

# Transnational Migration and Changing Gender Relations in Peruvian and Bolivian Cities

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## Abstract<sup>2</sup>

Labour migration has profound implications for the reconfiguration of gender relations. Most of the literature has focused on the changing status of women in so-called 'host' countries. However, it is well recognised that migration creates ripples of change throughout the migration process, not just at destinations. In this paper we draw the readers' attention to the changes that take place as a result of cross-border labour migration in places of origin. We focus on gender as an analytical concept, rather than just women as subjects. Through a comparative analysis of male-led and women-led migration, we analyse the changes that migration brings about for women in places of origin, particularly Bolivian and Peruvian cities. On the basis of in-depth interviews with women in low-income urban and peri-urban neighbourhoods we find that in both women-led and male-led migration patriarchal relations are challenged but then reconstituted.

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## Introduction

Migration is today high on the political agenda of both countries of origin and destination. Migration alleviates social and economic pressures in countries of origin by decreasing levels of unemployment and easing pressure on public services while at the same time contributing, sometimes substantially, to the national revenues, in the form of remittances sent back home. While migration is nothing new in the history of humanity, over the last couple of

decades there has been an increased appreciation that migration is a process involving multiple geographical locations. As a consequence, it has been conceptualised as a process that stretches social and economic relations across space or transnational social fields (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton, 1994).

Although there are continuations with previous migration ages (Castles and Miller, 2009), today's migrations are substantially different because of the current moment of capitalism that places migrants in a vulnerable situation, one in which migrants have little or no job security and they face continued racism (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton, 1994). Job insecurity and widespread racism in turn place migrants in a situation where they need to maintain and 'cultivate' their fallback position, offered by family members and acquaintances who remain in the countries of origin. In this process the inter-dependencies that have developed between nation-states as a result of the movement of labour in one direction and

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the flow of financial remittances in the opposite direction (Phillips, 2006) is also experienced at the micro level between households that stretch across national borders.

In this article we focus on this micro level of analysis, on the families and households that are stretched across borders through migration. We build on Mahler's analysis of gender and transnationalism (1999) and draw the readers' attention to the changes that take place as a result of cross-border labour migration in places of origin (see Piper, 2009b). Here we take gender as an analytical concept, rather than just women as subjects. This is critical, not only because of what has become known as the 'feminization of migration' but more importantly, because gender relations permeate all social relations. As such, gender relations are also fundamental for the ways in which the process of migration develops and how it is experienced. They are also critical for our understanding of the consequences migration brings about.

In this article we extend our existing work into a comparative analysis of the consequences of migration in cases where women are the ones who migrate (Bastia) and those where women are the 'stay at home wives' (Busse) in two countries that are historically and culturally similar. One would expect that the consequences of migration for women's equality be markedly different in contexts of women-led and male-led migration. However, this might not be the case. In this paper we therefore ask: What does it mean to be a woman in today's neighbourhoods where half of the families have at least one resident abroad? What does it mean to be a man in a transnational household where the woman is in another country, having taken on the 'breadwinning' role? Are there new ways of being women and men, which are being brought about as a result of transnational migration? To what extent is it possible to find instances of women's empowerment as a result of transnational migration? We recognise that there need not be migration involved for these identities to change but we choose to focus on transnational families where at least one family member lives and works abroad.

The paper is based on a subsample of the 182 interviews collected through multi-sited fieldwork with (i) Bolivian migrants and their families in the community of origin, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia and different destinations in Argentina and Spain and (ii) Peruvian migrants from different cities in Peru to the U.S.—mainly but not exclusively to New Jersey. For Bolivian migration, fieldwork was conducted in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2002 and 2008; in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2003 and 2008; Spain in 2009. For Peruvian migration, fieldwork began in Paterson, NJ and neighbouring cities in 2006. The contacts made in the U.S. were used to contact migrants' families in five different cities in Peru in 2007. This was followed by multiple month-long visits from 2008 to 2010. In this paper we focus on a selection of cases but also draw on our wider research projects to substantiate the findings.

#### **Migration trends in the region**

South America received a large number of European migrants after the economic depression of the 1930s and the World War II (Altamirano, 2000; Bonfiglio, 2001; Castles and Miller, 2009). However, from the 1970s onwards South America has been increasingly a region of emigration. This coincides with a declining level of economic performance, rapid growth of the labour force and political instability in the region. Migrants from the Latin American region have historically migrated north to the U.S. and south to Argentina and Chile. Europe, particularly Spain and Italy emerged as preferred destinations for many Latin American migrants during the late 1990s, especially Peruvians, Ecuadorians and more recently Bolivians. The Latin American and Caribbean region experienced the highest net emigration rate of any region in the world between 1995 and 2000 (O'Neil, Hamilton and Papademetriou, 2005).

Latin America and the Caribbean was also the first region to achieve parity in the numbers of women and men migrating (Cortés Castellanos, 2005). However, Latin America's special status in this respect is not surprising. Already in the 1970s, the Latin American region had the



Fieldwork site, Cochabamba, Bolivia (author's photograph)

highest female labour market participation rates as compared to other regions of the Global South (De Oliveira and Roberts, 1998). During the same period, between 1960s and 1980s, men's labour market participation rates had decreased (in some Latin American countries significantly while in others only slightly) as a result of increased opportunities for education but also due to economic stagnation in countries such as Argentina, Chile and Peru. Female labour market participation rates increased because of the processes linked to urbanisation: higher educational attainments and lower fertility rates. The highest increases were recorded in metropolitan areas, where women entered domestic and other personal services, petty trade as well as office work (de Oliveira and Roberts, 1998).

A decade later, Latin America was already experiencing high levels of international migration by women, a process which has also been associated to the high levels of urbanisation (Hinojosa, 2008b). At the receiving end, the feminization of global migrations has been linked to the ageing of industrialised countries, the higher labour market participation rates by women in Europe and North America as well as inadequate welfare

support for the older and youngest generations by the state. The flexibilization of labour markets and the shifts towards the service sector led to an increased demand for women workers, which is being met by migrant women. While general trends can tell us about the number of women migrants vis-à-vis men, it is also critical to analyse the consequences of transnational migrations in countries of origin, which is where we focus our empirical analysis.

#### *Migration trends in Bolivia*

Forming part of the Southern Cone regional economic system, Bolivian migration was directed until recently towards Argentina and to a lesser extent to the United States, Brazil and Chile. Spain emerged as a major destination after the 2001 Argentinian crisis. Based on official figures it is estimated that over 1.3 million or just over 14% of Bolivians live in another country and 18% of mothers interviewed for the last census stated that at least one of their children lives abroad (Servicio Nacional de Migraciones, cited in De la Torre 2006).

Men historically dominated Bolivia's international migration but this began to change during the 1980s when more women started migrating



to Argentina and specifically to Buenos Aires as a result of increasing demand for women workers (INDEC 1994). Women migrants accounted for 65 per cent of the total increase in migration from neighbouring countries for the period from 1970 to 1990 (INDEC 1997). Bolivians together with Chileans, showed the greatest percentage change in the masculinity indexes between 1980 and 2000 (Bastia, 2005). However, the greatest change occurred following Argentina's crisis in 2001, when Bolivians began to migrate to Spain in large numbers (Hinojosa, 2008a). Over half, 55 percent, of Bolivian residents in Spain in 2005 were women (INE 2005).

These broader trends are relevant for the processes analysed in this article as well as for how the interviewees experienced migration. The Bolivian interviewees have a background in mining. Most of them had relocated from a mining town to Cochabamba during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Men led the initial migration to Argentina, particularly to Buenos Aires. Some migrated directly from the mining town while others moved to Cochabamba first and from there on to Buenos Aires. Women followed closely and engaged in the migration to Argentina in increasing numbers throughout the 1990s. After the 2001 crisis in Argentina many Bolivians returned and women in particular began migrating to Spain. Given that women migrated to Spain in larger numbers than men and the fact that they were often the migrant pioneers, it can be said that this newer migration to Spain was led by women.

#### *Migration trends in Peru*

Peruvian migration to the U.S. has been present since after World War II, but the number has risen steadily since the 1980s due to the economic hyperinflation and political instability that characterized Peruvian politics. There are two different types of labour migration to the U.S., one promoted by specific programmes and the other related to independent migration. An example of labour migration through a U.S. based programme is the sheepherders who came on H-2A visas. From the 1970s onwards, American sheep ranchers in California, Oregon, Nevada,

Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming started recruiting Peruvians. The Peruvian sheepherders were workers on the ex-haciendas and peasant communities in the central highlands. Most of the Peruvian sheepherders are overwhelmingly from the mining region of Junín.

As for those who have migrated to the U.S. independently, there is a group composed of young women from the highlands who had already migrated to Lima to work as maids. Most of them had little education. Beginning in the 1950s, employers began bringing them into the U.S. In the past five decades these women have built up a network that helps recruit women from Andean villages to Miami and other cities in North America.

Another important group is made up of middle class migrants who often arrive without legal status, language skills, or employment sponsorship. Lacking these resources, many have experienced employment instability and downward mobility. As a coping strategy, these middle class Peruvians view their situation in the U.S. as temporary. They aspire to gain legal status and are working toward regaining the social status they held in Peru. This group has clearly distinguished themselves from other Peruvians and they have contributed to the reproduction of the racial and ethnic hierarchy of Peruvian society while in the U.S. (Sabogal, 2005). The last group of independent labour migrants is made up of skilled migrants, that is, professionals who leave the country to work in low end jobs or those who transfer their credentials and stay in the U.S. (Altamirano, 2006).

#### **Changing migrations, changing gender relations?**

In this section we would like to relate these wider migration trends to changes in gender relations. The literature on gender and migration raises the question of changing gender roles and the potential for women's empowerment in contexts where either women or men migrate (e.g. see Piper, 2009a; Pratt and Yeoh, 2003; Salgado de Snyder, 1993). In situations where migration is predominantly male-led, a central question regarding women's experiences has

been whether non-migrating women expand their roles and responsibilities as a consequence of their husbands' absence (e.g. David, 1995; Gisbert et al., 1994). This literature questions whether the expansion of women's roles brings about changes in their status and relationships. Some scholars argue that women are empowered by the new decisions they have to make (e.g. Balán, 1995; Dandler and Medeiros, 1988; Hirsch, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Parreñas, 2005), albeit with conflicts and anxieties. Other scholars claim that expansion of women's roles without substantive change in women's status and relationships means that male migration reinforces gender inequality (e.g. Menjivar and Agadjanian, 2007). In this view, migration exacerbates tensions which women resolve by conforming to strict gender norms. Scholars such as Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) assume that the expansion of women's decision-making in one sphere of their lives will be replicated in other spheres. However, most research on gender and migration that focuses on empowerment has been conducted in rural communities where several individuals—whether family or neighbours—have migrated and are part of a community in the country of destination.

In contexts where migration is predominantly led by women, the literature has also suggested that this type of migration might lead to greater women's empowerment (Pessar, 2005; McIlwaine, 2010; Morokvasic, 2007). A change in women's status is to be achieved through their exposure to different gender norms so that they might start questioning the assumption that gender inequality is 'naturalised'. These migrant women might begin appreciating the socially constructed nature of gender difference (Bastia, forthcoming). Women's position might also change by virtue of their new incorporation into foreign labour markets, which provides them with greater avenues for autonomy and independent decision-making. For this literature, an interesting question arises at the current conjuncture of high demand for 'women's labour'. While the highest earning individual was historically an adult man within the household – or the 'breadwinner' – and notwithstanding

the fact that men continue to earn higher salaries than women, what happens when the highest earning individual is the adult woman or the main 'reproductive worker'? What are the consequences of large numbers of women migrating? How do households and communities of origin cope with the absence of the main reproductive workers? Who are the losers and who are the winners in this global reorganisation of labour?

### Gender relations in Latin America

Gender relations in Latin America are loosely constructed around the idea of *marianismo* and *machismo*. Both emerged from the influence of the Catholic Church. The aspects of *marianismo* as a symbol of femininity that appear to be predominant in urban areas in both Peru and Bolivia include the belief in women's moral superiority over men, hyper-appreciation of maternity, denial of female sexuality and self-sacrifice (Dreby, 2006; Stevens, 1973). *Machismo*, in turn, emphasizes virility and aggressiveness (Fuller, 1993). The importance of these ideals varies across Latin American societies and across socio-economic groups. However, they serve as an important point of reference.

Patriarchal relations were predominant among the families we interviewed. Mothers are expected to be the primary caregivers and in charge of the social reproduction of the family, while fathers are responsible for providing for the family. Even though the socio-economic structure has changed in both Peru and Bolivia over the past twenty years, this model is still prevalent at the lower-end of the socio-economic structure (Kogan, 1992).

We need to highlight that the 'models' we explain here are very much *ideals* to aspire to. Very few women from low-income families are able to conform to these models as a result of lowering wages and the need for two incomes to sustain a family. Therefore, in practice, both men and women find it difficult to conform to this ideal. Single motherhood is common, particularly among lower-income groups. Moreover, an increasing number of women have taken up paid jobs as their husbands' incomes decreased and

male unemployment rates increased over the last couple of decades.

More specifically, between the 1970s and 1990s, Peruvian women experienced greater access to education, entered the labour market in large numbers (Nunura and Flores, 2001) gained more control over their fertility, and participated more in politics, together with expanding civil rights (Fuller 1993). Although these structural transformations did not challenge significantly the gender division of labour within Peruvian families, the way women in particular understand gender relations has changed (Fuller 1993; Rivera 1993). The religious foundation of being a mother (along with being a wife and a woman) has been questioned and reinterpreted by Peruvian urban women. The emphasis on motherhood is increasingly associated with women's own development rather than solely on the children's development. Meanwhile, urban masculinity has changed at a slower rate, if at all (Fuller 2001). Focusing on elements of urban masculinity, particularly the hegemonic working class culture, work is perceived as the "capacity to earn money for subsistence" and is performed mainly by men (Fuller 2003:3). As work opportunities diminished in Peru in the late 1990s and early 2000s, migration presents itself as a logical response. Further, as men's identity revolves around work, women's income is perceived as an additional help and not necessarily as primary income. For urban Peruvian men, and especially for those involved in the informal economy, being an economic provider and being responsible for others are crucial characteristics of masculinity. For these men "to attain their manliness and be worthy of respect they must become husbands and fathers" (Fuller 2001:319). Working class men tend to work and marry (or cohabit) at an early age so work may become even more important for their masculinity than for men in other economic sectors.

Similar changes have taken place in Bolivia, where women's position has changed considerably over the last ten years. Women increased their labour market participation rates as well as their role in politics, particularly since the election of the Morales government in 2005.

Literacy rates have also improved. However, deep inequalities persist, particularly in relation to income distribution and the quality of jobs women take up in the labour market. In fact, while the gender gap in labour market participation and literacy rates converged, the gender income gap and the quality of jobs men and women perform diverged over the same period (UNDP 2003).

We now turn to our empirical data to investigate whether migration disrupts these gender relations. Following the theory outlined above, we should expect to see at least a challenge to patriarchal relations when (i) women leave their places of origin to tap into foreign labour markets and higher salaries, effectively producing a role-reversal in which they become the breadwinners; and (ii) new spaces open up for less patriarchal control and greater decision-making power in relation to economic decisions within the household in contexts where men migrate.

#### **How cross-border migration is changing the role of women**

When women began to enter Latin American urban labour markets in greater numbers during the 1970s and particularly the 1980s, they often did so without having to force a major change on the nature of gender relations prevalent at the time (Fuller 1993). Many of the jobs undertaken by women, such as informal street trading or home working, were compatible with their domestic and reproductive responsibilities. Moreover, their jobs, even when critical for the survival of their household, were generally seen by both the women as well as their partners, as 'supplementary income'. The household head continued to be the man, and even when their wives engaged in paid work, they continued to have the primary, breadwinning role within the household. However, combining caring responsibilities with long-distance migration is no longer possible for many migrant women.

#### *Feminization of migration from Bolivia: women breadwinners*

Long distance cross-border migration poses a challenge for the way in which gender relations

are conceptualised in two respects: (i) the physical separation between the site of production and reproduction, making it impossible for women to combine both roles; and (ii) women becoming the family breadwinner.

The first challenge relates to the distance between the site of production (foreign labour markets) and the site of reproduction (family 'back home'), which effectively prevents women from combining paid work and reproductive work. Many would like to take their children abroad with them but they are unable to do so because of migration policies; the costs involved in migration; the nature of the jobs they take up, which often involve long hours, for example, as sleep-in domestic helpers; their low wages, which are insufficient to support an adult with children; racism and discrimination in schools in (some) 'host' countries. Therefore, those women who have children often decide to leave their children in their countries of origin, while they seek (temporary) work abroad. When this happens, they cease to be the main provider of childcare, providing the first critical challenge to women's identity as mothers.

One of the practical consequences of the many mothers who decide to migrate, with or without their partners, is a reconfiguration of care work in the community of origin. 'Granny fostering' is quite common and represents the first choice in terms of reconfiguring care work (Bastia 2009). In these cases the grandmother or an aunt takes full responsibility for any younger children. They often also do the cooking and cleaning for any adult men present in the house. When this is not possible the migrant mother tries to find another woman to look after her children. This was the case with Doña Silvana, who was married and had five children when she migrated to Buenos Aires during the late 1980s. Her husband liked drinking and seldom brought home enough to feed the family. A friend was encouraging her to go to Buenos Aires, but she could not get herself to leave her children: "And how could I leave them if my husband was a drunk? He liked drinking. How could I leave my children? No, until they grow up I will have to suffer. I will suffer and then one day I'm going to go." When her eldest daughter was

in her late teens, Doña Silvana decided to go to Argentina. She paid a neighbour to look after her children while she worked abroad.

If granny fostering or paying somebody to take care of the children is not possible, households merge to congregate around a main reproductive worker. The household where Tanja lived during fieldwork in Cochabamba had an adult woman who did all the cleaning and cooked for her resident two adult brothers, her own three children and a nephew (whose mother was in Spain; the father lived in the neighbourhood but in another house), plus two non-resident nephews and sometimes another adult brother (whose son lived in the household with her). Tanja heard of various but found only one verified case where the man was left 'to cope' on his own with his children and housework.

At the ideological level motherhood becomes fundamental for how women's migration is experienced and viewed by the community. Here, the social imaginary of *marianismo* to a great extent shapes the way in which migrant women's determination for migration is understood and socialised. While women's role as mothers does not prevent them from leaving to seek work somewhere else, their identity as primary caregiver is used against them when their migration projects are seen to go against the traditional notion of the patriarchal, nuclear family. Many of the mothers who migrate to Spain are vilified and criticised as being greedy and selfish by community leaders and neighbours<sup>3</sup>. Interestingly, the oppositional categories of "good woman" and "selfish, greedy migrant mother" emerge only around the most recent migration of mothers to Spain. This is largely related to the fact that there are more mothers who migrate without their children in the new migration to Spain (Román, 2009) than in the previous regional migrations. Despite higher levels of income, migration to Spain is much more expensive than regional migration (up to

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<sup>3</sup> In the Peruvian case, Erika found that the family of the husband tends to be more critical of the women who left. In contrast, the woman's family tends to be more supportive (Busse, forthcoming). These differences were not evident in the Bolivian case.

\$3,000 as opposed to around \$100 U.S. dollars). Restrictive migration policies in Spain also make it more difficult for women to take their children with them. Because of the increased levels of autonomous women's migration to Spain, neighbours and community leaders perceive these projects to be undertaken for individual benefit rather than as a family strategy. Young or single women who do not have children are relatively free to pursue modernity and inclusion into the global modern world through migration. But the recent vilification of migrant mothers stands in stark contrast to women's (and mothers') previous migrations to Argentina, precisely because women's migration then was seen as being a household survival strategy. The more recent migration to Spain in contrast is seen as being individualistic, selfish and greedy, autonomy gone too far in its clash with motherhood (see also Mills, 1997).

The second fundamental challenge is posed by women becoming the main breadwinners in their families. When women take up jobs in foreign labour markets, their wages are relatively high not only in relation to what they would have earned had they not migrated but also in relation to their husbands' earnings in the country of origin. If they migrate as a couple, women often earn lower wages than migrant men, but women's initial period of unemployment is often shorter.

Therefore, in cases where the woman migrates and her partner remains in the country of origin, the migrant woman becomes the highest earning individual in her transnational household, effectively assuming the breadwinning role. This was the case for most of the women who were successful in entering Spain between 2003 and 2007 before the introduction of the visa for Bolivians. Some families experienced a slight reconfiguration of gender roles, albeit a temporary one. For example, Doña Josefina, who went to Spain in 2006, left her children with her husband. She was away for twelve months, returning with a capital of around \$20,000 U.S. dollars. She said that while she was away her husband as well as her children started appreciating her domestic contributions,

because it was the first time that they had been responsible for cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. She also said that her husband's view of her also improved because she earned enough money to build their house and buy her husband a car so he could work as a taxi driver.

Many returnees highlight that economic gains go hand in hand with the emotional suffering. Doña Miriam went to Madrid in 2005, leaving her three year old daughter and one year old son with her mother-in-law. She found employment as a domestic worker. She said that in her family nothing changed as a result of migration. However, with her savings they have been able to expand their house from a two bedroom, single storey building to a five bedroom two storey building. They have also been able to buy a new truck and put a motor in one of the two trucks they owned before Doña Miriam's migration. She felt that there were many material benefits to the community as a result of migration: better housing, improved income-earning possibilities as a result of migrants' ability to buy cars and *trufis*, small vans that function as mini-busses. However, there are also many costs. She felt that children were neglected because "nobody looks after them as a mother". Many couples are not able to stay together and effectively separate because of the long distances.

Doña Pamela went to Spain in 2005 with her husband because they had a debt and were unable to repay it with the low income they were earning in Bolivia. They stayed in Spain for three years, leaving their seven year old son with his (maternal) grandmother. Her husband was unemployed for most of the time in Spain, working as a builder but only on a daily basis while Doña Pamela secured work looking after an elderly lady for a monthly wage. In the interview she pointed out that she was supporting her husband while they were in Spain. She was able to repay her debt after a year and four months, and then stayed to save enough money to buy a large plot of land and start building her own house. While Doña Pamela gained materially from working abroad, she also felt that there are many costs. Her sister observed that "children get lost, *se hechan a perder*". Doña Pamela also



commented that her son was not the same any longer.

However, most women seek to disguise their contributions to the household finances upon return. Moreover, their investment patterns suggest that they actively seek to reproduce at least a semblance of patriarchal family relations. Doña Silvana, whose initial migration experience was described above, was one of the first women to migrate to Buenos Aires. She was able to be financially independent and support her five children through her work in Argentina and more recently in Spain. She is now in her late fifties and divides her time between Argentina, Spain and Bolivia, the different localities where her grown-up children live, continuing to support them through periods of illness or when they need additional childcare. She continues to live with her husband, who never worked much because “he liked drinking too much”, managed to save enough money to build her own house and also buy a car so her husband could work as a taxi driver. For both Doña Silvana and Doña Josefina the taxi they bought for their husbands is unlikely to bring in a substantial amount of money. However, it does signal that their husbands are now the breadwinners again while they returned to their domestic roles (Bastia, forthcoming).

The Bolivian case therefore shows that migration poses a challenge to patriarchal relations, mainly through women’s inability to continue to be the main carers in their families as well as their experience of taking on the breadwinning role. However, this challenge is largely temporary and short lived, given that women tend to disguise their earnings and their improved position within the family. The strategies they employ also indicate that they seek to reproduce patriarchal family relations, by often ‘returning’ the breadwinning role to their partners in the form of investment that will lead to their eventual employment (Bastia, forthcoming).

#### *Intensive mothering: Peruvian stay at home mums*

The women interviewed for this research project lived in the outer suburbs of Lima, where

precarious and mostly multifamily housing is predominant. The neighbourhoods are characterized by loose immigrant networks and husbands who rarely, if ever, come back for a visit—unless they have been deported<sup>4</sup>.

Prior to migration, both wives and husbands worked to make ends meet in Peru. Women mostly worked in the informal sector and continued to do so after marriage. They also continued to perform a greater share of household responsibilities, including childrearing. Thus wives used to combine their caregiver role with paid-work and received instrumental extended family support as needed. Although they were not the poorest of the poor in Lima, they sometimes went hungry. Their husbands migrated to make sure that their families in Peru would be able to afford to pay for food and bills. Even if men’s salaries in the U.S. are low, they cover their expenses, as well as regular remittances to Peru, which are used to pay for children’s private education.

The interviews indicate that once the husbands migrate, the women cease their paid jobs and dedicate themselves solely to their children. In this section we will focus on how mothering is carried out by the mothers left behind. For this purpose we utilize the concept of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1991). This concept was developed to explain the cultural contradictions working middle class mothers faced in balancing paid work and family life. As such, it is limited, because it is highly context specific. In addition, it represents an ideal that these women ‘aspire’ to as a marker of social standing. The Peruvian women interviewed for this study live in low income neighbourhoods and come from a background where they were expected to work to make ends meet. However, they quit their jobs as soon as their husbands’ remittances allow. Although imperfect, the concept of

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<sup>4</sup> For Peruvians deported from the U.S., the numbers are scattered and imprecise. During the course of Erika’s research, the families with deported members were very few. Of the few deported, they tended to initiate a new migration shortly thereafter, whether to go back to the U.S. or to another country (e.g. Argentina, Chile, Spain).

'intensive mothering' does explain and is useful in describing the new practices we observed. It is our contention that intensive mothering is a way of signalling an improvement in these women's social standing, although it may incur some costs to the women who also become dependent on their husbands' remittances.

While *marianismo* refers to what being a martyr mother entails, intensive mothering helps us disentangle the specifics of the labour put into being a good mother. Intensive mothering consist of five elements: (i) an individual mother is responsible for child rearing, (ii) use of intensive methods, (iii) expert guidance, (iv) expensive (financially, emotionally and time-wise), and (v) concept of the sacred child. Although Hays (1991) identifies these five elements for how intensive motherhood works in the U.S., we now apply this analytical category to the choices women make in Peru once their husbands leave for the U.S. We should note that research conducted with women left behind in Latin America, and in Mexico in particular, emphasizes the empowerment of women through accessing remittances, as discussed above. This research highlights the fact that women in these countries balance work and family. Because of the relatively small sample of our respective studies, we are not in a position to argue whether this is a new phenomenon for Latin America as a whole. However, we do highlight that intensive mothering does take place and warrants further investigation (see also Busse, forthcoming). Through intensive mothering, low-income women are able to claim moral superiority and therefore deal with the insecurities which long-term separation from their husbands entails.<sup>5</sup>

An individual mother is responsible for child rearing

The model of intensive motherhood stresses that an individual mother is responsible for child rearing. Relying on extended families is no longer

accepted, despite the fact that this was common practice by these very same women before their husbands migrated. Mothers not only help their children with homework on a daily basis. They are also always at hand to console and accompany their children. The devotion women show toward their children is partly based on the absence of the father, a void wives want to make up for. This is reinforced by husbands' insistence that women should take care of the children.

According to these women, child-centred-motherhood involves that mothers are the only ones that can help their children. They are the only ones who know what their children need. This is a radical departure from the older generation, who argue that children should learn for themselves. Wives for the most part have graduated from high school so they have the basic skills to help their children with homework, while the older generation usually only had a few years of formal education. Being with their children also supports the idea that women work a lot and hard, or that being a mother results in devotion and dedication, as wives left behind will point out. Susy, for instance, a woman who has not seen her husband for the past five years, stays at home taking care of her eight-year-old son, Tony. Susy's daily activities revolve around Tony. Sometime this entails a lot of work. However, when her mother-in-law offers to look after Tony, Susy does not accept the offer because she thinks that nobody can look after her child the way she does, even if her mother-in-law has raised six children on her own. This is a typical example of the ways in which women who practice intensive mothering put the children first. This is apparent when women compromise their own feelings for the sake of their children. In the interview Susy confides that after having an argument with her husband over the phone, she saw Tony miserable. Ever since, Susy avoids arguing with her husband to prevent making Tony sad. Her experiences indicate that even her relationship with her husband is thought through the effect that an argument, in this case, can have on her child. As such, women centre their lives, and their relationships, on their children.

<sup>5</sup> The insecurities they face are twofold: holding husbands accountable to provide and remain faithful to their wives and the possibility of the nullification of their certificate of marriage as a strategy to acquire naturalization in the U.S.

The emotional, financial and time expense of intensive mothering

Being a full time mother is an emotionally absorbing activity, where mothers have to be affectionate and nurturing. They have to show unconditional love and anticipate their children's wishes. The drawback of child-centred mothering and the use of intensive mothering methods—along with it being an unpaid job—is that women not only turn to their children, but this is also the only thing they do.

The financial remittances pay bills and private education for children, but not for other services or activities. For example, women do not use the remittances for employing domestic help or to pay for extra-curricular activities. However, they do enrol their children in private schools. These schools tend to be parochial and small, but they have a better reputation than any state school to which they would otherwise send their children. As there is no other activity they can afford, school and homework are the main activities mothers engage in with their children.

As mentioned above, mothers turn to their children and their routines revolve around their children. In the process of centring their lives on motherhood, these women deny their own sexuality. Given that raising their children is a full-time job, and their husbands are not around, women sacrifice their own sexuality to take care of their children. This signals to their husbands that they are good mothers and therefore deserving to receive remittances. Also, these women lack time to socialise with other people as they used to when they worked. Further, contrary to those women who are single mothers and therefore carry the social stigma of it, these women have "responsible" men that went to the extent of migrating to the U.S. to perform their role as breadwinner. This redefinition of themselves against single mothers rests on women's performance of child-centred motherhood and may also be related to their aspirations for upward social mobility and being able to afford staying at home.

Expert guidance

The low income women encountered tend to

seek validation from the children's teachers, other mothers and husbands. For example, Lily shows good care of her children in every minute detail. Lily was talking about her children when she described her three children's lunch boxes. She said, "Today, they had cheese sandwich, homemade apple juice and a bottle of yogurt instead of a fruit. They wanted yogurt today." Then, she goes on to highlight that her younger son's teacher is always happy that Lily is a good mother for packing homemade juice rather than boxed juice or instant juice or fizzy drinks, which are considered worse options. In addition, this also shows that Lily is good at managing the money sent by her husband because she does not waste money on purchasing unhealthy foodstuffs. In this process Lily receives validation from the teacher for how good she is at taking care of her children's food—as indicator of how good she is at raising them.

Validation also comes from her husband. In the case of Lily, her husband Raul tells her in a judgmental voice that mothers in the U.S. are "different" because they send their children to day-care centres. Raul tells Lily that he is pleased that Lily takes care of the children. This validation also comes with the responsibility of looking after the children constantly. Lily cannot go out by herself. She needs to take at least one of her children with her at all times. One day Lily forgot to tell Raul that she was going to a farewell party next door. Although Lily attended the party with her children, after 30 minutes her children got bored so she took them back home and returned to the party. This was a source of an argument with Raul when he called home that day and found his children at home alone, without their mother. Lily's case shows that although women lack expert guidance (i.e. parenting books), they draw on teachers and friends, along with close supervision from their husbands as well.

Concept of the sacred child

In this case the use of the sacred child is more as the "destitute child," as children are deprived of a father figure. Mothers have to focus on raising their children as the most important thing for a mother to do. Patty highlights that

she wants to take care of her four daughters a hundred percent. She may consider working in the future when the family is reunited or when her daughters are older. Patty has not seen her husband for nine years and plans to join him in a few months. She points out that her children are already missing their father so there is no point for her to work. Working for her will make her daughters spend most of the day without their two parents. Similar to Patty, wives left behind indicated that they will rather be at home for their children, even if they missed working and earning their own money.

As the analysis shows, by doing intensive mothering women who have quit their paid jobs are further isolated. As mentioned above, women seem to claim their motherhood as a source of power vis-à-vis their husbands. At the same time, women develop a closer relationship with their children. This is sometimes used as leverage when negotiating with their husbands as well as an indication of being 'good wives' and honourable women to their families and the community in Peru.

Wives left behind present themselves as good mothers and faithful wives, partially in opposition to two other types of women: "bad mothers", i.e. working mothers, and the "immoral wives", squandering the remittances and cheating on their husbands while they are away<sup>6</sup>. Being with their children all the time prevents them from being gossiped about. They are able to show that they are dedicated mothers and therefore faithful wives. Further, as mentioned above, women quit their jobs given the remittances they receive from their husbands, which in turn may reinforce the caretaker/ breadwinner division of labour in the family. The consequences of these choices seem to reinforce patriarchal relations

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<sup>6</sup> These are women's own reports about how they present themselves. Although it is impossible to be certain whether wives left behind are faithful or not, it is important to note that they choose this way to present their lives to assert moral superiority, making a clear distinction between them (faithful) and the other women (immoral). This goes in hand with the insecurities women have to deal with upon husbands' migration.

and a traditional gender division of labour within families.

### Conclusion

While the opportunities afforded by locally deemed lucrative jobs in foreign labour markets are clearly posing significant challenges to the ways in which gender relations are conceived, it is difficult to say whether these challenges will bring about a fundamental change in the gender (im)balance. Women's autonomous migration, their ability to sometimes command higher wages than their husbands, the relative freedom with which they engage in geographical mobility could be the basis on which to build more equitable gender relations. However, the Bolivian case has shown that there are also indications that the 'gender gains' are short lived and largely temporary. Women's migration to Spain is qualitatively different from previous migrations not only because there are higher numbers of women migrating but also because these projects are often constructed as *individual* projects. Women, especially mothers, are vilified as greedy and selfish, thereby highlighting an increasing polarity between migrant women's articulations of the reasons for their migration and the way these projects are seen by the community leaders, neighbours and teachers. In view of such opposition and criticism, one strategy that women employ is to disguise their level of autonomy. Even when they return from Spain with significant savings, after finishing their house, they buy a taxi for their husbands to work as taxis, thereby symbolically returning to their husbands the breadwinning role they temporarily performed. So rather than expecting a more liberating effect from looser social control in urban areas, it is precisely this urban-urban long-distance type of migration process that helps exacerbate the negative social connotations linked to women's migration, particularly the migration of mothers.

Patriarchy was also reaffirmed in the Peruvian case, where migration was led by men. The Peruvian interviews have shown that motherhood is crucial to the construction of women's gender role identity and gender hierarchies. This



identity allows these women to assert moral superiority (good mothers) vis-à-vis working women. By practicing intensive mothering they are also able to show their faithfulness to their extended families and their husbands abroad. The possible consequences of the importance of motherhood for these women are manifold. Intensive mothering may turn mothers into traditional mothers in comparison to their own experiences prior to their husbands' migration. Prior sharing of household chores and caretaking disappears and the division of caregiver and breadwinner is consolidated upon migration. As women are solely mothers, children experience a caring mother and a breadwinner father. So in the Peruvian case migration has also reinforced the gendered division of labour.

Temporariness is critical to both cases. In the Bolivian case, patriarchy was temporarily challenged through women taking up the breadwinning role, but then returned, albeit in

new disguises (see Bastia, forthcoming for more details). However, the autonomy and relative high levels of earnings that these women experienced might have left a permanent mark on the type of patriarchy that is reshaped post-migration. In the Peruvian case, the intensive mothering and the sharp separation between the women's caretaking and the men's breadwinning roles is only possible due to the relatively high wages men earn in the U.S. and the relatively low living costs that their wives and children are able to benefit from in Peru. If these 'left behind' wives join their husbands in the U.S., as most aspire to, their families will yet again have to go through an additional reorganization. Therefore, only time will tell to what extent the migrations we examine in this paper fundamentally challenged gender roles and whether the changes we have observed will provide the foundations for women's empowerment in the future.

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