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CARE AND CONNECTIVITY IN LABOUR MIGRATION

• ESSEN LEIFSEN AND ALEXANDER TYMCZUK •

Until quite recently notions of kinship have been treated as localized modes of social organization and classification systems. Moreover, as forms of organization and as ideational relational structures, kinship systems have been considered to exist outside colonial administrations and economies, nation states and the market. An early non-typical example going against this trend is Esther Goody's study of fosterage practices among West-Africans in London. Her study is a prolongation of studies she carried out in Ghana on different types of institutionalized child-care arrangements which implied child circulation (Goody 1982). The study of fosterage, wardship and apprenticeship practices in West Africa has contributed to a newer research current which thematically links West Africa, the Pacific region, the Caribbean and parts of Latin America. Situations of multi-local families and kinship groups, relational and changeable socialities and the circulation of children have been shown by ethnographic accounts and social history studies to exist parallel and prior to the period when conditions of economic globalization turned transnational migration into a relevant research topic. Ethnographic insight from these studies can contribute to the study of kinship and the structuring of kinship relations in transnational contexts.

The new kinship anthropology contributes additional analytical possibilities to the study of transnational kinship. The approach leaves behind formalistic models of substance transference, inheritance, entitlements and genealogies, and reconsiders the

schematic distinction between consanguinity and affinity, between status and contract, thereby introducing a new view of kinship as process. As Janet Carsten argues (2000, 2004), this rethinking implies combining the understanding of how persons are formed through procreation and reproduction with how they are embedded socially. It suggests seeing kinship-making as a field of activity as well as a field of relational symbolism. This approach allows us to focus on how labour migrants in Spain, for example, *do* transnational families through everyday practices, without disregarding or rendering insignificant how their idioms of blood ties are constitutive of parenthood. The new anthropological turn, then, opens a much more dynamic and flexible approach to kinship constitution—where acts might produce weak or strong ties, and make relationships appear, disappear and reappear.

Concerning the making of kin through everyday practice, we advocate for a stronger engagement with care in anthropological research. There has been and still is a marked division of labour within the social sciences concerning how to approach relational issues. While the new anthropology of kinship tends to focus on relatedness as an issue of substance transference and substance sharing and as the material/symbolic dimensions of sociality; sociology deals with care: the everyday activity of making families. It is time to move beyond this division. Care should be a much more central focus in transnational kinship studies. In current anthropological studies of transnational migration there is a risk of delimiting the perspective to representational dimensions: to identity production and issues and experiences of multiple belongings. Care opens up the study of how migrants as well as other populations do kinship, of how, on a day-to-day basis, they create relational intimacy and distance: where they work and where they keep family. Doing kinship is a useful concept to explore in the transnational family setting because of the analytical possibilities it opens for us in understanding kinship constitution in situations where ‘spatial proximity cannot constitute the key criterion for social proximity’ (Drotbohm 2009: 147). It should be noted that care should be considered one dimension of doing kinship. Potentially entailing a broader range of activity, doing kinship refers to human actions that contribute to, produce and reaffirm what people from different cultural and social backgrounds, such as the Ukrainian and the Ecuadorian, conceive of as essential relationships.

Now it is relevant to consider migrants’ care practices in relation to the external structuring dimensions which influence family and kinship making. We have become interested in what at times is referred to as ‘connectivity’. We use this concept to refer to the differing conditions in which migrants are connected within multi-local networks. Transportation and communications technologies, infrastructure and markets, as well as systems of control and regulation of peoples’ movements at points of passage, condition the physical mobility and/or immobility of migrants. People’s technological, legal and economic prospects for physical movement between countries, and their access to modes of communication—formally and informally, within the market and outside of it—significantly influence the way migrants engage in care practices. This again, influences the way they can engage in kin-making over distance and multi-locally. The exciting challenge of this approach is that it permits us to see transnational kinship making as a process—not just because of migrants’ ongoing activity but also as a product of shifting structuring dimensions. Communication markets, national and international legal

frameworks and transportation possibilities change with time. And to some degree they change as a result of migrant activity and creativity. We are increasingly becoming aware that transnational kinship cannot be researched satisfactorily purely through a focus on internal dynamics, or even on internal dynamics as exposed in nation state contexts where legal, professional and bureaucratic practices clash with internal alternative modes of relatedness. We also have to relate to kinship as ongoing outcomes of both external structuring dimensions and internal constitution of relations (family, kinship), two fields which are in continuous change.

The structuring dimensions and care practices of labour migration differ significantly from those of asylum-seeking with regards the motivations and projections of return, revisiting, family reunion and work. As part of the research project 'Informal child migration in Europe', we have carried out a comparison of Ecuadorian and Ukrainian labour migration to Spain (Leifsen and Tymczuk 2008). Our data material, based on fieldwork among the two migrant groups in Madrid, show that Ecuadorians' and Ukrainians' care practices differ in important ways. The two groups of migrants live and work in the same area, and share many similarities such as occupation (construction being the crucial occupation for men and domestic care work for women), national migration history (the majority of migrants from both groups came to Spain in the late 1990s and onwards) and individuals' migration trajectories (the majority of Ecuadorians and Ukrainians went to Spain on tourist visas and then overstayed, lived a period as irregular migrants, and were then legalized in one of the Spanish legalization programs). Despite these more or less equal conditions, we found that the relative distance to their respective home countries structures their transnational care practices differently. In short, Ecuadorians' care relations stretching over continents are mainly practiced through virtual channels of market-integrated connectivity (ICT and virtual transfers of money and objects), whereas the care relations of Ukrainians flow through informal and 'concrete' channels of connectivity (transportation of objects, money and persons mainly by means of car and bus).

Differences in geographical distance and available technologies of connectivity thus imply that Ecuadorian and Ukrainian migrants have different possibilities for doing family, and our comparative materials show that Ukrainian migrants revisit their families much more frequently than Ecuadorians do. We also observe that Ukrainian migrants tend to establish semi-permanent multi-local collectives maintained and renewed by the activity of many members who regularly circulate and stay in different locations within the network. Ecuadorian migrants, however, tend to practice more restricted forms of circulation: occasional visits by parents to Ecuador or rare encounters with offspring and caretakers in Spain. The unequal frequency of moments of togetherness, coupled with unequal cultural distance to the Spanish way of life among the two groups, lead to different preferences regarding family reunion. Faced with similar economic and legal conditions in Spain, relatively more Ecuadorian couples tend to bring their children to Spain than do Ukrainian couples. We believe an important reason for these diverging preferences is that over time, family-making mediated virtually creates weaker ties than family-making through moments of togetherness.

Family reunions, extended family care networks, and the formation of new or renewed social-emotional bonds are outcomes of migrants' decision-making and caring possibilities

and dispositions. In the Ukrainian example the grandparent/grandchild bond becomes a central relationship of parenthood. In the Ecuadorian example the parent/reunited child relationship constitutes a vital part of cohabitating collectives characterized by a mix of new and renewed biological and social bonds. These examples of doing care and consolidating families should be seen as dynamic responses to specific situations of connectivity, among other structuring dimensions. In our view transnational family-making should not be understood as replicating traditional family models or static cultural kinship rationales. It seems much more relevant to see these as evolving forms both revealing how migrants are socially embedded and how their choices are informed and oriented by kinship ideals and values.

Transnational care practices undoubtedly produce complex family forms. At the same time these family forms are confronted by other complex kinship orthodoxies that are embedded in state policies, public service provision and administrative practices. Family reunion policies probably constitute one of the most conservative areas of legislation and legal practice. Challenged by the forms of multi-localized and extended family constellations, state practice of family classification tends to conserve core kin symbolism: nuclear unity, shared biogenetic origins, relational stability. In the contrast between the dynamic, changing character of transnational family life and the 'static' categories of the family in policy formulation, the anthropologist identifies a problem of governance. We could increase our analytical capacity to address this problem if we reconsider the issue of kinship and localization, and think of kinship in terms of process, social embeddedness and relational symbolism. Finally, we understand more if we capture the ways care constitutes relatedness and the ways connectivity structures the possibilities of care.

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