbing this behaviour in the interest of saving money ultimately delayed these gratifications. Between these competing constructions of men's identities, migrants were often at pains to find new ways in which to define their sense of manhood. In their search, this vacuum was often filled with the rhetoric of fatherhood, the difficulties of fathering from abroad and, above all, the role of consumption in maintaining transnational relationships with children back in Ecuador.

'Más Moderno y Progresivo': Consumption and Transnational Fatherhood

If they kept to a strict budget, the migrants I knew typically had some extra money to buy things for themselves, such as compact discs, a pair of trendy jeans or a nylon sports top. However, few would say that their dreams of *iony* modernity had been fulfilled or even partially satisfied by this petty consumerism. At some point during their time abroad, many faced the reality that, despite their attempts at urban adventure, such efforts were often mere pale reflections of the perceptions of life in the US they had formed before migrating. Similar to the way in which men accepted the fact that controlling spending on *vicios* was necessary to generate remittances, they also experienced how money spent on new clothing, compact discs and the like gobbled up discretionary income that otherwise could be remitted back to Ecuador. In the face of such realities, characterisations of themselves as *hombres más modernos y progresivos* provided only partial reconciliation. Still, beyond sending remittances, migrants did find occasions, if only briefly, when they could bring into alignment their identities as husbands and fathers and their quest for *iony* modernity to create a self-image that more closely approximated the construction of *hombres más modernos y progresivos*. In particular, these were moments when migrants sent special gifts to their families, gifts sent with specific recipients in mind and often shipped at key times of the year (holidays, birthdays, confirmation parties, etc.). For undocumented migrants largely unable to find outlets for status in their transplanted communities, the act of remitting gifts—and the accompanying tasks of shopping, packaging gifts up with letters and receiving family members' reactions to the purchase—allowed men to look towards their home communities and produce a coherent identity of themselves as successful migrants, committed husbands and attentive fathers.

Numerous migration researchers have pointed out that, along with remittances and other essentials (medicines, for instance), gifts form a significant portion of the goods that travel along national and transnational flows (Cliggett 2005; Levitt 1998; Mahler 1999; Parreñas 2001; Salih 2002). Among female transnational migrants who

leave children back home, gifts have been shown to supplement and sometimes replace other forms of provisioning that constitute culturally specific definitions of mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001). In some instances, gifts double as assets as migrants purchase and send home jewellery and other items that hold their value against unstable currencies (Gamburd 2000). In some Latin American contexts with long histories of transnational migration, and where migrants shuttle with frequency between host and home communities, returning with gifts has been studied as an important component of how migrants successfully re-enter into social relationships fraught with tensions (Fletcher 1999; Georges 1990; Levitt 1998). Ecuadorian migrants sent gifts for all of these reasons, in order to maintain status, enact parenthood and generate assets. Without papers and financial resources, very few migrants could hope to accompany their gift sending with a visit home, as in other migration contexts. As such, sending specific gifts assumed an all-important role as one of the only acts men could perform from afar which enabled them to stay connected in their home communities.

For men in Jatundeleg, aside from the exchanging of personal items in courtship, the giving of gifts does not form an important part of the building and maintaining of affective relations with kin, friends and neighbours. In particular, few men in their capacity as fathers and husbands routinely give gifts to their immediate family. As a father, a man's role was routinely described to me as providing generally for children, but not making specific purchases. Men routinely made this point by comparing their particular attention to their children's consumer desires with the role of their own fathers as mere providers of food and shelter.

However, for migrants in New York, shopping and gift-buying was more than a way to affirm their identities in their home communities. It was also a welcomed activity up against the backdrop of the rest of their lives. When I asked men about their leisure time, I was surprised to find them list '*vitrinear*' (window-shopping) among their limited choices. Most of this activity took place not in front of the famous Manhattan window displays, but rather in the more familiar surroundings of the migrants' own Queens neighbourhoods.

Often, window-shopping was purposeful, as men worked to fulfil the requests of family members back home. When I first met Luís, a migrant living in Woodside, Queens, he was obsessed with getting his hands on anything that made reference to the Chicago Bulls or Michael Jordan for his seven-year-old son back in Jatundeleg. While unlicensed Michael Jordan paraphernalia could be easily and inexpensively purchased in almost any Azuayo-Cañari market, the request from his son was for '*cosas auténticas*' (authentic goods). Discussing the mission before him, Luís emphasised his power of choice and the knowledge of his son's preferences rather than his mere ability to purchase goods for his family. Likewise, other migrants put almost as much care into the letters they wrote and packed along with the gifts. Inserted in cardboard boxes of otherwise impersonal gift items, letters reading like laundry lists would outline which gift was for whom and sometimes why. On multiple occasions, I helped to write letters to wives and children back in Ecuador

to accompany each gift. All the gifts were labelled with their own proper English-language names, identifying each *cosa auténtica* and its recipient.

While men's consumption habits were shaped by their desire to fulfil family needs, shopping and commodity consumption was never a one-way street. The desire to shop must be created and sustained through persuasive advertising. Dávila (2001) has written about the way Latinos, and especially recently arrived Latin American immigrants, are now squarely on advertisers' radar screens. Much Latino advertising, whether selling specific Latino products or clearly American brand names (e.g. McDonalds restaurants), is uniformly similar: focused around the solidarity of the 'Latin American family' and nostalgia for Latin American homelands. In heavily immigrant-saturated regions like Queens, this type of advertising is further localised and pitched to particularly transnational audiences, serving as a constant reminder of men's increasingly circumscribed roles as primary breadwinners.

For the migrants I knew, the business that most captured their attention was *Créditos Económicos*, a bi-national department store specialising in household appliances, whereby goods could be shopped for and purchased in New York, but delivered to migrants' home communities from a warehouse in Ecuador. To keep costs down, many *Créditos* products are fully assembled in Ecuador. Migrants save money as a result, since the goods do not have to be shipped from the US, thus sidestepping the taxes collected on goods entering the country. Delivery is also free, and payment plans are available to make it possible for even the poorest of migrants to purchase their products. The Queens branch of *Créditos Económicos*, on Roosevelt Avenue, was situated among an assortment of Ecuadorian money-wiring agencies and restaurants, and Latino music shops. However, in contrast to these businesses, *Créditos* always maintained an extremely clean exterior. It also had none of the long queues, complicated transactions and general client frustrations that migrants associated with money-wiring and shipping services. In short, it offered a shopping experience that was qualitatively different from what most migrants were typically accustomed to.

To be sure, for many migrants, *Créditos* represented the opposite of the decidedly unglamorous world of thrift shops where migrants dig through unsorted bins of used clothing in search of *iony* styles. *Créditos* instead afforded poor migrants a shopping experience they closely associated with both middle-class Ecuadorians and Americans, complete with helpful and courteous sales staff. Romero, a 23-year-old from Jatundeleg, shared with me a description of a shopping trip to *Créditos*, where he purchased a cooking range for his wife and family back home:

This woman—a beautiful Ecuadorian woman—came right up to help me. She was calling me 'Sir' and acting polite. I was nervous since I didn't know what to do. I don't know about stoves and microwaves But she helped me I told her I couldn't pay for it all at once, and she directed me towards a payment plan.

In Ecuador, Romero's dark skin and 'cholo boy' look of baggy sweatshirts and baseball caps pulled over his head would surely have disadvantaged him if he had visited a department store in Cuenca.

During my many visits to *Créditos*, alone or with migrant men on their shopping adventures, it was hard to miss the store's keen ability to target customers by playing on their desire to 'produce locality' in their home communities (Appadurai 1996). At any one time, the front windows of *Créditos Económicos* are decorated with dozens of three-by-five snapshots of the proud recipients of their products. The majority of pictures feature rural households in Cañar, with peasant women in traditional clothing and their children standing next to refrigerators, ranges and stereo systems. In some photos, children are shown hugging their new icons of modernity within the confines of adobe walls and dirt floors. In the front windows, corn fields and women in traditional Andean skirts and hats become part of a seamless whole with the elegantly dressed White Ecuadorian women working over shiny new stoves. Disparaging images of rural poverty are nowhere to be found. As opposed to Ecuador, the *Créditos* pastiche of 'objects in motion'—mixing the traditional and modern, if commodified—are to be celebrated rather than denigrated (see Mankekar 2002). By combining symbols of rural Andean life with those of modernity, *Créditos* helped migrants to temporarily synthesise their obligations to their family and the need to maintain status in their home communities with their own personal desires for a modern lifestyle.

While the act of slipping a piece of jewellery into an envelope for one's daughter or mailing a box of baseball caps and athletic jerseys for sons could go unnoticed by all those beyond the immediate recipients in their home communities, migrants took advantage of the particularly public reception that goods delivered by *Créditos* could offer. They particularly tried to coordinate the sending of gifts with special holidays, when the delivery of a new range or other appliance would be seen by other villagers.

Consuming Modernity, Consuming Fatherhood

In this article, I privilege the role of consumption over that of production (men's work lives) to explore ways in which the former reveals how 'culture is fought over and licked into shape' (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 57). Beyond a Marxist focus on consumption as mystification and commodity fetishism, I analyse specific practices of spending, saving and budgeting, as well as activities related to the consumption of alcohol, as key arenas for understanding how Ecuadorian men construct and give meaning to their lives abroad, and their in-part-emergent identities as transnational fathers. My own understanding of the role of consumption in these migration processes closely follows Miller's (1995: 277) assertion that consumption represents 'the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle towards control over the definition of themselves and their values'. Struggles of self-definition play out in the Ecuadorian context as migrants negotiate between obligations to wives and family back home and their quest for adventure and modern *iony* identities abroad.

Indeed, while never-before-experienced consumption possibilities help migrants shape a sense of self in the face of their position as invisible workers at the bottom rung of US society, they equally help men to define their role as husbands and fathers in the lives of families thousands of miles away.

When the migrant father who orchestrated the delivery of a new range to his family back in the Andes received a copy of the photograph, he no doubt took great pleasure in how this relatively inexpensive act had sent a far-reaching statement about migrant success, his claim to *iony* modernity and his continued commitment to his family. But, how best to analyse these practices and their results? Throughout this article, I have suggested different ways in which the practices of saving, budgeting and consumption provide clues to the construction of men's identities as migrants, and the ways in which they contribute directly to men's developing understanding of a particular form of transnational parenthood. For undocumented Ecuadorians in New York City, consumption must be analysed as more than simply a new 'domain of choice' otherwise absent in their pre-migration lives. As Miller (1987) proposes, consumption practices are perhaps better seen as the scarce resources which people appropriate as they seek to form and sustain affective relationships. 'Increasingly people have *no choice*', writes Miller, 'but to focus on consumption as the only remaining domain in which there are possibilities of sublation' (1987: 221; emphasis added). Indeed, for male migrants physically separated from their families, increasingly divorced from other forms of meaningful exchange, such as male drinking, and limited in their abilities to generate satisfying identities and statuses for themselves in US society, transnational consumption becomes one of the few avenues in which they can create a sense of self and society in their lives.

To be sure, the consumption practices of migrants I knew were motivated by a variety of factors. At one level, consumption fulfilled purely instrumental goals. Sending gifts or orchestrating a purchase to be sent by *Créditos Económicos* served as an inexpensive means for migrants to create status for themselves in their home community and maintain a respectful position in village affairs. While it may take months to generate what most men would consider a sufficient remittance amount, a gift could be delivered for much less. In some cases, the gifts became representative of economic capital which migrants otherwise did not have.

However, when migrants purchased gifts for their families, their actions reflected affective as well as instrumental purposes. Commodity consumption—along with the act of shopping—also speaks to relationships between people, between the giver and receiver of the gift (Mauss [1950] 1967). As Miller (1998) again proposes, the practice of shopping in complex societies mimics an act of sacrifice and therefore takes on the qualities of a devotional rite. Locating the essence of sacrifice in the activity of 'construct[ing] the divine as a desiring subject', Miller (1998: 148) promotes the seemingly mundane act of shopping to a purposeful one carried out 'not so much to buy the things people want, but to strive to be in a relationship with subjects that want those things'. Among migrants who shared with me their dilemmas of saving, budgeting and spending money, specific consumption decisions (saving money for

remittances, buying a child a gift or spending money on alcohol) often revealed important aspects of their relationships with others. Commodity consumption, however, differs from the cementing of relationships in a gift economy. As Miller argues, commodities have largely replaced the gift, as relationships in modernity are no longer rooted in fixed social categories. In the range of choices of what kinds of gift to purchase, modern shoppers can exploit selection in order to 'negotiate the ambivalences and anxieties of relationships' (1998: 154). In this regard, migrants' simple acts of money management speak to more than just the wish to balance their desire for *iony* modernity with the obligation to generate remittances. They also reveal the ways in which migrants seek to reconstitute relationships and to make sense of their newly imposed role as breadwinners.

Notes

- [1] For a discussion of the role of men's gender in migration studies, see Pribilsky (2007: 13–19). For general treatments on gender and migration, see Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999) and Pessar (1999).
- [2] Jatundeleg, along with all personal names, is a pseudonym.
- [3] Methodology and fieldwork details can be found in Pribilsky (2007: 24–31).
- [4] For an elaboration of *iony* as a specific form of modern experience, see Pribilsky (2007: 10–13).
- [5] Rates of failure, while not quantified in migration statistics, are nonetheless high, with many men and women returning to Ecuador soon after leaving.
- [6] Gutmann (1996: 151) defines 'degendering' as a way in which 'activities become less ... gendered—less ... identified with women or men in particular'.
- [7] In the Ecuadorian Andes, *nervios* is a condition that typically only afflicts women (see, e.g. Finerman 1989). The fact that this migrant claimed he fell victim to *nervios*, signalling a potentially feminised subject position, may suggest the particularly strong degree to which he understood his failure to generate remittances as a gendered failure.

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Transnational Family Separation: A Framework for Analysis

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Existing scholarly literature and public discussions in sending and receiving countries often attempt to assess the costs and benefits of transnational family separation, not from the point of view of the participants but by universalising notions of motherhood and fatherhood without recognising different familial contexts and traditions. Such universalisation often results in separated families being defined as pathological, and transnational parents being blamed for the problems of youth left behind. Immigrant parents, on the other hand, often create a cost–benefit calculus based on fragmentary and inaccurate information and use this calculus to influence their transnational parenting practices to mitigate the costs of their separation from their children. In this article, we argue for the importance of context in understanding the impact of transnational family separation and propose a framework for assessing costs and benefits from the points of view not only of parents but also of others in the transnational chain of care—children, substitute care-givers and members of the communities of departure and reception. The key components of this framework are pre-migration family and child-care traditions and structures; the nature and regularity of contact during the period of separation; the reliability of remittances, the ways in which they are perceived and used by recipients and their communities; the opportunities for and context of reunification; and public policies that shape transnational family separation and reunification.

Keywords: Transnational Motherhood; United States; Remittances; Reunification; Policy

Introduction

Parents who migrate across international borders and leave their children behind usually justify their decision to do so on the grounds that the children—and, in some cases, other family members, such as ageing parents—will be better off than if their parents had stayed. Many, perhaps most, seek to retain their status as parents, despite

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geographical separation, by carrying out old definitions of fatherhood or motherhood in new ways or creating new definitions of what it means to father or mother a child without the benefit of geographical proximity. Children may or may not respond positively to their parents' attempts to recreate and reinforce family bonds transnationally, and substitute care-givers may reinforce or undermine the parents' efforts. Scholars who study transnational parenting practices, nevertheless, are often impressed by migrant parents' creative efforts to keep family members connected to and involved with each others' lives, even in the case of prolonged separation. Psychologists and other social service providers who deal with families attempting to reunite after separation confirm that the quality of contact during separation is one important factor that influences the success of those reunions (Artico 2003; Boss 1999; Falicov 2002). For migrant parents, engaging in transnational parenting practices is one way of trying to mitigate the costs of separation and tip the cost-benefit calculus in a positive direction.

Critics of migrant parents believe that, if the true costs of separation were known, parents might not see their decision (or have it seen by others) so positively (Nazario 2006). Even those who acknowledge the larger social factors that create or encourage migrant parent flows argue that the costs and benefits of family separation are only partially visible to the actors directly involved (parents, substitute care-givers, children and other family members), or to other groups that are affected, including sending and receiving communities and social institutions. The real costs and benefits of 'normalising' family separation can be seen, they believe, only by tracking it over time (Cortes 2008). Only then can local and national policies be developed to reduce the costs of family separation and maximise positive outcomes when families reunite.

It is understandable that individual migrants or even groups of migrants from the same sending communities would have only partial or inadequate information on which to base their perceptions of costs and benefits. International migration is a risky and unpredictable process, the costs and benefits of which are impossible to predict ahead of time. Accurate information from both sending and receiving ends is difficult to obtain. It is impossible for migrant parents to know ahead of time whether their efforts to provide for their families through remittances and other benefits gained from migration will pay off in the short or long run, or exactly what part of family and home community life may end up benefitting or being sacrificed.

It is not only migrant parents and their families, however, who lack access to information about the short- and long-term costs of family separation. Research on immigrant family separation and reunification has been relatively scarce and has focused on a few parts of the chain (e.g. migrant parents residing in developing countries at the time of the research) or on a few outcomes (e.g. the impact of remittances on the health and educational achievements of children left behind or the household economies of substitute carers). A more holistic, but challenging, approach would be to systematically look at transnational parenting practices and the perceived and measurable costs and benefits of separation that shape and are shaped

by them over time from the point of view of key actors in their local, national and global contexts.

In the analysis that follows, we explore what a holistic and multi-dimensional framework for the analysis of costs and benefits of family separation might include, based on the existing literature and preliminary results from our own research. In each of its dimensions, the framework emphasises the importance of social, cultural and economic contexts at local, national and international levels in accounting for different outcomes in parents' efforts to keep families together during separation and, where desired, reunite with a minimum of conflict. The ultimate goal of the framework is not only to assist researchers in studying the phenomenon but also to aid policy-makers and social service providers in their efforts to come up with policies and services that minimise the social and individual costs of this growing global trend.

Transnational Families: Recent Trends

Family separation as a result of international migration to the US is not a new phenomenon. From the early waves of large-scale migration, when family members often migrated in stages (Foner 2000), and the migration of Mexican male '*braceros*' to the USA in the 1940s and 1950s, to the migration of unaccompanied minors from Cuba (Torres 2003) and the 'parachute kids' who came alone from Asia throughout the 1990s in the hopes of gaining admission to US colleges and universities (Ong 1999), families have been separated by national borders.

What is new in the recent decade, in addition to the attention of immigration scholars to this topic, is the number of children who are being left behind by parents who face declining economic opportunities at home for sustaining families, along with the high levels of demand for the labour that such migrants can provide in other countries. Globalisation has fuelled this trend by making it possible not only to cross international boundaries relatively rapidly and easily but also to maintain contact while separated, giving rise to new forms of 'transnational' family life and new definitions of parenting and parent-child relations. The growing number of children left with substitute carers and the concentration of the phenomenon in particular neighbourhoods, towns and countries, raise new social, cultural and economic issues for strategies of economic development that depend on migrant remittances.

What is also new in recent years is the number of mothers—including mothers of small children—who make the decision to migrate internationally, with or without male partners, in search of work. Journalists, religious and social welfare workers, educators, policy-makers and politicians in sending countries worry that the migration of mothers will accelerate family disintegration. At worst, this would result in a prevalence of 'deviant or anti-social behaviour', including school drop-out, rebellion against adult authority, high-risk behaviour—drug and alcohol abuse—precocious sexual relationships and teen motherhood; at best, depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-efficacy in 'abandoned' children, creating 'generations in crisis' (Dreby

2007a; Parreñas 2005; Save the Children in Sri Lanka 2006). While the migration of fathers with left-behind spouses and children also causes concern, many argue that the migration of mothers who leave behind their biological children creates a ‘vacuum’ that cannot be filled by other family members or substitute care-givers.

Scholarly interest in the growing phenomenon of transnational families whose members interact and carry out their family lives across national borders is relatively new. Although transnationalism studies emerged in the early 1990s, not until the early to mid-2000s did separated families become a central focus of migration studies that documented the use and impact of remittances on the well-being of children, families and communities.

Recent transnationalism research has begun to highlight the creative ways that parents and family members carry out their traditional roles and responsibilities even while separated, as well as the resilience of substitute carers and children left behind in adapting. Other reports, however, sound alarms about the potentially disastrous consequences for ‘unprotected’ and ‘inadequately supervised’ left-behind children.

Nazario’s work is among the latter. In the introduction to her recent book, *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey To Reunite with His Mother*, based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning series of the same name, Nazario (2006: xxv) appears to assume a universal trauma associated with absent mothers in describing her motive for writing the book:

For Latina mothers coming to the United States, my hope is that they will understand the full consequences of leaving their children behind and make better-informed decisions. For in the end, these separations almost always end badly.

The author suggests that immigrant women, such as Enrique’s Honduran mother, would not leave their children behind if they knew all the negative things that would happen to them or, at a minimum, they would not leave unless they were certain that the carers of their children would be reliable substitutes. She also seems to blame migrant mothers for problems associated with many adolescents and young adults in countries like Honduras—school dropout rates, involvement with gangs and drugs, etc.

But Nazario herself gives us enough information about Enrique’s mother’s choices and the alternatives available to her when she ‘decided’ to migrate to indicate the rationality of those choices. And we know from other sources that the problems that Enrique encounters in Honduras after his mother leaves are hardly limited to children left behind by their mothers. In Nazario’s view, and in accounts like it, migrant women are the catalyst for a host of social problems as a result of their attempts to exercise transnational parenting practices.

At the other end of the continuum, Suárez-Orozco *et al.* (2002) have argued that seemingly universal agreement that the migrant parent–child separation is traumatic and has long-lasting effects is based on some unquestioned Western cultural biases and assumptions, particularly about the nature of ‘attachment’ and ‘parent–child

bonding'. The particular emphasis on the mother–child dyad privileges, they argue, a Western understanding of the nuclear family. Many immigrant families come, they point out, from cultures that include a wide supportive network of extended family members. When multiple significant relationships are present and normative, parent substitutes can effectively attend to the emotional needs of developing children.

The work of Bernhard *et al.* (2005), Suárez-Orozco *et al.* (2002) and others suggests that the costs and benefits of immigration experiences that involve parent–child separations in general, and mother–child separation in particular, should not be assumed to be fixed; rather, they are varied and are influenced by the micro- and macro-level contexts in which they occur. Furthermore, since immigration is, in and of itself, an inherently disorienting and disruptive life experience and one whose effects may be long-lasting (Suárez-Orozco *et al.* 2002), the immigration experience should be distinguished, as far as possible, from whatever negative or positive effects that might occur because of family separation and reunification.

A Framework for Analysing the Costs and Benefits

What is clear from the small but growing body of literature is that, just as there is a wide variety of pre-migration family structures and child-care traditions, substitute care-giver arrangements, and parenting practices by migrant parents, so, too, are there important intervening variables that shape the separation experience and its outcomes for children and families. In addition to factors such as family characteristics, the age of the children at separation and reunification, the quality of substitute carers, the quality and quantity of contact during separation, and the regularity and use of remittances, important variables that intervene in the equation include the socio-economic environment surrounding the parents' migration, the family's social class and household structure, gender relations, and the history and current level of out-migration from the sending areas, as well as the degree of economic development and the nature of social policy institutions that are responsible for social welfare and child protection.

As new as the study of the impact of parent's migration on left-behind children and sending communities is, certain variables and factors have emerged which are affecting the cost–benefit equation. In the following discussion, we focus on some of these key factors: care-giving structures, communication from afar, remittances, reunification and policy contexts. The focus will be on the effects of these factors on parenting practices, parents' perceptions of outcomes for children, and children's assessments of the cost–benefit equation. Throughout there is an emphasis on gender differences and local, national and global contexts.

Pre-Migration Family and Child-Care Traditions and Structures

Leaving a child behind in order to migrate internationally can be a painful and anxiety-provoking process. Decisions are rarely taken lightly, especially by mothers,

and the circumstances surrounding the departure are often etched into the children's minds.

While separations are typically remembered as difficult, mothers report—much more than fathers—doing their best to prepare children for their departure (Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2006). In so doing, they help to reduce the emotional cost of the separation for their children. Suárez-Orozco *et al.* (2002) conclude that, if children are well prepared for the separation and if the situation is framed as temporary and necessary or for the good of the family, it will be more manageable for affected children, who are thus less likely to feel abandoned. Mothers tend to introduce the idea of migration early in the separation process, and children, of a certain age at least, tend to know before their mothers migrate where they themselves will be living and who will care for them. Fathers, on the other hand, (in the Mexican case, at least) typically leave home without saying goodbye to their children in an effort to avoid upsetting them (Dreby 2006).

In contrast to the view of children as passive receivers or victims of adult decisions, psychologists have shown that children display a remarkable amount of resilience in the face of loss or trauma by situating it in social and relational contexts rather than viewing it as a private experience (Neimeyer 2001). We cannot assume, therefore, that the separation of a parent and a child is necessarily traumatising, especially in cultures with a tradition of high levels of out-migration (see Erel 2002 in relation to Turkey; Olwig 1999 for the Caribbean; Parreñas 2005, the Philippines). Given this capacity of children for resilience when they can make meaning of loss or trauma, it is crucial for research on parent–child separation to understand how not only children but also the adults in a child's circle and the wider societal culture react to loss, particularly that generated by global migration (Shapiro 1994; Silverman 2000).

In the Caribbean, where there is a long history of out-migration as a means of pursuing economic progress and providing a better life for one's children, the migration of a parent, even one who leaves children behind, not only may be accepted but may even be lauded by society (Pottinger and Brown 2006). Caribbean communities also tend to have strong familial networks that allow mothers to migrate and leave children with relatives, friends or neighbours, which ensures greater continuity in children's lives and serves as a 'protective factor' (Thomas-Hope 2002).

While, in some cases, the practice of adults raising someone else's children is simply a safety-net in times of crisis—such as when biological parents face health or financial problems—in others it is a semi-institutionalised way of allowing biological parents to migrate internally in search of work or educational opportunities. In still others, the 'fostering' of children is a way to practise traditional cultural values of family solidarity and norms of reciprocity. Throughout Africa, for example, a number of societies practise 'wardship', whereby children are sent to the households of their parents' relatives (Bledsoe 1980; Goody 1973, 1975). In West Africa, 'fostering' for the purpose of migration is commonplace and is seen as a way for children to develop into responsible adults while strengthening systems of kinship and reciprocal obligation (Goody 1982). Systems of fostering in Cape Verde, a society characterised

as 'matrifocal' or 'female-headed' (Meintel 1984), are not only longstanding cultural practices and survival strategies, but an integral part of 'female solidarity within transnational families' (Åkesson *et al.*, this issue; Drotbohm 2008).

At the other end of the spectrum, Parreñas' (2001b) study of the Philippines reveals that families with absent parents are seen as 'deviant cases' despite their prevalence, and families with absent mothers, in particular, are seen as 'broken or abnormal' by the children themselves, as well as by society at large. In addition, few social services appear to exist for children with absent mothers in countries like the Philippines, and there is a general invisibility of the issue except when absent mothers are blamed for juvenile delinquency and other social problems.

Discussions of trauma as a result of family separation often mistakenly assume that the living situation of the child after a parent's departure signifies the beginning of a new experience. In fact, children may often be left with kin who had directly participated in their care prior to migration. This practice is not uncommon in countries like El Salvador, where more than 30 per cent of households are female-headed (Garcia and Gomariz 1989) and where there is a tradition of reliance on kin when mothers cannot take care of children because of work and other responsibilities.

As in the Cape Verde example, where male–female relations are relatively unstable and women having children with multiple fathers is fairly common, mutual support is provided by all those who live together in one household (Åkesson *et al.*, this issue; Drotbohm 2008). Thus, the migration of a mother results in little to no disruption to the living and caring conditions of the child. Similarly, in cultures such as the Aymara in Peru, the extended family unit is prioritised over the nuclear family, seen as a sub-unit which cannot survive on its own (Leinaweaver 2005). Thus, the migration of one household member does not significantly change the survival, living and caring conditions of the unit.

Quality and Quantity of Contact while Separated

Despite the physical distances between them, many transnational parents manage to maintain strong ties with children and other family members through a variety of often creative strategies (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Parreñas 2005). Regular contact is the glue that keeps transnational families together and is at the centre of parenting practices from afar.

The maintenance of regular, high-quality communication between absent migrant parents and their children is almost universally assumed to reduce the costs of separation on both sides. Contact may help to reduce the guilt that parents, particularly mothers, feel as a result of their absence, and children may interpret inconsistent or minimal contact as abandonment or lack of caring (Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese 1995). Contact through phone calls, letters, videotapes and gifts helps to maintain a sense of coherence (Falicov 2002) and helps children to deal with the

'ambiguous loss' caused by migration, whereby a parent is physically absent but psychologically available (Boss 1999).

Such practices become routine in the lives of transnational families but necessitate great creativity on the part of the parents, who believe that being a 'good' mother or father means not just economic support but tending to their children's emotional and social needs (Åkesson *et al.*, this issue). With some exceptions, transnational mothers seem to take responsibility for social and emotional needs in direct communication with their children, while fathers tend to emphasise discipline (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2005). One study on transnational motherhood among Cape Verdeans in Europe, for example, found mothers who not only call at the same time every week in an effort to 'build up a constant dialogue' with their children, but also exert control at a distance by cross-checking the information they receive about their children by regularly calling friends back home (Drotbohm 2008).

Transnational parenting practices change over time as parent-child relationships evolve. As the time of separation lengthens, and parents and children grow older, expectations, obligations and perceptions of family members change. Over time, children may 'get used to' the situation, despite feelings of emotional loss (Schmalzbauer 2008). On the other hand, as it becomes clear that promises of a speedy reunion are not going to be fulfilled any time soon, or at all, children's willingness to go along with the change cheerfully may fade.

Transnational parents may aspire to continue to exert control over their children, but physical distance can also contribute to unclear lines of authority, especially for teenage youth. In a study of Mexican transnational families, Dreby (2007b) found that care-givers often find it difficult to maintain authority over children with migrant parents, especially during adolescence. On the other side, parents struggle with how to assert parental authority from a distance, but may also attempt to foster friendships with their teenagers as a means of gaining their children's respect. The irony in Dreby's study is that teens did not view the autonomy resulting from their parents' absence as desirable and, as they became adolescents, their desires to have an active parent physically present increased. Some teens blamed their personal failures on the absence of a biological mother and attributed their misbehaviour to feelings of abandonment (Dreby 2007b; Parreñas 2001a).

The types and frequency of contact that transnational parents engage in, as well as children's perception of the quality of that contact, are shaped by cultural expectations. Dreby (2006) found that, while migrant mothers and fathers behave in similar ways when separated from children, their behaviour and emotional responses to separation differ. Migrant fathers' relationships to their children in Mexico are typically shaped by their economic success and a desire to maintain some degree of authority, while those of migrant mothers are focused on demonstrating emotional intimacy from a distance (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2001a; Worby 2006).

Dreby (2006: 53) suggests that '[I]n some ways, separation is a gender equaliser in transnational families'. International migration limits the type of contact that mothers and fathers can have with their children; for mothers this means that they

cannot be directly involved in routine care work, and both parents must rely on the same communication from a distance. Mothers and fathers stay in touch with their children by phone, letters, videotapes, etc., but fathers more typically see the sending of remittances as their primary means of contact, while mothers tend to emphasise emotional contact—that is, mothering from a distance—even if they also send remittances. Children often tell interviewers that they do not regard the sending of remittances as ‘real’ contact, and they may have gender-differentiated expectations of contact, whereby mothers are expected to continue to try to maintain emotional intimacy more than fathers (Chinchilla and Zentgraf 2007).

Finally, the quantity and quality of contact that parents maintain with their children while geographically separated is not solely determined by their wishes but by larger macro-economic and social structures, including the class and legal positions that migrant parents occupy, new family structures in which they may be embedded and, in the case of communication technology, the resources to which family members left behind have access.

When finances are tight, parents may not want to ‘waste’ money on calling, preferring instead to save it for remittances, future reunification, emergencies or daily survival. Mothers who maintain irregular or no contact whatsoever often tell researchers that they do so because of financial and/or legal problems, guilt at having left children behind, or conflicts between being a good parent to the children who are with them in the host country and helping those left behind (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2005). Technology has expanded the ways in which transnational families can see and hear each other and share in each other’s milestones, such as birthdays and graduations (Levitt 2001), but not all migrant parents have the knowledge, experience or resources to use such technology, and not all family members left behind have access to them.

For many migrant parents, the legal obstacles to and the risk involved in travelling back home or bringing family members for visits to or settlement in the host country are major determinants of the type and amount of contact. When crossing the US–Mexico border was inexpensive and involved relatively low levels of risk, Mexican men from the traditional northern migrant-sending communities often visited their families back home on a yearly or even more frequent basis, even when they themselves did not have legal status. As the cost and risk have increased, however, home visits have become less frequent. An elevated level of risk makes travel back and forth for undocumented mothers increasingly rare. Undocumented migrant mothers and fathers often spend years waiting for their own legal papers or those of the children they want to bring to arrive, or save the money they would have spent on a trip home for a more permanent reunification that seems to grow more costly over time, owing to unforeseen emergencies that deplete funds. The transnational vision of fluid networks among family members, with members travelling back and forth, is not the reality of many transnational parents, particularly those from Latin America who migrate to the United States.

Even when migrant parents have legal status themselves, or can get visas for family members, and when the risk of travel is minimal, other factors, including economics and personal preferences, may delay or interfere with dreams of permanent family reunification. Such is the case for the Polish migrants in London described by Ryan (2011), whose families may not achieve reunification as a result of ‘personal preferences’ (a spouse or child may not want to permanently relocate to London) or who may go through cycles of reunification and separation.

Even when consistent contact between migrant parents and children is achieved, whether in person or through the miracle of modern technology, it may not always result in the desired family coherence. Reunited children may not accept migrant parents as their ‘real’ mother or father, and left-behind children may regard their biological mother or father as ‘just another person that they don’t really know’, despite regular phone calls and photos, gifts and financial contributions sent from abroad.

Remittances

Remittances are an important part of transnational parenting practices. The desire to send back remittances to support families and households is at the core of most parents’ decisions to migrate in the first place. As Castañeda (2008: 235) observes, ‘[R]emittances represent the sweat, sacrifice, and loneliness that migrants endure in order to provide their families with basic goods and a humble increase in living standards’. While, in most cases, remittances are seen as a form of maintaining contact and interacting with children from afar, they are also meant to help to support other family members and the substitute carer. In a few cases, such as Peruvian Aymara migrant parents in Europe, remittances are seen as a way of fulfilling responsibilities to and maintaining contact with other family members (in this case, ageing parents), and only indirectly with the migrants’ children for whom the latter care (Leinaweaver 2005).

Even when remittances are intended for the direct benefit of left-behind children, transnational parents do not necessarily have control over how they are used and the extent to which they are directed toward their children’s basic needs, including education and health care (see Åkesson *et al.*, Boccagni, and Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue). Migrant parents hope that the remittances they send, often at great sacrifice, will mitigate the potentially negative effects of their absence and open up opportunities for their children—such as private schooling or university studies—which might not have been possible had they remained. This is one of the important potential benefits that offset the costs of separation in many migrants’ minds. However, parents do not always have accurate information about how their remittances are used or the outcomes from their use. Even where this information *is* forthcoming, transnational parents may draw conclusions between the remittances they send and certain outcomes on a personal or familial level, but there are also larger structural factors that help to shape those outcomes that may still be invisible to them.

The impact of remittances sent by individual parents may be influenced by the larger context, including how remittances are viewed by others. Some academic studies seem to confirm that remittances provide left-behind children with greater access to education (Borraz 2005; Yang 2006), as they increase the family's ability to pay and provide greater incentives for school enrolment (Asis 2006; Dreby 2006; Huang and Pieke 2003; Koc and Onan 2004; Kuhn 2006; Roongshivin 1985). Others that take into account not only student enrolment but also attendance and educational performance yield less-clear results. Some find a positive impact on children's levels of schooling and school performance (Curran *et al.* 2004; Jones 1995; Lu 2005; Taylor 1987), but others emphasise the importance of economic, household and ideological contexts in mediating educational opportunities provided by parental remittances. In cases where demands on children's labour contributions to the family economy are high or when children in migrant families take increasing responsibility for household duties after parental migration, academic performance and progress in school can be negatively affected (Parra and Zambrano 2006; Vladicescu *et al.* 2008).

The relationship between remittances and educational outcomes appears to be further complicated by the type of parental migration (i.e. father-only, mother-only or both parents). Prevailing patterns of gender roles inform the experiences of children left behind, and for those who must take on the unmet work responsibilities in migrant households, the positive effects of remittances can be neutralised (Mansuri 2006). The potential benefits of parental remittances on children's educational opportunities and attainment may also be mitigated by the actual or perceived support children receive for their schooling from their substitute carers. This, in turn, may be related to the family's class situation or the age of the carer (see Dreby 2007b; Herrera and Carrillo 2004; Vladicescu *et al.* 2008).

Finally, the school attendance and achievement records of youth in both migrant and non-migrant households may be influenced by their perceptions of employment opportunities (both locally and abroad) and by the value of an education for economic advancement (Kandel 2003). In such cases, the full potential benefits of educational opportunities made possible by parental remittances may be negated (Chiquiar and Hansen 2005; McKenzie and Rapoport 2004).

Although parents may see remittances as a key factor in reducing the costs associated with geographical separation, the real cost-benefit calculus may be determined by factors outside of their vision and control. A framework for analysis should therefore take into account not only parents' perceptions of the connection between remittances and outcomes but also the perceptions of children and the community, as well the relevant social context (gender expectations, family class situation, age of carer, and the value of degrees in local labour markets, etc.).

Reunification

Not all parents who migrate internationally without their children plan to reunite with them in the receiving country. Most begin their journeys thinking of themselves

as temporary migrants who will return home and reunite with their children once they have accumulated a modest surplus. Most economic-migrant parents believe that taking children with them from the start would increase the cost of their migration and interfere with their ability to accumulate a surplus. As their stay in the host country is prolonged, however, some begin to strategise about how to send for their children. Others become resigned to leaving their children at home, where they believe conditions are better for them on the basis of their experiences in the receiving country (e.g. discrimination, uncertain legal status, public safety issues or undesirable cultural norms) or because the care and standard of living which their children have back home are better than they would be in the low-income immigrant niche in which the absent parent is living. Parents' cost-benefit calculations in relation to reunification with children thus change over time as a result of their information and experiences (Åkesson *et al.*, this issue; Chinchilla and Zentgraf 2008).

Children are not always informed of a change in reunification plans or of the reasons why the separation is being prolonged. In addition, migrant parents often make conscious efforts to conceal the true circumstances of their lives from left-behind children so as to not add to their children's or substitute carer's worries (Boccagni, this issue; Schmalzbauer 2008). Some migrant parents tell researchers that they do try to be upfront about the stress, poor working conditions, low wages and insecurity of employment they experience, but remittance-receiving family members do not believe them (Schmalzbauer 2005). Migrant parents are also sometimes reluctant to reveal details of the new relationships or family situations into which they have entered. Children may also keep certain details of their lives from their parents so as to not worry them.

These gaps in information about the realities of each other's lives, together with a 'normal' tendency to idealise a parent or child who is physically absent, add significantly to the challenges (i.e. costs) of parent-child reunifications when these do occur. And the conflicts are even more intense when parents attempt to reunite with children who have already made no secret of their resentment at having been separated or when parents feel like their sacrifices are not appreciated (Leslie 1993; Menjivar and Abrego 2009; Nazario 2006).

Mothers, in particular, seem to focus on the emotional aspects of their relationships with children while separated (Dreby 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Menjivar and Abrego 2009), and children often blame mothers more than fathers for their absences. While some mothers seem to adapt relatively easily to working abroad without their children, many others experience depression, guilt and a sense of loss. After controlling for demographic differences, Miranda *et al.* (2005) found that the odds of depression among immigrant Latinas who were separated from their children were 1.52 times as great as the odds for those whose children were currently with them (see also Sánchez-Vallejo 2008). Therapists have also found that mothers' parenting styles in reunited families may be incongruent with an adolescent's development, and this incongruity is heightened by the fact that the child often had

to be self-reliant while in his or her home country (Mitrani *et al.* 2004). All these emotional factors may combine with a lack of parenting experience to create challenges for parent–child reunion.

For children who reunite with a parent in a country that is unfamiliar to them, there is the shock of a new language and culture. For those who are integrated into a family structure that includes members they have not met before, the domestic sphere does not represent a place where they can seek refuge while adapting to the outside but is another part of the new culture, in this case the culture of a blended family to which they must adapt (Chinchilla and Zentgraf 2008; Mitrani *et al.* 2004).

Existing studies tell us little, so far, about just how widespread, intense or lasting the wounds caused by parent–child separation may be. In Smith *et al.*'s (2004) study of Caribbean mothers and children reunited in Canada, some 30 per cent appear to have gone through the process without serious problems. Studies of immigrant families did not focus on separation until recently. And only lately have social workers, marriage and family counsellors, and psychologists attempting to help with family conflict been advised to ask systematically about family separation (Artico 2003; Rosseau *et al.* 2001; Shapiro 2002; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

Just as there are, undoubtedly, a wide range of degrees of tension in immigrant family reunification, so there may be different timelines for the development of conflict. Children and parents may feel the gap between image and reality early in the reunification process, when children also may be experiencing strong feelings of loss from leaving a substitute care-giver. A study of Chinese immigrant children's reunification with their parents in Hong Kong, however, found the opposite: for them, there is an initial 'honeymoon' period when family members pull together to make the adjustment successful and try to fulfil a strong cultural norm that all family members desire reunification and everyone is happiest when the goal is achieved (Lam *et al.* 2005).

If problems do develop in these reunions, they occur after this honeymoon period, when the gaps between expectations and realities are 'allowed' to become visible (Lam *et al.* 2005). It should be noted that, in this example, not only is there a cultural expectation that serves as glue during the immediate post-reunification period but there are also social services designed to help incorporate the recently arrived immigrant family members. There is also acceptance of the view by family members that, whatever the problems, reunification of the nuclear family is in their collective best interest. Such social services rarely exist for reunited (economic) immigrant families in the United States (Artico 2003; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001).

Both parents and children attempt to mitigate the costs of their separation by visualising a happy and harmonious reunion, the costs and benefits of which, however, are shaped by expectations and behaviours established long before and during the separation.

The Role of Public Policies

Public policies in sending and receiving countries shape transnational parenting practices and the costs and benefits of parent–child separations in important but often invisible ways. The wages and working conditions of transnational parents, directly and indirectly shaped by public policies, affect the frequency and type of contacts those parents have with their children, the monetary value of remittances they can send, and the time it takes to accumulate the surplus needed to return home or reunite with children in the receiving country (Leifsen and Tymczuk, this issue). Just as important are laws governing the legal status of transnational parents that facilitate or inhibit visits with children left behind, and make it possible to reunite with them in the receiving country when parents have the desire and economic resources to do so.

Studies in receiving countries such as the USA have begun to focus on the impact of public policies on separated parents, their children, the social institutions connected to them and the communities in which they are embedded (see Capps *et al.* 2007; Hagan *et al.* 2008; Menjivar 2006; Rodriguez and Hagan 2004). In Canada, however, Bernhard *et al.* (2005) and other policy-oriented scholars have studied in detail the effectiveness of national family reunification policies and practices and have made suggestions for improvements. Bernhard *et al.* (2005) argue that, even in a relatively family-reunification-friendly country like Canada, backlogs in processing refugee and family reunification applications often result in unexpected delays that take a negative toll on family dynamics. And in the absence of research or documentation to the contrary, weaknesses or gaps in settlement services for transnational multi-local families may go unnoticed.

Drawing on the results of their study, Bernhard *et al.* (2005) have identified ways in which governments and non-profit organisations can better facilitate transnational family reunification, reduce family conflicts and strengthen family bonds. On the national level, the authors call for amendments to immigration policies and current practices with a view to eliminating barriers to mother–child reunification (the particular focus of their study) and reducing the processing delays that prolong family separation. They highlight the importance of coordination between government agencies and non-governmental groups and the need to establish working relationships among all the different institutions and groups working with immigrant families or who train and guide them.

Bernhard *et al.* (2005) emphasise that particular effort should be made to provide funding and services for mothers who have been separated from their children, along with child-care and after-school programme subsidies for newly arrived immigrant children regardless of their status or entrance category. Religious institutions, including local congregations and clergy, should be included in the discussion and design of these services. Social service providers should be trained to deal with immigrant family histories and cultures that may affect their present circumstances, and should not assume that the family unit residing in Canada is semi-autonomous

but be open to the possibility that power and authority might be exercised or influenced by persons living outside the country. Service providers are urged to emphasise post-reunification needs as much as pre-unification ones, and parental education should include material that addresses the specific concerns of transnational, multi-local families. Group sessions—enabling members of transnational, multi-local families to get together for mutual support, information exchange and social occasions—should be encouraged and facilitated.

Although anti-immigrant sentiment in Canada is much less intense than in many other countries, and legal avenues for family reunification are greater, immigrant parents may still be reluctant to seek services for fear of stigmatisation. This was the case with some of the mothers interviewed by Bernhard *et al.* (2005), particularly those who bore children in Canada, sent them back home to be cared for and later sought to reunite with them. The relatively low level of anti-immigrant hysteria in Canada is both a direct and an indirect outcome of official public policies and discourses. The authors do not explicitly address this point, but nativist discourses, covert or overt racial profiling, and discriminatory policies where they exist, add to the cost of transnational parenting and parent–child reunification. They are thus an essential part of any framework for the analysis of immigrant family separation.

In sending countries, the role of government agencies and educational and social welfare institutions in mitigating the individual, community and societal costs of separated families is just beginning to receive attention (see Yeoh and Lam 2006). Recent studies sponsored by Save the Children in Sri Lanka (2006) and UNICEF (Cortes 2008) highlight the need to recognise, validate and support substitute care-giver roles in the migrant-remittance chain, and the changing roles of fathers when mothers migrate (whether the fathers are the primary-care substitutes or not). Such recognition and validation in public policies and services can be an important step toward acknowledging the ways that family structures are changing as a result of international migration and designing public policies that support the communities and individuals struggling to respond to those changes. Substitute care-givers and left-behind parents (fathers, in particular) need to have access to resources and training in good parenting practice and the specific needs of separated children.

The authors of the 2006 Save the Children in Sri Lanka report argue that support services provided by non-profit organisations, religious groups and government agencies can build on existing ‘natural’ support networks or fill in spaces where these are weak or non-existent. Children who are left behind need to feel there is an adult who can protect them and with whom they can communicate when there are problems. Children with elderly carers in Sri Lanka were more likely to feel sad, unable to communicate or unprotected. Likewise, children whose carers did not use physical punishment had better outcomes than those who did, as did those whose fathers infrequently or never drank alcohol, were employed and were comfortable with the care-giver role reversal when their wives migrated. Teachers were seen as surrogate mothers by Sri Lankan children (unlike in some other studies where left-behind children felt stigmatised in school), and those who seemed the best cared-for

were in households that had access to extended kin networks and assistance from neighbours.

UNICEF researchers emphasise the importance of addressing left-behind children's problems in the context of other changes in local and regional policies. They also emphasise the importance of allocating significant expenditure for infrastructure, sanitation, health and education related to left-behind children's needs (Cortes 2008: 28). Researchers from both UNICEF and Save the Children in Sri Lanka urge that support services for transnational families be designed and delivered in ways that do not 'problematise' or stigmatise separated families. Nor should the programmes or services heighten the jealousies of non-migrant families or contribute to the inequalities that might exist between them.

In both sending- and receiving-country studies, there have been calls for documenting 'best practice' in assisting transnational multi-local families and identifying programmes that already work so that new programmes can build on existing knowledge. This, in turn, requires that public policy be a central piece of any framework for understanding and explaining transnational parenting practices, family dynamics and the conditions that encourage successful family reunion.

Conclusion and Questions for Future Research

Any framework for assessing the subjective and objective costs and benefits of parent-child separation due to international migration, both for the participants themselves and for their communities of departure and reception, must begin with the assumption that costs and benefits are not fixed but vary according to the country context, family type, child-rearing and parenting practice, and the meanings given to such separations in public and private discourses, among other factors. It must acknowledge that the cost-benefit calculus cannot be understood on the basis of the characteristics of transnational family units and members alone, but must take into account a number of socio-economic contextual variables that shape the outcomes.

At the family level, these socio-economic contexts include the class position and ethnic identity in which the family members are embedded, the gender structure of economic opportunities in the area of origin, the degree to which out-migration is normative and has well-established social networks, and the nature of informal networks and social institutions in the area of origin.

At the macro level, it includes the economic benefits that parents can gain from migration to the host country, the degree of economic security and stability they are able to achieve, and the legal status to which they have access. This, in turn, influences the ability of parents to send income home, and to save for return visits home, and sending for children. Without access to legal status, sending for children becomes a question not only of cost and having a stable environment into which to integrate them, but also of the risks involved in the journey.

Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon of transnational families and the sending and receiving communities that are globally connected to them, a variety of methods and sampling strategies will continue to be needed if we are to understand the costs and benefits of these separations. It is important not only to study the cost–benefit calculus in the minds of transnational parents, their children and substitute care-givers, but also to develop a framework that accounts for the changing context and conditions that influence these perceptions and help to explain different outcomes. As pressure for examining public policies through the lens of separated families grows in sending and receiving countries, comparative research directed towards identifying both the optimum conditions for the well-being of separated parents and children and the ‘best practices’ of social institutions in sending and receiving countries will be essential.

There are a number of research questions the answers to which can contribute to the effort to maximise the benefits and minimise the social costs of this unprecedented global transformation in family structures and dynamics.

- How can separated children and parents be better prepared for the challenges to family life created by geographical distance?
- How does our understanding of transnational parenting practices change when children’s perceptions are added to those of their parents?
- Can the emotional and caring cost of mothers migrating be reduced by changing public discourses (e.g. by acknowledging family diversity and the substitutability of caring/nurturing roles, and/or validating the father’s care-giving)?
- How can members of transnational families, including children, be empowered to create their own support networks and pressure for needed changes?
- What happens when parents and children are reunited after prolonged separation? What factors increase or decrease conflict (factors relating to the separation itself, such as age of child at original separation, degree of disruption related to separation from care-giver, gaps in parent–child expectations, etc.)?
- How can parents and children be better prepared for reunification?
- What role can the media and educational and religious institutions play in ‘normalising’ transnational families, creating consciousness of the forces that result in family separation, and validating the gender role changes that may result?
- What public policies and forms of social support help to reduce the trauma of a ‘second separation’ (i.e. from carers in the home country) and conflict in reunification?

Just as it is easy to blame immigrants for the social ills of the countries which create a demand for their labour, it is easy to blame emigrant parents for a perceived breakdown in traditional family structures and roles and a ‘crisis in caring’ that are due to other forces, such as globalisation and economic restructuring. Mothers who leave their children behind to migrate across borders seem to be particular targets for this criticism.

Migrant parents may underestimate the costs of their migration, but so do other immigrants to the US who, as Mahler's (1995) study shows so well, routinely miscalculate the costs of their journey, overestimate their post-migration earnings and are unable to realistically anticipate the amount of time they will stay in the host country. Even if they were to have more-accurate information regarding the potential costs of their migration, it is not clear that this would be enough to change, in the aggregate, the incidence of migration. And blaming migrant parents for problems with youth that are widespread for both non-migrant and migrant parent families is parallel to blaming female-headed households in the African-American community in the USA for the high levels of young African-American males in the criminal justice system.

More useful than automatic assumptions about the pathologies of separated families will be a clearer understanding of the factors that increase or decrease the costs of family separation and reunification and a better understanding of the kinds of social service and public policy, including immigration policy, that help to strengthen transnational family bonds and facilitate family reunification. Such knowledge can potentially empower transnational parents, children, care-givers and community organisations to advocate for change. Scholars have an important role to play in this process by uncovering patterns and processes that have, up to now, been a relatively invisible part of the social networks being created by globalisation.

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Reviews

Ryszard Cholewinski, Paul de Guchteneire and Antoine Pécoud (eds), **Migration and Human Rights: The United Nations Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights**

Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and UNESCO, 2009, 450 pp., £60.00 hb. (ISBN 978-0-521-19946-9), £23.99 pb. (ISBN 978-0-521-13611-2)

When a book's subject matter is the 'UN's best kept secret', expectations are bound to run high and this volume does not disappoint. It is a persuasive work, not least because of its skilful avoidance of repetition, but also due to its great scholarship and the wide range of its contributors' professional backgrounds. It is impossible to do justice here to the book's numerous contributors, thanks to whom the book manages to be comprehensive without becoming tedious or less than readable. More significantly, the book fills an important gap in the human rights–migration literature since there has been scant academic and policy interest in the International Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights (ICMWR). Moreover, what makes the book unique and engaging is the underlying fervour that runs through the chapters and brings the authors together in indignation at the incapability or unwillingness of states to address the human rights of migrant workers in the twenty-first century.

The theme tackled in this volume is not new. In 1951, at the inception of the modern human rights movement, Hannah Arendt was already pointing out the difficulties that non-nationals had in accessing human rights. This situation is brought about by the inherent tension in the modern world, which Seyla Benhabib calls the 'paradox of democratic legitimacy', between democratic forms of representation and accountability and the spread of cosmopolitan norms. States increasingly find themselves juggling the responsibilities to promote and protect human rights on the one hand, and the prioritisation of state

interests, which at times involves the exclusion of non-nationals, on the other. These contradictory forces are what the authors eloquently expose and seek to unravel. This they do by using the ICMWR as a yardstick of political will and commitment to the human rights of migrant workers.

The book is divided into two sections. The first is devoted to documenting how the ICMWR came about and to analysis of its content, scope and mode of functioning. The ICMWR seeks to draw the attention of the international community to the dehumanisation of migrant workers and members of their families. Most of the rights listed in the ICMWR had appeared in earlier conventions, but their application to non-nationals was (and still is) problematic, since legislation in some states uses terminology that effectively excludes migrants, especially those in irregular situations. Moreover, great difficulties have characterised the Convention from its inception in the 1970s to the present day; the drafting phase took 13 years, with formal adoption by the UN in 1990, but it only entered into force in 2003, and it remains the Convention with the smallest number of participating states.

The first chapter, by the editors, De Guchteneire, Pécoud and Cholewinski, deserves a special mention for its adept introduction of the subject and the subsequent chapters, and also for summarising 'the way forward' by advancing policy considerations for policymakers and academics. The authors lament the increasingly hostile environment with respect to migrants' rights, created by current migration policies and sustained by the 'culture of citizenship' (Touzenis), which normalises migrants' poor living and working conditions. The editors identify three broadly defined factors leading to this situation—market forces, sovereignty and security issues—which they propose should be analysed thoroughly.

Section 2 introduces various case studies exploring the situation of migrant workers' rights; the chapters specifically deal with Asia, the

European Union, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy. The authors seek to uncover the underlying concerns of states which have not ratified the Convention, and look at prospects for ratification in a global economic climate in which migrant workers are among those the most negatively affected. The dominant discourse is state-centred, excluding migrant workers' human rights. Two themes emerge strongly in this section: first, most of the authors refer to the fact that some of the major concerns contributing to Western states' resistance to ratification of the ICMWR are unfounded. For example, it is often stated that ratification implies a loss of national sovereignty over admission policies but this claim is clearly refuted by Article 79 of the ICMWR. The second theme is the singular role that NGOs have in addressing such misperceptions and in increasing the visibility of the ICMWR. In spite of their atypical lack of engagement with the Convention's initial drafting process, NGOs' role in subsequent years has increased considerably and they have been credited with maintaining interest in the ICMWR. All of the volume's contributors, whatever their background, emphasise the need to reappraise states' perceptions of the human rights of migrant workers and the important role that the ICMWR can have in bringing this about. This book will surely be of interest to a wide spectrum of people including academics, policymakers, NGO activists and people working on migration issues within international organisations.

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Richard Phillips (ed.), **Muslim Spaces of Hope: Geographies of Possibility in Britain and the West**

London: Zed Books, 2009, 271 pp., £70.00 hb. (ISBN 978-1-848-13300-6), £19.99/\$37.95 pb. (ISBN 978-1-848-13301-3)

Jocelyne Cesari (ed.), **Muslims in the West after 9/11: Religion, Politics and Law**

Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010, 253 pp., £23.99 pb. (ISBN 978-0-415-77654-7)

While these two edited volumes both concentrate on 'Muslims in the West' since the start of the so-called 'war on terror', their foci are quite different. *Muslim Spaces of Hope* asks 'what Muslims have to

be hopeful about today, and how others might share this hope'. In contrast, *Muslims in the West after 9/11* 'posits the situation of Muslim minorities in a broader reflection on the status of liberalism in Western foreign policies' and explores 'changes in immigration policies, multiculturalism, and secularism'.

What is striking about both volumes is that the contributions range from theoretically sophisticated, insightful and imaginative contributions, to chapters that construct Muslims in essentialist ways, set up 'us' versus 'them' binaries and fail to interrogate the contested terms they employ. Let us begin by exploring some of the chapters that stand out in the two volumes.

In an imaginative and engaging *Muslim Spaces of Hope* chapter entitled 'Veils and sales: Muslims and the spaces of post-colonial fashion retail', Reina Lewis challenges essentialist constructions of Muslim women and explores the ways in which dress affects how they 'see and are seen in specific spaces at specific times' (p. 69). She argues that Britain's 'moral panic' about Islam means that women's Islamic dress is presented as antagonistic to 'the positive qualities associated with hip cosmopolitanism' (p. 69). She presents 'veiling as a dress act that, like all clothed performances, is historically and geographically located' (p. 70) and concludes that the bodies of Muslim women become the focus of essentialist debates about nationality and belonging as courts seek 'to arbitrate between acceptable and unreasonable forms of veiling' (p. 81).

Yasemin Shooman and Riem Spielhaus also challenge anti-Muslim essentialisms in 'The concept of the Muslim enemy in the public discourse' in *Muslims in the West after 9/11*. They argue that discursive stereotypes either homogenise Muslims or present Islam in simplistic binary constructions of 'good' and 'evil'. Furthermore, Islam is presented as a 'dangerous ideology' that incites violence and terrorism, encourages the suppression of women and is antagonistic to 'enlightened' European values of 'humanism and freedom'. They argue that blogs encourage the notion that Islam is incompatible with European norms and values while simultaneously constructing 'a Muslim other' and conclude that an 'Islamization of Europe' discourse has been established that is based on the construction of Muslims as a homogenous group engaged in a conspiracy to conquer Western Europe.

To discuss all the stimulating chapters in each volume is impracticable here. However, four more chapters demand a mention. In *Muslims in the West after 9/11*, Louise Cainkar draws on her

sociological and ethnographic research in metropolitan Chicago to make a striking point. She argues that the majority of the Arab Muslim participants in her study were optimistic about the future of Muslims in the US because they believed that their negative experiences following the 11 September 2001 attacks 'signified a minority group's right [sic] of passage in American society' (pp. 176–7). In an engaging chapter in the same volume, 'Bush's political fundamentalism and the war against militant Islam: The US–European divide', Dirk Nabers and Robert G. Patman explore 'how domestic religious thinking influenced the political behavior of the Bush administration' (p. 67).

The second two chapters I would identify as raising issues central to current debates come from *Muslim Spaces of Hope*. In the conclusion to their chapter, Claire Dwyer and Varun Uberoi argue that discourses of community cohesion emphasise cultural or ideological factors. They suggest that such discourses may therefore fail to tackle the realities of social exclusion for many British Muslims given the significant role socio-economic factors play in producing community divisions. In his chapter, Ziauddin Sardar challenges the uncritical use of terms such as 'segregation' and 'integration'. He argues that segregation is considered a problem when it is associated with Muslims, but not when it concerns others. Sardar interrogates the concept of 'integration' and argues that when it is a 'mutual process of transformation' (p. 19) it becomes a source of hope.

However, while some of the volumes' best chapters challenge essentialisms, one of the main weaknesses in both volumes is the tendency of some contributors to essentialise. For example, in *Muslims in the West after 9/11*, Jane I. Smith constructs Muslims as one-dimensional citizens when she argues that 'for law-abiding Muslims in the West who want only to live quiet lives as good citizens and good Muslims, awareness of anti-Muslim feelings is extremely painful' (p. 40). Similarly, in the same volume, Farhad Khosrokhavar (in 'Islamic radicalism in Europe') homogenises Muslim young people when he writes, 'Muslim youth find solace in the fact that "arrogant Westerners" suffer at the hands of Al-Qaeda or those who claim its symbolic paternity yet, at the same time, many of them deplore its ruthlessness' (p. 237).

Another limitation in a number of chapters is the uncritical use of contested terms to refer to

processes concerning Muslims. For example, authors including Cesari (p. 154) and Khosrokhavar (p. 232) use the term 'influx' to discuss the immigration of Muslims to Europe. This echoes the language of right-wing anti-immigration discourses. While Cesari writes that 'Islam makes it necessary to rethink and contextualize the principle of equality between cultures, thus incorporating ideals of tolerance and pluralism in the debate' (p. 170), I would argue that the term 'tolerance' conveys superiority and unequal power relations and is far from ideal. Similarly, Kevin M. Dunn and Alanna Kamp uncritically use the term 'tolerance' in their chapter in *Muslim Spaces of Hope*, implying that it is a desired goal in terms of non-Muslim attitudes to Islam (p. 59). In a similar way, a number of chapters in the two volumes use the term 'integration' without acknowledging that it is contested.

The failure to challenge the East–West binary is another limitation. In his introduction, Phillips writes that 'while it makes sense to speak of Muslims in the West, it may be more controversial to speak of "Western Muslims", though some contributors choose to do this' (p. 5). This reproduces the Orientalist binary between Muslims and the West, without problematising it. Similarly, in her collection, Cesari writes that 'it often surprises Westerners that arranged marriages continue to be supported and desired by young people born or educated in Europe' (p. 149), implying that certain young people born in 'the West' are not 'Westerners'. Similarly, while Jane I. Smith refers to 'American Muslims' in her chapter, when she argues that 'the American public... has questioned who speaks for Islam' (p. 33), she suggests that the American public is both homogeneous and non-Muslim.

In both volumes there are surprising variations in the contributors' awareness of key debates regarding Islam, essentialism and racialisation. While some of the chapters in both collections are frustrating to read, the thought-provoking and engaging contributions make both *Muslim Spaces of Hope* and *Muslims in the West after 9/11* valuable texts for students and others interested in Islamic studies, geography, the social and political sciences and critical security studies.

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