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Preliminary findings of the project:

“Who cares for those who cared? Ethnography on Transnational Negotiations for Social Protection. “

How are ageing migrant domestic workers negotiating their access to social protection transnationally? And how are these negotiations affected both by intersecting gender, race, and class markers of difference and by their transnational-family-networks relations? These are the questions that guided my doctoral research. Such questions seem to be particularly relevant as human beings become even more mobile¹ and their needs for social protection² (Sabates-Wheeler and Feldman 2011) become a transnational matter that should be relevant both for academics and policy makers. Although their needs are far from emerging into a publicly recognize concern, these questions are both intellectually and socially attractive.

Taking this context into account my thesis addresses the case of Peruvian and Colombian MDWs³ in the city of Brussels that have taken part in the productive and reproductive development of their sending-receiving societies but paradoxically experience social protection needs that have failed to be properly addressed by formal mechanisms of protection on both sides. Through a moving ethnography I have since last year traced the practices through which they negotiate their access to social protection across borders with formal institutions and their transnational family networks. Transnational (Faist 2012) and Intersectional (Walby, Armstrong et al. 2012) perspectives are used to analyze how their gender, race and class positioning within the global reproduction of labor and their within their transnational family networks affects their access to social protection leading towards the reproduction of social inequalities (Tilly 2000).

Through this presentation I first position my study within the existent literature that has looked into the social protection needs of migrant-domestic-workers in terms of their obligations towards their family members abroad. Following this review, I will present my case study and discuss the methodology used to collect the data. Consequently, I will discuss

¹ According to the U.N population department there are 232 million international migrants and this number is expected to raise to 405 million by 2050. See more at:

<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/wallchart/index.shtml>

² Social protection is defined as a set of risk-reducing practices in the area of human reproduction. The term protection treats supportive resources such as care, which are embedded in interpersonal networks (such as the transnational family network) and social policy regulations of the welfare state as closely interwoven. There are four dimensions of social protection Sabates-Wheeler, R. and R. Feldman (2011). *Migration and Social Protection: Claiming Social Rights Beyond Borders*. Great Britain Palgrave Macmillan

³ From here on MDWs is used to replace the term Migrant Domestic Worker

my findings in terms of migrant-domestic-workers practices to access social protection transnationally meaning: 1) circulation of financial means to assure the reciprocity of their family members, 2) establishing a savings plan for retirement 3) leading entrepreneurial projects to assure their retirement, 4) assuring the portability of social security and pension right across borders, 5) joining private and non-private health insurances to access formal care facilities in multiple locations 6) assuring their emotional wellbeing through the informal care of their family members using new media and technology or by physically traveling to obtain care 7) engaging in social activities with their transnational family networks and networks of compatriots to receive information and assistance in terms of formal access to social protection 8) investing in housing projects either in their sending or receiving contexts 9) assuring a safe way to bury their bodies. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that these practices could be understood as a transnational welfare net composed of informal-formal practices that are interdependent and in some cases could increase the life chances of ageing migrant-domestic workers but also reproduced and produce intersecting inequalities in the transnational social spaces in which they take place (Faist 1998). This project contributes to the debate on the transnational social question (Faist 2014), by providing a full picture of how transnational needs for social protection are met or not over borders and the inequalities that are reproduced through them.

Main References

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