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# Re-writing the domestic role: transnational migrants' households between informal and formal social protection in Ecuador and in Spain

Simone Castellani<sup>1\*</sup>  and Emma Martín-Díaz<sup>2</sup>

\* Correspondence:

[simone.castellani@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:simone.castellani@iscte-iul.pt)

<sup>1</sup>University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-IUL), Av. das Forças Armadas, Edifício Sedas Nunes, Sala 2N01D, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal  
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article

## Abstract

Ecuadorian migration to Spain can be described as an emblematic case of feminization of international migration. As the scholarship showed, this migration flow has been shaped by transnational female social networks in which different types of capital circulate and which are re-produced across generations, providing social protection for people involved in them, both migrants and non-migrants. Starting from three ethnographic studies conducted with Ecuadorian adults and teenage migrants in Seville and in different Ecuadorian localities between 2004 and 2011, this paper has two aims. First, it investigates the crucial role played by migrant women of the first and second generation to create a safety net for the members of their transnational households, in terms of child and elderly care, combining tactically both informal and formal social protection along the different stages of their migratory projects. Second, adopting an intersectional lens, which looks particularly at the dialectic between gender and generation, it analyses the tensions and conflicts generated by the re-positioning of these women within their transnational households. The paper contributes to the literature through questioning the changing gender role and relations in transnational social protection.

**Keywords:** Transnational social protection, Intersectionality, Women migration, Ecuador, Spain, Care

## Introduction

The contemporary Ecuadorian migration toward Spain is a prototypical case of what has been described in the literature as “feminization” of international migration in the globalization era (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Sassen, 2000) as well as an example of a flow marked by a high degree of transnationalization (Faist, Fauser, & Reisenauer, 2013). In this paper we aim to deepen our understanding on Ecuadorian migration to Spain reflecting on how Ecuadorian women shape transnational social protection (Faist, 2014; Levitt, Lloyd, Mueller, & Viterna, 2017) for their households through the adjustments of their migratory projects and the changes of the households' members roles in the different stages of the projects, in order to guarantee this protection. Furthermore, looking specifically through a gender and generation lens the paper seeks to clarify how

this readjustment and the subsequent changes can generate tension within the transnational households as well as within the broader transnational migratory networks.

The Ecuadorian migratory flow toward Spain, which assumes considerable dimensions between 1999 and 2006, has been shaped by migratory chains formed by young women (20–40 years). A considerable proportion of them were mothers who migrated alone and left their children in their locality of origin where their children were raised by other women of the household (mothers, sisters, aunts) (Herrera, Moncayo, & Escobar García, 2012). This model of care was based in a matrifocal organization of the household in which both production and reproduction roles are carried out almost autonomously by the female line of kinship (grandmothers, sisters, aunts, stepsisters, nieces, granddaughters, godmothers). Conversely, men who were still in the household were partially excluded from this system. Ecuadorian migrant women entered informally in the domestic work and care sectors of the Spanish labour market, which was the most demanding of womanpower during the Spanish economic growth at the turn of the century, thanks to the support of the other women of their networks both in countries of origin and destination. Afterward, when they succeeded in stabilizing their economic, administrative, residential, social situation, they reunified with their children (Herrera, 2007; Martín Díaz, Benítez Martínez, Castellani, & Cuberos Gallardo, 2012; Parella, 2007; Pedone, 2005b). This model of care that has been shaped by women within their household both in origin as in destination seem to configure an informal social protection which takes place in a transnational space (Faist & Bilecen, 2015). In this paper the transnational household<sup>1</sup> will be considered as a structure shaped by power relations<sup>2</sup> which follow the divisions of gender and generation. We will look at the household care practices which moulded social protection through a gender and intergenerational lens. The analysis will rely both on theoretical reflections and empirical bases rooted in three different ethnographic studies carried out in the same locality during a period of 8 years. The first objective is to understand how Ecuadorians involved in transnational migratory projects shape the informal social protection for their households, both in Ecuador and in Spain, and how they articulate it with the formal social protection. The second one is to understand how these transnational social protection practices challenge gender inequalities within the transnational households or conversely, contribute to reproduce them.

### **Ecuadorian migration to Spain**

In the first decade of the new millennium, Spain emerged as the main alternative destination to the U.S. for Ecuadorian international migration. The macro-economic reasons triggering the “migration stampede” (Ramírez Gallegos & Ramírez, 2005) at the turn of millennium were, first, the Ecuadorian economic and political crisis marked by the default of the State and the dollarization of the currency (Gastambide, 2010); the tightening of the U.S. immigration policies and, conversely, the opportunity for Ecuadorian citizens to enter in Spain as tourists without a visa (until August 2003); finally, a growing demand of womanpower in the domestic care sector of the Spanish labour market during the economic boom, which was covered until this moment mainly by internal migration (rural-urban) (Gómez Ciriano, Tornos Cubillo, & Colectivo IOE, 2007; Martín Díaz, 2003). Again, at the meso level, the “Spanish route” has been opened by a minority of pioneer migrants

(indigenous and mestizo) from the Andean provinces who moved to Spain since the '80 (Jokisch, 2001) and whose networks served as a foothold for the new flows.

Most Ecuadorians who migrated to Spain at the turn of the century were women who belonged to the urban lower-middle class (e.g., public employees, dependent and autonomous workers). They left Ecuador to cope with increasing deprivation, downgraded socio-economic status and vulnerability within their households. As Acosta (2001) highlights, between 1996 and 1999, the Ecuadorian State cut welfare spending by about 40% in order to repay the foreign debt. In 1999 the 48% of the Ecuadorians lived below the poverty line and 10% of the richest households had 65% of the national income (Ramírez Gallegos & Ramírez, 2005, p. 54–55). This had a direct effect on public welfare. For instance, the schooling system, which suffered historically from deficient state investments and a precarious situation (lack of logistic structure, overcrowded classes, semi-abandonment of the rural areas, low paid teachers, etc.) (UNESCO, 2013), got progressively worse during the great recession at the end of the decade of the 1990s.

Nevertheless, studies on this migratory flow (Bonizzoni, 2009; Herrera, 2005; Lagomarsino, 2006) showed, in line with the literature on female migrations (Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram, & Sales, 2000; Martínez Pizarro, 2003), that these movements were not only due to macro global forces, but also to the women's needs to turn away from their failed marriages, patriarchal dynamics within the household and the community, and intolerable family situations (e.g. domestic violence). Therefore, these women's transnational migratory projects represented, on the one hand, a sort of additional social protection for their household against the shortages they have to face during the Ecuadorian crisis in terms of basic incomes, access to education for the children or health care for the older relatives. On the other hand, they represented a way for these women to contrast a situation of inequality in the gender relations within their households and local community in Ecuador.

Scholars pointed out that the transnational model of care is a crucial feature of the migratory projects led by women (Salazar Parreñas, 2001). Starting from a macro analysis, scholars highlighted how these migratory flows are built on the reproduction at an international level of the "traditional" domestic female role of caregiving (Anderson, 2000; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Sassen, 2000) and how they have shaped global care chains (Hochschild, 2001; Yeates, 2004) During the years of Spanish economic growth (1998–2007), Ecuadorian migrant women as the other Latin-American women represented the "best substitutes" for the Spanish women who entered massively in the formal labour market (Izquierdo Escribano, López de Lera, & Martínez Buján, 2003). This preference of Spaniards for Latin American women for carrying out the "care duties" were justified in the public discourse with the cultural "closeness" (same language, colonial past, "natural" inclination to care, etc.) even if, as we showed in another paper, this cultural construction was strongly tied with the contingent needs of the labour market (Martín Díaz, Cuberos Gallardo, & Castellani, 2012).

Besides, in the Spanish case, the demand for a female workforce from the global South is strongly related to a welfare regime in which family and kinship are prominent welfare providers (Ferrera, 1996). These societies did not develop a strong welfare state and suffered from an historical limitation of formal social protection (i.e. scarcity of public nurseries, retirement homes, etc.). This lack has been compensated by a social protection shaped predominantly by women within the households, guaranteeing the

care of children and elderly people. Nevertheless, this crucial role of social protection has been underestimated both in the Spanish public discourse and within households due to the fact that care is considered, as in the majority of societies, as part of the “domestic duties” attributed “naturally” to the women, structuring a patriarchal system, through the traditional division of gender roles<sup>3</sup> (Comas d’Argemir, 1995).

Spanish women have gained some autonomy from the patriarchal system during the period of economic growth thanks to the access to the formal labour market. However, they have not achieved it through a redistribution of the reproduction “duties” by sharing them with the men of the household (male partners /brothers/fathers...) or thanks to an upgraded formal social protection (e.g. more and less expensive nurseries). In many cases, these care duties have been taken over by migrant women from the Global South, mostly from Ecuador and other Latin American countries (Martín Díaz, 2006; Oso, 1998). The majority of these migrant women experienced the consequences of being in an irregular administrative position, working in informal and unprotected jobs, and living under social precariousness for a long time. In turn, as has been shown in the literature on the Ecuadorian case (Herrera, 2013; Martín Díaz, Benítez Martínez, et al., 2012; Pedone, 2010), migrant women had to delegate the care of their children and elderly parents “left-behind” to other female members of the household. This model of care did not suddenly begin with the women’s migration toward Europe but it replicated transnationally a care model widespread within the Latin American societies based on a matrifocal organization of the household. In the end it represents a way to arrange social protection informally compensating the absence of strong social protection provided by the State.

### **Theoretical framework**

In a globalized society where the inequalities and social risks become increasingly stronger and the states (Bourguignon, 2015), particularly the western industrialized ones, progressively lose their role of main welfare providers (Offe, 1984), some scholars have stressed the need of investigating forms of regulation and redistribution of social risks which go “beyond the nation-state” and do not rely only on the national-citizenship as a key condition for being entitled of social protection (Faist, 2014, 2019; Faist, Bilecen, Bargłowski, & Sienkiewicz, 2015; Levitt et al., 2017). In other words, they propose to reflect about the combinations of formal and informal social protection resources crossing national borders and working in-between them, defining them as transnational social protection (TSP). Migrants experiences have been at the centre of most of these analyses. Subjects involved in transnational migratory projects, in fact, experiment several types of difficulties (economic, administrative, social, political, cultural and racial) and have to arrange social protection for them and their household, both in their country of origin and of destination.

Some of these contributions have begun to explore, both theoretically and empirically, how it is possible to draw a global social protection for people who live transnationally and how it can be shaped by different institutions, organizations (e.g. NGOs, enterprises) and actors at different levels (global, national, sub-national and local) which are articulated among them (Dobbs, Levitt, Parella, & Petroff, 2018; Levitt et al., 2017). Previous empirical studies in Europe suggested paying attention to “the extent to which the assemblages of formal and informal social protection strategies and cross-border mobility influence the distribution of life chances” (Faist & Bilecen, 2015,

p. 282). The “formal social protection” is a “top-down” form of protection shaped by state, market (e.g. private insurance) and social service organizations (e.g. NGOs and INGOs, unions, religious communities, diaspora organizations). During the modernization era most of them have been formalized under the category of welfare. Although this kind of protection is eminently national, it can be understood also transnationally, if we take into consideration, for instance, the multilateral agreements for pensions and healthcare reached among nation-states or at supranational level (i.e. EU). Conversely, “informal social protection” is a “bottom-up” type of protection, shaped by social networks (kinship, friendship, local community, ethnic group). Historically this model of protection was the most common in the pre-industrial societies and it was progressively replaced by the welfare state according to nations’ social policies. The “informal social protection” is based on ritualized bonds of social reciprocity where different capitals are exchanged (Moser, 2009). It becomes transnational when the social ties are maintained and the different capitals circulate within a transnational social space, namely the cross border social space which arises from processes of socialization, identification and reproduction within a transnational framework (Faist, 2000).

Therefore, migrants and non-migrants involved in a transnational migratory project shape an informal social protection in order to reduce social weaknesses, both in the localities of origin as well as in destination. In other words, they try to compensate a lack of formal protection due to the absence of a welfare state or to their legal and social position as foreigners, irregular migrants, refugees, etc.... The balance between formal and informal protection in the project of each migrant can change depending on several factors: the opportunity to access to the welfare benefits in the original and destination localities, the legal position of the migrants, the existence of multilateral agreements between two nation-states, etc. (Sabates-Wheeler & Feldman, 2011). Although it can be analytically useful to maintain the distinction between the two types of protection, scholars highlighted that in migrants’ everyday lives the boundaries between formal and informal social protection are blurred (Bilecen, Barglowski, Faist, & Kofman, 2019; Serra Mingot & Mazzucato, 2018). Indeed their empirical studies show that migrants assemble different form of protections for coping with risks as well as negotiating access to social protection resources (Bilecen & Barglowski, 2015).

The TSP debate addresses issues that have already been posed by other analytical perspectives, for instance the “global care economy”, which was largely explored in the last two decades within the theoretical scholarship of feminist economy (Elson, 1994; Folbre, 2006 among others). The care economy perspective focuses on mechanisms of social reproduction and on their costs, highlighting in its analysis the economic dimension of the social boundaries and the time distribution within the households. On the other hand, the TSP frame gives emphasis to the welfare policies and institutional relations within the sphere of labour, dependency and aging, as well as on the tactics implemented by the users/subjects who bricolage resources (Phillimore, Bradby, Knecht, Padilla, & Pemberton, 2018) within their environments for compensating the welfare state shortage or for integrating it. In this sense the care practices are in the centre of the TSP but the economy of care is a broader concept that looks beyond the institutional and policy frame and suggests to rethink the concept of economy and its rationality.

This paper will reflect on the articulation of the informal and formal protection within the Ecuadorian transnational households in Ecuador and in Spain. Taking into

account that informal social protection within this migration flow seems strictly bonded with the transnational care circulation (Baldassar & Merla, 2014), which is run almost exclusively by the women of the household, we consider it essential to put gender in the focus of the analysis. In the line with those scholars who, reflecting on transnationalism, emphasized the relation between migration and reproduction of the “traditional” gender role and relations (Bastia, 2013; Kofman et al., 2000; Martín Díaz, 2003; Silvey, 2006 among others), we hypothesise, firstly, that transnational social protection copes with risks and dangers of making a living and, secondly, that it has to deal with the process of social reproduction of inequality.

On the one hand, TSP could represent a defence against the deficiencies which members of Ecuadorian transnational households face both in origin and in destination but, on the other hand, it could reproduce the structural inequality within the same households, specifically on the gender and generation axes, as it was highlighted in the literature on the transnational care chains (Hochschild, 2001; Salazar Parreñas, 2001). For this reason we believe that it is crucial to look at the forms of subordination of women which operate within the transnational households through the generations (Levitt, 2001) as well as to the tactics<sup>4</sup> of resistance which migrants and non migrants arrange to challenge it.

## Methodology

The respondents of the studies in this paper are composed of Ecuadorian migrants in Seville, a medium-sized city of Southern Spain, arrived in early 2000s and the members of their households in Ecuador. This paper draws on ethnographic material collected in three different studies carried out in Seville and in the migrants’ localities of origin in Ecuador (mostly the two cities of Quito and Guayaquil) following a multi-sited ethnography approach (Marcus, 1995). Taking into account the three studies together, it will allow us to carry out the analysis within a multi-sited (Leonard, 2009) and inter-generational approach (Vathi, 2015) which pays attention to the changes which happened within Ecuadorian households in terms of gender and generational relationship in the course of eight years. Moreover, this approach permits to look after the effects of the economic crisis in Spain and the reactions within these households, due to the fact that the first two studies took place during the Spanish economic growth while the last one carried out during the first years of the crisis.

The first and the second studies were openly connected to each other and were carried out between 2004 and 2009. The first one was based on the comparison between the migration strategies of Ecuadorian and Moroccan women, the two biggest migrant groups in Seville.<sup>5</sup> 44 of 88 interviews of the study were conducted with Ecuadorian women in Seville and in Ecuador. The second study<sup>6</sup> was carried out between 2007 and 2009 with Ecuadorian migrants. In that research the focus shifted from these women to their households, analysing gender and generation roles among 20 families in Seville by means of interviews and participant observation.

The third study was part of a PhD research on the socio-cultural insertion of Ecuadorian migrants’ teenage children and was carried out between September 2008 and October 2011 in Seville (Spain) and Genoa (Italy) and in several localities in Ecuador. The fieldwork in Seville was based on an ethnographic methodology consisting of participant observation carried out in secondary schools and places, such as parks, squares,

playgrounds, churches, celebration halls, dance floors etc., where Ecuadorian teenagers and their families spent their free time. Furthermore, 26 interviews were conducted with Ecuadorian migrant children (13–18 years old), 10 with parents, 7 with teachers and 5 with social workers. The fieldwork in Ecuador was implemented through the participant observation within some schools and households where the teenagers grew up before being reunified in Seville.

The third study was taken into account together with the former two because they were carried out in the same neighbourhood where most of the Ecuadorian population is concentrated in Seville (la Macarena). During the second and the third studies we maintained the contacts with the subjects of the previous ones. In many cases the subjects of the different studies were part of the same transnational households and migratory networks. Following the authors who stressed the methodological prominence to study the gendered transnational spaces and practices starting from the household-level (Gardner & Grillo, 2002; Kofman, 2014; Parella, 2006), we will choose as unit of analysis the transnational household where the circulation of the different type of capitals takes place. The analyses will focus on the practices of children and elderly care performed by Ecuadorian migrant women which contributed to shape a TSP. The method of analysis is based on a “grounded theory” approach (Charmaz, 2005) and stands in the line of the “situational analysis” (Evens & Handelman, 2006).

### **Arranging social protection for the transnational household**

In our analysis it emerges how the matrifocal household organization, widespread in the Ecuadorian societies, is replicated by Ecuadorian women who moved to Seville. Women migrate within female migratory chains and structure transnational female networks where not only persons circulate but also different types of capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) in form of remittances, favours, gifts, reunions.

Marisa emigrated to Seville in 2000. Her sister and her sister in law joined her a year later. When she regularized her administrative position, she regrouped their children thanks to the help of some catholic nuns who accepted and enrolled the children in a secondary school that belongs to their religious congregation. Afterwards, thanks to the contacts that Marisa established in the neighbourhood, she managed to find a job offer for her husband, so that his regrouping was possible. The job could assure his financial contribution to the household. She observed:

I arrived first, thanks to a neighbour [*woman*] who told me that there was work here. The children remained with my mom. And then I brought my older sister and my brother's wife. I looked for a job for them. And then, when I started the paperwork to bring my children, I looked for a job for my husband to help me with the children here [Marisa, 31 years old, from La Troncal (El Cañar - *Sierra*), interviewed in 2005].

These transnational networks shape an informal social protection both in origin as in destination for the young minors and the elderly people of the household, which compensate the difficulties produced by the migration of these women. Regarding the child-care, for instance, a consistent part of these women's remittances pay the tuition for private schools for their children “left behind” in order to enable them to stay on longer in the educational system, principally considering the shortages that affected historically

the public educational system (limited places, overcrowded class, low salaries for the teacher, several strikes).<sup>7</sup>

By these means they avoid that children abandon the school and enter into the labour market early because of the lack of incomes in the household. As Fernanda told us:

I've already reached almost 100% of my goals, almost 100%. I'm building my little house there, my daughters studied at the university. If I hadn't come [to Seville] it wouldn't have been possible. It would not have been possible because thanks to my work here my daughters were not forced to leave school and get a job. Alone this reason, as I always say, compensates all the sacrifices that I made here, all the bad moments and the sadness of not being able to next to them, of not being able to see them grow up... [Fernanda, 54 years, from Sangolquí (province of Pichincha – *Sierra*), interviewed in 2005].

Fernanda emigrated to Spain in 1999 with her husband. Thanks to their networks, a few days later, they were contacted by the representant of a landowner in the province of Huelva who offered them jobs as guardians of the farm. Later they moved to Seville, where she worked in the domestic service and the husband in the construction sector. They bought a house in Seville with the intention of selling it when they would go back to Ecuador. In their locality of origin, they were already building a house, designed with different floors to host separate family units. However, the crisis of 2007 ended with their projects for the future. Fernanda was left by her husband who built a new family with a Bolivian woman. She had to sell the house at a lower price than the purchase one and to return to Ecuador on her own. After her return, she was helped by the same family members that she supported with the remittances.

Looking at social protection, these women compensated the lack of formal social protection in Ecuador, regarding public schooling, by giving their children the opportunity to access higher education. The great recession at the end of the 1990s contributed to perpetuate a classist scholar system in the Andean country with a strong presence of private actors, both secular and religious. Thus, the migrant households who own economic capital, thanks to the remittances from Spain, invested in the private schooling not only as a way to improve the cultural capital of children by receiving a better education and an easy access to the university system, but also to gain social capital trying to enter into middle class social circles, combining the need of social protection with the wish of social mobility. Furthermore, migrants' remittances could make up for the deficiencies of the Ecuadorian public health system and the costs of a private health care as well as they can assure a sort of "retirement" for the elderly people. Seniors provide, in turn, as a matter of reciprocity, a crucial contribution to the care and education of the children "left-behind".

Migrant women who were "invisible" during a long period of time due to their administrative irregular position and were occupied in the lowest positions of the labour market, can compensate their socio-cultural 'downgraded' status in Seville by sending remittances. In this way they gain symbolic capital<sup>8</sup> in the locality of origin within their household and reinforce their role as providers. On the one hand, the flow of remittances has allowed these migrant women who have become providers to gain power within the household but, on the other hand, these women are blamed in the Ecuadorian public and media discourse because they "abandoned" their children and their parents ignoring their educational and parental "duties" (Herrera, 2013). For example, a principal of a primary public school told us:

The issue of migration from the beginning on was terrible because many parents left... almost fleeing from the country, desperate for the economic situation... and they did not return, neither to visit their children here... [...] but what here was left behind were children, not furniture [...] right here [*in the neighbourhood*] there are completely dysfunctional households with totally lost customs, manners... with completely missing values [...] When the children come back home they don't have any care: their grandmother is very old or very sick; their neighbour [*woman*] does not care... because she is only interested in the euros that she is receiving for caring the son or the daughter... she doesn't care for the rest [School principal (woman), 53 years, working in a neighbourhood in the Southern Quito (Ecuador)].

This stigmatized representation of the migrants is transmitted also to the children left behind, particularly to the daughters, who are described as “problematic youngsters”, “potential alcohol and drug abuser” and “precocious mums” (Pedone, 2005a). However, as we showed in another analysis, the girls “left behind” have a crucial role in the migratory project, they contribute largely to the domestic work and the care of their younger siblings (Lagomarsino & Castellani, 2016). Therefore, they play a crucial role in order to configure an informal social protection. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases the girls have to face a situation of inequality with respect to the male brothers. In fact, they have to subtract time from their studies and employ most of the free time for taking charge of these new tasks within the household. We noticed that only a constant flow of remittances and an articulated and strong female network within the household can set aside the girls “left-behind” from this “natural” contribution to the reproduction of the household and allow them to improve their education and aspire to better job positions. As told by Laura, whose mother migrated to Spain when she was 9 and when she could decide to stay in Quito, while the little brother was regrouped and in 2014 they were still living in Barcelona:

Normally there are many girls who take care of their younger siblings. However, this was not my case. My aunt did not want that I would have become a second mother for my brothers because I wanted to concentrate on my studies and make my own life, and at home she has distributed the tasks between women and men [Laura, 22 years, living in a neighbourhood in Southern Quito (Ecuador)].

The Ecuadorian women who migrated to Seville experience empowerment with respect to the male members of the household, above all in terms of economic and symbolic capital. On the one hand, they could manage their remittances deciding how to invest them. On the other hand, when they reached the administrative regularization or obtained the Spanish citizenship,<sup>9</sup> they acquired the “power of papers” (Martín Díaz, 2011) because they could decide with whom they want to reunify first: “partner”, “children”, “sisters”, “parents”. By doing so, they decide the reconfiguration of the transnational household as well as the evolution of the migratory project.

Particularly, the reunion of the children “left behind” means a reconfiguration of the care within the transnational household. Our ethnographies show that these women in their migratory experience increasingly appreciate the opportunity of accessing a rather good free public education for their children, a universal health system,<sup>10</sup> as well as

family allowances or unemployment benefits. Nevertheless, as we pointed out before, the sector of the Spanish public care does not guarantee the care of the children and teenagers out of kindergarten and school. Therefore, migrant women, as well as “autochthonous” ones, have to count on other members of the household to manage it. In this sense, the decision of reunion of their mothers (parents) in Seville represents an emblematic tactic to guarantee both the care of the children and the elder parents’ health coverage, displacing the financial resources from the origin to the destination.

Natalia arrived in Spain in 2002. Her household is a clear example of matrifocality. The male partner left the household several years before her migration. Her mother thought care of their children when she migrated until Natalia regrouped them in Seville. In 2005 she regrouped her mother too.

I arranged the papers for my mother, because she is diabetic and she also had to operate her feet. Besides, the treatment there [in Ecuador] is very expensive, so she came with me [Natalia 35 years, from Guasmo Sur – Guayaquil, interviewed in 2005].

Natalia’s mother travelled forth and back to Ecuador, as her other daughter also needed help for her child’s care taking, especially since her husband left the household. As Natalia’s mother could not help the daughter in Ecuador by offering her presence and time, she worked on hourly bases in the domestic service to send remittances, which allowed her to support her daughter in Ecuador. After five years, she returned definitively. Natalia is still living in Seville with her Spanish partner. Their children emigrated towards other EU countries. She told us:

My daughter called me because she had a lot of work and needed help with the children, but I already want to go back because my other daughter is there alone and needs me [Natalia’s mother, 57 years, from Guasmo Sur-Guayaquil, spent 4 years in Spain – arrived in 2005, Interviewed in 2009].

Therefore, regarding this issue, we can highlight an articulation between the informal social protection shaped within the migratory project and the formal social protection granted by the Spanish welfare which enables the migrant household to incorporate welfare benefits as available asset for shaping TSP.

### **Gender and generation tensions in the TSP practices**

From these reflections it seems that the Ecuadorian women gained power through the migration as they became active agents of their life and they structured an informal social protection for their households. Nevertheless, this opportunity had to face the migration policy of the Spanish society and the advent of the economic crisis. Firstly, the reunion of the children and elder parents were marked by the cancellation of the possibility to travel with the tourist visa (2003) and for the change of the legislation for reunification (i.e. stricter economic and house requirements) that conditions the tactics of these women. Secondly, the economic crisis cut down the flux of remittances and many household started to configure return strategies, particularly for the male members (Lagomarsino & Herrera, 2015). The crisis also meant huge cuts in social

spending, which affected particularly the migrants' household that were in a more weak position with respect to the autochthonous ones (Aja, Arango, & Alonso, 2012).

In addition, the model of transnational care seems not to be a choice but an obligation for these migrant women, from both on the material and symbolic point of view. The former is due to the fact that Ecuadorians who replace Spanish women in the caregiving tasks have to find in turn someone who replaces them in their own household for the children and elderly care in their localities of origin as well as in Seville (particularly after the children's reunification). This situation forces these women to find substitutes in order to guarantee the social protection of the weak members of the network of care. In practice they delegate their "own duties" to other women of their households, by sending remittances or by using the "power of paper" for reunification. If they do not have enough financial capital or cannot count on a wide network, they have to deal with these tasks alone. From the symbolic point of view, they are obliged to structure social protection through this transnational model of care because they receive, both in origin and in destinations, a constant social pressure which reaffirms that care duties have to be carried out almost exclusively by women.

Furthermore, most of these women in Ecuador, even if the male partner was still part of the household, contributed to the financial incomes by working in the formal or informal labour market (e.g. selling street food). Whereas in destination, in most of the cases they were the breadwinners. In our ethnographies emerged a difference depending on the regional origin in Ecuador. In the Sierra household the women's contribution to the production is complementary to the one of the men of the household. This distinction is also reflected in the male participation in the reproduction duties<sup>11</sup>: there is a greater men's care contribution in the Sierra households, both in origin as in destination with respect to the Costa households.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the Ecuadorian women in Seville are clearly the breadwinners and have the power of deciding who to regroup. The men (husband, brother...) are regrouped only if they are instrumental to the economy of the transnational household.

Particularly during the hardest years of the economic crisis (2009–2011) when many Ecuadorian men who worked in the construction sector lost their jobs, many couples faced crisis and broke up. The women were the only providers for the family, because the care and domestic sector suffered less from the crisis (Pajares, 2009), but the men didn't accept to assume the care duties of their partners as well as they didn't accept that women managed the household economy on their own (Martín Díaz, 2011). Another women's tactic for avoiding conflicts within the households was "sending back" the husband or partner to Ecuador. Looking at the dynamics of social protection, it is less expensive doing it. Besides, it allows women to restore within the household a better gender equality which most of them lost after the reunification of the partner or after a new marriage or partnership begun in Seville. In fact, as it was also highlighted by other studies (Lagomarsino, 2006; Lagomarsino & Castellani, 2016), the change of Ecuadorian women's role within the household doesn't imply, in most of the cases, a change in the gender dynamic.

This argument gains strengths looking at the intergenerational relation within the migrants' transnational households. If we look at the experiences of the Ecuadorian migrants' daughters who have been reunified in Seville, we can observe firstly that they contribute highly, as in the origin localities, to the tasks of reproduction within the household: helping with the domestic work and taking care of the younger siblings.

As we pointed out before, the children are usually reunified when the mothers find a stable condition in destination in financial, administrative, residential and social terms. Many of these still young mothers after the reunification decide to give birth to another child with the former or a new partner.<sup>13</sup> This decision normally triggers a strong reaction from the regrouped children who were separated from their mothers during a long time and have to face another re-configuration of the household. Moreover, when the children arrive in Seville, they find a different situation from the one that they imagined regarding both the family dynamics and their social position in the neighbourhood and at school. Often, they experience a social downgrade and stigmatization for being children of migrants (Castellani, 2015, 2016).

This situation is even more difficult for the girls because they are expected, more than their brothers, to contribute in the reproduction tasks of the households taking care, for example, of the younger siblings. Therefore, the reunification generates strong intergenerational conflicts between mothers and daughters that once again are about the care duties. In this sense, the girls' assumption of care charges contributes, on the one hand, to configure informal social protection. However, on the other hand, this situation results particularly demanding for the girls with respect to their brother, shaping a situation of gender inequality within the household. In fact, the girls are those who have to consecrate more of their free time to care duties, also leaving less time for study.

Nevertheless, the girls do not accept passively this role of reproduction and invent ways of resistance to it. One of the most widespread tactics is becoming mothers when they are still teenagers as a way to obtain a definitive social role within the household and the society.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, this choice implies in material terms an increasing bunch of work. Those girls that, on the contrary, are less burdened by domestic duties because are part of transnational households in which the care duties are shared among different women (and also with men) or are part of households which have fewer financial problems, adopt other tactics. These girls tend to stay longer in the educational system and have success at school. This represents a tactic of empowerment within and outside the households because it permits to reduce the amount of the domestic and care work and it represents a challenge to the reproduction of the traditional gender relations by gaining cultural capital. Besides, this investment in education represents another way in which the mothers attempt to shape social protection by granting their children a future in Ecuador in the case of return. In fact, as we have observed in the case of young people who returned, their "European" schooling gave them indeed an easy access to university or qualified job positions with respect to their Ecuadorian peers.

## Conclusions

In the ethnographic studies presented here, we observed how "transnational social protection" represents a theoretical concept which permits to understand the reconfigurations of the migratory projects' within the Ecuadorian migration flow toward Spain, particularly during the Spanish economic crisis, as well as the transformation of gender roles within the Ecuadorian transnational household.

The strong feminization of this flow configures, as it was highlighted by previous studies (Herrera, 2005), transnational migratory networks and households organized around a matrifocal model. The migration of these women who become providers, puts at risk their primary role of caregivers assigned by the "traditional" gender division of

roles, which guarantees an informal social protection to the household in Ecuador. Therefore, on the one hand, they have to guarantee social protection in another way (remittances, reunification, etc....) and, on the other hand, their role of caregiver has to be reinterpreted and assumed by other members of the household, mostly women.

In the case of Ecuadorian migration in Seville, we found transnational care chains which were described by several authors who analyse feminized migration flows (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Salazar Parreñas, 2005; Vietti, Portis, & Ferrero, 2012). In our paper these chains can be not only understood as a transnationalization of the social protection but, also, they have to be analysed as a source of intra-gender conflict at the inter-generational level within the household. This dialectic gender-generation perspective allows us to highlight that the migrants' household is not an idyllic unit of consensus and mutual support, but a place of reproduction of gender inequality. As each social group, migrants' households are crossed by power relations which change over time depending on the adjustments of the migratory projects and the redefinition of their members' roles.

Through a transnational analysis we found out that migrant women can handle material and symbolic pressure that aims to confine them into the "domestic role", creating tactics for redefining their role within the transnational household (Lagomarsino, 2006; Pedone, 2005b). At the same time, through these tactics Ecuadorian women try to guarantee social protection to the other members of the household, for example, by integrating the economic remittances which they sent to Ecuador with the formal social protection provided by the Spanish welfare system, particularly before the economic crisis of 2008 (Martín Díaz, 2011).

This means variations in the flow of economic and social remittances over the time. The major finding which emerges from our analysis is the changing tactic of Ecuadorian migrant women in accommodating social protection needs, particularly facing a context of crisis. At the first stage, migrant women transferred economic assets to guarantee the social protection of the household members in the country of origin. After obtaining legal residence, they altered their tactic, disinvesting in origin and started to spend money in the household reunification, moving the focus of the social protection toward the host society. It is a re-orientation of the strategy of the household that goes beyond the re-unification, regarding the whole transnational migratory project. This modification of trend is particularly significant in the case of formal education and when they try to guarantee protection to older relatives. Practically, these women convert formal social protection into different kind of capitals to spend and put into circulation within the transnational household.

Besides, these tactics permit them to gain symbolic capital within the transnational household for redefining their role in the migratory chains, since they decide who are going to be regrouped and in which order. For this reason, there is a change in the role of the woman that sometime derive in questioning traditional gender roles both in the society of origin and destination, during a specific time-space. Nevertheless, in most of cases this not means a modification at the level of the gender patterns. As a matter of fact, our analysis highlights the existing intergenerational conflict between migrant mothers and daughters in most of the transnational households. The Ecuadorian girls are narrowed between two fires: the duties of contribution to the reproduction of the transnational household and the wish of being recognized as autonomous subjects.

Summarizing, transnational social protection within a household implicated in a transnational migratory project is mainly managed by women, being the care practice at the centre of the TSP. Our findings show that the TSP practices have a clear influence on the development of the migratory project, nevertheless it seems that they question only in a limited way the reproduction of gender roles. Secondly, our contribution shows that future reflections on TSP have to give a clear emphasis to a gender and generational intersectional perspective, taking into the debate the contributions made by the feminist anthropology and economy. This could benefit highly the future development of the TSP frame, as well as, open tangential spaces of discussion within the gender and youth studies.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Starting from Moore's (1988) definition of household, we defined the "transnational household" as the conjunction of the economic (income and consumption), reproductive, residential and socialization units, which is shaped within a transnational social space. Likewise the members of the households are the people who take part on this transnational social conjunction in a specific moment of her/his biography. In this sense, the household ties can include, differently from the family, also people who are not linked through consanguinity and affinity and who not live "down the same roof".

<sup>2</sup>In this work, on the one hand, we understand power as a relation of forces (Foucault, 1990), which legitimizes itself, hiding its nature of relation of forces (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). On the other hand, in the micro level, we understand that, within a given situation, an individual or collective actor stands in a dominant power position if it has the "power of defining the situation" (Collins, 1975).

<sup>3</sup>Here, we consider gender as an "organizing system" which "interacts and influences the institutional structures" (Murray, 1996, p. 370), reproducing a system of domination that intersects with other axes: class, ethnicity and generation (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992)

<sup>4</sup>Here we use the term "tactic" in opposition to "strategy" as it was defined by De Certeau (1984). For this author the strategy is planned by those who hold power (usually institutions) and have the privilege of having a comprehensive view of the field. On the contrary, tactic is carried out by people who are forced to play in an alien field and the power results as complex as to obscure the full view of the field.

<sup>5</sup>Funded by the Spanish National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation (IMU156/04, 2004–2009).

<sup>6</sup>Funded by Directorate General of Coordination of Migration Policy of the Andalusia government (2007–2009).

<sup>7</sup>During the economic growth of the last decade, the Correa government invested largely in public education, but in spite of this investment the prestige of the public school grew very slowly. The private school system offer is shaped on a wide range of fees and admission criteria (e.g. close relation with a religious congregation) which determine a stratification of the alumni within the system based on the family incomes and social capital.

<sup>8</sup>In this paper we understand symbolic capital in the Bourdieu meaning of the legitimated and recognized form that the economic, cultural and social capitals assume within the social circles in which the social actor take part (Bourdieu, 1984).

<sup>9</sup>In Spain, people of the former colonies can apply for the naturalization after two years of regular residence in the country (Art. 22.1, Ley 36/2002). The other foreigners, on the contrary, need to prove ten years of residence in Spain for obtaining the naturalization

<sup>10</sup>Before the crisis the access to the public health system was universal and guaranteed also for foreigners in irregular administrative positions.

<sup>11</sup>In the last years some scholars have highlighted the urgent need to draw the attention on the reproduction role that men play in the transnational migratory project (Kilkey, Plomien, & Perrons, 2014).

<sup>12</sup>Ecuador is constituted from four main regions: “Costa” (Pacific coast region) where there is the biggest metropolis of the country, Guayaquil; “Sierra” (Andean region) where is located the capital Quito and the majority of the indigenous populations live, together with the “Selva” (Amazon region). Finally there is the “Islas” region (Galapagos Islands). The division of Cost and the Andean regions, the main pool of migrants toward Europe, are particularly strong because of historical, economic, social and cultural differences which are maintained also after the migration in terms of networks and associations (Martín Díaz & Cuberos Gallardo, 2015).

<sup>13</sup>For many women, migration represented a way to escape from failure marriages. Due to this it was not unusual that they started a new relation in Seville (most commonly with other migrants) even if they were not yet divorced formally from the husband, who often, on his part, had new partner in Ecuador.

<sup>14</sup>A similar strategy was described in the literature within the working class teenagers in UK during the ‘80s (McRobbie, 2000).

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#### **Availability of data and materials**

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

#### **Authors’ contributions**

The authors participated to the data collection and analysis of the data of the studies which are on the base of this paper and drafted the manuscript together. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### **Authors’ information**

*Simone Castellani* is postdoctoral research fellow at the University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-IUL) carrying out a project on the new Portuguese migrations toward Germany. He holds a PhD in Social Anthropology (University of Seville, Spain) and in Migration and Intercultural Processes (University of Genoa, Italy). He was visiting fellow and at the INAH (Mexico), CONICET (Argentina), University of Santa Caterina (Brazil), University of Bielefeld and University of Freiburg (Germany), Wellesley College (US), FLACSO-Ecuador and University of Sussex (UK). His topics of research are related with the international migratory processes. Specifically, he has studied the Latino American migration flows toward Europe, paying particular attention to the so-called second generation, and the new Southern European migration flows toward Germany during the last economic recession. In the recent past he integrated the UPWEB-NORFACE project team which focuses on the practices of welfare bricolage in contexts marked by high super-diversity. Further, he collaborated with the Global Social Protection project, led by the Transnational Studies Initiative at the University of Harvard, which investigate transnational social protection focusing on the access to the health care of Ecuadorian migrants in US, Italy, Spain and Ecuador. Last publications: (2018) “Sliding down. New Spanish and Italian migrants’ labour insertion” in *Sociologia del lavoro*, 149, 77–93; with Lagomarsino (2016) “The unseen protagonists. Ecuadorians’ daughters between Ecuador and Southern Europe”, *Social Identities*, 22(3), 291–306; (2016) “Orgullo mestizo. El baloncesto como valorización de la diferencia entre hijos de inmigrantes en Sevilla”, *Studi Emigrazione*, 53(203).

Emma Martín-Díaz is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Seville. She is specialized in Migration, Ethnic Relationships and Public Policies. She obtained her MA Anthropology at the University of Seville in 1985, with a thesis on migrants returning from Western Europe to rural Andalusia. Her PhD thesis, (1988), focused on Andalusian immigrants in Cataluña, interethnic relationships and integration policies, and won the prize "Blas Infante" for the best original research on Social Studies in Andalusia in 1991. Since 1995 she has been carrying out research on "New Immigration" in Spain. The topics include migration, agriculture and labour markets in Mediterranean Spain, (1999, 2004) migration and citizenship (1999, 2003), migration and domestic services, (2002) migration and prostitution (2004) migration and transnational social networks (2007) and the 'second generation' (2009-) She participates in several masters and doctorates on migration, ethnicity, gender, development, citizenship and Human Rights at different Universities in Europe and Latin America. Last selected publications: with Bermúdez, A. (2017) "The Multilevel Governance of "Refuge": Bringing Together Institutional and Civil Society Responses in Europe", in Haines, D.; Howell, J. and Keles, F. (eds) *Maintaining Refuge: Anthropological Reflections in Uncertain Times*. CORI, American Anthropological Association; with Roca Martínez, B. (2016) "Solidarity networks of Spanish migrants in the UK and Germany: The emergence of interstitial trade unionism". *Critical Sociology*; with Cuberos Gallardo (2016) "Public spaces and immigration in Seville: building citizenship or reproducing power relationships?", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(6): 1089–1105.

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#### Author details

<sup>1</sup>University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-IUL), Av. das Forças Armadas, Edifício Sedas Nunes, Sala 2N01D, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal. <sup>2</sup>University of Seville, c/ Doña María de Padilla, s/n, 41004 Sevilla, Spain.

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