

Birds of a Feather in transnational flight: Return, Gender and Mobility-Immobility Strategies Between Ecuador and Spain **Avecillas y pájaros en vuelo transnacional: Retorno, género y estrategias de movilidad e inmovilidad entre Ecuador y España**

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ABSTRACT

This article looks beyond the explanation of returning Ecuadorian migrants in the light of the impact of Spain's economic crisis, analysing return within the framework of the articulation of mobility and immobility strategies and the social and cultural gendered and inter-generational relations of transnational households. It addresses the way in which female migration and return are closely linked to women's role as carers, whilst male return is frequently conditioned by crises of masculinity, stemming from the loss of their role as 'breadwinners'. The article concludes that return must not merely be considered a journey back, but rather as a continuum of mobility, framed by gender ideologies regarding the role of men and women, as well as by inter-generational strategies that are activated within the transnational space. The article is based on the empirical data obtained a multi-sited fieldwork carried out in Spain and Ecuador with Ecuadorian transnational families.

Key words: *Return; Transnational families; Gender; Mobility; Ecuadorian migration.*

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza el retorno, en el marco de la articulación de las estrategias de movilidad e inmovilidad y de las relaciones sociales y culturales de género e intergeneracionales de los hogares transnacionales. Aborda cómo la migración de mujeres y el retorno están estrechamente vinculados al rol femenino de las mujeres en tanto cuidadoras, mientras que el retorno de los hombres está muchas veces condicionado por la crisis de las masculinidades, derivada de la pérdida de su rol como "ganapán". Concluye que el retorno no puede entenderse sólo como un viaje de vuelta, sino como un continuum de movilidades, enmarcado por las ideologías de género sobre los roles femeninos y masculinos, así como por las estrategias intergeneracionales desplegadas en el espacio transnacional. El estudio se basa en la explotación de los datos empíricos obtenidos en un trabajo de campo cualitativo multi-situado (España, Ecuador), llevado a cabo con familias ecuatorianas transnacionales.

Palabras clave: Retorno; Familias Transnacionales; Género; Movilidad; Migración ecuatoriana.

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in conducting studies into migration and return tends to surge particularly within the context of economic crisis in host countries. The scope of this approach is limited, as it constrains the return process to a context of economic crisis, focusing essentially on the unemployed as returnees. However, as earlier research has shown, migration and return processes are woven into the lives of migrant households (Espinosa, 1998)¹, whereby return forms an inherent part of population flows. Return forms part of migrant mobility strategies and occurs before, during and after periods of economic crisis, and is dependent on a set of political, cultural, social and economic factors. Furthermore, from a transnational perspective, return is not seen as the closure of a process, or as a return to the point of departure, but rather as a central phase of the migratory cycle; one of the stages of a process that is constantly moving and changing, (Guarnizo, 1996; King 2000). Indeed, international migration is embedded in the rationale of the formation of complex migratory circuits linking migratory trajectories, social spaces and varying capitals of unequal societies (Glick Schiller 2005 in Rivera, 2011). However, to date, the crucial role played by the mobility/immobility axis in all migratory systems has been largely overlooked. Mobility in social studies tends to be considered from the paradigm of new forms of mobility, establishing a connection between mobility and immobility in an attempt to identify the conditions under which this mobility occurs. It acts as a marker of social difference, and is possibly the most important social stratification factor currently in existence (Salazar and Smart, 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). Bergeon et al. (2013) have shown that mobility and immobility

cannot be considered as separate categories, as individuals may shift from one position to another at various points in their lives. Moreover, both the mobile and the immobile take part in the flows of movements in the same manner. The movement of mobile immigrants maintains those that are immobile, whilst the latter group guarantees the stability required to make movement possible.

In turn, studies that have addressed return from a gendered approach have repeatedly stressed the limits of the research conducted due to the situation of crisis existing in the host countries. This is due to the inability to provide a plausible explanation for migrant women's decision to return, even though they have not been made redundant. However, when the focus is shifted to gender, a series of differentiated motivations for return among men and women come to the fore. In the 1990s, research into Mexican migration revealed that men were more inclined to return, whilst women would tend to lean more towards settling with their husbands and family in the United States (Goldring, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Rather than an exceptional, personal or isolated event, return occurs as a result of complex family negotiations, conflict and decisions that highlight the sharp variance of the impact of gender on return, as well as the crucial role played by women, not only in terms of the actual decision, but also in establishing the conditions that would permit plans for return to be made, with generational factors also forming a vital part of the study into this issue (Arias, 2007; D'Aubaterre, 2012; Espinosa, 1998; Goldring, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

The decision to return is made in accordance with the social norms governing behaviour considered acceptable for men and women (Hofmann, 2014). For example, in her analysis of Bolivian migration in Spain, Martínez-Buján shows how men return in order to initiate a strategy of self-employment, whilst women are primarily motivated by the desire to comply with their role as carers (Martínez-Buján, 2015). In the case of Caribbean women, return is related to the genderisation of kinship and accepted behaviour in the provision of care. In this sense, it is not related to material issues, but rather to women's role as good mothers or sisters, even after migrating,

1 As this author points out, Mexican migration is characterised by an ongoing tension between the structure established outside Mexico and return, two alternatives which although always a possibility, "are conditioned by structural factors, yet always defined by projects, needs and desires, and above all by the migrants' economic, social and cultural resources" (1998) (author' translation).

in order to provide for their families (Olwig, 2012)². This analysis considers migration framed by 'gender' production processes as a form of inequality, and therefore considers changes in femininity and masculinity from the perspective of migratory studies, and specifically the question of return (Vega and Martínez-Bujan 2016). On the other hand, a number of studies have revealed the key role played by the organisation of reproductive work in explaining how the crisis has impacted on both migration and return (Herrera, 2012; López de Lera and Pérez Caramés, 2015; Vega, 2016), to the extent that the migratory and return projects form part of a single process built around household productive and reproductive strategies (Sanz, 2015). In addition to mere economic factors, the stability of family relations and the settlement of children also influence the decision to return, as shown by Boccagni and Lagomarsino (2011) in the case of Ecuadorian migrants in Italy. It is therefore clear that these studies have addressed return from a gendered and intergenerational perspective, although they have failed to pay specific attention to the mobility-immobility axis.

This article considers the return process of Ecuadorian migrants from a perspective that looks beyond the reductionist analyses associated with the economic crisis in Spain. Instead, our analysis is framed within the family life cycle and the tensions that arise in the care model. We therefore adopt a line similar to that of the studies cited above, which addressed the question of return from a gendered and intergenerational perspective. However, we also attempt to take our previous analyses (Cortés, 2015; Oso, dir 2015-2019) a stage further by including the question of mobility, and specifically the study of the mobility/immobility axis in our study of return. Indeed, this is our principal contribution to scientific debate in this field. Consequently, the main aim of this article is to show

how the gender system organises the geographical and social mobility of men and women based on ideological claims and ideas regarding not only who should move, but also when and how (i.e. migrate, return and re-migrate). Our interest also lies in analysing the set of regulatory discourses deployed in transnational households by persons who have never migrated yet who have been dependent on the migration of at least one family member: daughter/son, mother/father and sister/brother. These justifications are active within the household, shaping the attitudes adopted by various members towards the migration of women (separation from the home, abandonment of their children and the obligation to return) or men (justification of their role as breadwinners and 'punishment' in the event of failure to comply with this obligation). This discourse will allow us to identify the principal organisers of men and women's mobility-immobility axis in an interrelated rather than a fixed or static manner within the framework of global mobility regimes (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013).

Our analysis is based on the data obtained from multi-sited qualitative fieldwork undertaken between 2007 and 2015 with Ecuadorian migrant families in Spain and Ecuador³. Semi-structured

2 However, the reasons for the decision to return do not exclude one another, but instead adopt an ambivalent sense. Constable, for example, exemplifies this ambivalence in the study of Filipino female domestic workers in Hong Kong: for many of these women, it is not only a means of fulfilling their family obligations, but also represents an autonomous and independent experience (Constable, 1999).

3 The fieldwork was conducted within the framework of the following research projects: Oso (dir.) (2015-2019): *Género, movilidades cruzadas y dinámicas transnacionales*, Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness FEM2015-67164-R; Oso (dir.) (2011-2015): *Género, transnacionalismo y estrategias intergeneracionales de movilidad social*, Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, FEM2011-26210; Oso (dir.) (2007-2011): *El impacto de la inmigración en el desarrollo: género y transnacionalismo*, Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, SEJ2007-63179. Almudena Cortés, Prometeo Post-doctoral Research (2013-2014), Ecuadorian National Secretariat for Science and Technology (SENESCYT). The article also draws on the activities carried out in collaboration with the INCASI Project (the International Network for Comparative Analysis of Social Inequalities), a European initiative funded by the Horizon 2020 programme (RISE action, GA 691004, http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/200034_en.html) coordinated by Pedro López-Roldán (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona). This article reflects only the authors' point of view and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

interviews were conducted with women, men and young people from households in which at least one member had returned or was in the process of doing so: a returned father/mother, son/daughter, brother/sister. Several members of each of the families were interviewed separately, including men and women from different generations in order to guarantee that the fieldwork included a gendered and intergenerational perspective. Transnational households were selected that complied with the requirement of having family members both in Ecuador (who had never migrated and were therefore immobile) and in Spain (and consequently mobile), as well as family members who had returned from this country. This criterion was necessary in order to analyse the mobile-immobile relationship, considering not only the role played by those that leave, but also by those that stay behind, within the framework of family mobility strategies. In some cases we were able to conduct participant observation within the families, and also monitor certain households over time (longitudinal methodology). These families were initially interviewed between 2007-2008, and follow-up interviews were conducted in 2014-2015. In addition, fieldwork was also conducted with other migrant or returnees' family members. Although they were interviewed individually and the opinions of other members of the family are not available, their testimonies do provide valuable support for our analysis. A mixed discussion group was also set up, comprising six women and five men belonging to a returnees' association in Quito. The interviews were held in Madrid (Spain) and in Quito (Ecuador), which is the principal point of migration and return from Spain⁴, as well as in Riobamba, in the province of Chimborazo, a space that has been practically ignored by studies in Ecuadorian migration since the start of the 21st century⁵. A total of 11 family groups took part, and a total of 43 people were interviewed or partici-

pated in the discussion group during the course of the fieldwork. The breakdown by gender was 25 women and 18 men.

Firstly, our study reveals that in the case of Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, return was essentially gender selective. This was due to the financial crisis, which impacted more heavily on men than women, and therefore the number of male returnees is higher. Secondly, the article considers gendered return to Ecuador in accordance with regulated discourse on gendered social control, studying the articulation of mobility and immobility strategies within the framework of gendered and international social relations in transnational households. Furthermore, it reveals how mobility, including return, must be seen with the context of personal and family life cycles, as well as the tensions that arise when handling responsibilities for care in transnational households. We consider the migration and return of these "birds in flight"⁶ (either mothers with children or single women) and their close relation to women's role as carers. This contrasts sharply with the situation of men, for whom migration and return are often conditioned by a crisis of masculinity stemming from the loss of their role as the "breadwinner" due to the economic crisis, and who can therefore be considered as "birds with broken wings". This section analyses the cases of various households, revealing the complexity of family strategies in return processes, highlighting particularly the role played by immobile family members (who have remained in Ecuador) in the mobility processes, and specifically, the regulatory discourse surrounding presence and absence deployed in transnational households by those that are immobile, either out of choice or necessity. The text ends with a series of conclusions that reveal the need to adopt a gendered, intergenerational approach in order to gain an insight into the question of mobility and immobility in return, as part of one of the proc-

4 The fieldwork in Quito was carried out mainly in the neighbourhood of Turubamba Bajo.

5 The fieldwork with families from Chimborazo was conducted by Almudena Cortés, whilst the interviews in Turubamba Bajo (Quito) and family members in Madrid were carried out by Laura Oso.

6 Birds in flight or *Avecillas*, in reference to the popular song of the same name of the *albazo* genre, performed by famous musical duos in Ecuador such as Benítez y Valencia or the Miño Naranjo Brothers.

esses that form the mobility dynamics of transnational households.

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE GENDER-SELECTIVE RETURN OF ECUADORIAN MIGRATION FROM SPAIN

A number of studies have addressed the impact of the crisis on the return of emigrants from Spain (Cavalcanti and Parella, 2013; López de Lera and Pérez-Caramés, 2015, among others). In the specific case of Ecuador, since the onset of the economic crisis the number of Ecuadorians in Spain that choose to return has experienced a sharp hike. Indeed, authors such as López de Lera and Pérez-Caramés (2015) calculate that the number of Ecuadorians leaving Spain has stood at around 18,000 a year since the start of the financial crisis in Spain, with 9 out of 10 returning to their country of birth⁷. Whilst during the early days of Ecuadorian migration to Spain, in the late 1990s, it was the women that initiated the process as pioneers in the migratory chains (Pedone, 2006), return in the context of the economic crisis will be essentially masculine, as shown by two key indicators.

The first of these refers to the variation in the percentage of women, compared to men, in the number of Ecuadorians registered on the Municipal Residents Census (Spanish National Institute of Statistics - INE in its Spanish initials)⁸. Our analysis of these data has shown that the number of residents included on the census as of 1st January 2015 that were born in Ecuador stood at 422,186. Whilst in the early days the number of Ecuadorian women was clearly higher (in 1998, 58.7% of all

those included on the census and born in Ecuador were women), the period of economic prosperity and the boom in the construction industry led to a situation of equality between both sexes, with the percentage of women standing at around 51% between 2001 and 2010. However, following the outbreak of the financial crisis, the population stock born in Ecuador experienced a further shift towards feminisation, with the number of women rising to around 53%, indicating that Ecuadorian men were more likely to leave Spain, whilst Ecuadorian women showed a greater inclination to remain in the country (Oso and Catarino, 2014).

Secondly, our study of the Residential Variation Statistics (INE) has enabled us to calculate the emigration rate⁹ of the Ecuadorian population in Spain. This rate, which at the turn of the century was extremely low for both sexes (0.3% in 2003), began to rise as a result of the economic crisis, reaching 3.9% in 2008. By 2013 it peaked at 5.1%, falling slightly to 4.6% in 2014. Throughout the crisis, emigration rates have remained consistently higher of Ecuadorian men in comparison with women (5.7% and 4.5% respectively in 2013 and 5.1% and 4.1% in 2014). Certain studies have used Workforce Census data (EPA in its Spanish initials) to show how the economic crisis has impacted more on employment for immigrant men than women, due to the bursting of the real estate bubble, which had a devastating effect on the construction industry in particular (Muñoz-Comet, 2013; Gil Alonso and Vidal-Coso, 2015). Nevertheless, unemployment alone is unable to explain why Ecuadorian men and women are showing different patterns of behaviour in terms of return, as we will analyse below.

7 The study of the of Residential Variation Statistics (which measures inbound and outbound population flows for Spain) carried out by López de Lera and Pérez-Caramés (2015), distinguishes between those returning to their country of birth (returnees) and those that emigrate to a third country (re-emigrants).

8 The comparison of the pre and post crisis feminisation of population stocks can be used as a possible indicator of the greater impact of return on Ecuadorian men. Indeed, in the light of the recession, this trend may indicate that women are more capable of withstanding the impact of crisis and that men are more likely to decide to leave Spain.

9 The emigration rate is calculated by dividing the losses in the population born in Ecuador in the Residential Variation Statistics (EVR, INE) by the population born in Ecuador (Municipal Census of Residents – INE. This rate is not an actual indicator of return, as it measures the percentage of people of a specific origin that choose to leave Spain and does not specify how many of them choose to travel to Ecuador (returnees) and how many embark on a new migratory project to a third country (in Europe, for example). However, it does give us some idea of the extent to which the economic crisis is determining their decision to leave.

“ABSENT BIRDS” FOR WHOM RETURN REPRESENTS A RECOVERY OF THEIR PRESENCE AND SOCIAL RECOGNITION

As stated earlier, literature has shown that one of the key features of Ecuadorian migration to Spain was women's role as pioneers in the migratory chains. They were the first to leave their country of origin for Spain, doing so in greater numbers than men (Pedone, 2006) and taking proportionally greater responsibility than men for organising the care of their households by sending remittances (Cortés 2013; Herrera, 2006). The regulatory discourse deployed in transnational households by members that have never migrated or are “active stayers”¹⁰ (Gaibazzi 2010) and in some cases dependent on the migration of a family member (daughter/son, mother/father or sister/brother), allows for the identification of the principal organisers of male and female mobility and the moral standards that shape it. In the case of women, favouring residence and remaining in the place of birth over migration and mobility is a means of preserving the traditional values and principles of those institutions that have been affected by migration, such as the traditional household. It is the patriarch's manner of resisting change. The women who migrated were exposed to media discourse that portrayed their decision to leave the country as a national tragedy, constantly reminding them of the dangers of migration (prostitution and human trafficking) and of their obligation to remain with their children (Cortés, 2017; Pedone, 2006). Yet even more than this, they were exposed to the discourse generated in their own homes by direct family members. These discourses remain active throughout the migratory process, to the extent that

those who left were constantly subjected to calls for their actual physical presence within the framework of the Ecuadorian transnational social space. However, it is most effective within the context of the collective reactivation of return, as occurred following the financial crisis in Spain. From 2009 onwards, the Ecuadorian population was exposed to political discourse from both Ecuador and Spain that urged them to return, either due to the crisis in Spain or portraying Ecuador as a country of opportunities through the Ecuadorian government's ‘Welcome Home’ plan¹¹. Against this new political and media context, return appeared as a desirable option targeting family members abroad, delegitimising in Ecuador the absence of those that left, and in Spain, the presence of those who insisted on remaining despite being unemployed.

The decision to return made by many of the Ecuadorian women that migrated to Spain stems from the desire to meet their obligations as “absent mothers” who had left their family, husband and children behind. In the light of the challenge of Ecuadorian female migrants' patriarchal control, neutralising patriotic voices have emerged, questioning their maternal functions due to the length of time they have been away. For instance, Jacqueline was the first member of her household to migrate, some fifteen years ago, following Ecuador's banking crisis that had a serious impact on the clothing factory she owned. After emigrating, she attempted to regroup her children in Spain, but was only successful in the case of her elder daughter who had become pregnant in Ecuador and travelled to Madrid to be looked after by her mother. Her younger son's application for a visa was rejected five times by the Spanish government, making regrouping impossible. Eventually, her husband travelled to Madrid because Jacqueline was working as a live-in domestic employee and was unable to help her

10 The notion of “active stayers” attempts to counter the notion that those that do not migrate are passive and have merely been left behind to wait. In this sense, Gaibazzi stresses the need to understand the non-migrating household members within a context of family care obligations and responsibilities, handling remittances, taking care of the family lands, home and other properties (Gaibazzi 2010). The aim is to establish a dynamic link between mobility and immobility, focusing on the capacity for agency of both situations.

11 This series of policies favoured return as an obligation Ecuadorians held to both their nation and family, strengthening traditional hierarchies and national and patriarchal logics surrounding mobility and immobility (Cortés, 2016). For more information regarding the impact of Ecuador's return policy, see the text by Vega and Martínez-Buján (2015).

daughter and granddaughter. Her son, aged just 12, was left behind in Ecuador. Jacqueline was the principal breadwinner for the transnational household (the family members in Madrid and her son in Ecuador). However, after being diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, declared unfit for work and awarded a pension, at the age of 63 she decided to return to Ibarra (Ecuador), leaving her husband, daughter and granddaughter in Spain and opting to live with her son, who, as she claimed, had been alone for a long time.

"My return...my son was the main reason why I came back. I wanted to spend at least a few years with him before he got married. One or two years. When he gets married it just won't be the same. I haven't been able to enjoy my son's childhood or youth...all mothers want to spend at least some time with their son; I've hardly been there to see him grow up; when I left he was just a skinny little kid and now, when I came back, I discovered he'd turned into a man". (Jacqueline, returnee, Riobamba, 2015)

Jacqueline's return is directly related to the fact that she left her son behind in Ecuador when he was still very young, as well as the fact that she is no longer able to work in Spain. The mobility structure within which migrants build their lives assigned her offspring with the role of a "forced stayer" albeit against his mother's will. In this sense, stayers' kinship, gender and age are key factors in understanding the mobility of those that migrated, and, as in the case of Jacqueline, chose to return. Jacqueline's son was left in the care of an aunt and uncle, although this arrangement was eventually unable to continue because they began to keep part of the remittances Jacqueline sent back for themselves and did not treat her son well. Her son therefore decided to live alone, looking after himself, and when he became of legal age, he administered the remittances his mother sent back himself. Jacqueline's migration guaranteed her son's maintenance and paid for his university education, and also financed the purchase of a family home. Yet her son's forced immobility has placed a heavy burden on Jacqueline in terms of her transnational obligations and transnational reciprocities as an absent

mother, which have shaped her relationship with her son. As a result, as she is no longer the main breadwinner for the household and is required to fill the role of a "good mother", strengthening the ties between mother and son. This relationship is also being nurtured in the opposite direction, looking ahead to the time when these obligations and reciprocities will be activated from son to mother. Jacqueline has therefore recovered the status and recognition she lost with migration, and is once again a "present mother".

However, the "moral sanction" imposed on migrant women does not only affect mothers in their role as "absent carers", but also unmarried daughters, over whom society has also lost control, as shown in the case of Nelly and her family of five daughters in Riobamba. The two eldest daughters dropped out of school and found work in domestic service, as Nelly ran a bar that was making only just enough money to maintain the family. Shortly after this they moved to Quito, and from there migrated to Madrid, where they knew they could earn more money for doing the same work. Although since she migrated the eldest daughter has sent regular remittances back home, Nelly is critical of her daughters' absence, claiming that "*you could make a good living in Ecuador and there was no need to leave*". In addition, her eldest daughter spends part of her salary instead of saving up, which Nelly strongly disapproves of. Nelly fails to admit the key role played by the elder sisters in enabling their younger siblings to study. By doing so, she reasserts her role as head of the family, as a breadwinner and carer occupying a dominant role in the household, at the expense of her daughters' migratory project, as she considers them to be beyond the control of the household and domestic group. Nelly is determined to return to the original order, although she finds it a struggle:

"How many times have I said to them, come on, you've been working, you've travelled to live new experiences and discover life in another country...she says: "What on earth would I do there, why would I want to go there?" In other words, I imagine she's not planning on coming back" (Nelly, a mother of migrants Riobamba, 2014).

In this case, the female migrants within the family structure are the elder daughters who, despite Spain's economic crisis, have no intention of returning. Nelly, their mother, had never considered emigrating (she is a member of the "voluntary stayers"), although she is heavily dependent on the resources sent back from her daughters abroad in order to pay for the studies of her three remaining daughters. The migration of the eldest daughters allows for improvements to the welfare and outlook of their younger siblings, as well as their social mobility in Ecuador. Yet at the same time it also enables the elder daughters to embark on their life projects without depending on their mother, living outside the strict family controls that befall them in their roles as women, sisters and daughters.

In turn, Martha Cecilia left Turubamba, a district in southern Quito as a single woman, leaving behind her siblings and parents, who ran a business in their area. She settled in Madrid, working in the domestic and catering sectors. Initially, she would send half of her salary back to her mother, who was responsible for handling the money. As a "stayer" she was able to control the savings, which proved crucial in order to secure investment in Ecuador. Part of the money was spent on expanding the family business (phone booths, computers, etc.), whilst the rest was spent on improvements to the family home. Martha Cecilia later acquired business premises, with a view to setting up a business if she eventually returned. In other words, the capital she sent back provided a major boost to the economy of the family members in Ecuador, thanks to the "stayers" that administered the funds. In addition, this also enhanced the social mobility of those that stayed behind in Quito (parents and siblings). However, Martha Cecilia's father takes a negative view of his daughter's migratory project, as it led to a loss of control over her and also of his authority as a father:

"For me, the fact that she left is a bad thing...It may well be positive as far as the money is concerned. But (...) the truth is that she has left and since then she's changed; her outlook on things is not the same. And for me that's terrible (...) So for me the fact that we

have a bigger house, a better business is not so great (...) she doesn't show the same sense of respect she used to; all the respect seems to have disappeared....." (Father of Martha Cecilia, a migrant Turubamba (Quito), 2015)

As in the case of Nelly's daughters, the role of single migrating daughters as breadwinners is disapproved of, and their contribution to driving the family's social mobility becomes invisible. This is because they appear to dispute the role of breadwinner with their father (in the case of Martha Cecilia) or mother (as occurred in Nelly's family). The resulting situation is therefore one of an intergenerational struggle within the family structure, fuelled by national discourse regarding "absent women" and their obligation to be physically present.

Continuing with the case of Martha Cecilia, when her mother became ill with cancer, she decided to return to Quito to look after her and spend time with her during the final months of her life. The reason for return once again links a woman with her role as carer. As with Jacqueline, who wished to spend time with her son before he married, these "absent women" make a "final effort" to use actual physical presence to strengthen the ties between mothers and their children which once again emerges as a hegemonic cultural model. However, following her mother's death, Martha Cecilia is unable to adapt to life in Quito and decides to emigrate again, this time choosing Argentina over Spain. Re-emigration is a form of resistance for those that fail to find an economic solution (when considering returning to Spain, caught in the midst of an economic crisis) or who fail to fit in with the hegemonic roles of men and women in their countries of origin (Morokvasic, 2016).

As can be seen, the mobility of these single "birds in flight" is also frowned upon by those who have not migrated and whose position of power is threatened due to the possible loss of social control that both family and society have traditionally exerted over them. Yet this disapproval not only stems from fatherly authority, but also on occasions is echoed by "stayer" siblings, who question the movements of these "mobile" women when the need arises to care for older members of the family.

This is the case of Patricia, a woman who returned to Ecuador (Riobamba) after initially migrating as a lone single woman to Spain. She spent 12 years in Madrid working in various care posts (looking after the elderly, cleaning houses by the hour and as a hotel chambermaid). Before emigrating to Spain, and from an early age, Patricia had worked selling pulses on a store, travelling to Machala on market days and selling in the local markets in Riobamba. Throughout her 12 years in Spain, she had sent remittances back to her mother, had managed to save up some money, and most importantly, had built a house, which enabled her to return to Riobamba with her husband (who she met in Spain) and son, set up home separately from her mother and also open a (cyber café) business in the same building. Unlike Patricia, her sister Magaly, who also sold pulses, stayed behind in Riobamba looking after her mother's home as well as her own (she married and had five children). Whenever she spoke to Patricia, she would always urge her to return:

"I always said to her: you should come back now because there are only two of us (sisters) and if anything should happen we will both be there..." (Magaly, sister of a returnee, Riobamba, 2014).

The return pattern was favoured in order to meet the obligations that actual physical presence demanded in terms of intergenerational solidarity. The hegemonic maternal model placed responsibility for caring for the mother with the daughters, who have a twofold obligation as both daughters and women. It could be understood that complying with these obligations from a position of absence would be limited to contributing to the financial and material resources necessary for the provision of care. However, this would imply no contribution in terms of time (as a resource) and an actual physical presence. In this case, the "absent mover" can channel their time and efforts into obtaining financial and material resources on the labour market, which would impact on the family's social status, allowing for upward social mobility. The women that stay behind caring for the sick and elderly are unable to invest their time in other productive tasks, and therefore their social status will remain unchanged.

The only way the "stayer" (in this case Magaly) can redress these family tensions is by appealing to Patricia's obligation as a woman (sex-gender) and sister (kinship) to actually physically care for her mother, criticising her absence and demanding she meet her intergenerational care obligations through return. This is partly due to the existence of a hegemonic model of maternity, based on the notion of the nuclear, residential family, which contrasts sharply with the nature of transnational families.

"Birds with broken wings": The stereotyped image of the "male breadwinner" and the crisis of masculinity as a cause of return

In the case of men, the decision to emigrate is not frowned upon in the same way as occurs with women, as migration implies the expectation that they will fulfil their role as "male breadwinners". However, those migrants that leave Ecuador but fail to comply with their obligation to send back remittances or regroup their families are criticised by the "stayers". This is the case of birds that become lost in flight within the transnational space, leaving all financial and care burdens behind them in the country of origin. In this sense, those men that migrate but do not send remittances, do not receive the social criticism that "stayers" levy against women due to their absence. This is particularly true of those that not only meet their financial obligations, but also uphold their emotional commitment to their partners and manage to regroup them:

"I was honest; as soon as I got my papers I brought my wife over... Other men go to get another woman... I brought mine; I thought about my home, my children, in building up something for the future... Thinking about the family rather than just about yourself". (Andrés, returnee, Turubamba (Quito), 2015).

However, for those "birds with broken wings", the economic crisis that affected Spain from 2008 onwards also brought with it a crisis of masculinity for many male migrants who found themselves out of work and unable to guarantee their role as the "male breadwinner". At the same time, they refused to take over the care work while their wives went out to work. In other words, care is not an

interchangeable task within the Ecuadorian hegemonic model of masculinity. The fact that they were reluctant or unable to take over the care of their homes would explain to a large extent the fact that many men opted to return to their country of origin, even though their partners had work in Spain.

Carlos' story is a case in point. His wife was the first family member to leave Ecuador ("the mover"), whilst her husband remained behind in Quito ("the stayer"). Carlos regained his role as head of the household once he had been regrouped by his wife, obtained his papers and found a job as a carpenter, his trade, within the context of Spain's economic boom. However, even though he managed to regroup his children, he failed to regain the same degree of authority he held over them in Ecuador. The male members of the family lost their jobs as a result of the economic crisis, which resulted in an additional loss of respect in comparison with their wives. As a result, many decided to return, this time assuming the role of "movers", whilst the female members of the family continue to work in Spain. The "birds with broken wings" return, not merely due to economic reasons, but also, as in the case of Mexico, the masculinity of these men appears to diminish in the North:

"I'm better off in Ecuador, because you see we believe that the man is the head of the family; it's up to him to provide for the household. Over there in Spain I had a really bad time because I was forced to ask my wife for money and she also became terribly bossy, telling me I had to make the meals, help out with the housework and things like that you know. I'm not used to that sort of thing. No way. I'm better off here. We had other issues too...It's no good for men over there who don't work. I'm much better here." (Carlos, returnee, Quito, 2015)

It is therefore clear that men's decision to return is also related to the need to recover their dominant position within the household, a position that has been undermined by migration. They are seeking to regain their authority and legitimacy before their wives and children. Nevertheless, male return migration cannot be seen as a return to a situation of "presence" or "immobility", as occurs

with women. Instead, it responds to a new form of mobility, framed within the social construction of gender, which favours the flow of men "in search of bread". Whilst society does not disapprove of this attitude, it does however frown upon those that remain immobile when unemployed, and therefore fail to comply with the role society has assigned to them. Family strategies consequently "encourage" them to return in what is a further form of mobility, due to the loss of their status as "male breadwinners". Return can therefore be seen as the relationship between mobility and immobility, as part of a single process within the framework of family strategies. The role played by "movers" and "stayers" changes over time, acquiring symbolic connotations. Whilst for women return means going back to their socially assigned role as a "stayer", for men return is a means of further asserting their role as the principal breadwinners of the household within the framework of migration. In this sense, they return to Ecuador as "movers" in search of the bread lost in Spain. In this case, the women that stay behind, such as Carlos' wife, could be seen as a "stayer" in Spain in relation to her husband, demonstrating that mobility and immobility are relational conditions that depend on each other.

Yet for men, return does not necessarily mean an end to the difficulties in maintaining their status as breadwinners, as many of those that return to Ecuador are unable to find employment and are also questioned for failing to exercise their role as breadwinners, leading to conflict and separation between couples following return: "*Because if a husband fails to contribute anything to the home they are told: You are a hindrance. Why don't you just get out? You don't do anything*". (Discussion group held at a returnees' association. Quito, 2015).

In other cases (such as that of Patricia, discussed above), the couple may return together, which means that the women give up their jobs, thereby underpinning men's role as breadwinners, and further consolidating their position as carers for their families, making their dual role as producers and carers invisible. Patricia's husband was stuck in Madrid without a job, whilst she was employed as a hotel chambermaid. However, although her husband was out of work, Patricia continued to

take responsibility for her son's care. She therefore had to face a twofold obligation as a carer: the demands her sister placed on her to return and look after her mother, as seen above, and her responsibility as a mother to look after her son in the light of the inability to balance employment and the reproductive tasks in the home. As a result, she gave up her job in Madrid and returned to Riobamba with the intention of earning a living from the cyber café (which they had set up in the house she had built using the remittance money, as discussed above), whilst her husband looked for work. Patricia's return project clearly articulates household productive and reproductive strategies and focuses on the balance between family and work life that falls entirely on her. It also highlights the fact that for men, unemployment leads to a crisis of masculinity, which favours return. Return has therefore enabled Patricia to find a life-work balance thanks to her work in the cyber café without altering traditional gender roles and has also enabled her husband to recover the traditional male role of breadwinner.

As we have seen, masculinity crises emerge as a result of issues relating to authority within the family group and the capacity to guarantee men's role as breadwinners before, during and after return. For men, return means access to new jobs following a period of unemployment. Yet for women, on many occasions it may mean having to give up their jobs in Spain. This is possible because many of the jobs women are employed in are considered "more expendable" due to their more precarious nature in comparison with traditionally male-dominated jobs. These differences between men's and women's jobs play a crucial role in household negotiations when considering return. In order to take this step, priority must be given to family care rhetoric, the importance of family unity and ties with Ecuador. This is particularly evident in the gendered-approach to return, due to the Ecuadorian government's failure to implement public policies that guarantee social protection and citizens' welfare. This lack of state social policies contributes to the continued reliance on migrant women and their families to take responsibility for organising transnational care throughout the migratory process (Cortés, 2016; Herrera 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

This article has shown how returning Ecuadorian migration should be analysed within the context of the family life cycle and tensions in the care model rather than focusing exclusively on economic factors associated with Spain's financial crisis. Our research is in line with the gendered and intergenerational approach (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Olwig, 2012; Boccagni y Lagomarsino, 2011, among others). However, we have also looked beyond this approach and the principal contribution of this article is the inclusion of the mobility/immobility axis. In this sense, we have shown how return is framed within family mobility strategies of transnational households in which both "movers" and "stayers" play an active role, mutually redefining both categories.

The article therefore also shows how the gender system organises the geographical mobility of the various members of the households through ideological reasons for who, when, how and why men and women should move (migrate, return and re-migrate). These causes shape the attitudes of the "stayers", towards the fact that the women (separation from the home, abandonment of their children) and men ("the movers") have left or are not present. The stayers' disapproval of Ecuadorian female pioneer migrants is revealed through their questioning of their role as mothers or carers that are present ("movers"). In turn, this explains why some women decide to return in order to recover their lost position and status and to care for their families after years of absence. On the other hand, the crisis of masculinity that many male Ecuadorian migrants experience following redundancy in Spain and the consequent loss of their role as the breadwinner mean that many choose to return in an attempt to regain this lost role, once again opting for mobility ("movers"). Some choose to do so alone, leaving their wives behind to continue with their jobs in Spain. Others choose to take their wives with them, which means that these women give up their job and return with their husbands, thereby supporting the recovery of traditional social roles (whereby the husband looks for work in Ecuador to recover his role as breadwinner and the wife once again becomes the carer in situ). Whilst

for women return can often be considered as moving back into their position as a “stayer”, in the case of men it can be seen as a new form of mobility, driven by unemployment and “in search of bread”. Return can therefore not only be seen as a return journey, but rather as a continuum of mobilities situated within the mobility strategies of transnational households whereby mobility and immobility must be seen as part of a single process framed by gender ideologies and morality regarding the roles of men and women, yet which is equally conditioned by the intergenerational strategies applied to the transnational space.

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