

TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERHOOD: NEW FAMILY STRATEGIES IN VIEW OF THE FEMINISATION OF LATIN-AMERICAN MIGRATIONS

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Abstract

Nowadays, in Spain the migratory flow that has had an accelerated process and feminisation proceed from Latin America, and in the last few years, in particular from Ecuador. In this sense, the migratory processes have become a transforming process with profound implications on a family level. Within this international migratory context a readjustment is produced in the gender and generational relationships that intervene in the negotiation of links within the domestic group and influence the modalities of family regrouping and in the experiences of the children of migrating families both in the place of origin and destination.

In this way, the family is revealed as an area of conflict and negotiation. In view of this new space-time configuration of migration from Ecuador, the migratory families are facing new challenges. The dynamic structure of the domestic groups, the patterns of conjugality and the ways in which the education of children is carried out, have undergone changes and therefore it is necessary to reconsider family relationships in a transnational context. This fact is connected to some fundamental topics, such as how to reinterpret the value assigned to feminine tasks, to understand and accept the cultural and ideological ruptures surrounding maternity and paternity in this transnational migratory context, to start up mechanisms to assume the new roles of the transnational parents; to redefine family roles carried out until now and take on the structural changes that can occur in these, principally as from the regrouping in the destination.

In this sense, the concept of transnational motherhood contradicts both the models of motherhood in the middle class of the central countries and even more the ideological notions of motherhood in Latin America (Hondgneu-Sotelo.,Ávila, 1997). Within this context, at the beginning of the XXI century, the transnational Latin-American mothers and their families are constructing new areas, expanding national limits and improvising motherhood strategies and new educational guidelines, a fact that is presented as a real Odyssey with high costs (Pedone, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b).

The Ecuadorian women as links for transnational social areas: ideological ruptures in the conception of motherhood

As from 1999, the worsening of the Ecuadorian social economic crisis together with a greater demand for feminine labour in the large Spanish cities, has caused the women to become the first link in the migratory chain. The determining participation by women in the displacement of the Ecuadorian people to Spain has generated a re-situation in the gender and generational relationships. Therefore, on the one hand, the visibilisation of the women and the children within the domestic group as a decisive part in the power game, has permitted centering the analysis of the family as a place of conflict and negotiation (Morovasick, 1984; Pessar, 1984; Whatmore, 1991; Gregorio Gil, 1998). On the other hand, it has meant breaking with a very strong social representation in Ecuador in relation to the organisation and execution of the international migratory projects as an eminently masculine decision.

This change has meant breaking with the idea of a travelling adventurous male who set out on a dangerous journey to the United States that would ensure the welfare

of the women, children and elderly back home. The exit by the women has not only produced a re-situation in the gender and generational relationships within the domestic group, but also has confronted the Ecuadorian society with the family, social and cultural structural transformations, product of the so called "stampede of the Ecuadorian people."

Motherhood includes a series of biological processes (conception, pregnancy, birth, nursing and in some cases, breast feeding) but it goes much further than that towards the practice and social relationships not linked to the feminine body (care and socialisation, health care, feeding, hygiene, love and affection). All these practices are interlinked with representations about what is socially accepted, legitimate and "natural" (Nari, 2004). And so, we can confirm that motherhood is not predetermined in only one way, but rather that it is a historical, social and cultural construction. While motherhood is, generally, understood to be a practice that involves the preservation, education and preparation of children for adult life (Ruddick, 1989), nowadays variations exist that are distinguishable by class and culture (Collins, 1994; Dill, 1988; Glenn, 1994).

The renegotiation of these roles in the past few years has been carried out in a context that has often been adverse for migrant women. In spite that on an economic level it is accepted that the transnational transference of reproductive work, - a process also called euphemistically "the globalisation of the cities" - is the consequence of the new strata in the worldwide labour market and generates a demand of feminine labour that has accelerated the movement North South, the paradox points us towards the migrant women who leave their roles as carers at home to migrate to take care of children, elderly and homes in exchange for a salary from the "First World".

In this sense, for example at the same time that the working market is feminised, the world survival is also feminised. In fact, the homes of the communities depend all the more on women's social resources and on the activities generated by the arriving groups of migrant women. (Sassen, 2000, 2003; Ribas Mateo, 2002, 2003).

The migrant women who have become the first link in the migratory chain have carried out complex processes of adaptation around the practise of transnational motherhood, a role disputed both at home and at destination.

At home, it is necessary to carry out a series of arrangements within the close family surroundings which will cover the role of social reproduction during their migration. Often, these negotiations have meant an overload in tasks and responsibilities for the grandmothers, and in other cases, it becomes a transfer of roles carried out by the eldest children who become the head of the house while only teenagers .

At the destination to manage to accede to worthy conditions of quality of life to exercise the right to live as a family takes many years' struggle and labour. To escape from precarious legal labour and residential situations is not an easy nor lineal course, but rather one replete with obstacles and therefore not exempt of contradictions, and from there come the redefinitions and changes in family strategies in the successive stages of the migratory project..

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