

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

**A Conceptual Take on Transnational Families:
Atypical Families from a Distance**Nur Banu KAVAKLI¹

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Abstract

Transnational families are among the by-products of global capitalism, the feminization of migration and the globalization of care work. Transnational families owe their existence to the rise of communication and transportation technologies, economic transformations, and cultural features in their countries of origin and destination. A transnational family is different from an ordinary immigrant family. The defining factor is not the act of cross-border movement of the family, but the dispersion of the family, nuclear or extended, across international borders, where different family members spend time in one or another country depending on various factors. The emergence of transnational family experience relates to economic, political, social, and cultural factors, and has far-reaching causes and consequences. This study offers a new conceptual approach to the discussion of transnational families departing from Judith Stacey's (1996) "postmodern family condition". As a family arrangement made possible in the postmodern family condition, transnational families better describe situations in which families are not visible yet not absent, not necessarily broken but separated. Transnational families require a whole new understanding and definition of familial relationships, which should focus on the fluid nature of those in the absence of a concrete family setting. The role of immigrant women in such a family structure stands as a challenge to the stereotypical "modern family" as defined by Stacey; hence, enabling the conceptualization of transnational families as part of the postmodern condition. The impact transnational family experience has on various actors involved is examined by asking some fundamental questions such as: How are the decisions concerning who migrate under what conditions taken? How does the transnational family experience affect gender relations? What are the

global and local conditions that make this experience possible? This study employs a three-layered approach to analyze the issue. First, the structural backdrop to transnational families is analysed; namely, the expansion of global capitalism that feeds female labour migration and the demand for the service sector, especially domestic care services. Second, the changes in the concept of family due to societal structural transformations and the emergence of new family forms are discussed. Third, the consequences of the first two aspects of the experience of transnational family life and its impact on parties involved at various levels are analysed: providers of care work and their families (parents, children, and extended family members), receivers of care work (employers and their families), and mediators of global care work (agencies and states).

Keywords: Transnational families, Global capitalism, Feminization of migration, Care work, Motherhood.

Ulusötesi Ailelere Kavramsal Bir Açılım: Sıradışı Uzak Mesafe Aileler

Öz

Ulusötesi aileler küresel kapitalizmin, göçün kadınsılaşmasının ve bakım işinin küreselleşmesinin yan ürünleri arasındadır. Ulusötesi aileler varlıklarını, menşe ve varış ülkelerindeki iletişim ve ulaşım teknolojilerinin yükselişine, ekonomik dönüşümlere ve kültürel özelliklere borçludur. Ulusötesi bir aile, sıradan bir göçmen aileden farklıdır. Tanımlayıcı faktör, ailenin sınır ötesi hareketi değil, farklı aile üyelerinin çeşitli diğer faktörlere bağlı olarak bir veya diğer ülkede zaman geçirdiği, ailenin çekirdek veya geniş uluslararası sınırların ötesine dağılmasıdır. Ulusötesi aile deneyiminin ortaya çıkışı ekonomik, politik, sosyal ve kültürel faktörlerle ilgilidir ve geniş kapsamlı nedenleri ve sonuçları vardır. Bu çalışma, Judith Stacey'nin (1996) "postmodern aile durumu"ndan yola çıkarak, ulusötesi ailelerin tartışılmasına yeni bir kavramsal yaklaşım sunmaktadır. Postmodern aile koşullarında mümkün kılınan bir aile düzenlemesi olarak ulusötesi aileler, ailelerin görünür olmadığı ancak yok olmadığı, mutlaka parçalanmış değil fakat ayrılmış olduğu durumları daha iyi tanımlar. Ulusötesi aileler, somut bir aile ortamının yokluğunda, aile ilişkilerinin değişken doğasına odaklanan yepyeni bir anlayış ve tanım gerektirir. Göçmen kadınların böyle bir aile yapısındaki rolü, Stacey'nin tanımladığı kalıplaşmış "modern aile"ye karşı bir meydan okuma olarak durmakta ve dolayısıyla ulusötesi ailelerin postmodern durumun bir parçası olarak kavramsallaştırılmasına olanak tanımaktadır. Ulusötesi aile deneyiminin ilgili çeşitli aktörler üzerindeki etkisi, aşağıdaki türden bazı temel sorular sorularak incelenmektedir: Kimin hangi koşullar altında göç edeceğine ilişkin kararlar nasıl alınmaktadır? Ulusötesi aile deneyimi toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerini nasıl etkiliyor? Bu deneyimi mümkün kılan küresel ve yerel koşullar nelerdir? Bu çalışma konunun üç katmanlı bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. İlk olarak, ulusötesi ailelerin yapısal arka planı; yani kadın işgücü göçünü besleyen küresel kapitalizmin genişlemesi ve başta ev içi bakım hizmetleri olmak üzere hizmet sektörüne olan talebin artmasını analiz etmektedir. İkinci olarak, toplumsal yapısal dönüşümlere bağlı olarak aile kavramında yaşanan değişimler ve yeni aile biçimlerinin ortaya çıkışı tartışılmaktadır. Çalışmanın üçüncü katmanında ise ulusötesi aile yaşamının fiili deneyimine ilişkin ilk iki hususun sonuçları ile bunun çeşitli düzeylerde ilgili taraflar (bakım emeği sağlayıcıları ve onların aileleri-ebeveynler, çocuklar ve geniş aile üyeleri; bakım emeğini alanlar-işverenler ve aileleri ve küresel bakım işinin aracıları -kurumlar ve devletler) üzerindeki etkisi analiz edilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ulusötesi aileler, Küresel kapitalizm, Göçün kadınsılaşması, Bakım emeği, Annelik

1. Introduction

Transnational families are among the by-products of global capitalism, the feminization of migration and the globalization of care work. Transnational families owe their existence to the rise of communication and transportation technologies, economic transformations, and cultural features in their countries of origin. A transnational family is different from an ordinary immigrant family. The defining factor is not the act of cross-border movement of the family but the dispersion of the family, nuclear or extended, across international borders, where different family members spend time in one or another country depending on various factors (Herrera Lima, 2001).

This study is an analytical attempt at a new conceptualization of the transnational family experience departing from Judith Stacey's "postmodern family condition" (1996). The postmodern family condition enables us to reconsider the recent developments experienced in the past several decades such as the expansion of global capitalism, feminization of migration and globalization of care work as phenomena contributing to the creation of an atypical family form: *the transnational family*. The expansion of global capitalism and associated regional inequalities in terms of purchasing power and living conditions; the changing attitude towards women's employment, both in countries of origin and destination; the related increase in women's share in cross-border movements, also referred to as feminization of migration had the combined effect of generating demand for women from poorer countries to emigrate to richer countries to compensate for the domestic/care work of employed women. In other words, the globalization of care work, created a global chain where women left their typical family conditions, literally and figuratively, to emigrate and care for the families of women who are employed in the public sphere, resulting in the formation of atypical families, families lived and loved from a distance, not typical yet still existent. This work examines the origins of conditions for and the consequences of transnational family experience through this new conceptual lens.

The emergence of transnational family experience relates to economic, political, social, and cultural factors, and has far-reaching causes and consequences. The impact transnational family experience has on various actors involved is examined by asking some fundamental questions such as: How are the decisions concerning who migrate under what conditions taken? How does the transnational family experience affect gender relations? What are the global and local conditions that make this experience possible? This work presents a three-layered examination of the issue. First, the structural backdrop to transnational families is analysed; namely, the expansion of global capitalism that feeds female labour migration and the demand for the service sector, especially domestic care services. Second, the changes in the concept of *family* due to societal structural transformations and the emergence of new family forms are discussed. Third, the consequences of the first two aspects of the experience of transnational family life and its impact on parties involved at various levels are analysed: providers of care work and their families (parents, children, and extended family members), receivers of care work (employers and their families), and mediators of global care work (agencies and states).

2. Globalization, Female Labor Migration and Domestic Work

The expansion of global capitalism paved the way for women from poor¹ countries to participate in migration and global economic production. Women have become significant actors in transnational migration processes for the last couple of decades. They are no longer the passive figures, who follow their fathers or husbands within “family reunification” programs (Kofman et al., 2000). Women are now active, autonomous agents of migration, who respond to local and global dynamics. However, the feminization of migration is not only a consequence of a series of transformations ranging from changing gender relations to economic restructuring or demands of global capitalism. There is an interactive relationship between women’s involvement in migration and structural transformations. Globalization encouraged more people, especially Third World women, to migrate to rich countries with the help of the influence of global media and multinational corporations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Sassen (1998) views globalization as the process of the incorporation of “Third World” women into wage labour. She notes how in this process women migrants compose a particular type of labour due to their double disadvantage, one of sex/gender and the other of class. Raijman et al. also draw attention to the gendered structure of the labour market and define immigrant women’s status as one of the “double negative effects” of gender and birthplace (2003: 730). Even though particular forms of low-wage employment open to women vary, female immigrants are the most suitable to be employed in domestic service (Nakano Glenn, 1986). Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003: 3) call this the “*female underside of globalization*”, a process whereby women from poor countries migrate to rich countries to do jobs considered as women’s work while leaving their own families in the care of others.

Immigrant women do not always enter into the labour force to stay there for long periods, and married women with children compose an important portion of the labour force, due to economic necessity. Women consider their current domestic work as instrumental, a short-term strategy to contribute to family income and save for their future (Raijman et al., 2003). Although working outside the home has always been an outlet for immigrant women, today not only the way women participate in the labour force but also their role in the process of migration is different (Foner, 2000). Due to macro-structural factors such as the availability of employment opportunities and changing immigration laws women initiate migration. The nature of the jobs that women take also differs strikingly due to the changing social capital of immigrant women with differing education levels and skills. Regardless of their level of education and professional experience, women are seen as suited for care work due to the gendered nature of care work. Even though having multiple language skills and/or higher education diplomas may increase the demand and subsequent wages for immigrant women, they are still employed in

1 It is difficult to choose the correct word to categorize these countries. “Third World”, “Global South”, “developing”, or “less developed” are equally problematic. Thus, “poor or poorer” is used to emphasize the centrality of economic factors in fostering the migration of women. In a typical manner, rather than using the “north”, “First World”, “Global North” or “developed/industrialized”, countries that demand immigrant women’s labour power and receive immigration are referred to as the “rich/richest” countries. This approach enables us to overcome geographical boundaries and differences in levels of industrialization when referring to receiving countries that range from the U.S. to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East or global cities like Hong Kong. Although First/Third World terminology is used at various points throughout the text due to usage in sources, the above connotation frames this work.

domestic and care work. This is also true for many immigrant women from poor countries, especially those lacking documents, domestic sector is the single most significant employment opportunity. Foner (2000) avoids crude conclusions about the outcomes of women's labour force participation. In her analysis, immigration and employment both oppress and liberate women. This double-sided nature of working abroad is a significant aspect of life for women who are heads of transnational families.

Domestic work deserves attention as a particular type of service sector job demanding the labour-power of immigrant women. The social organization of domestic work is highly racialized and class-based. Generally regarded as an inferior activity, it is almost always performed either by people of colour or immigrants to serve the white middle and upper-middle classes (Nakano Glenn, 1986; Rollins, 1985). Care work is defined as "*instrumental for social reproduction, nurturing and sustaining the labour force and providing the social infrastructure for the maintenance of economic and social institutions*" (Litt and Zimmerman, 2003: 156). Yet still, the fundamental problem with care work is that women's domestic activities are not considered to produce economic value (Litt and Zimmerman, 2003). Even though the activities of immigrant workers are highly monitored, especially in the U.S., the domestic sector as a branch of employment is not. Immigrant women work in informal settings, where the work they perform is not considered a real job, although private domestic work is covered by labour regulations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). The largest problems concerning domestic work are the "invisibility" of the job and the customary personal relationships between the employer and the employed (Nakano Glenn, 1986; Rollins, 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). It is very difficult for domestic workers to organize and demand work benefits and security as long as domestic work is not recognized as a legitimate occupation due to its invisible nature, and both the employers and the workers act accordingly. This difficulty is further hardened by the sociodemographic composition of immigrant workers. Most of the immigrant domestic workers are women of colour who experience racial discounting in host countries. It gets even more complicated when immigrant care workers stay in the host country without a legal immigrant status, thus they also feel the need to conceal themselves from the public view (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003).

Feminization of migration and the global division of reproductive work should also be analyzed in terms of the status of men. These two processes have changing effects on men depending on the geographic location and socioeconomic standing of men. The feminization of migration from poor countries is a trend parallel to the feminization of the labour force in rich countries. The gendered nature of domestic work holds women responsible for these kinds of jobs both in paid and unpaid forms (Litt and Zimmerman, 2003). Thus, middle-class women of rich countries, who want to have a career need to find a way to negotiate their work life with their domestic responsibilities since men in their families do not increase their contribution to the work of home. By transferring their domestic responsibilities to low-cost immigrant women of colour rather than to their spouses 'First World' women reproduce unequal gender relations (Hochschild, 2003; Lan, 2003b). The situation is quite different for poor countries. Women's migration to provide for their families while men stay at home indicates a gender shift in these countries. Men are expected to care for their families in the absence of mothers. However, even though

expectations regarding men's participation in domestic work change, women are still the key figures in managing and sustaining transnational households, even if from a distance (Aranda, 2003).

The relationship between globalization, female migration and domestic work has many main features (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001): Women, especially from poor countries, leave their communities and even families to participate in the domestic service sector of rich countries as invisible workers. Women who work in the domestic sector are not necessarily from lower socioeconomic classes, but the global inequalities that further marginalize poor countries force them to seek employment opportunities in rich countries even if they have a college degree. The logic of post-industrial capitalism promotes service-based sectors in rich countries and thus gives way to the "new world domestic order" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001), which generates an increasing demand for the labour-power of immigrant women and thus propels documented and undocumented female labour migration. One of the fundamental causes of family separation (of course in addition to regional inequalities caused by economic globalization) is the tendency of global capitalism to separate the locale of reproduction of the labour force from the locale where it is used. Parreñas (2001b) refers to this as the "international division of reproductive labour" and Richmond named it as a form of "global apartheid" (Richmond, 1994 cited in Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Prevalence of such logic affects the way immigration laws are formed to ensure not bearing the cost of rearing later generations of workforce while at the same guaranteeing the arrival of temporary labour power ready to fill the void in sectors in which native workers prefer not to be employed.

Each of the above-mentioned features requires a different theoretical approach that employs a global perspective to draw out a map of related processes. One particular perspective deals with the idea that the transfer of certain work reproduces social inequalities across boundaries of nation-states and social groups (Litt and Zimmerman, 2003; Nakano Glenn, 1986; Rollins, 1985). A second approach relates to the invisible nature of care work and examines the construction of the public-private sphere dichotomy as a mechanism that conceals the reproduction of unequal gender ideology (Lan, 2003a). And the final approach regards the role of state policies in mediating the globalization of domestic service, and the position of immigrant domestic workers in that process (Cheng, 2003). All of these theoretical perspectives will be employed in examining the transnational family experience.

3. A New Conceptual Approach to the Transnational Family

As changing gender roles and economic necessities enable and compel women to migrate, the experience of migration further transforms existing family and gender arrangements. Thus, for a considerable portion of immigrant families the traditional/normative family structure, with the husband as the breadwinner and the wife taking care of the house and the children, is no longer appropriate as a relevant unit of analysis. The economic system goes through transformations parallel to those of family arrangements; thus, the family structures in premodern, modern, and postmodern times have not been similar (Stacey, 1991). According to Stacey (1991) with the decline of the male family wage system in the post-industrial period, families became more dependent on the earnings of women and the decline of

the nuclear family, and the emergence of diverse household forms followed. Dual wage earners, single parent, and divorced families along with female-headed households are examples of such diversity.

The “*postmodern family condition*” concept coined by Stacey (1996) identifies a new plane on which analyses can be made rather than an analytical tool. In other words, it emphasizes that a uniform lens is no longer suitable for examining all family formations. However, by itself, this concept does not provide the analyst with the necessary tools but reminds her to change tools to capture the diversity and complexity of emergent forms of personal relations and family structures. In other words, it makes it possible to see the family as a “*place where there is dynamic interplay between structure, culture and agency*” and in the context of transnational families, as a place “*where creative culture-building takes place in the context of external social and economic forces as well as immigrants’ premigration cultural frameworks*” (Foner, 1997: 961). When we consider the various trajectories that lead to the emergence and maintenance of postmodern family conditions, we should be aware of a one-dimensional analysis of the concept, such as good, bad, progressive, emancipatory, limiting, mandatory etc., and capture the relative significance of every aspect concerning specific contexts.

As a family arrangement made possible in the postmodern family condition, transnational families better describe situations in which families are not visible yet not absent, not necessarily broken but separated. Transnational families require a whole new understanding and definition of familial relationships, which should focus on the fluid nature of those in the absence of a conventional family setting. The role of immigrant women in such a family structure stands as a challenge to the stereotypical “*modern family*” as defined by Stacey (1996). Women leave behind their spouses and children to sustain their families. However, in doing so they not only become the breadwinners and challenge the prevailing power structure, but they also, literally leave the domestic sphere and all the everyday responsibilities related to that. If the modern family is marital, nuclear, based on a gendered division of domestic work and ultimately dependent on the success of a male breadwinner, the transnational family is postmodern.

The transnational family is a particular type of family associated with the postmodern condition, specifically due to global capitalism, and relevant especially within the context of female-led immigration. Typically, the mother migrates away from the main family unit to work as a domestic worker in a foreign country to provide for her own family while some other person –usually a female kin member- takes care of her family. Although this particular example of a transnational family is only one of many possible forms, it diverges most from the stereotypical modern family both in terms of the breadwinner status of the mother figure and her literal absence from the family unit. In such a setting, not only the husband-wife relationship but also motherhood is transnational in the state. What maintains this, somehow virtual, relationship is the intentional involvement of family members in long-distance relationships to keep the family unit running.

Within this framework, Giddens’s (1992) concept of the “*pure relationship*” becomes useful in analyzing the dynamics of a transnational family. Even though Giddens’s formulation of a pure relationship refers

to a modern condition rather than a postmodern one, the emphasis on the voluntary nature of the relation and the importance of personal autonomy in decisions regarding the relationship make this concept compatible with a transnational family structure. Yet, the concept needs development to fully capture the dynamic quality of a relationship, not only within the context of transnational families but even for the “purest” and most egalitarian relationship. Although Giddens (1992) criticizes Foucault for applying a diffused understanding of power, he fails to look at power at any level in his analysis. He ignores power over the other party based on any kind of difference ranging from gender to race, age, education and/or religion along with the power to be in or leave a relationship. Here it is concurred that the ways individuals establish, maintain, and suspend relationships change from one context to another even if rough categorizations help us have a better understanding of social phenomena. The various kinds of power to which people have access significantly shape the context. Thus, for every general formulation regarding families, we need tools to fine-tune and account for the specificity of every particular case.

4. Transnational Family Experience

Transnational family is an umbrella term to cover a range of family arrangements made possible and necessary by immigration and globalization. The definitive feature of a transnational family is the spread of family members over more than one country. Even though the experience of split households due to migration is as old as international migration itself, contemporary transnational families represent a unique experience. Mexican *Bracero* workers in the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century or Middle Eastern guest workers in Western Europe after World War II were mainly male workers living far away from their families to generate incomes for their families back home. However, these split households were not considered transnational in the sense the term is employed today (Parreñas, 2001b). For example, the abandoned wives of the *bracero* workers in the patriarchal Mexican society had to act on the margins of the gender ideology to survive. The *bracero* wives challenged the strict gender system to provide the livelihood of their families, in cases without the help of extended family members (Rosas, unpublished manuscript). Yet, these families still confirmed the traditional structure, where the man migrated to fulfil his breadwinner role and the woman stayed behind. The most significant feature of transnational families of today is that women, in most cases mothers, leave their families to work abroad as the main providers of income. Thus, what is new in this type of family form is the shift of the “primary breadwinner status” from the man to the woman. The impact of such a shift on gender relations, especially in societies in which traditional patriarchy structures gender relations, is the most controversial issue. A second feature of transnational families derives from improved communication and information technologies and the postmodern concept of time-space compression. Thus, the family, as a social field, “operates through the circulation of goods, resources, individuals, and information across national borders” (Parreñas, 2001a: 362). The concept of transnational family does not only refer to the family type in which mothers are absent. The composition of families differs due to intersecting local/micro and global/macro factors. Mainly, there are three distinct types of transnational families: families with one parent working abroad, families with two parents working abroad, and families with

adult children working abroad for the survival of the rest of the family members back in their home country (Lan, 2003a; Parreñas, 2001b).

The movement of immigrant women across borders to work in the domestic sector should not be regarded as a clear-cut transformation of unpaid care work in the private sphere (their own homes) to paid care work in the public sphere. Lan coins the concept of the “*continuity of domestic labour*” to denote the multiplicity of work forms performed by women both in the private and public spheres (2003a: 188). When the life experiences of transnational migrant women are concerned this continuum of domestic labour provides a better understanding than binaries such as public/private, paid/unpaid, and love work/money work. It is not uncommon to find migrant women who have multiple and even contradictory roles on this continuum. Women who work as domestics overseas might have their domestic workers at home when transnational mothers try to negotiate their breadwinner status (paid work) with their primary domestic responsibility, motherhood (unpaid work) (Lan, 2003).

Another area where the public/private distinction blurs is the role of the state in the process of globalization of domestic labour. Home and host country states have differing roles in this process. Home country states, such as the Philippines, encourage women to take overseas jobs as domestic workers and contribute to the economy through their remittances (Parreñas, 2001b). The state crosses the public/private border even to a larger extent when it announces a certain type of women -single and childless- to be morally acceptable migrants (Parreñas, 2003). Host country states are much more protective of their borders; these appropriate women’s labour and the gendered nature of domestic labour shape household politics under globalization (Cheng, 2003). Thus, they can extract labour yet do not grant citizenship rights. Taiwan and Hong Kong provide good examples in this regard. Strict immigration and domestic work regulations enable the state to exert control over domestic workers’ bodies and sexuality. Furthermore, the employers who enforce similar control and exclusion carry this public control to the private sphere and monitor immigrant domestic workers in the household (Cheng, 2003; Constable, 1997). An extreme form of that control reveals itself in the attempts of employers to confiscate the passports of their immigrant nannies with concerns of security. This way, they control the mobility of the women and force them to stay.

The transnational family experience need not be the best option for the parties involved. Having families spread across borders for the sake of higher incomes is not necessarily desirable and attaching a scientific concept like “*transnational*” does not change the negative outcomes. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) raise three major criticisms against the transnational perspective when the experiences of Latino immigrants are concerned. The criticisms they raise are also valid in other cases. Their first objection is to the emphasis on circulation and indeterminacy of settlement, arguing that advocates of transnationalism often understate the permanency of immigrant settlement and put an emphasis on the temporality of circuits. However, a closer look at individual stories reveals the permanent nature of immigration, when it takes years just to go back to the home country for visits, and leave aside return migration. Their second criticism targets the celebratory nature of transnationalism, which

views movement across borders and seeking survival in uncertain environments as a type of resistance. The uncertainty is especially a concern for undocumented immigrants, who work without any kind of protection and security. A similar approach is voiced by Parreñas (2001b), who argues that transnational households are not symbols of immigrants' agency against global forces of capitalism, but are tangible forms of family separation enforced by border control. Finally, they criticize the lack of gender as an organizational variable in transnational experience. Circuits of migration are not gender-free but loaded depending on the gender of immigrants. That is why the migration of wives and mothers is the determining factor in transnational migration. The changing status of women and their move away from expected gender roles, especially motherhood, causes the largest difference in this type of migration.

In all these cases transnational families are made possible by the intersection of global structural and local cultural factors. While economic globalization creates employment opportunities abroad in certain sectors, such as domestic services that specifically demand labour power of immigrant women of colour, the cultural setting in the home country regarding family life and relations makes possible such a journey (Parreñas, 2001b). In all the societies where, transnational families are present collectivism and mutual responsibilities within the extended family along with the values attached to the family render those feasible (Parreñas, 2001b, Ho, 1999). Ironically, Parreñas (2001b) shows that although transnational families are supported, they are still regarded as "*broken homes*" in the Philippine society since they fail to fulfil the ideal of a traditional family. The reasons why transnational families are considered "*broken*" also reveal the effects of this family form on gender relations, and at the same time note the possibility of a (postmodern) family even when none of the traditional constraints prevail. The first reason is the failure of parents and children to live together. Second, they diverge from the traditional division of labour in the family, where men are the breadwinners and women take care of the house and children. Finally, they do not conform to traditional practices of socialization in the family, thus extended family members have to step in to supervise and interact with children rather than their parents (Parreñas, 2001b: 109). Although considered to be "*broken*", these families cannot survive without the support provided by the cultural values of collectivism and mutual obligations. Extended kin members, more often than the father when only the mother works abroad, take care of the children of immigrants in exchange for regular remittances (Parreñas, 2001b). The same is true in the Caribbean where child rearing is a collective responsibility rather than being the sole responsibility of biological parents, and in Mexico and Central America where extended family or fictive kin shoulder childcare duties (Ho, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).

Transfer of childcare responsibility to the community gives way to a particular case of transnational families, where the mother works in another country while some or all of her dependents stay in the country of origin (Parreñas, 2001a). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) call this type of organizational arrangement "*transnational motherhood*", where women leave their children behind to the care of female members of the extended family, fathers or paid caregivers, and migrate to provide the livelihood of their family. Transnational mothers are predominantly migrant women from poor countries of Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe who migrate to rich countries of North America

and Western Europe to sustain the families they leave behind (Lutz, 2002). Ironically, most of these women work in domestic services taking care of other people's children and houses while their own are left to other hands. In this manner, immigrant mothers contribute to the formation of global care chains, along with the commodification of care work and globalization of motherhood. Global care chains are created where each care worker relies upon the paid or unpaid labour of another woman to maintain the system that allows them to financially provide for their family by paying for the care work that they transfer (Hochschild, 2001).

It is not a new trend for working-class women to leave their homes for work. However, the feminization of migration and the internationalization of the caregiving/housekeeping sectors are new processes due to the global economic restructuring (Ho, 1999). Many scholars note the gendered nature of globalization. The new economic setting requires docile women workers to serve both the multinational corporations and the middle classes of the rich countries (Rotkirch, 2001). However, the rising demand for women's labour comes with costs, especially when the transnational movement of mothers is concerned. Migration as an economic strategy forces women to pay the price. The most significant of those are the downward occupational mobility since domestic work is the only available sector; in most cases, having an undocumented status in the host country; disruption of their family; and the necessity to reconstruct their identities as mothers and breadwinners (Raijman et. al., 2003). It might take years before mothers and children reunite. Hence, mothers need to find a way to legitimise their position as absent mothers. The relationship between transnational mothers and their children back home cannot be explained concerning the ideal of motherhood in the 'western' context (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Lutz, 2002). According to several studies conducted among transnational mothers working and living away from their children, these mothers emphasize the sacrifices they have made to support and sustain their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Lutz, 2002, Parreñas, 2001a, Raijman et. al., 2003). Thus, even though they are not physically present and cannot take care of their children in the traditional sense, they represent themselves as good mothers. Continuous comparison between themselves and their employers, who from their point of view prefer not spending time with their children even though they do have the means to do so, support their claim of good motherhood and legitimate physical absence in their children's lives (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Direct involvement in children's daily lives is not a vital condition of motherhood in non-Western contexts (Lutz, 2002). Paid caregivers, relatives or fathers can do cooking or cleaning, but mothers are responsible for providing the livelihood of their children. Hence, physical closeness is supplanted by the material goods and financial aid mothers send back home. Parreñas (2001a) calls this "*commodified motherhood*" to draw attention to the negative psychological effects that kind of arrangement might have on the children. However, there are limits to mothering from a distance. The well-being of the children back home is defined as the primary concern of migrant mothers. Thus, transnational mothers severely criticize migrant women who continue staying abroad even though they are aware that their children are not receiving proper care (Raijman et al., 2003). Goulbourne (2002) makes a similar argument based on his research among Caribbean transnational families, where he finds that the absence of mothers is harder for children while fathers' absence to fulfil their breadwinner role is considered normal. However, it would not be

fair to underestimate the emotional hardship that mothers go through in the host country. In particular cases, the mothers cannot bring their children even if they want to and have the financial means. This can be explained by the logic of capitalism which tries to reduce the cost and exclude the reproduction of the labour force. In such a setting, some of the mothers do not even think of raising their children in the hostile environment of the host country (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997).

Transnational mothers develop strategies to cope with the emotional cost of family separation. Because of the geographical distance between them and their children, migrant women change their object of affection and care from their children to their employers' children and search for emotional awards in this "surrogate" or "diverted" or "displaced" mothering (Lan, 2003a: 196). Along with criticizing the mothering techniques of their employers establishing close relationships with their employers' children becomes a way for migrant women to gain self-esteem. Transnational mothers confirm their belief in the quality of their mothering even though they have left their families behind when employers' children prefer them to their biological mothers (Lan, 2003). However, what Cheever calls the "attachment factor" (2003: 35) might work against migrant domestic workers when parents get jealous of the relationship between the nanny and the child.

Another coping strategy employed by immigrant domestic workers is participating in communal activities. The public/private distinction mentioned before is an important factor in determining domestic workers' access to social life. The indoor/private nature of domestic work limits women's access to public life compared to migrant men. Thus, coping strategies also tend to be gendered. In such a setting religious activity constitutes a major outlet for domestic workers, who consider the religious community as a "surrogate family" (Raijman et al., 2003: 745).

Once all these emotional and material hardships are acknowledged, the question remains: Why do women take on jobs abroad? How is the decision to migrate made and by whom? Family structures and marriage patterns in countries of origin along with prevailing gender structures are the most important determinants for the decision to migrate (Aranda, 2003; Parreñas, 2001b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Thus, Central American women are more likely to migrate and accept live-in domestic jobs due to low levels of marriage rates, however, this should not mean that married women avoid migration. At first sight, material returns seem to be the major reason behind the decision to migrate, especially for women who are ready to sacrifice their comfort for the well-being of their children. However, a deeper look reveals the intricate gender relations influencing the decisions, specifically in societies where patriarchy is the norm. Especially in cases where only the mother migrates, women do not leave the responsibility of childcare to their fathers but guarantee that children have enough funds. The major cause of such distrust is the tendency of men to form new families when their wives go abroad to work (Parreñas, 2001b). The prevailing patriarchal structure is one of the most significant forces that drive women away from their societies of origin. Factors such as domestic violence, stigma around divorce, and unequal division of family labour present migration as the only viable outlet for women who want to escape from the constraints of patriarchy (Parreñas, 2001b). Hence, when the migration of

women is concerned, it is the women themselves who take the agency to decide to leave the gender constraints and at the same time ensure a better future for themselves. Thus, on the one hand, increased economic independence and confidence, along with the sociability involved make wage working a desirable alternative for women. In his analysis of gender relations in Mexico, Stern (1995: 263) refers to the attempts of women to find “*uncontrolled pathways of female livelihood*” as “*the structure of escape from direct patriarchal vigilance*”. Yet on the other hand, traditional expectations concerning gender roles, especially mothering, prevail and cause emotional burdens for the women who are stigmatized for forming broken families due to their literal absence from the family unit, even if the father is present.

5. Conclusion

Departing from Judith Stacey's “*postmodern family condition*” (1996), this study attempted to conceptualize the transnational family experience as a site that revealed and exemplified what is no longer modern or typical about the family in the heightened era of global capitalism along with feminization of migration and globalization of care work. The feminization of international migration and the globalization of domestic work are two parallel trends that change women's and their families' life options dramatically. Individual women cross various borders to participate in these global trends and provide a livelihood for their families. The gendered nature of domestic work enables these women to become primary breadwinners by taking on domestic sector jobs in the global market, yet simultaneously continues to hold them responsible for domestic responsibilities back home, as mothers and wives. Women, who use international migration as a strategy to cope with economic hardships, have to pay the price in terms of downward occupational mobility, inferior social status, and emotional distress due to family separation. The logic of global capitalism uses immigrant women of colour as a reserve army to fulfil less desirable yet highly needed jobs in rich countries while keeping the reproduction of this type of labour force out of borders.

Furthermore, the transnational family experience represents a significant departure from the traditional/normative family structure, challenging the conventional roles of husbands as breadwinners and wives as homemakers. The shift of the “primary breadwinner status” from men to women is a notable feature of transnational families. The impact of this shift is particularly pronounced in societies where traditional patriarchy structures gender relations. The emergence of diverse family forms, such as dual wage earners, single-parent families, and those with absent mothers, reflects the changing economic and gender dynamics in the postmodern family condition.

The transnational family, as a postmodern family form, operates through the circulation of goods, resources, individuals, and information across national borders. The concept underscores the fluid nature of familial relationships in the absence of a concrete family setting. The role of immigrant women, especially transnational mothers, becomes a challenge to traditional notions of motherhood and family structure. The “commodified motherhood” experienced by transnational mothers, where physical closeness is replaced by financial support, reflects the complex intersections of gender, migration, and globalization. The transnational family perspective, it remains a critical lens for understanding

the intersectionality of global structural and local cultural factors. Economic globalization, with its demand for cheap and docile labour, intersects with cultural values supporting collectivism and mutual obligations within extended families. While transnational families may be considered “broken homes” in some societies, they continue to thrive through the support provided by cultural values that facilitate extended kin members’ involvement in childcare duties.

In conclusion, the transnational family experience illuminates the intricate dynamics of gender, migration, and globalization. It challenges traditional family structures and gender roles, offering a lens through which to analyse the evolving nature of families in the context of global capitalism. The experiences of transnational mothers, their coping strategies, and the broader implications for family structures highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of contemporary family life in the era of heightened global interconnectedness.

BEYANLAR / DECLARATIONS

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The author of this study declared that the Ethics Committee approval is not required for this study.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı

Yazar herhangi bir çıkar çatışmaları olmadığını beyan eder.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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