

Salvadoran Transnational Families, Distance and Eldercare: Understanding Transnational Care Practices in Australia and Belgium

15

Laura Merla

Studies of intergenerational solidarity and family care tend to assume that caregiving requires geographical proximity (Morgan 1975; Joseph und Hallman 1998). This assumption has been challenged by recent research on transnational families that show that migrants and their kin exchange care across borders and that migration does not automatically jeopardize family solidarity (Baldassar et al. 2007; Baldassar 2007; Finch 1989; Zontini und Reynolds 2007; Al-Ali 2002; Izuahara und Shibata 2002; Merla und Baldassar 2010).

Recognition of the maintenance of family solidarity in migrant families is tightly related to a definition of care that goes beyond the provision of the "hands-on" care that includes activities such as feeding, washing or dressing a dependent family member, to include other forms of support. In her study of elder care in transnational settings, Zechner (2008) builds on the concept of care developed by Fisher und Tronto (1990) that includes four dimensions: "caring about", "taking care of", "care-giving" and "care-receiving". The first two dimensions do not necessarily involve actions: they respectively refer to "an orientation to observe what parts of the world requires maintenance and repairs", and "the responsibility for initiating and maintaining caring activities" (Zechner 2008, S. 33). Care-giving involves the concrete care work, and care-receiving entails the response of the person who needs or receives care. This four-dimensional description makes visible the mental and emotional work that is involved in caring (Zechner 2008).

L. Merla (✉)

Catholic University of Louvain (UCL), Belgium
e-mail: laura.merla@uclouvain.be

T. Geisen et al. (Hrsg.), *Migration, Familie und soziale Lage*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-94127-1_15,

© VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften | Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2013

In their landmark study of transnational care-giving in the Australian context, Baldassar et al. (2007) apply another multi-dimensional conceptualisation of care to transnational relationships, drawing on Finch and Mason's model (Finch and Mason 1993). They identify six dimensions of care: financial support, practical support (such as the exchange of advice), emotional support that aims to improve someone's psychological well-being, personal support or "hands-on" care and accommodation. This conceptualization also acknowledges the emotional work involved in caring, and interestingly reconsiders the role and meaning of migrants' remittances as forms of care (Baldassar 2010). It also introduces a distinction between virtual caring practices, that is, financial, practical and emotional support, exchanged across borders via communication technologies, and proximate caring practices that occur during visits. The model focuses on actual practices and does not explicitly mention the mental work that is involved in caring. But "caring about" can be a significant dimension of moral and emotional support, which although largely invisible and non-practical, may be the only form of care that can be exchanged in transnational settings. In addition, knowing that distant kin "care about" them and can be called in case of emergency can be an important source of emotional support for family members (Baldassar et al. 2007).

In this chapter, I use Baldassar et al.'s conceptualization of transnational care-giving to analyze the transnational care practices of Salvadoran migrants living in Belgium and Australia, who care for their ageing parents across borders. The focus is on virtual and proximate care-giving practices, without denying the importance of mental dimensions associated with care work. After discussing the research methodology and the Salvadoran context, I present four case studies in which migrants' contributions to their parents' well-being are detailed. I analyze the factors that facilitate or impinge Salvadoran migrants' capability to care for their parents from a distance and discuss the influence of the context of receiving countries on transnational care-giving.

Research Methodology and the El Salvador Context

The data for this paper is drawn from comparative research on the transnational care practices of Latin American migrants in Australia and Europe.¹ The study focuses on migrants who occupy a lowly qualified and/or lowly remunerated position

¹ This research was financed by the EC 6th Framework Programme, Marie Curie Outgoing International Fellowship (MOIF-CT-2006-039076 Transnational care). The chapter reflects only the author's views. The European Community is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

in Australia or Europe despite coming from a mix of working class and professional backgrounds in their homeland. Data collection in Australia and Belgium comprised 44 life-history interviews in the participant's native language and participant observation with Salvadoran migrants living in Perth, Western Australia, and Brussels, Belgium (19 men and 25 women). The methods included observing people's lifestyles, the display of photographs of their distant kin, and other signs and symbols of transnational family relations in their homes, and participation to the activities of Latin American social clubs and churches. Key informants such as community leaders and social workers were also interviewed. Data were analyzed using the Nvivo software.

The majority of the migrants in Australia had arrived there under the United Nations refugee programme in the 1980s and the 1990s. Between 1982 and 1993, nearly 10,000 Salvadoran refugees arrived in Australia, the majority coming between 1988 and 1992 (Santos 2006, S. 80). According to the Western Australia Community Profile 2001 Census, 1,200 Salvadorans live in Western Australia, (Office of Multicultural Interests 2005, S. 8). In contrast, the Belgian sample is composed of a majority of migrants who travelled to the country during the last decade and settled irregularly. Salvadoran migration to Belgium is a recent, chain migration. According to the Salvadoran Embassy, 600 Salvadorans currently live in Belgium.

El Salvador is a small, densely populated country, with a current population of approximately 6 million people. During the 1980s the country was ravaged by a civil war that opposed guerrilla groups and the military government. The conflict generated massive migration within the region and towards the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada, Australia, Italy and Sweden. Approximately 1 million people (or 25 % of the population) fled the country (Santos 2006), and migration did not end with the signing of Peace Accords in 1992. According to estimates from the Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador, 25,000 Salvadorans leave the country every year, motivated by financial and/or security reasons. El Salvador ranks as one of the most dangerous countries in the world, with particularly high murder rates (Martínez Franzoni 2008), and more than 30 % of the population lives below the poverty line (CIA 2009). Migration and remittances are a major strategy for family survival. More than 22 % of families receive remittances, which represent 17 % of the country's GDP (UNDP estimates).

El Salvador's welfare system has been classified as an informal-familialistic regime where the state is absent and extended families carry the full burden of care duties and play the roles of production units and social protection networks (Martínez Franzoni 2008). Only one-fifth of the population has access to state-funded health care services (Martínez Franzoni 2008) and one in two Salvadorans aged 60 and over rely entirely on family and community support (Guzmán 2002, S. 14).

The Different Forms of Caregiving in Transnational Salvadoran Families – Case Studies

Migration and Settlement in Australia and Belgium

Nacho and Aurora both left El Salvador in 1989 under a political refugee program and migrated to Perth with their partners and children.² They had each enjoyed a good socio-economic situation in El Salvador. Nacho was an anaesthesiologist in a children's hospital, while Aurora was a doctor in a military hospital. Nacho's wife managed a small coffee shop and Aurora's husband Juan was an agronomist engineer. Both families had bought their own houses in the capital, San Salvador.

For both, the decision to leave El Salvador was directly related to security: their lives were threatened because of their political activities. On arrival in Perth, the two families benefited from the financial and practical support of the Australian government, under the refugee program. This support included, among other things, a subsidized apartment, unemployment benefits and free English lessons. They were also advised that, in order to have their qualifications recognized by the Australian education system, they had to pass English tests and go back to university and redo medical studies. Apart from Aurora, none had a good command of English. Juan and Nacho renounced their professions and took cleaning jobs, while Nacho's wife stayed at home to care for their four children. Later she took a cleaning job and her husband became the pastor of a Spanish-speaking evangelical church, while still working as a cleaner. Aurora joined a group of 120 overseas doctors who petitioned the Australian medical association for authorization to complete only the final year of medical studies, but their request was rejected. Aurora stayed at home, caring for her 3-year-old daughter and later took a casual job caring for aged persons – cleaning their houses, preparing meals and bathing them.

Both families suffered from their loss of social and economic status. As Aurora notes, moving to Australia meant losing everything: her language, her social status, her profession, her family, her friends. Aurora did not want to worry her relatives, so she kept her problems secret from them. Aurora and Nacho also felt bad about leaving their ill mothers behind.

Pablo and Natalia migrated to Belgium 10 years ago for economic reasons. They both come from poor families. In El Salvador, Natalia was a lone mother who struggled to support her three children and her mother Josefina with a receptionist job. Her eldest sister had migrated to the United States and regularly sent them remittances, and her three half-brothers were still in El Salvador. Pablo was single

He lived with his mother and had no children when he migrated. He occasionally worked in the building sector.

Pablo and Natalia were respectively invited by an uncle and an aunt to migrate to Belgium in the early 2000s. They entered the country as tourists and settled in the country illegally. Natalia travelled alone, leaving her three children in the care of Josefina. In Belgium the migrants received support from their relatives and Latin American friends who helped them find jobs and provided initial accommodation. They both took low-paid, undeclared cleaning jobs in private households.

Two years after migrating Natalia decided to move back to El Salvador. But when she realized how difficult it would be to make a living, she travelled back to Belgium with the intention of saving money to bring her children to her host country. Over the years she managed to finance the trip for her three children and two of her brothers, who are both irregular migrants and occasionally work in the building sector.

Virtual Care-Giving: Remittances, Emotional and Practical Support

When they lived in El Salvador, Nacho, Aurora, Pablo and Natalia provided various degrees of financial, emotional, practical and personal care to their parents, and migration has not prevented them from contributing to the provision of transnational elder family care, in the form of regular and emergency remittances, and practical and emotional support.

Like the majority of Salvadoran elderly people, the migrants' parents receive no government financial or practical support, except for Nacho's mother who has a small pension that only partially covers her expenses. All the parents rely almost entirely on their children's economic and practical help. These come in the form of regular and emergency remittances, and exchange of information on a variety of subjects that include best care-giving options and medical treatments. If the study and recognition of migrants' participation in transnational family care is relatively new (Merla und Baldassar 2010), financial support in the form of remittances constitutes a classic theme in the migration literature, but the link between moral and financial support is rarely mentioned. And yet, all forms of support can be seen as simultaneous expressions of emotional and moral caring (Baldassar 2010; Attias-Donfut et al. 2002). Together with sending remittances, keeping in regular contact and providing parents with practical support during telephone conversations (and internet communication in Nacho's case) represent the three major ways in which our four migrants contribute to their parents' emotional wellbeing. The frequency

² Nacho and Aurora migrated separately and do not know each other.

of communication is influenced by the availability and affordability of communication technologies, and by the history and quality of parent-child relationships.

Nacho is very close to his mother, who suffers from diabetes and can hardly walk. His father died when he was a child, and his mother remarried and had another son. He had a difficult relationship with his mother when he was a teenager but they became very close when they both embraced Christianity – he was 17 at the time. He helped her financially and continued to help her after he got married, and shared all his worries with her. During the first year of his migration, Nacho called his mother three times a week from a public telephone. Later he bought a computer for his children, and they taught him how to use the internet to communicate with his mother, who also has an internet connection at home. They chat every day on MSN and Nacho still calls his mother on the phone, three times a month, because he likes to hear her voice. He is also in regular touch with his brother who keeps him informed of their mother's situation.

Natalia also has a strong, close relationship with her mother. When her children lived in El Salvador she used to call her several times a week, not only to hear about her children but also because she missed her mother and enjoyed talking to her. When her children moved to Belgium she continued to call her mother every weekend and in cases of emergency.

Pablo and Aurora have more ambiguous relationships with their mothers. Pablo never knew his father. He is an only child, and has both a close and distant relationship with his mother Carmen whom he describes as a tough person. He calls her every fortnight from a telephone centre, and sends her presents and photos when friends travel to El Salvador – the Salvadoran post does not deliver mail in his mother's neighbourhood. He is particularly concerned about his mother's health: she had a cancer before he left, and he fears she might fall sick again. So when she feels sad or unwell, he calls her more often and provides her with emotional support.

Aurora's telephone conversations with her late mother were less frequent and took place every 3 months and on special occasions such as birthdays. She did not enjoy hearing her mother complain about her departure and accusing her of abandoning her. When she left El Salvador, Aurora still had her two parents. During the week, her mother, Eugenia, lived in the country-side with one of her granddaughters and her father, Javier, lived with their elder daughter on a coffee plantation. The two parents and their ten children used to gather each weekend at Eugenia's house. Eugenia had been suffering from diabetes for 40 years, and needed constant care. She had only one kidney and suffered from heart disease. The family had hired a live-in carer but the two did not get on well, so Eugenia's granddaughter moved in to care for her. Eugenia's eldest son, who enjoyed a good economic position, took on the responsibility of his mother's financial needs, but Aurora had always felt

morally obliged to care for her mother because of her profession – and her mother expected her to do so. This partly explains why Eugenia was so upset when Aurora left the country, and also why Aurora continued to care for her mother after she left the country.

Proximate Care-Giving: Visits

The frequency of visits home is very low in the whole sample, and the four cases on which this paper focuses are no exception. So far Nacho has not been able to visit his mother back home. When she had an accident 3 years ago, he wanted to visit her but she convinced him that it would be more useful to use that money to cover her medical expenses.

Aurora travelled back home with her husband and children 6 years after leaving her home country, using money she had put aside when she migrated in order to cover the costs of an eventual trip back home. Her visit was motivated by the feeling that it would be her last chance to see her mother alive. She stayed in El Salvador for a month, spending all her time with her mother, caring for her at home and taking her to the doctor. She did not see much of the rest of her family as she would only go to family events that her mother was able to attend. The old woman died a year after her daughter's visit. Aurora could not afford to attend the funeral.

Natalia has not visited her mother in El Salvador since her failed attempt to move back home, and Pablo has never been able to afford a visit back home. This is not only because the cost is prohibitive, but also because they fear having their passports confiscated at the border if an officer discovers that they do not have a residency permit. A few months before the interview they were both granted a 5-year visa, but neither of them considered travelling back home in the near future. They would rather their mothers move permanently to Belgium, which they think could be easier to achieve with their new status.

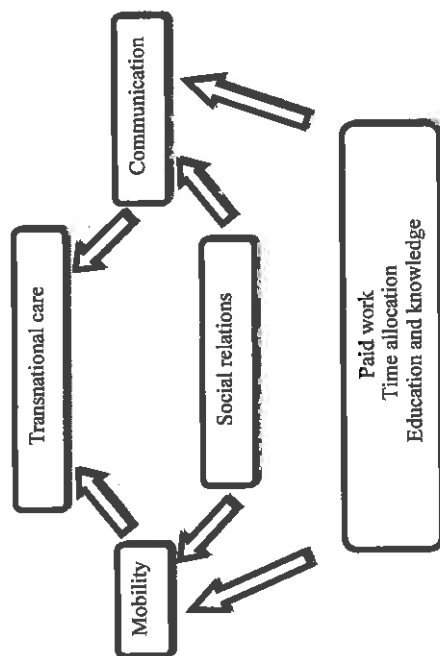
In the Australian case, visits from elderly parents are also exceptional. Neither Nacho nor Aurora has been able to invite their mother to visit them. In contrast, extended visits to Belgium are quite common in this sample. Natalia's mother visited twice. She flew to Belgium with her grandchildren and stayed for 1 month, and she came back a year ago with the initial intention of spending 3 months with her family. Her visit was also motivated by her hope to see her American daughter who was planning to visit the family in Belgium. Her children convinced her to extend her stay, but at the time of the interview she was hoping to fly back to El Salvador soon. Pablo's mother also visited him a couple of years ago. Her trip was financed by her Belgium-based brother. She spent a month in Belgium but was working 11 h a

day and did not see her much. Both Pablo and Natalia hope that their mothers will move to Belgium permanently, but the two old ladies would prefer to visit regularly rather than to move permanently.

Understanding the relations between national context and transnational care-giving practices

The Transnational Care-Giving Capability Framework

Together with Baldassar I have conceptualized transnational care-giving as practices that are influenced by a set of capabilities that includes, but is not limited to, mobility, communication, social relations, time-allocation, education and knowledge and paid work (Merla und Baldassar 2011), a series of factors that are interconnected and play at different levels (Merla forthcoming).³



The first level comprises mobility and communication. These are transnational care-giving practices themselves, and refer to the ability to travel back home when necessary and host parents, to communicate across distance (which involves access to communication technologies at reasonable rates) and to send material items. Mobility and communication both involve the physical ability to communicate and travel.

The third level comprises time-allocation, education and knowledge, and paid work, which influence mobility and communication (Merla forthcoming). "Time-allocation" refers to having time to exchange care, depending on time differences, other obligations including childcare and paid work, and access to leave. This can in turn influence a migrant's capacity to travel back home. "Education and knowledge" includes having the possibility to learn to use communication technologies, to learn the local language and having one's qualifications recognized, while "paid work" refers to access to a satisfying employment position and, if unemployed, to unemployment benefits. Lack of access to technologies or unpaid work can limit a migrant's capacity to communicate with their relatives and to invest funds in care-giving.

Social relations are located at an intermediary level. I have shown elsewhere that social relations, that is, having access to a social network of mutual support in the home and/or host country, such as transnational family networks, play a major role in helping Salvadoran migrants overcome obstacles to family solidarity, such as insufficient access to paid work and education, or difficulties getting time off from work (Merla 2011, forthcoming). As the next two sections show, institutional contexts, and formal and informal policies in particular, play a key role in migrants' access to and use of these transnational care-giving related capabilities.

Why Migrants Prioritize Virtual Care Over Proximate Care

In the four case studies presented here, migrants' mobility is extremely limited – a common feature of the whole sample. Nacho and Pablo never visited their parents back home, and Aurora and Natalia only visited them once. This restricted mobility is directly related to restricted access to paid work, education and knowledge, and time-allocation in the host country.

In the Australian case, the migrants were confronted with downward social mobility. For them, like for many of their compatriots, "the need to learn the English language and to have their qualifications recognised in Australia proved insurmountable" (Santos 2006, S. 83). This resulted in being downgraded to low-qualified, low-paid jobs in the cleaning and caring sectors, and also led Aurora and Nacho's wife postponing their return to the labour market in order instead to look after their young children and help them adapt to their new environment, while their husbands took unskilled work. This rapid acceptance of professional downgrading is also related to a reluctance to become dependent on social benefits (also noted by Santos 2006). Studies of migrants' integration into the Australian labour market identify a high level of unemployment in the refugee population, (Julian

³ This diagram comes from Merla (forthcoming).

et al. 1997; Santos 2006; Cobb-Clark 2000). Working refugees are concentrated in low-skills, low-paid employment niches in the secondary labour market – domestic and industrial cleaning, care of the aged, transport, and security and building industries (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006). Several factors have been identified to explain a labour market segregation that affects a majority of refugees, including the highly skilled: lack of human capital (language), structural marginalization and disadvantage, racism and discrimination, and “ethnic-path” integration in the labour market (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006, S. 222).

In the Belgian case, irregular migrants like Pablo and Natalia had little choice but to accept low-paid and time-demanding jobs, and struggled to improve their situation after gaining a temporary visa. Pablo's employment situation is exceptional in the Salvadoran community, where men usually struggle to find casual and precarious employment in the building sector. As Natalia's brothers note, it is more difficult for men to find undeclared jobs in Belgium than women, because the demand for domestic work is higher – and controls are less frequent – than in the building sector, and it is difficult for men to get a job in the “female” caring sector. Studies of the labour market insertion of ethnic minorities in Belgium have shown that foreign-born workers are concentrated in three sectors: services to business such as cleaning and temporary employment, building (predominantly men) and health and domestic care (predominantly women) (Martens und Verhoeven 2006). Martens and Verhoeven point to the ethno-stratification of the Belgian labour market, where foreign-born workers, and non-Europeans in particular, have lower opportunities for good employment conditions and access to certain types of professions and sectors (Martens und Verhoeven 2006). Since the late 1990s there has been an increase in the demand for migrant workers in highly flexible, illegal and low-paid jobs in the construction industry, catering and domestic services (Caestecker 2006; Bribosia und Rea 2002). As Queirolo Palmas und Ambrosini (2008) note, the recent migration flow of Latin-American women in Europe is inserted in a process of globalization of traditional feminine tasks, a phenomenon known as “global care chains” (Hochschild 2002). Latin-American female migrants rapidly find jobs in the caring and domestic sectors, whereas men struggle to find stable employment (Queirolo Palmas und Ambrosini 2008).

In the two host countries, migrants also struggle to get time off for travel. The precariousness of short-term employment contracts and irregular employment deprive them of certain leave options, such as long-service leave in Australia (3 months paid leave accessible to employees with 10 years of continuous service) and time-credit in Belgium (1 year paid leave accessible to employees after working at least 12 months for the same employer) in Belgium. In Australia, most working migrants accumulate their annual paid vacations and travel once they have saved

enough time to make a 1 or 2 month trip back home, an option that is not available in Belgium.

As I have shown elsewhere (Merla forthcoming), the decision to travel is often subject to family negotiations where different aspects are weighed, such as the ageing parents' current need of financial support; the availability of funds to pay for the travel; the time that the candidate can spend away from his employment and household members, including availability of paid leave; the partner's capacity to look after himself and/or children in the absence of the travelling partner. As Queirolo Palmas und Ambrosini (2008) explain, it is particularly difficult for domestic workers who bring their children to Europe to balance their child-rearing and working obligations. These tensions also reduce the possibility for them to make visits for elderly care purposes. Financial and practical limitations lead these migrants to prioritize remittances and communication over travel.

Virtual Care and Institutional Contexts

Nacho, Aurora, Pablo and Natalia's capacity to communicate with their parents largely depends on the affordability and availability of communication technologies in their home and host countries, including telephone lines and internet connections. According to the “ICT at a glance” World Bank statistics, in 2008, there were only 17.6 telephone lines, 10.6 internet users, and 5.8 personal computers per 100 people in El Salvador.⁴ Mobile phones were more widespread, with 113.3 mobile cellular connections per 100 people (compared with 12.5 in 2000). Cheap international telephone cards are also limited. As a consequence, it is more difficult and costly for people in El Salvador to communicate with their distant kin than the reverse, which means that communication between El Salvador and Australia or Belgium generally goes one way, except in cases of emergency.

The impact of long-distance mothering on communication between Natalia and her mother Josefina tells us an interesting story about the relationship between elderly care and childcare. Natalia used to call her mother three or four times a week when her children lived with Josefina, but the frequency of communication decreased to weekly conversations once the children moved to Belgium. Remittances also diminished substantially. This could be interpreted as a sign of the prioritization of childcare over elderly care, but Natalia gives a more nuanced explanation. She concedes that her calls and remittances were largely motivated by her desire to look after her children from a distance, which required frequent conversations with her

⁴ Accessible on the World Bank website <http://www.worldbank.org/> as at 1 Feb. 2011.

mother about her children's needs and education. But she insists that these calls were also occasions to exchange care with her mother, to receive and provide her emotional and practical support. Once her children joined her in Belgium, Natalia's capacity to invest time and money into elderly care diminished because of the high cost of raising children in Belgium and the difficulty of combining paid work, proximate childcare and long-distance elderly care.

The use of the internet for communication is limited among participants in this study, not only because of a lack of training and infrastructure in the home country, but also because of a lack of familiarity with the technology. Benítez's (2006) study of the digital divide among diasporic or migrant communities shows that it implies "not only disparities of income level, gender, ethnicity, education, language, generation and geographical location, but also the social distribution of knowledge, power and network capacity in the information society". Families whose members have high social, cultural and economic capital can access a wider range of communication technologies and are more likely to have the financial and cultural resources to be able to use them.

Cultural capital also impacts on mobility, as lack of proficiency in English may make travel difficult and risky. In the Belgian cases, the migrants' restricted mobility is partly compensated by the mobility of elderly parents. Extended visits from ageing mothers in particular are more common in the Salvadoran community in Belgium than in Australia. Visa regulations and migration policies play a decisive role in this regard.

If they want to visit Australia, El Salvador citizens require both costly visas and health insurance, which are more expensive for elderly people. Australia considers potential visitors from Latin America as "high-risk applicants", that is, visitors who are likely to overstay their temporary visa or "contrary to their stated intention, apply for a permanent visa once they are in Australia" (Burn und Reich 2005, S. 653). These people "must give evidence of a higher level of genuineness than other applicants" (Baldassar et al. 2007, S. 186). Alternatively, they can apply as "sponsored" family members, which requires that an Australian resident provide a refundable security bond (Baldassar et al. 2007). It is therefore difficult, time-consuming and costly for Salvadoran elderly parents to visit. It is also extremely difficult for these persons to migrate to Australia via the family reunion program. Applicants must demonstrate that "they are single, usually live in the household of the primary applicant and are financially dependent upon that applicant" (Baldassar et al. 2007, S. 189). They must also pass a "balance of family" test, that is, show that they have more children living in Australia than outside of the country. The financial obligations of the sponsors are also very high as they must reimburse any social security

payments made to successful candidates during the first 2 years of their migration. As Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding note, restrictions to parents' migration to Australia mainly arise from the underlying assumption that elderly people are a "burden" on welfare. (Baldassar et al. 2007, S. 191).

A similar assumption can be traced in the Belgian family reunification scheme. Visitors who wish to stay in Belgium for more than 90 days in order to visit their relatives can apply to this scheme. They must prove that they are dependent on the person with whom they wish to reside, and since 2006 and 2007, they must also prove that their sponsors can accommodate them, have sufficient means of subsistence "to ensure that they do not become dependent on the Belgian welfare system" (Service public fédéral Affaires étrangères 2011) and have taken up health care insurance.

In contrast, Belgium has not placed any restrictions on visits from El Salvador citizens, regardless of their age, provided that they stay in Belgium for a maximum of 90 days. Salvadoran visitors do not need to apply for a visa, but they can be asked to present a hotel reservation, a return ticket and or a proof that they have sufficient funds to cover their visit (such as cash or a credit card). Upon arrival they must also report to the local authorities where they are going to reside. This relative freedom compared to the Australian case explains why elderly parents visits are more common in the Belgian sample. Josefina's and Pablo's mother entered Belgium as tourists, with the initial intention of staying for less than 90 days. Those who stay for longer periods and who cannot apply for family reunification because their child is an irregular migrant become irregular migrants themselves. But having a child with a valid residency permit does not automatically lead to family reunification applications. As Foblets et al. (2004) note, foreigners find family reunification procedures complex and discouraging (see also Rea 2006). If family reunification represents the main source of migration in Belgium, family members other than spouses and children represent only a minor proportion of beneficiaries (Lodewyckx cf: https://hiva.kuleuven.be/resources/pdf/publicaties/R1379b_RegroupermentFamilialMylthe.pdf et al. 2011). In their study of a sample of 9,298 beneficiaries of family reunification in Belgium between 2000 and 2005, Lodewyckx et al. found that 77 % were aged between 20 and 39 years, and only 4 % were older than 55 (Lodewyckx et al. 2011, S. 30, 32). Less than 1 % was reunited with a daughter or son (including in-laws) (ibid., S. 37). Like many other elderly Salvadoran visitors, Josefina does not want to settle in Belgium, but would rather prefer to return to El Salvador and visit her children regularly. This desire to grow old and die in the home country can be partly related to the difficulties elderly migrants have in adapting to a new cultural environment and avoiding social isolation (also reported by Murri 2006).

Social Networks

The transnational care-giving framework highlights the specific role that social relations can play in compensating for difficulties gaining paid employment, education, knowledge and time, and negotiating other obstacles that directly affect mobility and communication. Participants from both Belgian and Australian samples benefit from the support and assistance of their extended families, which can take several forms. Family members help compensate for financial and material obstacles to communication by putting their own telephone lines, computers and internet connections at the service of transnational care-giving, and by relaying information between the elders and their distant children (Merla forthcoming, 2011). Kin living in El Salvador also assist illiterate parents in the exchange of letters, postcards and emails with their distant children. Family can also help solve problems generated by visa regulations restricting the parents' or children's opportunities of visiting, by inviting both parents and distant sibling to meet in their house in a third country. Josefina's visit to Belgium was financed by her daughter Gloria, who migrated without papers to the US in the 1990s, had recently applied for a permanent visa and thought it would be easier to visit her relatives in Belgium than to travel to El Salvador or invite them to the US. Pablo's mother would not have been able to visit him in Belgium if her Belgium-based brother had not paid for her travel and accommodated her during her stay. Family members can also act on behalf of their absent kin by providing them with hands-on care when they need it (as Nacho's brother did on several occasions), or ensuring their virtual presence at family events such as funerals.

Local communities are another important source of support for transnational care-givers. Salvadorans constitute a small community in both Western Australia and Belgium. They are split into several subgroups, organized around Spanish-speaking churches and are mixed with Latin American migrants from all origins. Salvadoran associations were created in both countries, but ceased activity after a few years. Solidarity is not formally organized within these groups: members develop individual friendships that can be mobilized in times of crisis to help a migrant finance an emergency trip back home, or that can facilitate the exchange of remittances and gifts between migrants and their kin.

Salvadorans in Perth did not specifically seek contact with co-nationals, something that can be explained by a general sense of distrust within the Salvadoran community, linked to traumatic experiences during the civil war (Allotey 1999; Santos 2006). As a consequence, migrants could only rely on a limited number of people for information about cheap telephone options or direct money transfers to their relatives. This was not the case in Belgium, where Salvadorans were keen to

develop and maintain contact with other Salvadorans. The fact that most migrants moved to Belgium with the assistance of a relative or friend who was already living in the country may partly explain why this sense of community is so strong. Natalia assisted several migrant families, providing them with initial accommodation and helping them to find work. Members of the network that she recreated in Belgium exchange useful tips on cheap communication, and those who travel back home (migrants or elderly parents on a visit) regularly deliver gifts and remittances to their friends' relatives. This is much less common in the Australian case, where the majority of remittances are sent home via Western Union.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at better understanding the transnational care-giving practices of Salvadoran transnational families and how these practices are shaped by the context of two host societies, Australia and Belgium. In both countries, the families who participated in this study had to overcome a series of barriers to transnational family solidarity that did not prevent them from caring for their ageing parents but led them to focus on virtual forms of support. Discrimination, social exclusion and confinement to low-paid and low-skilled work limit the financial and material resources that these migrants can invest in care-giving across borders. An official lack of recognition of migrants' transnational family responsibilities and obligations is also evident in both cases. It is reflected in particular in family reunification schemes that make aged migration difficult, based as they are on the assumption that elderly people are a potential burden for host societies, and in policies that do not always match the specific needs of transnational families and from which a majority of migrants working in the secondary labour market are excluded.

The higher frequency of visits from elderly parents to Belgium than Australia represents one of the major differences between the two samples. The absence of visa requirements for Salvadoran short-term visitors makes the circulation of ageing parents possible. Their presence in Belgium and the care that is both received from and provided to adult children contradicts the idea that elderly people are the passive recipients of care, and reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the dynamic character of family solidarity and its variation over the life-course and the family-cycle (Bonvalet und Ogg 2006). In cases where migrant women were separated from their children during the first years of settlement in Belgium, elderly care is also interpreted as a gift in exchange for the support received from grandmothers, who not only care for their grandchildren but also provide financial,

emotional and practical support to their daughters by supporting their migration project (Merla 2011).

In order to highlight the contribution of ageing parents to their children's well-being, subsequent research should investigate further the evolution of transnational care-giving over the life-course and family-cycle, the circulation of care within and across the generations, and the active role that ageing parents play in family solidarity.

References

- Al-Ali, N. (2002). Loss of status or new opportunities? Gender relations and transnational ties among Bosnian refugees. In D. Bryceson & U. Vuorela (Hrsg.), *The transnational family: New European frontiers and global networks* (S. 83–102). New York: Berg.
- Allotey, P. (1999). Travelling with "excess baggage": Health problems of refugee women in Western Australia. *Women & Health*, 28(1), 63–81.
- Attias-Donfut, C., Lapierre, N., & Segalen, M. (2002). *Le nouvel esprit de famille*. Paris: Editions Odile Jacob.
- Baldassar, L., Baldock, C., & Wilding, R. (2007). *Families caring across borders: Migration, ageing and transnational caregiving*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baldassar, L. (2007). Transnational families and aged care: The mobility of care and the migrancy of ageing. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(2), 275–297.
- Baldassar, L. (2010). Ce "sentiment de culpabilité": Réflexion sur la relation entre émotions et motivation dans les migrations et le soin transnational. *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, 41(1), 15–38.
- Benavides, B. M., Ortiz, X., Silva, C. M., & Vega, L. (2004). Pueden las remesas comprar el futuro? Estudio realizado en el Cantón San José La Labor, Municipio de San Sebastián, El Salvador. In G. Lathrop & J. P. Pérez Sainz (Hrsg.), *Desarrollo económico local en Centroamérica. Estudios de comunidades globalizadas* (S. 139–180). San José (Costa Rica): Flacso.
- Benítez, J. (2006). Transnational dimensions of the digital divide among Salvadoran immigrants in the Washington DC metropolitan area. *Global Networks*, 6(2), 181–199.
- Bonvalet, C., & Ogg, J. (2006). Place de l'entraide dans les recherches sur la famille. In C. Bonvalet & Ogg, J. (Hrsg.), *Enquêtes sur l'entraide familiale en Europe. Bilan de 9 collectes* (S. 25–52). Paris: Editions de l'INED.
- Bribosia, E., & Rea, A. (2002). Le débat sur les nouvelles migrations en Belgique à la lumière des politiques migratoires récentes. In E. Bribosia & A. Rea (Hrsg.), *Les nouvelles migrations. Un enjeu européen* (S. 233–260). Bruxelles: Complexe.
- Burn, J., & Reich, S. (2005). *The immigration kit: A practical guide to Australia's immigration law*. Sydney: Federation Press.
- Caestecker, F. (2006). Histoire de la migration aux XIX et XX siècles (1830–2000). In B. Khader, B. M. Martiniello, A. Rea, & C. Timmermans (Hrsg.), *Penser l'immigration et l'intégration autrement. Une initiative belge inter-universitaire* (S. 13–28). Bruxelles: Bruylant Central Intelligence Agency. (2009). *The world factbook 2010*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing Books.
- Cobb-Clark, D. (2000). Do selection criteria make a difference? Visa category and the labour market status of immigrants to Australia. *The Economic Record*, 76(232), 15–31.
- Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment niches for recent refugees: Segmented labour market in the twenty-first century Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19(2), 203–229.
- Fisher, B., and Tronto, J. 1990. "Toward a feminist theory of caring." In E.K. Abel and M. Nelson (Eds), *Circles of care* (35–62). Albany: State University New York Press.
- Finch, J. (1989). *Family obligations and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Finch, J., & Mason, J. (1993). *Negotiating family responsibilities*. London: Routledge.
- Foblets, M.-C., Martiniello, M., Parmentier, S., Vervaeke, G., Djait, B., & Kagné, N. (2004). *Wat denken personen van vreemde origine over recht en gerecht in België? Les populations d'origine immigrée face au droit en Belgique*. Gent-Bruxelles: Academia Press et Politique scientifique fédérale.
- Guzmán, J. (2002). *Envejecimiento y desarrollo en América Latina y el Caribe*. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.
- Hochschild, A. (2002). Love and gold. In B. Ehrenreich & A. R. Hochschild (Hrsg.), *Global woman: Nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy* (S. 15–30). New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Izuhara, M., & Shibata, H. (2002). Breaking the generational contract? Japanese migration and old-age care in Britain. In D. Bryceson & U. Vuorela (Hrsg.), *The transnational family: New European frontiers and global networks* (S. 155–172). New York: Berg.
- Joseph, A., & Hallman, B. (1998). Over the hill and far away: Distance as a barrier to the provision of assistance to elderly relatives. *Social Science and Medicine*, 46(6), 631–639.
- Julian, R., Franklin, A., & Felmingham B. (1997). *Home from home: Refugees in Tasmania*. Canberra: DIMA.
- Lodewyckx, I., Timmermans, C., & Wets, J. (2011). *Le regroupement familial en Belgique: les chiffres derrière le mythe*. Bruxelles: Fondation roi Baudouin.
- Martens, A., & Verhoeven, H. (2006). Les minorités ethniques sur le marché de l'emploi en Belgique. In B. Khader, M. Martiniello, A. Rea, & C. Timmermans (Hrsg.), *Penser l'immigration et l'intégration autrement. Une initiative belge inter-universitaire* (S. 271–298), Bruxelles: Bruylant.
- Martínez Franzoni, J. (2008). *Domesticar la incertidumbre en América Latina. Mercado laboral, política social y familias*. San José: Universidad de Costa Rica.
- Merla, L., & Baldassar, L. (2011). Transnational caregiving between Australia, Italy and El Salvador: The impact of institutions on the capability to care at a distance. In E. Addis, P. de Villota, F. Degavre, & J. Ericksen (Hrsg.), *Gender and well being: The role of institutions* (S. 147–162). London: Ashgate.
- Merla, L. (2010). La gestion des émotions dans le cadre du devoir filial: le cas des migrants salvadoriens vivant en Australie occidentale. *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, 41(1), 55–76.
- Merla, L. (2011). Familles salvadoriennes à l'épreuve de la distance: solidarités familiales et soin intergénérationnel. *Autrepart*, 57–58, 145–162.
- Merla, L. (Forthcoming). Salvadoran migrants in Australia: An analysis of transnational families' capability to care across borders. *International Migration*. Paper accepted for publication.
- Merla, L., & Baldassar, L. (2010). Les dynamiques de soin transnationales: entre émotions et considérations économiques. *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, 41(1), 1–14.

- Morgan, D. (1975). *Social theory and the family*. London: Routledge.
- Murti, L. (2006). At both ends of care: South Indian Hindu widows living with daughters and daughters-in-law in Southern California. *Globalizations*, 3(3), 361–376.
- Office of Multicultural Interests. (2005). *Western Australia community profiles 2001 census. Central and South American-born*. Perth: Office of Multicultural Interests.
- Queirolo Palmas, L., & Ambrosini, M. (2008). Les leçons de l'immigration latino-américaine vers l'Europe et l'Italie. In I. Yépez & G. Herrera (Hrsg.), *Nouvelles migrations latino-américaines en Europe. Bilans et défis* (S. 85–99). Barcelona & Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications i éditions de la Universidad de Barcelona & Presses Universitaires de Louvain.
- Rea, A., & Caestecker, F. (2002). De Belgische nationaliteitswetgeving in de twintigste eeuw. Een terugkeer naar de zelfbewuste natie of het koesteren van het wantrouwen?. In M.-C. Foblets, R. Focquet, & M. Verwilghen (Hrsg.), *Naar de Belgische nationaliteit/Devenir Belge* (S. 59–118). Brussels-Antwerpen: Bruylant-Maklu.
- Rea, A. (2006). L'étude des politiques d'immigration et d'intégration des immigrés dans les sciences sociales en Belgique francophone. In B. Khader, M. Martiniello, A. Rea, & C. Timmermans (Hrsg.), *Penser l'immigration et l'intégration autrement. Une initiative belge inter-universitaire* (S. 130–140). Bruxelles: Bruylant.
- Santos, B. (2006). *From El Salvador to Australia: A 20th Century exodus to a promised land*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University.
- Service public fédéral Affaires étrangères. (2011). http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/travel_to_belgium/visa_for_belgium/long_stay/family_family_reunion/with_child_or_grandchild/.
- Zechner, M. (2008). Care of older persons in transnational settings. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 22, 32–44.
- Zontini, E., & Reynolds, T. (2007). Ethnicity, families and social capital: Caring relationships across Italian and Caribbean transnational families. *International Review of Sociology*, 17(2), 257–277.

16

Migration und Gesundheit: Die „transnationale Familie“ als Raum für Reflexions- und Hybridisierungsprozesse

Katja Eichler

Einleitung: Migration, Gesundheit und Familie

So wie insgesamt der Zusammenhang von Migration und Gesundheit bislang meist ausgehend von einem sozialemidologischen Blickwinkel diskurtiert wird, begründet sich auch die Betrachtung der Migrationsfamilie im Kontext von Gesundheitszustand, -versorgung, und -prävention in epidemiologischen Studien. Dies führt insgesamt zu einer stark „pathogenetischen“ (Pourgholam-Ernst 2002, S. 52) Betrachtung des Zusammenhangs, die sich insbesondere auf den statistisch belegten schlechteren Gesundheitszustand und die hohen Gesundheitsrisiken von Bevölkerungsgruppen mit Migrationshintergrund bezieht.

Die Migrationsfamilie wird hierbei teilweise zwiespältig in ihren Auswirkungen auf die gesundheitliche Versorgung betrachtet: Auf der einen Seite wird die Familie mehrheitlich als Barriere hinsichtlich der Inanspruchnahme von Diensten der Gesundheitsversorgung betrachtet, begründet in sprachlichen und kulturellen Faktoren sowie in der sozialen Lage. Auf der anderen Seite wird in der Migrationsfamilie ein hohes Unterstützungspotenzial vermutet, was sich möglicherweise auf den Mythos der „harmonischen Gastarbeiter-Großfamilie“ (s. Kaewnetara und Uske 2001, S. 152)¹ zurückführen lässt.

¹ Kaewnetara und Uske (2001, S. 153) verweisen darauf, dass die „anatolische Großfamilie“ Anfang der 80er Jahre Bestandteil der gesellschaftlichen Vorstellungswelt war.

K. Eichler (✉)

Bremer Institut für Kulturforschung, bik, Universität Bremen, Deutschland

T. Geisen et al. (Hrsg.), *Migration, Familie und soziale Lage*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-94127-1_16,

313

© VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften | Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2013