

# Who Cares? Transnational Families in Debates on Migration and Development\*

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## Abstract

International migration sets in motion a range of significant transnational processes that connect countries and people. How migration interacts with development and how policies can promote and enhance such interactions have, since the turn of the millennium, gained attention on the international agenda. The recognition that transnational practices connect migrants and their families across sending and receiving societies forms part of this debate. The ways in which policy debate employs and understands transnational family ties nevertheless remains underexplored. This article sets out to discern the understandings of the family in two (often intermingled) debates concerned with transnational interactions: The largely state and policy-driven discourse on the potential benefits of migration on economic development, and the largely academic transnational family literature focusing on issues of care and the micro-politics of gender and generation. Emphasizing the relation between diverse migration-development dynamics and specific family positions, we ask whether an analytical point of departure in respective transnational motherhood, fatherhood or childhood is linked to emphasizing certain outcomes. We conclude by sketching important strands of inclusions or exclusions of family matters in policy discourse and suggest ways to better integrate a transnational family perspective in global migration-development policy.

**Keywords:** migration, development, transnational family relations, gender, global care chains

## Introduction

International migration sets in motion a range of significant transnational processes that potentially contribute to development. Over the past decade, transnational interactions conducive to development have received considerable attention in global policy papers, international forums, and dialogues (Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Sriskandarajah 2005; de Haas 2005, DRC 2009, UNDP 2009). Within this policy

field, reference is routinely made to 'migrants and their families': Migration potentially benefits migrants and their families; remittances lift individuals and families out of poverty; migration leads to increased female participation in employment and, by implication, empowerment of women and changed (gender) relations. At the other end of the spectrum, disconnections are emphasized: Family separation potentially leads to family disruption; has emotional, psychological and social costs for children, spouses and the elderly; disrupts family care regimes; and causes a plethora of social problems ranging from school dropouts and teenage pregnancies,

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to societal decay and the breakdown of social norms. Policy discourses rarely specify the family situations that circumscribe migrating subjects prior to, during and after migration. Rather, family relations are taken for granted or attributed particular normative qualities, predominantly conceived of on the basis of nuclear families or single unit households (Mazzucato and Schans 2011).

It is our contention that migrants remain understood as individual actors in the migration-development debate. They may be approached as individuals of particular sexes, colors and classes, but seldom as relational subjects embedded in larger social structures. Yet migration research has demonstrated how migration decisions, choice of destination, adaptation and incorporation, and transnational relations are linked with family ties and bonds, although not necessarily in harmonious or tension-free ways. The decision to send one or more migrants may be taken within the family and the financial costs involved found by pooling family resources. The motivation behind migration decisions may involve the need to be able to provide for family members, and family members – in both source and destination countries – may remain key sources of economic and emotional support throughout the migration process. However, in other instances, family-based conflicts and family-induced violence motivate movement, a clear warning against taking the primacy of family relations – or the moral sensibilities informing policies around families – for granted.

Early debates regarding the migration-development policy largely overlooked the impact of gender. A perceived increase in independent female migration – often termed the ‘feminization of migration’ – led to policy studies concerned with the specific forms female migration may take, such as migration for domestic work (e.g. produced by the ILO Global Action Programme on Domestic Workers and their Families<sup>1</sup>), the trafficking of women for sex work (e.g.

produced by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women<sup>2</sup>) or organized migration for marriage (Kawaguchi and Lee 2012). However, as several decades of gender studies have shown, whether women and men migrate or not, gender identities are characterized by fluidity, multiple social positioning, movement and transformation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Anthias 2000; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Throughout the migration process, ideas about appropriate gender roles become the lens through which desirable social change (the object of development policy) are expressed. The pressure exerted on migrating subjects often departs from idealized notions of family relations where everyone – and women in particular – acts according to societal expectations (Parreñas 2005; Abrego 2009). In almost all societies, gendered notions of appropriate travel, occupation and living conditions circumscribe female migration to a larger extent than that of men.

Basic research and policy studies have disparate traditions of categorizing social reality and gendered transitions; the diverse and complex case-based research in academia and the policy makers’ inclination towards operational solutions creates a complicated dialogue between the two disciplines. This article sets out to discern the conception of the family in two (often intermingled) debates concerned with transnational interactions: The largely state and policy-driven discourse on the potential benefits of migration on economic development and the largely academic transnational family debate focusing on issues of care and the micro-politics of gender and generation. A few recent articles have reviewed the transnational family literature from different angles, examining research on immigrant families (Glick 2010), the effects of transnational family life on children (Mazzucato and Schans 2011) and other central themes related to transnational parenthood (Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012). We supplement these contributions by focusing explicitly on what the lit-

<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/projects/WCMS\\_222567/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/projects/WCMS_222567/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.catwinternational.org/>

erature engaged with transnational motherhood, fatherhood, childhood and global care chains can tell us about migration-development dynamics. In addition, we bring in considerations of the consequences of macro-politics on the transnational family, a topic often given insufficient attention in research concerning family-related migration. We conclude by sketching out important strands of inclusions or exclusions of family matters in policy discourse and suggest ways to better integrate a transnational family perspective in global migration-development policy.

### **Migration, Development, and Family Matters**

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the two High Level Dialogues (HLDs) have maintained migrant family matters high on the international policy agenda since 2006. Supporting positive migration outcomes, a special Working Group on Human Rights, Gender and Migration was established under the Global Migration group (GMD) in late 2012, paying particular attention to the promotion and protection of the human rights of all migrants and their families. The GFMD 2013-14 Concept Paper states that “Migrants often bring higher income and more opportunities to their families and communities” but also communicates that the downside of migration may include “dependencies and social tensions within families and societies” (GFMD 2013). In a similar vein, the 2013 HLD on International Migration and Development makes ample reference to migrants and their families “who rely on migration to improve their livelihoods” but “too often face high costs and risks”, including “family separation”.<sup>3</sup> The 2013 Human Development report also points to the “profound human costs of forcibly prolonged family separation” (UNDP 2013), a concern shared by ILO who states that “little attention is paid to the social costs of family separation and impacts on families left behind”.<sup>4</sup> The IOM World

Migration 2013 Report nevertheless makes reference to a smaller sample of recent migrant family studies and concludes that these studies come up with various findings: in some contexts emotional costs of family separation is found, in particular among children left in the care of other family members. In other cases, the benefits of remittances may bring higher levels of well-being among migrant families (IOM 2013).

Engaging in this dialogue, transnational studies suggest that migrant parents may “leave children and other dependents behind” in a physical sense, but often migration is grounded in one’s sense of responsibility to the family. Most seek to retain their family relational status, e.g. by carrying out fatherhood or motherhood in new ways, challenging conventional notions of family life as defined by geographical proximity. The costs and benefits of family separation are not fixed; rather, they vary according to the micro and macro-level contexts in which they occur (Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012). The transnational family research field has grown extensively during the last 5-10 years, and a number of topical questions have been raised, particularly relating to care and parental roles. Most studies are concerned with migration from the Global South to the Global North, reflecting the general tendency in migration research to focus on the period after migration and processes of adaptation and integration to the host society (Nawyn 2010). Far less attention is given to South-South migrations.<sup>5</sup> Migration from Latin America and Asia and subsequent transnational family development are the predominant regions of investigation. Lesser attention is given to African migrations. Transnational family studies involving European migrants are beginning to emerge, as are comparative studies. Apart from a few exceptions, family dynamics of sub-Saharan migrants have been

<sup>3</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/population/mmeetings/HDL2013/documents/Roundtable\\_1-paper.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/mmeetings/HDL2013/documents/Roundtable_1-paper.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.ilo.org/migrant/publications/specialized-publications/WCMS\\_222913/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/migrant/publications/specialized-publications/WCMS_222913/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The focus on migration from developing to developed countries are misleading in comparison with current international migration flows in which only 37 percent of global flows move from developing to developed countries, 60 percent moves either between developing or between developed countries (UNDP 2009: 21).

only scarcely researched and have often been related to other topics,<sup>6</sup> but authors are beginning to take an interest in how South-South and interregional migration affects the involved families. These research interests include comparative studies focusing on the effects of internal, regional and international migration (i.e. Illanes 2010; Carrasco 2010; De Regt 2010).

In the following section we highlight two thematic trends: Firstly, we analyse family reproduction and issues of transnational motherhood, transnational fatherhood, and transnational (or local) childhood. Secondly, we focus on reproduction to production through the concept of global care chains. Our categorization in family or chain relationship is not indicative of mutable exclusive debates, but rather suggests a catalogue of themes that seems to form part of current trends in research on transnational families.

### Transnational Family Relations

The academic transnational family literature addresses the multifaceted and asymmetric character of relationships between family members and how these relationships transform by being subjected to spatial separation. Perhaps the most significant effort to develop a theory regarding transnational families was made in 2002, in Bryceson and Vuorela's edited volume 'The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks'. Building on the work of Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994), Bryceson and Vuorela defined transnational family life as social reproduction across borders. They further understood transnational families as families that live separated from each other for some or most of the time, yet still remain together and create a feeling of collective welfare and unity, a process they term 'familyhood across national borders'. Transnational families, they argued, have to cope with multiple national residences,

identities and loyalties. Like other families, transnational families are not biological units *per se*, but social constructions or 'imagined communities' that must mediate inequality amongst their members, including differences in access to mobility, resources, various types of capital and lifestyles (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 3-7).

In transnational family research, continuity in social family networks across borders is generally seen as conducive to human development and often underlies the formation of transnational institutions that can further economic development in the countries of origin (Oso and Ribas-Mateos 2013). At the other end of the continuum we find case studies emphasizing the high emotional tolls on individual family members, potentially leading to family breakdown and ultimately to the breakdown of the social fabric of entire local communities. Such findings will generally point to negative migration-development outcomes (UNICEF 2007). The contradictions between often idealized notions of family ideology and concrete lived experiences of differing but workable family configurations beg the question of whether breakdowns in the family occur naturally or as a consequence of migration. Often, female migration is a consequence of male abandonment of family responsibilities, leaving women in charge of both emotional and financial family needs (see e.g. Sørensen and Guarnizo 2007). Another question relates to the conditions and constraints within which migrant families maneuver; in particular, how the state and state migration and family policies play out in the life of migrant families (Boehm 2008). In the following paragraphs we take a closer look on what the transnational family literature has to say about particular family positions and whether an analytical point of departure in respectively transnational motherhood, fatherhood or childhood is linked to emphasizing particular outcomes.

### Transnational motherhood

Almost two decades ago Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) drew attention to how female Latina domestic workers in the United States

<sup>6</sup> For example, Nigerian migrants often figure in the literature on human trafficking, sex work and international crime but are absent in studies of transnational families (motherhood and multi-local households) (Kastner 2010: 18).

creatively rearranged and reconstructed themselves as mothers to accommodate spatial and temporal separation from their children. They termed these emerging cross-border care relations “transnational motherhood”, a term largely adopted in later literature. Drawing on social constructivist and feminist notions of family and gender roles, subsequent studies of transnational motherhood highlighted how family reconfigurations, on the one hand, are deeply rooted in and mediated by social stratification factors (Lutz 2008), and, on the other hand, how migrant women tackle the practical and emotional challenges of mothering from a distance in a context of socially defined moralities (Åkesson, Carling and Drotbohm 2012).

Transnational motherhood analyses the pressures of culturally-specific gender norms. Firstly, women’s migration for wage work – and ability to send home remittances – challenges local gender ideologies of male breadwinners and female caretakers (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2010, 2005; Dreby 2006; Gamburd 2008; Abrego 2009; Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2005). Secondly, social imaginaries of emotionally close mother-child relationships are challenged by women’s migration (Dreby 2006; Horton 2009; Parreñas 2010; Illanes 2010; Boehm 2011), potentially fostering myths of mothers abandoning or putting their children at risk and subsequent family breakdown (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie 2002; Boehm 2008). Preoccupations expressed in public discourse in receiving societies may not always reflect historically established child-rearing practices involving extended family members, as Olwig’s (2012) research on Caribbean and Åkesson, Carling and Drotbohm’s (2012) research on Cape Verdean child fostering practices demonstrate.<sup>7</sup> Such

<sup>7</sup> Examples of more fluid child fostering practices and by implication broader definitions of what transnational motherhood entails have also been reported for Latin American (Leinaweaver 2009; Sørensen and Guarnizo 2007; Madianou and Miller 2012); Africa (Al-Sharmani 2006; Drotbohm 2010; Filho 2009; Mazzucato and Schans 2011; Poeze and Mazzucato 2014); and Asia (Huang, Yeoh and Lam 2008).

preoccupations may also overlook how modern forms of low-cost communication enable migrant mothers to fulfil important maternal responsibilities (Tungohan 2013). While a sense of enhanced co-presence is produced under certain conditions as texting, chatting and skyping become part of the social fabric of transnational motherhood (Madianou and Miller 2011, 2013) this may not prevent migrant mothers from feeling insufficient, guilty and distressed (Horton 2009; Parreñas 2010). Enhanced communication can increase discontent, grunges, insults, arguments, and avoidance as much as it contributes to binding families together (De Bruijn, Brinkman and Nyamnjoh 2013).

The ways in which female migrants leave traditional gender roles behind and become economically independent and empowered by migrating to more ‘egalitarian’ societies also remains an open question (Barajas and Ramirez 2007). Rather than reconfiguring gender roles, a range of studies point to the inertia and conservative nature of gender systems. Rachel Parreñas’ (2010) work on Philippine transnational mothering indicates that fathers rarely take over child-rearing responsibilities when mothers migrate. Instead, other female kin step in, risking becoming overburdened with such responsibilities. As parental expectations to female migrants may not decrease, migrant mothers attempt to make up for emotional distress and social stigma by remitting as much of their income as possible, often irrespective to their economic situation (Lim 2009; Peter 2010). Moral expectations of motherly responsibilities and self-sacrifice may limit migrant women’s socio-economic integration in the receiving country and, in some cases, lead to a life in chronic poverty (Abrego 2009). When single mothers leave their first children in the countries of origin and later have new families and children in the migration destination, their dual breadwinning role may further limit the realization of social and economic independence (Kastner 2010).

Studies of transnational motherhood have mainly looked at family and gender relations

after migration and only rarely compared migrant and non-migrant families in the sending context (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). We therefore are unsure as to whether families were on the breach of falling apart due to national structural barriers and inequality prior to migration. We also lack knowledge regarding local transformations in gender relations and family norms. Finally, we lack analysis concerning the changing and dynamic nature of motherhood over the life course. Life stage clearly influences both family constructions, migration patterns and the respective mothering functions (Singh and Cabraal 2013; Bonizzoni and Boccagni 2014; Wall and Bolzman 2014); hence, an analytical framework of circulation might be one way forward to capture the dynamic and structurally diverse forms of family formations, care relations and relational motherhood (Baldassar and Merla 2014).

### Transnational Fatherhood

To counter-balance the predominant focus on transnational motherhood, a small but growing body of literature addresses the migration of fathers from a gendered perspective. This literature partly comes from a critique of equating attention to gender with attention to women (Pribilsky 2004; Waters 2009), and for incorrectly positioning men as the deviant 'other' who either abandon the family upon migration or who cannot or will not take over reproductive labour when mothers migrate (Datta et al. 2009; Abrego 2009; Alipio 2013; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). This literature underscores how masculine identities change during different stages of the migration process.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, it pays atten-

tion to diverse effects related to whether fathers leave mothers and children behind, or stay put when women migrate. Finally, it connects fatherhood to remittance practices and family welfare (Schmalzbauer 2005; Dreby 2006).

We detect two separate sets of effects on family wellbeing related to respectively paternal or maternal absence. Studies concerned with the household division of labour upon paternal migration explain fathers' reluctance to rearrange household labour and provide emotional childcare as embedded in dominant notions of fatherhood and paternal inclination to infuse respect and not care (Parreñas 2008, 2010; Ryan et al. 2008; Tungohan 2013). Pribilsky's study of Ecuadorian migration to New York shows a possible alternative outcome in which migration becomes a window into domestic work for male migrants, who after having had to cook and clean become more appreciative of women's work in the country of origin. In addition they experience more freedom to transcend traditional gender roles from their new position in the U.S., including the establishment of more affective care relations with their children (Pribilsky 2012). Studies concerned with stay-at-home fathers also find that they are willing to not only care for their children but also for their migrant spouse's wellbeing (Fresnoza-Flot 2014; Waters 2009). Some men strive to become different fathers than their own (Kilkey, Plomien and Perrons 2014).

Transnational fatherhood analysis contributes a nuanced understanding of 'parental abandonment'. Paternal abandonment may be due to disadvantaged socio-economic and legal positions, such as unemployment or lack of proper documentation (Pribilsky 2007; Abrego 2009; Coe 2011). A middle position is found among migrant fathers whose long and/or irregular working hours provide a challenge to maintain regular contact with their children. Thus working conditions, rather than essentialist masculine identities, may explain abandonment. Finally, abandonment may be temporary as contact may be reestablished when the social and economic situation improves. Yet other studies focus

<sup>8</sup> Other transnational literature links male migration to stages in the life course: In parts of the world where access to local work opportunities are scarce or no longer can provide a proper livelihood, migration may present the only way to become a "man" (Ahmad 2008; Pribilsky 2012; Christiansen, Vigh and Utas 2006; Vigh 2009). In such contexts, male migration should be understood as a prerequisite to realize the masculine potential of entering into a familial union and begin to father children; in short, become an adult.

attention to complications stemming from alcohol, drug abuse and the establishment of new affective relationships in the migration destination, resulting in complicated relations with the family-members in their country of origin (Dreby 2006; Worby and Organista 2007). While such behavior may result in 'social death' in the countries of origin (Peter 2010), it seems that men are less likely than women to be socially sanctioned for defaulting on family responsibilities (Dreby 2006; Abrego 2009; Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012).

Gender powerfully determines labor market opportunities and is therefore believed to shape remittance behavior. Although male migrants generally have access to better paid jobs than women, it is often assumed that women not only send home a higher proportion of their income but also remit more frequently and continuously (Sørensen 2005). In her study of Salvadoran transnational families, Abrego (2009) finds that transnational fathers generally send less money home than migrant mothers. As male migrants are less burdened by normative expectations of self-sacrifice, they tend to spend more of their earnings on personal needs with the result that many 'father-away' transnational families barely manage to survive. Such findings are not universally applicable, as other case studies provide evidence that remittances from male migrants support families quite well, especially when managed properly. To the extent that whole families become dependent of migrant fathers' remittances, family reunification may become more difficult or prolong the transnational family arrangement (Pribilsky 2004).

The relationship between fathers' whereabouts and family welfare cannot be limited to a question of migration, as parental absence might be due to divorce or death, as well. Recent findings from Malawi indicate that concern about the welfare of left behind migrant children might be exaggerated. Paternal orphans and children of divorcees are significantly disadvantaged compared to otherwise similar children who live with their father or whose father has migrated.

In the latter case, remittances benefit child welfare by strengthening household finances, reducing child labour, and contributing to cover the costs of education, healthcare and other welfare related expenses (Carling and Tønnessen 2013).

### **Transnational Childhood**

Parents' transnational migration practices affect children. Whether staying with a parent or another care-giver in the country of origin, becoming reunited with family members in the migration destination or migrating on their own to support their families, children take an active part in creating and maintaining transnational family configurations (Uehling 2008). The transnational family literature frequently focuses on children but often through the lens of their parents (Mazzucato and Schans 2011). This might explain the tendency to see children as acted upon rather than being actors in their own life. However, recent literature has started to adapt a more child-centered approach (Dreby and Adkins 2012), giving voice to children's own notions of family, gender and mobility, as well as emphasizing children's agency.

Age seems to be a significant variable when considering how children are affected by migration (Carling, Menjivar and Schmalzbauer 2012). Age also structures how migrant children are treated politically, e.g. as eligible for child-centered development programmes in the countries of origin (Carling and Tønnessen 2013), as dependants eligible for family reunification (Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2009), or as unaccompanied minors (Uehling 2008).

When children stay behind, migrating parents sometimes disclose the difficulties involved in migration. This can lead to misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations (Schmalzbauer 2008). Perceptions of parenting and childhood are shaped by societal norms, which partly explain the conflicting findings of problems related to feelings of 'abandonment' (Parreñas 2005; Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2009) or family relations based on acceptance of separation (Poeze and Mazzucato 2014). The quality

of care-giving arrangements is important, as difficult relationships with new care-givers create tensions between the child, the caregiver, and the migrant parent(s) (Parreñas 2010, 2008; Schmalzbauer 2006; Dreby 2007; Haagsman and Mazzucato 2014).

Due to their parents' migration, children benefit economically and get access to better health and education, which has diverse developmental effects. Several studies find that better economic family situations does not necessarily translate to higher human development for children (Schmalzbauer 2006; Dreby 2007; Parreñas 2008, 2010), as emotional strain may impact negatively on health and school performance (Kandel and Massey 2002). The extent to which transnational family arrangements under certain circumstances might strengthen children's sense of membership to their family is an understudied topic (Dreby and Adkins 2012).

Children who migrate to be reunified with their families adjust to their new family setting over time. This adjustment, however, can be a challenging one (Phoenix and Seu 2013). Disappointment with their new living arrangement and a desire to return to their former situation can occur, indicating that reunification with one family member might signify a loss of close relationships with others (Bonizzoni and Leonini 2013). Familial divisions of labour in country of origin contexts are rearranged when one or both parents migrate, but this is also the case when children reunite with their parents in the migration destination. Children with working parents may be put in charge of caring for younger siblings, which again might intensify the family's transnational identity (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2011; Øien 2010). Second and third generation youth remain a part of transnational social fields that influence their practices, values and ideas (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002; Levitt 2009; Reynolds 2006; Mand 2010). A child's involvement in transnational social fields also influences mobility, as parents may choose to send them back to their country of origin in order to avoid the 'bad influence' of the destination country

(Carling, Menjivar, and Schmalzbauer 2012). In some immigration contexts, states even facilitate such returns in the form of re-education camps for diasporic youth (Turner 2014).

Children are not just moved but also move independently for a variety of reasons, including escaping from fragile situations, human rights abuses, gang violence, or because of the breakdown of care arrangements. Others seek education, access to better paid jobs and economic opportunities (Terrio 2008; Hess and Shandy 2008; DRC 2009). Perhaps more than any other family category, the independent migration of children or 'unaccompanied minors' reveals the complex relationship between political impulses to protect children (e.g. from becoming victims of smuggling/trafficking networks) and protect the receiving societies from rising immigration pressure. Uehling (2008) describes this paradox by juxtaposing 'Childhood at risk' with 'Children as risk'. Recent studies of deportation and its effects on migrant communities underscore that 'childhood at risk' involve children's fear that one or more adult family members might get deported. The threat of a family member's detention and deportation demonstrates that, compared to the stresses of their initial migration, the risk of family disruption may be higher after the family is settled in the destination country (Boehm 2008; Dreby 2012).

### **Transnational Care**

In 2000 Arlie Hochschild coined the term 'global care chain' to describe how migrant domestic workers are employed by professional working women in the global North, which in turn leaves a care deficit, or care drain, behind with regarding their own families (Hochschild 2000). The discussion of global care chains within the migration-development debate include Rachel Salazar Parreñas' work on 'the international transfer of caregiving' and 'the international division of reproductive labour' (Parreñas 2000, 2001), as well as various related studies compiled in the edited volume 'Global Women' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).



Inspired by global value chain analysis, care chain analysis asserts that economic globalization is inextricably linked to the globalization of social reproduction. The conceptual framework attempts to illustrate/explain the processes in which several phenomena – e.g. neoliberal globalization and the feminization of migration – interact with gender relations, transnational families and cross-border care arrangements (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012). The care chain calls attention to the commodification of care work among women, how the economic value of care work diminishes as it gets passed along, and how economic and social inequality is maintained on a global scale. The care chain metaphor undoubtedly uncovers a variety of gendered economic push-pull dynamics (Nawyn 2010) and illustrates the interdependence between people in different positions across different places quite well (Escrivá 2004). Yet, this approach has been criticized for reifying that only women do care work, for insufficiently taking local inequalities into account, for ignoring institutionalized/professionalized care work chains involving trained migrants as doctors and nurses (Parreñas 2012; Raghuram 2012), and for remaining embedded in gendered and asymmetrical morality regimes that “risks underestimating migrants’ endeavors to provide care even under adverse conditions” (Boccagni 2014: 231; Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012).

The changing nature of global care economies has expanded the thematic orientation to include men’s reproductive labour, care for the elderly left behind, and children’s work as caregivers and as such acknowledged not only relations but also generations. In relation to the question of men, various scholars have attempted to ‘add the other sex’ to the care chain discussion by looking at the entrance of male migrant workers in care work, particularly how male domestic workers practise and reconstruct masculinity by underlining their traditional roles as the family head and breadwinner (Bartolomei 2010; Näre 2010; Sarti and Scrinzi 2010). Other studies have paid attention to the structural factors

that affect male migrants’ access to the labour market, leaving work in the care industry one of few open options for e.g. undocumented migrants (Sarti 2010). The function of children in care chains is only just emerging in the literature (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2011; Olwig 2012), while studies on transnational care for the elderly have attracted attention for quite some time (Baldassar and Baldock 2000; Baldassar, Wilding and Baldock 2006; Izuhara and Shibata 2002). New amalgams of care between children and the elderly may emerge, as suggested by an interesting multigenerational case study of care in Peruvian transnational families, where migrants fill ‘care slots’ by leaving the children to live with their grandparents in arrangements where the two generations take care of each other (Leinaweaver 2010).

Global care chain analysis has expanded in a number of important ways. It has applied a ‘transnational political economy of care’ perspective (Williams 2011). It has also revealed the role of the global migration industry in the production of particular chains (e.g. global domestic care chains, global nursing care chains), the huge profits made by international corporations in facilitating certain chains, and how global care chains are produced and facilitated by the intersection of government policy in the areas of migration, welfare and health with actors involved in recruitment, brokerage, training and travel (Yeates 2009).

Apart from attracting attention across academic fields, the global care chain concept has found a place in policy discussions. This particular response to global care chain conceptualizations are found in part in the unwearied rights-based advocacy efforts of feminist scholars and women’s organizations, which have broadened the policy debating tables over the past ten years. In 2005, Nicola Yeates introduced the concept and its usefulness to the Global Commission on International Migration (Yeates 2005). In 2008 UN-INSTRAW suggested that the formation of global care chains embodies the broader process of globalization of care and provides a

valuable position from which to examine the interrelationship between migration and development, culminating in the 2010 publication of 'Global Care Chains: Towards a Rights-based Global Care Regime' (Orozco 2011). The fourth meeting of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, held in Mexico in 2010, made explicit reference to transnational families and highlighted that "Global Care Chains are a 21st century development issue with major implications for gender and family" (but yet not a priority for development policy).<sup>9</sup> A final example of policy interest in the global care chain concept is the European Commission funded ILO Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families (2013-16), with the objective of "developing and strengthening national labour laws, migration policies, and recruitment regulations and practices that are oriented towards achieving decent work for migrant domestic workers across global care chains".<sup>10</sup>

### **The Impact of Macropolitics on the Family**

Early transnational studies are often criticized for romanticizing transnational family life. These studies have emphasized the continuity of social networks and institutions across borders while largely overlooking the macro-political structures limiting the mobility of individual family members within such networks (Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2009; Goulbourne et al. 2010). Studies on transnational families have likewise been criticized for privileging de-territorialized notions of family-care arrangements at the expense of analyzing the state policies and international regulations within which transnational families are situated (Baldassar 2008; Kilkey and Merla 2014). While we found examples of such 'celebratory', often under-theorized, research in our review, it should be stressed that the seminal work in transnational migration studies such as 'Nations Unbound' (Basch, Glick Schiller and

Szanton Blanc 1994) and the early work by Roger Rouse (1995) indeed underlined that transnational families have to be understood within a world of nation states.

Migration scholars have generally explained migration-policy making in terms of a rational balancing of economic interests, electoral pushes and judicial constraints. More recent studies have focused attention to the construction of collective identities and value systems by discussing migration policy in relation to issues such as social cohesion, national identity, the limits to multiculturalism and the alleged failure of integration (Bonjour and de Hart 2013). Within transnational family research, scholars have pointed to how complex factors deriving from family and migration policies contribute to the systemic production of transnational cross-border family arrangements. It is, in other words, politics, and not the exotic foreign family forms and child-rearing practices, that explains the current global extension of transnational families. Transnational family research has highlighted that international migration law doesn't necessarily serve the interests of all individuals equally (migrant mothers, fathers, single mothers, dependent children and the elderly). While formal equality between native men and women may be reached in national family law, substantive inequalities may persist in emigration and immigration law (Van Walsum 2009). Regarding emigration, some sending countries may restrict or ban the emigration of women based on either age or sector of employment (e.g. for domestic work or entertainment in certain countries, but not for nurses, doctors and engineers, (see Oishi 2005), often in attempts to protect nationals from known exploitation. In regard to immigration, transnational family arrangements may be built into the very structure of immigration policy, e.g. by installing temporary worker programs for particular and gender-specific sectors that are tied to long-term restrictions on acquiring permanent residence, family reunification or social benefits in the receiving country (Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2009),

<sup>9</sup> See [gfm\\_d\\_mexico10\\_rt\\_2-2-annex\\_en%20\(1\).pdf](#)

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS\\_222567/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/migrant/capacity-building-and-technical-assistance-on-labour-migration/projects/WCMS_222567/lang--en/index.htm)

a constraint strongly underscored by care chain analysis.

Feminist and actor-oriented research has equally underscored the contradictory nature of gender-specific migration. A case study of Mexican women employed in the highly masculinized temporary migration programmes in Canada by Preibisch and Grez (2013) found that even if acquisition of Canadian citizenship was out of the reach for these women, they expanded notions of citizenship in other ways, e.g. by being able to acquire land, property and capital in Mexico that in turn produced greater respect and social status from families and neighbours. Yet, while migration allowed these women to expand certain dimensions of their citizenship, they remained subject to “punitive labour-immigration regimes in the global North, to repressive gender systems embedded in both arenas of their transnational lives, and to the structural realities of the contemporary global political economy” (Preibisch and Grez 2013: 799).

Another line of studies has focused on the ways states divide families by defining and regulating family and kinship in numerous ways. State policy and migrant families may interpret and understand family in multiple and contradictory ways, leading to ongoing tensions over criteria for who actually constitutes a family member. It is exactly through definitions of who qualifies as a legitimate migrant that state power is particularly strong in disrupting family life (Boehm 2008). New post-Fordist migration management systems exclude an increasing number of people from the global circuits of legal mobility by disconnecting increasing numbers of individual transnational family members from the promises of globalization (De Genova 2002). Even when transnational families have ‘succeeded’ in dividing their productive and reproductive labour across borders (Schmalzbauer 2005, 2010), their strategies become increasingly vulnerable.

The recent increase in deportation has led migration scholars to focus on deportation, deportability and deportees (see e.g. De Genova and Peutz 2010; Juby and Kaplan 2011; Brotherton

and Barrios 2011; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). In these studies, deportation is examined as a global mechanism of state control, deportability (the protracted possibility of being deported) as the real effect of internalized migration policies and practices. In this process, deportees arise as members of a new global diaspora consisting of “people who had to leave one home only to be forcibly removed, often years later, from another” (Kanstroom 2012: ix). Some attention is paid to how these mass deportations affect migrants in the sending countries, for example by Hagan, Rodriguez and Castro (2011). These include both the termination of the ability to send remittances upon deportation and the additional pressures on local labor markets with high unemployment rates, adding yet another level of development problems to poor migrant sending countries.

Our analysis underscores the importance of understanding transnational families and cross-border family arrangements as always situated within broader macro- and geopolitical contexts. It highlights how current destination country deportation policies tend to undermine long-standing family reunification principles and pose dire social, economic and psychological costs for transnational families in both countries of destination and origin (Hagan, Eschbach and Rodriguez 2008). The threat of deportation is particularly poignant for families of mixed status (Brabeck, Lykes and Hershberg 2011), who, in the incidence of deportation of individual family members, become subjected to the ‘disruption of family ties’ that not only is an undesirable outcome of their initial migration, but ironically also the subject of much public concern.

### **Conclusion and Ways Forward**

Our findings point to a tendency to think in binary oppositions – women versus men, adults versus children, staying put versus migrating, staying connected versus breaking family ties – when discussing transnational families. We also detect a tendency to locate social concerns in a moral economy of emotions rather than in a political

economy of human mobility. These tendencies are more pronounced in policy debates but also traceable in academic contributions.

We find that policy debate generally has reacted inclusively to academic insistence on acknowledging diversity. This is perhaps not a surprise, as scholars often are contracted to produce policy inputs by international organisations. Attention to specific potentials, problems and risks facing migrant mothers and children (and only to a limited extent migrant fathers) increasingly appears in these papers, as does reference to the importance of more encompassing perspectives that consider the wellbeing of the entire transnational family. However, an acknowledgement of diversity in migrant experiences does not necessarily include attention to the structures that produce this diversity.

Awareness of the importance of migration policy was at the forefront of transnational migration theory (in particular the influential work of Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). In contrast to the rather simplistic belief that migrants are agents of change, this literature insists that ‘positive gains’ and ‘negative costs’ of migration always must be weighed against state policies, leading to an understanding of transnational families within – and not beyond – a world of nation states (Goulbourne et al. 2010). State policies either facilitate or constrain how ‘fluid’ or ‘continuous’ family contact and other exchanges can be maintained. Gains and costs are almost always closely connected to legal status, making the legal status of each individual transnational family member a key axis of differentiation (Piper 2005) and thus one of entanglement with migration and development policy. We therefore insist that the critique of reproducing a rather seamless image of transnational family arrangement – e.g. by focusing on the developmental impact of family remittances without emphasizing the conflicts these remittances give rise to and the state neglect they make up for – rather should be directed at migration-development political practice than at trans-

national scholarship (Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias 2007; Sørensen 2012).

We find that focusing solely on transnational motherhood, fatherhood or childhood obscures other central caregivers in transnational family arrangements and neglects the central role of the state in the lives of transnational families. As stated by Boehm, transnational family positions are “indeed riddled with difficult decisions, ambivalent emotions, and multiple negotiations in the face of limited options” (Boehm 2008: 788). Future studies of transnational family positions would benefit from turning attention towards the conditions and constraints within which migrants and migrant families maneuver. Paying attention to the ways in which motherhood, fatherhood and childhood are shaped by state power would lead to more nuanced and less normative assessments of transnational family arrangements.

In our view, attempts to connect individual migrants and migrant positions to larger global structures can be found in the literature on global care chains. The application of global care chain analysis to the migration-development policy field has uncovered the tendency to find market-oriented solutions to the vacancies in care functions in the global North by relaxing immigration policy towards people with certain skills in times of need (e.g. health workers in the 1960s and 70s, domestic workers in the 1980s and 90s) while using moralizing arguments in favour of return or extending only time limited labour contracts (families will suffer less emotional stress if the separation is short term). While we note a high policy responsiveness to the global care chain concept, we nevertheless ask whether this responsiveness is due to a rather linear image invoked by the chain metaphor, constructing easily defined victims (care drained families and care deprived children in the global South) to whose rescue social workers, religious institutions and NGOs (based in or paid by the North) can turn (Raghuram 2012)<sup>11</sup>, or to whom restric-

<sup>11</sup> For a parallel discussion of the schism between political efforts to rescue victims of trafficking and a

tive migration policies in the form of time-limited contracts can be constructed as beneficiary?

To find a balance between the extreme ends of the global care chain and regulate in a more just manner the burden of the costs, risks and investments currently falling on migrants and developing countries, some kind of global governance is clearly needed (Yeates 2012). The rights/treatment of migrant care workers is a strong human rights issue that often sits uneasily between migration and development policies. It also highlights the asymmetrical power balance in the debate between northern and southern partners. Extending labour rights to migrant domestic workers runs somewhat counter to current return and temporary migration scheme efforts in the migration policy field. Pushing for access to civil and social rights in both sending and receiving countries seems a more radical way forward. As recently argued by Lutz and Palenga-Möllnbeck (2012), neither the academic nor the policy oriented care chain discussion has hardly taken into account the citizenship situation of care workers, in particular the fact that care workers often fail to obtain citizenship rights in the countries of reception. At the same time, they are harshly reminded of their social citizenship obligations – which maintain an emphasis on migration-development on the remittance sending potential – in their countries of origin.

We agree with many of the policy recommendations made by our colleagues. Surely there is a need for policy development to support safe mobility for children, women and other perceived vulnerable migrant groups, and surely such policy development needs to recognize that both access to and experience with migration is highly gendered.<sup>12</sup> We also agree that the welfare of children and parents alike can be improved by avoiding stigmatization, preventing false promises, and providing support and stability for family members left behind to further maximize the

rights-based approach to sex work, see (Agustín 2007; Plambech 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See [http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/misc/Making\\_Migration\\_Work\\_for\\_Development.pdf](http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/misc/Making_Migration_Work_for_Development.pdf)

benefits of migration (Carling 2013). To move the migration-development policy agenda forward, we nevertheless insist that policy makers need to recognize the role played by policy making in the global North and South in generating and maintaining transnational family arrangements (Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring 2009; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). To support such efforts, transnational family research needs to bring the state into any analysis concerned with difference-producing family relations.

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