

Family in the age of migration, globalization and mobility:  
The Case of Latin American migrant domestic workers in  
Europe.



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INVITED GUEST LECTURE FOR THE SEMINAR: MIGRATION,  
TRANSNATIONALISM AND DEVELOPMENT.

# Lecture's Goals:



This lecture will provide a general overview of migration trends from Transnational families in Latin America highlighting its impact on the social and economic development of sending, destination and in-between countries.

## What exactly do we mean by transnational families?



*“Families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity namely “familyhood” even across national borders (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).”*

## Understanding Female Latin American migration to Europe: About the Factors that led to the formations of Transnational Families



- Since the 1990s the countries of origin of migrants in Europe have greatly diversify and this has included a significant number of LAC migrants (Lafleur 2011).
- Southern European countries were the main countries of emigration for LAC migrants.
- Their migration can partially be explain by three factors:
  - 1- The closure of border in traditional destinations such as the U.S after Sept 11, 2001 .
  - 2- Post-Colonial ties and their effect in the nationality laws in countries like Spain.
  - 3- The demographical changes that took place both in Europe and in LA which influenced LA women to migrate as care and domestic workers and led to the formation of transnational families.

Taking into account this past context, we will explore the following questions:



- *How and through which practices have Latin American female migrant domestic workers, manage to do transnational families in spite of the distance?*
- *What has been the impact of such ways of doing family for sending and receiving societies?*

In order to answer the past questions we will look at the following practices:



- Income generation transfers (Remittances) as vectors of social protection.
- Transnational Kinship work, practices that reproduce families.
- The reciprocal aspect of transnational caregiving.
- Access to Global Social Protection and challenges for the future of Latin American Transnational Families for researchers, policy makers and politicians.

# Income generation transfers



*“For every Christmas party I would send everything, so that the family could get together at least once a year. I send the money for: the food, the dresses, the decorations etc. In a way I was there as well. Oh and the birthdays I never missed one, I would send them all their pocket money. I promise you back then when I arrived I used to send my entire salaries something like 1000 euros; which will then get distributed among my brothers, sister and mom. This stopped when I had my first child here.”*

*Silvia 50, Peruvian Care-worker.*

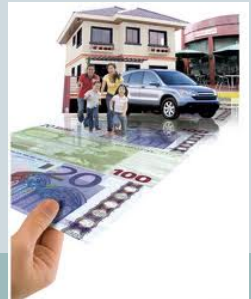
*Interviewed in Brussels 09-24-2014.*



# Income generation transfers in the broad context



- Latin America has been for the last 3 decades been appointed as the fastest growing region in terms of remittances; even in spite of the economic crisis that the main receiving destinations have experienced (IDB Report 2013).
- Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic remain the largest receivers (IDB Report 2013).
- Remittances mostly come from the U.S and selected European countries such as Spain and Italy (IDEM).





# Income Generation Transfers, much more than just money: the micro-meso effects.



- L.A Women's migration has definitely had an effect in the use of remittances and on the gender transformations in the region (Kofman 2006).
- L.A women massively send back remittances and constitute about two-thirds of the recipients in Latin America. Hence remittances are circulating within gendered networks (Kofman, 2006) . The transfer of remittances have signified among other things:
  - 1- complex process of negotiations in households about the use of remittances.
  - 2- for the Ecuadorian migrant care-workers interviewed by Boccagni 2010 in Italy, remittances have become a moral duty to migrants their ticket towards their belonging and being co-present in spite of the distance .
  - 3- While for Dominican migrant domestic workers, according to Soresen 2004 economic remittances have also been about the transfer of ideas, behaviors and the negotiations of gender roles transnationally.
  - 4- My own fieldwork with Peruvian and Colombian women also confirms this.

# Remittances aren't only reproductive but also productive: macro level effects.



- As reported in cases of Ecuadorian migrants in Italy, remittances are spend in education, health and the wellbeing of family members, which reduce the social expenditures for sending and receiving states (Lagomarsino 2014, Boccagni 2014, Herrera 2005).
- Authors suggest that remittances are about the social reproduction of families and have replace the skinny reproductive role of many Latin American states, temporarily remittances have alleviated the immediate effects of poverty (Kofman 2006, Boccagni 2014).
- However, they have also taught us a lesson on the social exclusion experienced by families that haven't got a migrant in the family (Canales 2008).

# The questions left unanswered by the literature in remittances



- How can remittances affect the lives of migrants themselves in the receiving country, when much of their revenues goes to supporting family members back at home?
- How are remittances spend in the transnational family life course and what's the role of such practices in migrants transnational belonging to the sending and the receiving society?

## About the non-economic contributions of transnational families: Emotional and Practical circulations of care.



- Initially the care-chain literature implied that migrant domestic workers absence led to their societies towards a “care drain” (Hochschild 2000).
- According to Parrenas (2001) the migration of women created a global care chain, in which care been a good commodified just like other products in the times of globalization.
- However the new theories of transnational family care, question Parrenas (2001) thesis. Evidence from cases of Latin American transnational families suggests that female migrant domestic workers have been able to do family and circulate “care” in its large emotional, practical sense in large transnational family networks (Merla and Baldassar 2014).

# Doing Motherhood from afar: Guidance, support and dual co-presence



*“ I came initially for a 1 year Period. I left the children with my ex-partner who was not their biological father. Sadly, he just couldn't keep up from drinking and spending the money I send on other women. So, my children had to move in with their grandparents but a year later they died. I couldn't come back, there was no choice my children needed an education. I called 4 times a week in between my cleaning jobs from the phone cabins. We constantly send letters and pictures to each other. We don't Skype because it's painful but we talk on whatasp, Facebook chat and the phone on a daily bases. I have raised them up alone with a lot of discipline because I had no choice, they are good kids now”*

Sofia, 51 Peruvian live-out domestic worker.

Interviewed August, 2014.

## A few reflections based on her case and other similar cases in the literature:



- Clearly, through these practices she has been able to mother her children in non-traditional but valid manner.
- Her practices as transnational mother have also helped her to maintain a sense of belonging in the transnational social space, as more than just another care-worker (Merla and Baldassar 2014).
- Sofia's punctual remittances and care practices are sign of full affection and a way of accomplishing her moral expectations towards her children (Boccagni 2014).
- Unfortunately these practices have been influenced by her positioning in Belgium as an undocumented worker (Merla 2014).
- Examples like Sofia's are found within the broader literature of transnational motherhood. Soresen's (2004) study on Dominican women in Madrid; Escriva and Skinner's (2008) study on Peruvian women in Barcelona, Lagomarcino's study Ecuadorian women in Northern Italy.

## Beyond transnational motherhood: Transnational daughters, mothers, grandmothers.



*“ I’m not a mom but that doesn’t mean that I don’t have a family. I do help them out. I think this is what keeps me at live while being abroad, what makes you be yourself is your family... I came here because my sister helped me to get this job, we are there for each other. Since I left I haven’t missed one single month. I always send them their pocket money as if it was my Obligation! My parents worked all of their lives for us, now it’s my turn. I left with one goal and I never forgot about it. I couldn’t finish my studies and so my goal became my little brother. He is almost an engineer now. I’m going to go back in a few years. We are going to buy a land that he is going to help me manage with his knowledge. One day when I’m old he will be there for me. “*

*Mariana 46 Peruvian live-in Domestic worker*

*Brussels, october 2014.*

# Her case: an example of intergenerational care exchanges.



- Through her practices, Mariana accomplishes her role as the oldest daughter and maintains her identity by fulfilling her obligations to her family (Baldassar et. al, 2007).
- Mariana's practices to maintain a sense of co-presence in her family are influenced by her legal status as a live-in diplomatic domestic worker. She can for example perform visits periodically, unlike Sofia. Her visits have different purposes: Routine visits, Crisis support visits, Duty and Ritual visits (Christmas) (Baldassar et.al 2007).
- Examples of cases like Mariana's are found within the literature, of Salvadorian Migrants in Belgium and Australia; who intended to show how Salvadorian fulfilled their obligation towards their elderly parents from abroad(Merla 2012a).



## But it's this care reciprocal? Can the older generations also contribute to family making from afar?



*“ I was here alone with the two kids and my whole family was abroad. I began to call mom more often because the lower price of telephone companies made things easier. Once mom lost herself in tears and explained she was sick and couldn't even afford to eat. Immediately, I did all the paper work to bring her over. I fought so hard so that she could stay because she is O.K here but I'm also O.K because she is here. She has watched over the kids when I'm working. She cooks she helps me clean, we are a family and the kids now almost adults adore her. Now she is sick again and is them (the kids) who are taking care of her. “*

*Carolina, Colombian live-out domestic worker .*

Interviewed in Brussels, September 2014.

And what about: who will care for care-workers in their old age? How will they negotiate their care needs in their old age?



*“ I took care of my parents in Colombia and I still do. I took care of my brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. Here I took care of my mother in law. Now I take care of my partner who has cancer. I took care of my “old” people (families she worked for). I’m quite sick now, all those years of lifting up old people have gave me a bad case of arthritis. This is been me someone who cares for. I guess is in our blood, right, us Latina women? Now, I don’t know about the future, I didn’t work enough for a pension, well not legally... Perhaps it will be time for those left behind to do something for their crazy auntie, Vanessa... (her). “*

*Vanessa, Colombian Care-worker*

*Interviewed in Brussels, November 2014.*



## Final remarks: Can the efforts of transnational families be normalized?



- This presentation has shown you how Latin American domestic worker's in Europe managed to do family from afar. It has given you an example of how people in times of globalization manage to do family in spite of their physical absence (Merla 2014).
- These examples have also highlighted that these women's transnational family making practices have enable a important source of social protection for their families left behind (Boccagni 2010). At the same time their care-domestic work in Europe has also fill in the care gaps that couldn't be fill in by governments.
- Finally, their experiences have hopefully made you reflect on how the right to family making in our modern societies, is conditioned by one's positions within our current global economies.

# For you to reflect:



Let's all watch the following video which illustrates what according the right to family making means to the United Nations declaration in terms Marriage and family making rights.

<http://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/videos/marriage-and-family.html>.

Question 1: Now, let's say you were in charge of making such campaign, what other elements will you add to a future campaign on the issue so as to reflect transnational family features and their contributions to the developments of various countries.

Question 2: If you were a European Union Politician which kinds of policies will you design that will help domestic migrant workers to achieve their rights to family making and obtain transnational protection in the areas of health and education?

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