

## Care circulation and Affectivity among Mexican and Dominican Transnational Families<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

By comparing the caregiving practices of immigrant domestic workers interviewed in Madrid (Dominicans) and New York (Mexicans) in 2006 and 2007, and fieldwork conducted in local communities in both sending countries, this paper seeks to highlight two essential features of transnational families' lives: 1) their dynamic nature throughout the family life course; 2) the indirect effect of migratory policies on the potential for caregiving circulation. The simultaneous comparison of caregiving practices through life course stages and between the countries of two different immigrant groups, reveals certain similar patterns of interaction and affective behavior that may be related to the degree of class homogeneity shared by these women. The centrality of monetary remittances as a means of exchange, their pattern of fluctuations throughout the family life course; the ways and resources by which these families collectively seek the wellbeing of children and significant relatives (parents, grandparents) left behind, are common traits of their transnational interaction, influenced by demographic factors such as the differences in family structures between Mexico and Dominican Republic.

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: to describe the dynamics of care circulation throughout the family cycle in two groups of Latin American immigrants interviewed in Madrid (Dominicans) and New York (Mexicans)<sup>3</sup>; and to weight the way in which various

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<sup>3</sup> These interviews form part of a broader research project, *Migration and Female Labor Markets in the Context of Globalization. A Comparative Perspective*, financed by the PAPIIT (IN303006) program of the National University of Mexico. The project seeks to compare the labor insertion into domestic service of Dominican women in Madrid *versus* Mexican women in New York. It included the reconstruction of the women's family dynamics at both the pre- and post-migratory moment.

structural factors in the societies of origin and destination (migratory policies and family structure) condition the potential for care circulation in the transnational space.

Three questions guide the reflection. 1) to what extent does the stage in the family cycle affect the patterns of care circulation in transnational spaces? 2) what are the similarities and differences in care provision between these two groups of transnational families (Dominicans in Madrid and Mexicans in New York)? 3) how do migratory policies (in sending countries) and family structure (in societies of origin) influence care circulation? The analysis is based on 24 interviews conducted between 2006 and 2007 in the four countries involved in these two migratory flows: Spain and Dominican Republic and New York and Mexico.

The work is divided into three sections: the first explains the analytic framework within which the empirical examination of data takes place in the second part, followed by a discussion of the findings. The conclusions summarize the most important aspects.

#### THE CONTOURS OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY LIFE: ANALYTICAL BASES

Unlike the relative spatial delocalization of global economic transactions, transnational family life takes place in the gaps between two or more nation states, which it transcends yet by which it is also constrained (Kearney, 1995; Levitt, 2001:14). The growth of transnational communities parallels the political limits established by nations and attempts to take advantage of the spaces opened up by the inequalities existing between societies of origin and destination (Portes, 1996). Transnational family members use all available resources (whether human or technological) to reduce the physical distances separating them. The different conditions in which family exchange takes place denote some of the marked social asymmetries characterizing today's global world, in which freedom to move has become, according to Bauman (1998), the main stratifying factor.

Several of the concepts developed in this field of research describe the complexity of long distance family interaction. Two widely accepted notions, transnational motherhood and global care chains (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001;

Hochschild, 2001)<sup>4</sup>, refer as much to the expansion of affective links in sending and receiving societies and to the efforts to ensure care provision for relatives remaining in the localities of origin. Both concepts were developed by observing the experience of international immigrants incorporated into the low manual sectors of the labor market, most of whom were domestic workers. The family undertaking is largely possible because of the concatenation of networks of social relations that transcend the countries involved in the transnational space since, as Bryceson and Vuorela (2002:19) point out, the community identity of a transnational family is inextricably linked to its extra-familial networks and links.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 11 y 25) propose the notions of “frontering” and “relativizing” to name the practices of creating connections and materializing the family as an imagined community implemented by migrants. These notions refer partly to the creativity shown by the members of these families in —through the selective expansion of their relations and bonds of loyalty— preserving the sense of belonging that gives them continuity in the enormous hiatus created by absence. The reflection of these authors is born of their observation of transnational European families.

In keeping with the original proposal of Finch (1989), Baldasaar et al (2007), draw up an analytical framework to understand the factors on which care exchange and moral support between migrant parents and children depends. For the authors, this is the function of the dialectic relationship between the capacity (ability) to produce it, the obligation (in terms of the cultural norms that prescribe it) and the negotiation of family commitments. These conditions vary as a result of family relations, specific migratory histories and the moment in the family and individual cycle (Baldasaar, et.al, 2007 and Baldasaar, 2007). They have made an effort to systematize the factors that permit care exchange on the basis

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of transnational motherhood was put forward by Hondagneau-Sotelo, and Hondagneau Sotelo and Avila, to refer to the situation in which immigrant domestic workers (nearly always Latin Americans) took care of the children of US families while their children remained in the countries of origin (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001: 24). By global chains of affect or assistance, Hochschild (2000:131) understands “...a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring “. These chains are usually formed by women, although in unusual cases, by men alone. They usually start in a very poor country and end up in a rich one. For a criticism, see Yeats, 2005.

of the experience of immigrants from Europe (Ireland, Italy, Holland), Oceania (New Zealand) and Asia (Singapore, Irak, Afghanistan)<sup>5</sup> living in Australia.

The analytical efforts mentioned —which do not exhaust the existing conceptual proposals— illustrate the complexity of the analysis of transnational families. The heterogeneity of situations according to a series of factors (countries' level of development, migratory policies, socio-economic status, stage of individual and family life cycle) is such that one or more concepts are unlikely to be able to comprehensively cover them. In any case, it is necessary to determine the actual contours of specific transnational spaces, by providing them with conceptual and empirical contents for heuristic aims. The specific analytical scheme used in our data analysis is described below. We begin with the assumption that the two transnational social spaces in which our transnational families participate are based on normatively established relations of reciprocity (Faist, 2000:203).

Taking up Bryceson and Vuorela's proposal (2002:8) regarding the need to differentiate between the social levels that intervene in transnational family life in contexts of globalization, we distinguished four analytical levels (diagram 1)<sup>6</sup>: 1) a first, macro level, provided by the strength of political borders in establishing criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of family members into a national (or supranational territory, such as the EU); 2) a medium socio-economic level represented by the conditions of transnational economic reproduction of these families by virtue of the insertion of some of their members into the labor markets of two or more nations; 3) a second, medium level, resulting from the way in which local contexts and cultures of societies of origin and destination condition the social reproduction of these families; and 4) lastly, a micro-social level comprising the different care and attention needs determined by the moment of migration, the stage in the family cycle and the position occupied by the migrant within the family.

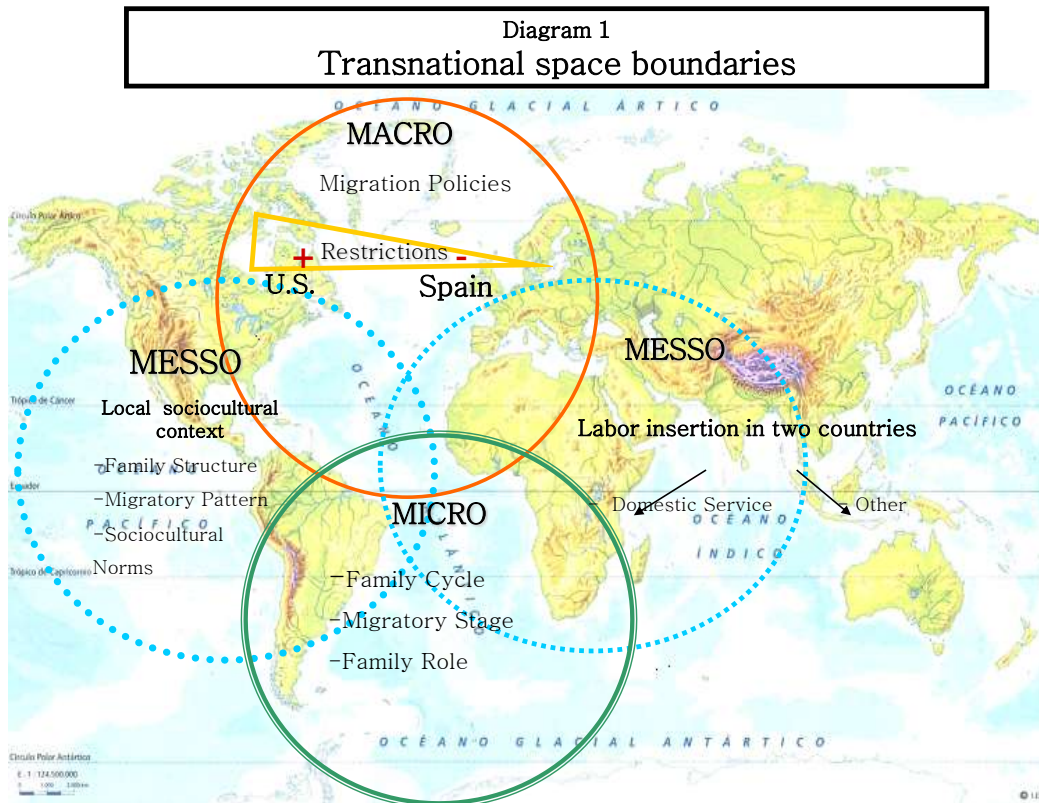
By delineating these levels in the case of the two groups of immigrants (Dominicans and Mexicans) and the countries we are comparing (Spain/ Madrid, United States/New York), we found that the two transnational spaces produced by the combination of these

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<sup>5</sup> In the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, they are refugees.

<sup>6</sup> These levels certainly do not reflect the variety of elements that intervene in the delimitation of transnational family space but we believe that they summarize the most important variables present in our population.

levels create different conditions for the circulation of care. The description of these differential conditions prevent us from the risk of disregarding the asymmetrical ways in which care flows, as the notion of circulation may suggest (Bonizzoni and Boccagni, in this volume). The macro level, of the migratory policies of Spain and the United States as receiving countries, has a decisive, structural effect on the possibilities of exchange (Cohen, 2000; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). The greater relative flexibility of Spanish migratory policy, the existence of more forms of legal access for unskilled labor immigration, as well as the relatively swift transition towards the naturalization of Latin American nationals in that country (Calavita, 1989 and 2006; Colectivo IOE, 2002), means that a substantial part of the Dominican immigrant population in Spain, as opposed to the vast majority of the Mexican population in



the United States comprise legal residents who can travel freely between the points on the *continuum* of transnationality<sup>7</sup>.

Whereas in our comparative exercise migratory policies as opportunity structures (Castles, 2004) constitute a factor of differentiation between Dominican and Mexican transnational families, economic insertion is an element of homogeneity since the overwhelming majority of immigrants interviewed in Madrid and New York (with the exception of one) are domestic workers<sup>8</sup>. This aspect places objective limits on the resources that can be mobilized within the transnational sphere, and therefore on the quality of care provision (see Baldasaar and Wilding, in this volume). It should be pointed out that

<sup>7</sup> Between 60% and 80% of Mexican immigration to the United States is undocumented. By 2008, it was estimated that there were approximately 39.2 million immigrants, 30.0% of which were undocumented; over half, i.e. 58.8 % (7 million out of 11.9) of which are Mexican. (Passel and Cohn, 2008). In Spain, the percentage of illegal Dominicans was approximately 23.6 % in 2001 (Domingo and Valls, 2006: 108).

<sup>8</sup> In New York, a limited number of interviews were conducted on women immigrants employed in the industrial sector (factories) as a means of controlling the inferences regarding the domestic service labor market.

socio-economic homogeneity is relatively greater among Mexican immigrants in the United States than among Dominicans in Madrid. The fact that domestic service in Spain is one of the legal channels for the admission of extra-communitarian immigration makes it one of the favorite gateways into the labor market for women with a wide range of socio-demographic profiles. In our data, three out of eleven of the Dominican immigrants hold undergraduate degrees and belong to lower middle-class social sectors.

At the other meso analytical level, that of the socio-cultural conditions of local contexts, we highlight the family structure and migratory patterns of the societies of origin, which are also a factor of differentiation between the transnational families compared. Within the context of Latin American countries, Mexican family structure is distinguished by its high stability, the predominance of legal marriages over consensual unions, the high percentage of nuclear households and the low albeit growing presence of households with female headship (24.5%, in 2010, Inegi). Conversely, the Dominican Republic, in keeping with the so-called Caribbean pattern of family formation, is characterized by a high degree of marital dissolution, a predominance of consensual over legal unions, a lower relative importance of nuclear households) compared with extended households and higher percentage of female-headed households (35.2% in 2007) (Endesa, 2008; Ariza et. al., 1994; Ariza and Oliveira 1999, 2001 and 2007). These aspects account for the greater presence of female heads of household in the universe of Dominican immigrants<sup>9</sup>.

As part of the contextual factors of the medium level, the differences in migratory patterns are one of the most striking aspects and can be summarized as follows: the clearly female selectivity of Dominican migration to Spain compared with the predominantly male profile of Mexican migration to the United States<sup>10</sup>; the virtually one-directional destination of Mexican international migration *versus* the greater diversification of Dominican emigration<sup>11</sup>; the higher percentage of households with international migrants in the

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<sup>9</sup> On the basis of data from the 1991 Regularization Survey 1991, Oso (1998: 238) points out that: "...Dominican Republic has the highest proportion of workers with dependents (84%). It is a type of migration consisting primarily of female heads of household..."

<sup>10</sup> In 2008, 58.6% of Mexicans who had lived in the United States for fewer than ten years were men (Caicedo, 2010: 264)

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the United States and Spain as the first and second most important destinations, Dominicans workers immigrate to the following countries, among others: Italy, Switzerland,

Dominican Republic (9.6%, in 2002)<sup>12</sup> in relation to Mexico (4.4 % between 2004 and 2009, Inegi, Enadid 2009). The last two aspects denote the higher degree of transnationality of Dominican society as a whole, despite the extraordinary volume of Mexican immigrants entering the United States annually.

Lastly, at the micro-social level, the women interviewed occupy one of three positions in our transnational families: they are mothers (the majority), they are grandmothers or daughters and they are distributed among three stages of the family cycle: the early stage, the stage of consolidation and the advanced stage<sup>13</sup>. These two aspects shape many of the needs and obligations regarding the reciprocity of persons linked by family bonds.

#### DATA AND METHOD

The analysis is based on 18 in-depth interviews with immigrant workers in Mexico and the Dominican Republic carried out in the cities of New York and Madrid between May 2006 and April 2007 (11 Dominicans and 9 Mexicans), plus six interviews with the immigrants' relatives in the places of origin or destination (3 from Dominican Republic and 3 from Mexico), comprising a total of 24.<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, a sub-set of interviews was selected, namely those that met the condition of belonging to divided families, in order to standardize the population, in other words, families that had not achieved full

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Holland, Belgium and Germany. Conversely, approximately 90% of Mexican international migration heads for the United States (Inegi, 2011; Ariza and Portes, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Maguid (2008:30). The author notes that the data should be viewed with caution due to the problems of estimating international emigration on the basis of national censuses.

<sup>13</sup> For this purpose we used a simplified version of the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean's (Eclac) operating classification for the family life cycle. Thus, women in the early and expansion stage, which we will simply call the early cycle from now on, have children under 13. Those in the consolidation phase have children between the ages of 13 and 18 while those at the advanced cycle have children over 19. In fact, Eclac combines the mother's age with that of the youngest child, whereas we only use the last criterion.

<sup>14</sup> A total of over 100 interviews were conducted in the project: Fifty semi-structured interviews were carried out on immigrant workers in the two destination cities; another 25 interviews were conducted with key informants (NGO representatives, teachers, priests, mayors, lawyers, institutions for dealing with minors, members of civil society); 12 were carried out in the places of origin with the relatives of women who had previously been interviewed in Spain and the United States, and over 30 informal interviews were carried out in the places of origin. A criterion of socio-demographic heterogeneity guided the selection of immigrants. An attempt was made to diversify them in terms of: age, marital status, length of migration, condition of motherhood, among other aspects. All the interviews were carried out by the author.



reunification of their members at the time they were interviewed. It also excluded women that immigrated single and formed families in the United States or Spain, since they raise different problems.

The methodological strategy followed two complementary paths: 1) An exhaustive examination in the destination cities of the workers' pre- and post-migratory trajectory, a detailed description of the labor sequence before and after migration, paying particular attention to domestic service and a compilation of the changes that had occurred in the family structure as a result of the displacement and the transnational networks and links, if any. 2) Ethnographic tours in the places of origin and selected interviews with some of the women's families in the sending communities of both countries (Mexico and Dominican Republic) as a means of triangulating the information. The cases were selected through the snowball procedure to prevent respondents from being drawn from a single network.

The interview script was designed to collect information on three central aspects: a) the migratory process itself and transnational links; b) a detailed reconstruction of the work career in the localities of origin and destination, paying particular attention to employment in domestic service, c) a sequence of the family changes that accompanied migration, examining family relations at a distance, their interactions with the migratory process and the women's overall perception of the impact of migration on their children's welfare.

The period of reference was the same for the two groups of immigrants: that they should have arrived in the city between 1986 and 2005/6. This criterion of uniformity over time is linked to the start of the recent wave of Latin American immigration to Spain and the moment New York emerged as a key destination for Mexican immigration. The selection of countries and cities was based on the fact that: 1) Spain and the United States constitute the main international destinations for Latin American emigration; 2) due to their migratory policies and another series of aspects (geopolitical location, migratory systems), they constitute different contexts of reception. During the period of observation, 1986-2006/2007, both countries have implemented border control policies aimed directly at containing the flow of immigration from Third World societies which were particularly reinforced during the 1990s, with a peak from 2001 onwards in US. In Spain, the most important outcome of these policies for our population was the establishment in 1993 of the

requirement of visa for a set of Latin-Americans countries including the Dominican Republic, plus five processes of regularization between 1991 and 2005. As regards the USA, the groundbreaking measure was the 1987 Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (CIRA) that legalized approximately three million immigrants and increased border control measures. Nevertheless, the lack of a regularization process since the 1987 confines most unqualified immigration -particularly Mexican immigrants-, to a nearly permanent state of illegality. As stated earlier (see footnote 5), legal status is a main difference between our Dominican and Mexican transnational families.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF CARE CIRCULATION AND ITS DIFFERENT SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS

##### A. Care circulation through family life cycle

Three analytical resources are used in the analysis of family interaction at a distance that follows: 1) the stage of family cycle and the role women play (daughter, mother, grandmother or both); 2) a list of the different forms of care<sup>15</sup>; 3) a description of the affective aspects involved in long distance interaction, if they existed. We began with the assumption that care circulation in the transnational space happens through three dimensions of mobility in the global sphere (Svasek and Skrbis, 2007): mobility of persons, ideas and practices and of objects and images. Thus whereas relatives' shift between one country and another forms part of persons' mobility, remittances (both monetary and non-monetary)<sup>16</sup> constitute the objects that shift while looking after the welfare of children and other relatives (parents) is located within the sphere of practices and ideas<sup>17</sup>. This distinction follows only analytical purposes since they are often combined. Thus when a person travels, she may take money, goods and ideas; nevertheless, transnational social

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<sup>15</sup> Although many of our immigrants perform some form of paid care work, since they are virtually all domestic workers, in this paper we chose to restrict the focus of analysis of care relations to those that take place within the transnational families to which they belong to avoid making the analysis excessively complex. This aspect would have included another heterogeneous factor in the comparison.

<sup>16</sup> By nonmonetary remittances I mean the sending of material goods (from food to gifts and cloth) as opposed to monetary cash. The sending of such remittances has always accompanied transnational family practices although it has been somehow overlooked by the focus on monetary flows.

<sup>17</sup> The mobility of practices and ideas throughout the transnational social space differs from Levitt's notion of social remittances (2011:54) since the exchange takes place in both directions on the continuum and not only from host- to- sending- country communities.

spaces as described above may deter their simultaneous occurrence. In transnational families, this mobility is structured around reciprocal relations based on affective bonds.

*Early family cycle: migrating to help the family progress*

Of the six immigrants located at this stage of family life cycle, two are daughters and single (with parents living in the place of origin) while four are mothers (with children in the country of origin). They are all aged between 22 and 29 and have spent less than five years separated from their loved ones;<sup>18</sup> three are from Mexico and three from Dominican Republic. The only one with regular migratory status is Dominican.

The two young women who are daughters (one from each country) have never had children and lived with their families of origin before they left. In both cases, the migratory project reflects individual reasons linked to the need to lend direction to their own lives<sup>19</sup> (Ariza, 2005). From the outset, this aspect involves fewer obligations in terms of reciprocal relations and care in the transnational sphere. During the short time they have been outside their country, interaction has mainly taken place through the irregular sending of monetary remittances and continuous telephone communication (every week); neither of them has yet been able to return to her country of birth.

Although strictly speaking, these migrants did not acquire the explicit commitment to leave their countries to improve the well-being of their relatives in their place of origin, it continues to be part of their objectives due to the normative expectations of the family role of migrant daughters in these social sectors<sup>20</sup>. The persons towards whom care is predominantly oriented are parents and sisters. Thus, although Marisol, a Dominican immigrant who has spent a year in Madrid, did not initially set out to provide financial assistance for her sisters, she feels happy to be able to assign some of her income to them as often as she can. This support is partly an act of voluntary reciprocity for the support she

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<sup>18</sup> In the event of more than one migratory displacement, the most recent one was analyzed.

<sup>19</sup> For both women, engaging in migration was a solution to what seemed to be a future without alternatives: failure to enter university and episodes of domestic violence in Gertrudis' account, and the narrowness of the marriage market and unemployment in the case of Marisol. For the sake of privacy all names have been changed.

<sup>20</sup> Within Dominican migratory culture, there is an expectation that everyone who leaves the country *must* support those that were left behind, since it is assumed that his socioeconomic situation has improved. The ones who do not do so are morally sanctioned.

was given when the time came to migrate. Although migration may be an individual project, the normative expectations are socially shared. Conversely, Gertrudis sends her mother more sporadic remittances since building her own house in Mexico, as protection from the misfortune of having a *bad husband*, is what guides her efforts.

As one would expect, motherhood places its own particular stamp on the dynamics of long-distance interaction. This is reflected in the accounts of the four young women who, at this stage of the family life cycle, are mothers (two Dominicans and two Mexicans) with children under the age of ten. Three of the four women are separated from their partners, while the fourth, (a Mexican), is married. They all left their children in the care of their maternal families. Although the *leitmotiv* of the migratory project is essentially to achieve a better future for their children, this sometimes extends to other close relatives (parents and siblings). Monetary remittances are sent regularly (either monthly or fortnightly) and account for a very high proportion of the income they earn (between 50% and 80%). Non-monetary remittances (clothes, books, toys) are more sporadic.

In addition to remittances, a palpable expression of the migrant's affective presence in the family home (Sorensen, 2004; Singh, 2006), shared socialization and raising of the children also occupy an important place. Children's academic performance and discipline are a constant source of concern among mothers. Within this sphere, collective care management is no easy task. This is partly due to the fact that the axis from which authority emanates is not always clear (Bernhard et al., 2008): Whereas the absent mother is assumed to have the last word and is occasionally consulted, the fact of not being physically present to intervene in the trivial decisions of everyday life reduces her authority. The tentatively "temporary" nature of family arrangements means that grandmothers feel that certain issues are not entirely their responsibility, giving rise to a degree of laxity that deeply affects the migrants. Some grandmothers have been forced to accept the responsibility of looking after their grandchildren at a stage in their lives when they were beginning to enjoy a certain amount of independence, as shown in the account given by Ines's mother, interviewed in a rural community in Hidalgo, Mexico:

*“I was used to not having children or anyone and going out whenever I wanted...so I said to her, how can you leave them with me? I have to go to meetings, to school and everything...because I had to help her out.*

On the subject of the behavioral problems of her oldest grandson, who is nearly ten, she says:

*“He doesn’t obey me...it is a good thing his mother’s here now to raise him...”*

In this scenario, school performance often becomes the most objective indicator used by mothers to gauge their children’s situation and attempt to correct their behavior. Grade sheets often become the currency for mother-child interaction. It is common practice for mothers to use the promise of future material goods to justify their departure and shape their children’s behavior. This practice reflects the well-known aspects of manipulation and blackmail that occur when remittances become the main factor structuring long distance family interaction among immigrants of low socioeconomic strata (Parreñas, 2002, 2005; Sánchez- Carretero, 2005; Debry, 2006).

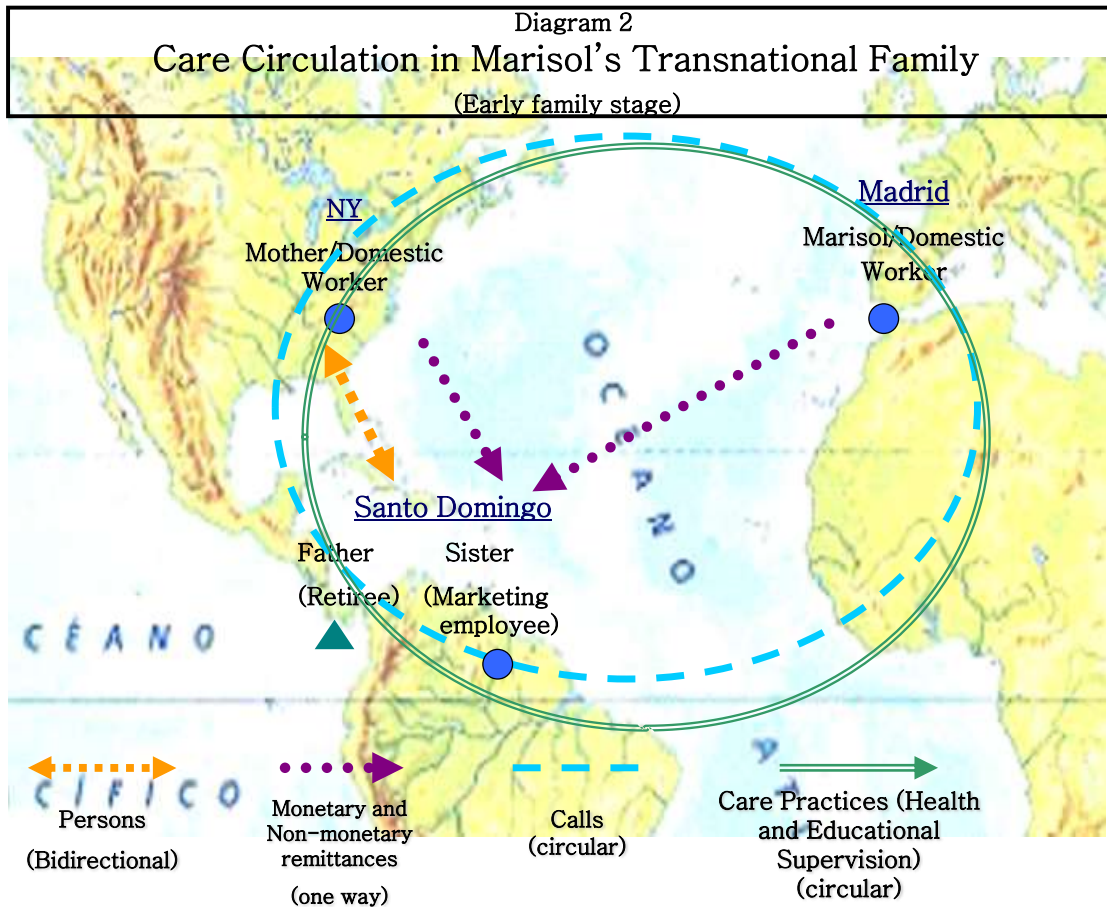
In keeping with the greater degree of transnationality in Dominican society, in two of the three immigrants at this stage of the family life cycle, collective care management included the circulation of resources and frequent communication between New York, Madrid and Santo Domingo (diagram 2)<sup>21</sup>. Thus, whereas Marisol, a 28-year-old woman tries to get ahead in Madrid where she arrived recently, her mother, a legal resident in the United States, is on one of her intermittent work stays in New York employed as a domestic worker for an American family. Thus, Marisol’s transnational household, comprising herself, her twin sister (a marketing employee) and her father (retired) support themselves on the basis of the material and affective resources that circulate between these three points on the transnational *continuum*. In our Mexican families at this stage of the family cycle, there is less spatial dispersion (multilocality) in transnational households.

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<sup>21</sup> To assess families’ degree of transnationality, we have used the criterion of whether one of the immediate relatives (siblings, parents, children) lives in another country and whether, at the time of the interview, they provided some form of support to the nucleus of the family in the place of origin or among themselves.

Immediate relatives resident in the United States live in New York and, at least according to these data, are less financially dependent on monetary remittances.

Two features should be highlighted in the sphere of affectivity: the changes perceived in the mother-child interaction and the tangible marks of migratory grief caused by the separation. With the exception of one young migrant, all the mothers detected changes in the affective interaction with their offspring as a result of migration. Sometimes children avoid speaking to their mothers by phone or, apparently upset and uncommunicative, they quickly hand the phone over to other adults standing nearby. This behavior forms part of the pattern of "feigned indifference" mentioned by Dreby (2007), as a common reaction among pre-teenage children in migrant families. The only one of the young women interviewed to minimize the effect of migration on her children was contradicted by the grandmother in an interview held months later in her place of origin (Mexico). According to the grandmother, both children were visibly affected by their mother's absence.



There is often a certain amount of confusion about the mother figure, with children calling their grandmothers “Mummy” which migrant women find deeply distressing: “...*I am afraid my children will adapt more to my parents than to me...*” (Inés, Mexican) (Cohen, 2000; Dreby, 2007).

In the accounts of these women, who only emigrated a few years ago, there are obvious signs of the process of grief entailed by separation (González, 2006), as well as marked feelings of sorrow and guilt, which they relieve by imagining that they will return in the near future. They often mention feelings of depression (sadness, grief, weeping, lack of appetite, weight loss). The most difficult aspect to handle is their separation from their children, which they cannot help regarding as abandonment, which is when feelings of guilt arise. But grief is something that not only migrant mothers and their children experience; it also affects grandmothers and other relatives. The mother-grandmothers interviewed recalled their separation from their daughters with great sorrow.

*Consolidation phase: the struggle to stay close and progress*

The four immigrants (two from Mexico and two from Dominican Republic) in the consolidation phase of the family life cycle are aged between 31 and 48 and have children aged 13 to 18.<sup>22</sup> With the exception of one who had only arrived in Madrid a year ago, they have all spent between 6 and 9 years in the receiving country. Two women (Dominicans) are separated and the heads of household in their places of origin; the two remaining Mexicans live with their partners. Children live within a variety of family arrangements<sup>23</sup>. Three of the immigrants have an irregular migratory status and only one, the Dominican, has a legal status (naturalized).

Once again, remittances (whether monetary or non-monetary) and regular telephone calls are the most frequent forms of interaction between mothers and the children they leave behind. In the case of the Dominicans, family households depend entirely on the money they send, which explains the high percentage of income they send (over 50%). It may also be linked to the greater frequency of telephone communication (daily) compared with Mexicans (every other day or weekly). In the case of one Dominican immigrant, care circulation includes –as in the previous stage- resources that move between New York, Madrid and Santo Domingo, countries among which members of their family household are scattered.

Collective management practices for child care show common patterns. Supervision is delegated to immediate relatives or other members of the same household (parents and in-laws in Mexican households; mother, sisters, brother in law and domestic worker in the Dominican households), but it continues to be a difficult, potentially conflictive process in several respects. Children are in the midst of adolescence, an age of affirmation and rebellion. Problems of authority, lack of discipline, disobedience and poor academic performance or apathy are widespread, according to immigrants' accounts. In the words of

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<sup>22</sup> Anastasia, born in Mexico, has two younger children whom she procreated with her husband in the United States after a lengthy separation due to migration. The other two daughters stayed in Mexico with her mother-in-law.

<sup>23</sup> In the case of Dominican women, the children live with their ex-husbands in the home they used to share or alone but supervised by the son-in-law and a domestic worker. As for the Mexicans, they live with their parents-in-law or the migrant's maternal family.

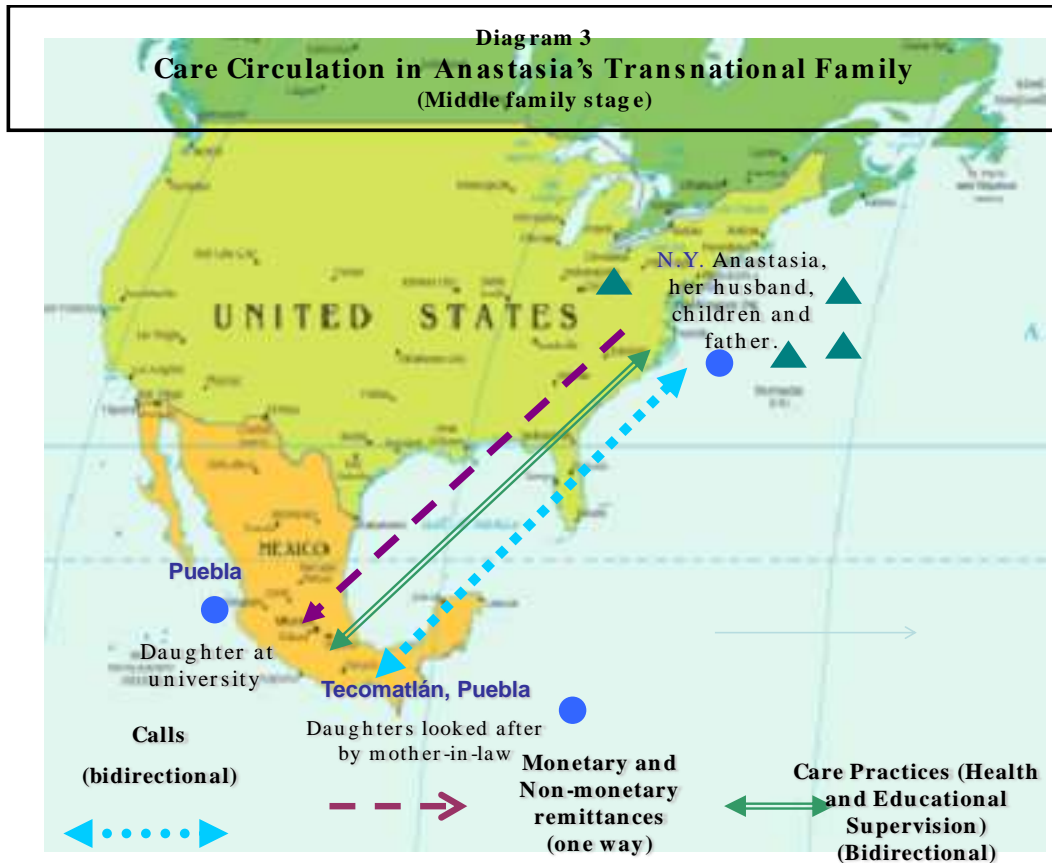


some of them, their children have “tantrums,” and have to be spoken to “firmly.” At other times, they understand that their behavior is the result of the grandchildren’s being spoiled by the grandparents, which is often mentioned in the immigrants’ accounts. Since we do not have interviews with non-migrant mothers with children of similar ages as a means of control, it is impossible to tell whether this behavior is the result of maternal absence or simply of adolescence. A plausible hypothesis is that it is the result of the interaction of both processes, exacerbated by the atmosphere of relative laxness attributed to the grandparents’ child-raising techniques.

Sometimes, these collective management practices can be extremely close. Juana, one of the Dominican mothers who had barely spent a year in Madrid, supervised her children’s welfare on a daily basis: she checked whether they had had their bath at the right time, whether they had done their homework, reminding the father (and ex-husband) of the dates of doctors’ appointments, what school supplies to buy and to buy bread on the way home. This zealous supervision even extended to household maintenance (bill paying, cleaning the drains, etc.) For this mother, it was particularly important to attempt to provide her children with a similar level of well-being to that of Spanish children, in a sort of compensation and social equality mechanism. In addition to punctually sending monetary remittances, she sent a box with the food in a typical Spanish child’s diet to Santo Domingo every month.

*“...my older son likes cars and sophisticated toys, robots and so on, so I send him all that... Everything Spanish kids eat, from sweets to tuna, arrives at my house every month in a box, with clothes and toys, and everything I find I can send them...”*

But some mothers realize that they can do very little and resign themselves to the fact that effective supervision is in the hands of the relatives that stayed behind. Anastasia (diagram 3), who has been living in New York for 9 years and has never been back to Mexico, and therefore has not seen again her children that stayed behind, claims: *“...my mother-in-law is there to keep an eye on them...”* Concern over their children’s welfare is a central feature of the women’s discourse. Some complain that their children are not looked after as they would like them to be or



express their chagrin at finding out how neglected their children had been in their absence. In the words of Mónica, a Dominican who has lived in Madrid for six months: "...I didn't feel comfortable with my family because they did not treat my children well..." These risks lead some of them to openly use the sending of remittances and gifts to the relatives in charge of their offspring as an overt means of blackmail to guarantee that their children are treated well. As one of them openly admitted, "...I buy them..." Sometimes these children become the hostages of these relatives, since they guarantee that the money will arrive.<sup>24</sup> In other cases they are subjected to situations of abuse in which they are not told that the

<sup>24</sup> This data emerges both in the interviews with women and those with key informants at institutions responsible for looking after children in Mexico's main sending communities.

money has arrived or else it is funneled off and used for other purposes by the caretaker responsible for them.<sup>25</sup>

As in the case of migrant mothers at the early stage, and with the sole exception of one Mexican women, they also mention the results of separation on affective relations. The main one is the sorrow at not being able to be physically with them and the overt or veiled guilt over what they regard as neglecting their maternal duties. However, they take comfort in and are proud of the fact that the material well-being they have provided for their children is much greater than what they would have had if they had stayed in their countries of origin.

But although remittances, telephone communication and other collective care management practices are fairly similar features of care circulation in Dominican and Mexican transnational families, a substantial difference emerges as regards the mobility of persons. This emerges when one contrasts the accounts of two immigrants who have been away from their homes for the same length of time (six years) yet in different places of residence: Mónica, who lives in Madrid and became a naturalized citizen after just two years and Hortensia, who lives in New York and is undocumented. Mónica had not only visited Dominican Republic several times during this period but, supported by family reunification laws, managed to bring over two of her daughters and used another means to obtain a work contract for her older son, who had already been in Madrid for two years. Conversely, Hortensia had not been back to Mexico once, even though the oldest of her four children had just been to New York after crossing the border illegally.

*Advanced family cycle: time to hand over*

There are eight women at this stage of the family cycle (six Dominicans and two Mexicans) with ages ranging from 48 to 59. Although two of them are childless (both Dominicans) most are mothers (six) and/or grandmothers (four). All the children are 19 or older. As a group, they have spent an average of ten years living in Madrid or New York, with a range

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<sup>25</sup> Jerónimo, a Mexican boy interviewed in the state of Puebla, whose mother had emigrated alone many years earlier, reported that for a long time during his childhood, he was unaware that his mother had sent him money regularly. They never told him, the youngest child, or his siblings, which led the mother to make the decision for the children to live by themselves.

of 2 to 15 years. Regarding migratory status, most of them are legal, although two of the immigrants are illegal (one from each country). Several of the legal residents have begun a process of family reunification, with some of their children living with them and others not.

As in the previous stages, frequent telephone calls are the most common form of communication, although there are different patterns regarding the sending of remittances. Among the women who are unmarried daughters, there is a pattern of maximizing savings in order to build their own houses, which combines with punctual financial assistance for needy relatives for reasons of health or material shortages. Elderly parents and nieces and nephews or siblings are the recipients of long-distance care.

Conversely, half of the women who are mothers and/or grandmothers have stopped sending regular remittances, and now do so in response to specific requests or on the occasion of specific family rites (birthdays, Christmas celebrations). In most cases, these women's children have formed their own families and are no longer primarily responsible for the reproduction of households in their countries of origin. There is, however, a sub-set of Dominican heads of household who have not handed over the responsibility of domestic reproduction and continue to be the main providers not only of the second but also of the third generations of their offspring<sup>26</sup>. They continue to send money to close relatives over the years to deal with any kind of eventuality, therefore reducing the women's scant possibilities of saving and even their living conditions. Thus Beatriz, a Dominican woman who has spend 12 years living in Madrid, exclaims proudly at the age of 59: "*...I will die working for them, I still work... [ ] ...I still work for them...*"<sup>27</sup> Even though she has covered most of her eight children's needs throughout her long migratory career, and has half of them living with her in Madrid, Beatriz currently covers the reproduction expenses of several of her grandchildren in the Dominican Republic due to the current unemployment in Spain of the mother, who is also the head of her own family. This pattern of behavior, based not on an economic rationality but in the continuous investment in social capital<sup>28</sup>, is

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<sup>26</sup> This finding parallels the endless breadwinner responsibilities found by Fresnoza-Flot (2009:264) among Filipinas domestic workers in Paris.

<sup>27</sup> From the point of view of people close to Beatriz, her children had turned out "ungrateful," since even after they had grown up, they continued to ask her for financial assistance, instead of helping her, since she was no longer young and had worked for them her whole life.

<sup>28</sup> I am in debt to María Eugenia D'Aubeterre for this observation.

coherent with the ideology of motherhood as the unrestricted dedication to the well-being of those one serves (Schmalbauzer, 2004). In our hypothesis, the fact that in our data this pattern of behavior was most obvious among Dominican heads of household is related to the type of family interaction that prevails in these households and its importance in Dominican socio-demographic structure.

The child raising period is over, meaning that the problems that arise refer more to concern over their offspring's possible marital disagreements, success or failure at work, financial difficulties or the grandchildren's needs. The mother's active role has therefore been weakened in general terms but is still present. Even at this late stage, two Dominican women made the radical decision to bring their youngest children to Madrid as an extreme measure to try to change their behavior after they had refused to go on studying. The mothers' aim was to "put them out to work" to prevent them from "going astray," in other words, getting into crime.

Collective care management practices now include looking after one's aged parents, who often suffer from chronic, degenerative diseases. Critical events, such as the severe illness or death of some of them requires a large collective effort, in terms of both material resources and affective support and if possible, physical presence, despite the political borders. After being told of her mother's imminent death, Julieta, a 48-year-old woman who left the country to put an end to many years of domestic violence, did not think twice about it and returned to Mexico. Shortly afterwards, she undertook the dangerous journey across the desert for a second time. These critical events often eat into immigrants' savings. Among Dominican women, collective care management not only includes the circulation of resources between Madrid, New York and Santo Domingo but also includes a fourth country: Venezuela, where some of them had had previous migratory experience and left some of their offspring there.<sup>29</sup>

In affective terms, grief over the separation caused by migration has led to a certain resignation yet other forms of loss persist, such as the death of one of the parents in the

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<sup>29</sup> Venezuela was an important destination of Dominican international migration during the years of its oil boom, particularly during the 1970s.

absence of the migrants<sup>30</sup>, which tends to cast doubt on the entire migratory project. The impossibility of providing them with face to face care is a source of considerable suffering.

Migratory policies leave a distinctive mark on long-distance family interaction, not only by restricting people's mobility, since most of the immigrants in this stage are legal residents, but because of the effects of the duration of the family reunification process on affectivity (Cohen, 2000), a process that takes much longer in the United States than in Spain, particularly if the applicants have had to overcome the status of illegal alien. A lengthy separation with little or no opportunity for face-to-face interaction may give rise to processes of defamiliarization and strangeness between family members.

This is the case of the family of Raquel, a Mexican immigrant now a legal resident who has been living for 13 years in New York and was separated from her husband for 17 out of the 34 years they have been married due to migration. The husband left for a year when the first child was six months old and twelve years went by before she was able to cross the border with all their children as irregular immigrants. Two years later, she returned to Mexico with her four children since they were unable to make ends meet in New York. When due to the migratory reform of 1986 (IRCA) they regularized their migratory status, mother and children met up again with the father and husband in New York. Meanwhile 25 years had elapsed and 13 had gone by since the father had last seen his youngest child.

Afterwards, three of her four children did not adapt to the US way of life and soon returned to Mexico on their own. Raquel says that after so many years of separation, not only did she and her husband become strangers to each other but despite achieving legal residence and managing to travel to be all together, she feels that there is a lack of “...*that connection*,” the love there should be between parents and children and that a lot of resentment remains:

*“...They always respect him [referring to the father] but I feel that there is a barrier of love...”. “In other words, the family has been emotionally destroyed...”*

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<sup>30</sup> Four out of the eight migrants at this stage of the family cycle lost one of their parents when they were outside the country.

*“...In the long run, when your children grow up, instead of thanking you for the enormous effort you made, they feel resentful...”*

In the context of our families, this is undoubtedly an extreme yet emblematic case of the various aspects that may be assumed by the transnational family life of work migrants on the lower rungs of the social structure, migrants who experience powerful restrictions on their movement and interaction. The pain and distancing caused by prolonged separation coexist with the pride and satisfaction of having escaped from poverty and provided children with a minimum opportunity for an education.

#### B. Migratory systems and care circulation

The data show that the possibilities of mobility and interaction through the transnational social space are relatively greater for Dominican than Mexican families belonging to low socioeconomic strata, even though they are geographically more distant. Similar results have been found in Ecuadoran migration to both countries (Spain and the United States) (Herrera, 2008). Among Dominican families there is greater face to face interaction through the circulation of persons, as well as possibilities for family reunification, partly because of the greater ease of becoming legal residents.<sup>31</sup> The fact that international Dominican migration is inserted in more than one migratory system<sup>32</sup> multiplies the points of contact between relatives in the transnational sphere and the possibility of taking advantage of the opportunities for insertion in the labor force provided by these markets.<sup>33</sup>

As expressions of Latin American international migration, the flow from Dominican Republic to Spain and from Mexico to the United States participates in two different

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<sup>31</sup> Spanish family reunification forms part of the norms established for the protection of families within the framework of the European Human Rights Agreement. Foreigners that are legally resident may request reunification with the spouse, children under 18 (both biological and adoptive) and economically dependent family members of the previous generation, provided they have spent at least a year in Spain, are authorized to live there for at least another year and have the financial means to support them (Fernández, 2002; Legislación de Extranjeros, 2005; Díaz, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> A migratory system includes a particular combination of types of flows of population between countries of origin and receiving countries. The rules that govern these flows and the lasting and institutionalized reactions or counter-reactions of the organizations that seek to maintain or eliminate them (Moulier and Papademetriou, 1994:4).

<sup>33</sup> The Dominican international migration in our data participate in three migratory systems: from Latin America to Spain (European Union), from Latin America to the United States and within Latin America (flow between Dominican Republic and Venezuela).

migratory systems: the one linking Latin America and Spain as part of the European Union and the one linking the same region to the United States, where Mexican migration plays a particular role. In the context of the European Union, Latin American migration to Spain also has a special place. Spanish migratory policy displays an attitude of positive discrimination towards Latin American immigrant, borne out by the fact that: 1) bilateral agreements with various countries have been signed to channel flows;<sup>34</sup> 2) Latin-Americans are able to achieve naturalization in a shorter time. By virtue of traditional colonial links, Latin Americans have the privilege of being able to obtain Spanish citizenship within two years, provided they are able to prove continuous legal residence in the country.

Conversely, the United States displays a radically different attitude towards Mexican immigration, which can be described as overt criminalization. Since 1993 enhanced border enforcement has been a key element of U.S. migratory policy, which was reinforced after the events of 9/11 when the U.S. Mexico Border became a target in the U.S. war against terrorism (Cornelius, 2001; Waslin, 2009)<sup>35</sup>. This strategy helped weaken the eminently temporary and rural pattern of migration that had hitherto characterized the flow of Mexican migration into the US, according to which migrants annually returned to their places of origin. The consequences of this strategy include: 1) the steady rise of arrests and the deaths of migrants trying to cross the border; 2) rechanneling the flow toward the east; 3) the higher cost and physical risks associated with illegal entry; 4) the higher rate of permanent settlement among undocumented migrants (Cornelius, 2001:664-676). Beyond the internal factors of domestic policy, these measures can be explained by the place Mexico occupies as a border country of the main pole of attraction in this migratory system and the double role of the Mexico-US border: the pivot of the anti-terrorist strategy and a wall of contention keeping out transit immigrants from other countries.

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<sup>34</sup> Agreements have been signed with Ecuador, Colombia, Morocco, Dominican Republic, Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria (San Martín, 2006:130-73). ‘El acceso de los extranjeros al mercado de trabajo: régimen general y contingente’, *Revista del Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales*, 63 (2006), pp. 139-73.

<sup>35</sup> Some of the technology that forms part of the “concentrated border enforcement” strategy along the Mexico-US border dates from the Vietnam War, such as the infrared night scopes that detect migrants by their body heat (Cornelius, 2001:663). Measures with a negative effect on the U.S. Latino community after 9/11, includes: a) new changes of address requirement; b) state and local police enforcement of federal immigration law; c) restrictions on identification documents; d) worksite enforcement (Waslin, 2009: 42-46)



US migratory policy is based on a settlement model with emphasis on family immigration: direct blood links with the resident population are the main criteria for admission (Moulier and Papademetriou, 1994; Calavita, 1989).<sup>36</sup> Paradoxically, however, there are very few (or infrequent) effective possibilities of legal entry into US territory for the type of working-class immigrants we are analyzing. This is not only due to Mexicans' high levels of irregular immigration status but also because the complicated admission system due to blood links with legal residents and citizens –which follows a strict hierarchy- and the set number of annual visas per country for non-citizens involve waiting times of up to ten years or more (Parreñas, 2005). The waiting period is much greater for immigrants from countries whose demand for reunification far exceeds the annual quota of approximately 20,000 visas per country, as happens with Mexico<sup>37</sup> Conversely, Spanish migratory policy, promoted by the European Union, is based on labor migration (Moulier and Papademetriou, 1994). Precisely because they were admitted as workers (or obtained legal status to enable them to work), within the short space of a year, immigrants can make use of the right to family reunification, provided they are legal residents

It seems obvious that the most important effect of both migratory systems on family life lies in the different migratory status of the majority of (unskilled) labor immigrants encouraged by both countries, and its consequences on the possibility of family reunification: over 70% of Dominicans are legal immigrants, whereas between 60 and 70% of Mexicans are illegal. Forcing them into illegality, with very few escape routes, undoubtedly reduces their possibilities of constructing a decent family life and envisaging a horizon of reunification in a nearby future, particularly if this takes place at a distance.

In the context of the overlap between migratory policy and security policy and by virtue of the strongly asymmetrical nature of Mexico and the United States as border countries, geographic proximity somehow strengthens the obstacles to affective proximity

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<sup>36</sup> Of the 946,142 permanent residence visas granted in 2004, 65.6% involved family links. According to Wasem (2006), there are four main principles governing US policy on permanent residence: 1) family reunification; 2) admission of immigrants with particular skills for which there is a demand; 3) protection of refugees; 4) diversity of admissions requirements by country of origin.

<sup>37</sup> Mexico is the country with by far the largest number of relatives on the waiting list: 1,381,896 in the 2010 tax year, followed by the Philippines with 535,750. For that year, the number of annual visas per country was 25,620 (<http://travel.state.gov/pdf/waitingListItem.pdf>, last retrieved on 5 August 2011).

in the construction of transnational family life. Thus, the acute asymmetry between the two countries translates into greater social and affective distance for those that interact through them. If we accept that in the global environment, mobility is in itself a factor of stratification (Bauman, 1998), then this is relatively more unequal in the migratory system in which our Mexican immigrants participate.

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