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The Social Reproductive Worlds of Migrants
Editorial for Special Issue of Journal of Family Studies
Majella Kilkey, Laura Merla and Loretta Baldassar

Introduction

Social reproduction entails physical and socialization processes to ensure ‘the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical human beings’ (Glenn 1992: 4). The production and reproduction through the life-course of people as physical beings incorporates family building through relationship formation and procreation, and the ongoing care required in the maintenance of people on a daily basis involving the physical manual work of ensuring that people are fed, clothed, housed and cared for to the socially expected standards, and the mental and emotional work associated with such endeavours (Laslett and Brenner 1989). Social reproduction also constitutes people as social and cultural beings, and entails the work of ‘socializing the young, building communities, producing and reproducing the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation’ (Fraser 2014: 61).

Contemporary societies are commonly characterised as facing ‘a crisis of social reproduction’, with its roots, according to Fraser (2014; 2016), lying in the contradiction that while social reproduction is a background condition for the possibility of capitalist production, capitalism accords it no monetized value and treats it as if it were free. In a myriad of ways – including as carers (Parreñas, 2001), cleaners (Anderson, 2000), nurses (Yeates, 2012), handymen (Kilkey et al 2013) and brides (Kim and Kilkey, 2017) - ‘rich’ countries have come to rely on migrant labour to alleviate their social reproductive crises. While there is now a large body of scholarship on migrants' contributions to plugging the social reproductive deficits in migrant-receiving countries, considerably less, although increasing (for example see, Baldassar and Merla (eds) 2014; Erel, 2009; Kofman and Raghuram, 2015), attention has been paid to migrants' own social reproductive experiences. This is clearly problematic for as Laura Agustín (2003: 391) reminds us, ‘[T]o pay attention only to the jobs migrants do is to essentialize them as workers and deny the diversity of their hopes and experiences’.

As we have argued elsewhere (Baldassar et al. 2018; Kilkey and Urzi, 2017), the relationship between migration and social reproduction from the perspective of migrants themselves is a contradictory one. Thus, on the one hand, migration, often a response to a crisis of social reproduction in the country of origin, may secure better livelihoods, reducing the deficit in the ability of migrants to reproduce their households (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015). This is clearly a factor in the migration flows examined in this special issue, which include those from Central America through Mexico to the USA (Willers), from Latin America to Spain (Oso and Suárez-Grimalt), from Italy to the United Kingdom (Bonizzonni), from Poland to the United Kingdom (Kordasiewicz, Radziwinowiczówna and Kloc-Nowak) and Vietnam to the Czech Republic (Souralova). Collectively, the papers in this special issue demonstrate that "[P]eople are not migrating simply for their own benefit, but rather as part of a larger strategy for supporting and caring for their children, parents, spouses and extended kin, and for planning for their future family life" (Baldassar et al. 2018: 431).

Simultaneously, however, migration can put at risk other aspects of migrants' social reproduction as their opportunities to form and reshape their families and households, as well as maintain links with their kin across national boundaries, are constrained by a range of structural factors including, migration, welfare, gendered care and working-times regimes (Kilkey and Merla, 2014). Such constraints, however, are not uniformly experienced; social reproduction capacities during processes of migration are deeply stratified, with nationality, class, income, age and educational and skill levels among the most significant axes of differentiation (Kofman et al., 2011).

Contributing to understandings of migrants' social reproductive worlds

The articles in this special issue contribute new insights to a growing body of scholarship on the risks and opportunities migration presents for migrant families' social reproduction, variously understood as the physical and social / cultural processes entailed in reproducing people, and the strategies migrants develop to navigate those risks and opportunities. Informed by the notion of 'care circulation' (Baldassar and Merla (eds) 2014), collectively the articles capture a range of migration flows within and between the Global South and Global North, involving low- and high-skilled migrants, with social reproductive responsibilities spanning both ends of the life course, and situated in local / proximate, as well as distant / transnational, contexts.

In her article, Souralova reverses the existing literature's focus on the care work that nannies from the global South perform for families from the global North, by turning her attention to the delegation of childcare by migrant mothers (in this case Vietnamese migrants) to nannies originating from the host country (here, the Czech Republic). Central to this article is the crucial role that this delegation of childcare plays in the social and cultural incorporation of first-generation Vietnamese migrant mothers and their second-generation migrant children. Here, nannies can potentially act as cultural and social mediators for the migrant children they care for. This very practice, however, can at the same time, deprive migrant mothers of the opportunity to socialize with locals through for example, contacts with schools and local communities. Drawing on analysis of interviews with Vietnamese mothers who delegate(d) childcare and interviews with second-generation Vietnamese children who have had a Czech nanny, the article highlights in particular the ambivalent meanings these two generations of migrants attach to the delegation of care to Czech nannies and its influence on their position in the Czech society and their relation with Vietnam.

Bonizzoni meanwhile explores the transnational mobility projects of young Italian families, who migrated from Italy to London to pursue a middle-class lifestyle threatened by the economic crisis in their home country. This enduring crisis has stimulated 'new' South-North, intra-European flows, which, although initially mainly consisting of single young people, became increasingly diversified with time. Drawing on qualitative interviews undertaken with mothers of young children, the results show that intra-EU migration can be seen as an adequate solution to overcome a middle-class social reproduction crisis. They also highlight, however, that in order to achieve this at an intergenerational level, migrants, and women in particular, must engage in a transnational negotiation and validation of different forms of capital, including cultural capital, which involves social reproductive practices such as childcare. Indeed, the high cost of paid childcare in the UK hinders women's participation in the labour market, and this can create tensions within couples (sometimes leading to divorce) while at the same time, equipping these Italian women with skills they later use as an asset to (re)integrate into the labour market. The author also shows how middle-class Italians pursue their middle-class status by investing in their children's education through selecting social reproductive environments that will allow them to maximize their (future) cultural capital.

Based on an in-depth, longitudinal and multi-sited empirical study of the social and spatial mobility strategies and trajectories of Latin American households in Spain, the article by Oso and Suárez-Grimalt proposes an innovative framework for the study of transnational social mobility strategies, conceptualized at the intersection between reproductive and productive strategies. The analytical model draws on the differentiated strategic investments of transnational families, articulating four types of resources - physical and financial, educational, social and emotional - and explores variations in the strategic behaviour of migrants along gender, generational, migratory and family positions and situations. This study reveals major inequalities between on the one hand, unmarried migrants who can largely invest in individual social mobility projects through the accumulation of financial assets, a strategy that is compatible with the material expectations of their families left behind, and on the other hand, married migrants with parental and/or grandparental responsibilities who face greater pressure for intergenerational social mobility, and so invest to a larger extent in reproductive, emotional and affective resources, postponing their own social mobility projects for the benefit of the next generations.

Drawing on qualitative fieldwork with Central American women who get stuck in transit in Mexico during their journey to the United States, Willers' article explores the important, and yet understudied question, of the consequences of violence and uncertainty on the social reproduction strategies of migrant mothers, and highlights the complex temporality of the migration journey. Here, violence takes on several forms, originating both in the violent situations in the home country that prompts families to migrate to the United States, and in the violence stemming from restrictive US migration policies and generalized social violence in Mexico, where women get stuck for prolonged periods of time and are therefore at high risk of being exposed to violence. The analysis reveals the various social reproduction strategies that women develop in this context, and the impact of closed borders on migrant women's capacities to provide care and other types of support to their families.

The article by Kordasiewicz, Radziwinowiczówna and Kloc-Nowak also reveals the temporality of migration processes in its analysis of the discursive space constructed in transnational families while planning and envisaging arrangements for elder care in the future. Drawing on interviews with Polish post-2004 EU enlargement migrants living in UK and their still relatively young parents back in Poland, the authors develop the concept of the

‘ethnomorality of care’ to illuminate care intentions in terms of the willingness to provide care in the future and the expectations to receive it. The authors articulate care intentions as the locus of socially-embedded agency that mediates between what is considered morally right and what is perceived as possible within a given opportunity structure. The article reveals how the potential transnational struggles migrants and their left-behind family members experience when anticipating the tensions between their multi-sited productive and reproductive worlds, are alleviated to some extent when migrants and their ageing parents share a transnational ethnomorality of care, rather than living in two separate discursive worlds.

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