



Here or there? Gendered return migration to Bolivia from Spain during economic crisis and fluctuating migration policies

Raquel Martínez-Buján

To cite this article: Raquel Martínez-Buján (2019) Here or there? Gendered return migration to Bolivia from Spain during economic crisis and fluctuating migration policies, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45:16, 3105-3122, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547023](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547023)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547023>



Published online: 04 Jan 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 576



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)



Here or there? Gendered return migration to Bolivia from Spain during economic crisis and fluctuating migration policies

Raquel Martínez-Buján 

Department of Sociology and Communication, University of A Corunha, Corunha, Spain

ABSTRACT

This article's aims are twofold: to consider the motivations for return migrations to Bolivia from Spain in a context of economic crisis and to explore the impact of recent Spanish migration policies using a transnational family perspective. Migrants' decisions to return home are embedded in the gendered allocation of economic and reproductive responsibilities and patriarchal ideology in Bolivian homes. Spain's tightened immigration regulations of 2007 limited circular migration between the two countries for the majority of Bolivians in Spain. In contrast, a window for citizenship acquisition opened for approximately one-third of Bolivians in Spain between 2012 and 2015. With dual Bolivian and Spanish citizenship, their freedom to travel between the two countries has afforded them far more scope for meeting transnational family care and provisioning responsibilities.

KEYWORDS

Return migration; gender; migration policies; economic crisis

Introduction

The relationship between migration and economic crisis has been a central element in the analysis of return migrations. Todaro's (1969) pioneering migration study stresses that financial and economic disparities between destination and supply areas are the underlying reason why migrants decide to return home. Jensen and Pedersen (2007) emphasise that the decision to return is motivated by specific economic and professional aspects such as success achieved in the destination country or reintegration into the home country's labour market.

However, studies of transnationalism (Portes and Landolt 1999), social networks (Massey 1990) and circular migration (Vertovec 2007) have probed motivating influences unrelated to economic calculations and labour restrictions. The recent global financial crisis of 2008 heightened interest in the determinants of return migration and further broadened the investigative scope of migration causation. Meanwhile, an extensive body of literature on migration from a gender perspective was coalescing, which interrogated the effect of social reproduction responsibilities and patriarchal value structures influences on migratory trajectories (Baldassar and Merla 2014). However, the convergence of these two literature streams in studies on return migration has not been very pronounced

(Herrera 2013). Male and female return migration patterns have been generally overlooked.

Addressing this literature gap, this article contrasts male and female patterns of return migration to Bolivia from Spain during the economic recession of 2008 and its aftermath. The article's analytical objectives are two-fold: first, to adopt a gender and transnationalist orientation that highlights the way family responsibilities have a differential and unequal influence on male and female migration decision-making. Second, I question the tunnel vision of seeing economic and labour motivations as determinant in return migration.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with return migrants conducted in Bolivia in 2010 and 2012, as well as published migration statistics, my analysis reveals striking differences between men's and women's motivations to return back to their home country amidst Spain's changing migration policies. The next section introduces the evolution of the theoretical debate on return migration and inclusion of a gender perspective. Thereafter, my methodology, analytical framework and data collection procedures are outlined. The demography of Bolivians' migration to and return from Spain during the recession are traced, followed by analysis of new patterns of transnational mobility for Bolivian migrants who remained in Spain. Thereafter, the gendered outcomes of return migration based on my fieldwork findings are discussed in view of exigencies of economic recession and family life cycle demands. The impact of immigration regulations on transnational links with family members in the country of origin is analysed before concluding.

Theoretical considerations

Concern with migrant labour and earnings in destination countries has dominated analytical enquiry (Hernández, Maldonado Aguirre, and Calderón Chamorro 2012), whereas knowledge of return migration patterns and motivations has not received sufficient attention. On a micro level, there is a relative lack of data for accurate estimation and comparison, given the difficulties of tracing and measuring return movements, especially during times of cyclical economic change.

Todoaro (1969) interpreted return to one's home area as a failed migration experience in response to a gap between anticipated employment availability and earnings versus reality. His focus was on motivation at the individual level. Migrants were viewed as rational individuals, calculating the costs and benefits of migration and endeavouring to maximise the length of their work stay. By contrast, Stark (1991) regarded return migration as the logical and positive result of a strategy of migrant households, premised on circular migration of household member/s directed at garnering material benefit for the household. In other words, migrants were conceived as target workers who returned home once they have achieved their intended economic goals.

Taking a different tack, Gmelch (1980) sought to avoid over-simplified economic assumptions by linking returnees' strategies and decisions to their social and political environments, classifying return migrations on the basis of their length of work away and their reasons for returning. The main motive for return was the relative attraction of opportunities in their home societies rather than escaping from economic crisis in the destination countries of the West. He argues that returned migrants are neither the most economically unsuccessful nor successful. The intervention of other non-economic variables, such as strong family ties, looking after sick or elderly parents or feelings of

loyalty towards their home society were taken into account. Despite return migration being visualised as linked to non-economic processes, these influences on migrants were not analysed from a gender perspective (De Haas and Fokkema 2010).

Neoclassical economic analyses assume that migrants' return to their home countries for economic reasons and rarely problematise gender differences. The new economics of labour migration approach transfers the decision-making from the individual to the family, but considers that the migration strategy is harmoniously constructed within the family, without recognising inherent household tensions or power imbalances. Structuralist theories highlight the influence of social, political, economic and family factors, but gender differences are not consistently considered.

The incorporation of gender analysis in the study of return migration is relatively recent, despite the abundance of gender research in other realms of the international migration literature (Herrera 2013). Recent research adopting a gender lens has identified rationales for return migration other than work or money. Significantly, financial and professional motives do not prevail equally gender-wise. Migration is often seen as a rite of passage according to age and gender, associated with the assumption that cultural rules govern acceptable male and female behaviour.

Hansen (2008) analyzes the differentiated meanings of return for male and female Somali migrants, observing that the decision to migrate is not harmoniously established - family interests and create tensions. Similarly, Constable's (1999) research on the return of Filipino women, who had worked in Hong Kong as domestic employees, documents deeply ambivalent feelings about returning home. The women are compelled to fulfil their care obligations, but the decision to return home is embedded with emotional challenges, given their sense of independence and autonomy acquired abroad.

Olwig (2012) highlights the ambiguity in narratives of returned Caribbean women, which reflect gendered attitudes towards kinship, moral values and ethical conventions of family care. Vlase's (2013) analyses of return migration of Romanian couples leaving Italy asks why Romanian women define themselves more as mothers and wives than as workers, while men primarily identify with their work experience as a means of gaining economic success.

Hernández, Maldonado Aguirre, and Calderón Chamorro (2012) traces how different roles in family production and social reproduction condition return migration by Ecuadorian men and women. In all the types of return that they referred to, be it temporary return, test return, planned return, return driven by governmental institutions or by the persons themselves, family 'care' is the pre-eminent motivation of women returnees (32 per cent in comparison to 18 per cent of males). Men mostly stress work-related difficulties (54 per cent).

Turning to the literature on Bolivian return migration, male and female mobility is not conditioned by the same factors and economic crisis has not uniformly influenced their migratory trajectories. Reviewing the elements that discourage or encourage migrants' return home, De La Torre (2014) finds the likelihood of returning depends on three basic explanatory variables: the existence or stability of work in the destination country; the absence or possession of residency papers; and the possibility of family reunion. Bastia (2011) opines that rates of Bolivian migration return were not commensurate with the depth of Spain's eroded labour market. Parella (2012) identifies migrants' gender as an influential explanatory variable for the return of Bolivian migrants from

Catalonia. All these authors note differences in men's and women's patterns of return and women's more frequent return is linked to family obligations. In Ledo's (2014) survey of Bolivian migrants returning from Catalonia, 79% of females returned for family reasons compared to only 5% citing a lack of work.

All of the above investigations are grounded in a conceptual framework of transnationalism in which migrants border crossings challenge feelings of locational belonging and test family togetherness across physical space (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). And in an era of the rising incidence of transnational families, the traditional concept of return as a final stage in the migration process is under review (Portes and Landolt 1999). Social networking, economic exchange and physical care between family members are not unidirectional. The decision to return is often related to family members' ties rather than economic returns to labour and is incorporated into the family life cycle of the actors and the ensuing changes (Bryceson 2019). Economic and political contingencies influence spatial mobility. Analysis of their impact on migration decisions should include consideration of the gender patterns that ensue.

Data and methods

This article draws on narratives obtained from Bolivian migrants who have returned to their community of origin from Spain. The technique of semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in the Cochabamba and La Paz areas (with a large migration flow to Spain) was used. In total, 38 testimonials were collected in two waves. The first one in the year 2010, when the economic outlook started declining and, the second, in the year 2012, when austerity policies began to have an effect on the population.

The criteria for selecting interviewees were based on length of stay in Spain and date of permanent return to Bolivia. Interviews were sought with those who, had resided in Spain for at least one year and had returned to their places of origin during the recession (as of 2008) intending to stay and reintegrate back into their communities. Anyone returning because of deportation, holidays, visits or other temporary options were omitted from the sample. A snowball sampling technique was deployed. The interviewees' ages ranged between 30 and 56 years. They had all settled in Spain during the period between 2005 and 2007. Twenty-one were married, 6 were single and 11 were divorced; 31 of them had at least one child and 4 had studied at university.

The sample encompassed 13 men and 25 women, corresponding to the gender imbalance existing in Bolivian migration to Spain. Access to interviewees was possible thanks to contacts provided by non-governmental organisations and associations committed to managing international migrations. Information was gathered on migration and work experience in Spain; family issues; transnational practices; social organisation of care; decision-making regarding return; opportunities upon return and self-perceived identity changes.

Interview lengths ranged between one and three hours and were recorded, transcribed and coded. An interpretive framework (Holt et al. 2009) was followed to analyze how the accounts given by these men and women about their return migration experience were related to their gender ideologies and their position in the transnational family. I conducted all of the interviews in Spanish and translated the interview extracts included in this article.

In order to put Bolivian migration to Spain into context, to estimate the incidence of return migration and to determine its position in the labour market, data were collected from several different secondary sources including the Municipal Census Registry, Statistics on Residence Change and the Workforce Survey. All of these databases are compiled by Spain's National Statistics Institute.

Migration between Bolivia and Spain: context and characteristics of settlement and return

Bolivian migration to Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon. Historically Bolivians' cross-border migration flowed to targeted Latin American countries, notably Argentina, Brazil and Chile, or the United States. The 2001 economic crisis in Argentina and the border closure that same year in the US redirected migratory flows further with Spain emerging as the most attractive country. Bolivia experienced an internal economic downturn and political uncertainty marked by discontent and social instability, which triggered a surge in out-migration between 2004 and 2007.

Spain's economic expansion at the time provided a dynamic labour market for the absorption of semi-skilled foreign workers. It was easy for Bolivians to enter the country because they had no work visa requirements until 2007. Spanish migration policies were flexible with regard to the entrance of immigrants on a tourist visa (valid for three months) and officials largely turned a blind eye to settlement of those who decided to stay without the appropriate administrative formalities (González-Ferrer 2011). Family reunion was possible after one year of legal residence and authorisation to reside in Spain for at least one more year. Bolivian migrants evolved 'migration projects' in which they endeavoured to facilitate the migration of other family members to Spain after complying with the above requirements.

Official data from the Spanish Municipal Population Census recorded only approximately 15,000 inhabitants from Bolivia in 2003. By 2006, this figure had more than quadrupled. The strength of arrivals during that brief, intense period was undoubtedly linked to Spain's economic boom, notably in construction and domestic service sectors, which exerted heavy demand for foreign workers (Figure 1).

The early period of easy entry and ready work was followed by difficulties when Bolivian migrant workers tried to obtain the appropriate government permits for residence and permanent work within Spain. Work visas became compulsory for the Bolivian population in April 2007, just before the country's plunge into the recession. Bolivian migrants found themselves in limbo, with only 29 per cent of Bolivian residents possessing a residence permit.

There are no official figures on the percentage of the Bolivian population with a legal residential status, but comparing data from the Municipal Population Census and labour statistics from the Ministry for Employment suggests that 69% of Bolivian inhabitants were undocumented in 2008. Thus at the onset of the global financial crisis, Bolivians constituted one of the most vulnerable population groups in Spain in terms of illegal residence. Their residential vulnerability (Figure 2) had been compensated by good access to employment up to that point.

In 2008, 79% of men and 74% of women from Bolivia had a job. This altered as the global economic crisis unfolded, especially in the construction sector, where more than



Figure 1. Evolution of the Bolivian-born population residing in Spain by gender, 2002–2015 (thousands). Source: Municipal Population Census (Spanish National Institute of Statistics). Own calculations.

half of the Bolivian male workforce was concentrated (Table 1). Men lost 71,800 jobs between 2008 and 2015 (Spanish Labour Force Survey data).

Dramatic job loss led to an unemployment rate of 34% in 2015 amongst Bolivian men, concentrated in the construction sector. The rate of unemployed females also increased,

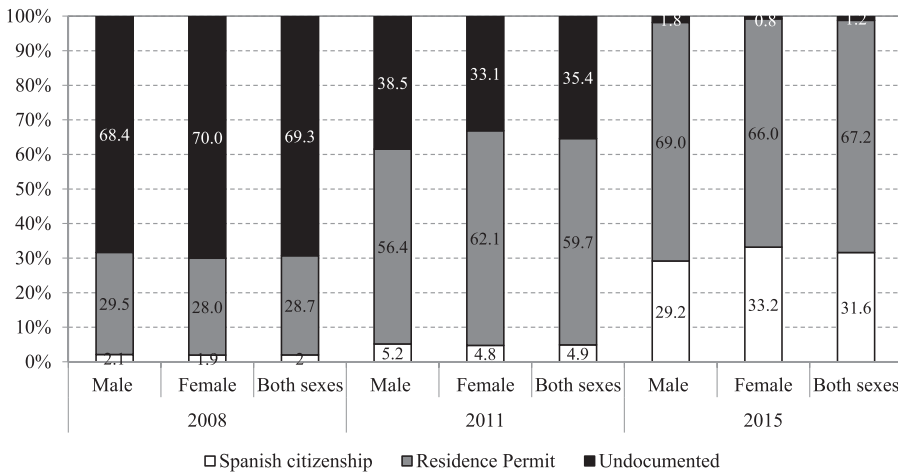


Figure 2. Evolution of the legal status of the Bolivian-born population residing in Spain by gender, 2008–2015. Source: Data on Spanish citizenship and undocumented migrants estimated from the Municipal Population Census (Spanish Statistics Institute) and the Spanish Municipal Population Register which provides a broad spectrum of high quality, easily accessible information on international migration (Poulain, Perrin, and Singleton 2006). The data’s reliability is related to the fact that being in possession of a certificate of municipal registration is requisite for foreigners to access many public services (including health care and education) as well as providing proof of length of stay in Spain, needed for applying for a Temporary Residence Permit.

Table 1. Activity, employment and unemployment rates of Bolivian immigrants by branch of activity and gender, 2008–2015 (percentages).

	Male		Female	
	2008	2015	2008	2015
Activity rate (Active persons/Pop. 16+ years old)	95.3	88.3	82.8	84.4
Employment rate (Employment persons/Pop. 16+ years old)	79.0	58.4	74.1	67.4
Unemployment rate (Unemployment/Pop. 16+ years old)	17.1	33.9	10.5	20.1
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying	11.5	9.4	1.2	1.4
Construction	54.3	21.1	0.7	0.0
Accommodation and food service activities	7.6	15.1	8.5	13.8
Wholesale and retail trade	8.3	7.9	8.0	6.5
Domestic service	1.6	12.0	63.8	64.1

Source: Spanish Labor Force Survey (Spanish Statistics Institute). Own calculations.

reaching 20% in 2015 (compared to 11% in 2008). Bolivian women’s resilience was linked to their massive presence in domestic service and care work, which remained consistently high at 64% of their work activities between 2008 and 2015.

Table 2 hints at other influences on out-migration besides economic recession. First, emigration rates were not as differentiated between men and women, as would be expected considering men’s greater vulnerability to job loss. In 2014 the male emigration rate was 7.9% and the female emigration rate 6.3%. In 2008, when the recession hit, the gender differential was smaller: men (7.6%) and women (6.7%) (Residential Variation Statistics). However, Bolivian women’s emigration levels were higher than the Latin American average, despite Bolivian women’s dominance in a still relatively buoyant domestic service sector.

Migration of both genders was most pronounced among those without Spanish citizenship, although some stayed in Spain as undocumented migrants hoping to eventually obtain a passport. We turn now to an interesting twist in the story of migrants and borders in Spain.

From blurred to bridged borders: spanish citizenship acquisition

From 2012, Bolivian migrants’ legal position substantially improved. According to 2015 statistics, 31 per cent of Bolivians held legal permanent residence while 67 per cent had

Table 2. Evolution of emigration rates (ER)* from Spain by gender, country of birth and Spanish citizenship, 2008–2014.

	Bolivia				Latin America			
	Male ER	Male ER (with citizenship)	Female ER	Female ER with citizenship	Male ER	Male ER with citizenship	Female ER	Female ER with citizenship
2008	7.6	1.5	6.7	1.4	5.2	1.0	4.5	0.9
2009	10.9	1.2	8.3	1.3	5.7	1.1	4.7	1.0
2010	10.2	1.1	7.2	1.1	6.3	1.1	4.9	1.0
2011	9.9	1.9	6.8	1.7	5.8	1.4	4.6	1.3
2012	9.6	2.0	7.0	1.6	6.0	1.7	4.9	1.5
2013	9.5	2.3	6.9	2.1	6.2	2.1	5.2	1.9
2014	7.9	3.1	6.3	2.9	5.7	2.2	4.9	1.9
Average	9.4	1.9	7.0	1.7	5.8	1.5	4.8	1.4

*Emigration rates have been calculated by dividing the amount of people leaving by the total number of persons registered in the census and multiplying that result by one hundred.

Source: Statistics for Residential Variations (Spanish National Institute of Statistics) 2008–2014. Own calculations.

Spanish citizenship. The undocumented Bolivian-born population in Spain appeared to have virtually disappeared (Figure 2), a process related to decreasing migration flows and the stability inherently brought about by settlement in the country.

A sizeable Bolivian immigrant group has remained in Spain and stabilised over time as evidence in naturalisation data (Table 3). In 2015, roughly 54,000 Bolivian-born individuals were Spanish citizens, while in 2011 the figure was under 10,000. Paradoxically, the highest increase took place during the period 2012–2015 coinciding with the application of the harshest policies of economic austerity, which bear no relation to changes in Spanish migration policies *per se*.

This process was part of a number of administrative changes related to citizenship application procedures. The Ministry of Justice (2015), responsible for processing citizenship applications, had amassed a huge backlog of 465,000 unresolved requests for citizenship in 2011 over the previous two and a half years, in addition to the monthly inflow of new applications). To speed up the processing, in 2012 the Ministry implemented the Intensive Nationality Plan, a temporary measure, digitalising the applications and extending the administrative effort, resulting in faster citizenship granting.

In fact, the vast majority of nationalised Bolivians obtained citizenship by fulfilling two years of continuous legal residence. Although the irregular situation of a large part of the Bolivian population made it difficult for them to comply with this requirement, it must be taken into account that acquiring legal residence in Spain is not just linked to access to formal employment. Acquiring continuous legal residence is also possible on the basis of direct family ties to a Spanish citizen (Triguero 2014).¹ For Spain's migrant population born in Latin America, nationality acquisition was a simple procedure once they have obtained legal residence, premised on their longstanding, shared language and cultural ties dating from their colonial history. They become dual passport-holders, which greatly enhances their exercise of transnationality, allowing them to move easily between Spain and Bolivia.

Gendered patterns of return migration: weighing the influences of economic crisis and family life cycles

The analysis in this section is based on 38 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Bolivians carried out in the cities of Cochabamba and La Paz Bolivia in 2010 and 2012

Table 3. Evolution of the Bolivian-born population by nationality and gender 2008–2015.

	Total	With Spanish citizenship	Male	Male with Spanish citizenship	Female	Female with Spanish citizenship	% Male with Spanish citizenship	% Female with Spanish citizenship
2008	240,912	4,864	105,877	2,250	135,035	2,614	2.1	1.9
2009	229,375	5,920	99,579	2,723	129,796	3,197	2.7	2.5
2010	213,862	7,227	90,872	3,272	122,990	3,955	3.6	3.2
2011	202,657	9,986	84,394	4,368	118,263	5,618	5.2	4.8
2012	193,600	15,137	79,459	6,421	114,141	8,716	8.1	7.6
2013	185,194	20,522	75,185	8,444	110,009	12,078	11.2	11.0
2014	177,149	36,067	71,074	13,974	106,075	22,093	19.7	20.8
2015	171,392	54,113	68,366	19,936	103,026	34,177	29.2	33.2

Source: Municipal Population Census (Spanish National Institute of Statistics). Own calculations.

described in the preceding methodology section. All the interviewees had been resident in Spain during 2005–2007, the years of relatively easy migrant entry into Spain. Thereafter, with tightening migration controls and the shock of the global financial crisis they migrated back to their home country, before the acquisition of Spanish citizen was eased between 2012 and 2015. This section probes what happened when they returned to Bolivia.

As previously outlined, before 2007 Spain enforced heavy restrictions on obtaining residence permits, but had been relatively lax about controlling visitor entries. Bolivians had relied on 3-month tourist visas to gain entry into Spain and flexibly entered and exited Spain, often overstaying their tourist visas. Blurred borders prevailed since Bolivians easily entered Spain, and could move to and fro between Spain and Brazil on tourist visas.

Following implementation of the 2007 migration policy, the undocumented migrant population could leave Spain whenever they wanted, but it was impossible for them to return, as their passports showed that they had violated their tourist visas. This measure was particularly detrimental to women who depended on circular migration between the two countries for fulfilment of their family care commitments during the family life cycle and when called upon to be present in emergency situations. The imposition of the 2007 visa stipulations followed by tightened 2009 requirements for family reunion, in compliance with new European Union regulations, made it difficult to manage transnational family life.

Meanwhile, the global financial crisis from 2008 onwards caused heavy job retrenchment. The worsening employment situation differed markedly from what migrants had originally expected in terms of work availability. These circumstances in combination with the new immigration policies short-circuited Bolivian migrants' circular migration pattern and restricted their ability to secure family reunion with members of their family in Spain, catalysing many to contemplate returning to their home country.

The in-depth interviewees with return migrants in Bolivia revealed that their decision to leave was based on interwoven considerations arising from the depressed economy and affective family dynamics. Furthermore, the decision-making criteria markedly differed according to gender.

Men, prompted by dissatisfaction with the work constraints, typically left Spain with the expressed aim of 'starting up a business' and re-entering previous occupations. Male migrants used two narratives to explain their decision to return. Those who had achieved their original aim of financial improvement cited success as their main rationale for returning, while those who failed to fulfil their migration aspirations identified their economic vulnerability in Spain as their primary reason for returning. Once back in their country of origin, men reasserted their role as their household's main breadwinners, despite the vulnerability they faced in the prevailing Bolivian labour market.

Women's return and social reproductive care strategies

Women's return, on the other hand, was usually triggered by instances of emergency family care and life cycle needs of their family members, notably failures or tensions in the management of childcare and/or care for elderly parents. These took the form of: poor childcare provided by the guardians left in charge, marital discord with their partners who had not migrated, various child upbringing matters associated with offspring in their rebellious teenage years, as well as issues related to ill-health or death of a family member.

Among women migrants who were mothers working abroad, family life cycle issues were perceived as more problematic as well as being magnified by the lack of certainty about their legal position in Spain. Women's migration to Spain had generally improved their financial position within the transnational family, but nonetheless back in Bolivia their role in the family was usually directed at domestic management of social reproduction, rather than income earning in the labour market.

Women's family responsibilities were exposed to greater moral scrutiny than that of men. Both women and men had shared the desire for returning to closer family life. But men looked forward to seeing their role as economic providers normalised, whereas women, by moral default, were expected to devote themselves primarily to domestic-bound care-giving.

Given Bolivian women's more favourable and relatively secure position as paid domestic care workers in the Spanish labour market, their home return came with higher costs. Furthermore, migration to Spain had afforded many social opportunities and greater decision-making autonomy that they no longer enjoyed in Bolivia.

Ruptures in women's migration trajectories are consistent with transnational families' social reproduction needs. Many of the female interviewees revealed that their return to Bolivia had not been consciously planned. They had responded to Bolivian family members' request for their return home and then discovered that the 2007 immigration policies precluded them from returning to Spain. This derailed their hopes of gaining legal residence permits and Spanish nationality. Women interviewees mentioned this predicament more than men.

The women discovered that their greater earning power in Spain, and the remittances they had sent to increase their economic contribution to family welfare, tended to be devalued. Instead their Bolivian-based family often chastised them for the loss of their physical presence as *in situ* family carers. Subject to re-assertion of strongly polarised gender roles of male breadwinning and female care provisioning, women's interviews were laced with ambivalence about their Bolivian home return.

Given the moral pressure they faced, they were inclined to be reticent about their role as economic providers, even when their income constituted the main contribution to household maintenance. Most of their narratives attributed their return to the need to remedy family care. Not one female interviewee mentioned material hardship in Spain or the worsening of their labour conditions as a motive for returning to Bolivia. Of the 25 women interviewed during the research, 23 adduced issues related to the family life cycle as the main reason for return migration.

Female migration, in the case of mothers who leave children behind, is necessarily the result of a series of agreements negotiated among various family members, especially women, for the transferal of childcare responsibilities. These agreements may be fragile and even if the father of the children remains as the resident carer, migrant women were frequently obliged to 'negotiate the care of their children from long distances' (Arias 2013: 442). When transnational family organisational restructuring failed or could not adapt adequately to evolving care needs, a migrant mother's return was likely to become imperative to ameliorate the situation.

No, I didn't come back because of the economic crisis. Not at all. It was more of an emotional thing. The decision to come back arose when my daughter's father was attempting to take my

daughter away from me and asked the judge to be her guardian, on abandonment grounds. As soon as I found out I did not hesitate and quickly prepared for my departure and flew back. (Inés, 38 years old, 1 daughter, 3 years of residence in Spain, Cochabamba, 5 April 2010).

My idea had been to stay for three years, no longer. I intended to have my husband and little boy join me but that didn't happen ... I thought about my son. I talked to him frequently and he was asking me to come back. Three years passed. My husband told me I had been away too long and he wanted me to return. My parents kept saying: 'Your child needs you and you have spent too much time separated from the family.' (Paulina, 25 years old, 1 son, 3 years of residence in Spain, La Paz 7 May 2012).

Female return is closely aligned with events and phases of the family life cycle. The inter-generational continuity of the family unleashes a number of strategies, including returning home before children go on to tertiary education. Offspring completing their education, economic or residential independence from their parents, birth and care of children, parents' old age or couples separating are all key in women's timing of their migration movement.

A woman's return to her children after a long time abroad is momentous. For example, Nora (45 years old) who departed for Spain, leaving her three children in the care of her husband returned to face a family crisis. Her husband, inexperienced in household and social reproduction task management found the work too burdensome. Moreover, her children were becoming rebellious teenagers: 'I was working in Spain, but because of the problematic situation my son was in ... going off the track, I came back here' (Nora, 45 years old, 3 children, 5 years of residence in Spain, Cochabamba, 10 April, 2010). She returned to reaffirm family harmony that had eroded during her absence.

Although none of the interviewed women linked their return to entrepreneurial plans, in some cases female entrepreneurship emerged after returning to Bolivia and usually arose due to family necessity. Several of the women interviewees omitted mentioning businesses that their children had established based on investment capital derived from their mother's Spanish earnings. Alicia (45 years old) described how this happened after the interviewer prompted her to talk about her savings. 'When I got back to Bolivia, my son told me: "Mum, I can drive now!" So we bought a car. And he earns money taxi driving. I bought a taxi license.' (Alicia, 3 children, 4 years of residence in Spain Cochabamba, 30 March 2010).

In other cases, women describe business investments they made as compensation to their stay-behind husbands who had cared for children during their absence. For example, Cristina (38 years old) returned to Bolivia because the father of her son constantly threatened to take guardianship away from her because he disapproved of the care of their son being provided by her sister. Despite his aggressive stance and the level of tension between the couple, Cristina gave him major financial transfusions on two occasions.

I sent almost three months work pay to my husband, almost €3,000 to purchase a minibus and I had given my husband €2,500 to pay for his medical operation. I bought a real estate plot in order to build a small house but the money didn't amount to what I needed to start building because of my large-scale expenditures on my husband's behalf. (Cristina, 38 years old, 1 son, 3 years of residence in Spain, Cochabamba, 29 March 2010).

Stigmatised and blamed for leaving their children behind, migrant women endeavour to demonstrate how advantageous their earnings are for family material provisioning

and investment, countering criticisms from those upholding traditional gender norms (Pedone 2008). Attitudinally, women's economic migration goes against the grain of conventional Bolivian cultural expectations. Gender patterns according women the role of family caregiver impinges on their migration trajectory, while men's role as economic provider facilitates their migration within transnational families (Hofmann 2014).

Negotiation of gender relations is part and parcel of the formation of transnational family organisational structures, money flows and marital relationships. The decision to return to one's home country does not necessarily put an end to transnational family dynamics. Changing attitudes, marketable skills and investments arising from the international migration experience alter men and women. Gender roles are likely to continue to be contestable between conjugal couples back in the home country, whereas changing gender role models and opportunities are likely to surface in the next generation. The family will continue to be aware of global work possibilities and weigh up the costs and benefits of pursuing them through the passage of the family life cycle.

Male returnees' decisions and dilemmas

Male attitudes towards return migration also incorporates emotive family considerations, in addition to economic imperatives. For instance, Antonio (28 years old) relates how he and his wife migrated to Spain where they lived for four years. When she became pregnant, she returned to Bolivia to have her mother's support for this new phase of the family life cycle. He stayed in Spain until he lost his job and was unable to find alternative work. The migration patterns of Antonio and his partner show the traditional gender division of productive and reproductive family maintenance tasks.

After my wife migrated back, I found myself jobless. A friend told me: 'Look, you can go and clap.' TV channels wanted audiences to provide hand clapping. But they paid only €10-15. I did that for almost two months, well, it was not a salary, but it got me some money for daily needs. I was also talking to my family in Bolivia saying: 'I am jobless, I'm not doing anything for a living.' I called some of my friends in Bolivia and asked them if they had any work but they didn't. The crisis was there too. I felt stifled because I couldn't earn money for my family. (Antonio, 28 years old, 1 son, 4 years of residence in Spain, La Paz, 5 May 2012).

While Antonio's homecoming was a direct outcome of unemployment, his decision to return was underlined by a wish to be back with his family in Bolivia. His role as an authority figure in the family and his affective relations with his wife and children were on the line (Poeze 2019). Most of the Bolivian male returnees faced uncertain re-insertion into the Bolivian labour market.

Santos's interview provides another insight into the intricacies of male migration decision-making. Santos (40 years old) stayed at home in Cochabamba looking after his four children when his wife migrated. Eventually, he decided that he too wanted to try his luck in Spain. When he arrived he found that his wife was living with another partner and divorce ensued. After three years in Spain he returned to Bolivia because his mother was no longer capable of caring for all his children. With his small savings he was able to start up a business that, in his own words, lifted his spirits and allowed him to resume his breadwinning role within his family:

Mind you my mum took care of my children while I was in Spain but later she couldn't bear it. Four kids! My parents said they couldn't look after them any longer ... Also, I could no longer remain in Spain because there wasn't much work left. Now that I'm back in Bolivia, I'm happy to be with my kids and doing my business, performing a good job. (Santos, 40 years old, 3 years of residence in Spain, Cochabamba, 2 April 2010).

Both of the above interviews with male informants put forward a case for traditional gender roles within the family, where the man's contribution to the family was breadwinning. Nine of the 13 male interviewees described a decision-making processes in terms of unemployment and/or the creation of a micro-enterprise after return to Bolivia.

Migration policies and gendered return strategies

Migration policies shape migrants' entry and exit plans and configure how they manage physical separation from family members in their home country. Since the economic crisis of 2008 and heightened security concerns in the face of terrorist attacks, Spanish and indeed European Union policies have become increasingly brittle and restrictive about migrant entry, thereby impacting on transnational family members' physical contact with one another across national borders. By contrast, most of the Bolivians who stayed until 2012 managed to obtain Spanish citizenship and enjoyed free entry and exit that facilitated transnational family bonds (Bonjour and Krale 2015). Between 2008 and 2012, Bolivians had no way of knowing that citizenship would be a possibility, nor that their fate would bifurcate into those with enhanced as opposed to reduced opportunity for transnational familyhood. It is useful to dissect the context and content of the legal hitches generating these two pathways.

First, the mechanisms and legal conditions for migrant settlement were tightened as economic recession took hold in the Spanish economy. Most types of work and residence permits in Spain depend on formal participation in the labour market. Losing one's job and failing to find alternative work undermines a migrant's legal residence status, especially if the goal is to acquire legal permanent residence. Becoming an undocumented person complicates if not precludes migrants' circular migration between Spain and Bolivia to visit family members abroad.

The Bolivian migrant population had the highest rate of transnational family conjugal couple separation among migrant groups, according to 2007 National Immigrant Survey data: 36 per cent of married males and 21 per cent of married females residing in Spain had partners living abroad. Among migrants with children (32 per cent of all immigrants), more than half had left their children behind in Bolivia (Baby-Collin and Cortés 2014). In the context of economic stringency and immigration status uncertainties, many women were torn between returning to Bolivia or staying in Spain as illustrated in the following interview.

I returned for my family, for the kids. I said: 'They're old already.' I realised I couldn't stay in Spain. Mind you I had only one month left to be eligible for permanent residence, because I was only on a work card. And during that month, while I was waiting for the answer, I said - 'No, I'm leaving.' I applied for a permit to be able to come back to Spain after three months and it was granted. But when I tried to travel back I found that I could no longer enter Spain (Miriam, 45 years old, 3 children, 3 years of residence in Spain, Cochabamba, 17 May 2012).

Second, after the economic recession, family reunion criteria were tightened, reducing the right for family members over 65 years of age to apply for long-term residence permits along with limitations placed on reunited working aged family members' right to work. Only migrants with skills that were in short supply in the Spanish labour force were allowed to join their family members in Spain. Many unemployed Bolivian men and children, who did not have permanent residence or citizenship, returned to their home country, while many employed wives or mothers in care and domestic work remained in Spain because the Spanish labour market favoured them.² Divided transnational parenting arrangements with children remaining *in situ* in their home countries became increasingly prevalent (Pedone, Echeverri, and Gil 2014)

Third, public programmes to facilitate and promote return migration have been designed for permanent return (Parella et al. 2015) without taking individual migration trajectories into account. There are two main types of programmes: first, the 'voluntary return for immigrants in a vulnerable situation' (*Retorno Voluntario para Inmigrantes en Situación de Vulnerabilidad* - PREVIE), instituted already in 2003, which assists immigrants facing difficult situations, who want to return to their countries. The programme provides migrants with information and guidance about returning, helping them to arrange the necessary paperwork and tickets for the journey, supplemented by a small amount of pocket money. Its uptake has been small; only 3,250 Bolivians took advantage of the programme between 2009 and 2014. The second programme covers voluntary return linked to an advance of accrued unemployment benefit payments to foreign workers. This programme, started in 2008, is distinguished by its highly restrictive requirements, which include a ban on returning to Spain for the following three years. It is aimed only at migrants from non-EU countries earning unemployment benefits. The programme allows migrants to receive their benefit payments as a single lump sum. In the face of the strict eligibility rules, only 11,572 people have benefited from it, of which only two per cent came from Bolivia because few had formal employment that accorded entitlement to such benefits.

Migrants' return to their home country are usually 'silent' returns, which take place outside programmes and statistics-gathering (Parella et al. 2015). Stricter entry regulations, in other words 'brittle borders', preclude entry of new migrant arrivals and circular migration of non-citizens. These restrictions force undocumented migrants to choose between staying in Spain without seeing their transnational family members back home or visiting their family members in Bolivia without permission to return to Spain. Such policies have important gendered consequences for women's migration trajectories given their greater social reproduction responsibilities.

When I arrived back in Bolivia, I no longer had anywhere to work. As I had grown accustomed to Spain, I wanted to go back. When I prepared my return, I was told I could only take two of my three children with me. But my oldest was studying and I couldn't leave him in Bolivia all alone. So I decided not to go back to Spain ... I would do so only if I could take all my children. We have to be together as a family (Judith, 43 years, 3 children, two and a half years of residence in Spain, La Paz 10 May 2012).

While brittle borders have prevailed with respect to migrant entry, a distinctive feature of Spain during the period under review has been the large number of Bolivians who were granted Spanish citizenship (Figure 2 and Table 3). Their dual nationality bridges border crossing between Spain and Bolivia, enabling them to surmount the country's

brittle border policies. The granting of Spanish nationality to Bolivian migrants showed little difference in terms of gender (with males accounting for 29% and females 33% of total Bolivian nationals). However, the fieldwork interviews suggest that citizenship acquisition is especially important to women. They can readily travel between Spain and Bolivia to fulfil their Bolivian-based family obligations, enhancing transnational family coherence both materially and emotionally.

Conclusion

Spain's transition from blurred to brittle border controls amidst global recession catapulted Bolivia's transnational migrant families into decision-making of a dilemmic and sometimes conflictual nature. Prior to 2007, a marked inflow of Bolivian migrants to Spain and their integration into the informal labour market took place on the basis of irregular blurred administrative implementation.

Tightening immigration polices in 2007 and the economic crisis of 2008 generated an unexpected bifurcation of outcomes for women compared to men, and for undocumented Bolivians as opposed to those holding Spanish citizenship. Historically, Bolivians were accustomed to the dualism of men working in paid labour positions outside the home while women were seen as economic dependents caring for their husbands and children within the home. International migration to Spain catalysed role reversal. Through their waged cleaning and care work, women gained a more secure foothold in the Spanish labour market than men.

The rising entry of Spanish women into the formal labour market and country's ageing population increased the demand for hired domestic workers. While Bolivian women found themselves in a favourable employment position in Spain's growing care industry, they were criticised for neglecting the care of family members in Bolivia. Meanwhile migrant men faced declining labour demand in the recession-prone construction sector, losing face as family breadwinners in Spain and Bolivia.

Return migration patterns reflected gender differences in the interface between state migration policy and transnational family migration decision-making. Bolivian families had to weigh the employment opportunities in Bolivia and Spain vis-à-vis the needs of family members over the course of the family life cycle. In the absence of employment, men and women lost residential rights and were legally obliged to return to Bolivia, unless they obtained Spanish citizenship. Women who returned to Bolivia were likely to regret doing so.

Meanwhile in Spain, the numbers of Bolivians obtaining Spanish citizenship increased significantly between 2012 and 2015. With the government's administrative efforts to resolve a backlog of nationality applications, undocumented migrant numbers became negligible. Naturalised Bolivians were afforded a transnational lifestyle with bridged border crossing. They could keep in close touch with their Bolivia-based family members while enjoying secure residence in Spain.

For the Bolivian migrants who had returned to Bolivia before the Spanish citizenship was eased, the border between Bolivia and Spain remains brittle. Some considered emigration to countries elsewhere to improve their earnings. Amidst hardening immigration regulations, transnational family management of members' material and emotional care needs, while separated from each other by brittle international borders is subject to highly volatile circumstances within the state and global economy.

This article has provided both quantitative and qualitative case study data documenting marked gender contrasts in return migration. Diverging Bolivian-Spanish transnational family experiences emerged from the context and timing of unexpected changes in state migration policies. ‘Roll of the dice’ migration policies fostered winners and losers with attendant dilemmas and tension or opportunities within transnational families’ work strategies and home life. Returnee migrants in 2008–2011 had to respond to brittle border conditions, while those who did not return met with entirely different fortuitous legal circumstances in which they gained Spanish citizenship between 2012 and 2015. The political and economic context of migration decision-making was critical to transnational family welfare outcomes. Those who had the requisite two-year continuous residence benefitted from preferential citizenship rights recognising cultural ties between Bolivia and Spain dating back to colonialism. They enjoyed the freedom of travelling unimpeded back and forth between the two countries to tend to transnational family needs as they arose.

As argued at the outset of this paper, neo-classical economic approaches to migration have been blind to the gender perspective as well as the uncertain context in which family migration takes place, as evidenced by the impact of fluctuating labour circumstances and unpredictable migration policies documented in this case study. Such unpredictability is not conducive to optimising economic behavioural decision-making. Much more attention needs to be paid to transnational families’ material and emotional needs as drivers of genderised migration patterns. A gender lens is crucial for understanding the significance of context, content and the changing nature of state policies for transnational families’ decision-making. And inversely, awareness of the influence of transnational family life cycle needs associated with family care flows and tensions in gender roles are vital to the formulation of effective migration policy.

Notes

1. This includes having a Spanish mother or father or being the parent of a Spanish national. By contrast, migrants from other geographical areas such as Africa or Asia have to prove ten years of continuous residence before qualifying. Spanish immigration law is more flexible with the Latin American population, owing to their Spanish colonial past and because many Latin American countries have bilateral agreements with Spain on immigration.
2. The Bolivian population represents the most feminized Andean migrant group in Spain. Women constitute 60% of the total adult Bolivian population (data from the year 2015). This rising level of migration of Bolivian women is representative of the worldwide emergence of an international division of reproductive labour (Benería 2008).

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness under the research projects, *Community care. Experiences, practices and ties for livelihood support in Spain and Latin America* [grant number CSO2016-77960R] and *Geographies of care: Implications of its privatisation* [grant number CSO2012-32901]. The author would like to thank members of Oxford’s International Gender Studies Centre and especially Deborah Bryceson for her detailed suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness under the research projects, *Community care. Experiences, practices and ties for livelihood support in Spain and Latin America* [grant number CSO2016-77960R] and *Geographies of care: Implications of its privatisation* [grant number CSO2012-32901]; Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, Gobierno de España

ORCID

Raquel Martínez-Buján  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0260-0651>

References

- Arias, P. 2013. "International Migration and Familial Change in Communities of Origin: Transformation and Resistance." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39: 429–450.
- Baby-Collin, V., and G. Cortés. 2014. "New Trends in Bolivian Migratory Fields in the Face of the Crisis." *Revista CIDOB D'Afers Internacionals* 106-107: 61–83.
- Baldassar, L., and L. Merla, eds. 2014. *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*. London: Routledge.
- Bastia, T. 2011. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Return Migration in Times of Crises." *Journal of International Development* 23: 583–595.
- Benería, L. 2008. "The Crisis of Care, International Migration and Public Policy." *Feminist Economics* 14 (3): 1–21.
- Bonjour, S., and A. Krale. 2015. "Family Migration as an Integration Issue? Policy Perspectives and Academic Insights." *Journal of Family Issues* 36 (11): 1407–1432.
- Bryceson, D. F. 2019. "Transnational Families Negotiating Migration and Care Life Cycles Across Nation-State Borders." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (16): 3042–3064. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547017.
- Bryceson, D. F., and U. Vuorela. 2002. *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks*. Oxford: Berg.
- Constable, N. 1999. "At Home But Not At Home: Filipina Narratives of Ambivalent Returns." *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (2): 203–228.
- De Haas, H., and T. Fokkema. 2010. "Intra-Household Conflicts in Migration Decision-Making: Return and Pendulum Migration in Morocco." *Population and Development Review* 36 (3): 541–561.
- De La Torre, L. 2014. "Más notas sobre el retorno cíclico boliviano. Control y libertad en los proyectos de movilidad entre España y Bolivia." In *Las migraciones bolivianas en la encrucijada interdisciplinar: evolución, cambios y tendencias*, edited by C. Solé, S. Parella, and A. Petroff, 127–153. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Gmelch, G. 1980. "Return Migration." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9: 135–159.
- González-Ferrer, A. 2011. "Explaining the Labour Performance of Immigrant Women in Spain: The Interplay Between Family, Migration and Legal Trajectories." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 52 (1-2): 63–78.
- Hansen, P. 2008. "Circumcising Migration: Gendering Return Migration among Somalilanders." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34 (7): 1109–1125.
- Hernández, K., M. Maldonado Aguirre, and J. Calderón Chamorro. 2012. *Entre crisis y crisis: Experiencias de emigración y retorno. El caso de los barrios populares de noroccidente de Quito*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

- Herrera, G. 2013. "Gender and International Migration: Contributions and Cross-fertilizations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 39: 471–489.
- Hofmann, E. T. 2014. "Does Gender Ideology Matter in Migration?" *International Journal of Sociology* 44 (3): 23–41.
- Holt, Nicholas L., Katherine A. Tamminen, Lisa N. Tink, and Danielle E. Black. 2009. "An Interpretative Analysis of Life Skills Associates with Sport Participation." *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* 1 (2): 160–175.
- Jensen, P., and P. Pedersen. 2007. "To Stay or Not to Stay? Out-migration of Immigrants from Denmark." *International Migration* 45 (5): 87–113.
- Ledo, C. 2014. "Múltiples arreglos del hogar transnacional en la ciudad de Cochabamba." *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals* 106-107: 105–128.
- Massey, D. 1990. "Social Structure, Household Strategies and the Cumulative Causation of Migration." *Population Index* 56 (1): 3–26.
- Ministry of Justice. 2015. *Cifras y gráficos del Plan Intensivo de Tramitación de Expedientes de Nacionalidad (PIN)*. Accessed 24 October, 2015. <http://www.mjusticia.gob.es/cs/Satellite/es/1288775381843/50-50.html>.
- Olwig, K. F. 2012. "The 'Successful' Return: Caribbean Narratives of Migration, Family and Gender." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18: 828–845.
- Parella, S. 2012. "Familia transnacional y redefinición de los roles de género. El caso de la migración boliviana en España." *Papers* 97 (3): 661–684.
- Parella, S., Alisa Petroff, Clara Piqueras, Emilia Aiello. 2015. "La gestión de la migración de retorno en los países andinos." *Mondi Migranti* 3: 123–141.
- Pedone, C. 2008. "Varones aventureros vs. madres que abandonan: Reconstrucción de las relaciones familiares a partir de la migración ecuatoriana." *ReMHu* 16 (30): 45–64.
- Pedone, C., M. M. Echeverri, and S. Gil. 2014. "Entre dos orillas. Cambios en las formas de organización de las familias migrantes latinoamericanas en España en tiempos de crisis global." In *El Género en Movimiento. Familias y Migraciones*, edited by M. E. Zavala and V. Rozée, 109–138. México, DF: El Colegio de México.
- Poeze, M. 2019. "Beyond Breadwinning: Ghanaian Transnational Fathering in the Netherlands." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (16): 3065–3084. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547019.
- Portes, A. L. G., and P. Landolt. 1999. "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promises of an Emergent Research Field." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 217–237.
- Poulain, M., N. Perrin, and A. Singleton. 2006. *Thesim: Towards Harmonised European Statistics on International Migration*. Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain.
- Stark, O. 1991. *The Migration of Labour*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Todaro, M. P. 1969. "A Model of Labour Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developed Countries." *The American Economic Review* 59 (1): 138–148.
- Triguero, L. A. 2014. "El arraigo y los modelos actuales jurídico-políticos de inmigración y de extranjería." *Migraciones* 36: 433–458.
- Vertovec, S. 2007. *Circular Migration: The Way Forward in Global Policy*. Working Paper. Oxford: International Migration Institute.
- Vlase, I. 2013. "My Husband is a Patriot! Gender and Romanian Family Return Migration From Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39 (5): 741–758.