



# Transnational families and gender inequality in contexts of migratory circularity in the Victoria del Portete parish, Azuay, Ecuador

Familias transnacionales y desigualdad de género en contextos de circularidad migratoria en la parroquia Victoria del Portete, Azuay, Ecuador

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## Abstract:

The article analyzes the readjustments of the care system that take place within Ecuadorian transnational families living circular and return migration processes in the rural parish of Victoria del Portete (Azuay, Ecuador). Using a qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews with adolescents, children of migrants between 15 and 18 years of age, the study examines how the reorganization of care activities in contexts of migratory circularity implies not only an overload of work, but also the perpetuation and exacerbation of gender inequality. The research findings show how this transfer of care falls on the older daughters of nuclear families, in many cases still adolescents, who also assume productive roles, causing early adulthood processes that reinforce traditional gender mandates and roles.

**Keywords:** transnational families, gender roles, caregiving, early adulthood, gender inequality.

## Resumen:

El artículo analiza los reajustes del sistema de cuidados que se gestan en el interior de las familias transnacionales ecuatorianas que viven procesos migratorios circulares y de retorno en la parroquia rural Victoria del Portete (Azuay, Ecuador). A partir de una metodología cualitativa, haciendo uso de entrevistas a profundidad a adolescentes hijos e hijas de migrantes entre 15 y 18 años, se estudia cómo la reorganización de las actividades de cuidado en contextos de circularidad migratoria implica no solo una sobrecarga de trabajo, sino también la perpetuación y exacerbación de las desigualdades de género. Los hallazgos de la investigación dan cuenta de cómo esta transferencia de cuidados recae en las hijas mayores de las familias nucleares, aún adolescentes en muchos de los casos, quienes asumen también roles productivos, provocando procesos de adultez precoz que refuerzan los mandatos y roles tradicionales de género.

**Palabras clave:** familias transnacionales, roles de género, cuidados, adultez precoz, desigualdad de género.

## 1. Introduction

Migration in the 21st century is taking on new structural spatial and temporal dimensions (Ortín, 2013), which invite us to investigate its macro, meso, and micro levels of understanding. In this sense, the transnational perspective offers important contributions to the analysis and understanding of the reasons behind these phenomena, as well as investigating “the links that are established, both in the sending and receiving societies, as well as between the two, once the flows become more dynamic and universal” (Solé et al., 2008, p. 7). This perspective not only questions classic conceptions of the nation-state, but also discusses “the subjectivities that emerge from collective displacements, highlighting the circulation of cultural, religious, ethical, and identity meanings” (Boric Bargetto et al., 2021, p. 10).

However, this perspective has not placed sufficient emphasis on “the gender causes and specific gender experiences of migration” (Jolly and Reeves, 2005, p. 4). This is despite empirical evidence showing how “women play a predominant role in both countries of origin and destination” (Palacios, 2016, p. 158). This is true across a wide range of situations involving a broad spectrum of vulnerabilities and exclusions, but also situations of empowerment and personal autonomy.

Attempts to include gender as a variable in migration studies have emphasized the presence of women in migration and their relationship with migrant domestic work, moving toward a more holistic view of the social organization of care. and has led, in a new reflective turn, to the dissemination of studies on transnational families that link the crises in care policies, the transnationalization of social reproduction work, and the increase in women’s migration worldwide (Herrera, 2013). This has made it possible to highlight the unfair global care regime between the North and the South (Herrera, 2013), the care crisis in Northern countries (Gregorio-Gil, 2009), and the emergence of global care chains (Herrera, 2005, 2016a, 2016b; Izquierdo, 2003; Molano and García, 2012; Pérez Orozco, 2006).

Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate a gender perspective into the analysis of transnational migration, given that gender affects “all aspects of the migration experience” (Petrozziello, 2013, p. 22), as well as the social and care relationships that are established between places of origin, destination, and transit. In this way, the analysis of transnational families allows us to understand “the consequences of divided families on family dynamics and reproduction” (Cerruti and Maguid, 2010, p.11), as well as to address adjustments in terms of the renegotiation of responsibilities and how these affect the reorganization and transfer of care, especially in complex socioeconomic contexts both in the origin and destination of migration.

In this context, using a qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews, this research was carried out with the objectives of analyzing the readjustments of care tasks

and their transfer in transnational families in the parish of Victoria del Portete (Azuay, Ecuador), as well as understanding how the changes produced by 21st-century migrations affect social and gender relations. In terms of structure, the article first presents a brief theoretical discussion on transnational families, circular migration, and return, before presenting the methodology and territorial context of the study area. Second, the results of the empirical social research are presented and discussed, and finally, the conclusions of the study are presented.

## 2. Theoretical, methodological, and territorial context

Transnational families are families whose members, despite living physically apart, are able to build and maintain emotional and family ties between their societies of origin and destination, thus reaffirming a sense of belonging (Bryceson and Vuroela, 2002). These are family structures that increasingly interact in dynamic, return, and circular migration scenarios. From a transnational perspective, this breaks with the idea of return migration as a unidirectional and definitive event, in contrast to other historical moments that presented return as a definitive event (Cavalcanti and Parella, 2013), and a notion of complexity and dynamism is acquired that refers to “a growing intensity of multifaceted flows of people, objects, information, and symbols beyond national borders”<sup>1</sup>(Cavalcanti and Parella, 2013, p. 10).

This vision implies accepting how transnational families reconstruct their life processes and constantly reconfigure their family and care organization between their place of origin and their destination. For this reason, the forms of social organization of this type of family increasingly follow a circular logic. Circularity, for its part, implies that these families maintain links and ties between different spaces for economic, labor, social, and emotional reasons. Thus, it implies a transnational way of life where new subjectivities are constructed (Cargua, 2016; Zapata, 2009; Cavalcanti and Parella, 2012). For Zapata (2009), these processes involve a redefinition of gender roles, as well as the consolidation of new parental and maternal figures in transnational contexts, care tasks and resource allocation, while where uncles, aunts, grandmothers, and older siblings take on the tasks of caregiving and managing new economic resources (Zapata, 2009).

Thus, transnational families involve reorganization and renegotiation of caregiving activities without questioning gender roles, which continue to be assigned to the figure of the mother, in what is known as “transnational motherhood” (Betancourt, 2016). This dynamic is based on social networks formed mainly by women who substitute for

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1 Cavalcanti and Parella (2013) consider return as another stage in the migration cycle based on the logic of circularity sustained by “dual” or multiple identities that are not anchored in either the place of origin or the place of destination and that generate a constant exchange of resources (money, goods, ideas, information, and values)” (p. 16).

other women. The existing literature focuses on the transfer of caregiving activities from mothers to grandmothers, sisters, or older daughters. However, this reassignment of tasks continues to uphold patriarchal gender inequality by continuing to assign the role of caregiver to women in the family. (Betancourt, 2016; Pedone and Gil, 2008; Oso, n.d.; Herrera, 2013), thus perpetuating the modern colonial and gender system (Lugones, 2008).

### 3. Methodology and territorial contextualization

The research was conducted in the rural parish of Victoria del Portete (Azuay, Ecuador). It has a population of approximately 5,251 inhabitants (54.46% women and 45.54% men) (INEC, 2010). Its economy is mainly agricultural. In addition, it is a territory with a long history of migration, between 1996 and 2010, 544 people, 10.4% of its population, emigrated to countries in the global north, and 12.6% have at least one family member residing abroad, with 85% residing in the United States and 12% in Spain (INEC 2010).<sup>2</sup>

The methodology used is qualitative in order to analyze the reorganization and transfer of care in transnational families in processes of return and re-emigration in Victoria del Portete, from a gender perspective. To this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18, sons and daughters of migrants, who attended the parish's Millennium Educational Unit (UEM) during the 2018-2019 period. It is important to note that the interviewees remained in the parish because they never migrated or emigrated with their parents, but were settled in the area during the period when the interviews were conducted.

To conduct the interviews, a brief survey was first administered to high school students. (130) with the aim of identifying members of transnational families. The survey collected information on the number of family members abroad, their relationship, country of residence, and length of time abroad. This, in turn, made it possible to identify the number of migrant students. Based on these results, the sample was selected using three criteria: a) gender parity in the sample (50% men and 50% women); b) direct migration experience; and c) age range between 15 and 18 years old. This resulted in a total of 15 students (8 women and 7 men) for the research.

The in-depth interviews included questions about the migration experience as children of migrants and their experience of transnationality. Once transnational families were identified, questions were asked about the transfer of caregiving roles and the impact on their daily lives. The information was analyzed using Nvivo software. Confidentiality criteria were applied to the results, using fictitious names to accurately cite the information provided in the interviews and protect the privacy of those who participated.

Based on the results of the surveys and interviews, the information was systematized in a matrix, which identified who received the transfer of caregiving activities as a result of direct transnational migration experience. Table 1 shows relevant information on the eight young women interviewed, who are daughters of migrants and are part of transnational families, aged between 15 and 18 years. Of the total, 75% have both parents abroad and 25% have only one parent abroad. Fifty percent of the young women interviewed have parents in the United States, and 50% in Spain. Analysis of the migration projects shows that 62.5% are in a recent re-emigration process, meaning that these second emigration projects have developed in the last year prior to the interview date. In addition, it is noteworthy that most of the migration projects are long-standing, as they have been living abroad for more than 10 years or were in a situation of emigration for more than 10 years and subsequently returned to Victoria de Portete.

With regard to the transfer of care, trends are observed that coincide with other studies showing that when the father migrates, the mother assumes sole responsibility for family care (25% of interviews). There are also cases in which other women in the extended family take over caregiving (in 25% of cases, the niece or grandmother). However, it is noteworthy that in half of the interviews conducted, it is the older daughters in nuclear families who assume responsibility for caregiving in situations of re-emigration.

Table 2 presents information related to males (7). Of these, 57% had their father abroad, while in 47% of the interviews, both parents were abroad. In terms of long-term emigration, all males with parents in the United States had been abroad for more than 10 years, although no re-emigration processes were identified. With regard to the transfer of care, unlike what was observed in the case of migrant daughters, in 57% of cases, mothers were responsible for caregiving tasks, while in 14% of cases, it was the paternal aunt and in another case, the older sister.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have current information, as the last census in Ecuador was conducted in 2010. There is a Land Use and Development Plan (PDOT) for Victoria del Portete, published in 2014, but it was based on data from the 2010 census. Although a new national census was conducted at the end of 2022, the official results are not expected to be released until the end of 2023.

**Table 1:** Migration experiences of adolescent girls  
**Source:** Own elaboration

Name	Age	Who migrated?	Destination	Tiempo de residencia en el exterior (re-emigración)	Transfer from abroad
Natalia	18 years old	Both	Spain	6 months Second migration	Eldest daughter
Daniela	18 years old	Both	EE.UU	1 year Second migration	Eldest daughter
Estefanía	18 years old	Both	EE.UU	17 years	Eldest daughter
Carolina	17 years old	Padre	EE.UU	16 years	Mother
Andrea	17 years old	Both	Spain	1 years Second migration	Eldest daughter
Belén	17 years old	Both	Spain	1 years Second migration	Eldest daughter
Paula	17 years old	Both	Spain	1 years Second migration	Maternal niece
Angélica	16 years old	Padre	EE.UU	12 years	Mother
Total	Eight adolescents				

**Table 2:** Migration experiences of adolescents  
**Source:** Own elaboration

Name	Age	Who migrated?	Destination	Tiempo de residencia en el exterior (re-emigración)	Transfer from abroad
Bryan	18 years old	Father	EE.UU	17 years old	Mother-older brother
Pablo	17 years old	Father	EE.UU	12 years old	Mother
Jonatan	17 years old	Mother	EE.UU	15 years old	Mother
Cristian	17 years old	Both	EE.UU	12 years old	Paternal aunt
Jason	16 years old	Both	EE.UU	14 years old	Older sister
Juan	15 years old	Father	EE.UU	6 years old	Mother
Joel	15 years old	Father	EE.UU	10 years old	Mother
Total	Seven teenagers surveyed				

In summary, of the 15 cases, it was found that in 33% there was a transfer of caregiving responsibilities to older adolescent daughters in the context of transnational families, when both parents migrate. Of these, in 26% this transfer of care occurred during processes of return and re-emigration to Spain. However, no situations of transfer of care to sons were observed, except in one case where the older brother shares care responsibilities with the mother, suggesting a readjustment of parental roles through the older male in the household.

Transnational migration has generated complex social processes in the southern parish. Many migrants maintain close ties with their community of origin and their families, motivated by the possibility of return, which often depends on obtaining residence permits and/or citizenship in the destination countries. Others have chosen to break family ties with their place of origin, either temporarily or permanently. There are also situations of temporary or permanent return. Return in this parish, as in other parts of the country, is linked to different causes, such as:

the previously established migration objectives that were achieved; nostalgia for the environment; desire to be present during the growth of their children (when they remained in their place of origin), or to take them with them so that they can be educated or live in an environment that they believe is more in line with their culture and values (Mena and Cruz, 2017, p. 285).

Difficulties in adapting to the destination or marital breakdowns can be reasons for return, especially for women due to gender mandates that require them to care for children, older adults, or other dependents in their place of origin (Mena and Cruz, 2017). However, return does not always turn out as expected and, due to difficulties in readjusting to life in the community or the difficult economic situation in the country, some people decide to emigrate again.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Transnational migration involves adjustments in caregiving, with women, especially grandmothers and maternal aunts in extended families, being the recipients of this care (Oso, n.d.; Zapata, 2009; Parella, 2012; Betancourt, 2016). However, in current migratory movements, where return is not definitive and re-emigration is frequent, older daughters under the age of majority in nuclear families also receive this care, which deepens existing gender inequalities (Herrera, 2013).

This research observes a reconfiguration of roles in transnational families, where caregiving activities are concentrated in nuclear families and are increasingly transferred to older daughters, including adolescents, in processes of return and circular migration. However, these



processes deepen gender inequalities and result in work overload and early adulthood for adolescents. Thus, the importance of analyzing second-generation migrants who experience forced return to their parents' country of origin is highlighted.

Sometimes, these second generations have different ethnic-territorial and legal-administrative statuses, which causes and deepens inequalities among members of transnational families, even among brothers and sisters (Camarero, 2010). Although these families are increasingly taking the form of nuclear families, they continue to maintain vertical power relations based on gender and age, which makes them seem like a reduced version of pre-modern extended families, even though their functionality is extensive and they are geographically dispersed (Camarero, 2010, p. 43).

In the parish studied, transnational families have formed between Ecuador and the United States and between Ecuador and Spain, reflecting changes in contemporary societies and family structures that are constantly adapting to local and global political and economic circumstances. In this sense, reciprocal interactions can be observed between cultural norms and the behaviors of families and their members, which result in family agreements and arrangements that seek to guarantee the material and emotional reproduction of their members (Herrera and Carrillo, 2009).

The global economic crisis that began in 2008 in the United States and Europe created diverse scenarios for transnational families. In some cases, entire families returned, while in others, only some members returned to their country of origin. Those who returned faced difficulties in readjusting to the local community due to a lack of job opportunities, which led many families to re-migrate. However, the family agreements established in the face of re-emigration processes are now very different.

It has been observed that in these circular migration processes, the migration of the entire family is no longer necessarily contemplated, and care arrangements take on different forms. In the parish studied, it has been found that when only the father returns to migrate in two-parent households, care tasks remain the responsibility of mothers, as was the case with re-emigration to the United States. In these cases, as it is the father who emigrates, no significant changes are observed in the allocation of care roles to women in the family, in line with the traditional division of labor. However, certain conflicts arise related to the contradiction between the father's role as provider and his lack of authority due to his absence. In some cases, this authority has been replaced by the figure of the older brother, who helps the mother in caring for the children.

When my dad emigrated, my older brother became a father to me and my younger sister. My mom always tells us that he matured early. I saw him as a father figure, I trust him a lot, he always gives me advice and supports me (Bryan, 18).

In two-parent households that decided to return to Spain, the children were no longer involved in the decision-making process or family reorganization. The research found that older daughters were responsible for caring for their younger siblings, despite still being minors. Natalia, an 18-year-old high school student, explained how the lack of job opportunities in Ecuador motivated her parents to re-emigrate to Spain and transfer the responsibility of caring for their children to their eldest daughter, who took on this task despite her youth. As Natalia explains: "Six months ago, they decided to return to Spain because they couldn't find work here, or what they earned wasn't enough because my dad was a carpenter. My siblings and I stayed behind, and now, as the oldest, I take care of them."

In some cases, administrative issues such as the possible loss of residence permits lead parents to decide to re-emigrate without including their children in their new migration plans. As a result, the responsibility for caring for the children falls on the eldest daughter, who is also a minor.

One day, a letter arrived from the embassy stating that if they did not return to Spain, they could lose their residence permits, so they returned (...) leaving me and my 12-year-old brother behind (...) When they left, my mother told me to take care of my brother. (Belén, 17 years old).

In this case, we can see how gender criteria carry greater weight in decision-making regarding the transfer of care, as the mother assumes that her eldest daughter, despite being a minor, has the capacity and responsibility to take care of the home and family in her absence. This reflects the persistence of traditional gender roles, where women are expected to take on the burden of caregiving and domestic tasks, even in situations of migration and re-emigration.

My mom decided to come live here, but she couldn't find a good job and my dad told her to come back, so she did. Since we're studying, we stayed here at my parents' house (Andrea, 17).

In the case of Paula, aged 17, she, her younger sister, and her mother returned to Ecuador, while her father decided to stay in Spain. Shortly afterwards, her mother decided to return to Spain and transferred the care of her daughters to her niece, who is a little older than Paula.

We came with my mom two years ago, but she didn't study here because she couldn't find a job and decided to go back to Spain. Since we were already enrolled in school, if we went back, we would have lost another year, so my mom told us to finish school and then she would take us back (Paula, 17).

In the cases cited, the older daughters who remain in charge of caring for their younger siblings are a second generation born in the destination country, in this case Spain, and who have Spanish nationality. However, their parents decide to re-emigrate for work reasons, maladjustment to the community of origin, or to maintain their administrative-legal status in the destination country. The decision to leave their children in Ecuador is made in order to maintain the small family assets resulting from remittances or to allow them to complete the academic year in their community of origin. However, the decision to re-emigrate is not made by consensus, but is imposed vertically by the parents, demonstrating the asymmetrical power relations within

some transnational families. Minors play a passive role in decision-making and, in some cases, are forced to go against their will.

I want to go back to Spain, but my parents don't want me to. It was much better there than here. My mom wanted to come here, I don't even know why (...). Back there, I focused on my studies, I was a good student. Now I'm not, sometimes my mind is in the clouds and I get bad grades (Paula, 17).

This second generation of migrants who return involuntarily to take care of their transnational families in their country of origin do not always manage to adapt successfully. The transfer of care often involves an overload of work, especially in a context where other members of the extended family have lost importance. As a result, many of these adolescents live with the idea of returning to their country of origin forever.

We are living in my parents' house with my 21-year-old cousin. We get along, but we don't trust each other very much because we didn't know each other very well, since we were there (...) but we are trying (Paula, 17).

On the other hand, the different types of gender-based violence experienced by some adolescent girls in transnational families reveal their extreme vulnerability to sexual violence:

When I was nine years old, my uncle sexually abused me. My grandmother never did anything. Until a year ago, he [the rapist] kept coming into the house. I told the school psychologist and said I didn't want to live with my grandmother anymore, I couldn't take it anymore. (...) They took me to a shelter. There they said I was a teenager at risk, and I stayed for four months. For the first two months, I didn't hear anything from my family. I thought they were angry with me. After two months, my brother came to visit me. When I left (...) I went to live with my brother (Estefanía, 18 years old).

In general, the maladjustment experienced by these adolescent women is due to the fact that they take on domestic and caregiving tasks at an early age. Although there is little literature on the transfer of caregiving to older daughters in transnational families (Zapata, 2009; Herrera and Carrillo, 2009; Herrera, 2013), this research has shown that the transfer of caregiving, productive, administrative, community, and remittance management activities falls disproportionately on older daughters compared to sons. None of the underage boys acknowledged taking on caregiving tasks, which fall on the mother when the father is abroad. These gender inequalities in the allocation of care imply a process of "early adulthood" (Pedone, 2008), where older daughters in transnational families, even as teenagers, take on new activities and responsibilities that were previously the responsibility of the mother and father.

On Sundays, I get up at 5 a.m. to prepare everything. By 7:30 a.m., we have everything ready and we go out to sell. I start cooking while my younger sister makes the dough for the empanadas. By 11:30 a.m., we have all the food ready. (...) Sometimes we sell everything, sometimes there is something left over, but we bring that home. At first I was afraid because I didn't know how much to invest or how to do it, but little by little we're getting there. We were afraid to prepare the food because before we only saw how it was done, but well, we were able to do it and we sell it (Natalia, 18 years old).

Older teenage daughters play a fundamental role in the dynamics of transnational families by assuming and replacing the role of fathers and/or mothers (Parella, 2012). The overload of tasks and physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion affect their life cycle, accelerating the process of assuming adult responsibilities. Narratives such as "becoming a mother or father" reveal what these processes of deepening gender roles and mandates entail:

It's like becoming a mom or a dad, I have to take care of everything, make sure the money comes in, feed everyone, and I also take care of things that are missing in the house. Sometimes there's no food (...) my parents do send money, but since they're not financially stable there yet, they send us very little. Last time they sent us \$120 for food and we have to make it last (Natalia, 18 years old).

This process of early adulthood among young women triggers a series of feelings of fear, insecurity, and uncertainty when it comes to caring for children and managing financial resources. Daniela's case illustrates this phenomenon. When she was 17, her parents emigrated to the United States a year ago, forcing her to take on the social role of "mother."

The money is in my name, so since I'm of legal age, I manage it. I have to pay the electricity bill, put food in the freezer, buy groceries (...). It's difficult because you have to be there to take care of everything, we don't know what's going to happen, the other day my dad's car broke down and we had to pay for it out of the food money. It's a huge responsibility because I took on my mom's role. (Daniela, 18 years old).

The overload of domestic, caregiving, and productive tasks and responsibilities often forces older daughters to give up their own life plans, as their education and leisure activities are hindered. Meanwhile, this does not happen to their brothers or younger sisters. An example of this is Natalia, who, at the time of the interview, was pregnant and had to take charge of running her family home and her new family.

Since I am the oldest sister, I am like their mother, I am in charge and I represent them at school meetings. I also have to look after my partner, cook meals, and do my laundry and my partner's laundry, as well as my brothers' uniforms (Natalia, 18 years old).

Carolina expresses it in a similar way:

Weekends are even harder because I get up at 8 a.m. and have to look after my little brother, and I also have to do the washing, sweeping, dusting, cooking (...) My older brother just does his homework. He's finishing school this year and they give him a lot of homework, so I try to help him. I do my homework at night (Carolina, 17).

A completely different picture emerges in the case of the sons of transnational families. The younger children of migrants continue with their academic activities and life projects after their parents migrate, without having to take on reproductive, care or community tasks. They use their free time for leisure and personal development:

On Saturdays, I come to school from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. to fulfill my participation hours. In the afternoons, I have free time. Sometimes I go to Cuenca to buy things I need for myself or for school, for my practical training (...) (Pablo, 17 years old).

The men interviewed benefit from remittances to improve their academic training and enjoy recreational activities, free from caregiving responsibilities. This situation reflects the persistent colonial and gender system (Lugones, 2008) in which women continue to be subject to the same traditional and gender-based logic, being assigned mainly domestic and care tasks, while men remain exempt from responsibility for these activities.

Sometimes my dad sends us \$50 each, and that helps us buy clothes or whatever we need (...) Last time, I bought some soccer cleats and materials for school practice. In April, I'm going to start a pre-university program so I can take the university entrance exam (Bryan, 18).

My sister complains about the things my mom asks her to do. She always says, 'Only me,' but it doesn't help because she has to do them. I help too, but not always because I study in the afternoons. I'm in a pre-university program to get into college (Jonatan, 17).

As Herrera (2013) points out, when gender roles converge in a single person, they cause an overload of work and, in turn, exacerbate gender inequality within families and society, which becomes normalized and perpetuated. This gender inequality is perceived by the older daughters in transnational households when they compare their situation with that which they experienced in more egalitarian contexts in their country of destination. Nostalgia sets in; the sense of belonging becomes blurred:

In Spain, my life was different. I only had to study, but here I have to help with things, (...) make sure my brother does his homework, and I hardly have any time to do my own homework. Sometimes I do it during my free time at school and also at night (...) When I have exams, I study at night, but I fall asleep (Paula, 17 years old).

The agreements, "arrangements and disagreements surrounding care that arise as a result of migration, especially female migration, are a reflection of broader processes of social inequality" (Herrera, 2013, p. 18). Thus, migration has a significant influence on gender relations, perpetuating inequalities and traditional roles assigned to women, who are responsible for domestic, care, and production tasks, as well as community activities, simply because they are women (Solé et al., 2007). In migratory processes, especially circular ones, there is a significant transformation that involves the transfer of domestic and care roles to other women, particularly daughters, who take on an intergenerational burden of care work among women (Parella, 2007). This perpetuates and deepens existing gender inequalities.

They consider that they are designated to perform household tasks as a rule, by custom, and therefore they naturalize, internalize, and normalize caregiving activities:

I've gotten used to doing things around the house. When my mom was here, she took care of everything (...) now it's my turn. It's hard not having my parents here, it's not the same as before, I miss them a lot (Natalia, 18 years old).

Gender roles have been perpetuated historically by key social institutions (state, family, religion), which function as agents that construct and reproduce social patterns and values that relegate women to the private sphere, crystallizing in the stereotype of the self-sacrificing mother,

responsible for transmitting the same cultural values, and the stereotype of the father as the main breadwinner of the family, basing his authority on the family unit.

In short, during the migration process, which never ends, new female and male identities may be constructed (Ciurlo, 2014), but this does not imply that more equitable relationships are created within the home or society. In fact, inequalities and discrimination against younger women are widespread and intensify in many cases.

## 4. Conclusions

Migration in the 21st century is characterized by its circularity and the formation of transnational households in which family practices are maintained despite physical distance. In this context, adjustments and readjustments occur in terms of social reproduction and the transfer of care, especially in the context of new return and re-emigration processes that continue to perpetuate gender inequalities both within the family and in society at large. The existing literature has shown that mothers in transnational families routinely transfer direct childcare activities to other women in their family, usually women from the extended maternal family. However, in the present research, in circular migration contexts, it is the older daughters, often adolescents, who take on direct childcare.

Furthermore, transnational households reproduce family practices beyond physical distance, often aided by new technologies, information, communication, and social media. In the homes of transnational families undergoing re-emigration, direct caregiving tasks are assigned to older daughters without consultation or consensus, leading to premature adulthood and perpetuating and exacerbating the existing gender inequality system. In conclusion, these findings underscore the need to rethink gender relations and the role of women in transnational families and in societies in general, in order to achieve greater equity and shared responsibility in social reproduction and caregiving.

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